

CHAPLAIN'S DESK:

A WEEKLY REFLECTION

Volume II



REV. FR. DR. PETER ADDAI-MENSAH
REV. FR. JOHN K. POKU

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TABLE OF CONTENT

Table of content.....	i
Acknowledgement.....	iii
Preface.....	iv
Mary, our model in christian life.....	1
Ordinary time of the year - I.....	3
Ordinary time of the year - II.....	5
Baptism of the lord.....	7
Putting my life in the hands of the Lord.....	9
The dignity of human beings.....	10
Living our calling as adopted sons and daughters of God..	11
Lent – A period of preparation for Easter.....	13
Almsgiving – a noble human gesture.....	15
The ascension of the Lord – the glory of all Christians.	17
Pentecost novena—a period of waiting in prayer.....	19
Pentecost Sunday – the birthday of the church.....	21
The trinity – a mystery of the church.....	23

Corpus Christi – food for our soul (body and blood of christ)	24
The Ordinary time of the year—a time for newness of life	26
Saints Peter and Paul – the two pillars of the church.	29
Living our authentic Christian life today I.....	31
Living our authentic Christian life today II.....	32
Living an authentic Christian life today—the place of Jesus Christ	33
Living an authentic Christian life today—the place of the church	36
Living an authentic Christian life today—the place of the sacraments	38
Living an authentic Christian life today—the place of the Eucharist	40
Commitment and loyalty—necessary ingredients for living an authentic life today	42
Living an authentic life today—the place of Mary	44
Catholic doctrine on the four (4) last things (1)	46
Catholic doctrine on the four (4) last things (ii).....	48
Catholic doctrine on the four (4) last things (iii)	50
Catholic doctrine on the four (4) last things (iv)	52
The public act of worship for Catholics	54

Prayer – a necessity in our relationship with God - I.. 56

Prayer – a necessity in our relationship with God - II. 58

Year of faith I 60

The year of faith II..... 62

The year of faith III..... 64

Jesus Christ – the King of our hearts – solemnity of
Christ the King 66

Advent season – a period of preparation 68

A time for preparation for the coming of the Lord – ii. 70

A time for preparation for the coming of the Lord – iii 72

The incarnation – the beginning of our redemption, our
restoration and reconciliation with God..... 73

The Holy Family – the exemplary of all families 75

References 77



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What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift – 1Cor. 4:7b.

It is a fact that cannot be gainsaid that God is the creator and sustainer of all life. God is the giver of all gifts. We will like to thank God for the gift of life God has given to us, for the expertise, the intelligence and the knowledge to come out with this book.

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To all those who contributed to the publication of this book, may the good and gracious Lord bless you. Amen.

PREFACE

As part of his sermon on the mount, Jesus made this statement, *for truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the laws until all is accomplished* – Matt. 5:18. This is a very profound statement. It buttresses the importance and significance of the Word of God. It is against this backdrop that the authors came out with the chaplain's Desk. *Chaplain's Desk: A Weekly Reflection* Vol. II is a sequel to the earlier edition published last year. It is serving as the same purpose to help the Family of God and allow the Word of God to guide them in their spiritual journey towards eternal life.

May God touch the hearts of all who read these volumes as they try to grow in their spiritual life. Amen.

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MARY, OUR MODEL IN CHRISTIAN LIFE

New Year's Day—a day of giving special thanks to God for ushering us into a new year. We thank God for the life and protection given us. In celebrating the arrival of a new year, it must at the same time give us moments for a sombre and a serious reflection. The passing away of one year and the coming of another one is a lesson for all of us. It teaches us that time changes and that life is transient. For that reason, we cannot be complacent and live anyhow. The gift of a new day, a new month and a new year must give us the opportunity to turn a new leaf, a new page or a new chapter in our lives—and forge ahead for a better life.

The gift of a New Year offers us the opportunity to make New Year's resolutions to do better and improve our lives. To help us to do this, the church in its wisdom has put the celebration of Mary — Mother of God on the first day of the year. This is to assist us in our resolution to strive to do the will of God as Mary declared in her *fiat*—*Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word* - Lk. 1:38.

New Year's Day is also declared as United Nations World Day of Peace. We need to build, maintain and promote peace all the time. This peace must be promoted in our

homes, in our schools, in our churches, in our communities, in our countries and throughout the world.

As a country we cannot take the peace we now enjoy for granted. We need to build on it, maintain and promote it especially as we enter into an election year, whatever might be a cause or a source of conflict and division must be nibbled in the bud. The politics of insult that has crept into our national politics must be condemned in no uncertain terms and those who are fond of doing it must be rejected completely.

Today is also the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. As we begin a new year, we are given Mary as our model because she was able to do the will of God.

As we begin a New Year, with Mary as our model, think positive and do away with negative tendencies and receive in abundance the blessings and graces that the new year brings.

EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

Epiphany means manifestation, revelation or showing. It means something was hidden at first but it is now made known.

The Epiphany of the Lord therefore means that Jesus Christ who was once hidden is now made known, - cf. Jn 1:1-14. This manifestation or revelation is not to any particular group of people but to all humanity. This is exemplified by the visit of *Magi* – the three wise men. This is captured by Paul when he says,

you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for your benefit, namely that the mystery was made known to me by revelation. It was made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and co-partners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel – (Eph. 3:2-3a, 5-6).

The Epiphany of the Lord teaches us never to lose hope, for no matter the situation we find ourselves in, God will intervene in God's own time to remedy the situation.

When the *Magi* came to see the baby Jesus, they offered him gifts – gold, frankincense and myrrh. Traditionally, the church has given meaning to these gifts. They symbolize the kingship, divinity and humanity of Jesus respectively. That is to say, the new born baby is a king, a divine and a human being at the same time. As a human being, he will die. What gift can you offer to Jesus – the new born baby? Perhaps, no other gift will be more pleasing to him than your whole heart and mind.

Once the three wise men encountered Jesus they took a different direction as the angel directed. As people who have encountered the Lord in this feast of Epiphany, we cannot remain the same. We cannot go in the same direction in our lives. We need to take a new direction in our lives as we enter a New Year.

ORDINARY TIME OF THE YEAR

There is the Latin saying, *Tempus fugit* - which means *Time flies*. In other words, we cannot control time. Whether we like it or not, whether we make use of it or not, time will move on. As we all know, we have entered into a new year. As we enter a new year, it reminds us of the transient nature of our human life especially as we look back to see that some family members and others that we started the year with are no more with us. They have passed on or move on to the Lord. This is captured in the letter to Hebrews when it says, *it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgement* - Heb. 9:27. The transient nature of human life is a reminder to keep our relationship with God—the creator and the sustainer of our lives—always in focus. It is for this reason that the church in its wisdom, has divided the year into difference seasons and times.

As you recalled after celebrating the Solemnity of Christ the King, we began the season of Advent, the beginning of the church's year. We went through four Sundays of Advent. These were times of preparation for the celebration of the Christmas season—the season that commemorates the incarnation of the Word of God. Jesus Christ comes to live among us as a human being. It is a time that changed our

status as John indicates, *But to all who receive him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.* — Jn. 1:12. He goes on to say *From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace* - Jn. 1:16.

After the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord on Monday, we have moved into the Ordinary Time of the year. The Ordinary Time of the Year is divided into two parts. The first part begins after Baptism of the Lord to Ash Wednesday. The second part starts from Monday after Pentecost to the beginning of Advent. It can be realised that the seasons of Lent and Easter come between the two Ordinary Times of the year.

The Ordinary Time of the year refers to the times when we do not celebrate the mysteries of the Lord. It does not mean that we go back to our ordinary way of living. Rather, it means that having experienced the mysteries of the Lord and having encountered the Lord, we do not live as we want, we live a life influenced by the Lord. This is what St. Paul means, when he says *I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who live in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*—Gal. 1:19b-20.

Let us make good use of the graces we have received in the Ordinary Time of the year and live lives worthy of adopted sons and daughters of the Lord and heirs to the Kingdom—cf. Gal. 4:6-7.

ORDINARY TIME OF THE YEAR – II

Ordinary Time of the year does not mean that having passed through the Advent and Christmas Seasons; we revert to our own way of doing things and live as we want. Rather, it means that having encountered and experienced the Lord Jesus Christ, the type of life we live must be guided and influenced by the Lord. We referred to St. Paul when he talked about the new life of the Christian in Christ when he said *I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me* - Gal. 1:19b-20. This is where we want to continue today's discussion from.

New life in Jesus calls for a radical conversion. It means turning one's back to one's former way of life and living a completely new life in Christ. Using his own life as an example of complete conversion, St. Paul says,

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ - Phil. 3:7-8.

