

## BRINGING LIGHT INTO DARKNESS

There is much that would lead people to think of the priesthood today as embattled and besieged and discredited. If they think about how priests feel, people probably imagine that the prevailing attitude of priests is not a sense of joy in living the priesthood but a sense of depression and loss of morale.

The elements that might destroy morale are all too visible:

- ❖ Declining statistics of Mass attendance and vocations in Ireland and elsewhere.
- ❖ Public disillusionment and hostility, which is not just the result of child abuse by priests, but also because of undeniable instances of priests who either deaden any initiative in their parish or are arrogant in their treatment of lay people or who push their own agendas, however admirable, with no effort to persuade or encourage the people of the parish to understand and to 'own' the agenda.
- ❖ The allegations of cover-up or at least incompetence, which are shocking and disheartening, whether the failures are perceived or real – and in some cases they were real.
- ❖ The way in which the phenomenon of child sexual abuse has been presented as if it were exclusively or even principally perpetrated by Catholic clergy. This is partly the result of pre-existing prejudice and resentment against the Church but because priests perpetrated real and shocking wrong, any attempt by Church people to balance the picture will be perceived as an effort to minimise the evil. [Although I notice that some Catholic laity in the US are now beginning to point out facts such as that there were almost ten times as many complaints of sexual abuse in the public school system in one year, 1998 (103,600) as there were against Catholic priests in the 53 years from 1950-2003 (10,667)]<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ The widespread perception of the Church as an unfeeling and unheeding institution. We would like to think of the role of a priest not as a functionary in a heartless institution but as part of a communion, a family. Many people, however, see priests precisely as functionaries in an institution and are uneasy with a priest who keeps saying 'Don't blame me, I only work here'.
- ❖ The polarisation between people on opposing wings of the Church, which seems to grow more acute while, at the same time, moving far away from the concerns of the great majority of Catholics. (After a televised Mass in Limerick, I got an angry letter complaining that Judas could be seen in the stained glass window of the Last Supper. I refrained from replying that it was Jesus, not I, who invited him!). Perhaps the most disturbing thing about these conflicts is the ease with which the protagonists seem to be able to judge the inner thoughts of their opponents, and to attribute all sorts of unworthy motives to them.
- ❖ The various interpretations of the causes for these bleak realities by people both on the right and on the left who find that, amazingly, the whole phenomenon confirms their own pre-existing analyses of what is wrong with the Church. They all agree we are in a dire state but their proposed remedies point in precisely the opposite directions.
- ❖ The fact that the essential building blocks of the Catholic community as we have known it in Ireland – religious orders, Catholic schools and hospitals, and above all the Catholic family – are in many ways under question and under threat, facing challenges that would never have been imagined a half a century ago, and in some cases disappearing before our eyes.

---

<sup>1</sup> R.J.NEUHAUS, First Things, May 2006.

## A MOMENT OF CHOICE

The reality is, however, even more disturbing than that. These questions, painful as they are, are symptoms of a deeper malaise. If we focus solely on these issues, although they are, of course, important and inescapable, we will miss the more fundamental point. There is a much deeper question that we have to face, a question about the credibility of faith today and about the credibility of the Church as the messenger of Good News. When the present Pope, like his predecessor, speaks of the need for a new evangelisation, he is not using a dramatic metaphor. He is recognising what Pope John Paul said in Knock, that every new generation is a new continent to be won for Christ. In other words every new generation is mission territory. And we can see that around us.

We are faced with:

- ❖ The realisation that many people find our faith incredible on matters that are central for us, such as the existence of a God who loves us individually and who wishes us to share in the infinite flow of Trinitarian life, the divinity of Christ and his resurrection, his real presence in the Eucharist, life after death and the place of Mary;
- ❖ The fact that the Church's moral teaching is widely rejected, in fact it is regarded as absurd and unrealistic, on various issues such as the permanence of marriage, the inviolability of human life from conception, and sexual morality; that moral teaching is regarded as being not just absurd but inhuman in its response to AIDS prevention or its questioning of research on embryonic stem cells and in its opposition to euthanasia when someone pleads to be allowed to die with dignity. Even people who are quite well disposed to the Church, who are practicing and believing, find that they do not really go along with the teaching on some of these issues. It can be a little like what often happened in families committed to violent republicanism – very good Catholics in most ways but knowing like their fathers before them that 'you can't trust the Church on the National Question!';
- ❖ The fact that in modern life the hunger for God, which we believe to be deep in every human being, seems to have become virtually invisible. In the lives of many people, as someone put it, God is missing but not missed.
- ❖ We can sometimes look at our Churches and the chattering crowd out there waiting for Mass to begin and wonder what kind of concept they have of the Real Presence. We get very concerned when primary school children speak about 'the blessed bread', but what are we to make of the largely favourable reaction to the 'ecumenical' Eucharist in Drogheda? What are we to make of the incomprehension that people have about why they cannot share communion, perhaps with people who would certainly not wish to share in a Catholic celebration of the Eucharist.

