

THE CELEBRATION OF OUR PASCHAL LIBERATION

EVERY GENERATION of Christians has sought its own proper understanding of the mission and identity of the Church in the world.¹ In times of cultural stability such theological endeavours proceed without anguish in a context of tranquillity and certainty. Much about the identity and mission of the Church is taken for granted. Our era, however, is one of profound cultural transformation, indeed of cultural revolution. In such transitional periods the issues of identity and mission become critical for the christian community. Not accidentally this debate about the Church's self-understanding is going on at the same time as contemporary theology is undergoing a profound transformation in its own method, orientation and understanding. Furthermore the global community is immersed in a crisis regarding the meaning as well as the survival of modern society.²

Emerging from this contemporary situation is the Church's new self-awareness as a 'world-Church' which proclaims the message of liberation and justice in and through Jesus Christ to a world which is alienated from its true purpose and destiny and whose people are oppressed. Such a proclamation of necessity involves active engagement in efforts to realize what is proclaimed.

Seeking liberation and justice as constitutive dimensions of the Church's mission in the world is rooted in God's action of liberation and justice in the course of history. The biblical record reveals a God who is deeply concerned and involved in the liberation of his creation from every form of injustice, alienation and oppression. In the Old Testament the justice of God is most vividly portrayed in Yahweh's concern for the hebrew people when they were slaves in Egypt. In their bondage and slavery they called out to God for liberation (Exod 2,23-25). Yahweh responded to their cry by calling Moses to act on his behalf in delivering the people from their slavery (Exod 3,7-8.10). The Exodus was the fundamental experience for the Israelites. Led out from oppression and slavery they were to be concerned about those who were oppressed and suffered from injustice. Indeed, whenever the widows and orphans were cared for and the rights of the poor upheld, the justice of God was present. Whenever the world and all that it contains were used responsibly and the hungry fed, there was an instance of the reign of God.

The justice of God or the reign of God is more fully seen in the person of Jesus. Jesus is the just one. He announced the coming of the reign or kingdom of God, and embodied that kingdom in his own person. In his death and resurrection he inaugurated that kingdom on earth in a definitive way. Jesus's paschal sacrifice is our justice and liberation. The imperative to seek justice and liberation arises as a consequence of the gift

of liberation and justice which God has given us through the life, death, resurrection and glorification of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit who animates the Church.

The purpose of this essay is to examine the liturgical texts of the Easter season in an effort to understand better the Church's identity and mission in the world today as a world-Church which proclaims Christ's liberation and justice to an alienated, unjust world. After a brief explanation of the Easter season, I will present several major theological themes of these fifty days of paschal joy, developing some of the theological implications of the Easter season for the Church's understanding of her identity and mission in the world. In the final section of the paper, I will suggest several points appropriate to a spirituality of such a world-Church.

The Easter season

The Easter season is the period of fifty days from Easter to Pentecost. These fifty days 'are celebrated as one feast day, sometimes called the Great Sunday'.³ Beginning with the Easter vigil, these fifty days are to be 'fifty days of rejoicing in the resurrection, ascension, bestowal of the Spirit, and founding of the Church, understood not as separate episodes succeeding each other in time but as different facets of one and the same mystery of Jesus's exaltation as Lord'.⁴ This 'day' which lasts fifty days is the high point of the entire liturgical year because the Church celebrates her Lord's victory over death and his exaltation in glory. This season is the Sunday of Sundays. What the Church celebrates cannot be contained in twenty-four hours, so it is extended to a space of fifty days. The celebration of this season is constitutive of christian identity and mission both in the sense that it is proper to the life of the christian community to celebrate the exaltation of Jesus as Lord, and in the sense that it represents to the Church her unique identity and mission in the world.

Major theological themes of the Easter season

(a) THE PASCHAL MYSTERY. As the Church gathers in vigil during the hours before dawn on Easter morning, she proclaims the theme that will resound for the next fifty days, indeed throughout the liturgical year.

We praise you with greater joy than ever on this Easter night when Christ became our paschal sacrifice. He is the true Lamb who took away the sin of the world. By dying he destroyed our death: by rising he restored our life.⁵

The liturgical texts of the Easter season vividly describe the human condition before the paschal victory. The human race was in the grip of the evil one and was subject to the 'Lord of death'.⁶ We were oppressed by the 'power of darkness' (Col 1,13), and the 'power of hell'.⁷ Our lives were spent in the 'darkness of error and sin'.⁸ The world was a 'broken world'.⁹

We were slaves to sin (Rom 6,5). Oppressed by the forces of evil and sin, we were without the power to free ourselves from this wretched condition. Simply put, we were living our lives 'in darkness and the shadow of death' (Lk 1,79).

