

# Letter to Hebrews

## Hebrews 7

(Heb 7, 1-3) The Son of God remains a priest forever

[1] This "Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High," "met Abraham as he returned from his defeat of the kings" and "blessed him." [2] And Abraham apportioned to him "a tenth of everything." His name first means righteous king, and he was also "king of Salem," that is, king of peace. [3] Without father, mother, or ancestry, without beginning of days or end of life, thus made to resemble the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.

(CCC 58) The covenant with Noah remains in force during the times of the Gentiles, until the universal proclamation of the Gospel (Cf. Gen 9:16; Lk 21:24; DV 3). The Bible venerates several great figures among the Gentiles: Abel the just, the king-priest Melchisedek - a figure of Christ - and the upright "Noah, Daniel, and Job" (Cf. Gen 14:18; Heb 7:3; Ezek 14:14). Scripture thus expresses the heights of sanctity that can be reached by those who live according to the covenant of Noah, waiting for Christ to "gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (Jn 11:52). (CCC 2569) Prayer is lived in the first place beginning with the realities of *creation*. The first nine chapters of Genesis describe this relationship with God as an offering of the first-born of Abel's flock, as the invocation of the divine name at the time of Enosh, and as "walking with God" (Cf. Gen 4:4, 26; Gen 5:24). Noah's offering is pleasing to God, who blesses him and through him all creation, because his heart was upright and undivided; Noah, like Enoch before him, "walks with God" (Gen 6:9; 8:20- 9:17). This kind of prayer is lived by many righteous people in all religions. In his indefectible covenant with every living creature (Gen 9:8-16). God has always called people to prayer. But it is above all beginning with our father Abraham that prayer is revealed in the Old Testament.

(Heb 7, 4-11) See how great he is

[4] See how great he is to whom the patriarch "Abraham (indeed) gave a tenth" of his spoils. [5] The descendants of Levi who receive the office of priesthood have a commandment according to the law to exact tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, although they also have come from the loins of Abraham. [6] But he who was not of their ancestry received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had received the promises. [7] Unquestionably, a lesser person is blessed by a greater. [8] In the one case, mortal men receive tithes; in the other, a man of whom it is testified that he lives on. [9] One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, was tithed through Abraham, [10] for he was still in his father's loins when Melchizedek met him. [11] If, then, perfection came through the levitical priesthood, on the basis of which the people received the law, what need would there still have been for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not reckoned according to the order of Aaron?

(CCC 2570) When God calls him, Abraham goes forth "as the Lord had told him" (Gen 12:4); Abraham's heart is entirely submissive to the Word and so he obeys. Such attentiveness of the heart, whose decisions are made according to God's will, is essential to prayer, while the words used count only in relation to it. Abraham's prayer is expressed first by deeds: a man of silence, he constructs an altar to the Lord at each stage of his journey. Only later does Abraham's first prayer in words appear: a veiled complaint reminding God of his promises which seem unfulfilled (Cf. Gen 15:2 f.). Thus one aspect of the drama of prayer appears from the beginning: the test of faith in the fidelity of God. (CCC 2571) Because Abraham believed in God and walked in his presence and in covenant with him (Cf. Gen 15:6; 17:1 f.), the patriarch is ready to welcome a mysterious Guest into his tent. Abraham's remarkable hospitality at Mamre foreshadows the annunciation of the true Son of the promise (Cf. Gen 18:1-15; Lk 1:26-38). After that, once God had confided his plan, Abraham's heart is attuned to his Lord's compassion for men and he dares to intercede for them with bold confidence (Cf. 18:16-33).

### **(Heb 7, 12-16) Another priest is raised up**

[12] When there is a change of priesthood, there is necessarily a change of law as well. [13] Now he of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, of which no member ever officiated at the altar. [14] It is clear that our Lord arose from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. [15] It is even more obvious if another priest is raised up after the likeness of Melchizedek, [16] who has become so, not by a law expressed in a commandment concerning physical descent but by the power of a life that cannot be destroyed.

(CCC 648) Christ's Resurrection is an object of faith in that it is a transcendent intervention of God himself in creation and history. In it the three divine persons act together as one, and manifest their own proper characteristics. The Father's power "raised up" Christ his Son and by doing so perfectly introduced his Son's humanity, including his body, into the Trinity. Jesus is conclusively revealed as "Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his Resurrection from the dead" (Rom 1 3-4; cf. Acts 2:24). St. Paul insists on the manifestation of God's power (Cf. Rom 6:4; 2 Cor 13:4; Phil 3:10; Eph 1:19-22; Heb 7:16). through the working of the Spirit who gave life to Jesus' dead humanity and called it to the glorious state of Lordship. (CCC 649) As for the Son, he effects his own Resurrection by virtue of his divine power. Jesus announces that the Son of man will have to suffer much, die, and then rise (Cf. Mk 8:31; 9:9-31; 10:34). Elsewhere he affirms explicitly: "I lay down my life, that I may take it again.... I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (Jn 10:17-18). "We believe that Jesus died and rose again" (1 Thess 4:14).

### **(Heb 7, 17-23) Jesus is the guarantee of a better covenant**

[17] For it is testified: "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." [18] On the one hand, a former commandment is annulled because of its weakness and uselessness, [19] for the law brought nothing to perfection; on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. [20] And to the degree that this happened not without the taking of an oath - for others became priests without an oath, [21] but he with an oath, through the one who said to him: "The Lord has sworn, and he will not repent: 'You are a priest

forever" – [22] to that same degree has Jesus (also) become the guarantee of an (even) better covenant. [23] Those priests were many because they were prevented by death from remaining in office,

(CCC 616) It is love "to the end"(Jn 13:1) that confers on Christ's sacrifice its value as redemption and reparation, as atonement and satisfaction. He knew and loved us all when he offered his life (Cf. Gal 2:20; Eph 5:2, 25). Now "the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died" (2 Cor 5:14). No man, not even the holiest, was ever able to take on himself the sins of all men and offer himself as a sacrifice for all. The existence in Christ of the divine person of the Son, who at once surpasses and embraces all human persons, and constitutes himself as the Head of all mankind, makes possible his redemptive sacrifice *for all*. (CCC 1476) We also call these spiritual goods of the communion of saints the *Church's treasury*, which is "not the sum total of the material goods which have accumulated during the course of the centuries. On the contrary the 'treasury of the Church' is the infinite value, which can never be exhausted, which Christ's merits have before God. They were offered so that the whole of mankind could be set free from sin and attain communion with the Father. In Christ, the Redeemer himself, the satisfactions and merits of his Redemption exist and find their efficacy" (*Indulgentiarum doctrina*, 5). (CCC 1477) "This treasury includes as well the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are truly immense, unfathomable, and even pristine in their value before God. In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints, all those who have followed in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by his grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission the Father entrusted to them. In this way they attained their own salvation and at the same time cooperated in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body" (*Indulgentiarum doctrina*, 5).

(Heb 7, 24) He has a priesthood that does not pass away [24] but he, because he remains forever, has a priesthood that does not pass away.

(CCC 1356) If from the beginning Christians have celebrated the Eucharist and in a form whose substance has not changed despite the great diversity of times and liturgies, it is because we know ourselves to be bound by the command the Lord gave on the eve of his Passion: "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24-25). (CCC 1357) We carry out this command of the Lord by celebrating the *memorial of his sacrifice*. In so doing, *we offer to the Father* what he has himself given us: the gifts of his creation, bread and wine which, by the power of the Holy Spirit and by the words of Christ, have become the body and blood of Christ. Christ is thus really and mysteriously made *present*. (CCC 1358) We must therefore consider the Eucharist as: - thanksgiving and praise to the *Father*; - the sacrificial memorial of *Christ* and his Body; - the presence of Christ by the power of his word and of his *Spirit*. (CCC 1366) The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it *re-presents* (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross, because it is its *memorial* and because it *applies* its fruit: [Christ], our Lord and God, was once and for all to offer himself to God the Father by his death on the altar of the cross, to accomplish there an everlasting redemption. But because his priesthood was not to end with his death, at the Last Supper "on the night when he was betrayed," [he wanted] to leave to his beloved spouse the Church a visible sacrifice (as the nature of man demands) by which the bloody sacrifice which he was to

accomplish once for all on the cross would be re-presented, its memory perpetuated until the end of the world, and its salutary power be applied to the forgiveness of the sins we daily commit (Council of Trent (1562): DS 1740; cf. 1 Cor 11:23; Heb 7:24, 27).

**(Heb 7, 25) He lives forever to make intercession for them**

**[25] Therefore, he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them.**

(CCC 1362) The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the making present and the sacramental offering of his unique sacrifice, in the liturgy of the Church which is his Body. In all the Eucharistic Prayers we find after the words of institution a prayer called the *anamnesis* or memorial. (CCC 1363) In the sense of Sacred Scripture the *memorial* is not merely the recollection of past events but the proclamation of the mighty works wrought by God for men (Cf. Ex 13:3). In the liturgical celebration of these events, they become in a certain way present and real. This is how Israel understands its liberation from Egypt: every time Passover is celebrated, the Exodus events are made present to the memory of believers so that they may conform their lives to them. (CCC 1364) In the New Testament, the memorial takes on new meaning. When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ's Passover, and it is made present: the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present (Cf. Heb 7:25-27). "As often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which 'Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed' is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out" (LG 3; cf. 1 Cor 5:7). (CCC 1365) Because it is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the Eucharist is also a sacrifice. The sacrificial character of the Eucharist is manifested in the very words of institution: "This is my body which is given for you" and "This cup which is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my blood" (Lk 22:19-20). In the Eucharist Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross, the very blood which he "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28).

**(Heb 7, 26) High priest: holy, innocent, undefiled**

**[26] It was fitting that we should have such a high priest: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, higher than the heavens.**

(CCC 1370) To the offering of Christ are united not only the members still here on earth, but also those already *in the glory of heaven*. In communion with and commemorating the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, the Church offers the Eucharistic sacrifice. In the Eucharist the Church is as it were at the foot of the cross with Mary, united with the offering and intercession of Christ. (CCC 2634) Intercession is a prayer of petition which leads us to pray as Jesus did. He is the one intercessor with the Father on behalf of all men, especially sinners (Cf. Rom 8:34; 1 Jn 2:1; 1 Tim 2:5-8). He is "able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25). The Holy Spirit "himself intercedes for us... and intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom 8:26-27). (CCC 2741) Jesus also prays for us - in our place and on our behalf. All our petitions were gathered up, once for all, in his cry on the Cross and, in his Resurrection, heard by the Father. This is why he never ceases to intercede for us with the Father (Cf. Heb 5:7; 7:25; 9:24). If our prayer is resolutely united with that of Jesus, in trust and boldness as children, we obtain all that we ask in his name, even more than any particular thing: the Holy Spirit himself, who contains all gifts.

(Heb 7, 27) He did that once for all when he offered himself  
[27] He has no need, as did the high priests, to offer sacrifice day after day, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did that once for all when he offered himself.

(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 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.

(Heb 7, 28) A son who has been made perfect forever  
[28] For the law appoints men subject to weakness to be high priests, but the word of the oath, which was taken after the law, appoints a son, who has been made perfect forever.

(CCC 618) The cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ, the "one mediator between God and men" (1 Tim 2:5). But because in his incarnate divine person he has in some way united himself to every man, "the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery" is offered to all men (GS 22 § 5; cf. § 2). He calls his disciples to "take up [their] cross and follow [him]" (Mt 16:24), for "Christ also suffered for [us], leaving [us] an example so that [we] should follow in his steps" (1 Pt 2:21). In fact Jesus desires to associate with his redeeming sacrifice those who were to be its first beneficiaries (Cf. Mk 10:39; Jn 21:18-19; Col 1:24). This is achieved supremely in the case of his mother, who was associated more intimately than any other person in the mystery of his redemptive suffering (Cf. Lk 2:35). Apart from the cross there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven (St. Rose of Lima: cf. P. Hansen, *Vita mirabilis* (Louvain, 1668). (CCC 1371) The Eucharistic sacrifice is also offered for *the faithful departed* who "have died in Christ but are not yet wholly purified" (Council of Trent (1562): DS 1743), so that they may be able to enter into the light and peace of Christ: Put this body anywhere! Don't trouble yourselves about it! I simply ask you to remember me at the Lord's altar wherever you are (St. Monica, before her death, to her sons, St. Augustine and his brother; *Conf.* 9, 11, 27: PL 32, 775). Then, we pray [in the anaphora] for the holy fathers and bishops who have fallen asleep, and in general for all who have fallen asleep before us, in the belief that it is a great benefit to the souls on whose behalf the supplication is

offered, while the holy and tremendous Victim is present.... By offering to God our supplications for those who have fallen asleep, if they have sinned, we... offer Christ sacrificed for the sins of all, and so render favorable, for them and for us, the God who loves man (St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech. myst.* 5, 9. 10: PG 33, 1116-1117).

## Hebrews 8

### (Heb 8, 1-5) The throne of the Majesty in heaven

[1] The main point of what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, [2] a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle that the Lord, not man, set up. [3] Now every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus the necessity for this one also to have something to offer. [4] If then he were on earth, he would not be a priest, since there are those who offer gifts according to the law. [5] They worship in a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary, as Moses was warned when he was about to erect the tabernacle. For he says, "See that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."

(CCC 1069) The word "liturgy" originally meant a "public work" or a "service in the name of/on behalf of the people." In Christian tradition it means the participation of the People of God in "the work of God" (Cf. Jn 17:4). Through the liturgy Christ, our redeemer and high priest, continues the work of our redemption in, with, and through his Church. (CCC 1068) It is this mystery of Christ that the Church proclaims and celebrates in her liturgy so that the faithful may live from it and bear witness to it in the world: For it is in the liturgy, especially in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, that "the work of our redemption is accomplished," and it is through the liturgy especially that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church (SC 2). (CCC 1072) "The sacred liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church" (SC 9): it must be preceded by evangelization, faith, and conversion. It can then produce its fruits in the lives of the faithful: new life in the Spirit, involvement in the mission of the Church, and service to her unity. (CCC 1075) Liturgical catechesis aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ (It is "mystagogy.") by proceeding from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the "sacraments" to the "mysteries." Such catechesis is to be presented by local and regional catechisms. This Catechism, which aims to serve the whole Church in all the diversity of her rites and cultures (Cf. SC 3-4), will present what is fundamental and common to the whole Church in the liturgy as mystery and as celebration, and then the seven sacraments and the sacramentals.