Speaking on the new life in Christ and at the same time going back to one's own life without a change, St Peter uses two despicable images to describe such a life. He says that it is like a dog who goes back to eat its own vomit or a pig who after being washed goes back to wallow in the mud—cf. 2 Peter 2:22. St. Leo the Great captures it beautifully for us the new life in Christ and turning back on one's former way of life when he says *Christian, remember your dignity, and now that you share in God's own nature, do not return by sin to your former base condition* - (*The Liturgy of the Hours, Vol.1*) P. 405. He goes on to say, *Bear in mind who is your head and of whose body you are a member. Do not forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of God's Kingdom* - Ibid.

This is what we have been called to do in this Ordinary Time—to live a new life after encountering and experiencing Jesus Christ during the Christmas Season.

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

The Solemnity of The Baptism of the Lord ends the Christmas Season. After that we begin the Ordinary Time of the Year. When Christmas falls on a Sunday, certain important feast days could not be celebrated. Instead, they were celebrated on weekdays. They are Holy Family and Baptism of the Lord. For this reason, we did not have the opportunity to discuss the Baptism of the Lord. I would like us to reflect on this feast since it is very important in our Liturgical calendar.

Writing on *Baptism—The most important of all the sacraments*, we said that Baptism comes from the Greek word *bapto* which means to dip, to plunge, to immerge. Baptism must be seen in the context of covenant relationship with the Lord.

The antecedent of Baptism is circumcision. When God first entered into covenant with the people of Israel, circumcision was given as the sign of the covenant—cf. Gen. 17:9-14. However, since the people of Israel were not faithful to the covenant, the Lord promised to enact a new covenant—cf. Jer. 31:32-34.

In the new dispensation, circumcision is no longer the

requirement or the sign of the covenant. This is buttressed by St. Paul when he says, *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor un-circumcision counts for anything the only thing that counts is faith working through love— Gal. 5:6.* This means that today what makes one a member of God's family is Baptism. This is what Jesus—who is *the Way, the Truth and the Life* — cf. Jn. 14:6—teaches when he says, *Very truly, I tell you; no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above* and again, he says, *Very truly I tell you no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit — Jn. 3:3, 5.* This points out the importance and necessity of Baptism.

However, it must be pointed out that the Baptism that Jesus received from John the Baptist is different from our baptism. This is affirmed by the *Catechism of The Catholic Church* when it says, *With John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit begins the restoration to man of the divine likeness, prefiguring what he would achieve with and in Christ, John's baptism was for a repentance; baptism in water and of the Spirit will be a new birth—CCC. No 720.* In other words, we are baptised and incorporated into the Blessed Trinity—cf. Matt. 28:19-20.

The Baptism of the Lord must remind us of our own baptism and the words spoken by the Father at Jesus' baptism—*You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased—Lk. 3:22b*—are applicable to us. What Jesus is to the Father by nature, we also are by adoption. Let us strive to live by our baptismal promises.

PUTTING MY LIFE IN THE HANDS OF THE LORD

We do not know what the next day/week/month/year holds in store for us. In short, the future is unknown to us. But as believers, as men/women of faith, we can never say the future is bleak. We believe in God and we trust that God has good plans for us. Listen to what the gracious Lord is telling you and me.

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, You will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord – Jer. 29:11-14.

God has plans for us. The plans are not to harm us. They are for our welfare. They are for our well-being. All that we have to do as believers is to continue to have faith in God and put our lives in the hands of God. You know that the good Lord cares for us. God has cared for us all these years and will definitely care for us throughout the year. In case you are worried and doubting like King Ahaz, listen to these words of assurance from the Lord.

But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour – Isa. 43:1-3.

This is the God, we are serving. The God Almighty has promised us a secured and adequate protection. Some people who have gone before us enjoyed this protection. It is for this reason that the Psalmist said, *even if I should walk in the valley of darkness, no evil would I fear. For, you are there with your cloak and staff. With these you guide me.* – Ps. 23.

As we go through the Ordinary Time of the Year let us continue to have faith in God and put our lives in the hands of the Lord and the Lord will be with us.

THE DIGNITY OF HUMAN BEINGS

The bible tells us that as human beings, we were created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen. 1:26). We were created a little less than God. We, human beings, have been crowned with glory and honour. We have been given dominion over all created things in the world (cf. Ps. 8:5-8). This is our dignity as human beings. We are very precious in the eyes of our creator. We are priceless as far as our creator is concerned. It is for this reason that when human beings disobeyed God and fell from God's friendship, God did not abandon human beings to the power of clutches of death. Human beings are so precious, we are so priceless, and are so valuable that we are worth dying for by the Son of God. This is what St. John means when he says, *For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life* – Jn. 3:16.

This is the dignity, the honour that has been bestowed upon us by God. You know as well as I do that an honour goes with a responsibility. As people created in the image and likeness of God, we have a responsibility to live as God wants to. As St. Peter admonishes us, *Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had*

in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourself in all your conduct; for it is written, You shall be holy, for I am holy – 1 Pt. 1:14-15.

Living a life of holiness, does not mean abandoning our daily lives and going to live in a deserted place. No! Rather, it means carrying out our daily chores but doing them in the Lord and making sure that we walk and live in the presence of the Lord. We need to always to recognise our dignity as sons and daughters of God and live as such.

LIVING OUR CALLING AS ADOPTED SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF GOD

We have talked about the Dignity of Human Beings. Among other things we said that as people who have been created in the image and likeness of God our responsibility is to live holy and decent lives. This means doing everything in our lives in the Lord and walking in the Lord.

We will like to continue in the same vein. It is always important to bear in mind the purpose of our existence here on earth. St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians says,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who had blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved - Eph. 1:3-6.

In this particular passage, St. Paul demonstrates to us our identity and our responsibility as people of God. In other words, in this pericope, we are taught, *who we are; where*

we come from or what we are doing here and where we are going from here.

This places a greater responsibility on us as adopted sons and daughter of God. For this reason, the way we live must be worthy of our status as children of God. Speaking on this issue of our calling, St. Paul admonishes,

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in all - Eph. 4:1-6.

As the above quote teaches, our duty as adopted sons and daughters of God is always to build, maintain and promote peace. We must be men and women of peace in our homes, our schools, our workplaces and our country. Let us not engage ourselves in the politics of insults and condemn all those who do so. We need to maintain and promote peace always and everywhere, so that our country will always have peace to develop.

LENT – A PERIOD OF PREPARATION FOR EASTER

There are four main Liturgical Seasons. They are Advent, Christmas, Lent and Ordinary Time.

The Lenten season begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on the vigil of Holy Saturday. The colour of the season is violet

Lent is a season in which we prepare ourselves for the celebration of Easter—the Mother of all feasts. Speaking on Easter,

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, has this to say, Therefore Easter is not simply one feast among others, but the Feast of Feasts, the Solemnity of the Solemnities, just as the Eucharist is the Sacrament of the Sacraments (the Great Sacrament). Athanasius calls Easter The Great Sunday and the Eastern Churches call Holy Week The Great Week. The mystery of the Resurrection, in which Christ crushed death, permeates with its powerful energy, our old time, until all is subjected to him - CCC. No. 1169.

What the Church is teaching is that it is on Easter Day that our salvation by Jesus Christ reaches its climax. To celebrate such an important Day, there is the need

for upmost preparation. This calls for repentance and remorsefulness for our sins. It is a time to renew ourselves in order to be once again reconciled with God. This, we demonstrate by putting ashes on our foreheads to indicate our desire to renounce our sins and return to God. We fast and abstain from food and other pleasures to indicate our inner remorsefulness. This is what we are called upon to do—

Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing, who knows whether he will not turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him - Joel 2:12-14.

To help us on our Lenten journey and prepare adequately for Easter, the church proposes three essential elements for our consideration. They are Prayer, Fasting and Almsgivings—cf. Matt. 6:1-6, 16-18.

As we begin the season of Lent, Let us make a maximum use of the season, for the bible says, *At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation, I have helped you; See, now is the acceptable time; see now is the day of salvation: - 2 Cor. 6:2.*

ALMSGIVING – A NOBLE HUMAN GESTURE

During the season of Lent, we are encouraged to pay attention to Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving. Prayer and Fasting have been talked about earlier and now we focus our discussion on Almsgiving.

Life Prayer and Fasting, Almsgiving is an ancient religions practice. It is highly encouraged in all the major world religions. In the Christian context Almsgiving flows from the attitude and the life experience of Jesus Christ. We read from the bible that

who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be explained, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being formed in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father - Phil. 2:6-11.

The above biblical quotation demonstrates that Jesus emptied himself and reached out to us. St. Athanasius captured it very well when he said that *Jesus come to share our humanity so that we human beings in turn, will have a share in God's divine nature*. It is Jesus' attitude of reaching out to us, that we are encouraged to do the same as followers of the Lord and reach to others. In giving alms therefore, we are sharing whatever we have received from the Lord with others. This may be in the form of our time, our talent and our treasure.