Precisely in the midst of this human condition, Jesus Christ the Passover has been sacrificed.¹⁰ He is the 'Passover that brings salvation'.¹¹

The Lord, though he was God, became man. He suffered for the sake of those who suffer, he was bound for the sake of those in bonds, condemned for the guilty, buried for those who live in the grave, but he rose from the dead and cried aloud: 'Who will contend with me? Let him confront me! I have freed the condemned, brought the dead back to life, raised men from their graves. I have destroyed death, triumphed over the enemy, trampled hell underfoot, bound the strong one, and taken men up to the heights of heaven: I am the Christ'.¹²

Through the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, God the Father 'conquered the power of death and opened for us the way to eternal life'.¹³ We were 'freed from the power of the enemy'.¹⁴ Through his victory over death, the power of evil has been broken and sin and death destroyed.¹⁵ 'Death itself was slain'.¹⁶ The Father rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his beloved Son.¹⁷

The whole of creation was called from death to life.¹⁸ Through the paschal event of Jesus Christ, salvation was brought to the whole human race.¹⁹ We were given the freedom of the sons and daughters of God and 'our lives were touched with the healing power of God's love'.²⁰ In Christ 'a new age has dawned'²¹ and we experienced a new 'birth into a living hope'.²² We are indeed a new creation because of Christ's sacrifices.²³

As a consequence of the Easter mystery, we have become the people of God. 'Thus, through the blood of our Redeemer, we have become a people claimed by God as his own, as in ancient times the people of Israel were ransomed from Egypt by the blood of a lamb'.²⁴

These liturgical texts and many others from the Easter season focus attention on our liberation and salvation in and through the paschal sacrifice of Christ. This mystery of the dying and misery of Jesus of Nazareth is the heart of the christian experience. From this foundational experience emerges the Church's identity and mission.

What are the theological implications of this for the Church's understanding of her identity and mission? First, salvation is a gift from God which human beings could not accomplish on their own behalf (Eph 2,9). As such, the Church is a community which knows herself as having been saved by God in Christ and of having the mission to proclaim that salvation to the whole world.

However, the salvation that she proclaims, precisely because it is salvation through Christ, is a historical reality and not a disembodied purely supernatural reality. It is salvation in the midst of human history and life. Thus this message of salvation, if it is to be christian, must be one of liberation and justice.

This is in accord with the witness of biblical revelation. In the Old Testament, the historical experience of the Exodus provides a key to the inner meaning of salvation. We are able to understand the fact of the Exodus on three levels. First, there is the historical fact that the people moved out of Egypt. On the second level, there is a political understanding of the historical fact, namely, that the people moved out of slavery into freedom. At the third level, the theological understanding is manifested because God is the one who is seen as being responsible for the liberation of the israelite slave.

In the New Testament, the story of the Old reaches its fulfilment and culmination in Christ. His death and resurrection are seen as the definitive Exodus (Lk 9,31; Jn 13,1). The paschal mystery of Jesus Christ becomes a mystery of liberation. In the Just One, the fullness of justice is made present in the world. As in the Old Testament, the salvation of Christ is found and incarnated in the human reality of liberation.

This understanding leads us necessarily to the realization that the gift of salvation and liberation requires of those conscious of receiving the gift the pursuit of liberation in the world today. The Church understands herself as the community that not only proclaims the word about the paschal liberation but that is called to foster and establish liberation and justice in the world. The critical point in this realization is that the pursuit of justice and liberation necessarily involves the Church in living out the dynamics of the paschal mystery. Just as it was necessary for the Just One to undergo the torment of the cross to bring about the salvation of the world, so it is necessary for his Church to live out the paschal mystery in the world today.

During the Easter season the Church prays for the grace to participate in the paschal mystery of Christ. 'Lord, you walked the way of suffering and crucifixion, may we suffer and die with you, and rise again to share your glory'.²⁵ The Church prays that she might follow Christ in his risen life, recognizing that 'first he must die, and then he would rise'.²⁶ This becomes most clear in the prayers regarding fidelity to the baptism that Christians received. 'Help us to put into practice the baptism that we have received'.²⁷ This is prayed for with the full recognition that we are baptized into the death of Christ and that 'if we have died with Christ, we shall also live with him' (Tim 2, 11).