### (Heb 8, 6-7) He is mediator of a better covenant

[6] Now he has obtained so much more excellent a ministry as he is mediator of a better covenant, enacted on better promises. [7] For if that first covenant had been faultless, no place would have been sought for a second one.

(CCC 1076) The Church was made manifest to the world on the day of Pentecost by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Cf. SC 6; LG 2). The gift of the

Spirit ushers in a new era in the "dispensation of the mystery" - the age of the Church, during which Christ manifests, makes present, and communicates his work of salvation through the liturgy of his Church, "until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). In this age of the Church Christ now lives and acts in and with his Church, in a new way appropriate to this new age. He acts through the sacraments in what the common Tradition of the East and the West calls "the sacramental economy"; this is the communication (or "dispensation") of the fruits of Christ's Paschal mystery in the celebration of the Church's "sacramental" liturgy. It is therefore important first to explain this "sacramental dispensation". The nature and essential features of liturgical celebration will then appear more clearly. (CCC 1089) "Christ, indeed, always associates the Church with himself in this great work in which God is perfectly glorified and men are sanctified. The Church is his beloved Bride who calls to her Lord and through him offers worship to the eternal Father" (SC 7).

### (Heb 8, 8-9) I will conclude a new covenant

[8] But he finds fault with them and says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will conclude a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. [9] It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers the day I took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt; for they did not stand by my covenant and I ignored them, says the Lord.

(CCC 1088) "To accomplish so great a work" - the dispensation or communication of his work of salvation - "Christ is always present in his Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the Sacrifice of the Mass not only in the person of his minister, 'the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross,' but especially in the Eucharistic species. By his power he is present in the sacraments so that when anybody baptizes, it is really Christ himself who baptizes. He is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church. Lastly, he is present when the Church prays and sings, for he has promised 'where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them'" (SC 7; Mt 18:20). (CCC 1091) In the liturgy the Holy Spirit is teacher of the faith of the People of God and artisan of "God's masterpieces," the sacraments of the New Covenant. The desire and work of the Spirit in the heart of the Church is that we may live from the life of the risen Christ. When the Spirit encounters in us the response of faith which he has aroused in us, he brings about genuine cooperation. Through it, the liturgy becomes the common work of the Holy Spirit and the Church. (CCC 1095) For this reason the Church, especially during Advent and Lent and above all at the Easter Vigil, re-reads and re-lives the great events of salvation history in the "today" of her liturgy. But this also demands that catechesis help the faithful to open themselves to this spiritual understanding of the economy of salvation as the Church's liturgy reveals it and enables us to live it. (CCC 1099) The Spirit and the Church cooperate to manifest Christ and his work of salvation in the liturgy. Primarily in the Eucharist, and by analogy in the other sacraments, the liturgy is the *memorial* of the mystery of salvation. The Holy Spirit is the Church's living memory (Cf. Jn 14:26).

### (Heb 8, 10) I will be their God and they shall be my people

[10] But this is the covenant I will establish with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their minds and I will

write them upon their hearts. I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

(CCC 1104) Christian liturgy not only recalls the events that saved us but actualizes them, makes them present. The Paschal mystery of Christ is celebrated, not repeated. It is the celebrations that are repeated, and in each celebration there is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that makes the unique mystery present. (CCC 1097) In the *liturgy of the New Covenant* every liturgical action, especially the celebration of the Eucharist and the sacraments, is an encounter between Christ and the Church. The liturgical assembly derives its unity from the "communion of the Holy Spirit" who gathers the children of God into the one Body of Christ. This assembly transcends racial, cultural, social - indeed, all human affinities. (CCC 1092) In this sacramental dispensation of Christ's mystery the Holy Spirit acts in the same way as at other times in the economy of salvation: he prepares the Church to encounter her Lord; he recalls and makes Christ manifest to the faith of the assembly. By his transforming power, he makes the mystery of Christ present here and now. Finally the Spirit of communion unites the Church to the life and mission of Christ. (CCC 1103) *Anamnesis*. The liturgical celebration always refers to God's saving interventions in history. "The economy of Revelation is realized by deeds and words which are intrinsically bound up with each other.... [T]he words for their part proclaim the works and bring to light the mystery they contain" (DV 2). In the Liturgy of the Word the Holy Spirit "recalls" to the assembly all that Christ has done for us. In keeping with the nature of liturgical actions and the ritual traditions of the churches, the celebration "makes a remembrance" of the marvelous works of God in an anamnesis which may be more or less developed. The Holy Spirit who thus awakens the memory of the Church then inspires thanksgiving and praise (*doxology*).

(Heb 8, 11-13) I will remember their sins no more

[11] And they shall not teach, each one his fellow citizen and kinsman, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know me, from least to greatest. [12] For I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sins no more." [13] When he speaks of a "new" covenant, he declares the first one obsolete. And what has become obsolete and has grown old is close to disappearing.

(CCC 1106) Together with the anamnesis, the epiclesis is at the heart of each sacramental celebration, most especially of the Eucharist: You ask how the bread becomes the Body of Christ, and the wine... the Blood of Christ I shall tell you: the Holy Spirit comes upon them and accomplishes what surpasses every word and thought.... Let it be enough for you to understand that it is by the Holy Spirit, just as it was of the Holy Virgin and by the Holy Spirit that the Lord, through and in himself, took flesh (St. John Damascene, *De fide orth.* 4, 13: PG 94, 1145A). (CCC 1090) "In the earthly liturgy we share in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle. With all the warriors of the heavenly army we sing a hymn of glory to the Lord; venerating the memory of the saints, we hope for some part and fellowship with them; we eagerly await the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, until he, our life, shall appear and we too will appear with him in glory" (SC 8; cf. LG 50). (CCC 1110) In the liturgy of the Church, God the Father is blessed and adored as the source of all the blessings of creation and

salvation with which he has blessed us in his Son, in order to give us the Spirit of filial adoption. (CCC 1111) Christ's work in the liturgy is sacramental: because his mystery of salvation is made present there by the power of his Holy Spirit; because his Body, which is the Church, is like a sacrament (sign and instrument) in which the Holy Spirit dispenses the mystery of salvation; and because through her liturgical actions the pilgrim Church already participates, as by a foretaste, in the heavenly liturgy. (CCC 1112) The mission of the Holy Spirit in the liturgy of the Church is to prepare the assembly to encounter Christ; to recall and manifest Christ to the faith of the assembly; to make the saving work of Christ present and active by his transforming power; and to make the gift of communion bear fruit in the Church.

## Hebrews 9

(Heb 9, 1-5) The first covenant had regulations for worship

[1] Now (even) the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary. [2] For a tabernacle was constructed, the outer one, in which were the lampstand, the table, and the bread of offering; this is called the Holy Place. [3] Behind the second veil was the tabernacle called the Holy of Holies, [4] in which were the gold altar of incense and the ark of the covenant entirely covered with gold. In it were the gold jar containing the manna, the staff of Aaron that had sprouted, and the tablets of the covenant. [5] Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the place of expiation. Now is not the time to speak of these in detail.

(CCC 1113) The whole liturgical life of the Church revolves around the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments (Cf. SC 6). There are seven sacraments in the Church: Baptism, Confirmation or Chrismation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony (Cf. Council of Lyons II (1274): DS 860; Council of Florence (1439): DS 1310; Council of Trent (1547): DS 1601). This article will discuss what is common to the Church's seven sacraments from a doctrinal point of view. What is common to them in terms of their celebration will be presented in the second chapter, and what is distinctive about each will be the topic of the *Section Two*. (CCC 1114) "Adhering to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, to the apostolic traditions, and to the consensus... of the Fathers," we profess that "the sacraments of the new law were... all instituted by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Council of Trent (1547): DS 1600-1601). (CCC 1118) The sacraments are "of the Church" in the double sense that they are "by her" and "for her." They are "by the Church," for she is the sacrament of Christ's action at work in her through the mission of the Holy Spirit. They are "for the Church" in the sense that "the sacraments make the Church" (St. Augustine, *De civ. Dei*, 22, 17: PL 41, 779; cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* III, 64, 2 ad 3), since they manifest and communicate to men, above all in the Eucharist, the mystery of communion with the God who is love, One in three persons. (CCC 1119) Forming "as it were, one mystical person" with Christ the head, the Church acts in the sacraments as "an organically structured priestly community" (LG 11; cf. Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis* (1943)). Through Baptism and Confirmation the Priestly people is enabled to celebrate the liturgy, while those of the faithful "who have received Holy Orders, are appointed to nourish the Church with the word and grace of God in the name of Christ" (LG 11; cf. Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, 1943).

### (Heb 9, 6-7) The high priest offers for himself

[6] With these arrangements for worship, the priests, in performing their service, go into the outer tabernacle repeatedly, [7] but the high priest alone goes into the inner one once a year, not without blood that he offers for himself and for the sins of the people.

(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). (CCC 1123) "The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the Body of Christ and, finally, to give worship to God. Because they are signs they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it. That is why they are called 'sacraments of faith'" (SC 59). (CCC 1121) The three sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders confer, in addition to grace, a sacramental *character* or "seal" by which the Christian shares in Christ's priesthood and is made a member of the Church according to different states and functions. This configuration to Christ and to the Church, brought about by the Spirit, is indelible (Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1609), it remains for ever in the Christian as a positive disposition for grace, a promise and guarantee of divine protection, and as a vocation to divine worship and to the service of the Church. Therefore these sacraments can never be repeated. (CCC 1125) For this reason no sacramental rite may be modified or manipulated at the will of the minister or the community. Even the supreme authority in the Church may not change the liturgy arbitrarily, but only in the obedience of faith and with religious respect for the mystery of the liturgy. (CCC 1126) Likewise, since the sacraments express and develop the communion of faith in the Church, the *lex orandi* is one of the essential criteria of the dialogue that seeks to restore the unity of Christians (Cf. UR 2; 15).

### (Heb 9, 8-10) In which gifts and sacrifices cannot perfect

[8] In this way the holy Spirit shows that the way into the sanctuary had not yet been revealed while the outer tabernacle still had its place. [9] This is a symbol of the present time, in which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the worshiper in conscience [10] but only in matters of food and drink and various ritual washings: regulations concerning the flesh, imposed until the time of the new order.

(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 1139) It is in this eternal liturgy that the Spirit and the Church enable us to participate whenever we celebrate the mystery of salvation in the sacraments. (CCC 1140) It is the whole

*community*, the Body of Christ united with its Head, that celebrates. "Liturgical services are not private functions but are celebrations of the Church which is 'the sacrament of unity,' namely, the holy people united and organized under the authority of the bishops. Therefore, liturgical services pertain to the whole Body of the Church. They manifest it, and have effects upon it. But they touch individual members of the Church in different ways, depending on their orders, their role in the liturgical services, and their actual participation in them" (SC 26). For this reason, "rites which are meant to be celebrated in common, with the faithful present and actively participating, should as far as possible be celebrated in that way rather than by an individual and quasi-privately" (SC 27). (CCC 1141) The celebrating assembly is the community of the baptized who, "by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, that through all the works of Christian men they may offer spiritual sacrifices" (LG 10; cf. 1 Pet 2:4-5). This "common priesthood" is that of Christ the sole priest, in which all his members participate (Cf. LG 10; 34; PO 2): Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and to which the Christian people, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people," have a right and an obligation by reason of their Baptism (SC 14; Cf. 1 Pet 2:9; 2:4-5).

#### (Heb 9, 11) More perfect tabernacle not made by hands

[11] But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that have come to be, passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not belonging to this creation,

(CCC 1197) Christ is the true temple of God, "the place where his glory dwells"; by the grace of God, Christians also become the temples of the Holy Spirit, living stones out of which the Church is built. (CCC 1198) In its earthly state the Church needs places where the community can gather together. Our visible churches, holy places, are images of the holy city, the heavenly Jerusalem, toward which we are making our way on pilgrimage. (CCC 1199) It is in these churches that the Church celebrates public worship to the glory of the Holy Trinity, hears the word of God and sings his praise, lifts up her prayer, and offers the sacrifice of Christ sacramentally present in the midst of the assembly. These churches are also places of recollection and personal prayer. (CCC 1181) A church, "a house of prayer in which the Eucharist is celebrated and reserved, where the faithful assemble, and where is worshipped the presence of the Son of God our Savior, offered for us on the sacrificial altar for the help and consolation of the faithful - this house ought to be in good taste and a worthy place for prayer and sacred ceremonial" (PO 5; Cf. SC 122-127). In this "house of God" the truth and the harmony of the signs that make it up should show Christ to be present and active in this place (Cf. SC 7). (CCC 1182) The *altar* of the New Covenant is the Lord's Cross (Cf. Heb 13:10), from which the sacraments of the Paschal mystery flow. On the altar, which is the center of the church, the sacrifice of the Cross is made present under sacramental signs. The altar is also the table of the Lord, to which the People of God are invited (Cf. GIRM 259). In certain Eastern liturgies, the altar is also the symbol of the tomb (Christ truly died and is truly risen). (CCC 1183) The *tabernacle* is to be situated "in churches in a most worthy place with the greatest honor" (Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei*: AAS (1965) 771). The dignity, placing, and security of the Eucharistic tabernacle should foster adoration before

the Lord really present in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar (Cf. SC 128). The *sacred chrism (myron)*, used in anointings as the sacramental sign of the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit, is traditionally reserved and venerated in a secure place in the sanctuary. The oil of catechumens and the oil of the sick may also be placed there. (CCC 1180) When the exercise of religious liberty is not thwarted (Cf. DH 4), Christians construct buildings for divine worship. These visible churches are not simply gathering places but signify and make visible the Church living in this place, the dwelling of God with men reconciled and united in Christ.