However, Jesus shows the correct attitude and mentality of Almsgiving. It must not be a show-off. He says,

so whenever you give alms, do not send a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you—Matt. 6:2-4.

Let us continue to be kind and generous. We need to give alms and reach out to those in need. However, in doing so, let us not create a dependency-syndrome. Furthermore, be careful with fraudsters and tricksters.

THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD – THE GLORY OF ALL CHRISTIANS

On coming into the world, Jesus said that he came not to do his own will but the will of his Heavenly Father. The will of his Heavenly Father was that he inaugurates and preaches about the Kingdom of God and invites people to repent and enter into it—cf. Mk. 1:14-15. Unfortunately, the religious authorities at his time did not see eye-to-eye with him and crucified him. On the third day, as we know, he rose triumphantly from death. This is what we have been celebrating during Easter Season.

The Bible tells us that forty days after his resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven—cf. Acts 1:6-14. Before his Ascension, he had a lot of discussions with his disciples. Among other things, he said to them, *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also* - Jn. 14:1-3.

It is important to point out Jesus did not only promise his

disciples dwelling places in heaven before his Ascension but also prayed for them – *I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one* – Jn. 17:20. He goes on to pray, *Father, I desire that those also whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because of the world* - Jn. 17:24.

It can be seen that Jesus' Ascension is for our own good. He returns to his heavenly Father to prepare a place for us. Jesus we know is our head and we are the members and together we form one body. Our Christian belief is that where Jesus, our head has ascended to, we, the members will follow later. It is for this reason that the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ is seen as the glory of all Christians.

As we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord on Thursday, we need to be highly encouraged and motivated to be steadfast in our Christian life. Let us keep our focus on the Lord and always see heaven as our destination and goal in life.

PENTECOST NOVENA

- A PERIOD OF WAITING IN PRAYER

Ascension marks the end of Jesus' public ministry here on earth. On coming into the world, Jesus said that he came not to do his own will but the will of his Heavenly Father. The work of his Heavenly Father was that he preaches about the Kingdom of Heaven and invites people to repent and enter into it—cf. Mk.1:14-15. After a mission—accomplished here on earth, Jesus went back to his Father from where he had come.

Before his ascension, Jesus said many things to his disciples. Among other things he told them that he would not leave them as orphans but he would send the Holy Spirit, the Advocate to be with them and remind them of all the things that he had told them—Jn. 16:5-11.

Furthermore, he told them, *you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witness in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth* - Acts 1:8. In the meantime, they were encouraged to remain in Jerusalem until such a time that they were empowered from above.

After experiencing the Ascension of the Lord into heaven, the disciples returned to Jerusalem and went to the room upstairs where they were staying. It is very important to note what they were doing in the upper room. They were not idle and sleeping and taking life easy. The bible tells us that *All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers* - Acts 1:14.

It can be seen that the period between Ascension and Pentecost is a time of waiting. It is a period of prayerful awaiting for the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit. As a church, this is the period in which we find ourselves. It is for this reason that the Chaplaincy is organizing the Pentecost Novena which began on Friday. Let us all take interest and participate actively and fully in the Pentecost Novena so that we may be renewed and be filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Day for according to St. Paul, *all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God* - Rom. 8:14.

PENTECOST SUNDAY

— THE BIRTHDAY OF THE CHURCH

Pentecost from its Hebrew roots means Fifty (50). Originally, it was a Jewish Agricultural feast. On this day, all Jews make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast.

For us Christians, Pentecost Sunday is the day that the Holy Spirit descended on the early disciples in the form of tongues of fire when they were gathered in the Upper Room—Acts 2:1-21. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. Technically, biblical scholars refer to it as *glossolalia*.

This was to the amazement of all those who had come from the four (4) corners of the world for the agricultural feast. They were deeply amazed because they could hear the testimony of the disciples in their own native language—cf. Acts 2:7-13.

It must be noted that after the Ascension of the Lord, the disciples were locked up in the upper room waiting for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This was a command from the Lord—cf. Acts 1:8. Once they received the Holy Spirit,

they were empowered and went outside to proclaim boldly the message of the resurrection. As they did so, about three thousand people were added to their number—cf. Acts 2:41. It is for this reason that the Church teaches that Pentecost Sunday is the birthday of the Church. It was on that day that the Church was out-doored.

As we celebrate Pentecost Sunday, the emphasis is not on the speaking of tongues. On Pentecost day, it was for a purpose. Furthermore, as St. Paul teaches, it is the least of the gifts of the Spirit—cf. 1 Cor. 12:1 ff. On this day, what we need to pay attention to, is how to rekindle and renew the Holy Spirit whose temple is in our hearts—cf. 1 Cor. 3:16-17. We cannot do away with the Holy Spirit. For as St. Paul tells us, *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God*—Rom. 8:14. We need to be filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The seven (7) gifts of the Holy Spirit are: Wisdom, Knowledge, Understanding, Courage, Counsel, Piety and Fear of God.

In addition to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the fruits of the Spirit are: love, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control—Galt. 5:22.

As we celebrate Pentecost, may we be rekindled and renewed so that whatever we do as Christians may be under the guidance and influence of the Holy Spirit.

THE TRINITY – A MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH

Trinity Sunday. Trinity comes from two Latin words, *Tres* – which means three and *Unus* which means one. Trinity, therefore, means three in one. It was a term coined by Tertullian, an African theologian who lived in the third century. He coined it to explain the Godhead. Tertullian was trying to explain the Christian belief that there is only One God but in this One God, there are three (3) divine and distinct persons. It means that the Godhead is a community or a family.

It must be pointed out that the word *Trinity* per se cannot be found in the bible. However, what the word connotes permeates throughout both the Hebrew bible or the Old Testament and the New Testament – cf. Gen. 1:1-2; Prov. 3:22-31; Matt. 28:19-20; Lk. 3:21-22; Jn. 10:30; Jn. 16:12-15.

The Trinity is one of the mysteries of the church. As a mystery, we cannot comprehend or understand it as human beings. Yet, we believe it because it has been revealed to us by God in the scriptures. Since the Trinity is a mystery, all that we can do is to believe in it for problems are to be solved but mysteries are to be lived.

Even though, the Trinity is a mystery and therefore cannot be understood, it permeates the whole of our lives as Catholic Christians. Among other things, it is in the Trinity that: we are received into the Church; baptized; begin and end all our liturgical celebrations; begin and end all our private devotions and prayers; and commit ourselves to when we die. In short, the Trinity is the origin, the sustainer and the end or goal of Christian Life.

As we celebrate Trinity Sunday, we need to recommit and rededicate ourselves to God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and live lives worthy of the Blessed Trinity.

CORPUS CHRISTI – FOOD FOR OUR SOUL

(BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST)

Our human nature is such that we cannot do without food. We eat in order to live. The importance of food, therefore, cannot be overemphasized. However, we do not eat anything that comes our way. We pick and choose what we eat. All things being equal, we eat good and nutritious food. We know that our human nature is made up of both body and soul. Just as we eat good and nutritious food to keep the body healthy, in the same way, the soul needs to be fed with good and nutritious food in order to stay healthy to carry out its spiritual warfare. The most precious food for the soul, needless to say, is the Body and Blood of Christ.

Feeding the soul is something we cannot do without as Catholic Christians. To buttress this assertion, Jesus warns us, *Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life which the Son of Man will give you—Jn. 6:27*. Continuing his discourse on food for the soul, Jesus says: *I am the living bread that came down from heaven, whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh - Jn. 6:51*.

He goes on to say, *Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.* - Jn. 6:57. He concludes by saying, *This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they die, but the one who eats this bread will live forever* - Jn. 6:58.

Corpus Christi Sunday: *Corpus Christi* in Latin means the Body of Christ. It is the food for our souls as we journey towards eternal life.

As we celebrate Corpus Christi, we need as Catholic Christians, to always show our utmost respect and reverence for the Body and Blood of Christ. Secondly, we need to receive it worthily.

For those who do receive the Body and Blood of Christ, strive to remove and ratify anything that prevents you from receiving Christ in the Eucharist.

THE ORDINARY TIME OF THE YEAR

- A TIME FOR NEWNESS OF LIFE

There are four seasons in the Liturgical Year. They are: Advent, Christmas, Lent and Ordinary Time. The Ordinary Time is divided into two parts—the first part begins immediately after the Christmas season and ends on Ash Wednesday. The second part starts from the day after Pentecost and ends with the beginning with Advent.

The liturgical colour for this season is green. It is very symbolic and meant to teach us a great lesson. Green, we know, is a sign of freshness. It is a sign of growth and newness of life. Liturgically and spiritually, it means that after receiving the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Day, we are not the same. We are changed persons filled with the Holy Spirit.