The important point here is that in this effort to reproduce in her own life the suffering of Christ, so as to bring to completion the redemption of the world, the Church realizes her identity and mission in the world. This pattern of sacrificial love which calls each Christian willingly to lay down

his or her life for the sake of the other is in imitation of the Good Shepherd who 'lays down his life for the sheep'.²⁸ Such a dynamic is to be the pattern of life for the Church. Indeed, we can define the Church as the community of the disciples of Jesus which lives the paschal mystery in the world today. As her Lord gave his life for others, and willingly identified himself with the lowly and the rejected, thus bringing about healing and liberation, so the Church gives her life for the sake of the world. By doing this she participates in the liberating action of Christ and comes into possession of her own identity.

The struggle between death and life that emerges in the liturgical texts of the Easter season provides a useful guiding principle for the Church's mission in the world. Just as the Lord of life entered into battle with the Prince of death in order to defeat death, so the Church is to be engaged in liberating human beings from all the structures and forces of death that are operative in society. This liberation from the forces of death is so that people may have the opportunity to live life to the full. Thus the Church stands opposed to all that keeps people from living a truly human life, and stands for all that fosters human life and dignity.

(b) JESUS IS THE LORD. In the liturgy of the Easter season, as well as for the whole year, the Church celebrates Jesus as Lord. It is the Lord who is risen.²⁹ Through his resurrection, Jesus becomes the Lord. 'Let the whole house of Israel know beyond any doubt God has made both Lord and Messiah this Jesus whom you crucified' (Acts 2,36). He has become 'the Lord of life'.³⁰ He is not only the Lord of the living, but of the dead as well (Rom 14,9). Indeed, he is 'Lord of all'.³¹ Christ's lordship extends over all the nations. 'The Father glorified Jesus and appointed him heir to the nations'.³² In the Office of Readings for Monday within the Octave of Easter, Psalm 2 is prayed with the antiphon: 'I have asked my Father, and he has given me the nations for my inheritance, alleluia'.³³ God has exalted Christ as 'Ruler and Saviour',³⁴ thus making him 'the King of the new creation'³⁵ and the 'Heir to all nations'.³⁶ His lordship does not stop with the nations. The Church proclaims Jesus as 'truly God and Lord of the universe'.³⁷

This proclamation of Jesus's lordship has often been understood in individualistic terms. He is 'my personal Lord and Saviour' is a commonly held proposition, with this phrase having no social or political implications. Thus, we find devout Christians professing faith in the 'King of the new creation' and the 'Lord of the nations', but ignoring the realities of war, the stockpiling of armaments and the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The Prince of Peace seems only interested in inner peace.

Such an interpretation contradicts the biblical witness which proclaims Jesus as Lord of the nations and the whole universe. As Yahweh is cosmic Lord, so is Jesus because of his exaltation. In the battle with the demonic forces, Jesus is victorious and is proclaimed Lord of all the universe. Thus,

this lordship of Jesus has implications for all social, economic, and political structures and systems of the world. All such systems stand under the claim and teachings of the Just One who is Lord and are to be brought into his reign.

The Church, as the community that lives under the Lordship of Jesus, gives witness to the new creation that God is bringing about in Christ. She lives as part of that new creation, even though it is not yet fully realized. Part of the way that the Church does this is by challenging every structure and system or ideology that would make itself 'Lord'. The Church also opposes every social system or institution that perverts the possibility of human beings living in peace and freedom because such systems and institutions are demonic stated positively. The Church seeks the renewal and reformation of all nations, and all of their social and political institutions as well as their economic structures, so that they may foster fully human life for all peoples.

In addition, the Church recognizes that the Lordship of Jesus is not like that of earthly lords. It must be remembered that the one of whom this title of Lord is predicated is the one who is obedient to death on the cross. The power of the Lord is revealed as powerlessness, obedience, and gracious love. In light of this fact, the Church must be open to recognizing her Lord's presence in the world today in those experiences of sacrificial love and willingness to suffer for the sake of the poor and oppressed.

In the liturgy, Jesus's exaltation as Lord of the whole universe is celebrated as a past event, a present possibility, and a future consummation. The Church is the community which remembers and witnesses that Jesus is the Lord of the universe. This has several implications for the Church. First, because this claim is an absolute claim, Christians stand in a critical position or prophetic relationship to every movement, institution, or structure which seeks to embody the new creation over which Jesus is Lord. No such effort can fully embody the new creation. It follows that all instances of liberation or justice must be scrutinized. Secondly, while knowing this, the Church is still able to commit herself to working for a greater approximation of the new creation in this world.