**(Heb 9, 12) His own blood obtaining eternal redemption**

**[12] he entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.**

(CCC 1187) The liturgy is the work of the whole Christ, head and body. Our high priest celebrates it unceasingly in the heavenly liturgy, with the holy Mother of God, the apostles, all the saints, and the multitude of those who have already entered the kingdom. (CCC 1188) In a liturgical celebration, the whole assembly is *leitourgos*, each member according to his own function. The baptismal priesthood is that of the whole Body of Christ. But some of the faithful are ordained through the sacrament of Holy Orders to represent Christ as head of the Body. (CCC 1194) The Church, "in the course of the year,... unfolds the whole mystery of Christ from his Incarnation and Nativity through his Ascension, to Pentecost and the expectation of the blessed hope of the coming of the Lord" (SC 102 § 2). (CCC 1195) By keeping the memorials of the saints - first of all the holy Mother of God, then the apostles, the martyrs, and other saints - on fixed days of the liturgical year, the Church on earth shows that she is united with the liturgy of heaven. She gives glory to Christ for having accomplished his salvation in his glorified members; their example encourages her on her way to the Father. (CCC 1196) The faithful who celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours are united to Christ our high priest, by the prayer of the Psalms, meditation on the Word of God, and canticles and blessings, in order to be joined with his unceasing and universal prayer that gives glory to the Father and implores the gift of the Holy Spirit on the whole world. (CCC 1178) The Liturgy of the Hours, which is like an extension of the Eucharistic celebration, does not exclude but rather in a complementary way calls forth the various devotions of the People of God, especially adoration and worship of the Blessed Sacrament. (CCC 1191) Song and music are closely connected with the liturgical action. The criteria for their proper use are the beauty expressive of prayer, the unanimous participation of the assembly, and the sacred character of the celebration.

**(Heb 9, 13-14) Christ offered himself unblemished to God**

**[13] For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of a heifer's ashes can sanctify those who are defiled so that their flesh is cleansed, [14] how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God.**

(CCC 1127) Celebrated worthily in faith, the sacraments confer the grace that they signify (Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1605; DS 1606.). They are *efficacious* because in them Christ himself is at work: it is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies. The Father always hears the prayer of his Son's Church which, in the

epiclesis of each sacrament, expresses her faith in the power of the Spirit. As fire transforms into itself everything it touches, so the Holy Spirit transforms into the divine life whatever is subjected to his power. (CCC 1128) This is the meaning of the Church's affirmation (Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1608) that the sacraments act *ex opere operato* (literally: "by the very fact of the action's being performed"), i.e., by virtue of the saving work of Christ, accomplished once for all. It follows that "the sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, but by the power of God" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* III, 68, 8). From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it, independently of the personal holiness of the minister. Nevertheless, the fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them. (CCC 1131) The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions. (CCC 1132) The Church celebrates the sacraments as a priestly community structured by the baptismal priesthood and the priesthood of ordained ministers. (CCC 1133) The Holy Spirit prepares the faithful for the sacraments by the Word of God and the faith which welcomes that word in well-disposed hearts. Thus the sacraments strengthen faith and express it. (CCC 1134) The fruit of sacramental life is both personal and ecclesial. For every one of the faithful on the one hand, this fruit is life for God in Christ Jesus; for the Church, on the other, it is an increase in charity and in her mission of witness.

### **(Heb 9, 15-17) He is mediator of a new covenant**

[15] For this reason he is mediator of a new covenant: since a death has taken place for deliverance from transgressions under the first covenant, those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance. [16] Now where there is a will, the death of the testator must be established. [17] For a will takes effect only at death; it has no force while the testator is alive.

(CCC 522) The coming of God's Son to earth is an event of such immensity that God willed to prepare for it over centuries. He makes everything converge on Christ: all the rituals and sacrifices, figures and symbols of the "First Covenant" (Heb 9:15). He announces him through the mouths of the prophets who succeeded one another in Israel. Moreover, he awakens in the hearts of the pagans a dim expectation of this coming. (CCC 1145) A sacramental celebration is woven from signs and symbols. In keeping with the divine pedagogy of salvation, their meaning is rooted in the work of creation and in human culture, specified by the events of the Old Covenant and fully revealed in the person and work of Christ. (CCC 1143) For the purpose of assisting the work of the common priesthood of the faithful, other *particular ministries* also exist, not consecrated by the sacrament of Holy Orders; their functions are determined by the bishops, in accord with liturgical traditions and pastoral needs. "Servers, readers, commentators, and members of the choir also exercise a genuine liturgical function" (SC 29). (CCC 1144) In the celebration of the sacraments it is thus the whole assembly that is *leitourgos*, each according to his function, but in the "unity of the Spirit" who acts in all. "In liturgical celebrations each person, minister or layman, who has an office to perform, should carry out *all* and *only*

those parts which pertain to his office by the nature of the rite and the norms of the liturgy" (SC 28).

### (Heb 9, 18-20) "This is the blood of the covenant"

[18] Thus not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. [19] When every commandment had been proclaimed by Moses to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves (and goats), together with water and crimson wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, [20] saying, "This is 'the blood of the covenant which God has enjoined upon you.'"

(CCC 766) The Church is born primarily of Christ's total self-giving for our salvation, anticipated in the institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross. "The origin and growth of the Church are symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of the crucified Jesus" (LG 3; cf. Jn 19:34). "For it was from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth the 'wondrous sacrament of the whole Church'" (SC 5). As Eve was formed from the sleeping Adam's side, so the Church was born from the pierced heart of Christ hanging dead on the cross (Cf. St. Ambrose, *In Luc.* 2, 85-89: PL 15,1666-1668). (CCC 1159) The sacred image, the liturgical icon, principally represents Christ. It cannot represent the invisible and incomprehensible God, but the incarnation of the Son of God has ushered in a new "economy" of images: Previously God, who has neither a body nor a face, absolutely could not be represented by an image. But now that he has made himself visible in the flesh and has lived with men, I can make an image of what I have seen of God... and contemplate the glory of the Lord, his face unveiled (St. John Damascene, *De imag.* 1, 16: PG 96: 1245-1248). (CCC 1158) The harmony of signs (song, music, words, and actions) is all the more expressive and fruitful when expressed in the *cultural richness* of the People of God who celebrate (Cf. SC 119). Hence "religious singing by the faithful is to be intelligently fostered so that in devotions and sacred exercises as well as in liturgical services," in conformity with the Church's norms, "the voices of the faithful may be heard." But "the texts intended to be sung must always be in conformity with Catholic doctrine. Indeed they should be drawn chiefly from the Sacred Scripture and from liturgical sources" (SC 118; 121).

### (Heb 9, 21-24) Christ did enter into heaven itself

[21] In the same way, he sprinkled also the tabernacle and all the vessels of worship with blood. [22] According to the law almost everything is purified by blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. [23] Therefore, it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified by these rites, but the heavenly things themselves by better sacrifices than these. [24] For Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands, a copy of the true one, but heaven itself, that he might now appear before God on our behalf.

(CCC 662) "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn 12:32). The lifting up of Jesus on the cross signifies and announces his lifting up by his Ascension into heaven, and indeed begins it. Jesus Christ, the one priest of the new and eternal Covenant, "entered, not into a sanctuary made by human hands... But into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (Heb 9:24). There Christ permanently exercises his priesthood, for he "always lives to make intercession" for "those who draw near to God through

him" (Heb 7:25). As "high priest of the good things to come" he is the centre and the principal actor of the liturgy that honours the Father in heaven (Heb 9:11; cf. Rev 4:6-11). (CCC 1164) From the time of the Mosaic law, the People of God have observed fixed feasts, beginning with Passover, to commemorate the astonishing actions of the Savior God, to give him thanks for them, to perpetuate their remembrance, and to teach new generations to conform their conduct to them. In the age of the Church, between the Passover of Christ already accomplished once for all, and its consummation in the kingdom of God, the liturgy celebrated on fixed days bears the imprint of the newness of the mystery of Christ. (CCC 1163) "Holy Mother Church believes that she should celebrate the saving work of her divine Spouse in a sacred commemoration on certain days throughout the course of the year. Once each week, on the day which she has called the Lord's Day, she keeps the memory of the Lord's resurrection. She also celebrates it once every year, together with his blessed Passion, at Easter, that most solemn of all feasts. In the course of the year, moreover, she unfolds the whole mystery of Christ .... Thus recalling the mysteries of the redemption, she opens up to the faithful the riches of her Lord's powers and merits, so that these are in some way made present in every age; the faithful lay hold of them and are filled with saving grace" (SC 102).

**(Heb 9, 25-26) Now once for all he has appeared**

**[25] Not that he might offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters each year into the sanctuary with blood that is not his own; [26] if that were so, he would have had to suffer repeatedly from the foundation of the world. But now once for all he has appeared at the end of the ages to take away sin by his sacrifice.**

(CCC 1166) "By a tradition handed down from the apostles which took its origin from the very day of Christ's Resurrection, the Church celebrates the Paschal mystery every seventh day, which day is appropriately called the Lord's Day or Sunday" (SC 106). The day of Christ's Resurrection is both the first day of the week, the memorial of the first day of creation, and the "eighth day," on which Christ after his "rest" on the great sabbath inaugurates the "day that the Lord has made," the "day that knows no evening" (Byzantine liturgy). The Lord's Supper is its center, for there the whole community of the faithful encounters the risen Lord who invites them to his banquet (Cf. Jn 21:12; Lk 24:30): The Lord's day, the day of Resurrection, the day of Christians, is our day. It is called the Lord's day because on it the Lord rose victorious to the Father. If pagans call it the "day of the sun," we willingly agree, for today the light of the world is raised, today is revealed the sun of justice with healing in his rays (St. Jerome, *Pasch.*: CCL 78, 550). (CCC 1167) Sunday is the pre-eminent day for the liturgical assembly, when the faithful gather "to listen to the word of God and take part in the Eucharist, thus calling to mind the Passion, Resurrection, and glory of the Lord Jesus, and giving thanks to God who 'has begotten them again, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' unto a living hope" (SC 106): When we ponder, O Christ, the marvels accomplished on this day, the Sunday of your holy resurrection, we say: "Blessed is Sunday, for on it began creation... the world's salvation ... the renewal of the human race.... On Sunday heaven and earth rejoiced and the whole universe was filled with light. Blessed is Sunday, for on it were opened the gates of paradise so that Adam and all the exiles might enter it

without fear (Fanqîth, *The Syriac Office of Antioch*, vol. VI, first part of Summer, 193 B).

**(Heb 9, 27) It is appointed that human beings die once**

**[27] Just as it is appointed that human beings die once, and after this the judgment,**

(CCC 571) The Paschal mystery of Christ's cross and Resurrection stands at the centre of the Good News that the apostles, and the Church following them, are to proclaim to the world. God's saving plan was accomplished "once for all" (Heb 9:26) by the redemptive death of his Son Jesus Christ. (CCC 1170) At the Council of Nicaea in 325, all the Churches agreed that Easter, the Christian Passover, should be celebrated on the Sunday following the first full moon (14 Nisan) after the vernal equinox. Because of different methods of calculating the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Nisan the date of Easter in the Western and Eastern Churches is not always the same. For this reason the Churches are currently seeking an agreement in order once again to celebrate the day of the Lord's Resurrection on a common date. (CCC 1013) Death is the end of man's earthly pilgrimage, of the time of grace and mercy which God offers him so as to work out his earthly life in keeping with the divine plan, and to decide his ultimate destiny. When "the single course of our earthly life" is completed (LG 48 § 3), we shall not return to other earthly lives: "It is appointed for men to die once" (Heb 9:27). There is no "reincarnation" after death. (CCC 1173) When the Church keeps the memorials of martyrs and other saints during the annual cycle, she proclaims the Paschal mystery in those "who have suffered and have been glorified with Christ. She proposes them to the faithful as examples who draw all men to the Father through Christ, and through their merits she begs for God's favors" (SC 104; cf. SC 108, 111).

**(Heb 9, 28) Christ will appear a second time**

**[28] so also Christ, offered once to take away the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to take away sin but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him.**

(CCC 1021) Death puts an end to human life as the time open to either accepting or rejecting the divine grace manifested in Christ (Cf. 2 Tim 1:9-10). The New Testament speaks of judgment primarily in its aspect of the final encounter with Christ in his second coming, but also repeatedly affirms that each will be rewarded immediately after death in accordance with his works and faith. The parable of the poor man Lazarus and the words of Christ on the cross to the good thief, as well as other New Testament texts speak of a final destiny of the soul - a destiny which can be different for some and for others (Cf. Lk 16:22; 23:43; Mt 16:26; 2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23; Heb 9:27; 12:23). (CCC 1200) From the first community of Jerusalem until the parousia, it is the same Paschal mystery that the Churches of God, faithful to the apostolic faith, celebrate in every place. The mystery celebrated in the liturgy is one, but the forms of its celebration are diverse. (CCC 1201) The mystery of Christ is so unfathomably rich that it cannot be exhausted by its expression in any single liturgical tradition. The history of the blossoming and development of these rites witnesses to a remarkable complementarity. When the Churches lived their respective liturgical traditions in the communion of the faith and the sacraments of the faith, they enriched one another and grew in fidelity to Tradition and to the common mission of the whole Church (Cf. Paul VI, EN 63-64). (CCC 1175) The Liturgy of the Hours is

intended to become the prayer of the whole People of God. In it Christ himself "continues his priestly work through his Church" (SC 83). His members participate according to their own place in the Church and the circumstances of their lives: priests devoted to the pastoral ministry, because they are called to remain diligent in prayer and the service of the word; religious, by the charism of their consecrated lives; all the faithful as much as possible: "Pastors of souls should see to it that the principal hours, especially Vespers, are celebrated in common in church on Sundays and on the more solemn feasts. The laity, too, are encouraged to recite the divine office, either with the priests, or among themselves, or even individually" (SC 100; cf. 86; 96; 98; PO 5).

## Hebrews 10

(Heb 10, 1-4) Law has only a shadow of the good things

[1] Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of them, it can never make perfect those who come to worship by the same sacrifices that they offer continually each year. [2] Otherwise, would not the sacrifices have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, once cleansed, would no longer have had any consciousness of sins? [3] But in those sacrifices there is only a yearly remembrance of sins, [4] for it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats take away sins.