Our responsibility is to proceed and live new lives. This is what St. Paul meant when he said, *Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord, you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness,*

greedy to practice every kind of impurity—Eph. 4:17-10. He went on to say, that is not the way you leaned Christ!..... You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the Spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness—Eph. 4:20-24.

The Ordinary Time reminds us of our identity as People of God who have been ransomed, redeemed, rescued and filled with the Holy Spirit. We are to live new lives befitting our status as sons and daughters of God.

JOHN THE BAPTIST – A MAN FOR OUR TIME

When it comes to our Salvation History, Jesus Christ stands tall among all others. He is the one who redeemed, ransomed and rescued us and reconciled us finally with God. However, this salvific event was a process. It was not a onetime event. Before the coming of Jesus Christ, God had called patriarchs, kings, prophets and priests to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus Christ, the redeemer and saviour of the world.

Among all those who preceded Jesus Christ, the role of John the Baptist is very significant and indispensable. He is the forerunner of Jesus Christ. He is the prophet who stands between the Old and New Testaments. John the Baptist is the only person apart from Jesus Christ in the Christian calendar whose birthday and day of death are celebrated. John the Baptist was a son of promise. It means that his birth was prophesised.

He was to be a Nazirite – *never drink wine or strong drink, even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit – Lk. 1:15*. The bible tells us that *the child grew and became strong in Spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel – Lk. 1:80*. When he began his ministry John the Baptist called the people to a life

of repentance and renewal and prepared them for the coming of the Saviour – cf. Matt. 3:1-12. When it came to the authorities, he was bold and truthful. He took Herod on and pointed out his wrongs to him. This incurred the displeasure of the king and for that reason imprisoned him. Finally, he was beheaded – cf. Matt. 14:3-12.

As we celebrate the Solemnity of the Birth of John the Baptist, we are reminded that like John the Baptist, all of us were born and brought into this world for a purpose. Secondly, we are to be bold and truthful. This is what is destroying our country and world today. As People of God, we need to stand for the truth all the time, for as it is said, *truth at best can be thwarted and falsified but it can never be defeated.*

SAINTS PETER AND PAUL

- THE TWO PILLARS OF THE CHURCH

It is often said that a nation that neglects or refuses to honour its heroes and heroines is not a nation worth dying for. It is a common practice among us as human beings, to honour some personalities whose lives and works are outstanding. We do so in order that other people will emulate them. Secondly, it is to motivate and urge others on to lead exemplary lives. It is the same in religion. In the Catholic Church those who have lived lives worth emulating are canonised as Saints. Examples are Peter and Paul.

Peter and Paul are considered to be the two pillars of the Church. While Peter is seen as an apostle to the Jews, Paul is referred to as the apostle to the Gentiles. Peter and Paul stand for the two strands of the Church. While the latter is seen as liberal, the former is considered as conservative. Conservative is used here in the good sense of the word. While Peter is very particular about guarding the deposit of faith bequeathed to him by Christ—cf. Matt. 16: 13-19, Paul is more charismatic. Even though Peter and Paul are of two different characteristics and personalities, they both

suffered martyrdom in Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero (about 64—68 AD). Since they are considered as unit of the Church, they have a common feast day.

The lives of Sts. Peter and Paul must be lessons for all of us. They were human beings and we can identify with their human frailties and weaknesses. Peter denied Jesus three times and Paul was a persecutor of the Church. Yet, by the grace of God, they rose above their human sinfulness and became saints and celebrities in the Church.

Secondly, they both suffered greatly for the Lord. In spite of all the suffering, they remained faithful, loyal and steadfast in the Lord. They were able to do this because they had come to know the Lord intimately and for the sake of what the reward would be for them in future.

As we celebrate the Solemnity of Peter and Paul, the two pillars of the church, let us remain committed and dedicated to the Lord so that at the end of our lives, we can say with St. Paul, *As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing—2 Tim. 4: 6-8.*

LIVING OUR AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LIFE TODAY

We described Saints Peter and Paul as the two pillars of the Church. These two apostles were very faithful and steadfast in the Lord. Once they had come to know the Lord better, there was no turning back. They died for the Lord.

As Paul said at the end of his life, *I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me that day, and not only to me but also all who have longed for his appearing*—2 Tim. 4:6-8. This assertion of Paul is to what all Christians are aspiring. We want to receive the crown of glory at the end of our lives—cf. Jn. 17:24-25. To be able to do this requires commitment, dedication, faithfulness, loyalty and steadfastness in the Lord.

Socrates, the great philosopher once said, *unexamined life is not worth-living*. It is always very important to do self-examination as far as our spiritual lives are concerned.

At the beginning of the year we all make some resolutions.

We have entered into a new month and we are half-way through the year. It is an importance time to look back and see how we have lived our lives for the past six months with the view to make amends and look to the future.

It is very important to point out that each day is a new page in our lives. What we need to do is to examine our lives as far as our relationship with the Lord is concerned. Like those who have gone before us, we need to be authentic in our Christian lives and live for the Lord.

LIVING OUR AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LIFE TODAY II

We said in our discussion above that, in living our authentic Christian life today, we need to do self-examination as far as our Spiritual lives are concerned. In doing so, we must pay great attention to our relationship with God.

We shall reflect on how we can deepen this relationship with God. We believe as Catholic Christians that God is the creator and sustainer of our lives. In God we have received many blessings and graces. The most important of these blessings and graces is the fact that we have been redeemed and rescued from our former way of lives and once again reconciled with God.

Consequently, our focus in life today as Catholic Christians is not to look back and live our former way of life that plunged us into sin. Rather, God and the new life must be our new focus. This is what St. Paul meant when he said, *Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ - Phil. 3:7-8.*

What St. Paul said must be an eye-opener and lesson for all of us—that nothing can be compared to our newly won freedom in Christ. In other words what St. Paul meant to say was that Christ must be our priority and focus in life. All other things have no significance – they have no value as far as our relationship with Christ is concerned. As we live our lives as authentic Catholic Christians, we must demonstrate in our day-to-day activities that God occupies the first position in our lives and all others are secondly.

LIVING AN AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LIFE TODAY

- THE PLACE OF JESUS CHRIST

It is said, “*deɛ odi akyiri sua deɛ odi kan nantee*” - the one who is behind follows the footsteps of the one who is leading. As Christians we believe that Jesus Christ is our leader. Consequently, we have the responsibility to follow him. One cannot claim to be a Christian and neglect or refuse to live for Jesus wholeheartedly. That will be a *contradictio in termino* - contradiction in terms. Living an authentic Christian life today is inseparable with life in Jesus. It is to buttress this point that Jesus without mincing words said, *I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit, he prunes to make it bear more fruit in me Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me, you can do nothing* - Jn. 15:1-5.

It can be seen clearly from the above scriptural quotation that Jesus Christ is the foundation and the source of Christian Life. To live a Christian life and make it more

authentic one must live in and for Jesus. The one must live the principles and values of the gospels.

Authentic Christian Life today requires commitment, dedication, faithfulness, loyalty and steadfastness in the Lord Jesus Christ. It means, for the Christian Jesus must be the focus and goal of the Christian.

We must not just be only Christian in name but also in deed and serve the Lord in spirit and truth.

LIVING AN AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LIFE TODAY

- THE PLACE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

We deliberated on the place of Jesus Christ in the life of the Christian today in the above Chapter. Among other things, we emphasised that one cannot claim to be a Christian and neglect or refuse to live by the gospel principles and values.

Today, we want to reflect on the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian today because our Christian belief teaches us that we are born into the Blessed Trinity.

The place of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian cannot be over-emphasised. It was by the power of the Spirit of God who hovered on the formless waters before creation began—cf. Gen.1:1-2. Furthermore, it was under the impulse of the Spirit that the prophets of old were able to carry out their prophetic roles.

Before his ascension into heaven, Jesus promised his disciples *When the Advocate comes whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning - Jn.*

15:26-27. He went on to say, when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth - Jn. 16:12.

We read in the Acts of the Apostles that when the Holy Spirit finally descended on the apostles on the Pentecost day, they were empowered and went out into the open and proclaimed boldly the message of the resurrected Christ—cf. Acts 2:1-13. It can be seen clearly that with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the apostles were able to bear testimony on behalf of Jesus Christ.

Speaking on the place of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian, St. Paul says, *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words— And God who searches the heart knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God—Rom. 8:26-27.*

From the above, it can be clearly seen that the follower of Jesus Christ cannot live an authentic Christian life today without the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Let us, therefore, give the Holy Spirit a place in our lives and pray to Him earnestly and frequently, for as St. Paul says, *all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God—Rom. 8:14.* May whatever we do as Christians be under the guidance and influence of the Holy Spirit.