The reality of the Lordship of Jesus over all the nations offers the Church of North America and of Europe something important for reflection in this new age of the world-Church. As the Church of 'Christendom' becomes the universal Church, those members from Europe and North America can rejoice in this development because it gives witness to the fact that Jesus's lordship extends over all the nations and cultures and is not tied to a particular culture.

(c) THE VICTORY OF CHRIST. The liturgical texts for the Easter season offer another important insight into the human condition before the paschal victory, namely, that people are living lives of despair. The prayer of Easter Day captures this beautifully: 'This is the morning on which the Lord

appeared to men who had begun to lose hope. . .'.³⁸ With the paschal victory, Jesus is proclaimed the 'Victorious King'³⁹ who brings hope. The Easter season abounds with prayers, antiphons, readings and songs that celebrate this hope that comes from Christ's victory over sin, evil and death.

Praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 he who in his great mercy
 gave us new birth;
 a birth unto hope which draws its life
 from the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.⁴⁰

The birth that Christians experience is a birth into a new and living hope. Christ has given 'sure hope to his people'⁴¹ and he is 'the foundation of all our hopes'.⁴²

In the paschal victory Christians experience the vindication of Jesus of Nazareth himself as well as that of his cause. Left in despair, their hopes shattered (Lk 24,21), the disciples of Jesus experienced in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead the eschatological victory of God's grace in the world and the vindication of his message and cause. The Easter event is God the Father's resounding 'yes' to all that Jesus is and says. According to Karl Rahner, the disciples 'saw the Lord's resurrection as the final confirmation by God himself of the claim made by Jesus before Easter: the claim that the word, the fate, and the person of the Lord means the nearness of the kingdom of God and that this is a fact that cannot be rescinded'.⁴³ The resurrection of Jesus gave birth to a faith that is experienced as liberation from all the forces of finitude, guilt, and death. Because of this liberation, Christians know that 'victorious too will be his followers'.⁴⁴

For the community of Jesus's disciples, this is good news. The vindication of Jesus and his message means that the Church knows herself as a community that is free to seek the establishment of God's kingdom. This freedom is rooted in the conviction born of faith in the risen Christ that some day the kingdom of God will be fully established. The final victory is certain. The hope is sure. Therefore the Church is able to remain committed to seeking justice for all people and liberation from every oppressive situation, even in the face of great difficulty and tremendous obstacles. Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador expressed the power of this conviction at the funeral Mass of five people who were killed several months before his own death:

But I do not believe the murder of these five has been in vain. They have preceded us in the experience of the resurrection. We live by that power that even death cannot destroy. We honour them and our faith by living unafraid, by knowing that evil has no future.⁴⁵

Action on behalf of the poor or efforts to secure peace are not pursued on the basis of positive empirical results. Christians pursue justice and liberation in season and out of season because it is part of the work of Christ the Just One. Because of the paschal victory, the Church knows that whatever she does in the Lord's name and on behalf of his cause is not in vain but will find its fulfilment in the final completion of Jesus's kingdom at the second coming. Put another way, all action by Christians is rooted in hope, a hope that knows the darkness of despair and has gone beyond it into the glorious promise of fulfilment.

Christ and the Church are one

Of all the mysteries that the liturgy of the Easter season presents to the Church, the relationship between Christ and the Church offers a profound truth which often evades understanding. However, this relationship has major consequences for the Church's understanding of her identity and mission. The relationship between Christ and the Church is presented in the gospels in a variety of ways that complement one another. First, Christ is proclaimed as being present with his Church: 'See my hands and my feet and know that I am here among you!'⁴⁶ In the conclusion of Matthew's gospel, Jesus promises to be with his disciples 'until the end of this world' (Mt 28,30).