(CCC 128) The Church, as early as apostolic times (Cf. 1 Cor 10:6, 11; Heb 10:1; 1 Pt 3:21), and then constantly in her Tradition, has illuminated the unity of the divine plan in the two Testaments through typology, which discerns in God's works of the Old Covenant prefigurations of what he accomplished in the fullness of time in the person of his incarnate Son. (CCC 1540) Instituted to proclaim the Word of God and to restore communion with God by sacrifices and prayer (Cf. Mal 2:7-9), this priesthood nevertheless remains powerless to bring about salvation, needing to repeat its sacrifices ceaselessly and being unable to achieve a definitive sanctification, which only the sacrifice of Christ would accomplish (Cf. Heb 5:3; 7:27; 10:1-4). (CCC 1202) The diverse liturgical traditions have arisen by very reason of the Church's mission. Churches of the same geographical and cultural area came to celebrate the mystery of Christ through particular expressions characterized by the culture: in the tradition of the "deposit of faith" (2 Tim 1:14 (Vulg.)) in liturgical symbolism, in the organization of fraternal communion, in the theological understanding of the mysteries, and in various forms of holiness. Through the liturgical life of a local church, Christ, the light and salvation of all peoples, is made manifest to the particular people and culture to which that Church is sent and in which she is rooted. The Church is catholic, capable of integrating into her unity, while purifying them, all the authentic riches of cultures (Cf. LG 23; UR 4). (CCC 1205) "In the liturgy, above all that of the sacraments, there is an *immutable part*, a part that is divinely instituted and of which the Church is the guardian, and parts that *can be changed*, which the Church has the power and on occasion also the duty to adapt to the cultures of recently evangelized peoples" (John Paul II, *Vicesimus quintus annus*, 16; cf. SC 21).

### (Heb 10, 5-7) A body you prepared for me

[5] For this reason, when he came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; [6] holocausts and sin offerings you took no delight in. [7] Then I said, 'As is written of me in the scroll, Behold, I come to do your will, O God.'"

(CCC 488) "God sent forth his Son", but to prepare a body for him (Gal 4:4; Heb 10:5), he wanted the free co-operation of a creature. For this, from all eternity God chose for the mother of his Son a daughter of Israel, a young Jewish woman of Nazareth in Galilee, "a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary" (Lk 1:26-27): The Father of mercies willed that the Incarnation should be preceded by assent on the part of the predestined mother, so that just as a woman had a share in the coming of death, so also should a woman contribute to the coming of life (LG 56; cf. LG 61). (CCC 805) The Church is the Body of Christ. Through the Spirit and his action in the sacraments, above all the Eucharist, Christ, who once was dead and is now risen, establishes the community of believers as his own Body. (CCC 1204) The celebration of the liturgy, therefore, should correspond to the genius and culture of the different peoples (Cf. SC 37-40). In order that the mystery of Christ be "made known to all the nations... to bring about the obedience of faith" (Rom 16:26), it must be proclaimed, celebrated, and lived in all cultures in such a way that they themselves are not abolished by it, but redeemed and fulfilled (Cf. CT 53): It is with and through their own human culture, assumed and transfigured by Christ, that the multitude of God's children has access to the Father, in order to glorify him in the one Spirit. (CCC 1203) The liturgical traditions or rites presently in use in the Church are the Latin (principally the Roman rite, but also the rites of certain local churches, such as the Ambrosian rite, or those of certain religious orders) and the Byzantine, Alexandrian or Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Maronite and Chaldean rites. In "faithful obedience to tradition, the sacred Council declares that Holy Mother Church holds all lawfully recognized rites to be of equal right and dignity, and that she wishes to preserve them in the future and to foster them in every way" (SC 4).

### (Heb 10, 8-9) Behold, I come to do your will

[8] First he says, "Sacrifices and offerings, holocausts and sin offerings, you neither desired nor delighted in." These are offered according to the law. [9] Then he says, "Behold, I come to do your will." He takes away the first to establish the second.

(CCC 606) The Son of God, who came down "from heaven, not to do (his) own will, but the will of him who sent (him)" (Jn 6:38), said on coming into the world, "Lo, I have come to do your will, O God." "And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:5-10). From the first moment of his Incarnation the Son embraces the Father's plan of divine salvation in his redemptive mission: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (Jn 4:34). The sacrifice of Jesus "for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jn 2:2) expresses his loving communion with the Father. "The Father loves me, because I lay down my life", said the Lord, "[for] I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father" (Jn 10:17; 14:31). (CCC 810) "Hence the universal Church is seen to be 'a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit'" (LG 4 citing St. Cyprian, *De Dom. orat.* 23: PL 4, 553). (CCC

1208) The diverse liturgical traditions or rites, legitimately recognized, manifest the catholicity of the Church, because they signify and communicate the same mystery of Christ. (CCC 1209) The criterion that assures unity amid the diversity of liturgical traditions is fidelity to apostolic Tradition, i.e., the communion in the faith and the sacraments received from the apostles, a communion that is both signified and guaranteed by apostolic succession. (CCC 1207) It is fitting that liturgical celebration tends to express itself in the culture of the people where the Church finds herself, though without being submissive to it. Moreover, the liturgy itself generates cultures and shapes them. (CCC 1206) "Liturgical diversity can be a source of enrichment, but it can also provoke tensions, mutual misunderstandings, and even schisms. In this matter it is clear that diversity must not damage unity. It must express only fidelity to the common faith, to the sacramental signs that the Church has received from Christ, and to hierarchical communion. Cultural adaptation also requires a conversion of heart and even, where necessary, a breaking with ancestral customs incompatible with the Catholic faith" (John Paul II, *Vicesimus quintus annus*, 16).

**(Heb 10, 10) By this "will," we have been consecrated**

**[10] By this "will," we have been consecrated through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**

(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). (CCC 2824) In Christ, and through his human will, the will of the Father has been perfectly fulfilled once for all. Jesus said on entering into this world: "Lo, I have come to do your will, O God" (Heb 10:7; Ps 40:7). Only Jesus can say: "I always do what is pleasing to him" (Jn 8:29). In the prayer of his agony, he consents totally to this will: "not my will, but yours be done" (Lk 22:42; cf. Jn 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). For this reason Jesus "gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father" (Gal 1:4). "And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:10).

**(Heb 10, 11-14) His seat forever at the right hand of God**

**[11] Every priest stands daily at his ministry, offering frequently those same sacrifices that can never take away sins. [12] But this one offered one sacrifice for sins, and took his seat forever at the right hand of God; [13] now he waits until his enemies are made his footstool. [14] For by one offering he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated.**

(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 874) Christ is himself the source of ministry in the Church. He instituted the Church. He gave her authority and mission, orientation and goal: In order to

shepherd the People of God and to increase its numbers without cease, Christ the Lord set up in his Church a variety of offices which aim at the good of the whole body. The holders of office, who are invested with a sacred power, are, in fact, dedicated to promoting the interests of their brethren, so that all who belong to the People of God... may attain to salvation (LG 18).

### (Heb 10, 15-18) The holy Spirit also testifies to us

[15] The holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying: [16] "This is the covenant I will establish with them after those days, says the Lord: 'I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them upon their minds,'" [17] he also says: "Their sins and their evildoing I will remember no more." [18] Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer offering for sin.

(CCC 64) Through the prophets, God forms his people in the hope of salvation, in the expectation of a new and everlasting Covenant intended for all, to be written on their hearts (Cf Isa 2:2-4; Jer 31:31-34; Heb 10:16). The prophets proclaim a radical redemption of the People of God, purification from all their infidelities, a salvation which will include all the nations (Cf. Ezek 36; Isa 49:5-6; 53:11). Above all, the poor and humble of the Lord will bear this hope. Such holy women as Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Judith and Esther kept alive the hope of Israel's salvation. The purest figure among them is Mary (Cf. Zeph 2:3; Lk 1:38). (CCC 750) To believe that the Church is "holy" and "catholic," and that she is "one" and "apostolic" (as the Nicene Creed adds), is inseparable from belief in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the Apostles' Creed we profess "one Holy Church" (*Credo... Ecclesiam*), and not to believe *in* the Church, so as not to confuse God with his works and to attribute clearly to God's goodness *all* the gifts he has bestowed on his Church (*Roman Catechism* I, 10, 22). (CCC 749) The article concerning the Church also depends entirely on the article about the Holy Spirit, which immediately precedes it. "Indeed, having shown that the Spirit is the source and giver of all holiness, we now confess that it is he who has endowed the Church with holiness" (*Roman Catechism* I, 10, 1). The Church is, in a phrase used by the Fathers, the place "where the Spirit flourishes" (St. Hippolytus, *Trad. Ap.* 35: SCh 11, 118). (CCC 758) We begin our investigation of the Church's mystery by meditating on her origin in the Holy Trinity's plan and her progressive realization in history.

### (Heb 10, 19-22) Confidence of entrance into the sanctuary

[19] Therefore, brothers, since through the blood of Jesus we have confidence of entrance into the sanctuary [20] by the new and living way he opened for us through the veil, that is, his flesh, [21] and since we have "a great priest over the house of God," [22] let us approach with a sincere heart and in absolute trust, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water.

(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 804) One enters into the People of God by faith and Baptism. "All men are called to belong to the new People of God" (LG 13), so that, in Christ, "men may form one family and one People of God" (AG 1). (CCC 816) "The sole Church of Christ [is that] which our Savior, after his Resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care, commissioning him and the

other apostles to extend and rule it.... This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in (*subsistit in*) the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him" (LG 8 § 2). The Second Vatican Council's *Decree on Ecumenism* explains: "For it is through Christ's Catholic Church alone, which is the universal help toward salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained. It was to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, that we believe that our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant, in order to establish on earth the one Body of Christ into which all those should be fully incorporated who belong in any way to the People of God" (UR 3 § 5).

### (Heb 10, 23-25) He who made the promise is trustworthy

[23] Let us hold unwaveringly to our confession that gives us hope, for he who made the promise is trustworthy. [24] We must consider how to rouse one another to love and good works. [25] We should not stay away from our assembly, as is the custom of some, but encourage one another, and this all the more as you see the day drawing near.

(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 1835) Prudence disposes the practical reason to discern, in every circumstance, our true good and to choose the right means for achieving it. (CCC 1837) Fortitude ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. (CCC 1638) "From a valid marriage arises a *bond* between the spouses which by its very nature is perpetual and exclusive; furthermore, in a Christian marriage the spouses are strengthened and, as it were, consecrated for the duties and the dignity of their state *by a special sacrament*" (Cf. CIC, can. 1134). (CCC 2191) The Church celebrates the day of Christ's Resurrection on the "eighth day," Sunday, which is rightly called the Lord's Day (cf. SC 106). (CCC 2178) This practice of the Christian assembly dates from the beginnings of the apostolic age (Cf. Acts 2:42-46; 1 Cor 11:17). The *Letter to the Hebrews* reminds the faithful "not to neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some, but to encourage one another" (Heb 10:25). Tradition preserves the memory of an ever-timely exhortation: Come to Church early, approach the Lord, and confess your sins, repent in prayer.... Be present at the sacred and divine liturgy, conclude its prayer and do not leave before the dismissal.... We have often said: "This day is given to you for prayer and rest. This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it" (*Sermo de die dominica* 2 et 6: PG 86/1, 416C and 421C).

### (Heb 10, 26-27) If we sin deliberately...

[26] If we sin deliberately after receiving knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains sacrifice for sins [27] but a fearful prospect of judgment and a flaming fire that is going to consume the adversaries.

(CCC 1855) *Mortal sin* destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him. *Venial sin* allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it. (CCC 1862) One commits *venial*

*sin* when, in a less serious matter, he does not observe the standard prescribed by the moral law, or when he disobeys the moral law in a grave matter, but without full knowledge or without complete consent. (CCC 1863) Venial sin weakens charity; it manifests a disordered affection for created goods; it impedes the soul's progress in the exercise of the virtues and the practice of the moral good; it merits temporal punishment. Deliberate and unrepented venial sin disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin. However venial sin does not break the covenant with God. With God's grace it is humanly reparable. "Venial sin does not deprive the sinner of sanctifying grace, friendship with God, charity, and consequently eternal happiness" (John Paul II, RP 17 § 9). While he is in the flesh, man cannot help but have at least some light sins. But do not despise these sins which we call "light": if you take them for light when you weigh them, tremble when you count them. A number of light objects makes a great mass; a number of drops fills a river; a number of grains makes a heap. What then is our hope? Above all, confession... (St. Augustine, *In ep. Jo.* 1, 6: PL 35, 1982). (CCC 1868) Sin is a personal act. Moreover, we have a responsibility for the sins committed by others when *we cooperate in them*: - by participating directly and voluntarily in them; - by ordering, advising, praising, or approving them; - by not disclosing or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so; - by protecting evil-doers. (CCC 1869) Thus sin makes men accomplices of one another and causes concupiscence, violence, and injustice to reign among them. Sins give rise to social situations and institutions that are contrary to the divine goodness. "Structures of sin" are the expression and effect of personal sins. They lead their victims to do evil in their turn. In an analogous sense, they constitute a "social sin" (John Paul II, RP 16).

### (Heb 10, 28-29) Who has contempt for the Son of God

[28] Anyone who rejects the law of Moses is put to death without pity on the testimony of two or three witnesses. [29] Do you not think that a much worse punishment is due the one who has contempt for the Son of God, considers unclean the covenant-blood by which he was consecrated, and insults the spirit of grace?

(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 1864) "Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven" (Mt 12:31; cf. Mk 3:29; Lk 12:10). There are no limits to the mercy of God, but anyone who deliberately refuses to accept his mercy by repenting, rejects the forgiveness of his sins and the salvation offered by the Holy Spirit (Cf. John Paul II, *DeV* 46). Such hardness of heart can lead to final impenitence and eternal loss. (CCC 1035) The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, "eternal fire" (Cf. DS 76; 409; 411; 801; 858; 1002; 1351; 1575; Paul VI, CPG § 12). The chief

punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.

### (Heb 10, 30-31) The Lord will judge his people

[30] We know the one who said: "Vengeance is mine; I will repay," and again: "The Lord will judge his people." [31] It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

(CCC 1036) The affirmations of Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church on the subject of hell are a *call to the responsibility* incumbent upon man to make use of his freedom in view of his eternal destiny. They are at the same time an urgent *call to conversion*: "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Mt 7:13-14). Since we know neither the day nor the hour, we should follow the advice of the Lord and watch constantly so that, when the single course of our earthly life is completed, we may merit to enter with him into the marriage feast and be numbered among the blessed, and not, like the wicked and slothful servants, be ordered to depart into the eternal fire, into the outer darkness where "men will weep and gnash their teeth" (LG 48 § 3; Mt 22:13; cf. Heb 9:27; Mt 25:13, 26, 30, 31 46). (CCC 1037) God predestines no one to go to hell (Cf. Council of Orange II (529): DS 397; Council of Trent (1547):1567); for this, a willful turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary, and persistence in it until the end. In the Eucharistic liturgy and in the daily prayers of her faithful, the Church implores the mercy of God, who does not want "any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9): Father, accept this offering from your whole family. Grant us your peace in this life, save us from final damnation, and count us among those you have chosen [*Roman Missal*, EP I (Roman Canon) 88].

