

Lesson #10

The Incarnation

The Grace I am seeking . . .

***To enter into the meaning of the Incarnation.
Our central mystery reveals “Emmanuel,” God
has visited His people.***

Before each prayer session:

O Holy Spirit, fill me with Yourself; fill me with love. Help me to feel loved by the Father and by Jesus. Help me to feel loved by my Associates. Set me on fire with love. Teach me how to love the Father and Jesus. Teach me to love my Associates and my neighbors. As you taught the first Apostles at Pentecost to communicate the love of God to all persons, teach me to be the apostle I have been called to be. Let me bring the message of the Father’s love and Jesus’ love to all, but especially to those who really do not know You, who do not feel loved. Help me, O Holy Spirit of love, to be an apostle of love. Amen.

After each prayer session:

Jesus, spark me with your Holy Spirit and grant that I may never merit the condemnation of the lukewarm, whom You have declared You will vomit from Your mouth. Fire me with a passion for life, and a passion for loving You, my brothers and sisters, and all of creation. Holy Spirit, completely fill me as You filled my brother Jesus. Produce in me the same mind that was in Jesus so that I, like Him, will be consumed with a passion for the will of His Father and my Father. Amen.

Missionary Cenacle

Practice and Devotion

To keep this mystery of Emmanuel -- “God-with-us” -- ever before our minds and in our religious imaginations, Father Judge stressed the importance of **two key feasts** in the Church’s liturgical year:

***Annunciation (March 25):** this is the *feast of the Incarnation* when Jesus takes Flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary through the action of the Holy Spirit. During the nine days preceding the feast in the Cenacle we pray a novena (nine days of prayers) to praise God for this awesome mystery. It is also the day when all the religious members of the Cenacle renew their profession of vows and is the anniversary of profession for many.

***Christmas (December 25):** in the Cenacle it is the custom to begin on Christmas Day to prepare for the next Christmas! We are to live our missionary vocation throughout the year in such a way that Jesus in all His poverty and smallness finds a ready welcome there. We make intense preparation for this feast through a solemn novena prayed by all the Cenacle missionaries.

A special reverence for the **name of Jesus** also will mark our lives in the Missionary Cenacle. “**To extol the Holy Name of Jesus**” was the expression Father Judge used. To focus our minds and hearts on the mystery of the Incarnation, **two practical customs** are recommended in the Cenacle:

***upon awakening or driving in a car**, we make the sign of the Cross;

***every letter, envelope or document** is marked with a small Cross in the corner of the page.

Two key feasts, a **reverential love for the name of Jesus**, and a **few simple customs** all have the effect of keeping our minds and hearts centered, gravitating toward, this central mystery of God’s indescribable love in becoming One with us!

Introduction

“Of all the wondrous works of God, there is no greater than that of the Incarnation of His Son. Astounding thought -- God raised humankind in and through Christ, through divine dignity to divine station, to intimate union with the Triune God.” (Father Judge, cited in *The Apostolic Life*, p. 166)

Father Judge, like his spiritual father St. Vincent de Paul, emphasized the central role of the Incarnation in Missionary Cenacle spirituality. This awesome mystery of God’s becoming one of us, one with us, seized his soul. He recognized in it the key and the door to all the other mysteries of God’s life. He perceived in the Incarnation the very foundation of all true human dignity and value.

For the Incarnation is not simply a past event, something that “happened.” It reached a moment of ecstatic realization with Mary’s “yes” to the angel’s invitation. Her “let it be done to me according to your will” brought God-in-the-Flesh to us in the Person of Jesus. Yet from the very beginning of God’s creative work the Divine Word was mysteriously present in all creation:

“Through [the Word] all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through him. All that came to be had life in him and that life was the light of men, a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower.” (John ½-5)

“ . . . in [Christ] were created all things in heaven and one earth: everything visible and everything invisible . . . all things were created through him and for him . . . He holds all things in unity.”
(Colossians 1/15-17)

In brief, the whole creation *breathes* the name and Person of Jesus! As the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote: “The world is charged with the grandeur of God.” The Incarnation was not a once-for-all event. The Incarnation continues in all creation and in every human person, however mostly unknown, unrecognized. Our call as missionaries of the Cenacle is to reveal this mystery, to honor and glorify this mystery, to thrill to the knowledge of this mystery and share this unbelievable Good News with all. As one of the early Fathers of the Church said, “Annunciations are frequent, Incarnations are few!” May our heart-felt, obedient “yes” allow the on-going Incarnation of Jesus in our midst to continue and grow to the divine fullness!

Process for Daily Prayer

▮ Read each passage once slowly, then reread it. Underline or mark any phrases or ideas that strike you.

▮ Think about what you've read. What attracts, challenges, excites, or upsets you? Perhaps the questions below can help you in your reflection.

▮ Talk to God about it. Whatever is on your heart -- concerns, anger, hopes, dreams, joy, thanksgiving -- open it up to God.

▮ Rest a while and let God speak to you in the quiet.

WEEK I

Weekend Reflection: **“Jesus, Redeemer of All Humanity”**

[John Paul II began his papacy with an encyclical in 1979 entitled “Redemptor Hominis” -- “Redeemer of Man.” In many ways it reflected the underlying vision and missionary approach of Father Judge to the Incarnation. Although not “easy reading,” a meditative reflection on these words of the Holy Father can draw us into a very deep understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation not as a past event but as today, ongoing.]

#8. *Redemption as a New Creation.* The Redeemer of the world! In Him has been revealed in a new and more wonderful way the fundamental truth concerning creation to which the Book of Genesis gives witness when it repeats several times: "God saw that it was good." The good has its source in Wisdom and Love. In Jesus Christ the visible world which God created for man - the world that, when sin entered, "was subjected to futility" - recovers again its original link with the divine source of Wisdom and Love. Indeed, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." As this link was broken in the man Adam, so in the Man Christ it was reforged.

Are we not convinced of the overpoweringly eloquent words of the Apostle of the Gentiles concerning the "creation (that) has been groaning in travail together until now" and "waits with eager longing for the revelation of the sons of God," the creation that "was subjected to futility"? Does not the previously unknown immense progress - which has taken place especially in the course of this century - in the field of man's dominion over the world itself reveal -to a previously unknown degree - that manifold subjection "to futility"? It is enough to recall certain phenomena, such as the threat of pollution of the natural environment in areas of rapid industrialization, or the armed conflicts continually breaking out over and over again, or the prospective of self-destruction through the use of atomic, hydrogen, neutron, an similar weapons, or the lack of respect for the life of the unborn. The world of the new age, the world of space flights, the world of the previously unattained conquests of science and technology - is it not also the world "groaning in travail" that "waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God"?

In its penetrating analysis of "the modern world," the Second Vatican Council reached that most important point of the visible world that is man, by penetrating like Christ the depth of human consciousness and by making contact with the inward mystery of man, which in biblical and non-biblical language is expressed by the word "heart." Christ, the Redeemer of the world, is the one who penetrated in a unique, unrepeatable way into the mystery of man and entered his "heart." Rightly therefore does the Second Vatican Council teach: "The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man,

was a type of him who was to come (Rom. 5:14), Christ the Lord. Christ, the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling." And the Council continues: "He who is the 'image of the invisible God' (Col. 1:15), is Himself the perfect man who has restored in the children of Adam that likeness to God which had been disfigured ever since the first sin. Human nature, by the very fact that it was assumed, not absorbed, in Him, has been raised in us also to a dignity beyond compare. For, by His Incarnation, He, the Son of God, in a certain way united Himself with each man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart He loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin," He, the Redeemer of man.

