



IGLESIA CATÓLICA ECUMÉNICA RENOVADA EN GUATEMALA
COMUNIÓN ECUMÉNICA "SANTA MARÍA DEL NUEVO ÉXODO"
EDUARDO ÁGUIRRE OESTMANN
OBISPO PRIMADO

June 27.

**First Conversation:
Life in the Spirit**

1. The mission of the Apostles
 - a. Matthew 28:18-20
 - b. Acts 6:4
2. Meaning of "Prayer"
 - a. Luke 3:21-22
 - b. John 17:1-3
 - c. Romans 8:15-16
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June 27:

**Second Conversation:
The Gifts of the Spirit**

1. What are the gifts
 - a. The special gifts or graces that God gives
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June 27:

**Third Conversation:
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 - a. Galatians 1:10-11
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 - a. I Corinthians 12:5
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June 28:

**First Conversation:
The Church that Christ Founded**

1. A community identified with Jesus

The basis of the new community is faithfulness to Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16). Everyone who is joined to Jesus is a stone that is part of building the new society, the Kingdom of God (Matthew 16:18). "Messiah" is a Hebrew word that designates the savior sent by God to transform human society. In the Jewish conception, the Messiah is called "the Son of David," because he was conceived as a king in the lineage of David, a victorious warrior (Mark 10:47). The Kingdom of God awaited by the Jews was limited to Israel. Over against this concept is that of "Messiah, Son of God," which means that he does not have David as his model, but God Himself as the giver of life. The transformation of society likewise does not occur by violence or power but by means of the Spirit that overcomes even death. And it is not limited to one people, but is directed to the whole of humanity. Mark defines "joining Jesus" as "being with him" (3:14), that is, to pledge unconditional support to his person and program. This implies taking on his values and his life style. John expresses the same idea by using the term, "love for Jesus" (14:15), meaning a love in which one identifies oneself with him. This joining to or love for Jesus is expressed in and authenticated by practice. Matthew and Luke express this by quoting Jesus as saying that it is not enough to call him "Lord, Lord," but one must put his message into practice (Matthew 7:21; Luke 6:46). John expresses it as "fulfilling the commandments of Jesus" (14:15, 21), meaning to respond with concrete actions of love to the needs that reality is continuously presenting.

A metaphor "follower" is used by all four evangelists to express joining Jesus and its outcome in action (Mark 1:18; 2:14). To follow Jesus means to keep close to him by means of making all one's movements subordinate to his. The metaphor imagines Jesus as a pioneer and the disciples as those who follow the trail he has blazed.

Joining Jesus cannot be imposed. It is born spontaneously in the meeting between human hopes and fears and the person and work of Jesus. One joins Jesus and his project because in him one sees one's own aspirations fulfilled. Meeting Jesus means discovering the happiness that practicing his message brings (Matthew 13:44,46: "treasure" and "pearl").

Anxious persons, who cannot resign themselves to the situation in which they find themselves nor reconcile themselves with human society, and who are concerned about the fullness of life, join Jesus. Those who are settled in a secure place refuse to join Jesus.

The evangelists present Jesus as the "Son of Man" (the Man *par excellence*) (Mark 8:31) and the Son of God (John 3:17). In this way they indicate that in Jesus there is at once manifest what is man and what is God. With the expression, "Son of Man," is indicated the human origin of Jesus; with the expression, "Son of God," his divine origin. But the force of the word "son" in Semitic thought and language means that the expressions also indicate his mode of behavior. Jesus is thus the paradigm of human behavior and at the same time the expression of God's behavior. The union of the two terms in the one person indicates that the goal of human development is the divine condition, meaning that human becomes fully human when his behavior comports with God's.

As result, to join oneself to Jesus, in whom the fullness of humanity is realized, is to be true to the best of oneself and to the development of the full humanity that borne within each of us. At the same time, this faithfulness is the guarantor of bringing the project into reality. That means that faithfulness to Jesus is identical with being true to oneself. Support for Jesus as the Son of God opens to a person the full scope of his or her own self-realization.

To be a follower does not consist only in accepting a doctrine, an endeavor, or some values, but it means to make the Jesus's inner reality one's own inner being. It means to hold onto his Spirit, his attitudes. Community of Spirit with Jesus creates a vital communion with him that John describes as the relation of vine branches to the vine (John 15:1-4). It would be absurd to try to realize Jesus's project without this communion of Spirit, for it would mean professing some values without at the same time being identified with the one who incarnated them in his person.

Participation in Jesus as the living beginning makes possible the realization of the project and is the guarantor of its success (John 15:5: "without me you can do nothing"). A person's dependence on Jesus and the Father is based on the Father, who is the origin and source of life, and on Jesus, who is his mediator (John 1:16: "we have all received out of his full store"). The human being needs to be united to Father and Son in order to enjoy the full life. This dependence, nevertheless, does not involve subordination, because the communication of life has the effect of empowering the human to develop his autonomy and freedom. Just as air, an indispensable element for life, does not limit human freedom, but makes it possible, so the breath of divine life is what permits the human to have life and to be free.

Moreover, life is identified with love, and love does not exist except in a relationship. As result, being a follower does not mean submission and obedience, but spontaneous collaboration (John 15:15, "I do not call you servants, but friends") that is born of possessing the same spirit, taking on the same values and the relation of friendship with Jesus.

This means that following does not imply a diminution of human dignity or liberty; on the contrary, joining Jesus and participating in his Spirit makes a person more and more similar to Jesus, "the Lord," the free one *par excellence*. It is not a matter of obeying Jesus or God, but of being like them. The growth that results from joining Jesus develops human capacities, stimulates their creativity and permits one to continue turning the deepest human aspirations into reality (John 4:14).

2. A Community of the Spirit

By joining Jesus, each and every member of the Christian community participates in his Spirit (John 1:16). Thus, the trait proper to the community is the possession of a life that is the life and love of God. This life is offered to human beings in Jesus, whose life and death translate into human language the infinite love of God.

The Spirit/life actualizes the presence of the Father and of Jesus in the individual and in the community. The Spirit/life is the mode of permanent presence that replaces the corporal presence of Jesus among those who belong to him (John 14:16-19). Jesus himself puts his presence through the Spirit above his historical presence; in effect he says to his disciples, "It is for your good that I am leaving you, for if I do not go your Advocate [the Spirit] will not come, whereas if I go I will send him to you" (John 16:7). In fact, the physical presence of Jesus, with his overwhelming superiority can be a hindrance in the personal development of his followers, occasioning a childish dependence; inner identification with him, produced by the Community of the Spirit, is what brings about Christian development (John 14:20: "Then you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you"). More than an outward model, Jesus wants to be a vital inner impulse in the life of limitless love.

