

“For the Life of the World: A Pastoral Letter on the Church”

“I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”

John 10:10

Dear Sisters and Brothers in the Lord,

Today the Church throughout the world celebrates the great outpouring of God’s gift of new life. On Pentecost the Holy Spirit descends upon the Apostles gathered around the Mother of God to enkindle their hearts and inspire their tongues so that they might become messengers of God’s reconciling love. As your Bishop, I want to share with you my confidence in Christ’s saving power among us. Jesus is alive in his Church. In fact, now he is carrying out his mission right here in the Diocese of Rockville Centre, in our parishes and schools, in our agencies of healthcare and social outreach, in the grace-filled lives of our priests, deacons, consecrated women and men, and laity. Even in these times, when threats of violence at home and abroad unsettle us; even when the Church herself is disturbed by discord and scandal within her ranks; and even when our homes and workplaces are torn by division, we know that Christ remains present to comfort his people through the holy and unity-building instrument that is the Church. Today, as in times past, the Church of Christ serves her divine Savior by continuing his work of teaching, sanctifying, and nurturing the members of the human family.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) has enriched the lives of all Catholics, offering us a deeper understanding of the Church as the people of God made new in the blood of Christ. The Holy People of God excludes no faithful follower of Christ from its concern, seeking to carry out the Father’s plan to gather all of his scattered children into the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church exists by mandate of the eternal Trinity to reestablish that lost communion between God and humanity that was intended from the creation. He alone gives us this precious gift. We do not draw life from itself or from any created reality of this world. It is from the Father of Lights, the giver of peace and solidarity who wills the Church to come into being from the One who said that he came “so that [we] might have life and have it more abundantly.”

In my previous pastoral letter, “Seeking the Face of Christ,” issued on this year’s Feast of the Epiphany, I proposed three images of our Lord and invited us, as this local Church, to

meditate on them as a way of opening ourselves up to his transforming grace. The last of the three images was the face of the crucified Jesus. Viewed in the light of Easter, the blood-stained visage of our Lord discloses “the sacrificial love that conquers death, restores lost friendship with God, and causes a rebirth to righteousness” (cf. Rom 5:6-11). We Christians look to the sign of the Redeemer’s Cross and find depths of meaning that shed light on individual destiny and on all that we are as a people of faith. A fruitful spirituality of the Church, I suggest, can begin by contemplating the image of the Crucified One who changes a symbol of death into an instrument of healing and life-giving power.

In this, my third pastoral letter, I intend to share with you, my sisters and brothers of this diocese, my understanding of how the Church originates in the person of Christ whose sacrifice on Calvary reveals for all time and all people God’s saving will. Once we have understood this christological foundation, we can grasp the primary definition of the Church used by the Fathers of Vatican II in chapter one of the Sacred Constitution on the Church. Before drawing on the image of the “people of God,” the council refers to the Church as abiding in Christ “like a sacrament,” that is, a “sign and instrument” both of a very closely-knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.¹ As we explore the meaning of the term “sacrament,” we will see that it applies not just to the seven holy actions that draw believers into communion with God, but also to the Church in whose name these actions are performed. It is my firm conviction that only a sacramental definition of the Church can give us the proper perspective to avoid some of the misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the Church that have hindered our growth in Christ recently. For the Church as mystery and sacrament is a truth that is fundamental to our faith.

From this teaching of the Council, I want to offer some thoughts about ordained ministry and lay service, two different but complementary forms of discipleship that are so important to the welfare of our diocesan community. They are rooted in the unity-principle found in the concept of sacrament. This leads me to make some recommendations for pastoral action that will enhance the unity and mission of our diocesan church. Finally, I wish to retrieve an ancient representation of the first Adam as a figure alongside Christ, the “new Adam,” who enters into the new creation through the Cross—the great symbol of suffering love.

I. Born from the side of the Crucified One

John's Gospel presents the events of Jesus' crucifixion with a density of meaning. At the very moment when the Son of God announces that his work is "finished," and then breathes his last, the Evangelist expresses his death in a curious manner. Saint John does not say that Jesus "gave up his spirit," a conventional way of indicating that he expired. Rather, Christ is described as having bowed his head and "handed over *the* spirit" (John 19:30). What could *the* spirit mean, if not the promised Holy Spirit to be sent by the Father and the Son—the Comforter-Advocate whose mission would begin only after Jesus' work had finished (cf. 16:7-15; 15:25-26). It is better that Jesus leave this world and return to the Father, so that the age of the Spirit may commence—that is, *the time of the Church* when all the scattered children of God are gathered together in an ordered society that draws its life from the great deed of Christ's Passover from death to life. When the Son of Man is "lifted up," human beings find themselves absorbed by divine love which empowers them to become a self-sacrificing community (cf. 15:13). The Cross, in the mind of the Evangelist, becomes "the tree of life," the font of spiritual regeneration, indeed, the womb of the Church in which the Spirit creates out of people of every time and place one family in God.