#9. The Divine Dimension of the Mystery of the Redemption. As we reflect again on this stupendous text from the Council's teaching, we do not forget even for a moment that Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, became our reconciliation with the Father. He it was, and He alone, who satisfied the Father's eternal love, that fatherhood that from the beginning found expression in creating the world, giving man all the riches of creation, and making him "little less than God," in that he was created "in the image and after the likeness of God." He and He alone also satisfied that fatherhood of God and that love which man in a way rejected by breaking the first Covenant and the later covenants that God "again and again offered to man." The redemption of the world - this tremendous mystery of love in which creation is renewed - is, at its deepest root, the fullness of justice in a human heart - the heart of the first-born Son - in order that it may become justice in the hearts of many human beings, predestined from eternity in the first-born Son to be children of God and called to grace, called to love. The cross on Calvary, through which Jesus Christ - a Man, the Son of the Virgin Mary, thought to be the son of Joseph of Nazareth - "leaves" this world, is also a fresh manifestation of the eternal fatherhood of God, who in Him draws near again to humanity, to each human being, giving Him the thrice holy "Spirit of truth."

This revelation of the Father and outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which stamp an indelible seal on the mystery of the Redemption, explain the meaning of the cross and death of Christ. The God of creation is revealed as the God of redemption . . . and faithful to His love for man and the world, which He revealed on the day of creation. His is love that does not draw back before anything that justice requires in Him. . . . since "God is love." Above all, love is greater than sin, than weakness, than the "futility of creation"; it is stronger than death; it is a love always ready to raise up and forgive, always ready to go to meet the prodigal son, always looking for "the revealing of the sons of God," who are called "to the glory that is to be revealed." This revelation of love is also described as mercy; and in man's history this revelation of love and mercy has taken a form and a name: that of Jesus Christ.

Re-read this passage several times. Each time underline or take note of any words or expressions that particularly touch your heart or you would like to think about. Bring those to the Lord. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a deep understanding of this Mystery of God's coming among us.

▶ Write down your reflections briefly here:

WEEK I

Monday: “. . . in the Light of God”

From Father Judge:

“Christmas means something to all. It has a special meaning to the Christian. It has a most particular meaning to a [Cenacle missionary]. For you in the Missionary Cenacle are in the family of the Incarnation. Your [Rule of Life] commit[s] you to a very particular devotion to this mystery, and this commitment means that of all, you must take this mystery most earnestly and seriously to heart.

“You are trained to adore the mercies, the wisdom, the love of the Triune God in this mystery, to thank Him for it, to extol the Holy name of Jesus and to felicitate His Immaculate Mother Mary and to be eager for the privilege with her of adoring the Word made Flesh. Your traditions tell you to begin your preparations for next Christmas on Christmas day lest one instant of the year be lost in tribute to the Savior born for you.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 21)

From the Word of God:

“As his fellow-workers, we urge you not to let your acceptance of his grace come to nothing.² As he said, ‘At the time of my favour I have answered you; on the day of salvation I have helped you’; well, now is the real time of favour, now the day of salvation is here.” (2 Corinthians 6/1-2

)

Father Judge -- like the founder of the Vincentian community, St. Vincent de Paul -- had a singular devotion to the mystery of the Incarnation, “God-with-us.” How often each day do you think of this mystery? How much is it a part of your thanksgiving as you wake up in the morning or go to bed at night? Do you adore God present among us in creation, the Church, the Eucharist, other human beings? How attentive are you to the “godliness” of all life?

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

Tuesday: “What is to be your gift?”

From Father Judge:

“What is to be your gift? What is the big thing you are going to do this coming year for your Savior? The thing is so big, it may hurt you to do it and demand a large draft of self-sacrifice. Do not . . . generalize, because these generalizations may mean nothing but platitudes. Do not merely offer soul elevations.

“Come right down to some specific work of self-control, self-renunciation, detachment -- an act that going to be contrary to the spirit of the world. Do something the performance of which will mark off for you another chapter of progress in the spiritual life. It may concern the correction of some fault or disposition, or a fault to which your attention has been called. . . .

“In all things let it be a closer following of Him, a more cheerful talking up of His cross, a putting on of His spirit so that all will confess and say: you see with [the] eyes of Jesus, you hear with His ears, and you think with His mind, and beat of the Sacred Heart is that of Your Heart.

“. . . The grace is waiting for you. Your Savior gives you this grace. His Immaculate Mother is waiting to help you show that you are truly glad, joyous and happy that your Savior is born to you.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 21)

From the Word of God:

“**4** Always be joyful, then, in the Lord; I repeat, be joyful.**5** Let your good sense be obvious to everybody. The Lord is near.**6** Never worry about anything; but tell God all your desires of every kind in prayer and petition shot through with gratitude,**7** and the peace of God which is beyond our understanding will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.**8** Finally, brothers, let your minds be filled with everything that is true, everything that is honourable, everything that is upright and pure, everything that we love and admire—with whatever is good and praiseworthy.**9** Keep doing everything you learnt from me and were told by me and have heard or seen me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.” (*Philippians 4/4-9*)

As we say “no” to self-centeredness and “yes” to God’s will and plan in our lives, Jesus becomes incarnate once again in our very own flesh, our person. What will your “gift” be to Jesus this Christmas, this day? Be as specific as possible! Ask the Holy Spirit for the grace to allow your “Yes” to bring forth Jesus the Christ once again into our world in and through you! This is truly to “honor” the Incarnation.

Write down your reflections briefly here:

Wednesday: “Without faith . . . life has no meaning”

From Father Judge:

“This Christmas Eve, as every other Christmas Eve, will see the nations hurrying to the cave of Bethlehem to behold the great thing . . . a Savior born to us. We cannot think of it without hearing the angelic choirs and chorusing back: ‘Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth among men of good will’ (*Luke 2/14*). We cannot speak of it without jostling the Bethlehem shepherds that we, too, may have our turn to praise and adore.

“Christmas has only the meaning that our Faith gives. Our Faith measures its message. A Faith without Christ, a Faith without the manger, a Faith without the mystery of Bethlehem, is a sepulcher of religious aspirations. Indeed, without faith and hope in the Christ Child, life has no meaning. What does the faithful, loving mind behold in this Christmas Infant? His God, his Savior.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 26)

From the Word of God:

“**1** Now it happened that at this time Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be made of the whole inhabited world.**2** This census—the first—took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria,**3** and everyone went to be registered, each to his own town.**4** So Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee for Judaea, to David’s town called Bethlehem, since he was of David’s House and line,**5** in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.**6** Now it happened that, while they were there, the time came for her to have her child,**7** and she gave birth to a son, her first-born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the living-space.” (*Luke 2/1-7*)

Spend a few minutes contemplating in your mind and heart this scene. Look at Joseph and Mary. Feel the chill of the Judean night, the smells of the animals. Now look carefully at the manger. See the little baby lying there. Who do you see? Do you see your God and your Savior? Speak to Jesus about what is in your heart. In what way has His birth and life given meaning to your life?