In this way, the Spirit is the force that unifies the Christian community. It is the unity of life and love, which creates equality and leads to the unity of commitment. Within the unlimited individual diversity of character and abilities, there is only one basic commitment: to work to convey life to humanity.

It is also the Spirit who inspires the prayer of the community. Prayer has two aspects, union with God and petition to God. Union with the Father and with Jesus is given with the Spirit himself, which is the presence of them both within the Christian (John 14:23), and Christian prayer basically consists in awareness of this reality; if it is expressed in words, it turns into praise and thanksgiving. But petition for necessities is also the effect of the Spirit, for it is nothing but a manifestation of universal love, which he pours into human beings.

In the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), the prayer that Jesus taught, the union is presupposed: it is what permits Christians to call God "Father." What Jesus teaches in this prayer is how the Christian community ought to ask. He establishes an order: the first three petitions refer to all of humankind, the last three to the community itself.

In the first part, Christians, having experienced the rule of God over them, when the Spirit/life was conveyed to them, bringing about the relation of Father and children between God and humans, want the same for all humanity. Each petition presupposes an experience, expresses a desire and implies a commitment to activity that may contribute to actualizing it (Matthew 5:9). "That your name be hallowed" asks that humanity come to understand that God is the Father and giver of life (Matthew 5:16) and that only he can satisfy the deepest human aspiration. "Thy Kingdom come" asks for human beings the gift of Spirit/life, a petition that presupposes the choice of universal love, the choice for God and against money (Matthew 5:6), a choice for the divine plan, the Kingdom of God.

In the second part the Christian community prays for itself ("our," "we") in order to rise to and stay at the height of its mission in the world. "Give us this day our daily bread" expresses the desire that the union, love and joy characteristic of the banquet promised for the future ("of tomorrow"), symbol of the final stage of the Kingdom of God, be actual in the present community. "Forgive us our offenses, etc." expresses the desire that the Father

pour his love/pardon continually over his community and its members, on condition that they promise to manifest their love/pardon for all those who offend them. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" asks that the community know how to resist the temptations that Jesus conquered: that of seeking one's own advantage in the plan of God, that of acting irresponsibly in seeking one's own glory, and that of trying to rule over people with the pretext of spreading the Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:1-11). To yield to any of these, giving oneself over to evil, the personification of the ambition for power, would make the mission empty and futile; salt would have lost its flavor (Matthew 5:13).

Another aspect in which the Spirit is manifest in the community is that of the gifts. A gift is not simply a present that has fallen from heaven, independent of the qualities of the person receiving it. Being fruit of the Spirit/love, which develops and empowers the qualities of a person, the gift involves the development or qualities existing in the individual so that he or she may put them to the service of humanity or the Christian community.

Thus, the gift of being an apostle develops the Christian's capacity of organization, making him or her suitable to found new communities and to educate them in the faith.

The gift of prophecy involves sensitivity both to the Spirit and to the historical moment. It also involves the refinement of intuition. This sensitivity and refinement make the prophet capable of perceiving the state of a community at a given time—its harmony with the Spirit or lack of harmony, its need for liberation, of enthusiasm, of openness, of commitment. The prophet is then capable of knowing the lines of development that, in conformity to the Spirit and to the qualities of the members of the community, should be proposed. By means of prophecy and in the light of each new historical moment, the Spirit is continuously re-reading the message of Jesus and continues discovering its powers in response to the needs that continuously arise (John 16:13). Thus the "then" of the message combines with the "now" of history as the language in which God is totally reasserting His address to humanity.

The evangelist is the enthusiast empowered by the Spirit, whose preaching in the communities lifts their spirit and stimulates them to maintain and increase their joining to the Lord. The teacher keeps the message of Jesus alive in the community. The importance of instruction is decisive, for the power of the Spirit is inseparable from the foundation of the message. The prophet, inspired by the Spirit, makes actual the teaching of Jesus; the teacher, aided by the Spirit, recalls and deepens the message as such. The gifts are complementary to one another.

Any human quality can be transformed into a gift; thus I Corinthians 12:28f, adds after those of apostle, prophet and teacher, "then there are gifts of working miracles, then gifts of healing, or the ability to help others, or power to guide them, or the gift of ecstatic utterance of various kinds."

The importance that the Apostle Paul gives to prophecy is noteworthy: "Put love first, but there are other gifts of the Spirit at which you should aim also, and above all prophecy" (I Corinthians 14:1) He further adds that in the Christian community all are capable of it: "If the whole assembly is using the 'strange tongues' of ecstasy and some uninstructed persons or unbelievers should enter, will they not think you are mad?" (I Corinthians 14:24; cf. Matthew 5:12: "prophets before you"). In fact, the prophecy or inspired message constitutes the permanent teaching of Jesus to the community, applying the message to the state and circumstances in which it is living. And consequently, to establish and discern true prophecy it is necessary ceaselessly to remember the message of Jesus.

If the Spirit/love unites and assimilates Christians to Jesus, it is clear that it not only forms and gives life to the community but that in the same way, it impels the church to mission, which is the continuation of the work begun by Jesus. Moreover, universal love, which is the Spirit, necessarily leads to work for the good of humanity and to make Jesus's model of the individual and of society pervade the human race. Therefore in John 20:21 the gift of the Spirit immediately follows the mission assignment. Being love, the Spirit impels the commitment to humanity; being love, it can communicate it to people; being power, it sustains them in difficulties and persecution (Mark 13:11: "So when you are arrested and taken away, do not worry beforehand about what you will say, but when the time comes say whatever is given you to say; for it is not you who will be speaking, but the Holy Spirit.") In fact in the midst of persecution, the Spirit prevents the community from being frightened or feeling guilty for not having accepted the values of an unjust society that judges and condemns it. The Spirit makes the community see that in spite of the discredit that grieves it, in Jesus is life and in the system is death (John 16:8-11).

3. A Community of Free People

In Jesus's day, to eat while reclining was a privilege reserved for free persons; on no occasion was a slave or servant permitted to adopt this posture to eat. Thus in the Jewish Paschal supper the meal was eaten reclining as a symbol of the freedom won for Israel with the exodus from Egypt. It is notable that the gospels, whenever they mention that Jesus eats with his followers, always indicate that they reclined at the table. Mark points that out in the meal Jesus had with his disciples and numerous unsavory characters who are following him (Mark 2:15). The same is the case in the narrative of the Last Supper (Mark 14:18; John 13:12, 23) and in the description of the new, future society (the banquet of the Kingdom), which will also incorporate the pagans (Matthew 8:11).

The freedom belonging to Jesus's followers is due to everyone in the new community who possess the same Spirit, which establishes in each one the relation of son to God the Father. This relation excludes fear (I John 4:18: "There is no room for fear in love; ... anyone who fears has not attained to love"), for the Father does not require submission and obedience; what he hopes and wants (John 4:23) is the likeness of his sons with himself. (Matthew 5:48: "There must be no limit to your goodness, as your heavenly Father's goodness knows no bounds"). The experience of God as Father, not as Lord, creates the fundamental freedom of the Christian, liberating him or her from all slavery and submission (John 8:21, 36). This condition is reflected in the Christian community where there are not some who give commands and others who obey; some who are above, and others who are below; the mutual relationship is that of friendship (III John 15).

This Jesus affirms when he was reproached for not following the tradition of the spiritual teachers who imposed rigid ascetic observances on their disciples (Mark 2:18: the fast). For Jesus the festive atmosphere that ought to exist in his community (hence the comparison to a wedding) excludes the sadness of a fast, and the bond that unites his followers to him is not that of obedience, but of friendship (Mark 2:19: "the friends of the bridegroom;" Luke 12:4; John 15:15).

Jesus therefore does not wish that his disciples have a childish dependence on him, but wants them to be autonomous adults, responsible for their life and activities. The message itself is not proclaimed as the message of Jesus; Christians present it as their own, because they have made it their own (John 17:20). It is not proclaimed as something learned, but something vitally internalized. The Christian's decisions are not made because Jesus ordered them but because, illumined by him, the individual understands each choice as the

only path to full development and the only means for creating a just society. They are not felt as a burden, but as a joy that is born from having encountered an answer to the human being's deepest aspirations (Matthew 13:44-46).

Jesus's and his disciples' experience of liberty must be communicated to other people. Therefore in the stories of the bread, Jesus or his disciples on his behalf have the people sit on the grass or soil to eat (Mark 6:39, 8:6), signifying thereby the freedom to which they are called. In the Gospel of John, only when they are reclining as free men do they cease to be a "multitude" (John 6:5) and become "adult people" (John 6:10).

4. A Community of Equals

The fundamental equality of the members of the community of Jesus is illustrated by Matthew in the parable of the workers in the vineyard (19:30-20:16). The parable makes clear that all those called to work for a new humanity ("the vineyard," symbol of the Kingdom of God) receive the same daily wage, regardless of the time when they were called or of the fatigue from labor. This equal wage for all is a figure of the Spirit/life that each member of the community receives as the fruit of his or her labor, decisions and dedication.

According to the parable, work in the new community is not to be done for the sake of recompense, but voluntarily, as the spontaneous fruit of the Spirit/love. Work is not done to create inequality but to attain equality among all people, and this must be obvious in the Christian community. The amount or quality of work or service, the person's age or productivity does not create situations of privilege, nor is it the source of merit, for this service must be the disinterested response to the appeal heard in freedom.

Jesus himself establishes a bond of equality with his followers by calling them "friends" (Mark 2:17; Luke 12:4; John 15:15) and "brothers" (Mark 3:35; Matthew 28:10; John 20:17). Therefore it is not permitted for there to be inequality among his followers (Matthew 23:8-10).

Equality does not, however, rule out the organization of the community. It is indispensable for a community to be organized when it tries to develop internal and external activity. The organization is based precisely on the actual presence of particular gifts—the members' natural or acquired gifts, empowered by the Spirit and put at the service of love. The gift of each, recognized by the community, enables him or her to carry out certain functions in the group and to direct certain activities. It must be remembered that the organization is for fulfilling functions, and does not constitute a fixed and permanent institution; its criterion is what is necessary and appropriate above all for the function of mission. And it must always be kept in mind that in the Christian community the qualification of persons or the responsibility that they accept does not award any superiority. The difference among gifts does not create ranks or levels.

5. A Community Open to All

Jewish society was characterized by its compartmentalization and marginalization and its feeling of superiority vis-à-vis other peoples; this feeling resulted in a pride, a sense of distance from others, justified theologically by its being a "people elected" by God. The reasons for marginalization always had a religious motive, or at least pretext.

Jewish nationalism, which excluded other peoples, may seem to be only a problem of the past. Nevertheless, new “elect peoples” are created nowadays. Such is the case with the nationalism that affirms a certain peculiar feature to be an aspect of superiority or that tries to isolate a group and set up barriers to communicating with other human beings. On the level of the planet as a whole, that is already the case with the so-called “first world” with respect to the poor peoples of the earth. Like the Jewish nation of long ago, the “first world” considers it natural to be the recipient of “divine blessings,” wellbeing, riches and hegemony, while often remaining indifferent to the fortune of the “unelected” people. Permeated with the feeling of superiority, it proposes its model of society to other peoples, while its conduct with them shows its lack of solidarity and exploitation.

Against the particularism and exclusivity of Jewish society in Jesus’s time, he opens the doors to all the marginalized within and outside that society. He approaches those who are socially despised, particularly the non-believers, called “sinners” by those who observed the law meticulously. Not only does he draw near to them but he also invites them to be part of his group (Mark 2:14), which was composed partly of people coming from the religious system and partly by others, who were excluded from it and hence from society.

This configuration can be seen in the banquet that is celebrated after the call of Levi, the tax collector/sinner, representative of this marginalized class. At the table, the tax collectors and non-believers, who have been accepted in the person of Levi (Mark 2:15), are reclining, on an equal footing with Jesus and his disciples (the followers who came out of Judaism). This banquet is the figure of the universal community of Jesus, for when the non-believing Israelites refuse to join, the way is clear for the pagans, the non-believers par excellence for the Jews, to become participants.

Jesus does not only affirm equality among individual persons, but also equality among peoples. Accepting pagans and integrating them into the new society is expressed by Mark in the story of the paralytic (2:1-13). In it, four litter-bearers (corresponding to the four cardinal points of the compass; 2:3) represent the humanity that is approaching Jesus eager for salvation; the paralytic represents the same humanity, which, because of its state of death/sin (paralysis), needs to be saved. In contrast to the contempt and hostility of Judaism for the pagan peoples, destined (according to the official theology) to be subjected to Israel, the work of Jesus with them consists in erasing the past of injustice that paralyzes them and prevents their development (2:5) and in communicating new life/Spirit (2:1) to them, which enables them to achieve full humanity.

Matthew and Luke, in the stories that describe the cure of the centurion’s servant (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10), announce the salvation that the message of Jesus offers to humanity without distinction of person, race or religion. John, for his part, expresses this universal offer of salvation in the story of curing the son of the royal official (John 4:46b-54). Matthew and Luke refer to it when they announce that people coming from the four cardinal directions will participate in the joy of the Messianic banquet (symbol of the future society), while the Israelites, who refuse the universal program of Jesus, are excluded from it (Matthew 8:10-12; Luke 13:28-30). Jesus affirms this in the parable of the murderous vineyard workers (Mark 12:9) and in the parable of those invited to the banquet (Matthew 22:1-10; Luke 14:15-24).

The principle that underlies the praxis of Jesus is that what is important, decisive, primary, and of supreme value for the human is to be a human person. Belonging to a race, to a culture, speaking a certain language, adhering to a particular tradition, having attained a certain level of development—all these are secondary aspects that cannot be used to create division nor to demonstrate superiority over other people or nations. The principle has its

ultimate basis in the universal offer of the love of God to humanity; all individuals are called to be children of God without discrimination or difference. It is to be the mission of Christians and of the Christian communities to put the value of the human being above every particularism and to be opposed to it whenever it breaks the fundamental unity of the human race or creates obstacles for unity.

The letter to the Ephesians describes the plan of God to carry history to his fulfillment in this way: "that the universe, all in heaven and on earth, might be brought into a unity in Christ;" it is the universal unity, that has its basis in the unity of human beings ("the earthly") with God ("the heavenly"), from which the new human relation, that of love, will arise. The Messiah made possible the unification of humanity by abolishing the Jewish law, which constituted the pride of that people and the barrier that separated them from the rest of humanity (Ephesians 2:14: "he is our peace; he who of two peoples [Jews and Gentiles] made one and broke down the divisive barrier, the hostility, abolishing the law and regulations; thus with the two created in himself a new humanity").

In the midst of a humanity corrupted by injustice, ancient Israel should have been a just society, a society that made the true God known. Its mission was centripetal, meaning it was to present a model of society that would be a focus attracting all peoples (Mark 11:17). This mission failed historically; Israelite society became as unjust as the others (Isaiah 1:10-18; 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:1-13; 7; Ezekiel 34, and others).

In the Gospel of Mark, the followers of Jesus coming out of Judaism constitute the Messianic Israel ("the twelve;" Mark 3:13ff). To this new Israel Jesus assigns a universal mission, but this time it is centrifugal, inverting the calling of this people: instead of being the attracting center, it is to be put at the service of all humankind (Mark 3:14ff). This fact is illustrated in the second story of the loaves (Mark 8:1-9) in which Jesus charges the disciples (followers coming from Judaism) to serve bread to a pagan multitude.

This universal acceptance and service must be characteristic of the community of Jesus (Matthew 28: 16-20). It is symbolized by the tiny mustard weed that becomes a huge tree, spreading wide its branches where the birds of the air can gather, a figure of people of all groups and nations (Mark 4:30-32).

6. A Community of Solidarity

The decision to be poor (Matthew 5:3), given by Jesus as the indispensable condition for starting the alternative society ("the Kingdom of God"), has to be the constitutive decision for his community (Matthew 16:24: "He who wants to come with me must renounce himself," meaning that he must renounce personal ambition). Consequently, Jesus urges that his followers not accumulate wealth nor put their trust in money (Matthew 6:19-21), and he stressed the incompatibility between faith in God and worship of money (Matthew 6:24).

Humans cannot, however, live without support and security. Thus Jesus, confronting the false and unjust security that the accumulation of wealth offers, proposes an alternative security, that of the Father's love, which is manifest in the love of brothers and sisters. In effect, the community lives from the Spirit, which is the force of the life/love of the Father, and this experience impels each to deliver himself to others with a similar love. Thus is created a multiple bond of love and solidarity among the members of the community, which gives to it its unity and to each member the needed security.

So it is explained that Jesus asks his followers that they not worry for the goods necessary for life; for the love of the Father, which is made present in the love of the brothers and sisters, will take care of them; this new security permits them to give themselves without reservation to work for justice (Matthew 6:25-34).

From the renunciation of wealth is born generosity, another characteristic of the community of Jesus. For him, the value of the person is measured precisely by his openhandedness, while stinginess impoverishes and makes a person miserable (Matthew 6:22). Therefore those who are his must show their solidarity in generous sharing, not only among the members of the group but equally with those outside it.

It is through sharing that sharing is taught and learned; such is the lesson that Jesus gives in the stories of the loaves (Mark 6:34-35). In face of the problem of the multitude's hunger, the disciples show how much they are lacking in solidarity, and they ask Jesus to dismiss the people so that each can fend for himself as well as he can (Mark 6:36). When Jesus, paradoxically, invites them to give them food, they object that there is no money to buy it (Mark 6:37). In response, Jesus takes all the food that they have and gives it to the disciples so that they can serve the people (Mark 6:41; 8:6). The abundance of the leftovers (Mark 6:43; 8:8) shows the power of sharing. The lesson of these stories is that, if there be solidarity, it will resolve the problem of hunger. And it is the mission of the Christian community to demonstrate a solidarity that impels other people to generosity.

Sharing shows love; the gift of bread would be incomplete and would be humiliating if it did not include the gift of the person. Jesus does not intend that there exist among people a merely material benefit, but also a relation of mutual love that is expressed by giving generously.

Therefore, in the Gospel of John, after the story of the loaves (6:1-15), Jesus reproaches the multitude for seeking him for only material satisfaction without having understood the love that he had shown them by spreading out the bread (6:26). The people worry about material food, which gives transitory life, but not love, the food that enables one to grow and gives one everlasting life (6:27). They want someone to guarantee their daily sustenance; they are disposed to receive, but not to love. For Jesus, however, the solution is not in putting power into the hands of one person (6:15) but in the love of everyone.

7. A Community of Service

Jesus's disciples from Judaism ("the twelve") kept the hierarchical mentality typical of the Jewish world and tried to make themselves superior to others (Mark 9:33b-34). Bringing this attitude into the open, Jesus reacts by enunciating the principle that in his community "to be first," meaning to be nearer to him, comes about only by renouncing all ambition for preeminence (9:35: "to be last of all") and by having the attitude of service to all the members of the community ("servant of all"). He uses as an example one of his followers whom Mark describes as a child (9:36a), thus resuming in this figure the traits of "last" and "servant." Jesus embraces this follower showing his identification with him and his affection for him (9:36b).

The ambition of the twelve arises again at the time of the journey up to Jerusalem (Mark 10:32-34). The sons of Zebedee ask Jesus that they might occupy the first places in the Messianic kingdom, which, they hoped, Jesus was about to inaugurate in the capital (10:37). The two brothers' ambition provokes the indignation of the other members of the group (10:41), who, in their hearts, want the same thing for themselves. Jesus takes advantage of the occasion to confront them with the idea that the Messianic ideal they

profess is no different from any other tyranny imposed on humanity (10:42). He insists on continuing in the attitude appropriate of his followers: to be "first" it is necessary to be at the service of the community (cf. Matthew 23:11; Luke 22:24-27); to be "great" it is necessary to become a servant, meaning it is necessary that one feel solidarity with the oppressed of all humanity. Therefore, following Jesus, no Christian may demand the service of others in the community, but rather each is to give service and in addition be open to work fearlessly for the liberation of the oppressed (Mark 10:44).

The meaning of service to people is specified in the Gospel of John in the story of the washing of feet (John 13:2-17). In this scene, Jesus, the "Lord" (13:13f) becomes the servant of his disciples: he ties a cloth to his waist, pours water into a basin and begins to wash and dry their feet (13:4f). Making himself a servant he gives them the rank of "lords," a term which in the Gospel of John does not mean that they have others at their service (15:15) but are free individuals who are not subject to anyone. Jesus' service consists therefore in giving people dignity and liberty, lifting them to a condition similar to his. This, moreover, is the mission he gives to his disciples (13:14f). Christians' service to humanity is not to consist, then, in charity exercised from above, humiliating the recipient, but, by renouncing all kinds of domination and superiority, in helping people from below to achieve their full dignity, their human stature.

This service does not diminish the dignity of those to whom it is endowed. Jesus, in serving, does not lose in any moment his condition as "Lord" (13:13f). In society, service is interested or humiliating and therefore debases the individual; in exchange that of Jesus and those joined to him is a service for love, freely handing over to the person an authentic life that develops and makes the person grow.

June 28:

Second Conversation: The Renewed Catholic Church

1. The Living Sacramentality of the Church

In spite of all the signs of life, hope and security that God is present in our midst and blesses us, the declaration of the Roman Catholic hierarchy puts us, from the sacramental point of view, in a very difficult position. We are all aware that the flowering of life and gifts, as well as the attractiveness of our communion and its rapid growth, are tightly bound to liberty in the Spirit, to joy and love for all, that is alive in our communities. We also recognize that the source from which come all these gifts is the sacramental life, for we have centered our spirituality around the Eucharist.

Sacramentality, however, we do not understand in an isolated way, for it is an integral part of the life of the church. Christ is the great sacrament, through whom the Father communicates to us the grace of the new life (Romans 5:12). The church is the sacrament of Christ, through whose witness and ministry he is made present, communicating his life through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Cf. Romans 12:4-5; I Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 4:12; I Peter 2:5). It is in this context that we must understand the significance and validity of the seven sacraments; for the outpouring of the Spirit that is conveyed to us through each of them comes from the totality of the church; and the gifts and ministries that are received are destined for building up the body, which is the whole church. According to the Apostolic tradition, the totality of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, in the sense we have explained and experience it, makes itself present, real,

efficacious sacramentally in each local church. (I Corinthians 1:2). Moreover the mystery of the church as the body of Christ uniquely becomes actual and manifest in each local church, which, in turn, is open to communion with other local churches in order to signify its catholic and ecumenical character.

2. The Local Church as the People of God and Sacrament of the Universal Church

Having clarified these matters, we move now to see why the local church is the space in which the church is sacramentally manifest, what is the role the diverse forms of ordained ministry have in the local church and what are the standards that give sacramental validity both to the local church and to the ordained ministries, specifically to the bishop.

For the Apostolic tradition, the local church is the visible reality where the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church, finding its culminating sacramental expression in the Eucharistic celebration, is made present. In the local church, in accord with the organization going back to the first days of the church, is to be seen the People of God (Romans 1:6-7; I Corinthians 1:2; Revelation 21:3). It is structured in a synodical and participatory form (cf. Acts 15:6-22), with a diversity of gifts and ministries. Among these is the ordained ministry, comprising deacons, priests and the bishop (Acts 6:1-7, 11:30, 20:28; Philippians 1:1; I Timothy 3:1-8, 5:17). This forms more or less clearly a communion of communities (Cf. Galatians 1:2). The characteristic principle of the local church is the equality of all its members (Cf. I Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28). The parable of the day workers is a magnificent illustration of this equality (Cf. Matthew 19:30-20:16). The basis of equality is that all the members have received the same dignity on being consecrated as a priestly people (Cf. I Peter 2:9ff) and all have been made children and heirs to the life of liberty (Cf. Galatians 4:28-5:1). Everyone has received the anointing of the Holy Spirit and therefore, as opposed to those who want to impose doctrines and rituals on the community, John proclaims, "I write you concerning those who try to ensnare you. But you have the Holy Spirit with which Jesus Christ has consecrated you, and do not need anyone to teach you, because the Spirit whom He has given you instructs you concerning all the things and his teachings are true and do not lie. Remain united to Christ, be conformed to what the Spirit has taught you" (I John 2:26-27).

The ministry ordained by the Spirit is never to be understood as something that put above the community, but as a gift bestowed by the Holy Spirit (Cf. Acts 20:28), recognized by the community (Cf. I Timothy 4:14, Acts 1:12-26) and at the service of and for the upbuilding of the community (Cf. Ephesians 4:11-13). By this reason, it must be exercised with humility and void of all intention to impose its own pleasures or standards, or to try to make uniform, instead of which the Spirit will unify; or to try to take the place of Jesus himself. John, on telling us the story of the last supper, which is the point of reference commonly accepted as the basis of the ordained ministry, leaves unsaid the cultic aspects of the memorial of bread and wine—which are central in the synoptics—and limits himself to presenting to us the washing of feet, which symbolizes the attitude of extreme humility which the ordained ministry is called to exercise: "You call me Master and Lord, and with reason, for that I am. For if I, the Master and Lord, wash your feet, you also must wash one another's feet. I have given you an example so that you may do the same as I have done for you" (John 13:13-15).

3. The Sense of the Faith of the Church, Manifest and Operative in the Local Church

The active presence of the Spirit in the members of the church means not only that not each believer as an individual but also that the whole community together develops a supernatural capacity that allows it to know and discern the truth. In theology this has been given the name, "the sense of the faithful," or "the sense of the faith of the church," which we can call "the sense of the faith of the People of God." This sense of the faith is not the privilege of a group of directors or leaders but is a gift that belongs to the whole community. It is the principle of basic discernment. It is what allows consensus to be created and it is also what bases and empowers the church to take on its responsibilities, actualize decisions and make choices. During the history of the church, the recognition of the "sense of faith" has played a very important role: for example, when the Arian heresy, which denied the divinity of Jesus Christ, was supported by many, many bishops, it was the People of God who, with its sense of faith, made the witness that the Spirit gave in their hearts prevail, affirming the divinity of the Lord. Something similar happened in the council of Ephesus, on proclaiming Jesus to be true God and true man. Therefore, for Augustine of Hippo the sense of faith of the church held greater weight than the arguments of the theologians (see Augustine, *Contra Julianum* I: 29 and 31).

In spite of the transcendent importance that this dimension occupies in the Apostolic tradition, with the process of clericalizing and then centralizing the various functions and roles of and in the church, the recognition of the importance of the "sense of the faith of the People of God" more and more lost its relevance, until it was reduced to a mere theological concept, which was explained more or less artificially. For this reason, space for the people to express and participate in the actual life of the local church are not open; instead, the effort is made to reduce them to receiving, more or less submissively and passively, the dispositions of the leaders, under pain of the being accused of insubordination and lack of humility, of suffering marginalization and persecution, and eventually of being expelled from the institution.

4. The Election of the Bishop as the Right and Responsibility of the Local Church

The capacity, coming directly from the Holy spirit, of discerning, creating consensus, experiencing the unity and celebrating the faith through prayer and the sacraments, is what makes each local church the true sacrament in which the totality of the church is manifest. This capacity is the basis of the rights and duties that she has. Among these a very important one is the election of its own bishop. This ministry, given by the Lord as a gift among other gifts, must be discerned and recognized by the local church. For this reason this practice cannot just be remembered as an out-dated custom that was practiced in the first millennium, but, given its solid basis in Scripture and in the sacramental constitution of the church as a priestly people, must be rediscovered and reestablished as an integral part of the of Apostolic tradition in those places where it has been lost.

Consequently, we believe that the first criterion that gives legitimacy and Apostolic validity to the episcopacy is the fact that the local church, formed by the People of God, organized as a communion of communities, along with their ordained ministers and acting in a participative and synodical way, in a climate of prayer and discernment, does the electing. The task of the local church in such circumstance is that of recognizing on the basis of its sense of faith who is the ordained minister to whom the Lord has given the grace and has chosen to exercise the role of the bishop. If this first criterion is set aside, we believe that all the other steps are like castles in the air, because an essential and original element of the Apostolic tradition has been distorted.

5. Implementing the Apostolic Tradition with Care

As evident to all, through the length of our process of discernment, we have tried to be faithful and to follow carefully each of the three criteria that, from the perspective of the Apostolic tradition, give sacramental validity to the local church and to the ordination of its bishop. For we are completely convinced that what justifies our existence and what guarantees that we continue growing and be a ferment of renewal is our disposition and commitment to rediscover and reestablish all the elements and characteristics that constitute the genuine and whole Apostolic tradition. That is, that filled with the Spirit, living in free, pluralistic and inclusive communities we shall, in the way we organize ourselves and live as the church, succeed in shaping ourselves as the Scriptures witness and the indivisible church lived. For that reason we believe we ought to continue on the road along which the Lord has guided us to the present, for he has given us signs and experiences that make us certain that we are maintaining the full Catholic and Apostolic communion. But also it is required that with profound humility we be in constant conversion so that stripped of egoism we can discover and transmit, with ever greater clarity, the inestimable treasures of his Kingdom.

6. A Time of Grace for Our Church: Our Ecumenical Commitment

The moment in which we live we recognize as “God’s time, a special time of grace for us.” For being constituted sacramentally as the local church, where is manifest and actualized the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, symbolized by the presence of the bishop and by the bond with other local churches, we can experience at least spiritually ecumenical and catholic communion. Likewise we recognize the commitment that we have to work tirelessly so that, rediscovering the original meaning of the ordained ministry, of the Episcopal ministry in general and the Petrine ministry in particular, we can achieve the desired historic unity in pluralism, diversity, and mutual respect through recognizing the dignity, identity, characteristics and functions of each local church.

This implies that the Bishop of Rome, as successor to the Apostle Peter, reestablish fully the characteristics and scope of ministry that Christ gave him, namely to preside in love (Cf. John 21:15-19; Ignacio of Antioch, *Prologue to the Letter to the Romans*) and take on the style of ministerial practice that, during the first millennium, the undivided church recognized: that of the Bishop of Rome being first among equals, not diminishing the autonomy of each local church, an autonomy that Christ conferred (Matthew 18:18) and the Apostolic tradition recognized. We also believe that each of the local churches and collegial bodies to which they are bound must be open to recognize that Christ is the only Lord and true Shepherd of his church and that, through the Holy Spirit, he continues to be the master who teaches and effectively guides the church (Cf. Matthew 23:9, John 14:16; 14:26; 15:26 and 16:7), so that we ordained ministers, regardless of the rank our ministry may have attained, are to embody the same attitude as Christ, of whom St. Paul wrote, “The divine nature was his from the first; yet he did not think to snatch at equality with God, but made himself nothing, assuming the nature of a slave” (Philippians 2:6-7). Jesus teaches us unequivocally that one who receives a ministry in the church, contrary to what happens in the world, “must be your servant; and whoever wants to be first must be the willing slave of all—like the Son of Man; he did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give up his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26-28).

7. Implications of Our Ecumenical Commitment

From our poverty and smallness we see ourselves in communion with the whole church, and feel ourselves called to pray, to be concerned for and to love every human being and all of creation. Thus with St. Augustine to “those who say to us, ‘You are not our brothers,’ to those who call us sectarians and ... who ask us, ‘Why do they look for us, whom they do not like?’ we respond to them, ‘They are our brothers.’ And if they still refuse, saying, ‘Get away from us, we have nothing to do with you,’ we insist because we know that indeed we have to deal with them; if we recognize the same Christ, we must be united in one body. Therefore we pray for those who judge according to the flesh, who are nevertheless our brothers, for they celebrate the same sacraments as we, although not with us, and they respond to same Amen as we, although not with us; for which we do not hesitate to lavish on them before God, the most intimate of our love for them” (St. Augustine, Commentary on the Psalm 32:29).

As the concrete manifestation of this love and communion, in the culminating moment of our life, when our church makes itself actual as a sacrament of the whole church in celebrating the Eucharist, we have chosen to maintain explicitly our prayer for the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, for all other bishops, for the ordained ministers, and for those who from their heart-felt convictions care for the People of God, which more or less explicitly embraces all humanity redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. This prayer expressed in such a sublime moment signals the importance we give and the commitment we make to work with boldness and resolution so that the communion with all churches and all humanity, which by the witness of the Spirit is for us a spiritual reality, can progressively achieve its full historicity, being manifest as a visible unity within the recognition of the autonomy of each local church, presided over in love as a first among equals by the Bishop of Rome, successor of the Apostle Peter.

8. Conclusion: the Process of Change, with the Attitude of Saint Mary

We know that the road is hard. Nevertheless, now, having been constituted as the sacramental presence of the universal church, the certainty of the call that the Lord has made to us is reaffirmed, and we feel ourselves full of the grace of the Spirit and the divine energy for fulfilling the mission that he has entrusted to us. As we start off on this road, we are aware that it behooves us to commit ourselves to the end that each of the communities that make up our church may be constantly renewed by the power of the Spirit. We know also that we must press toward the goal that in every aspect of the life of our communities and of our whole church all the aspects belonging to the Apostolic tradition may be carefully reestablished in our thinking and feeling, in celebration, in giving witness, in evangelizing, in the ministry of presiding, in the ecclesiastical structure, and above all in love. And, from this attitude of humility and continuous conversion and renewal, it behooves us to support by all possible means the work so that as communities and as churches we may attain full historic unity. With profound joy and enthusiasm we entrust this new exodus to Saint Mary, helper of Christians, and with her and like her we say to the Father, “So be it—let it be to me according to your word.” “So that we may be one as Father and Son are one in the Holy Spirit.”

June 28:

Third Conversation: The Renewed Catholic Mission

Pope Paul VI in one of his speeches about the church said that "the name of the church is mission." He was trying to underline the basic meaning of the church, which is to carry forward in time and space the mission that the Father entrusted to Christ and that Christ entrusted to the Apostles. That is valid for the whole church, but it has an even more special force for us Renewed Catholics, who believe that the gift that God has given us and the mission that he has entrusted to us has to reach out to all people and all places.

1. Problems in the Mission Activity of Our Communities

It is necessary that we identify some problems that are somehow coming into our communities and that hinder the development of a true missionary attitude.

Perhaps the first problem is that often we have still not become fully aware of what the Lord is doing among us and of what the mission is that he has entrusted to us.

Some still live in a certain confusion about what has been left behind. Perhaps, many have the same state of mind as did the Israelites in the desert who continued to look toward Egypt (Exodus 16: 1-3).

The attitude of others resembles the experience of those Christians who came from Judaism who continued to trust in the law rather than in faith and in the grace of Jesus Christ. This frame of mind is precisely what Paul reproached them for (Galatians 3: 1-5).

In others perhaps it is a matter of a certain attitude of passivity and resignation: one remains in the community, resigned to continue life as it now is, and keep the communities as they are.

In order to overcome these temptations it is necessary for us to be aware of the validity of our mission; we have to stop looking at what is left behind in order to follow Christ fully; we have to realize that what gives force to our mission is not approval of others but the witness of the Spirit within us; and we have to promise to work arduously to carry out the mission impulse.

Let us examine each of these four aspects

2. The Validity of our Mission

The first point that we must see is that the Lord has entrusted to us a mission that is fundamental to his project of salvation.

Everyone has a past; we have all had certain experiences before becoming Renewed Catholics. Now we have to realize that, what has been experienced is part of a project that God has had for us from the beginning. What happened to Joseph (Genesis 50:20) is happening to us, "God turned the evil into good in order to save the lives of many people." This awareness should make us feel deeply blessed by the Lord. What Jesus says in the Gospel of John applies to us in every way: "You did not choose me, but I have chosen you and have appointed you to bear much fruit, fruit that shall last" (John 15: 16).

3. Stop Looking Back

In the gospels, Jesus is very clear about the qualities of those who are to be his disciple.

The Gospels of Matthew (8:19-22) and Luke (9:60-62) both make plain, blunt statements:

* Luke 9:62-- "He who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God.

* Luke 9:60—let the dead bury their dead; you see and proclaim the Kingdom of God.

So long as we are not able to understand the radicality of these words and put them into practice, following Jesus will not go beyond something superficial, a mere appearance of following. To follow looking back has two dimensions:

* Above all, it means to feel what has been left as a loss, and so to repeat, as we mentioned before, the experience of Israel in the desert. It is to have the liberty of God but to feel insecure because there is no human power that is commanding us, giving us approval or scolding us. This attitude is one of the surest signs of being lost in sin. We see it clearly in the condemnation pronounced in Genesis (3:16): "To the woman he said, 'your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall be your master.'" This passage is not speaking of the relation that God wants between man and woman, for God made them equal so that they might live in fellowship; rather it is the relationship of domination—submission—which takes place as a consequence of sin. This is what many experience with respect to what is left behind.

* Also it is to want to go on doing only what was done before the Lord came to us and constituted us as a living church. In the past when we were just a group within the Roman Church as well groups in places that were excluded from the sacraments, we were simply a spiritual movement. Now, still having all the spiritual power that we had then, the Lord has constituted us as the living presence of his Church. Therefore our mission is much broader and more demanding. To be limited to using the methods that we used before is to keep on working the fields with a hoe and machete when the Lord has given us all the machinery necessary to work his whole land without limitations of any kind.

14. Our Standard Is Not the Approval of People but the Witness of the Spirit

Many are dependent on what others say and their approval: members of other churches, civil or religious authorities or the opinion of those who have greater economic resources. At times the life of some communities depends more on the celebrations and thanksgivings that they ask those who have economic resources to make than a project really based in the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. When that happens, the communities are manipulated according to the convenience of some, be they leaders or those who want to have special activities for their personal or family celebrations. In these cases, the communities do not grow, they divide, have conflict within themselves, and are always dependent on what others say about them.

By contrast, in the Scripture we find what ought to be the standards to guide our attitude:

* Paul affirms in Galatians 1:10-11, "I do not seek the approval of men, but of God. I do not seek men's favor. If I sought men's favor, I should be no servant of Christ! I must make it clear to you, my friends, that the gospel you heard me preach is no human invention. I did not take it over from any man; no man taught it me; I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ."

* And also Philippians 2:3-4 says, "There must be no room for rivalry and personal vanity among you, but you must humbly reckon others better than yourselves. Look to

each other's interest and not merely to your own."

* The Apostle John affirms in I John 2:27: "You have the Holy spirit with which Jesus Christ has consecrated you, and do not need another teacher because the Spirit that he has given you instructs you in all things and his teachings are true and not lies. Remain united to Christ, be conformed to what the Spirit has taught you."

* And in Matthew 23:5,8-11, speaking of the Pharisees and the masters of the law, Jesus says, "All that they do they do for show. They go about with broad phylacteries and with large tassels on their robes; they like to have the place of honor at feasts and the chief seats at the synagogues, to be greeted respectfully in the street, and to be addressed as 'rabbi.' Do not call any man on earth 'Father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor may you be called 'teacher; you have one teacher, the Messiah. The greatest among you must be your servant."

* And in Matthew 6:1, Jesus also exhorts, "Be careful not to make a show of your religion before men; if you do, no reward awaits you in your Father's house in heaven."

According to these standards, our life style and our commitment to missionary action must have only one goal: to be grateful to the Lord in all things, to do what he wants and hopes of us, and not to be afraid of what others can say or criticize, provided that we are certain that we are fulfilling completely the will of God.

When some of us are discouraged or are bothered because of criticism, when some say that our community is not progressing according to others' criteria, when another is afraid or confused because of not doing what others are doing (whether they are Roman Catholics or Protestants)—when any of these is the case what is really going on is a lack of faith; there is no life in the Spirit. These people do not enjoy the life that comes from God because they do not know that their "hearts have become hard as stone" (Ephesians 4:18). In the face of all that, we have to trust completely the witness of the Spirit in our hearts and work ceaselessly for the glory of God.

5. Our Missionary Commitment

In Matthew 25:14-28, the parable of the master who entrusted his money to his servants before going on a trip; the one to whom he gave 10 returned 20 to him; the one to whom he gave 5 returned 10; but the one who received 1 buried the money and returned exactly what he had received. The first two received multiples what they had returned, but from the last was taken what he had returned. This parable clearly has a missionary character. It is speaking of the promise that the Christians make with respect to the gifts and the mission that the Lord entrusts to them.

We ought to keep this in mind in order to examine our response. Often we are content just to stick to what we already have so long, for example, as one family or another takes care of matters; or so long as a family gets together from time to time but only because of illness or need or rejection. Certainly all these attitudes are like those of the servant who buried the money he had received and returned it, for they lose even what they thought they had.

Before, when we were excluded and rejected, our commitment was small. But now that "the Lord has done great things for us and we are glad (Psalm 126:3), our commitment is very large. We cannot forget what Jesus says to us, "To whom much has been given, much is expected; to whom much has been entrusted, the more will he be required to repay" (Luke 12:48). We can identify our mission with what Jesus said to his Apostles just before he ascended into the heavens, "Jesus said, 'Full authority in heaven and on earth has been

committed to me. Go forth therefore and make all nations my disciples; baptize men everywhere in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20).

It is necessary that we understand each of these phrases so that we may put them fully into practice:

* God has given me full authority in heaven and on earth: this implies for us that the Lord has all the power and that, by the outpouring of the Spirit, the same authority that Christ possesses has been conveyed to us. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21).

* Go forth to all people: here the Lord is sending us to all people, without distinction of any sort.

* To all nations: this implies that there are no frontiers of any type. Therefore the Renewed Catholic does not have any limits on going where the Spirit sends him or her nor in proclaiming the Good News to all people everywhere.

* Make them my disciples; baptize them in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: This command for the first Christians implied integrating everyone into the community. In Acts we see a clear witness to how this took place in the beginning (Acts 2:41, 44).

* Teach them to obey all that I have commanded you: this means that, as members of the community, they are to learn to love and share their goods (Acts 4:33-35). John insists that the command of Jesus Christ is to learn to love (John 15:12).

As result of this, we must draw the following conclusions:

* The mission that Christ has given us has no boundaries.

* To be Renewed Catholic means that, full of the Holy Spirit, one takes on the same mission that the Apostles had, which, in turn, is the mission of Christ.

* We cannot tire in taking and fulfilling this mission if we want to be faithful to the Lord.

* What will happen to one who is not ready to take on the mission is what happened to the fig tree: “Jesus saw a fig tree that had leaves, and went to see if he could find anything on it. But when he came there he found nothing but leaves. Then he said to the fig tree, May no one ever again eat fruit from you!” (Mark 11:12-14). The leaves are the gifts and graces, the song and the praise. The fruit is our style of life and our missionary commitment.

* It would be important that we mediate on the following parable of the fig tree (Luke 13:6-9) and that we apply it to what the Lord is doing with us, to the opportunity that he gives us and to what he hopes to receive as result: “Jesus told them this parable: ‘A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and went to see if it was yielding figs, but he did not find any. So he said to the caretaker of the vineyard, “For three years I have come to this fig tree in search of fruit, but never found any. Cut it down, then. Why should it go on using up the soil?” But he replied, “Leave it, sir, this one year while I dig round it and manure it. And if it bears fruit next season, well and good; if not you shall have it down”’”(Luke 13:6-9).

6. Our Proposal:

To respond to the call that the Lord gives us, we have a proposal:

To declare the year 2009 the Mission Year.

This will mean that every region, parish, community and every brother and sister will be

newly aware of our identity and mission and commit to working tirelessly to create new communities and to visit those who have fallen or have never belonged to our communities.

No one can be excluded from this commitment. One person will fulfill it by visiting and proclaiming the Good News. Others can do it from the place where they are, praying or participating in the way that is possible for them. The ill and the elderly will join in by offering their limitations and sufferings.

But the principal responsibility will fall on each of the servants and leaders of the communities to create awareness through education and to organize mission programs in a systematic way, in which each and all of the members can be involved.