In other words the Church's fundamental beliefs and teachings, the whole shape of the Church as the sign of Christ's presence and of Christ's Gospel, has suffered a profound loss of credibility. And we have looked at some of that already today.

The crisis we face – and crisis after all means a moment of choice – is also the key to deepening the joy of living as a priest and as a Christian in this new century. That is so because the joy of Easter always has to pass through the pain and death of Calvary. This crisis points us back towards the foundations of our faith and of our moral vision.

We find ourselves speaking a language that does not make much sense in the kind of lives that many people live. It may be good to ask ourselves what is the source of this deafness. In a letter he wrote to mark the fourth centenary of the death of St John of the Cross, Pope John Paul speaks about the horrors that the world has lived through in the twentieth century:

Our age speaks of the silence or absence of God... The term dark night is now used of all of life and not just a phase of the spiritual journey... (John of the Cross) does not try to give to the appalling problem of suffering an answer in the speculative order; but in the

light of the Scripture and of experience he discovers and sifts out something of the marvellous transformation which God effects in the darkness...<sup>2</sup>

Without faith, there is no answer to the problem of suffering except to try to avoid it and to keep it at bay and to think about it as little as possible. The fear that life may be absurd can either raise the issue of faith or it can lead to a deadening of the deeper questions. That is the crossroads that appears ahead of us now in Ireland and in Western Europe as a whole.

In his letter on the importance of the Eastern Christian tradition, Pope John Paul speaks of the temptation to avoid the deeper questions. We often miss the real meaning because we do are not listening at sufficient depth. The Christians of the East, he says, “perceive that one draws close to this presence above all by letting oneself be taught an adoring silence, for at the culmination of the knowledge and experience of God is God’s absolute transcendence”. He goes on to say that we are often unable to be silent for fear of meeting ourselves, for fear of “feeling the emptiness that asks itself about meaning”. “All, believers and non-believers alike, need to learn a silence that allows the Other to speak”. The absolutely transcendent One may speak in the most unforeseen ways, or through the most unexpected people, or in the most surprising circumstances; only attentive listening, adoring silence, will allow us to hear and to understand what the Other says to us<sup>3</sup>.

### **THE DARKNESS AND THE DEPTH**

The central point that I would like to make in this final reflection might be summed up in the phrase, ‘Experiencing the Darkness and the Depth’. The most crucial element in any attempt to speak about faith today is to touch the deep questions of the meaning of human life – the dignity and destiny of the human person on the one hand and the ways in which that dignity seems to be permanently threatened and destined for ultimate extinction. These are the questions to which faith speaks. But they must be received with an open mind – not brushed aside in case they may be too painful or disturbing.

We can speak effectively of faith only if we keep reminding ourselves of the deeper underlying question. Anyone who wishes to engage in dialogue has to experience the darkness so as to be able to witness to the Gospel promise, which is the light that shines in the darkness and that even the deepest darkness cannot overcome. The pattern of the incarnation is that the Son of God became one with us, sharing our darkness, our anguish and our death, in order to be able to lead us into the light beyond suffering and death.

Not the least of the problems about the fact that so many people view the Church as an institution is that an institution seems to be impervious to suffering. People will not hear the Gospel from a source which they do not perceive as sharing in the anguish of the deepest human questions. Also the Church sometimes seems to them to be saying that we have all the answers. But only somebody who really experiences the suffering can even begin really to understand the answers and can convincingly communicate the wonder of God’s response.