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

Thursday: “The Christian’s first school”

From Father Judge:

“The stable of Bethlehem is the Christian’s first school. He cannot attend it without learning the mystery of the Holy Trinity, One God and Three Persons in God. He cannot see without knowing of the second Person Who took his nature. He cannot see without beholding the cooperation of the Holy Spirit in the miraculous conception and birth. He cannot behold without knowing the mystery of the Immaculate Conception and the privileges of the Babe’s Immaculate Mother, Mary. He cannot be enrolled in that school without knowing of all the Christ mysteries. There he sees the Arbiter of the living and the dead, the conqueror of sin and death and hell, his Elder Brother, his God. And if there be in the life of the faithful aught of light or sweetness, or music or joy, there with the angels and shepherds he beholds the source, Him Who is the light and music, the sweetness and joy of his life, his Savior.”
(*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 26)

From the Word of God:

“**8** In the countryside close by there were shepherds out in the fields keeping guard over their sheep during the watches of the night.**9** An angel of the Lord stood over them and the glory of the Lord shone round them. They were terrified,**10** but the angel said, ‘Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people.**11** Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.**12** And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.’**13** And all at once with the angel there was a great throng of the hosts of heaven, praising God with the words:**14** Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace for those he favours.**15** Now it happened that when the angels had gone from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go to Bethlehem and see this event which the Lord has made known to us.’**16** So they hurried away and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger.**17** When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him,**18** and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds said to them.**19** As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.**20** And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as they had been told.” (Luke 2/8-20)

In what ways is Jesus the “light and music, the sweetness and joy” of your life? How has Jesus saved you? From what has Jesus saved you? Be as specific as possible. Make a list. Give thanks!

Write down your reflections briefly here:

Friday: “He gave His all to us!”

From Father Judge:

“Our Savior’s birthday! He gave His all to us. O how much He had to give! What will you and I give? What is to be our birthday present? Jesus has followers; He need friends. Jesus has believers; he needs workers. This is the hour to plan for His Christmas. This is the moment to make birthday suggestions for our sweet Jesus.

“Would you know that which would delight the heart of your Infant King and Savior? Jesus loves the Holy Spirit. He hears you confess so often, ‘I believe in God the Father Almighty . . .; in Jesus Christ . . . conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary’ Consider then, the operation of the Holy Spirit in the Mystery of the Incarnation, as the litany says, ‘Who didst accomplish the Incarnation of the Son of God.

“Would you do that which would give Him unutterable joy? Do something for the cause of the Holy Spirit. Jesus would have you please His Immaculate Mother Mary; welcomed and cherished will your gift be to both if you promise a particular devotion to the Holy Spirit.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 26)

From the Word of God:

“**26** In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,**27** to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary.**28** He went in and said to her, ‘Rejoice, you who enjoy God’s favour! The Lord is with you.’**29** She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean,**30** but the angel said to her, ‘Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God’s favour.**31** Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus.**32** He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David;**33** he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.’ **34** Mary said to the angel, ‘But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?’**35** The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God.**36** And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month,**37** for nothing is impossible to God.’ **38** Mary said, ‘You see before you the Lord’s servant, let it happen to me as you have said.’ And the angel left her.” (*Luke 1/26-38*)

Reflect on this scene of the Annunciation, especially on Mary’s “yes” -- “fiat” -- to the invitation of the angel. Consider how her “yes” brought to life in her womb the very Person of God, “Emmanuel,” the Holy Incarnation. All this was done through the Holy Spirit. Father Judge says, “Do something for the cause of the Holy Spirit.” What concretely does this mean to you? What is the “cause of the Holy Spirit” as experienced in your daily life? What might the Holy Spirit be inviting you to do for that “cause”? Be as specific and practical as possible.

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

WEEK II

Weekend Reflection: Mystery and Human Dignity

[We continue reading from "Redemptor Hominis," the first encyclical letter of John Paul II.]

#10. The Human Dimension of the Mystery of the Redemption. Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. This, as has already been said, is why Christ the Redeemer "fully reveals man to himself." If we may use the expression, this is the human dimension of the mystery of the redemption. In this dimension man finds again the greatness, dignity and value that belong to his humanity. In the mystery of the redemption man becomes newly "expressed" and, in a way, is newly created. He is newly created! "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." The man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly - and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures of his being - he must with his unrest, uncertainty and even his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death, draw near to Christ. He must, so to speak, enter into Him with all his own self, he must "appropriate" and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself. If this profound process takes place within him, he then bears fruit not only of adoration of God but also of deep wonder at himself. How precious must man be in the eyes of the Creator, if he "gained so great a Redeemer," and if God "gave his only Son" in order that man "should not perish but have eternal life." In reality, the name for that deep amazement at man's worth and dignity is the Gospel, that is to say: the Good News. It is also called Christianity. This amazement determines the Church's mission in the world and, perhaps even more so, "in the modern world." This amazement, which is also a conviction and a certitude - at its deepest root it is the certainty of faith, but in a hidden and mysterious way it vivifies every aspect of authentic humanism - is closely connected with Christ. It also fixes Christ's place - so to speak, His particular right of citizenship - in the history of man and mankind. Unceasingly contemplating the whole of Christ's mystery, the Church knows with all the certainty of faith that the Redemption that took place through the cross has definitively restored his dignity to man and given back meaning to his life in the world, a meaning that was lost to a considerable extent because of sin. And for that reason, the Redemption was accomplished in the paschal mystery, leading through the cross and death to resurrection.

The Church's fundamental function in every age and particularly in ours is to direct man's gaze, to point the awareness and experience of the whole of humanity towards the mystery of God, to help all men to be familiar with the profundity of the Redemption taking place in Christ Jesus. At the same time man's deepest sphere is involved - we mean the sphere of human hearts, consciences and events.

#11. The Mystery of Christ as the Basis of the Church's Mission and of Christianity. . . .

With regard to religion, what is dealt with is in the first place religion as a universal phenomenon linked with man's history from the beginning, then the various non-Christian religions, and finally Christianity itself. The Council document on non-Christian religions, in particular, is filled with deep esteem for the great spiritual values, indeed for the primacy of the spiritual, which in the life of mankind finds expression in religion and then in morality, with direct effects on the whole of culture. The Fathers of the Church rightly saw in the various religions as it were so many reflections of the one truth, "seeds of the Word," attesting that, though the routes taken may be different, there is but a single goal to which is directed the deepest aspiration of the human spirit as expressed in its quest for God and also in its quest, through its tending towards God, for the full dimension of its humanity, or in other words for the full meaning of human life. The Council gave particular attention to the Jewish religion, recalling the great spiritual heritage common to Christians and Jews. It also expressed its esteem for the believers of Islam, whose faith also looks to Abraham.

The opening made by the Second Vatican Council has enabled the Church and all Christians to reach a more complete awareness of the mystery of Christ, "the mystery hidden for ages" in God, to be revealed in time in the Man Jesus Christ, and to be revealed continually in every time. In Christ and through Christ God has revealed Himself fully to mankind and has definitively drawn close to it; at the same time, in Christ and through Christ man has acquired full awareness of his dignity, of the heights to which he is raised, of the surpassing worth of his own humanity, and of the meaning of his existence.