At Mass today, we heard the matching passage in Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:1-13). Do we not see in Saint Luke's account of Pentecost a similar theme of the Holy Spirit as the agent who brings forth the Church as God's unifying instrument reaching "to the ends of the earth" (cf. 1:18; 13:47)? Were not all twelve Apostles—whose complement of twelve had just been restored—present for the event? Did not the visitors to Jerusalem, representing the world's principal language groups, hear the disciples speaking in their own native tongues? What could these signs of *universality* imply, if not that Christ's work of reversing the effects of human sin—played out in the Old Testament story of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9)—now achieves the goal which he had intended. We human beings now understand each other because we have been gathered into Christ. We communicate truth and goodness to each other because the Spirit dwells within us. Pentecost celebrates that "fullness of life" which—in the power of his Spirit—God has made available through the community born of the crucified and exalted Christ.

For John union with the Son of God is the precondition of our unity as human beings. Think only of the moment when Jesus gives Mary His Mother to the Beloved Disciple, and by extension to all those who believe in his testimony (cf. Jn 19:26-27; 20:31). The early church Fathers refer to Mary as the "New Eve," the Mother of all the living who belong to the new

creation accomplished in the resurrection of her Son (cf. Gen 3:20). Yet there is one image that stands out in the account of the crucifixion in the Fourth Gospel that many commentators view as particularly linked to the birth of the Church. The special importance of this event becomes clear when an eyewitness testifies to it, a testimony given so that others “may also come to believe” (19:35).

After breaking the legs of the two criminals crucified with Jesus, the soldiers prepare to do the same to the Lord but discover that he is already dead. Then one soldier takes a spear and thrusts it into his side, and water and blood begin to flow out (19:34). Earlier in the Gospel Jesus plainly identifies himself as the source of the “living water” that becomes available only when he is glorified on the Cross (7:37-39). By opening the Lord’s side, the Roman soldier does more than perform a perfunctory test to see whether a condemned man has died. In this case the gesture opens a door to the new temple “not made by human hands” (2:21; cf. 2 Cor 5:1), so that the mystery of God’s plan can finally be laid bare. Now that Christ has been glorified, and divine love has even wrapped itself around death, there is nothing left for God to do but make available the means by which we can share in the “fullness of life” he offers. From Christ’s wounded side stream water, symbolizing baptism, the sacrament of our rebirth, and blood, symbolizing the Eucharist, the sacrament of our participation in God’s very own life!

As baptized Catholics journeying through this world, we receive our life from Christ in the waters of baptism, and we draw our daily nourishment from Christ at the Altar of Sacrifice so that we can continuously live in his love. Yet the sacraments effect more than the union of each believer with his or her Savior. The cleansing water and life-sustaining blood also enable Christ to produce the Church which becomes his partner in this new phase of salvation history that has followed his exaltation on the Cross and resurrection from the dead. Saint John Chrysostom cautions us in the Office of Readings for Good Friday not to pass over this mystery too quickly: “As God then took a rib from Adam’s side to fashion a woman, so Christ has given us blood and water from his side to fashion the Church...As a woman nourishes her child with her own blood and milk, so does Christ unceasingly nourish with his own blood those to whom he himself has given life.”²

What exactly is the Church then? First of all, it is more properly a “who” rather than a “what.” As partner with Christ, *she* is the sacrament of God’s maternal solicitude for humanity, the effective sign of God’s saving action. Through her all who have been “born anew” in baptism

(Jn 3:3) find the means of sharing in Jesus' true worship and sacrificial work of uniting humanity in the bond of peace (cf. Col 1:18-20). The Church does not exist for herself, but to serve the kingdom that Jesus has come to proclaim. In her the kingdom is already present "in the manner of a seed,"³ at times imperceptibly, at other times quite visibly, growing by means of the preaching of the Gospel and the celebration of the sacraments. In these ways the Spirit acts to make men and women holy, courageous for truth, and committed to renewing the face of the earth.