### (Heb 10, 32-34) You endured a great contest of suffering

[32] Remember the days past when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a great contest of suffering. [33] At times you were publicly exposed to abuse and affliction; at other times you associated yourselves with those so treated. [34] You even joined in the sufferings of those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, knowing that you had a better and lasting possession.

(CCC 769) "The Church... will receive its perfection only in the glory of heaven" (LG 48), at the time of Christ's glorious return. Until that day, "the Church progresses on her pilgrimage amidst this world's persecutions and God's consolations" (St. Augustine, *De civ. Dei*, 18, 51: PL 41, 614; cf. LG 8). Here below she knows that she is in exile far from the Lord, and longs for the full coming of the Kingdom, when she will "be united in glory with her king" (LG 5; cf. 6; 2 Cor 5:6). The Church, and through her the world, will not be perfected in glory without great trials. Only then will "all the just from the time of Adam, 'from Abel, the just one, to the last of the elect,'... be gathered together in the universal Church in the Father's presence" (LG 2). (CCC 1816) The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it: "All however must be prepared to confess Christ before men and to follow him along the way of the Cross, amidst the persecutions which the Church never lacks" (LG 42; cf. DH 14). Service of and witness to the faith are necessary for salvation: "So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever

denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 10:32-33).

(Heb 10, 35-39) You need endurance to do the will of God

[35] Therefore, do not throw away your confidence; it will have great recompense. [36] You need endurance to do the will of God and receive what he has promised. [37] "For, after just a brief moment, he who is to come shall come; he shall not delay. [38] But my just one shall live by faith, and if he draws back I take no pleasure in him." [39] We are not among those who draw back and perish, but among those who have faith and will possess life.

(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). (CCC 2826) By prayer we can discern "what is the will of God" and obtain the endurance to do it (Rom 12:2; cf. Eph 5:17; cf. Heb 10:36). Jesus teaches us that one enters the kingdom of heaven not by speaking words, but by doing "the will of my Father in heaven" (Mt 7:21). (CCC 2016) The children of our holy mother the Church rightly hope *for the grace of final perseverance and the recompense* of God their Father for the good works accomplished with his grace in communion with Jesus (Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1576). Keeping the same rule of life, believers share the "blessed hope" of those whom the divine mercy gathers into the "holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev 21:2).

## Hebrews 11

(Heb 11, 1) Faith is the realization of what is hoped

[1] Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.

(CCC 1814) Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself. By faith "man freely commits his entire self to God" (DV 5). For this reason the believer seeks to know and do God's will. "The righteous shall live by faith." Living faith "work[s] through charity" (Rom 1:17; Gal 5:6). (CCC 1842) By faith, we believe in God and believe all that he has revealed to us and that Holy Church proposes for our belief. (CCC 192) Through the centuries many professions or symbols of faith have been articulated in response to the needs of the different eras: the creeds of the different apostolic and ancient Churches (Cf. DS 1-64), e.g., the *Quicumque*, also called the Athanasian Creed (Cf. DS 75-76); The professions of faith of certain Councils, such as Toledo, Lateran, Lyons, Trent (Cf. DS 525-541; 800-802; 851-861; 1862-1870); or the symbols of certain popes, e.g., the *Fides Damasi* (Cf. DS 71-72) or the *Credo of the People of God* of Paul VI (Paul VI, CPG (1968)). (CCC 817) In fact, "in this one and only Church of God from its very beginnings there arose

certain rifts, which the Apostle strongly censures as damnable. But in subsequent centuries much more serious dissensions appeared and large communities became separated from full communion with the Catholic Church - for which, often enough, men of both sides were to blame" (UR 3 § 1). The ruptures that wound the unity of Christ's Body - here we must distinguish heresy, apostasy, and schism (Cf. CIC, can. 751) - do not occur without human sin: Where there are sins, there are also divisions, schisms, heresies, and disputes. Where there is virtue, however, there also are harmony and unity, from which arise the one heart and one soul of all believers (Origen, *Hom. in Ezech.* 9, 1: PG 13, 732). (CCC 818) "However, one cannot charge with the sin of the separation those who at present are born into these communities [that resulted from such separation] and in them are brought up in the faith of Christ, and the Catholic Church accepts them with respect and affection as brothers.... All who have been justified by faith in Baptism are incorporated into Christ; they therefore have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers in the Lord by the children of the Catholic Church" (UR 3 § 1).

## **(Heb 11, 2) Because of it the ancients were well attested**

### **[2] Because of it the ancients were well attested.**

(CCC 193) None of the creeds from the different stages in the Church's life can be considered superseded or irrelevant. They help us today to attain and deepen the faith of all times by means of the different summaries made of it. Among all the creeds, two occupy a special place in the Church's life: (CCC 194) *The Apostles' Creed* is so called because it is rightly considered to be a faithful summary of the apostles' faith. It is the ancient baptismal symbol of the Church of Rome. Its great authority arises from this fact: it is "the Creed of the Roman Church, the See of Peter the first of the apostles, to which he brought the common faith" (St. Ambrose, *Expl. symb.* 7: PL 17, 1196). (CCC 195) *The Niceno-Constantinopolitan* or *Nicene Creed* draws its great authority from the fact that it stems from the first two ecumenical Councils (in 325 and 381). It remains common to all the great Churches of both East and West to this day. (CCC 196) Our presentation of the faith will follow the Apostles' Creed, which constitutes, as it were, "the oldest Roman catechism". The presentation will be completed however by constant references to the Nicene Creed, which is often more explicit and more detailed. (CCC 191) "These three parts are distinct although connected with one another. According to a comparison often used by the Fathers, we call them *articles*. Indeed, just as in our bodily members there are certain articulations which distinguish and separate them, so too in this profession of faith, the name *articles* has justly and rightly been given to the truths we must believe particularly and distinctly" (*Roman Catechism*, I, I, 4). In accordance with an ancient tradition, already attested to by St. Ambrose, it is also customary to reckon the articles of the Creed as *twelve*, thus symbolizing the fullness of the apostolic faith by the number of the apostles (Cf. St. Ambrose, *Expl. symb.* 8). (CCC 819) "Furthermore, many elements of sanctification and of truth" (LG 8 § 2) are found outside the visible confines of the Catholic Church: "the written Word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope, and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as visible elements" (UR 3 § 2; cf. LG 15). Christ's Spirit uses these Churches and ecclesial communities as means of salvation, whose power derives from the fullness of grace and truth that Christ has entrusted to the

Catholic Church. All these blessings come from Christ and lead to him (Cf. UR 3), and are in themselves calls to "Catholic unity" (Cf. LG 8).

**(Heb 11, 3) The universe was ordered by the word of God**

**[3] By faith we understand that the universe was ordered by the word of God, so that what is visible came into being through the invisible.**

(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 297) Scripture bears witness to faith in creation "out of nothing" as a truth full of promise and hope. Thus the mother of seven sons encourages them for martyrdom: I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of man and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws... Look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. Thus also mankind comes into being (2 Macc 7:22-23, 28).

**(Heb 11, 4-5) By faith Abel offered to God a sacrifice**

**[4] By faith Abel offered to God a sacrifice greater than Cain's. Through this he was attested to be righteous, God bearing witness to his gifts, and through this, though dead, he still speaks. [5] By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and "he was found no more because God had taken him." Before he was taken up, he was attested to have pleased God.**

(CCC 292) The Old Testament suggests and the New Covenant reveals the creative action of the Son and the Spirit (Pss 33: 6 104: 30; Gen 1: 2-3) inseparably one with that of the Father. This creative co-operation is clearly affirmed in the Church's rule of faith: "There exists but one God... he is the Father, God, the Creator, the author, the giver of order. He made all things *by himself*, that is, by his Word and by his Wisdom", "by the Son and the Spirit" who, so to speak, are "his hands" (St. Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 2, 30, 9; 4, 20, I: PG 7/1, 822, 1032). Creation is the common work of the Holy Trinity. (CCC 316) Though the work of creation is attributed to the Father in particular, it is equally a truth of faith that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit together are the one, indivisible principle of creation. (CCC 296) We believe that God needs no pre-existent thing or any help in order to create, nor is creation any sort of necessary emanation from the divine substance (Cf. *Dei Filius*, can. 2-4: DS 3022-3024). God creates freely "out of nothing" (Lateran Council IV (1215): DS 800; cf. DS 3025): If God had drawn the world from pre-existent matter, what would be so extraordinary in that? A human artisan makes from a given material whatever he wants, while God shows his power by starting from nothing to make all he wants (St. Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum* II, 4: PG 6, 1052).

**(Heb 11, 6) Without faith it is impossible to please him**

**[6] But without faith it is impossible to please him, for anyone who approaches God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.**

(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). (CCC 842) *The Church's bond with non-Christian religions* is in the first place the common origin and end of the human race: All nations form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth, and also because all share a common destiny, namely God. His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all against the day when the elect are gathered together in the holy city.... (NA 1). (CCC 843) The Catholic Church recognizes in other religions that search, among shadows and images, for the God who is unknown yet near since he gives life and breath and all things and wants all men to be saved. Thus, the Church considers all goodness and truth found in these religions as "a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life" (LG 16; cf. NA 2; EN 53). (CCC 841) *The Church's relationship with the Muslims*. "The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day" (LG 16; cf. NA 3). (CCC 344) There is a *solidarity among all creatures* arising from the fact that all have the same Creator and are all ordered to his glory: May you be praised, O Lord, in all your creatures, especially brother sun, by whom you give us light for the day; he is beautiful, radiating great splendour, and offering us a symbol of you, the Most High.... May you be praised, my Lord, for sister water, who is very useful and humble, precious and chaste.... May you be praised, my Lord, for sister earth, our mother, who bears and feeds us, and produces the variety of fruits and dappled flowers and grasses.... Praise and bless my Lord, give thanks and serve him in all humility (St. Francis of Assisi, *Canticle of the Creatures*). (CCC 354) Respect for laws inscribed in creation and the relations which derive from the nature of things is a principle of wisdom and a foundation for morality.

**(Heb 11, 7) By faith Noah built an ark for the salvation**

**[7] By faith Noah, warned about what was not yet seen, with reverence built an ark for the salvation of his household. Through this he condemned the world and inherited the righteousness that comes through faith.**

(CCC 56) After the unity of the human race was shattered by sin God at once sought to save humanity part by part. The covenant with Noah after the flood gives expression to the principle of the divine economy toward the "nations", in other words, towards men grouped "in their lands, each with (its) own language, by their families, in their nations" (Gen 10:5; cf. 9:9-10, 16; 10:20-31). (CCC 57) This state of division into many nations is at once cosmic, social and religious. It is intended to limit the pride of fallen humanity (Cf. Acts 17:26-27), united only in its perverse ambition to forge its own unity as at Babel (Cf. Wis 10:5; Gen 11:4-6). But, because of sin, both polytheism and the idolatry of

the nation and of its rulers constantly threaten this provisional economy with the perversion of paganism (Cf. Rom 1:18-25). (CCC 58) The covenant with Noah remains in force during the times of the Gentiles, until the universal proclamation of the Gospel (Cf. Gen 9:16; Lk 21:24; DV 3). The Bible venerates several great figures among the Gentiles: Abel the just, the king-priest Melchisedek - a figure of Christ - and the upright "Noah, Daniel, and Job" (Cf. Gen 14:18; Heb 7:3; Ezek 14:14). Scripture thus expresses the heights of sanctity that can be reached by those who live according to the covenant of Noah, waiting for Christ to "gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (Jn 11:52). (CCC 71) God made an everlasting covenant with Noah and with all living beings (cf. Gen 9:16). It will remain in force as long as the world lasts.

### (Heb 11, 8-16) By faith Abraham obeyed

[8] By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; he went out, not knowing where he was to go. [9] By faith he sojourned in the promised land as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs of the same promise; [10] for he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and maker is God. [11] By faith he received power to generate, even though he was past the normal age - and Sarah herself was sterile - for he thought that the one who had made the promise was trustworthy. [12] So it was that there came forth from one man, himself as good as dead, descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sands on the seashore. [13] All these died in faith. They did not receive what had been promised but saw it and greeted it from afar and acknowledged themselves to be strangers and aliens on earth, [14] for those who speak thus show that they are seeking a homeland. [15] If they had been thinking of the land from which they had come, they would have had opportunity to return. [16] But now they desire a better homeland, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

(CCC 59) In order to gather together scattered humanity God calls Abram from his country, his kindred and his father's house (Gen 12:1), and makes him Abraham, that is, "the father of a multitude of nations". "In you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 17:5; 12:3 (LXX); cf. Gal 3:8). (CCC 146) Abraham thus fulfils the definition of faith in *Hebrews* 11:1: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb 11:1): "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Rom 4:3; cf. Gen 15:6). Because he was "strong in his faith", Abraham became the "father of all who believe" (Rom 4:11, 18; 4:20; cf. Gen 15:5). (CCC 147) The Old Testament is rich in witnesses to this faith. The *Letter to the Hebrews* proclaims its eulogy of the exemplary faith of the ancestors who "received divine approval" (Heb 11:2, 39). Yet "God had foreseen something better for us": the grace of believing in his Son Jesus, "the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Heb 11:40; 12:2). (CCC 60) The people descended from Abraham would be the trustees of the promise made to the patriarchs, the chosen people, called to prepare for that day when God would gather all his children into the unity of the Church (Cf. Rom 11:28; Jn 11:52; 10:16). They would be the root on to which the Gentiles would be grafted, once they came to believe (Cf. Rom 11:17-18, 24). (CCC 61) The

patriarchs, prophets and certain other Old Testament figures have been and always will be honoured as saints in all the Church's liturgical traditions.