All of us who are Christ's followers must therefore meet and unite around Him. This unity in the . . . individual Christian Churches and ecclesial communities cannot be brought about without effective work aimed at getting to know each other and removing the obstacles blocking the way to perfect unity. However, we can and must immediately reach and display to the world our unity in proclaiming the mystery of Christ, in revealing the divine dimension and also the human dimension of the Redemption, and in struggling with unwearied perseverance for the dignity that each human being has reached and can continually reach in Christ, namely the dignity of both the grace of divine adoption and the inner truth of humanity, a truth which - if in the common awareness of the modern world it has been given such fundamental importance - for us is still clearer in the light of the reality that is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the stable principle and fixed center of the mission that God Himself has entrusted to man. We must all share in this mission and concentrate all our forces on it, since it is more necessary than ever for modern mankind."

How does the Church look on non-Christian religions? other Christian Churches and "ecclesial communities"? What should be our attitude toward them? What does the Holy Father mean when he writes that "in Christ and through Christ man has acquired full awareness of his dignity, of the heights to which he is raised, of the surpassing worth of his own humanity, and of the meaning of his existence"? Think of two examples that would illustrate this.

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

WEEK II

Monday: “Charged with sacred mystery”

From Father Judge:

“Christmas Day, the birthday of our Blessed Savior! Christmas! Never was there such a word! The mystery of the Incarnation gave us this word. Poets have dreamed, writers have written, artists have had their raptures, great have been the flights and marvelous the triumphs of the intellectual strivings of the race, but no fantasy of poetry, no classic of writer, no rapture of artist, has ever been comparable to the thoughts that the word, Christmas, inspires.

“No word can so gather and fix the thought of multitudes and generations as the word Christmas. No word is so personal to us. It is just charged with sacred mystery. It has thrown generations on their knees and caused them with bated breath, spell-bound, to gaze upon an infant lying in a cradle of straw.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 27)

From the Word of God:

“**1** The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, concerning Judah and Jerusalem.**2** It will happen in the final days that the mountain of Yahweh’s house will rise higher than the mountains and tower above the heights. Then all the nations will stream to it,**3** many peoples will come to it and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob that he may teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths.’ For the Law will issue from Zion and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem.**4** Then he will judge between the nations and arbitrate between many peoples. They will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into sickles. Nation will not lift sword against nation, no longer will they learn how to make war. **5** House of Jacob, come, let us walk in Yahweh’s light.” (*Isaiah 2/1-5*)

Think about your own experience of Christmas. What images or feelings does it bring to your mind or heart? Pleasant, disturbing, thrilling, peaceful? How do these feelings and visions relate to God’s “vision” of Christmas? Now take some time in your own mind and heart contemplating the baby in Bethlehem. How does this affect, change, enhance, or modify your feelings and images of Christmas?

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

Tuesday: “Plunging into the mystery of the Godhead”

From Father Judge:

“Christmas! No word makes heaven and earth so akin. No word makes for such a comradeship among angels and men. Christmas! A word that actively energizes thoughts, gives birth to inspiration, and shatters all contracted circumstance and horizon of time. It lets loose our thought to sweep the farthest reachings of eternity. We cannot look upon the Babe of Bethlehem without plunging into the mystery of the Godhead. We cannot consider the mystery of the Godhead, we cannot consider the Mystery of the Incarnation without considering the Mystery of the Holy Trinity, because the dogma of the Blessed Trinity and dogmatic teaching of the Church in regard to Jesus Christ run together into one.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 27)

From the Word of God:

“**18** This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.**19** Her husband Joseph, being an upright man and wanting to spare her disgrace, decided to divorce her informally.**20** He had made up his mind to do this when suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit.**21** She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.’**22** Now all this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophet:**23** Look! the virgin is with child and will give birth to a son whom they will call Immanuel, a name which means ‘God-is-with-us’.**24** When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home;**25** he had not had intercourse with her when she gave birth to a son; and he named him Jesus.” (*Mt 1:18-25*)

Read over the section from Matthew again. In your mind and heart carefully consider the scene. What must Joseph have been thinking, feeling -- before the dream, after the dream? “God-is-with-us,” “Immanuel” -- how much did he truly believe this? How much do you truly believe this? Make an act of profession of faith in this mystery of “God-is-with-us.” Ask the Holy Spirit to deepen your love and understanding of this mystery of the Incarnation.

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

Wednesday: “. . . without him nothing could be”

From Father Judge:

“That babe is so like other Babes, and yet so unlike. Just born, indeed, and yet He is so ancient that time cannot measure His life; so weak, like other little human mites, yet so powerful that human content and gauge cannot measure His strength; poor, it would seem, yet He hold absolute title to the treasures of the universe; seemingly unknowing, as a babe should be, yet He has wisdom that is infinite; helpfulness He surely looks, as any other one-hour babe, yet He it is who controls the spheres and causes the seasons to march in orderly procession. The universe looks to Him for conservation; without Him nothing could be.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 27)

From the Word of God:

“**15** He is the image of the unseen God, the first-born of all creation,**16** for in him were created all things in heaven and on earth: everything visible and everything invisible, thrones, ruling forces, sovereignties, powers—all things were created through him and for him.**17** He exists before all things and in him all things hold together,**18** and he is the Head of the Body, that is, the Church. He is the Beginning, the first-born from the dead, so that he should be supreme in every way;**19** because God wanted all fullness to be found in him**20** and through him to reconcile all things to him, everything in heaven and everything on earth, by making peace through his death on the cross.” (*Colossians 1:15-20*)

Keep your imagination centered on the small baby Jesus in the manger at Bethlehem. Now imagine the greatest, most awesome natural phenomenon you have ever seen: a sunset, sunrise, the ocean, the mountains, the vastness of the night sky, the desert, an approaching storm. What is the relationship of the two: the baby in the manger and the power-filled phenomenon of nature? Spend some time considering the two. Ask the Holy Spirit to intimately teach you how they are related. Give thanks! Express some act of worship of such an extraordinary mystery.

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

Thursday: “A child is born for us!”

From Father Judge:

“Every Christmas the world turns its gaze toward Bethlehem. Generation after generation is ever seeking Him who is born King of the Jews The watchword of the hour is ‘Let us go over to Bethlehem, and let us see the word that is come to pass, which the Lord hath showed to us.’ (*Lk 2:15*).

“The Divine Babe of Bethlehem still holds sway over the sons and daughters of men in every age and wise men from the east and the west, from the north and the south are ever bringing gifts to Him. Christ reigns. He is the King and Center of all hearts. The impassioned love of millions wells up to Him. Live Jesus! Reign Jesus!” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 28)

From the Word of God:

“1 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; on the inhabitants of a country in shadow dark as death light has blazed forth.2 You have enlarged the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at harvest time, as they exult when they are dividing the spoils.3 For the yoke that weighed on it, the bar across its shoulders, the rod of its oppressor, these you have broken as on the day of Midian.4 For all the footgear clanking over the ground and all the clothing rolled in blood, will be burnt, will be food for the flames.5 For a son has been born for us, a son has been given to us, and dominion has been laid on his shoulders; and this is the name he has been given, ‘Wonder–Counsellor, Mighty–God, Eternal–Father, Prince–of–Peace’6 to extend his dominion in boundless peace, over the throne of David and over his kingdom to make it secure and sustain it in fair judgement and integrity. From this time onwards and for ever, the jealous love of Yahweh Sabaoth will do this.” (*Isaiah 9:1-6*)

***“A son -- a child -- is born for us”:* how has this Child affected your life? How does this Child affect your life? The life of your family? Your friends? Your nation? The world? Has the prophecy of Isaiah regarding this Child been fulfilled? In what way? Be as specific, practical and personal as possible.**

▶ Write down your reflections briefly here:

Friday: The glory of the child

From Father Judge:

[Much of Father Judge's reflections on the Incarnation related practically to the situation of children. We will see this concern reflected clearly in the meditations for the next several days.]