LIVING AN AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LIFE TODAY - THE

PLACE OF THE CHURCH

It is a fact that cannot be gainsaid that Jesus did not come into the world to establish or form a church. He came purposely to inaugurate the kingdom of heaven. He preached the Word of God and invited people to repent and enter into the Kingdom—cf. Mk. 1:14-15. People responded positively to his message and decided to follow him. This was the beginning of the church. We can, consequently, say even though Jesus came to preach about the kingdom of God, the church came into being as a result of his preaching. The church, therefore, is intrinsically linked to Jesus. In fact, the church is described as a Sacrament of Christ. It points to Christ and it exists for Christ.

In the study of ecclesiology, the church which in Latin is *ekklesia* is derived from the Hebrew *qahal* which means an *Assembly of God*. To be a member of the church means that one belongs to the Assembly of God. For this reason, one cannot claim to be a Christian and refused to belong to the Church. There is no *lone-ranger-ism*. In the church, one cannot belong to the church and refuse to listen to

what the church teaches. One's Christian life must be guided and guarded by the beliefs, principles, values and programmes of the church.

To live an authentic Christian life today, the church has an indispensable role to play. It is in the church, that the individual is baptised and become a Christian. It is in the community of believers that the Christian is nourished by the Eucharist. For the Christian to survive his/her spiritual warfare, one needs the sacraments which are found in the church. It is for this reason that the author to the letter to the Hebrews admonishes, *let us consider how to provide one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day approaching - Heb. 10:24-25.*

In sum, the Christian cannot be without the church. Authentic Christian life today must always be formed, informed and transformed by the activities and teachings of the church.

LIVING AN AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LIFE TODAY

- THE PLACE OF THE SACRAMENTS

The bible tells us that everything that God created has a purpose. Human beings who are very special in the eyes of God were created for a purpose. St. Paul captures beautifully for us this purpose when he said, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessings in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love—Eph.1:3-4.* Christ Jesus said it all when he said, *You must be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect—Matt. 5:48.*

To help us to live this life of perfection or holiness in our lives as Christians today, we have been given the sacraments to help us on our spiritual journey towards eternal life. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *celebrated worthily in faith, the sacraments confer the grace that they signify. They are efficacious because in them Christ himself is at work; it is he who baptises, 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 sacraments, 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.No.1127.

On the sacraments and salvation, the church teaches; the church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for salvation.—CCC.No.1129.

In the light of this, the Catholic Christian cannot do away with the sacraments of the church. There are seven (7) Sacraments in the church. However, this is not the place to talk about them into details. It has been done in earlier writings. What needs to be said and emphasised is that living an Authentic Christian Life Today the sacraments have a place in our lives. Every Catholic Christian must, therefore, strive to receive the sacraments frequently. They must, however, do so in a descent and worthy manner.

LIVING AN AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LIFE TODAY

- THE PLACE OF THE EUCHARIST

No one can deny the necessity of food. In other words, the importance of food cannot be overemphasised. It is food that sustains us. It is food that gives us the energy and strength that we need to carry out our duties and responsibilities. The lack of food, therefore, can be catastrophic. It can be fatal.

Just as we need food for the body to be healthy and live, in the same way, in our Spiritual lives, we need food for the soul to stay strong and be in a better position to forge ahead on our journey towards eternal life in heaven. It is for this reason that Jesus spoke strongly and warned those who had eaten of the five loaves of bread and two fishes and were still following him – *Do not work for food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal—6:27.*

Our Christian faith teaches us that as Christians this earth is not our true home. Heaven, rather, is our true home. We are, therefore, on a pilgrimage, journeying towards heaven, our true home.

As we go on this journey, we need food to sustain us. Just as the Israelites were fed with Manna during their sojourn to Canaan, the Promised Land, in the same way, Christians need the bread of life for sustenance. According to Jesus, the manna in no way can be compared to the bread of life which is food for the soul.

He says *I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the Manna in the wilderness and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die—*Jn. 6:48-50. Continuing his discourse of the Bread of Life, Jesus emphasises, *Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day—*Jn. 6:53-54.

It can be seen clearly that the Christian cannot do without Christ, the Bread of Life. To live an authentic Christian life today, the place of the Bread of Life (Eucharist) is indispensable. Just as the food that Elijah ate strengthened him for forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of the Lord, in the same way the Bread of Life will strengthen the Christian as he/she journeys towards eternal life in heaven.

Christians must, therefore, strive to eat this Bread of Life regularly and frequently. However, they must do so reverently and worthily.

COMMITMENT AND LOYALTY - NECESSARY

INGREDIENTS FOR LIVING AN AUTHENTIC LIFE TODAY

The bible tells us that after Jesus' long discourse on the Bread of Life in John's gospel (6:1-69), many of his followers left and no longer followed him. The amazing thing is that Jesus did not call them to come back. Neither did he water down his teaching. What he did was to turn to the Twelve and asked them if they would also leave. Peter, representing the Twelve, responded, *Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.* —Jn. 6:68.

It can be seen that Peter and the other Apostles came to this conclusion after they had come to know Jesus and stayed with him. In the course of their staying with Jesus, the relationship was nurtured and deepened. This, finally, resulted in their commitment and loyalty to the Lord, Jesus Christ. With this commitment and loyalty, the Twelve worked tirelessly to proclaim and spread the message of Jesus and even died for him.

As Christians living in our world today, the words spoken by Peter must be made of our own. It is only by knowing

the Lord and deepening our relationship with him that will make us true and authentic Christians. This will call for commitment and loyalty. These are ingredients that we cannot do without if we really want to live an authentic Christian life today.

Commitment and loyalty will enable the Christian to accept Jesus as one's personal Lord and Saviour. Secondly, they will help the Christian to live a life that is distinct and exemplary which will draw others to the Lord. Thirdly, a life of commitment and loyalty to the Lord, will motivate the Christian to even suffer and die for the Lord just as the Twelve and early Christians did.

As Christians living our authentic Christian lives today must not lead to compromises in terms of principles and values. We must be committed and loyal to the Lord and always stand for the truth.

LIVING AN AUTHENTIC LIFE TODAY

- THE PLACE OF MARY

The bible tells us that it is the intention of God to save all human beings—cf. 1 Tim. 2:4-5. For this reason, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ to come and live about us in order to show and lead us the way back to God. Jesus in the course of his earthly ministry, taught us what to do and what not to do in order to inherit the Kingdom of God and enjoy the beatific vision – seeing God face to face. One person who listened and lived the message of the Lord and consequently enjoyed the beatific vision is the Blessed Mary.

Some time ago, we celebrated the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On that day we acknowledge the honour that the Lord had done the Blessed Virgin Mary in raising her body and soul to heaven after her death. This honour was done to Mary not because of her special position as the Mother of God. Rather, she was honoured because of the life she lived. First, she always tried not to do her own will but the will of God—cf. Lk.1:37b. Secondly, she always kept the Word of God in her heart and reflected on it. It was for this reason, that Jesus considered her *Blessed*—cf. Lk. 11:237.

It must be pointed out that the honour done to the Blessed Virgin Mary was not peculiarly her own. It was in fulfilment of the promise and prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ before his Ascension—*Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory; which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world*” - Jn. 17:24.

As we try to live an authentic Christian life today, we cannot neglect to live our lives as the Lord wants; firstly, to sacrifice our own wills and do the will of God. Secondly to keep the Word of God in our hearts and reflect upon it. This is something that the Blessed Virgin Mary did excellently well for her to be honoured by the Blessed Trinity. Consequently, if we want to live an authentic Christian Life today, the Blessed Virgin Mary has a role to play. We need to emulate her. By living our lives as she did we too will be honoured and enjoy beatific vision at the end of our lives.

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE ON THE FOUR (4)

LAST THINGS (1)

Living an authentic Christian life today has already been discussed. We have seen the role that various people play in this regard. In subsequent chapters, we will discuss some Catholic Doctrines with particular reference to the Four (4) Last things namely Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell.

It is the teaching of the Catholic Church that death was not originally part of God's creation. Death came into the world as a result of disobedience and disorderliness on the part of human beings. Since The Fall of our first parents, death has become part and parcel of our lives. This is attested to by the letter to the Hebrews, when it says, *it is appointed for mortals to die once and after that judgement—Heb. 9:27.*

Furthermore, the Church teaches that death is universal. Every human being will die. However, death will not have the final say. With the death and resurrection of Christ, death has become a gateway to eternal life. This is confirmed by the Preface of the Death when it notes, *Lord, for your faithful people life is changed not ended. When the*

body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we are given an everlasting dwelling place in heaven—Sacramentary, p.523.

According to Catholic Doctrine, by death the soul is separated from the body, but in the resurrection God will give incorruptible life to our body, transformed by reunion with our soul. Just as Christ is risen and lives forever, so all of us will rise at the last day— Catechism of the Catholic Church— No.1016.