Those who were seminarians as long ago as I was grew up with the idea of the priest as standing above the fray, above the doubts and the weakness that mark every human life. In those days, when a young man went off the seminary, people were all saying, ‘Aren’t you great!’ Nowadays a fair number of them are saying, ‘Are you mad?’ It is a change which has the choice of offering oneself for the priesthood and the choice of remaining true in living the priestly ministry more courageous. Maybe it is also more realistic. Perhaps the pain of the last ten years has forced us to recognise a lot more clearly our weakness and our fallibility.

It is a painful lesson. In the fifties and the sixties, we were attracted by the idea of the priest as someone that was looked up to by everybody. We saw the priesthood as a way of life which expressed generous commitment and complete integrity. We came to the priesthood, following the example of men whose lives seemed to us to be entirely admirable. In many cases their apparent serenity and calm disguised their own personal struggles in living their vocation. In some painful cases, some of those priests turned out to have had terrible guilty secrets. In any case, we have had to learn that some priests have not been what they

---

<sup>2</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Master in the Faith*, 14.

<sup>3</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Orientalis Lumen*, 16.

seemed to be. Now, instead of thinking of priests as better than other people, we find ourselves, drawing consolation from the fact that there is no evidence to suggest that priests are more likely to be paedophiles than other people in positions of care and trust in relation to children! “Priests are no worse than anyone else” is a far cry from the image we grew up with!

In a world where we are in danger of feeling overwhelmed, this recognition of our fragility is the first step. When he had a dialogue with the priests of Albano a few weeks ago, Pope Benedict responded to a question from an 84 year old priest<sup>4</sup>:

*Young and old, we all feel ourselves inadequate, in the first place because we are so few in the face of so many needs and we all have different backgrounds; we also suffer because of the scarcity of vocations to the priesthood. For these reasons we are often discouraged, trying to patch a bit here and a bit there, often able to do no more than first aid without any definite plans... I have reached a certain age... but these young confreres, can they have hope?*

And among other things the Pope said:

This... refers also to the Pope. What should I do at this time in the Church, with so many problems, so many joys, so many challenges in relation to the universal Church? So many things happen day after day, and I am not able to respond to all of them. I do my bit. I do what I can.... And I am happy to be helped by so many good collaborators... And so, naturally, even more so, a parish priest, who is on his own, sees that so many things remain to be done in this situation briefly described by you, Fr Zane. And he can only do something ‘patching’ as you put it, carrying out a kind of ‘first aid’, conscious that one ought to be doing much more. I would say, then, that the first necessity for all of us is to recognise our own limits with humility, to recognise that we ought to leave the greater part of our concerns to God. Today we heard the Gospel of the trusted servant (Mt 24:42-51). This servant, the Lord says, gives food to others at the right time. He doesn’t do everything all at once, but he is a wise and prudent servant who knows how to distribute at different moments what he ought to in that situation. He does that with humility but he is also sure of the trust of our ‘master’, of the Lord, because in the end he himself is the one to guide his Church. We come in with our little gift and we do what we can do, above all the things that are always necessary – the Sacraments, the proclamation of the Word, the signs of our charity and love.

So the painful lesson is not all negative. Without a sense of our fragility and our helplessness, we can never appreciate the wonder of God’s gift. That is why the Gospel and indeed the whole of the Scriptures give a special place to the poor, the *anawim*. It is the poor who are open to the hope of a better future: “I am lowly and in pain; let your salvation, O God, protect me” (Ps 69:29); “Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers” (Jer 20:13). The kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit (Mt 5:3).

I want to reflect on these issues with particular reference to the moral teaching and vision of the Church. But I don’t think that we can do that without realising that it is precisely here, in the meaning of our lives and of God’s gift, that we have to begin.

I’ve already mentioned the passage in *Evangelium Vitae* where in speaking about the Gospel of Life and of the moral vision that it implies, Pope John Paul stresses the necessity of what he calls ‘the contemplative outlook’ if we are truly to celebrate the Gospel of Life:

It is the outlook of those who see life in its deeper meaning, who grasp its utter gratuitousness, its beauty and its invitation to freedom and responsibility. It is the outlook of those who do not presume to take possession of reality but instead accept it as a gift, discovering in all things the reflection of the Creator and seeing in every person his living image.<sup>5</sup>

The importance of this contemplation on the basics is stressed also in a challenging address that Paul VI gave to his priests when he was Archbishop of Milan:

---

<sup>4</sup> My translation.