“We cannot separate the Christmas celebration from the thought of a Child. Tenaciously the mind seeks in it that [Divine Child] and because of it the child idea in general is exalted and made glorious.

“If we would do something to please Him, if we would have a birthday gift delightful to Him, then hold the child in your affection and for the sake of the Divine Child of Bethlehem minister to that little one according to the mind of Jesus. He wishes the child protected, sheltered, instructed, safeguarded above all in the interests of its soul. Christmas with all its beautiful tradition and lessons would be a calamity for the child, if it were to be held as a mere secular feast. . . .” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 28)

From the Word of God:

“**1** At this time the disciples came to Jesus and said, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?’**2** So he called a little child to him whom he set among them.**3** Then he said, ‘In truth I tell you, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven.**4** And so, the one who makes himself as little as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven.

5 ‘Anyone who welcomes one little child like this in my name welcomes me.**6** But anyone who is the downfall of one of these little ones who have faith in me would be better drowned in the depths of the sea with a great millstone round his neck.**7** Alas for the world that there should be such causes of falling! Causes of falling indeed there must be, but alas for anyone who provides them!’” (*Matthew 18:1-7*)

Father Judge instinctively goes to the practical, the personal in his contemplation of the mysteries of Faith. As he contemplates the Child of Bethlehem, he invites us to consider the children of our day and time. How are they being taught the mysteries of God's Love for them, God's presence with them in the person of Jesus? Which children, in our experience, are being neglected, abandoned or ignored in their faith formation? In the other aspects of their lives? Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to your mind and heart about these realities. Ask for direction, light, and strength to respond to God's call.

▶ Write down your reflections briefly here:

WEEK III
Weekend Reflection:
“The Son of God . . . united with each person”

[We continue reading from “Redemptor Hominis,” the first encyclical letter of John Paul II]

#12. The Church's Mission and Human Freedom. In this unity in mission, which is decided principally by Christ Himself, all Christians must find what already unites them, even before their full communion is achieved. This is apostolic and missionary unity, missionary and apostolic unity. Thanks to this unity we can together come close to the magnificent heritage of the human spirit that has been manifested in all religions, as the Second Vatican Council's Declaration *Nostra Aetate* says. It also enables us to approach all cultures, all ideological concepts, all people of good will. We approach them with the esteem, respect and discernment that since the time of the apostles has marked the missionary attitude, the attitude of the missionary. Suffice it to mention St. Paul and, for instance, his address in the Areopagus at Athens. The missionary attitude always begins with a feeling of deep esteem for ‘what is in man,’ for what man has himself worked out in the depths of his spirit concerning the most profound and important problems. It is a question of respecting everything that has been brought about in him by the Spirit, which ‘blows where it will.’ The mission is never destruction, but instead is a taking up and fresh building, even if in practice there has not always been full correspondence with this high ideal. And we know well that the conversion that is begun by the mission is a work of grace, in which man must fully find himself again. . . .

“We perceive intimately that the truth revealed to us by God imposes on us an obligation. We have, in particular, a great sense of responsibility for this truth. By Christ's institution the Church is its guardian and teacher, having been endowed with a unique assistance of the Holy Spirit in order to guard and teach it in its most exact integrity. In fulfilling this mission, we look towards Christ Himself, the first evangelizer, and also towards His apostles, martyrs and confessors. The *Declaration on Religious Freedom* [of Vatican Council II] shows us convincingly that, when Christ and, after Him, His apostles proclaimed the truth that comes not from men but from God (‘My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me,’ that is the Father's), they preserved, while acting with their full force of spirit, a deep esteem for man, for his intellect, his will, his conscience and his freedom. Thus the human person's dignity itself becomes part of the content of that proclamation, being included not necessarily in words but by an attitude towards it. This attitude seems to fit the special needs of our times. Since man's true freedom is not found in everything that the various systems and individuals see and propagate as freedom, the Church, because of her divine mission, becomes all the more the guardian of this freedom, which is the condition and basis for the human person's true dignity.

“Jesus Christ meets the man of every age, including our own, with the same words: ‘You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.’ These words contain both a fundamental requirement and a warning: the requirement of an honest relationship with regard to truth as a

condition for authentic freedom, and the warning to avoid every kind of illusory freedom, every superficial unilateral freedom, every freedom that fails to enter into the whole truth about man and the world. Today also, even after two thousand years, we see Christ as the one who brings man freedom based on truth, frees man from what curtails, diminishes and as it were breaks off this freedom at its root, in man's soul, his heart and his conscience. What a stupendous confirmation of this has been given and is still being given by those who, thanks to Christ and in Christ, have reached true freedom and have manifested it even in situations of external constraint!

#13. Christ United Himself with Each Man. When we penetrate by means of the continually and rapidly increasing experience of the human family into the mystery of Jesus Christ, we understand with greater clarity that there is at the basis of all these ways that the Church of our time must follow, . . . one single way: it is the way that has stood the test of centuries and it is also the way of the future. Christ the Lord indicated this way especially, when, as the Council teaches, ‘by His Incarnation, He, the Son of God, in a certain way united Himself with each man.’ The Church therefore sees its fundamental task in enabling that union to be brought about and renewed continually. The Church wishes to serve this single end: that each person may be able to find Christ, in order that Christ may walk with each person the path of life, with the power of the truth about man and the world that is contained in the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption and with the power of the love that is radiated by that truth.”

As we approach people of different cultures, ways of thinking, ages, experiences, what is our attitude? Is there any sense of superiority, fear, disrespect? Or do we manifest “the esteem, respect and discernment that since the time of the apostles has marked the missionary attitude, the attitude of the missionary”? Think carefully about this since it is at the very heart of our missionary vocation. When the Church teaches that ‘by His Incarnation, He, the Son of God, in a certain way united Himself with each man,’ what does this mean? What are the practical implications of this as we live out our daily lives in the world?

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

WEEK III

Monday: “. . . a little boy to lead them”

From Father Judge:

“Is there any misery comparable to not knowing or loving or serving Jesus Christ? Sad to say there are multitudes of children who have no knowledge or love of the Sacred Heart, or [of] the Precious Blood of their Redeemer, Jesus. What can the Christ Child mean to such?