In sum, it must be said that God created human beings for eternity, to enjoy life forever. Unfortunately, due to the disobedience of human beings, death, decay and destruction which were not created by God entered into the world. With Christ dying on the cross and rising again, death was conquered and destroyed. Therefore, death must not be feared. Our Christian attitude towards death must be one of passage and a gateway to eternal life.

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE ON THE FOUR (4)

LAST THINGS (II)

According to Catholic Doctrine, the Four Last Things are: Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell. We want to discuss Judgement which comes after the reflection on Death. Our human nature is that as human beings we demand accountability in all our dealings.

In our business endeavours, we want people to render account for their dealings. In the classroom and lecture rooms, we demand accountability from our students through quizzes, mid-semester papers and final exams. We want people entrusted with responsibility to account for their stewardship from time to time and at the end of their tenure of office. In the religious sphere, accountability or in the religious parlance, judgement is demanded of human beings. In the letter to the Hebrews, it is said, *it is appointed unto human beings to die but once and after this, judgement—Heb. 9:27.*

According to the teachings of Catholic Church, creation has been entrusted to human beings—cf. Ps. 8. Human beings are not to dominate and destroy the work of creation. Rather, they are to take care of it and render

account to God, the creator. It is for this reason, that the letter to the Romans says, *None of us lives as his own master and none of us dies as his own master. If we live, we live for the Lord and if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, in life and in death, we are the Lords..... Therefore, all of us will appear before the judgement seat of God and account for our stewardship—Rom. 14:7-12.*

The fact that there will be judgement at the end of the world is explained in details in the Matthew account of the gospel chapter 25:31-46.

According to the teachings of the Catholic Church, there are two (2) types of judgement: particular and general. The latter refers to judgement of all people at the end of the world and the former refers to the judgement of individuals immediately when they die.

The Catholic Church's teaching on judgement is not to scare us. Rather, it is to encourage and motivate us to live good and decent lives as Christians.

We need to live authentic and genuine Christian lives so that we can give good account of our stewardship on the judgement day.

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE ON THE FOUR (4)

LAST THINGS (III)

We have already spoken about Death and Judgement. We will reflect on the third segment which is Heaven.

It is our Christian belief that this earth is not our home. Our true home is heaven. Christians are, therefore, on a journey towards heaven. This is not a theology that has been invented by the church. Before his ascension into heaven, Jesus said *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also—Jn. 14:1-3.*

In addition to this solemn assurance and promise, Jesus furthermore prayed to his heavenly Father for his disciples. Among other things he prayed, *Father, I desire that those also whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world—Jn.17:24.*

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, To

live in heaven is to be with Christ. The elect live in Christ but they retain, or rather find, their true identity, their own name—CCC. No.1025.

The church teaches that All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but, after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven—CCC. No.1030.

It must be pointed out that the fact that heaven is our true home does not mean that we should disregard and neglect this earth and not pay attention to it. No.! The earth is the gateway or the path through which we enter into heaven—our true home. We have a duty and a responsibility to take good care of it. After all our entrance into heaven will be based or determined on how we conduct ourselves here on earth. The Second Vatican Council captures it very well when it says *it is a mistake to think that, because we have here no lasting city, but seek the city which is to come, we are entitled to shirk our earthly responsibilities.—(Vatican II. G.S. No.43).* They go on to say, *The Christian who shirks his temporal duties shirks his duties towards his neighbour, neglect God himself and endangers his eternal salvation.—(I bid).*

As Christians, we need to keep our focus always on heaven and live good and decent lives so that after our death when we are judged, we may enter into heaven and see God face to face.—1 Jn. 3:1-3.

Catholic Doctrine on the Four (4) Last Things (IV)

Our discussion on the Catholic Doctrine on the Four Last Things ends with the reflection on Hell.

Hell is believed to be the place where Satan and his followers live. It is a place of hardship and suffering. It is reserved for people who died in mortal sin and forfeit the grace of God. In Christian theology, Hell is a place of hardship and suffering because those who go there miss the presence of God. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 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 punishment of hell, eternal fire. 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.—CCC. No. 1035.

It must be pointed out that just as death was not originally part of God's creation, but came as a result of human beings' disobedience and disorderliness, in the same way, Hell was not created by God. Consequently, it must be emphasised that God does not destine anybody to go to Hell. The bible makes it evidently clear that it is the intention of God to save all—cf. 1 Tim.2:4. People who go

to Hell choose it. They refused to accept and listen to the dictates and direction that God points out to them. They turn their backs to God. In the opinion of St. Augustine, God is the author of life. If one turns his/her back to God, it means, the one is heading towards death and destruction.

According to the teachings of the Church, we cannot be united with God unless we freely choose to love Him. But we cannot love God if we sin gravely against Him, against our neighbour or against ourselves: He who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. Our Lord warns us that we shall be separated from Him if we fail to meet the serious needs of the poor and the little ones who are His brethren. To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God's merciful love means remaining separated from Him forever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called hell—CCC. No.1033.

The doctrine of Hell is not an invention by the Church. It is biblical based. Jesus referred to it during his teaching on judgement on the last day when he said, *these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life—Matt. 25:31-46.*

Since Hell is a place of choice, we can avoid going there by living good and descent Christian life. Let us, therefore, live for God so that when we die, we will die in God and live with God in heaven forever.

THE PUBLIC ACT OF WORSHIP FOR CATHOLICS

The bible tells us that as human beings, we were created in the image and likeness of God – cf. Gen. 1:26. Our happiness as human beings, therefore, is intrinsically linked with our relationship with God. It is for this reason that St. Augustine (*Confessions*; Book I: I) once said, *Our souls were made for God and they will continue to be restless until they finally rest in God*”.

Flowing from this, it is very important to consider the purpose of our earthly existence. It is for nothing else other than to praise and thank God. This is done best through worship.

In the opinion of Pope Benedict XVI (*The Spirit of the Liturgy*: 2000:21), *Worship gives us a share in heaven’s mode of existence, in the world of God, and allows light to fall from the divine world into ours. In this sense, worship.... has the character of anticipation. It lays hold in advance of a more perfect life and, in so doing, gives our present life its proper measures.*

It is in recognition of this that the church is very careful and particular about its Liturgy. According to the teaching of the church, *the Liturgy is the summit toward which*

the activity of the church is directed: it is also the fount from which all her power flows. For the good of apostolic endeavour is that all who are made sons of God by faith in the midst of his church, to take part in the sacrifice and to eat the Lord's Supper (Sacrosanctum Concilium, Vatican II, No. 10).

Since the Liturgy is very important to the church, Catholic Christians are admonished not to be passive during Liturgical celebrations. Rather, they are encouraged to participate actively and fully in any Liturgical celebration. This they do best by: not absenting themselves from the gathering of the brethren – cf. Heb. 10:25; prayerfully disposing themselves in the presence of the Lord and remained attention; responding to the prayers of the church; joining in the singing; participating in the gestures of the assembly such as standing, kneeling and sitting; going for communion.

It must be emphasised that since the Liturgy is the church's public act of worship, it has no place for private devotion in the course of the celebration. That is to say for example, it is not right to be saying the rosary privately while Liturgical celebration is going on.

The Catholic Liturgical Celebration is an anticipation or a replica of what pertains in heaven. Consequently, there is the need to be prayerfully attentive during Liturgical celebrations and participate in it actively and fully.

PRAYER

- A NECESSITY IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The bible tells us that human beings were created in the image and likeness of God – cf. Gen. 1:26. It goes into details how this happened – that the man was made with clay from the earth and then God breathed into his nostrils the breadth of life. Since then the man became a living being – cf. Gen. 2:7. It means that the human person is not an ordinary created being. A divine spark is in the human person. Consequently, the human person does not exist on his/her own since he/she is intrinsically linked to God. It is for this reason that Jesus using the image of the vine and its branches, says emphatically without mincing words *I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains, with me in him bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing* – Jn. 15:5.

It is against this background that the Christian must always remain anchored and connected to the Lord. This is done mainly through prayer.

Prayer in simple terms is the lifting up of the heart and mind to God. It is a conversation with God. Since it is a conversation, it must be a two-way traffic. It cannot be a monologue. It must be a dialogue between God and the Christian.

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, there are three (3) different types of prayer: vocal, meditation and contemplation – cf. CCC. No. 2699; 2721. Furthermore, prayer can be characterised into two (2): Common and Private.

Common Prayer is when we come together as a community and pray together. Examples of Common Prayer are the celebration of the Eucharist, Recitation of the Rosary, Stations of the Cross, etc.