<sup>5</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 83.

Let us try to keep our eyes open, to learn how to marvel... St. Augustine says, 'The fountain is greater than my thirst.' And I must marvel at this. I must always be ready to marvel, to feel amazement; and the old things that I have celebrated for so many years must always appear to me as something new. The birth of Jesus, his passion, his death, the coming of the Holy Spirit. All these mysteries that gradually will become habit, must become fresh again, immediate, and I must rejoice at their greatness... To see! To see!<sup>6</sup>

Maybe the idea is most poetically summed up by Emily Dickinson when she wrote in a letter to a friend, "*Consider the lilies*' (Mt 6:28) is the only commandment I ever obeyed."<sup>7</sup> But then, contemplating the lilies of the field may be the path towards to loving the Lord our God with our whole heart and soul and might, which is the first and the greatest commandment!

We need to experience the darkness and the depth, but not because darkness is a good thing but because it enables us to see the light more clearly. That is why the Easter Vigil should be celebrated after nightfall, so that the light of the paschal candle can be clearly seen in the darkness of the night. Experiencing darkness would be an entirely negative thing unless we also reflect on how that darkness can be experienced not as absurdity but as a hunger for God. More than that, we need to reflect on how that darkness can be illuminated by the light that has come into the world. We look more deeply into the darkness because we know that the deepest truth is found in God who dwells in inaccessible light.

But we can awaken an awareness of that hunger and darkness in others and help them to see the wonder of God's truth only if we experience that darkness ourselves. That is why an image of the priest as living in some ivory tower, above the storms and the fray, is in fact an obstacle to our preaching. A priest should be a person who is able to share in people's griefs and struggles because he recognises his own.

#### **VULNERABLE AND SEARCHING**

In previous eras, the questions of God, of death and meaning, of judgement and eternal life were close to people's consciousness. Those questions occupied people's thoughts and their prayers. They obviously arise in the life of individuals, since no one can escape the experiences of illness and bereavement. But occasionally they are also experienced in a more general way, when tragedy strikes on a large scale.

One of the reasons why traditional sacred words (grace, incarnation, salvation, hell, heaven) seem to have lost their power is that the experience to which they are addressed is pushed out of public discourse and when the questions do arise, as they do at certain points in every life, many people do not look to the Church or the Gospel for a response that would give meaning. Even if they do, the thrust of society is that, even after a shattering bereavement, a person should get back to normal as quickly as possible. The world seems to say, "Don't expect us to enter into these deep and disturbing questions with you; we are too busy with what we imagine are the more important questions of daily life!"

Perhaps that is why situations that pose the questions of death and meaning to us all at the same time can have such a powerful and lasting impact. That was obvious of course in the bombings like Bali, Madrid and London, the unease at the alleged threat to bomb airliners; it was obvious on September 11<sup>th</sup>; it was obvious at the time of the tsunami and hurricane Katrina, even in smaller tragedies like the death of Princess Diana or Steve Irwin (leading people it seems to massacre sting rays!) of celebrities or sports stars, of which there have been a number of very sad cases in Ireland in recent years.

When death comes in the course of an ordinary day, as on September 11<sup>th</sup> or in the holiday beaches of South East Asia, or the Beslan siege, or the London Underground; when it strikes someone young and healthy who is popular and wealthy and influential it brings sorrow and anguish to the close members of their families. But it also brings to all of us the uncomfortable realisation that fame and fortune and success and even a contented routine are not the meaning of life. It brings home to us that nobody is invulnerable. It brings home the questions we do not like to face.

---

<sup>6</sup> MONTINI, J. B., *The Priest*, Helicon Dublin 1963, p. 137.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Norris, K., *The Cloister Walk*, Riverhead, New York, 1996, p.222.

The prophet, exiled in Babylon, wanted God to intervene mightily in history as in times past, slaying dragons, drying up the sea and bringing the chosen people safely home from exile and danger. So, he prayed: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord" (Isaiah 51:9). He looks to the time when the Lord will indeed have "bared his holy arm" (52:10).

Part of that prophecy is read at Mass on Christmas morning to celebrate the fact that the Lord *has* awoken and bared his holy arm. But where is its strength? It does not carry powerful weapons or wield irresistible force. It is the fragile arm of a tiny baby.