“Think of this as you kneel before the crib. Think of those other abandoned children who have never gazed into the crib with Catholic thought and love. [When the children under your care] with awe-struck faces see in the straw the Babe they love and gaze upon His Immaculate Mother Mary and Saint Joseph, while they wonder at the shepherds, pray for those poor little ones from whom . . . all this taken. Ask yourselves what can I do for them? Resolve either yourself to help them or to help someone else to bring them to the Christ Child. No more pleasing birthday gift can you offer Him.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 28)

From the Word of God:

“**1** A shoot will spring from the stock of Jesse, a new shoot will grow from his roots.**2** On him will rest the spirit of Yahweh, the spirit of wisdom and insight, the spirit of counsel and power, the spirit of knowledge and fear of Yahweh:**3** his inspiration will lie in fearing Yahweh. His judgement will not be by appearances. his verdict not given on hearsay.**4** He will judge the weak with integrity and give fair sentence for the humblest in the land. He will strike the country with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips bring death to the wicked.**5** Uprightness will be the belt around his waist, and constancy the belt about his hips.**6** The wolf will live with the lamb, the panther lie down with the kid, calf, lion and fat-stock beast together, with a little boy to lead them.**7** The cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together. The lion will eat hay like the ox.**8** The infant will play over the den of the adder; the baby will put his hand into the viper’s lair.**9** No hurt, no harm will be done on all my holy mountain, for the country will be full of knowledge of Yahweh as the waters cover the sea.” (*Isaiah 11:1-9*)

Read carefully the prophecy from Isaiah. What thoughts and feelings does this inspire in you? How does this prophecy relate to the Christ Child? To the situation of children today? Ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten your mind and heart to know what you are individually being called to as you contemplate this reality? In what way is the Spirit calling the Missionary Cenacle to respond? Be as practical and specific as possible.

Write down your reflections briefly here:

Tuesday: “Herods of today”

From Father Judge:

“When the Divine Child came first He found the world in peace. This year He has found His world very much upset . . . We find in so many quarters, active conspiracies against Christ and His Church. Shameless worldliness, frivolous pleasure and brutal sensuality are the vogues among those who are not Christ’s

“The most alarming, however, and [most] terrible phase of disregard of God, His holy law and teachings, is the open propaganda to despiritualize, to demoralize, and to dechristianize the child. The enemies of religious have so many agencies and means and activities whose fiendish purpose seems to be to take Christ out of the life of the little ones. Those are the Herods of today who destroy Jesus in . . . the hearts of His child brothers and sisters.”
(Missionary Cenacle Meditations, p. 29)

From the Word of God:

“**13** After they had left, suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother with you, and escape into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, because Herod intends to search for the child and do away with him.’ **14** So Joseph got up and, taking the child and his mother with him, left that night for Egypt, **15** where he stayed until Herod was dead. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: I called my son out of Egypt. **16** Herod was furious on realising that he had been fooled by the wise men, and in Bethlehem and its surrounding district he had all the male children killed who were two years old or less, reckoning by the date he had been careful to ask the wise men. **17** Then were fulfilled the words spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: **18** A voice is heard in Ramah, lamenting and weeping bitterly: it is Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted because they are no more.” *(Matthew 2:13-18)*

As you reflect on the reality of the world today, how accurate is Father Judge’s analysis of the spiritual situation of children? Are you aware of “agencies, means, activities” and “propaganda to despiritualize, to demoralize, and the dechristianize the child”? Who or what are these “agencies, means, and activities”? What is the “propaganda” that our children receive that would have a negative impact on their spiritual development? In what way -- if any -- are society’s children the innocent victims of “the Herods” of today? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a clear knowledge and understanding of this truth.

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

Wednesday: “The mother . . . especially admirable”

From Father Judge:

“Your thoughts this Christmas must take this [situation of children] in, and your worship of Him must not ignore it. What must His Immaculate Mother Mary think of it all? What were Her thoughts when she heard the cry of the Holy Innocents, and the shrieks of their agonizing mothers. Those little ones were so blest, the first martyrs of Jesus. But what lives for those little children of today without Jesus Christ! What a terrible future is opening up to them. You must think of these things as you place your gift [at the Christmas] crib. . . . Think this over. . . .”
(Missionary Cenacle Meditations, p. 29)

From the Word of God:

“**1**It also happened that seven brothers were arrested with their mother. The king tried to force them to taste some pork, which the Law forbids, by torturing them with whips and scourges.**2** One of them, acting as spokesman for the others, said, ‘What are you trying to find out from us? We are prepared to die rather than break the laws of our ancestors.’**3** The king, in a fury, ordered pans and cauldrons to be heated over a fire.**4** As soon as these were red-hot, he commanded that their spokesman should have his tongue cut out, his head scalped and his extremities cut off, while the other brothers and his mother looked on.**5** When he had been rendered completely helpless, the king gave orders for him to be brought, still breathing, to the fire and fried alive in a pan. As the smoke from the pan drifted about, his mother and the rest encouraged one another to die nobly, with such words as these,**6** ‘The Lord God is watching and certainly feels sorry for us, as Moses declared in his song, which clearly states that “he will take pity on his servants.”’**7** When the first had left the world in this way, they brought the second forward to be tortured. . . .**20** But the mother was especially admirable and worthy of honourable remembrance, for she watched the death of seven sons in the course of a single day, and bravely endured it because of her hopes in the Lord.**21** Indeed she encouraged each of them in their ancestral tongue; filled with noble conviction, she reinforced her womanly argument with manly courage, saying to them,**22** ‘I do not know how you appeared in my womb; it was not I who endowed you with breath and life, I had not the shaping of your every part.’**23** And hence, the Creator of the world, who made everyone and ordained the origin of all things, will in his mercy give you back breath and life, since for the sake of his laws you have no concern for yourselves.’” *(2 Maccabees 7:1-7,20-23)*

What helps to form in the minds and hearts of children an absolute devotion to God similar to the mother and children in the Maccabees story? How can this spirit be fostered today?

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

Thursday: “As a mother comforts a child”

From Father Judge:

“You are to make up for the offense offered today to that sweet Divine Babe of Bethlehem. You are to administer to Him for the wrong done to Him. You are to save His little brothers and [sisters] for Him. You are to solace His Immaculate Mother. Understand, again, your gift to Him must take in all this.

“Your resolutions must not be too general. It is not sufficient to say I will be good or I will offer up some prayers or Masses, or even, I will be a saint. That Christmas gift of yours must mark out how you will be good, how you will be a saint. It must speak of sacrifice and self-denial and self-renunciation and self-detachment. It must show forth sentiments that are contrary to these horrid vices of the day, contrary to its pleasure-loving spirit, its frivolity, its detestation of spiritual things, and its worldliness.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 29)

From the Word of God:

“**10** Rejoice with Jerusalem, be glad for her, all you who love her! Rejoice, rejoice with her, all you who mourned her!**11** So that you may be suckled and satisfied from her consoling breast, so that you may drink deep with delight from her generous nipple.**12** For Yahweh says this: Look, I am going to send peace flowing over her like a river, and like a stream in spite the glory of the nations. You will be suckled, carried on her hip and fondled in her lap.**13** As a mother comforts a child, so I shall comfort you; you will be comforted in Jerusalem.**14** At the sight your heart will rejoice, and your limbs regain vigour like the grass. To his servants Yahweh will reveal his hand, but to his enemies his fury.” (*Isaiah 66:10-14*)

As we become consciously aware of the problems of our day, especially relative to children, we can become discouraged, overwhelmed by a sense of helplessness. It is important to listen deeply to the words of the prophet Isaiah: “Rejoice, rejoice!” God will come to comfort, to bring strength, peace, and joy. As you present to God in prayer today the pains and sorrows of the world -- especially those of the world’s children -- allow God to speak to you words of hope and encouragement. Allow the life of God to flow into and through you powerfully today.