But Christ is not only present *with* his Church, he also is present in his Church. He dwells in the Church. 'Lord, you are always present in your Church, through the Holy Spirit guide it into all truth',⁴⁷ is a prayer of the Church on several occasions during the Easter season. In one of his sermons, Leo the Great explains the relationship between Christ and his Church in this way:

My dear brethren, there is no doubt that the Son of God took our human nature into so close a union with himself that one and the same Christ is present not only in the first-born of all creation, but in all his saints as well . . . even now he dwells, whole and undivided in his temple the Church.⁴⁸

Throughout the Easter season, Christ is described as the 'head of the Church'⁴⁹ and the Church is understood as his body. Thus each member of the Church is a member of Christ's body. 'All who receive the sacred flesh of Christ are united with him as members of his body',⁵⁰ according to Cyril of Alexandria. The Church is 'itself Christ's body'.⁵¹ As Paul says, 'Just as a human body, though it is made up of many parts, is a single unit because all of these parts, though many, make up one body, so it is with Christ' (1 Cor 12,12). The members of Christ's body are one. 'Though many, we are one body, and members one of another. . .'.⁵² As Gaudentius of Brescia said:

It is appropriate that we should receive the body of Christ in the form of bread, because as there are many grains of wheat in the flour from which bread is made by mixing it with water and baking it with fire, so also we know that many members make up the one body of Christ which is brought to maturity by the fire of the Holy Spirit.⁵³

But even more that this oneness of many members in the one body of Christ, the Church celebrates an even greater truth: Leo put it this way: 'The effect of our sharing in the body and blood of Christ is to change us into what we receive'.⁵⁴ In his explanation of Eph 4,9, Augustine said: 'These words are explained by our oneness with Christ, for he is our head and we are his body. No one ascended into heaven except Christ because we are also Christ.'⁵⁵ Isaac of Stella in one of his sermons presented it in this fashion:

Just as the head and body of a man form one single man, so the Son of the Virgin and those he has chosen to be his members form a single man and the one Son of Man. Christ is whole and entire, head and body, say the scriptures, since all the members form one body, which with its head is one Son of Man, and he with the Son of God is one Son of God, who himself with God is one God. Therefore, the whole body with its head is Son of Man, Son of God and God. This is the explanation of the Lord's words: 'Father, I desire that as you and I are one, so they may be one with us'.

And so, according to this well-known reading of scripture, neither the body without the head, nor the head without the body, nor the head and body without God make the whole Christ. When all are united with God they become one God. The Son of God is one with God by nature; the Son of Man is one with him in his person; we, his body, are one with him sacramentally. Consequently, those who by faith are spiritual members of Christ can truly say that they are what he is: the Son of God and God himself. But what Christ is by his nature we are as his participants. Finally, what the Son of God is by generation, his members are by adoption, according to the text: As sons you have received the Spirit of adoption, enabling you to cry, Abba, Father.⁵⁶

The mystery that is referred to in these liturgical texts and that is celebrated throughout the Easter season is much greater than the affirmation that the Church is Christ's body when this is understood as an ecclesiological statement. The depth of this mystery is touched when we understand these statements as christological statements. Once we understand that, then we can draw the implications for ecclesiology. The mystery

that is being celebrated here is that these many who are one are who Christ is now. Commenting on 1 Cor 12,12, John Haughey captures this mystery:

What he (Paul) is saying is not only that the many are one but that the one the many are is Christ. He is saying more than that individuals participate in Christ or that through baptism they are made part of an ecclesial reality. He is saying: together they are Christ.⁵⁷

Thus the one who is the Lord of the Universe is also an immanent reality. The Risen Lord and the members of the Church are so intimately united with one another that they are Christ.

The implications of this mystery for the Church's understanding of her identity and mission are profound. With this understanding, the Church knows herself not only to be 'in Christ', but to be Christ. The death and resurrection of Christ are the constitutive reality of the Church. They make her who she is. The life that Jesus lived is the life she lives. She seeks to proclaim the message of God's reign, to embody that reign in her works and in her life as a community, and to celebrate the liberation of creation. But the Church does this not in some kind of imitation of someone else. Rather she is living her own life because her life is Christ. Thus as Jesus is the Just One who announces liberty and justice for the poor and oppressed, so too the Church. As Christ willingly suffered and died so that we might have life, so too the Church. As Jesus identified himself with the rejected and downtrodden of his day, so too the Church.