God does not come to surround us with an armour plate of invulnerability. If we face the uncertainty of life, if we recognise the unreliability of our hopes and expectations, if we seriously reflect on the inevitability of death, we may begin to see how extraordinary the truth is. God's eternal Son is born in a stable in order to be vulnerable with us. At the end of his life the arm of Jesus is bared once more - and brutally nailed to a cross as we saw in such gory detail in *The Passion of the Christ*.

There *is* no armour plate of invulnerability. We are not indestructible. It is self-deception to imagine we are secure and indispensable because of our achievements, reputation, possessions or talents. The call to look into the darkness in order to find the God who dwells in unapproachable light must in many instances, therefore, be less programmed, more ready to respond to crises and experiences that arise, sometimes unpredictably, in the life of individuals and in the life of society. The world which appears to be self-contained and without the capacity to hear the deepest questions can, sometimes quite unexpectedly, reveal itself to be vulnerable and searching.

#### HELPLESSNESS

Some of the unease and the darkness has a moral basis. It is often said that there is, in the modern world, a lack of the sense of sin. This is undoubtedly true, but paradoxically, it is also true that there is, in the modern world, a great sense of guilt. Pope John Paul, in *Dives in Misericordia*, speaks of the threats which exist in our world through war and oppression. Then he says:

All this is happening *against the background of the gigantic remorse* caused by the fact that, side by side with wealthy and surfeited people and societies living in plenty and ruled by consumerism and pleasure, the same human family contains individuals and groups *that are suffering from hunger....* That is why moral uneasiness is destined to become even more acute. It is obvious that a fundamental defect, or rather a series of defects, indeed a defective machinery is at the root of contemporary economics and materialistic civilisation, which does not allow the human family to break free from such radically unjust situations.<sup>8</sup>

The divisions between wealth and poverty, war and peace, are much more acute in the world of modern communications. The contrast between what appears on the television screen in the corner of the room and what is happening in the rest of the room can be startling if we stop to think about it.

In the wars in the Balkan states and in Iraq, we in the West saw live pictures of bombs and artillery, raining down on apartments and houses not too different from our own, containing television sets and computers and dishwashers just like ours. We see starving people exposed to the most hostile weather conditions while we are actually in the process of eating a good meal sitting in a well heated or air conditioned house.

It would take considerable insensitivity to avoid the realisation that one's trivial and routine expenditure – on a newspaper or a cup of coffee – could feed a starving child. It is evident, from the evidence in our own living rooms that some of our brothers and sisters are suffering unimaginably while we live in relative comfort.

At the same time there is a realisation that greater personal generosity, desirable, useful and obligatory though that is, will not cure the defective machinery at the root of the problems. We do not know how to repair the economic system. Yet we also know in our hearts that one of the chief forms of social sinfulness is to fail to eliminate or limit social evils "out of laziness,

---

<sup>8</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 11.

fear or the conspiracy of silence, through the secret complicity of indifference ;... ( through taking) refuge in the supposed impossibility of changing the world”<sup>9</sup>.

We know also that for all the technological development and wealth creation we have seen in recent decades, justice for all remains beyond our grasp. And we know that in the wider picture of the human race throughout history, millions of our brothers and sisters are beyond any material help that we will ever be able to give, because they are already dead.

So the hunger for a world of fairness and peace is suppressed because we feel that it is unrealistic. As with the hunger for meaning and the hunger for perfection, what is needed is not to diminish this hunger but to experience it more fully. The experience of that hunger is another crack in the wall of self-sufficiency. The meaning of human life cannot simply depend on the time or place of one’s birth. If life is absurd for some human beings, it is absurd for all of us. That threat of absurdity may open people’s minds to hear of the God who offers vindication and justice to the living and the dead.

There lies the difference between a sense of guilt and a sense of sin. Sin is an offence against God who is infinitely good and infinitely merciful. Sin is an offence against God who alone is loving enough and powerful enough to overcome sin and its effects, to offer hope even in the most hopeless situations.

In the light of such a vision, the “gigantic remorse” is transformed from mere misery into a sense of sin against the God who can and will overcome sin and offer justice and healing to everything that gives rise to remorse and helplessness and despair. It can thus become a source of hope. We can look straight into the darkness and begin to see the light.