Private Prayer is the prayer offered by an individual during his/her quiet time. This is the time that a Christian encounters the Lord in a more intimate and personal way. This is what Jesus refers to when he says, *when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them..... But when you pray, go to your private room, and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you – Matt. 6:5-6.*

It must be pointed out that Common and Private Prayer do not negate each other. Rather, they complement each other. What is not encouraged is doing private devotion while Common Prayer is going on. As Christians we must be men and women of prayer. In this way, we will be emulating our Lord Jesus Christ who was a man of prayer. Through prayer, we constantly stay in touch with the Lord and discern the moves that the Lord is making in our lives. Through prayer, we are protected by the Lord against the evil one – cf. Eph. 6:12-17.



PRAYER

- A NECESSITY IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD - II

Prayer is a necessary weapon in the Spiritual warfare of the Christian. We saw from the previous chapter that prayer can be divided into Common and Private or Group and Individual. In this chapter we will dwell more on Private or Individual Prayer.

Prayer in the life of the Christian cannot be over-emphasised. In the opinion of Karl Rahner *Prayer is, therefore, one of the essentials of our life – the food we feed to our souls in order that this deep and secret longing may live into eternal life – (On Prayer 1958).*

The essence of prayer in the life of the Christian is due to the fact that human person was made in the image and likeness of God. There is, therefore, an intrinsic link between God and the human person. It is in this light that Karl Rahner noted, *For deep in our hearts there is a profound restlessness, because God has given us a thirst for the infinite, for the Incomprehensible, for himself – (Ibid. 19).* This statement of Karl Rahner resonates very well

with what St. Augustine had said centuries earlier on that *our souls were made for God and they will remain restless until they rest in God* – (*Confessions Book I:I*). Since the human person is intrinsically linked with God, it is only in God that the human person can have his/her peace. For this reason, the human person must always find a place for God. The Spirit of God is in us since at the beginning of creation. God breathed into the human person the breadth of life before the human person became a living being – cf. Gen. 2:7. Based on this Karl Rahner admonishes that *we must find a place in our lives for the Holy Spirit, that this Spirit may pray in us and with us. There is a craving for the divine deeply stamped in our nature, whether we acknowledge it, or choke it with sin and worldliness* – (*Ibid.* 21). According to Rahner *Because the Spirit of God prays within us, our prayer will become as a fountain springing up unto life everlasting* – (*Ibid.* 29).

Having seen the importance of prayer in our lives as Christians, we must cultivate the habit of praying privately. This act of prayer must be frequent and regular. For example, pray when you rise in the morning and before you go to bed. Secondly, before you begin your schedule or duty at school, at the office or the workplace, spend some minutes in quiet time and offer what you are going to do to God. In this way, you will always be in the presence of the Lord as Jesus did during his earthly ministry. This will also enable us to discern what the Lord is saying to us. Rahner

said it very well when he noted, *Not to pray daily means that we are ignoring God, not listening for His Word, and not preparing every day for our decisive trials. Thus we are in danger of becoming gradually blind and deaf, indifferent and lazy* – (Ibid. 48).

Let us cultivate the habit of praying privately or individually. In this way, we will deepen our relationship with God in our Spirituality and also embellish common or community prayer.

YEAR OF FAITH I

It is a basic foundation of our Christian beliefs that our human life is intrinsically and totally linked with God. The bible describes for us how the human person was created in the image and likeness of God – cf. Gen. 1:26: 2:7ff. For this reason the human person cannot do anything apart from God – cf. Jn.15:5.

There is the need for the human person to have faith in God. *By faith, man completely submits his intellect and his will to God. With his whole being man gives his assent to God the revealer. Sacred Scripture calls this human response to God, the author of revelation, the obedience of faith – Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC No.143).*

As I noted in my book *Doing Christian Religious Education in Ghana Today: A Personal Approach*, Faith plays a very important part in our lives. It is a very complex reality and therefore refuses to be defined in simplest terms. Faith is a gift of God. As a gift from God like life, faith is not given to specific or special people. It is part of our human nature to have faith. As Roger Haight acknowledges *all human beings live according to some form of faith. He goes on to*

say that faith is a common human phenomenon on essential dimension of human action that constitutes integral human existence – (Dynamics of Theology, P. 18).

However, common faith must be distinguished from Christian Faith. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed. As a personal adherence to God and assent to his truth, Christian faith differs from our faith in any human person. It is a right and just to entrust oneself wholly to God and to believe absolutely what He says. It would be futile and false to place such faith in a creature – No. 150.*

The gift of faith is not static. Faith must grow. It must be nurtured in order that it may grow. We grow in faith by hearing and reflecting more deeply on the Word of God. The disciples in the time of Jesus asked the Lord to increase their faith. It is against this background that Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI has declared this year – *The Year of Faith*. It begun on 11th October, 2012 and ends on 24th November, 2013. The Year of Faith has two-fold purpose. It is first to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Second Vatican Council and secondly, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

According to Pope Benedict XVI, *The Year of Faith is intended to contribute to a renewed conversion to the Lord*

Jesus and to the rediscovery of faith, so that the members of the Church will be credible and joy-filled witnesses to the Risen Lord in the world of today – capable of leading those many people who are seeking it to the door of faith. This door opens while man's gaze to Jesus Christ present among us always, until the end of the age.

Let us pay attention to the year and participate in it actively and fully so that our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ will grow deeper and deeper.



THE YEAR OF FAITH - II

The *Year of Faith* which has been declared by Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI runs from 11th October, 2012 to 24th November, 2013. It is to help us to deepen our faith and rededicate ourselves to the service and worship of the Lord. As we do so it is very crucial and important to look at the lives of personalities who can serve as role models on this journey of faith. Two personalities who readily come to mind are Abraham and Our Blessed Mother, Mary.

Abraham is described in the bible as a man of faith. One day, as he was serving the Lord, the word of God came to him *go from your country and your kindred and your Father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great so that you will be a blessing* – Gen. 12:1-2. As a man of faith, Abraham left, not knowing where he was going. Since he had great faith in the Lord, he left the life of comfort and known to a life of uncertainty and unknown. Furthermore, as a dedicated and devout man of God, he was barren but did not complain and curse Yahweh. He continued to demonstrate his faith in the Lord when finally Isaac was born to him. When he was asked to offer

his beloved son as a sacrifice, he was ready to do so – cf. Gen.22:1ff.

Another example of a personality whose faith in the Lord is worth emulating is Mary. We read from the bible that when the angel Gabriel came to Mary to announce the birth of Jesus Christ, Mary said, *Here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word* – Lk. 1:38. Mary demonstrates her faith in the Lord through her *faith*. It can be seen from the lives of the two personalities that because of their faith in the Lord, the Lord in turn blessed and honoured them. Today, in all Christendom Abraham and Mary stand tall and are seen as a *man of faith* and a *woman of faith* respectively.

Abraham and Mary have been given to us as role models. We are on a journey of faith. These personalities are to help us as guides. Let the *Year of Faith* be a period that we deepen our faith in the Lord and rededicate ourselves to the service and worship of the Lord.



THE YEAR OF FAITH - III

As we continue our discussion on the *Year of Faith*, we would like to talk about the contents of faith. As expounded by Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI in launching the *Year of Faith*, the contents consist of two aspects; namely: the Doctrines of the Church and the Practice of the Faith. When we talk about the doctrines of the church, they encompass a wide range of teachings. They include all the *Logies*.

1. Fundamental Theology (which deals with Faith, Reason, Revelation, Inerrancy and the Canonicity of the bible and others).
2. Trinity – (The three divine and distinct persons in the Godhead).
3. Christology – (The two natures of Jesus Christ – divine and human)
4. Pneumatology – (deals with the Holy Spirit).
5. Ecclesiology – (talks about nature and the structure of the church).

6. Sacramentology – (deals with the Sacraments and the Sacramentals of the church).
7. Theological Anthropology – (talks about Creation, The Fall, Redemption, Sin, Grace and the Four Last Things).
8. Mariology – (deals with Mary in the work of Jesus' redemption).

These constitute the contents of faith that we need to consider in the *Year of Faith*.

The second component of the *Year of Faith* is the Practice of the Christian Faith. This means how we put the doctrines of the church into practice. The doctrines are to direct and influence how we live our lives as men and women of faith. It must be pointed out that the two components are complimentary to each other. One cannot, therefore, choose one and leave the other. They are like the two faces of the same coin. While the contents reinforce the practice of the faith, the latter does not make the former theoretical and utopian.

In the *Year of Faith*, it is important to study or revise our knowledge about the many doctrines of the church. The bible, the Vatican II documents, the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Encyclicals can be resource materials for us. Let us make the *Year of Faith* a beneficial and a fruitful one for us all.



JESUS CHRIST – THE KING OF OUR HEARTS

- SOLEMNITY OF CHRIST THE KING

One institution that has stood the test of time is kingship or chieftaincy. It has passed through and survived various turbulent epochs: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. In Ghana today, kingship is still respected and has relevance in our contemporary situation. The position and the roles of the king are still acknowledged today.