The Holy Spirit

Throughout the Easter season, the Church celebrates her bestowal of the Holy Spirit on the Church. This gift of the Holy Spirit is an integral part of the exaltation of Jesus as the Lord. Indeed, the bestowal of the Holy Spirit brings 'the paschal mystery to its completion'.⁵⁸

The unity of Christ and the Church discussed above is made possible by the Holy Spirit. 'It was in one Spirit that all of us, whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, were baptized into one body. All of us have been given to drink of the one Spirit'.⁵⁹ Once the work of the Holy Spirit is recognized, the transcendent and the immanent can be joined together, and the divine and the human can be united, because the Holy Spirit is able to fathom the depths of both (1 Cor 2,10). The Holy Spirit is 'the bond of union between us and Christ our Saviour'.⁶⁰ 'He dwells in us and makes us aware of God's presence in us'.⁶¹ The Holy Spirit is 'our rest in labour'.⁶² and gives 'witness to our spirit that we are children of God'.⁶³ The Holy Spirit is the great gift of the paschal victory. Among the many texts to choose from, the following from St Basil gives some indication of how integral the Holy Spirit is to the life of the Church.

The Spirit is the source of holiness, a spiritual light, and he offers his own light to every mind to help it in its search for truth. By nature the Spirit is beyond the reach of our mind, but we can know him by his goodness. The power of the Spirit fills the whole universe, but he gives himself only to those who are worthy, acting in each according to the measure of his faith.

Simple in himself, the Spirit is manifold in his mighty works. The whole of his being is present to each individual: the whole of his being is present everywhere. Though shared in by many, he remains unchanged; his self-giving is no loss to himself. Like the sunshine which permeates all the atmosphere, spreading over land and sea, and yet is enjoyed by each person as though it were for him alone, so the Spirit pours forth his grace in full measure, sufficient for all, and yet is present as though exclusively to everyone who can receive him. To all creatures that share in him, he gives a delight limited only by their own nature, not by his ability to give.

The Spirit raises our hearts to heaven, guides the steps of the weak, and brings to perfection those who are making progress. He enlightens those who have been cleansed from every stain of sin and makes them spiritual by communion with himself.

As clear transparent substances become very bright when sunlight falls on them and shine with a new radiance, so also souls in whom the Spirit dwells, and who are enlightened by the Spirit, become spiritual themselves and a source for others.

From the Spirit comes foreknowledge of the future, understanding of the mysteries of faith, insight into the hidden meaning of scripture, and other special gifts. Through the Spirit we become citizens of heaven, we are admitted to the company of the angels, we enter into eternal happiness, and abide in God. Through the Spirit we acquire a likeness to God; indeed, we attain what is beyond our sublime aspirations — we become God.⁶³

These brief highlights from a variety of liturgical texts of the Easter season regarding the Holy Spirit focus attention on general important theological implications for the Church's understanding of her identity and mission. First, the liberation of creation from death and sin that Christ brings and the new creation which the Church is called upon to realize are the work of the Holy Spirit. In every sphere of life the Holy Spirit is in conflict with the old creation which leads to death. The Spirit brings new life and the new creation which was inaugurated with the paschal victory. Therefore, when people are praying in authentic and life-giving ways, and when people are healing the sick and establishing justice in the land, the same Holy Spirit is operating. Both kinds of actions further the full

realization of the kingdom of God on earth. Secondly, the Holy Spirit works outside the Church as well as within the Church. Therefore, the Church must always seek to discern the workings of the Spirit beyond herself. Discerning the Spirit beyond the household of faith, the Church should work with those who are so moved by the Spirit of God.

Toward a spirituality of paschal liberation

The corollary to the efforts to understand the Church's identity and mission in the world is the task of formulating a spirituality for the Church that is appropriate for such an understanding. The fundamental issue in christian spirituality is: how does one live in the Spirit of Jesus?

In order to live in the Spirit of Jesus, it is necessary to reach out and touch as well as to be touched by the experience of Jesus. Thus the question that needs to be raised here is behind and beyond the theological implications and understandings that were suggested above. The question here is how one is to know the experience of Jesus in one's own personal experience. How is one to verify in one's own personal life the experience that is celebrated in the paschal festival of the Easter season?

The experience of Jesus is most fully expressed in the death and resurrection of Jesus. This paschal mystery is the well-spring of life for the Church as well as the way to the fullness of life. Living in the Spirit of Jesus means living the paschal mystery in the circumstances of life in the world. It means living the paradox that one gains one's life by losing it for the sake of others. This paschal mystery, like all the profound mysteries of life, invites the fullest possible personal participation and encounter. It calls us beyond ourselves into something greater than ourselves. This means that the Church must build bridges of empathy from our personal experiences into that reality which is greater than ourselves.