One of the roles that evil and disaster has played in the lives of the chosen people has been to teach them that their hope is too limited. When they are exiled in Egypt and treated as slaves, they begin to lose hope only to experience the Exodus; when they begin to starve in the desert, they complain only to receive the manna; when they are exiled in Babylon and lose the Temple and the Promised Land itself, all seems lost. All the time God is teaching them that his love is bigger and more powerful even than this new disaster, bigger even than the Temple which is his dwelling place and the Land which he promised to Abraham. Even this, they keep learning, cannot conquer my love. That is what is shown to us in the disaster of Calvary: the darkness cannot overcome the Word made flesh, the Light of the world.

Only a person who has felt the hunger for justice can begin to appreciate the God who is the source and guarantee of the dignity of every human being. In the light of that vision, the real challenge is not to make hopeless attempts to achieve the impossible. The real challenge is to see that the meaning of human life lies not in the acquisition of goods but in sharing ourselves. This was one of the ideas expressed by the Irish bishops in the pastoral letter on the economy published about seven years ago:

Divine revelation helps us to see that either wealth is shared, or its owners become the owned and are diminished in themselves. This is a message that is liberating for rich and poor alike, each of whom is invited to see through the falseness of making material possessions the goal of human life and to experience the joy that the Spirit of God gives in the act of sharing.<sup>10</sup>

The hunger for justice is a field in which the dialogue of faith and culture can take place. So too, is the hunger for peace. The hardest step is the first, to begin that dialogue means facing questions and challenges that many of us, in our hearts, would prefer not to face.

#### **AMAZEMENT**

The complexity of modern life is both a challenge and an opportunity to recognise God’s presence. Even committed Christians live most of their lives in circumstances where the Gospel has not been inculturated. Multi-national companies, the Internet, the advances of technology, growing urbanisation, globalisation of the economy, multi-culturalism, none of these have existed in the same way before. In other words, the Gospel has never been lived

---

<sup>9</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 16

<sup>10</sup> IRISH CATHLIC BISHOPS’ CONFERENCE, *Prosperity with a Purpose*, Veritas 1999, 173.

in these contexts before; they are the new continents referred to by Pope John Paul in Knock, waiting to be won for Christ.

The danger is that believers enter these areas without any sense of being missionaries. That does not mean preaching and making a nuisance of oneself in the workplace. It means first of all recognising for oneself that here, as in every other sphere and aspect of God's creation, we meet the Lord. Here I am to love the Lord my God with my whole heart and soul and might, just as much as when I am in the church or saying my prayers. If that sense is lacking then large sections *even of the lives of believers* remain unevangelised. .

What we have to bring to this new, unevangelised world is a sense of the wonder of the Gospel. The real problem is that the horizons within which people think and live are too narrow. What Christians believe seems to many of them to be 'too good to be true', 'wishful thinking', 'fairy tales'. And yet, it is a world in search of wonder. You only have to go into a major bookshop to see that, as the Religion section shrinks, the New Age, Esoteric, Body/Mind/Spirit sections grow even faster.

It is a world in which we live with an ineradicable sense that there is more to us and to life than what we see, even through the most powerful telescope or microscope.

The wonders that Science and New Age offer are not what the restless heart is seeking – it is seeking the fulfilment beyond what any eye has seen or ear heard or human heart conceived. It is not just the fulfilment of human potential; it is the fulfilment of the potential that is in us because of God's loving invitation and his Son's Paschal Mystery. The word 'amazement' frames the pontificate of Pope John Paul. He used it in his first encyclical:

The man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly... 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... "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... 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"<sup>11</sup>

He also used it in his last encyclical:

With [the gift of the Eucharist, Jesus] brought about a mysterious "oneness in time" between [the Easter] *Triduum* and the passage of the centuries. The thought of this leads us to profound *amazement* and gratitude... This *amazement* should always fill the Church assembled for the celebration of the Eucharist. But in a special way it should fill the minister of the Eucharist. For it is he who, by the authority given him in the sacrament of priestly ordination, effects the consecration. It is he who says with the power coming to him from Christ in the Upper Room: "This is my body which will be given up for you This is the cup of my blood, poured out for you..."<sup>12</sup>

That is perhaps a good thought with which to end. The priest is to be the one who is filled with amazement at the gift he preaches and makes present.

---

<sup>11</sup> *Redemptor Hominis*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 5.