Write down your reflections briefly here:

Friday: “Put on Christ”

From Father Judge:

“You must determine to do some big thing for Him. And that big thing must mean that more and more you are going to put on Christ; more and more you are going to show forth his spirit which will effect that your brothers [and sisters] will recognize in you more generosity, more devotion to your Missionary Cenacle and its duties, more forgetfulness of self, more detachment from worldly things, worldly ways; more self-sacrifice. You are going to show that you have been an apt pupil in the School of the Sacred Heart.”(*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 29)

From the Word of God:

“**22** You were to put aside your old self, which belongs to your old way of life and is corrupted by following illusory desires.**23** Your mind was to be renewed in spirit**24** so that you could put on the New Man that has been created on God’s principles, in the uprightness and holiness of the truth.**25** So from now on, there must be no more lies. Speak the truth to one another, since we are all parts of one another.**26** Even if you are angry, do not sin: never let the sun set on your anger**27** or else you will give the devil a foothold.**28** Anyone who was a thief must stop stealing; instead he should exert himself at some honest job with his own hands so that he may have something to share with those in need.**29** No foul word should ever cross your lips; let your words be for the improvement of others, as occasion offers, and do good to your listeners;**30** do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God who has marked you with his seal, ready for the day when we shall be set free.**31** Any bitterness or bad temper or anger or shouting or abuse must be far removed from you—as must every kind of malice.**32** Be generous to one another, sympathetic, forgiving each other as readily as God forgave you in Christ. “1 As God’s dear children, then, take him as your pattern,² and follow Christ by loving as he loved you, giving himself up for us as an offering and a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God.” (*Ephesians 4:21-5:2*)

As we seek to be instruments of God’s healing, light, and service to children and others who are poor and abandoned, the “power for good” we become comes from God. Concretely and practically, in what ways do you see God transforming and changing your life to be more like that of Jesus? Give thanks for this transformation. It is an awesome grace. The Incarnation continues in and through you!

Write down your reflections briefly here:

WEEK IV

Weekend Reflection:

“To make human life ever more human”

[We continue reading from “Redemptor Hominis,” the first encyclical letter of John Paul II]

#13 (continued) Jesus Christ is the chief way for the Church. He Himself is our way "to the Father's house" and is the way to each man. On this way leading from Christ to man, on this way on which Christ unites Himself with each man, nobody can halt the Church. This is an exigency of man's temporal welfare and of his eternal welfare. Out of regard for Christ and in view of the mystery that constitutes the Church's own life, the Church cannot remain insensible to whatever serves man's true welfare, any more than she can remain indifferent to what threatens it. In various passages in its documents the Second Vatican Council has expressed the Church's fundamental solicitude that life in "the world should conform more to man's surpassing dignity" in all its aspects, so as to make that life "even more human." . . . We are not dealing with the "abstract" man, but the real, "concrete", "historical" man. We are dealing with "each" man, for each one is included in the mystery of the Redemption and with each one Christ has united Himself for ever through this mystery. Every man comes into the world through being conceived in his mother's womb and being born of his mother, and precisely on account of the mystery of Redemption is entrusted to the solicitude of the Church. Her solicitude is about the whole man and is focused on Him in an altogether special manner. The object of her care is man in his unique unrepeatable human reality, which keeps intact the image and likeness of God Himself. The Council points out this very fact when, speaking of that likeness, it recalls that "man is the only creature on earth that God willed for itself." Man as "willed" by God, as "chosen" by Him from eternity and called, destined for grace and glory - this is "each" man, "the most concrete" man, "the most real"; this is man in all the fullness of the mystery in which he has become a sharer in Jesus Christ, the mystery in which each one of the four thousand million human beings living on our planet has become a sharer from the moment he is conceived beneath the heart of his mother.

#14. For the Church All Ways Lead to Man. The Church cannot abandon man, for his "destiny," that is to say his election, calling, birth and death, salvation or perdition, is so closely and unbreakably linked with Christ. We are speaking precisely of each man on this planet, this earth that the Creator gave to the first man, saying to the man and the woman: "subdue it and have dominion". Each man in all the unrepeatable reality of what he is and what he does, of his intellect and will, of his conscience and heart. Man who in his reality has, because he is a "person", a history of his life that is his own and, most important, a history of his soul that is his own. Man who, in keeping with the openness of his spirit within and also with the many diverse needs of his body and his existence in time, writes this personal history of his through numerous bonds, contact, situations, and social structures linking him with other men, beginning to do so from the first moment of his existence on earth, from the moment of his conception and birth.

Man in the full truth of his existence, of his personal being and also of his community and social being - in the sphere of his own family, in the sphere of society and very diverse contexts, in the sphere of his own nation or people (perhaps still only that of his clan or tribe), and in the sphere of the whole of mankind - this man is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission: he is the primary and fundamental way for the Church, the way traced out by Christ Himself, the way that leads invariably through the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption.

It was precisely this man in all the truth of his life, in his conscience, in his continual inclination to sin and at the same time in his continual aspiration to truth, the good, the beautiful, justice and love that the Second Vatican Council had before its eyes when, in outlining his situation in the modern world, it always passed from the external elements of this situation to the truth within humanity: "In man himself many elements wrestle with one another. Thus, on the one hand, as a creature he experiences his limitations in a multitude of ways. On the other, he feels himself to be boundless in his desires and summoned to a higher life. Pulled by manifold attractions, he is constantly forced to choose among them and to renounce some. Indeed, as a weak and sinful being, he often does what he would not, and fails to do what he would. Hence he suffers from internal divisions, and from these flow so many and such great discords in society."

This man is the way for the Church - a way that, in a sense, is the basis of all the other ways that the Church must walk - because man - every man without any exception whatever - has been redeemed by Christ, and because with man - with each man without any exception whatever - Christ is in a way united, even when man is unaware of it: "Christ, who died and was raised up for all, provides man" - each man and every man - "with the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme calling."

Since this man is the way for the Church, the way for her daily life and experience, for her mission and toil, the Church of today must be aware in an always new manner of man's "situation". That means that she must be aware of his possibilities, which keep returning to their proper bearings and thus revealing themselves. She must likewise be aware of the threats to man and of all that seems to oppose the endeavor "to make human life ever more human" and make every element of this life correspond to man's true dignity - in a word, she must be aware of all that is opposed to that process.

First, think of your own life and that of the people you know: what are the qualities or situations that make "human life ever more human"? What are the qualities or situations that make our human life "less human"? Try to give a few examples of each. Second, the Pope writes that "with each [human being] without any exception, Christ is . . . united, even when [the person] is unaware of it." What does he mean by this? Give a few examples of how this practically can be seen in your life and in your missionary vocation.

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

WEEK IV

Monday: “The Word was God”

From Father Judge:

“Many are the lessons to be drawn from the Christmas tide. Every class, every station, every rank of life -- the mighty Pontiff, the prelate, the priest, the people -- all can learn much, and each is taught our particular spiritual need as adoringly we kneel at the manger.