The eucharist invites us into the paschal mystery of Jesus. It calls us to reflect on those experiences within our own lives from which we can try to build bridges of empathy into the reality of Jesus's death and resurrection. Fortunately, the eucharist not only calls us to this task, it also provides us with some assistance in achieving the task. The words and actions of the eucharistic celebration point out the personal experiences from which the bridges of empathy and understanding can be built. At its simplest level, the eucharist is a sharing of food. This points to two fundamental human experiences, namely those of human need and of sharing. To be human means to be in need. It means to recognize that I am not sufficient unto myself. I stand in need of God, of food and water, of human companionship, of love. People who recognize their need can respond in two ways. They can seek to satisfy their need by acquiring possessions, by defining their self-worth in terms of having things or skills, or they can recognize their fundamental need and see that it points to sharing with others. In this second option, the choice is clear. The answer to the problem of life is to go

out of oneself, to transcend the prison of one's isolated ego and to love the other person. It also means accepting love from another person.

The person who recognizes that the path to life is in sharing with others in love gradually begins to recognize that such love cannot be exclusive or only for those who can love in return. Rather, this mystery of love of its very nature desires to reach out to the poor, the oppressed and the forsaken. In this very human experience of love for others, the person is able to discover the point within his own human experience from which a bridge of empathy and understanding can be built into the paschal mystery of Jesus. Thus one comes to know the principle of the paschal mystery as the inner principle of one's own life. But more than that, one comes to recognize that by participating in this dynamic of dying and rising, one is not only with Christ and in Christ, but with the community of disciples one is actually Christ in the world.

A spirituality of paschal liberation which is appropriate for the Church in the world today seeks to invite people into this paschal mystery. The person living this mystery in the ordinary circumstances of life knows that the ability to live this way is itself a gift from God for which eucharist is the only appropriate response. He also knows that this life in the Spirit of Jesus brings joy, peace, and hope because it 'draws its life from the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' (1 Pet 1,3).

Anthony Cernera.

NOTES

¹ The Church's understanding of her identity and of her mission in the world are intrinsically connected. The Church expresses her identity in her mission.

² Rahner, Karl: *Concern for the Church* (New York, 1981), p 94.

³ *Roman Calendar: Text and Commentary* (United States Catholic Conference, Washington, D.C., 1976), p 8.

⁴ Regan, Patrick: 'The fifty days and the fiftieth day', in *Worship*, Vol 54 (May 1980), p 195.

⁵ From the Easter Preface I, *The sacramentary* (Collegeville, 1974), p 437. Hereafter as *Sacra*.

⁶ From a sermon by Theodore the Studite in *The liturgy of the hours*, Vol II (New York, 1976), p 677. Hereafter as *LH*.

⁷ From the antiphon for the Magnificat of Friday in the Second Week of Easter, *LH*, p 682.

⁸ From the prayer for Thursday of the Third Week of Easter, *LH*, p 730.

⁹ From the Easter Preface IV, *Sacra*, p 441.

¹⁰ 1 Cor 5,7: cf Midafternoon prayer for Friday within the Octave of Easter, *LH*, p 641.

¹¹ From an Easter Homily of Melito of Sardis. Cf Office of Readings for Monday within the Octave of Easter, *LH*, p 554.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Prayer for Easter Day, *LH*, p 525.

¹⁴ Prayer for Friday of the Second Week of Easter, *LH*, p 680.