### **(Heb 11, 17-18) By faith Abraham offered up Isaac**

**[17] By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer his only son, [18] of whom it was said, "Through Isaac descendants shall bear your name."**

(CCC 2570) When God calls him, Abraham goes forth "as the Lord had told him" (Gen 12:4); Abraham's heart is entirely submissive to the Word and so he obeys. Such attentiveness of the heart, whose decisions are made according to God's will, is essential to prayer, while the words used count only in relation to it. Abraham's prayer is expressed first by deeds: a man of silence, he constructs an altar to the Lord at each stage of his journey. Only later does Abraham's first prayer in words appear: a veiled complaint reminding God of his promises which seem unfulfilled (Cf. Gen 15:2 f). Thus one aspect of the drama of prayer appears from the beginning: the test of faith in the fidelity of God. (CCC 2572) As a final stage in the purification of his faith, Abraham, "who had received the promises" (Heb 11:17) is asked to sacrifice the son God had given him. Abraham's faith does not weaken ("God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering."), for he "considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead" (Gen 22:8; Heb 11:19) and so the father of believers is conformed to the likeness of the Father who will not spare his own Son but will deliver him up for us all (Rom 8:32). Prayer restores man to God's likeness and enables him to share in the power of God's love that saves the multitude (Cf. Rom 8:16-21). (CCC 145) *The Letter to the Hebrews*, in its great eulogy of the faith of Israel's ancestors, lays special emphasis on Abraham's faith: "By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go" (Heb 11:8; cf. Gen 12:1-4). By faith, he lived as a stranger and pilgrim in the promised land (Cf. Gen 23:4). By faith, Sarah was given to conceive the son of the promise. And by faith Abraham offered his only son in sacrifice (Cf. Heb 11:17).

### **(Heb 11, 19) God was able to raise even from the dead**

**[19] He reasoned that God was able to raise even from the dead, and he received Isaac back as a symbol.**

(CCC 992) God revealed the resurrection of the dead to his people progressively. Hope in the bodily resurrection of the dead established itself as a consequence intrinsic to faith in God as creator of the whole man, soul and body. The creator of heaven and earth is also the one who faithfully maintains his covenant with Abraham and his posterity. It was in this double perspective that faith in the resurrection came to be expressed. In their trials, the Maccabean martyrs confessed: The King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws (2 Macc 7:9). One cannot but choose to die at the hands of men and to cherish the hope that God gives of being raised again by him (2 Macc 7:14; cf. 7:29; Dan 12:1-13). (CCC 1052) "We believe that the souls of all who die in Christ's grace... are the People of God beyond death. On the day of resurrection, death will be definitively conquered, when these souls will be reunited with their bodies" (Paul VI, CPG § 28). (CCC 1524) In addition to the Anointing of the Sick, the Church offers those who are about to leave this life the Eucharist as viaticum. Communion in the body and blood of Christ, received at this moment of "passing over" to the Father, has a

particular significance and importance. It is the seed of eternal life and the power of resurrection, according to the words of the Lord: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn 6:54). The sacrament of Christ once dead and now risen, the Eucharist is here the sacrament of passing over from death to life, from this world to the Father (Cf. Jn 13:1). (CCC 1525) Thus, just as the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist form a unity called "the sacraments of Christian initiation," so too it can be said that Penance, the Anointing of the Sick and the Eucharist as viaticum constitute at the end of Christian life "the sacraments that prepare for our heavenly homeland" or the sacraments that complete the earthly pilgrimage.

### **(Heb 11, 20-22) By faith Isaac blessed Jacob**

[20] By faith regarding things still to come Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau. [21] By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph and "bowed in worship, leaning on the top of his staff." [22] By faith Joseph, near the end of his life, spoke of the Exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions about his bones.

(CCC 2573) God renews his promise to Jacob, the ancestor of the twelve tribes of Israel (Cf. Gen 28:10-22). Before confronting his elder brother Esau, Jacob wrestles all night with a mysterious figure who refuses to reveal his name, but he blesses him before leaving him at dawn. From this account, the spiritual tradition of the Church has retained the symbol of prayer as a battle of faith and as the triumph of perseverance (Cf. Gen 32:24-30; Lk 18:1-8). (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 2626) *Blessing* expresses the basic movement of Christian prayer: it is an encounter between God and man. In blessing, God's gift and man's acceptance of it are united in dialogue with each other. The prayer of blessing is man's response to God's gifts: because God blesses, the human heart can in return bless the One who is the source of every blessing. (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 11, 23-29) By faith Moses kept the Passover**

[23] By faith Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that he was a beautiful child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. [24] By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter; [25] he chose to

be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than enjoy the fleeting pleasure of sin. [26] He considered the reproach of the Anointed greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the recompense. [27] By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's fury, for he persevered as if seeing the one who is invisible. [28] By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. [29] By faith they crossed the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted it they were drowned.

(CCC 62) After the patriarchs, God formed Israel as his people by freeing them from slavery in Egypt. He established with them the covenant of Mount Sinai and, through Moses, gave them his law so that they would recognize him and serve him as the one living and true God, the provident Father and just judge, and so that they would look for the promised Saviour (Cf. DV 3.). (CCC 204) God revealed himself progressively and under different names to his people, but the revelation that proved to be the fundamental one for both the Old and the New Covenants was the revelation of the divine name to Moses in the theophany of the burning bush, on the threshold of the Exodus and of the covenant on Sinai. (CCC 205) God calls Moses from the midst of a bush that burns without being consumed: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Ex 3:6) God is the God of the fathers, the One who had called and guided the patriarchs in their wanderings. He is the faithful and compassionate God who remembers them and his promises; he comes to free their descendants from slavery. He is the God who, from beyond space and time, can do this and wills to do it, the God who will put his almighty power to work for this plan. (CCC 210) After Israel's sin, when the people had turned away from God to worship the golden calf, God hears Moses' prayer of intercession and agrees to walk in the midst of an unfaithful people, thus demonstrating his love (Cf. Ex 32; 33: 12-17). When Moses asks to see his glory, God responds "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name "the LORD" [YHWH]" (Ex 33:18-19). Then the LORD passes before Moses and proclaims, "YHWH, YHWH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness"; Moses then confesses that the LORD is a forgiving God (Ex 34:5-6; cf. 34:9).

### (Heb 11, 30-38) By faith obtained the promises

[30] By faith the walls of Jericho fell after being encircled for seven days. [31] By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish with the disobedient, for she had received the spies in peace. [32] What more shall I say? I have not time to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, [33] who by faith conquered kingdoms, did what was righteous, obtained the promises; they closed the mouths of lions, [34] put out raging fires, escaped the devouring sword; out of weakness they were made powerful, became strong in battle, and turned back foreign invaders. [35] Women received back their dead through resurrection. Some were tortured and would not accept deliverance, in order to obtain a better resurrection. [36] Others endured mockery, scourging, even chains and imprisonment. [37] They were stoned, sawed in two, put to death at sword's point; they went about in skins of sheep or goats, needy, afflicted, tormented. [38] The world was not worthy of them. They wandered about in deserts and on mountains, in caves and in crevices in the earth.

(CCC 60) The people descended from Abraham would be the trustees of the promise made to the patriarchs, the chosen people, called to prepare for that day when God would gather all his children into the unity of the Church (Cf. Rom 11:28; Jn 11:52; 10:16). They would be the root on to which the Gentiles would be grafted, once they came to believe (Cf. Rom 11:17-18, 24). (CCC 61) The patriarchs, prophets and certain other Old Testament figures have been and always will be honoured as saints in all the Church's liturgical traditions. (CCC 64) Through the prophets, God forms his people in the hope of salvation, in the expectation of a new and everlasting Covenant intended for all, to be written on their hearts (Cf. Isa 2:2-4; Jer 31:31-34; Heb 10:16). The prophets proclaim a radical redemption of the People of God, purification from all their infidelities, a salvation which will include all the nations (Cf. Ezek 36; Isa 49:5-6; 53:11). Above all, the poor and humble of the Lord will bear this hope. Such holy women as Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Judith and Esther kept alive the hope of Israel's salvation. The purest figure among them is Mary (Cf. Zeph 2:3; Lk 1:38). (CCC 68) By love, God has revealed himself and given himself to man. He has thus provided the definitive, superabundant answer to the questions that man asks himself about the meaning and purpose of his life. (CCC 69) God has revealed himself to man by gradually communicating his own mystery in deeds and in words. (CCC 73) God has revealed himself fully by sending his own Son, in whom he has established his covenant for ever. The Son is his Father's definitive Word; so there will be no further Revelation after him.

**(Heb 11, 39-40) God had foreseen something better for us**

**[39] Yet all these, though approved because of their faith, did not receive what had been promised. [40] God had foreseen something better for us, so that without us they should not be made perfect.**

(CCC 147) The Old Testament is rich in witnesses to this faith. The *Letter to the Hebrews* proclaims its eulogy of the exemplary faith of the ancestors who "received divine approval" (Heb 11:2, 39). Yet "God had foreseen something better for us": the grace of believing in his Son Jesus, "the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Heb 11:40; 12:2). (CCC 543) *Everyone* is called to enter the kingdom. First announced to the children of Israel, this messianic kingdom is intended to accept men of all nations (Cf. Mt 8:11; 10:5-7; 28:19). To enter it, one must first accept Jesus' word: The word of the Lord is compared to a seed which is sown in a field; those who hear it with faith and are numbered among the little flock of Christ have truly received the kingdom. Then, by its own power, the seed sprouts and grows until the harvest (LG 5; cf. Mk 4:14, 26-29; Lk 12:32). (CCC 545) Jesus invites *sinners* to the table of the kingdom: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mk 2:17; cf. 1 Tim 1:15). He invites them to that conversion without which one cannot enter the kingdom, but shows them in word and deed his Father's boundless mercy for them and the vast "joy in heaven over one sinner who repents" (Lk 15:7; cf. 7:11-32). The supreme proof of his love will be the sacrifice of his own life "for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28). (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 658) Christ, "the first-born from the dead" (Col 1:18), is the principle of our own resurrection, even now by the justification of our souls (cf. Rom 6:4), and one day by the new life he will impart to our bodies (cf. Rom 8:11).

# Hebrews 12

(Heb 12, 1) Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses

[1] Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us

(CCC 2683) The witnesses who have preceded us into the kingdom (Cf. Heb 12:1), especially those whom the Church recognizes as saints, share in the living tradition of prayer by the example of their lives, the transmission of their writings, and their prayer today. They contemplate God, praise him and constantly care for those whom they have left on earth. When they entered into the joy of their Master, they were "put in charge of many things" (Cf. Mt 25:21). Their intercession is their most exalted service to God's plan. We can and should ask them to intercede for us and for the whole world. (CCC 2684) In the communion of saints, many and varied *spiritualities* have been developed throughout the history of the churches. The personal charism of some witnesses to God's love for men has been handed on, like "the spirit" of Elijah to Elisha and John the Baptist, so that their followers may have a share in this spirit (Cf. 2 Kings 2:9; Lk 1:1; PC 2). A distinct spirituality can also arise at the point of convergence of liturgical and theological currents, bearing witness to the integration of the faith into a particular human environment and its history. The different schools of Christian spirituality share in the living tradition of prayer and are essential guides for the faithful. In their rich diversity they are refractions of the one pure light of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is truly the dwelling of the saints and the saints are for the Spirit a place where he dwells as in his own home since they offer themselves as a dwelling place for God and are called his temple (St. Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 26, 62: PG 32, 184).

(Heb 12, 2) Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus

[2] while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God.

(CCC 2825) "Although he was a Son, [Jesus] learned obedience through what he suffered" (Heb 5:8). How much more reason have we sinful creatures to learn obedience - we who in him have become children of adoption. We ask our Father to unite our will to his Son's, in order to fulfill his will, his plan of salvation for the life of the world. We are radically incapable of this, but united with Jesus and with the power of his Holy Spirit, we can surrender our will to him and decide to choose what his Son has always chosen: to do what is pleasing to the Father (Cf. Jn 8:29). In committing ourselves to [Christ], we can become one spirit with him, and thereby accomplish his will, in such wise that it will be perfect on earth as it is in heaven (Origen, *De orat.* 26 PG 11, 501B). Consider how [Jesus Christ] teaches us to be humble, by making us see that our virtue does not depend on our work alone but on grace from on high. He commands each of the faithful who prays to do so universally, for the whole world. For he did not say "thy will be done in me or in us," but "on earth," the whole earth, so that error may be banished from it, truth take root in it, all vice be destroyed on it, virtue flourish on it, and earth no longer differ from heaven.

**(Heb 12, 3) He endured such opposition from sinners**

**[3] Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart.**

(CCC 569) Jesus went up to Jerusalem voluntarily, knowing well that there he would die a violent death because of the opposition of sinners (cf. Heb 12:3). (CCC 557) "When the days drew near for him to be taken up [Jesus] set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Lk 9:51; cf. Jn 13:1). By this decision he indicated that he was going up to Jerusalem prepared to die there. Three times he had announced his Passion and Resurrection; now, heading toward Jerusalem, Jesus says: "It cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem" (Lk 13:33; cf. Mk 8:31-33; 9:31-32; 10:32-34). (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 12, 4-8) Do not disdain the discipline of the Lord**

**[4] In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood. [5] You have also forgotten the exhortation addressed to you as sons: "My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reprovved by him; [6] for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines; he scourges every son he acknowledges." [7] Endure your trials as "discipline"; God treats you as sons. For what "son" is there whom his father does not discipline? [8] If you are without discipline, in which all have shared, you are not sons but bastards.**

(CCC 2061) The Commandments take on their full meaning within the covenant. According to Scripture, man's moral life has all its meaning in and through the covenant. The first of the "ten words" recalls that God loved his people first: Since there was a passing from the paradise of freedom to the slavery of this world, in punishment for sin, the first phrase of the Decalogue, the first word of God's commandments, bears on freedom "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Origen, *Hom. in Ex.* 8,1: PG 12, 350; cf. Ex 20:2; Deut 5:6). (CCC 2090) When God reveals Himself and calls him, man cannot fully respond to the divine love by his own powers. He must hope that God will give him the capacity to love Him in return and to act in conformity with the commandments of charity. Hope is the confident

expectation of divine blessing and the beatific vision of God; it is also the fear of offending God's love and of incurring punishment.

**(Heb 12, 9-11) In order that we may share his holiness**

[9] Besides this, we have had our earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not (then) submit all the more to the Father of spirits and live? [10] They disciplined us for a short time as seemed right to them, but he does so for our benefit, in order that we may share his holiness. [11] At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it.

(CCC 2091) The first commandment is also concerned with sins against hope, namely, despair and presumption: By *despair*, man ceases to hope for his personal salvation from God, for help in attaining it or for the forgiveness of his sins. Despair is contrary to God's goodness, to his justice - for the Lord is faithful to his promises - and to his mercy. (CCC 2092) There are two kinds of *presumption*. Either man presumes upon his own capacities, (hoping to be able to save himself without help from on high), or he presumes upon God's almighty power or his mercy (hoping to obtain his forgiveness without conversion and glory without merit). (CCC 1828) The practice of the moral life animated by charity gives to the Christian the spiritual freedom of the children of God. He no longer stands before God as a slave, in servile fear, or as a mercenary looking for wages, but as a son responding to the love of him who "first loved us" (Cf. 1 Jn 4:19): If we turn away from evil out of fear of punishment, we are in the position of slaves. If we pursue the enticement of wages,... we resemble mercenaries. Finally if we obey for the sake of the good itself and out of love for him who commands... we are in the position of children (St. Basil, *Reg. fus. tract., prol.* 3 PG 31, 896 B).

**(Heb 12, 12-13) Make straight paths for your feet**

[12] So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees. [13] Make straight paths for your feet, that what is lame may not be dislocated but healed.

(CCC 2506) The Christian is not to "be ashamed of testifying to our Lord" (2 Tim 1:8) in deed and word. Martyrdom is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith. (CCC 2505) Truth or truthfulness is the virtue which consists in showing oneself true in deeds and truthful in words, and guarding against duplicity, dissimulation, and hypocrisy. (CCC 2480) Every word or attitude is forbidden which by *flattery, adulation, or complaisance* encourages and confirms another in malicious acts and perverse conduct. Adulation is a grave fault if it makes one an accomplice in another's vices or grave sins. Neither the desire to be of service nor friendship justifies duplicitous speech. Adulation is a venial sin when it only seeks to be agreeable, to avoid evil, to meet a need, or to obtain legitimate advantages. (CCC 2481) *Boasting* or bragging is an offense against truth. So is *irony* aimed at disparaging someone by maliciously caricaturing some aspect of his behavior. (CCC 2488) The *right to the communication* of the truth is not unconditional. Everyone must conform his life to the Gospel precept of fraternal love. This requires us in concrete situations to judge whether or not it is appropriate to reveal the truth to someone who asks for it. (CCC 2489) Charity and respect for the truth should dictate the response to every *request for information or communication*. The good and safety of others, respect for

privacy, and the common good are sufficient reasons for being silent about what ought not be known or for making use of a discreet language. The duty to avoid scandal often commands strict discretion. No one is bound to reveal the truth to someone who does not have the right to know it (Cf. Sir 27:16; Prov 25:9-10).

### **(Heb 12, 14-15) Strive for peace with everyone**

**[14] Strive for peace with everyone, and for that holiness without which no one will see the Lord. [15] See to it that no one be deprived of the grace of God, that no bitter root spring up and cause trouble, through which many may become defiled,**

(CCC 2512) Society has a right to information based on truth, freedom, and justice. One should practice moderation and discipline in the use of the social communications media. (CCC 2496) The means of social communication (especially the mass media) can give rise to a certain passivity among users, making them less than vigilant consumers of what is said or shown. Users should practice moderation and discipline in their approach to the mass media. They will want to form enlightened and correct consciences the more easily to resist unwholesome influences. (CCC 2497) By the very nature of their profession, journalists have an obligation to serve the truth and not offend against charity in disseminating information. They should strive to respect, with equal care, the nature of the facts and the limits of critical judgment concerning individuals. They should not stoop to defamation. (CCC 2493) Within modern society the communications media play a major role in information, cultural promotion, and formation. This role is increasing, as a result of technological progress, the extent and diversity of the news transmitted, and the influence exercised on public opinion. (CCC 2494) The information provided by the media is at the service of the common good (Cf. IM 11). Society has a right to information based on truth, freedom, justice, and solidarity: The proper exercise of this right demands that the content of the communication be true and - within the limits set by justice and charity - complete. Further, it should be communicated honestly and properly. This means that in the gathering and in the publication of news, the moral law and the legitimate rights and dignity of man should be upheld (IM 5 § 2). (CCC 2495) "It is necessary that all members of society meet the demands of justice and charity in this domain. They should help, through the means of social communication, in the formation and diffusion of sound public opinion" (IM 8). Solidarity is a consequence of genuine and right communication and the free circulation of ideas that further knowledge and respect for others.

### **(Heb 12, 16) No one be an immoral or profane person**

**[16] that no one be an immoral or profane person like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.**

(CCC 1852) There are a great many kinds of sins. Scripture provides several lists of them. The *Letter to the Galatians* contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit: "Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God" (Gal 5:19-21; cf. Rom 1:28-32; 1 Cor 9-10; Eph 5:3-5; Col 3:5-8; 1 Tim 9-10; 2 Tim 2-5). (CCC 2353) *Fornication* is carnal union between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman. It is gravely contrary to the dignity of persons and of human sexuality which is naturally ordered to the good of

spouses and the generation and education of children. Moreover, it is a grave scandal when there is corruption of the young. (CCC 2390) In a so-called *free union*, a man and a woman refuse to give juridical and public form to a liaison involving sexual intimacy. The expression "free union" is fallacious: what can "union" mean when the partners make no commitment to one another, each exhibiting a lack of trust in the other, in himself, or in the future? The expression covers a number of different situations: concubinage, rejection of marriage as such, or inability to make long-term commitments (Cf. FC 81). All these situations offend against the dignity of marriage; they destroy the very idea of the family; they weaken the sense of fidelity. They are contrary to the moral law. The sexual act must take place exclusively within marriage. Outside of marriage it always constitutes a grave sin and excludes one from sacramental communion. (CCC 2391) Some today claim a "*right to a trial marriage*" where there is an intention of getting married later. However firm the purpose of those who engage in premature sexual relations may be, "the fact is that such liaisons can scarcely ensure mutual sincerity and fidelity in a relationship between a man and a woman, nor, especially, can they protect it from inconstancy of desires or whim" (CDF, *Persona humana* 7). Carnal union is morally legitimate only when a definitive community of life between a man and woman has been established. Human love does not tolerate "trial marriages." It demands a total and definitive gift of persons to one another) Cf. FC 80).

#### (Heb 12, 17-21) Blazing fire, gloomy darkness and storm

[17] For you know that later, when he wanted to inherit his father's blessing, he was rejected because he found no opportunity to change his mind, even though he sought the blessing with tears. [18] You have not approached that which could be touched and a blazing fire and gloomy darkness and storm [19] and a trumpet blast and a voice speaking words such that those who heard begged that no message be further addressed to them, [20] for they could not bear to hear the command: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." [21] Indeed, so fearful was the spectacle that Moses said, "I am terrified and trembling."

(CCC 409) This dramatic situation of "the whole world [which] is in the power of the evil one" (1 Jn 5:19; cf. 1 Pt 5:8) makes man's life a battle: The whole of man's history has been the story of dour combat with the powers of evil, stretching, so our Lord tells us, from the very dawn of history until the last day. Finding himself in the midst of the battlefield man has to struggle to do what is right, and it is at great cost to himself, and aided by God's grace, that he succeeds in achieving his own inner integrity (GS 37 § 2).

#### (Heb 12, 22-24) Have approached the city of the living God

[22] No, you have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering, [23] and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect, [24] and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood that speaks more eloquently than that of Abel.

(CCC 707) Theophanies (manifestations of God) light up the way of the promise, from the patriarchs to Moses and from Joshua to the visions that inaugurated the missions of the great prophets. Christian tradition has always recognized that God's Word allowed himself to be seen and heard in these

theophanies, in which the cloud of the Holy Spirit both revealed him and concealed him in its shadow. (CCC 757) "The Church, further, which is called 'that Jerusalem which is above' and 'our mother', is described as the spotless spouse of the spotless lamb. It is she whom Christ 'loved and for whom he delivered himself up that he might sanctify her.' It is she whom he unites to himself by an unbreakable alliance, and whom he constantly 'nourishes and cherishes'" (LG 6; cf. Gal 4:26; Rev 12:17; 19:7; 21:2, 9; 22:17; Eph 5:25-26, 29).

### (Heb 12, 25-27) Do not reject the one who speaks

[25] See that you do not reject the one who speaks. For if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much more in our case if we turn away from the one who warns from heaven. [26] His voice shook the earth at that time, but now he has promised, "I will once more shake not only earth but heaven." [27] That phrase, "once more," points to (the) removal of shaken, created things, so that what is unshaken may remain.

(CCC 2716) Contemplative prayer is *hearing* the Word of God. Far from being passive, such attentiveness is the obedience of faith, the unconditional acceptance of a servant, and the loving commitment of a child. It participates in the "Yes" of the Son become servant and the *Fiat* of God's lowly handmaid. (CCC 2465) The Old Testament attests that *God is the source of all truth*. His Word is truth. His Law is truth. His "faithfulness endures to all generations" (Ps 119:90; Cf. Prov 8:7; 2 Sam 7:28; Ps 119:142; Lk 1:50). Since God is "true," the members of his people are called to live in the truth (Rom 3:4; cf. Ps 119:30). (CCC 33) *The human person*: with his openness to truth and beauty, his sense of moral goodness, his freedom and the voice of his conscience, with his longings for the infinite and for happiness, man questions himself about God's existence. In all this he discerns signs of his spiritual soul. The soul, the "seed of eternity we bear in ourselves, irreducible to the merely material" (GS 18 § 1; cf. 14 § 2), can have its origin only in God. (CCC 2498) "*Civil authorities* have particular responsibilities in this field because of the common good.... It is for the civil authority... to defend and safeguard a true and just freedom of information" (IM 12). By promulgating laws and overseeing their application, public authorities should ensure that "public morality and social progress are not gravely endangered" through misuse of the media (IM 12 § 2). Civil authorities should punish any violation of the rights of individuals to their reputation and privacy. They should give timely and reliable reports concerning the general good or respond to the well-founded concerns of the people. Nothing can justify recourse to disinformation for manipulating public opinion through the media. Interventions by public authority should avoid injuring the freedom of individuals or groups. (CCC 2499) Moral judgment must condemn the plague of totalitarian states which systematically falsify the truth, exercise political control of opinion through the media, manipulate defendants and witnesses at public trials, and imagine that they secure their tyranny by strangling and repressing everything they consider "thought crimes."

### (Heb 12, 28) We should offer worship pleasing to God

[28] Therefore, we who are receiving the unshakable kingdom should have gratitude, with which we should offer worship pleasing to God in reverence and awe.

(CCC 98) "The Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes" (DV 8 § 1). (CCC 1147) God speaks to man through the visible creation. The material cosmos is so presented to man's intelligence that he can read there traces of its Creator (Cf. Wis 13:1; Rom 1:19 f; Acts 14:17). Light and darkness, wind and fire, water and earth, the tree and its fruit speak of God and symbolize both his greatness and his nearness. (CCC 1148) Inasmuch as they are creatures, these perceptible realities can become means of expressing the action of God who sanctifies men, and the action of men who offer worship to God. The same is true of signs and symbols taken from the social life of man: washing and anointing, breaking bread and sharing the cup can express the sanctifying presence of God and man's gratitude toward his Creator. (CCC 1149) The great religions of mankind witness, often impressively, to this cosmic and symbolic meaning of religious rites. The liturgy of the Church presupposes, integrates and sanctifies elements from creation and human culture, conferring on them the dignity of signs of grace, of the new creation in Jesus Christ. (CCC 2717) Contemplative prayer is *silence*, the "symbol of the world to come" (Cf. St. Isaac of Nineveh, *Tract. myst.* 66) or "silent love" [St. John of the Cross, *Maxims and Counsels*, 53 in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, tr. K. Kavanaugh, OCD, and O. Rodriguez, OCD (Washington DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1979), 678)]. Words in this kind of prayer are not speeches; they are like kindling that feeds the fire of love. In this silence, unbearable to the "outer" man, the Father speaks to us his incarnate Word, who suffered, died, and rose; in this silence the Spirit of adoption enables us to share in the prayer of Jesus. (CCC 2719) Contemplative prayer is a communion of love bearing Life for the multitude, to the extent that it consents to abide in the night of faith. The Paschal night of the Resurrection passes through the night of the agony and the tomb - the three intense moments of the Hour of Jesus which his Spirit (and not "the flesh [which] is weak") brings to life in prayer. We must be willing to "keep watch with (him) one hour" (Cf. Mt 26:40).

## (Heb 12, 29) Our God is a consuming fire

### [29] For our God is a consuming fire.

(CCC 696) *Fire*. While water signifies birth and the fruitfulness of life given in the Holy Spirit, fire symbolizes the transforming energy of the Holy Spirit's actions. The prayer of the prophet Elijah, who "arose like fire" and whose "word burned like a torch," brought down fire from heaven on the sacrifice on Mount Carmel (Sir 48:1; cf. 1 Kings 18:38-39). This event was a "figure" of the fire of the Holy Spirit, who transforms what he touches. John the Baptist, who goes "before [the Lord] in the spirit and power of Elijah," proclaims Christ as the one who "will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Lk 1:17; 3:16). Jesus will say of the Spirit: "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!" (Lk 12:49). In the form of tongues "as of fire," the Holy Spirit rests on the disciples on the morning of Pentecost and fills them with himself (Acts 2:3-4). The spiritual tradition has retained this symbolism of fire as one of the most expressive images of the Holy Spirit's actions (Cf. St. John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, tr. K. Kavanaugh, OCD, and O. Rodriguez, OCD (Washington DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1979), 577 ff.). "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thess 5:19). (CCC 1127) Celebrated worthily in faith, the sacraments confer the grace that

they signify (Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1605; DS 1606.). They are *efficacious* because in them Christ himself is at work: it is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies. The Father always hears the prayer of his Son's Church which, in the epiclesis of each sacrament, expresses her faith in the power of the Spirit. As fire transforms into itself everything it touches, so the Holy Spirit transforms into the divine life whatever is subjected to his power. (CCC 1031) The Church gives the name *Purgatory* to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned (Cf. Council of Florence (1439): DS 1304; Council of Trent (1563): DS 1820; (1547): 1580; see also Benedict XII, *Benedictus Deus* (1336): DS 1000). The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent. The tradition of the Church, by reference to certain texts of Scripture, speaks of a cleansing fire (Cf. 1 Cor 3:15; 1 Pet 1:7): As for certain lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgment, there is a purifying fire. He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor in the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come (St. Gregory the Great, *Dial.* 4, 39: PL 77, 396; cf. Mt 12:31).

## Hebrews 13

(Heb 13, 1-3) Let mutual love continue

[1] Let mutual love continue. [2] Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels. [3] Be mindful of prisoners as if sharing their imprisonment, and of the ill-treated as of yourselves, for you also are in the body.

(CCC 2447) The *works of mercy* are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities (Cf. Isa 58:6-7; Heb 13:3). Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead (Cf. Mt 25:31-46). Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God (Cf. Tob 4:5-11; Sir 17:22; Mt 6:2-4): He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none and he who has food must do likewise (Lk 3:11). But give for alms those things which are within; and behold, everything is clean for you (Lk 11:41). If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? (Jas 2:15-16; cf. 1 Jn 3:17).

(Heb 13, 4a) Let marriage be honored

[4a] Let marriage be honored among all

(CCC 1660) The marriage covenant, by which a man and a woman form with each other an intimate communion of life and love, has been founded and endowed with its own special laws by the Creator. By its very nature it is ordered to the good of the couple, as well as to the generation and education of children. Christ the Lord raised marriage between the baptized to the dignity of a sacrament (cf. CIC, can. 1055 § 1; cf. GS 48 § 1). (CCC 1661) The sacrament of Matrimony signifies the

union of Christ and the Church. It gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church; the grace of the sacrament thus perfects the human love of the spouses, strengthens their indissoluble unity, and sanctifies them on the way to eternal life (cf. Council of Trent: DS 1799). (CCC 1612) The nuptial covenant between God and his people Israel had prepared the way for the new and everlasting covenant in which the Son of God, by becoming incarnate and giving his life, has united to himself in a certain way all mankind saved by him, thus preparing for "the wedding-feast of the Lamb" (Rev 19:7, 9; cf. GS 22). (CCC 1614) In his preaching Jesus unequivocally taught the original meaning of the union of man and woman as the Creator willed it from the beginning: permission given by Moses to divorce one's wife was a concession to the hardness of hearts (Cf. Mt 19:8). The matrimonial union of man and woman is indissoluble: God himself has determined it "what therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Mt 19:6). (CCC 1615) This unequivocal insistence on the indissolubility of the marriage bond may have left some perplexed and could seem to be a demand impossible to realize. However, Jesus has not placed on spouses a burden impossible to bear, or too heavy - heavier than the Law of Moses (Cf. Mk 8:34; Mt 11:29-30). By coming to restore the original order of creation disturbed by sin, he himself gives the strength and grace to live marriage in the new dimension of the Reign of God. It is by following Christ, renouncing themselves, and taking up their crosses that spouses will be able to "receive" the original meaning of marriage and live it with the help of Christ (Cf. Mt 19:11). This grace of Christian marriage is a fruit of Christ's cross, the source of all Christian life. (CCC 1617) The entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and the Church. Already Baptism, the entry into the People of God, is a nuptial mystery; it is so to speak the nuptial bath (Cf. Eph 5:26-27) which precedes the wedding feast, the Eucharist. Christian marriage in its turn becomes an efficacious sign, the sacrament of the covenant of Christ and the Church. Since it signifies and communicates grace, marriage between baptized persons is a true sacrament of the New Covenant (Cf. DS 1800; CIC, Can. 1055 § 2).

### **(Heb 13, 4b) The marriage bed be kept undefiled** **[4b] and the marriage bed be kept undefiled,**

(CCC 1662) Marriage is based on the consent of the contracting parties, that is, on their will to give themselves, each to the other, mutually and definitively, in order to live a covenant of faithful and fruitful love. (CCC 1664) Unity, indissolubility, and openness to fertility are essential to marriage. Polygamy is incompatible with the unity of marriage; divorce separates what God has joined together; the refusal of fertility turns married life away from its "supreme gift," the child (GS 50 § 1). (CCC 2360) Sexuality is ordered to the conjugal love of man and woman. In marriage the physical intimacy of the spouses becomes a sign and pledge of spiritual communion. Marriage bonds between baptized persons are sanctified by the sacrament. (CCC 2361) "Sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is not something simply biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. It is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and woman commit themselves totally to one another until death" (FC 11). Tobias got out of bed and said to Sarah, "Sister, get up, and let us pray and implore our Lord that he grant us mercy and safety." So she got up, and they began to pray and implore that they

might be kept safe. Tobias began by saying, "Blessed are you, O God of our fathers.... You made Adam, and for him you made his wife Eve as a helper and support. From the two of them the race of mankind has sprung. You said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; let us make a helper for him like himself.' I now am taking this kinswoman of mine, not because of lust, but with sincerity. Grant that she and I may find mercy and that we may grow old together." and they both said, "Amen, Amen." Then they went to sleep for the night (Tob 8:4-9). (CCC 2362) "The acts in marriage by which the intimate and chaste union of the spouses takes place are noble and honorable; the truly human performance of these acts fosters the self-giving they signify and enriches the spouses in joy and gratitude" (GS 49 § 2). Sexuality is a source of joy and pleasure: The Creator himself... established that in the [generative] function, spouses should experience pleasure and enjoyment of body and spirit. Therefore, the spouses do nothing evil in seeking this pleasure and enjoyment. They accept what the Creator has intended for them. At the same time, spouses should know how to keep themselves within the limits of just moderation (Pius XII, Discourse, October 29, 1951).

### **(Heb 13, 4c) God will judge the immoral and adulterers**

**[4c] for God will judge the immoral and adulterers.**

(CCC 2351) *Lust* is disordered desire for or inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes. (CCC 2352) By *masturbation* is to be understood the deliberate stimulation of the genital organs in order to derive sexual pleasure. "Both the Magisterium of the Church, in the course of a constant tradition, and the moral sense of the faithful have been in no doubt and have firmly maintained that masturbation is an intrinsically and gravely disordered action" (CDF, *Persona humana* 9). "The deliberate use of the sexual faculty, for whatever reason, outside of marriage is essentially contrary to its purpose." For here sexual pleasure is sought outside of "the sexual relationship which is demanded by the moral order and in which the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love is achieved" (CDF, *Persona humana* 9). To form an equitable judgment about the subjects' moral responsibility and to guide pastoral action, one must take into account the affective immaturity, force of acquired habit, conditions of anxiety, or other psychological or social factors that can lessen, if not even reduce to a minimum, moral culpability. (CCC 2354) *Pornography* consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties. It offends against chastity because it perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other. It does grave injury to the dignity of its participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others. It immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world. It is a grave offense. Civil authorities should prevent the production and distribution of pornographic materials. (CCC 2356) *Rape* is the forcible violation of the sexual intimacy of another person. It does injury to justice and charity. Rape deeply wounds the respect, freedom, and physical and moral integrity to which every person has a right. It causes grave damage that can mark the victim for life. It is always an intrinsically evil act. Graver still is the rape of children committed by parents (incest) or those responsible for the education of the children entrusted to them.

(CCC 1665) The remarriage of persons divorced from a living, lawful spouse contravenes the plan and law of God as taught by Christ. They are not separated from the Church, but they cannot receive Eucharistic communion. They will lead Christian lives especially by educating their children in the faith.

### **(Heb 13, 5-6) Let your life be free from love of money**

[5] Let your life be free from love of money but be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never forsake you or abandon you." [6] Thus we may say with confidence: "The Lord is my helper, (and) I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?"

(CCC 2556) Detachment from riches is necessary for entering the Kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." (CCC 2536) The tenth commandment forbids *greed* and the desire to amass earthly goods without limit. It forbids *avarice* arising from a passion for riches and their attendant power. It also forbids the desire to commit injustice by harming our neighbor in his temporal goods: When the Law says, "You shall not covet," these words mean that we should banish our desires for whatever does not belong to us. Our thirst for another's goods is immense, infinite, never quenched. Thus it is written: "He who loves money never has money enough" (*Roman Catechism*, III, 37; cf. Sir 5:8). (CCC 2551) "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt 6:21). (CCC 2552) The tenth commandment forbids avarice arising from a passion for riches and their attendant power.

### **(Heb 13, 7-12) Jesus suffered to consecrate the people**

[7] Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. [8] Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. [9] Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teaching. It is good to have our hearts strengthened by grace and not by foods, which do not benefit those who live by them. [10] We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. [11] The bodies of the animals whose blood the high priest brings into the sanctuary as a sin offering are burned outside the camp. [12] Therefore, Jesus also suffered outside the gate, to consecrate the people by his own blood.

(CCC 1182) The *altar* of the New Covenant is the Lord's Cross (Cf. Heb 13:10), from which the sacraments of the Paschal mystery flow. On the altar, which is the center of the church, the sacrifice of the Cross is made present under sacramental signs. The altar is also the table of the Lord, to which the People of God are invited (Cf. GIRM 259). In certain Eastern liturgies, the altar is also the symbol of the tomb (Christ truly died and is truly risen). (CCC 1383) *The altar*, around which the Church is gathered in the celebration of the Eucharist, represents the two aspects of the same mystery: the altar of the sacrifice and the table of the Lord. This is all the more so since the Christian altar is the symbol of Christ himself, present in the midst of the assembly of his faithful, both as the victim offered for our reconciliation and as food from heaven who is giving himself to us. "For what is the altar of Christ if not the image of the Body of Christ?" (St. Ambrose, *De Sacr.* 5, 2, 7: PL 16, 447C) asks St. Ambrose. He says elsewhere, "The altar represents the body [of Christ] and the Body of Christ is on the altar" (St. Ambrose, *De Sacr.* 4, 2, 7: PL 16, 437D). The liturgy expresses this unity of sacrifice and communion in many prayers. Thus the Roman Church prays in its anaphora: We entreat you, almighty God, that by the hands of your holy

Angel this offering may be borne to your altar in heaven in the sight of your divine majesty, so that as we receive in communion at this altar the most holy Body and Blood of your Son, we may be filled with every heavenly blessing and grace (*Roman Missal*, EPI (Roman Canon) 96: *Supplices te rogamus, omnipotens Deus: iube haec perferri per manus sancti Angeli tui in sublime altare tuum, in conspectu divinae maiestatis tuae: ut, quotquot ex hac altaris participatione sacrosanctum Filii Corpus et Sanguinem sumpserimus, omni benedictione caelesti et gratia repleamur*).

### (Heb 13, 13-16) Let us offer God a sacrifice of praise

[13] Let us then go to him outside the camp, bearing the reproach that he bore. [14] For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the one that is to come. [15] Through him (then) let us continually offer God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. [16] Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have; God is pleased by sacrifices of that kind.

(CCC 2796) When the Church prays "our Father who art in heaven," she is professing that we are the People of God, already seated "with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" and "hidden with Christ in God" (Eph 2:6; Col 3:3); yet at the same time, "here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling" (2 Cor 5:2; cf. Phil 3:20; Heb 13:14). [Christians] are in the flesh, but do not live according to the flesh. They spend their lives on earth, but are citizens of heaven (*Ad Diognetum* 5: PG 2, 1173). (CCC 1330) The *memorial* of the Lord's Passion and Resurrection. The *Holy Sacrifice*, because it makes present the one sacrifice of Christ the Savior and includes the Church's offering. The terms *holy sacrifice of the Mass*, "*sacrifice of praise*," *spiritual sacrifice*, *pure and holy sacrifice* are also used (Heb 13:15; cf. 1 Pet 25; Ps 116:13, 17; Mal 1:11), since it completes and surpasses all the sacrifices of the Old Covenant. The *Holy and Divine Liturgy*, because the Church's whole liturgy finds its center and most intense expression in the celebration of this sacrament; in the same sense we also call its celebration the *Sacred Mysteries*. We speak of the *Most Blessed Sacrament* because it is the Sacrament of sacraments. The Eucharistic species reserved in the tabernacle are designated by this same name.

### (Heb 13, 17-19) Obey your leaders and defer to them

[17] Obey your leaders and defer to them, for they keep watch over you and will have to give an account, that they may fulfill their task with joy and not with sorrow, for that would be of no advantage to you. [18] Pray for us, for we are confident that we have a clear conscience, wishing to act rightly in every respect. [19] I especially ask for your prayers that I may be restored to you very soon.

(CCC 1269) Having become a member of the Church, the person baptized belongs no longer to himself, but to him who died and rose for us (Cf. 1 Cor 6:19; 2 Cor 5:15). From now on, he is called to be subject to others, to serve them in the communion of the Church, and to "obey and submit" to the Church's leaders (Heb 13:17), holding them in respect and affection (Cf. Eph 5:21; 1 Cor 16:15-16; 1 Thess 5:12-13; Jn 13:12-15). Just as Baptism is the source of responsibilities and duties, the baptized person also enjoys rights within the Church: to receive the sacraments, to be nourished with the Word of God and to be sustained by the other spiritual helps of the Church (Cf. LG 37; CIC, cann. 208-223; CCEO, can. 675:2).

(Heb 13, 20-25) To Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever

[20] May the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant, Jesus our Lord, [21] furnish you with all that is good, that you may do his will. May he carry out in you what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever (and ever). Amen. [22] Brothers, I ask you to bear with this message of encouragement, for I have written to you rather briefly. [23] I must let you know that our brother Timothy has been set free. If he comes soon, I shall see you together with him. [24] Greetings to all your leaders and to all the holy ones. Those from Italy send you greetings. [25] Grace be with all of you.

(CCC 632) The frequent New Testament affirmations that Jesus was "raised from the dead" presuppose that the crucified one sojourned in the realm of the dead prior to his resurrection (Acts 3:15; Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:20; cf. Heb 13:20). This was the first meaning given in the apostolic preaching to Christ's descent into hell: that Jesus, like all men, experienced death and in his soul joined the others in the realm of the dead. But he descended there as Savior, proclaiming the Good News to the spirits imprisoned there (Cf. 1 Pt 3:18-19). (CCC 2013) "All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity" (LG 40 § 2). All are called to holiness: "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). In order to reach this perfection the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ's gift, so that... doing the will of the Father in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor. Thus the holiness of the People of God will grow in fruitful abundance, as is clearly shown in the history of the Church through the lives of so many saints (LG 40 § 2).