One of the roles of the king is the religious role. The chief is seen as the link between the living and the Spirit world (ancestors). In the bible, the king of Israel was considered to be the regent or the viceroy of God. He was supposed to exercise his dominion under the dictates and directions of God.

Today, we celebrate the Solemnity of Christ the King. We accept Jesus Christ as our king. Today, Jesus Christ will be symbolically paraded through the principal streets in many parts of the world. This is to acknowledge and

proclaim Jesus Christ as the King of the Universe.

It must be pointed out that even though Jesus many times in the course of earthly ministry rejected the title *king* because of its political ramifications – cf. Jn. 6:15 – He was a king. His kingdom was not an earthly kingdom – cf. Jn. 18:36. His kingdom is a kingdom with a difference. It is *an eternal and universal kingdom: a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace (Preface of Christ the King).*

If Jesus is our king, then it means that we are his subjects. If we are his subjects, then it means that we owe allegiance to him. Consequently, we have the duty and responsibility to live lives worthy of our status as princes and princesses of God. This is what St. Paul meant, when he said, *So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God – Gal. 4:7.*

Secondly, if we accept Jesus as our king, then we need to ask where is his palace? It is in our hearts. This is captured beautifully by St. Paul when he said *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple – 1 Cor. 3:16-17.*

As we celebrate the Solemnity of Christ the King, let us renew our allegiance to Jesus Christ and live lives befitting our status as children of God.



ADVENT SEASON - A PERIOD OF PREPARATION

It is often said that everything that has a beginning has an end. Quothet, the preacher, captured it beautifully when he said; *there is a time for everything; a time to be born and a time to die..... Eccl. 3:1ff.* We have come to the end of one Liturgical Year. We begin the season of Advent, a new Liturgical Year.

Advent comes from the Latin word *advenio* – *advenire* which means to come; arrival. In its historical perspective, it referred to the arrival or the coming of an important dignitary such as a king, an emperor, a government official. In the Christian perspective, advent refers to the coming of Jesus Christ. The Advent Season is divided into two (2) significant parts. The first part begins from the First Sunday of Advent to December 16. During this period the focus is on the second coming of Jesus Christ. The second part begins from December 17 and ends on December 24. This time the Church's attention turns to the incarnation, the first coming of Jesus Christ when he was born in Bethlehem.

The colour for the Advent Season is violet, the same as the Lenten Season. It is to remind us of the need to do away with our sinfulness, and our sinful inclinations as we prepare for the arrival of Jesus Christ, our king and our saviour. The Advent Season, therefore, has the themes of repentance and renewal which are generally considered to be Lenten themes.

As Catholic Christians, there is the need to give our saviour and redeemer a rousing welcome. This, we must do by preparing adequately for the coming of the Lord. Our preparation for the celebration of the coming of the Lord must not only be materialistic but also spiritual. In fact, the emphasis should be on the Spiritual preparation. This is what the prophet Isaiah meant when he said, *A voice cries, Prepare in the wilderness a way for Yahweh. Make a straight highway for our God across the desert. Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be laid low, let every cliff become a plain, and the ridges a valley; then the glory of Yahweh shall be revealed and all mankind shall see it; for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken – Is. 40:1-5.*

The Advent Season is another opportune time for us. Let us make good use of it by preparing ourselves spiritually for the Lord.



A TIME FOR PREPARATION FOR THE COMING OF THE LORD – II

The season of Advent, is the beginning of a new Liturgical Year. The Advent Season has two (2) parts. The Parousia – the second coming of Christ and the Incarnation – the first coming when he was born in Bethlehem. First, we shall talk about the Parousia.

Before his Ascension into heaven, Jesus promised his disciples that he was going to prepare a place for them and after that he will come back and take them where he is – cf. Jn. 14:1-3. When this will happen remains a mystery to you and to me. From the horse's own mouth, Jesus says, *But as for that day or hour, nobody knows it, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son; no one but the Father* – Mk. 13:32.

As Christians, we believe that when Jesus comes again, he will come this time, not to suffer again but he will come in his glory. It will be a time for assessment, a time for judgement when all people from the four corners of

the world will be assembled before him. According to Jesus, people will be called upon to give account of their stewardship and judgement will be pronounced – To some it will be said, *Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the Kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world* – Mt. 25:34, and To others it will be said, *Go away from me, with your curse upon you, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels* – Mt. 25:41.

It is often said *to be forewarned is to be forearmed*. In these words, Jesus is warning us ahead of time not to allow this to befall us. They will be said to us if and only if we do not heed his warnings and live as we want.

As we begin the second Sunday of Advent let us prepare ourselves adequately for the coming of the Lord so that when he comes, he will say to us *Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world* – Matt. 25:41.



A TIME FOR PREPARATION FOR THE COMING OF THE LORD – III

The third week of Advent is a time of preparation for the coming of the Lord. According to the tradition of the Catholic Church, this day is called *Gaudate* Sunday. *Gaudate* is a Latin word which means rejoice or be glad. It can be seen that the antiphon and the readings of today encourage all of us to rejoice because our salvation is closer than when we began the preparation, awaiting the saviour to come. The third week of Advent is the time when the pink candle in the Advent wreath is lighted. It is to keep our faith and our hope in the coming of the Lord still alive.

This period of preparation is very similar to the time when God was about to liberate and redeem the people of Israel after many years of being sent into exile. At that time, God through the Prophet Isaiah said to the people of Israel: *The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice and bloom. They will bloom with abundant flowers, and rejoice with joyful songs. The glory of Lebanon will be given*

to them, the splendour of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the Lord, the splendour of our God. Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak, say to those whose hearts are frightened; be strong, fear not! Here is your God; he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you – Is. 35:1-5.

These words of comfort and consolation are very applicable to our situation. *Gaudate* Sunday is to urge us on. It is to motivate us so that we do not lose focus and become lethargic or lose concentration. Let us keep our forward march and prepare adequately for the coming of the Lord so that when he finally arrives we may be found wealthy to receive him.



THE INCARNATION – THE BEGINNING OF OUR REDEMPTION, OUR RESTORATION AND RECONCILIATION WITH GOD

It must be pointed out that the greatest thing ever to happen to humanity after the creation is the Incarnation. Through the Incarnation, God comes to live among us as a human being. St. John elaborates on this wonderful mystery when he says *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being..... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory as of a father's only Son, full of grace and truth – Jn. 1:1-14.*

What makes the Incarnation so unique is that it has made us adopted sons and daughters of God – cf. Jn.1:13 – As St. John notes, *From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace – Jn. 1:16.* The Incarnation, consequently, is the starting point of our redemption. It is the time when

we are renewed and restored to our status as children of God. In short, it reconciles us again with God.

Speaking on the Incarnation, St. Augustine said, *You would have suffered death had he not been born in time. Never would you have been freed from sinful flesh, had he taken on himself the likeness of sinful flesh. You would have suffered everlasting unhappiness had it not been for his mercy. You would never have returned to life, had he not shared your death. You would have been lost if he had not hastened to you. You would have perished, had he not come.* – (*The Liturgy of The Hours*, Vol. I p.37).

We have every reason to rejoice and be happy as we celebrate the birth of Christ. Through the Incarnation God and sinners are reconciled. This is indeed a wonderful exchange. As we celebrate this great event, it must not lead to over-indulgence in food, drink and sexual impropriety. Christmas is a time of blessing. It is a time of grace. Let us keep it as such. Just as Jesus has come to share his life with us, let us reach out to others especially, the less fortunate brothers and sisters.



THE HOLY FAMILY – THE EXEMPLARY OF ALL FAMILIES

There is an Akan saying that says *se onipa firi soro sane a, obesi abusua mu anaa ekuro mu* – *When a human being descends from the heavens, one lands in a family or in a town.* This is to buttress the point that family life is natural to human beings. The reason is that human beings were created in the image and likeness of God and the Godhead is a community or a family – cf. Gen. 1:26.

The importance of family to the society cannot be over-emphasised. It is the basic unit on which all societies hinge on. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *the family is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundation for freedom, security, and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honour God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is*

an institution into life in society – CCC 2201.

Family life was instituted by God for a purpose – for companionship; partnership; procreation. It must be pointed out that divorce does not exist in the eyes of God – cf. Mk. 10:1-9; Matt. 19:3-6. God says without mincing words, *I hate divorce* – Mal. 2:16. Today is the Feast of the Holy Family – made up of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. This family has been given to us as a model. It is to enable us to live our family lives as God intended it to be. It is for this reason that we are called upon to pay greater attention to the household ethics as enshrined in the bible – cf. Col. 3:12-21; Eph. 5:21-32.

As we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family, husbands are called upon to emulate St. Joseph; wives are to see Mary as their model and children are to study Jesus. We pray that all families will stay in love and unity through prayer, for as the Church teaches: the family is the domestic church and the family that prays together stays together.

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