- ¹⁵ From Morning Prayer for Monday of the Third Week of Easter *LH*, p 707.
- ¹⁶ From a sermon of St Ephrem. Cf Office of Reading for Friday of the Third Week of Easter, *LH*, p 734.
- ¹⁷ Col 1,13. Cf Midafternoon Prayer for Thursday within the Octave of Easter, *LH*, p 602.
- ¹⁸ From Evening Prayer for Wednesday of the Octave of Easter, *LH*, p 591.
- ¹⁹ From an ancient Easter homily of Pseudo-Chrysostom. Cf Office of Readings for Monday of the Second Week of Easter, *LH*, p 645.
- ²⁰ Prayer for Tuesday within the Octave of Easter, *LH*, p 570.
- ²¹ Easter Preface IV, *Sacra.*, p 441.
- ²² Antiphon in the Office of Readings for Friday within the Octave of Easter, *LH*, p 607.
- ²³ Cf Eucharist of Wednesday within the Octave of Easter, *Sacra.*, p 267.
- ²⁴ From the commentary on the First Letter of Peter by Bede the Venerable. Cf Office of Readings for Monday of the Third Week of Easter, *LH*, p 705.
- ²⁵ From Morning Prayer for the Third Sunday of Easter, *LH*, p 697.
- ²⁶ Prayer for Easter Day, *Sacra.*, p 260.
- ²⁷ Prayer for Monday within the Octave of Easter, *Sacra.*, p 264.
- ²⁸ Jn 10,11. The Gospel Reading in Cycle C for the Fourth Sunday of Easter. *The Lectionary*, (Collegeville, 1974).
- ²⁹ Responsory used throughout the Easter season.
- ³⁰ Prayer for Sunday within the Octave of Easter, *LH*, p 630.
- ³¹ Ascension Preface I, *Sacra.*, p 442.
- ³² From Morning Prayer of Monday within the Octave of Easter, *LH*, p 556.
- ³³ Cf Office of Readings of Monday within the Octave of Easter, *LH*, p 550.
- ³⁴ Acts 5,31. Cf Morning Prayer for Friday within the Octave of Easter, *LH*, p 610.
- ³⁵ From Morning Prayer for Monday within the Octave of Easter, *LH*, p 552.
- ³⁶ From Morning Prayer of Monday of the Fifth Week of Easter, *LH*, p 827.
- ³⁷ From a discourse by Anastasius of Antioch. The Office of Readings for Tuesday within the Octave of Easter, *LH*, p 568.
- ³⁸ Prayer for Easter Day, *Sacra.*, p 260.
- ³⁹ From Morning Prayer for Easter Sunday, *LH*, p 534.
- ⁴⁰ 1 Pet 1,3. Cf Office of Readings for Monday within the Octave of Easter, *LH*, p 552.
- ⁴¹ From Evening Prayer for Tuesday of the Second Week of Easter, *LH*, p 657.
- ⁴² From Evening Prayer for Thursday of the Fourth Week of Easter, *LH*, p 793.
- ⁴³ Rahner, Karl: 'Jesus's Resurrection', in *Theological investigations*, Vol 17 (London, 1981, p 22.
- ⁴⁴ Apoc 17,14. Cf Office of Readings for Friday of the Fourth Week of Easter, *LH*, p 794.
- ⁴⁵ Lara-Braud, Jorge: foreword to Erdozain, Placido: *Archbishop Romero: Martyr of Salvador* (Maryknoll, New York, 1980), p xiv.
- ⁴⁶ Cf Evening Prayer for Thursday within the Octave of Easter, *LH*, p 602.
- ⁴⁷ From Evening Prayer for Monday of the Third Week of Easter, *LH*, p 709.
- ⁴⁸ From a sermon of Leo the Great. Cf Office of Readings of Wednesday of the Second Week of Easter, *LH*, p 660.
- ⁴⁹ Ascension Preface 1, *Sacra.*, p 442.
- ⁵⁰ From a commentary on the Gospel of John by Cyril of Alexandria. Cf Office of Readings of Tuesday of the Second Week of Easter, *LH*, p 889.
- ⁵¹ From a book addressed to Monimus by Fulgentius of Ruspe. Cf Office of Readings for Tuesday of the Second Week of Easter, *LH*, p 652.
- ⁵² From the commentary on the Letter to the Romans of Cyril of Alexandria. Cf Office of Readings for Sunday of the Fourth Week of Easter, *LH*, p 806.
- ⁵³ From a sermon by Gaudentius of Brescia. Cf Office of Readings for Thursday of the Second Week of Easter, *LH*, p. 670.
- ⁵⁴ From a sermon by Leo the Great. Cf Office of Readings for Wednesday of the Second Week of Easter, *LH*, p 660.

⁵⁵ From a sermon by Augustine. Cf Office of Readings for Friday of the Fifth Week of Easter, *LH*, p 921.

⁵⁶ From a sermon by Isaac of Stella. Cf Office of Readings for Friday of the Fifth Week of Easter, *LH*, p 856.

⁵⁷ Haughey, John C.: 'Eucharist at Corinth: you are the Christ', in Clarke, Thomas: *Above every name* (New Jersey, 1980), p 125.

⁵⁸ Preface for Pentecost, *Sacra.*, p 444.

⁵⁹ 1 Cor 12,13. These verses are used repeatedly through the Easter season.

⁶⁰ From a commentary on the Gospel of John by Cyril of Alexandria. Cf Office of Readings for Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Easter, *LH*, p 833.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² From Evening Prayer for Friday of the Seventh Week of Easter, *LH*, p 1003.

⁶³ From Morning Prayer for Wednesday of the Seventh Week of Easter, *LH*, p 985.