“Apart from individual wants and spiritual aspirations, this holy season teaches one lesson applicable to all. The lesson is in the astonishing way in which Jesus came. So unthought of was this coming that the chosen people of His own generation were taken by surprise. ‘He came unto His own, and His own received Him not’ (*John 1:11*). Their inspired books marked off that he plenitude of time had come. They looked indeed for a saviour but for a savior who would come as a mightily conqueror of nations. They looked indeed for an infant Messias, but one who would be cradled in the magnificence of worldly courts.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 30)

From the Word of God:

“**1** In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God.**2** He was with God in the beginning.**3** Through him all things came into being, not one thing came into being except through him.**4** What has come into being in him was life, life that was the light of men;**5** and light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it.**6** A man came, sent by God. His name was John.**7** He came as a witness, to bear witness to the light, so that everyone might believe through him.**8** He was not the light, he was to bear witness to the light.**9** The Word was the real light that gives light to everyone; he was coming into the world.**10** He was in the world that had come into being through him, and the world did not recognise him.**11** He came to his own and his own people did not accept him.” (*John 1:1-11*)

Reflect on the glory of God resplendent in the heart of the Trinity: the fullness of light, truth, beauty, joy, goodness, peace, energy! Now picture the Word, the Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity, leaving that resplendence to enter and become fully human: limited, subject to sickness, death, poverty, ignorance, sadness, fatigue. Talk to Jesus about this: what was it like for Him? Why did He do it? What did it cost Him? Give Jesus time to speak to your heart and give you insight. Be grateful.

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

Tuesday: “The Word became flesh”

From Father Judge:

“Jesus came, but O, He came in such a lowly way. He came to the lowly and for the lowly. It was the lowly who first commingled their praise and adoration with the canticles of adoring angels. It was the lowly to whom Jesus came a Teacher. It was the lowly shepherds who received His first lessons. We . . . this Christmas have knelt at the manger. Shoulder to shoulder with these humble men of the fields, we have crowded in and looked on to rejoice and to adore. Surely, the lesson of lessons that the Christ Child teaches . . . is to have a thought and a heart for the lowly.

“First of all, the poor are the patrimony of the Church, His legacy to us. ‘For the poor you have always with you’ (John 12:8) . . . It is mainly from lowly homes that comes those who are consecrated to God in every field of holy, vowed service. It is the lowly who are so constantly faithful to Holy Mother Church, who so spontaneously and sacrificially carry her burdens.” (Missionary Cenacle Meditations, p. 30)

From the Word of God:

“**12** But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believed in his name **13** who were born not from human stock or human desire or human will but from God himself. **14** The Word became flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. **15** John witnesses to him. He proclaims: ‘This is the one of whom I said: He who comes after me has passed ahead of me because he existed before me.’ **16** Indeed, from his fullness we have, all of us, received—one gift replacing another, **17** for the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.” (John 1:12-18)

When the “Word became flesh,” God assumed completely our lowliness and poverty. What is our own attitude toward our own poverty and weakness or that of others? Do we readily admit it, “assume” it? Or do we experience shame or fear when confronted with our personal poverty or that of others? In what way(s) is Jesus made present to us and to others through our poverty and lowliness? How have we experienced God present in the poverty of our sisters and brothers? Try to think of a few specific examples

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

Wednesday: “Love the lowly!”

From Father Judge:

“Pride of life may tempt us, the glamor and delusions of the world beguile us, so much so as to make sweet the patronizing of the worldlings. Gazing into the Crib, beholding there our Infant Savior and divine Teacher, how vividly there comes to mind and how illuminated we are by that teaching of His later life: ‘Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him’ (1 John 2:15). To whom . . . are these words addressed?”

“Our Christmas lesson then is: Behold Me come to you, poor. Love the lowly. Love not the world. Fatal will be the consequences to us if in the works of our ministry a large place is not given to the poor and humble.”
(*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 30)

From the Word of God:

“**15** Do not love the world or what is in the world. If anyone does love the world, the love of the Father finds no place in him,**16** because everything there is in the world—disordered bodily desires, disordered desires of the eyes, pride in possession—is not from the Father but is from the world.**17** And the world, with all its disordered desires, is passing away. But whoever does the will of God remains for ever.” (1 John 2:15-17)

Jesus came to us in absolute lowliness and poverty. How do “disordered desires” for pleasure, recognition, possessions and similar things rule in my spirit? To what degree are they a part of my life? Is “a large place” in our lives as missionaries “given to the poor and humble”? In what way? To whom? How often?

▶ Write down your reflections briefly here:

Thursday: “To extol the Holy Name of Jesus”

From Father Judge:

“The Holy Name of Jesus . . . what holy thoughts, impulses and resolutions it provokes. What will we do for the Holy Name? We must do something; we must do much. This at least we can do -- love it more, use it more, bless with it more, and the more with it be blessed, make it the sweetness of our mouths, the music of our ears, the love of our hearts, the light of our minds, the strength of our wills, the joy of our souls.

“We can say it and say it again. We can use it in so many ways of praise and prayer and thanksgiving and reparation and adoration . . . We must remember -- we cannot forget -- that we have a special grace; yes, so specially is it ours, that it is a life work, a destiny and perhaps a destiny given to few -- to extol the Holy Name of Jesus. We must, therefore, use it in our hearts and give it to others that they may make use of it in theirs. We must use it in our words and in our writings, use it in season and out of season. Praise be to the Holy Name of Jesus! We can begin and end and carry on our works with that Holy Name, and resolve and work to this end: that all things may confess the Holy Name of Jesus.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 35)

From the Word of God:

“**5** Make your own the mind of Christ Jesus:**6** Who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped.**7** But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being,**8** he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross.**9** And for this God raised him high, and gave him the name which is above all other names;**10** so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus**11** and that every tongue should acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (*Philippians 2:5-11*)

How often do you consciously use the name of Jesus? In what circumstances? In what way is the Name of Jesus in your daily conversation with others? In your prayer? How would you say you are “extolling” -- lifting up, honoring, bringing glory to -- the “name of Jesus”? Spend some time quietly repeating the name of JESUS as a prayer.

Write down your reflections briefly here:

Friday: “Who is Jesus Christ?”

From Father Judge:

“Who is Jesus Christ? He is a most exacting Lord. Who is He? . . . Alas, many do not truly know Him. Jesus Christ is an historical personage . . . [Yet] other historical personages have lived and done their work, a great work, perhaps, but Christ is different from all of them. Others lived, they died, they passed away, their works have gone to dust and they themselves do not resent oblivion. No so this Christ. Jesus Christ today, yesterday and tomorrow, just as informing, just as enlightening, and that Name of His is just as powerful today to those who invoke it.

“Christ will not permit men to be indifferent to Him. They must accept or reject Him. They must adore or blaspheme Him. He stands at the cradle of every generation and exacts that it declare itself toward Him, affirming, ‘He that is not with me, is against me: and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth’ (*Matthew 12:30*). He is the First and the Last. All things come from Him and go back to Him. He is the Foundation Stone on which men build or are dashed to pieces.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 37)

From the Word of God:

“**1** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; the first heaven and the first earth had disappeared now, and there was no longer any sea.**2** I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride dressed for her husband.**3** Then I heard a loud voice call from the throne, ‘Look, here God lives among human beings. He will make his home among them; they will be his people, and he will be their God, God-with-them.**4** He will wipe away all tears from their eyes; there will be no more death, and no more mourning or sadness or pain. The world of the past has gone.’**5** Then the One sitting on the throne spoke. ‘Look, I am making the whole of creation new. Write this, “What I am saying is trustworthy and will come true.”’

6 Then he said to me, ‘It has already happened. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give water from the well of life free to anybody who is thirsty;**7** anyone who proves victorious will inherit these things; and I will be his God and he will be my son.’” (*Revelations 21:1-7*)

As we end this month of prayer and meditation on the mystery of the Incarnation, ask yourself this simple question: Who is Jesus Christ for me? Reflect on this, and then write a few sentences, a paragraph, a poem that summarizes your present understanding of and relationship to Jesus.

Write down your reflections briefly here: