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## UNDER THE SIGN OF COMMUNION

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The final section of Pope John Paul's Letter on the New Millennium takes us back to the very heart of the new commandment Christ gave us: "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12). As the object of our Lenten meditation this year, may the Pope's letter contribute to our contemplation of Jesus, as we are encouraged to pursue the way of holiness! Truly, « *His Love is from age to age!* »

### WITNESSES TO LOVE

« *This is the other important area in which there has to be commitment and planning on the part of the universal Church and the particular [i.e., diocesan] Churches: the domain of communion, which embodies and reveals the very essence of the mystery of the Church. Communion is the fruit and demonstration of that love which springs from the heart of the Eternal Father and is poured out upon us through the Spirit which Jesus gives us (Cf. Rm. 5:5), to make us all "one heart and one soul" (Acts 4:32). It is in building this communion of love that the Church appears as "sacrament", as a "sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the human race" ["Lumen Gentium", 1]*

### " IF I HAVE NO LOVE "

«*The Lord's words on this point are too precise for us to diminish their import. Many things are necessary for the Church's journey through history, not least in this new century; but without charity, all will be in vain. It is again the Apostle Paul who in the hymn to love reminds us: even if we speak the tongues of men and angels, and if we have faith "to move mountains", but are without love, all will come to "nothing" (Cf. 1 Cor. 13:2). Love is truly the "heart" of the Church, as was well understood by Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, whom I proclaimed a Doctor of the Church precisely because she is an expert in the scientia amoris: "I understood that the Church had a Heart and that this Heart was aflame with Love. I understood that Love alone stirred the members of the Church to act... I understood that Love encompassed all vocations, that Love was everything"*

### A SPIRITUALITY OF COMMUNION

«*To make the Church the home and the school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God's plan and respond to the world's deepest yearnings. What does this mean in practice? Here too, our thoughts could run immediately to the action to be undertaken, but that would not be the right impulse to follow. Before making practical plans, we need to promote a spirituality of communion, making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons, and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up. A spirituality of communion indicated above all the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us. A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as "those who are a part of me". This makes us able to share their joys and sufferings, to see their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship. A spirituality of communion implies also the*

*ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a “gift for me”. A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to “make room” for our brothers and sisters, bearing “each other’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2).*

## **IN DAILY LIFE**

*« Communion must be cultivated and extended day by day and at every level in the structures of each Church’s life. There, relations between bishops, priests and deacons, between Pastors and the entire People of God, between clergy and Religious, between associations and ecclesial movements must all be characterized by communion. To this end, the structures of participation envisaged by Canon Law, such as the Council of Priests and the Pastoral Council, must be ever more highly valued. These of course are not governed by the rules of parliamentary democracy, because they are consultative rather than deliberative, yet this does not mean that they are less meaningful and relevant. The theology and spirituality of communion encourage a fruitful dialogue between Pastors and faithful: on the one hand uniting them a priori in all that is essential, and on the other leading them to pondered agreement in matters open to discussion.*

## **THE DIVERSITY OF VOCATIONS**

*« Such a vision of communion is closely linked to the Christian community’s ability to make room for all the gifts of the Spirit. The unity of the Church is not uniformity, but an organic blending of legitimate diversities. It is the reality of many members joined in a single body, the one Body of Christ (Cf. 1 Cor. 12:12). Therefore the Church of the third Millennium will need to encourage all the baptized and confirmed to be aware of their active responsibility in the Church’s life. Together with the ordained ministry, other ministries, whether formally instituted or simply recognized, can flourish for the good of the whole community, sustaining it in all its many needs: from catechesis to liturgy, from the education of the young to the widest array of charitable works. Certainly, a generous effort is needed – above all through insistent prayer to the Lord of the harvest (Cf. Mt. 9:38) – in promoting vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. There is a pressing need to implement an extensive plan of vocational promotion, based on personal contact and involving parishes, schools and families in the effort to foster a more attentive reflection on life’s essential values. These reach their fulfilment in the response which each person is invited to give to God’s call, particularly when the call implies a total giving of self and of one’s energies to the cause of the Kingdom. It is in this perspective that we see the value of all other vocations, rooted as they are in the new life received in the Sacrament of Baptism. In a special way it will be necessary to discover ever more fully the specific vocation of the laity, called “to seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God” [“Lumen Gentium”, 31], they “have their own role to play in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world... by their work for the evangelization and the sanctification of people [“Apostolicam Actuositatem”, 2].*

## **“ DUC IN ALTUM! ”**

*« Let us go forward in hope! A new millennium is opening before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture, relying on the help of Christ [who] bids us to set out once more on our journey: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19). » [Apostolic Letter translation by Zenit News Agency]*

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