II. "The Gift we cannot give ourselves"

It belongs to the very nature of a sacrament that human beings cannot give it to themselves. God always acts as the primary agent in leading us to encounter his self-revealing love. Ordained and lay worshipers are never more than Christ's instruments when one of the seven sacraments is administered. For this reason, the Catholic tradition has always understood that no one can confer a sacrament on himself or herself. Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony, and Holy Orders must be *received* from another who acts as a minister of grace. Even in the case of the Eucharist in which the priest gives to himself the Body and Blood of the Lord, it is always Christ who acts through the celebrant to bring about the latter's transformation, as well as that of the other faithful whom he serves.

Saint Augustine may have been the first theologian to have grasped fully the gift-character of the Catholic sacraments, and then to have found it possible to apply this understanding to the nature of the Church. This great Latin Father meditated at length on the question Saint Paul put to the Corinthians who were divided by controversy over spiritual gifts: "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor 4:7). If the Holy Spirit is the true originator of the gifts that build up the community in faith, hope, and love (cf. 1 Cor 12 and 13), then no one is entitled to claim that *his or her* creative abilities have caused what is only God's to give.

Yet how are we to understand the Church as *the* sacrament from which all others flow? The Church, too, must be grasped as a gift—not an invention of human ingenuity and effort. *We* do not create the Church; rather *she* creates *us* and restores us and reshapes us for life with God. Not even the best of human intentions can will her into existence. As shown in the New

Testament passages discussed above, the Church emerges from the historic mission of the Son—in particular, from the great events of Calvary and Pentecost as the instrument by which God draws all people into unity. Every local community that participates fully in the mission comes forth from the whole, as a child from its mother, as a branch from the fruitful vine (cf. Jn 15:1-5). The parts do not come together to form the whole, as happens in modern societies when independent states elect to form themselves into a union. Such a “federalist” notion, while often well suited to the secular sphere of democratic institutions, is foreign to the nature of the Church. The universal Church, which always has priority, makes itself present in each of the particular churches (dioceses) and altar communities (parishes, religious houses, etc.) that maintain the bonds of Catholic communion.⁴

Within a properly sacramental understanding, no one can say “*we* make the Church,” or even “*we* are the Church.” Such words betoken the self-assertion of a particular group. Such assertions are based on a false autonomy from the larger historic body founded by Christ. The one Church exists from the day of Pentecost whole and complete—already endowed with ecclesial gifts and apostolic ministries. This Church belongs to Christ, and exercises its mission through the college of apostles—with Peter as the head (cf. Mt 16:16-19; 18:18)—equipped for a universal mission meant to last until the Lord returns. Her hierarchical ministry is effective from the first day, as Peter begins to preach to the crowds in Jerusalem (Acts 2:14-41). These apostolic pastors soon receive the assistance of other workers, devoted women and men whose various charisms (“gifts”) enable the Church to grow in holiness and continue Christ’s far-reaching work of teaching, reconciling, and caring for all peoples (cf. Acts 18:2, 26; Rom 16:3). At no point in Saint Luke’s account of early Christianity, however, does anyone succeed in planting the seeds of the faith or building up the Church if they cut themselves off from the apostolic body (cf. Acts 5:1-11; 15:1-31). Effectiveness for mission requires communion with the whole Church, and with the pastoral authority that passes from the Apostles to the bishops whom they appoint as successor-shepherds to the local communities.

An important twofold perspective now comes into focus. First, the identity of every Christian community depends on its bond with the one Church that spans time and space. We, the faithful of Rockville Centre, belong to the Church of Peter and Paul, of Francis and Clare, and of our immigrant grandparents. The Church of Christ which “subsists in the Catholic Church”⁵ truly embraces the great sweep of dedicated women and men who are linked together

as one because of their common profession of faith, their devotion to the same sacraments, and their adherence to a pastoral leadership that exists to “strengthen” the members (cf. Lk 22:31f.). With our Protestant sisters and brothers we gratefully share many elements of this faith, most especially the Scriptures and belief in a common baptism. Although our communion with these fellow Christians is only partial, and indeed wounded by past sins against unity, we rejoice in our shared dedication in recent years to seeking the unity Christ wills and giving common witness to peace and justice. With our Orthodox Christian brothers and sisters, we recognize an even more substantial communion that exists on account of our common roots in the Church of the Fathers, our veneration of the Mother of God and the saints, true apostolic succession, and devotion to the authentic priesthood.

The Catholic Church that comes to life on the day of Pentecost already possesses a unity that can never be lost. Visible unity becomes the *task* of the Church as she continues on pilgrimage through history. However, unity in the form of “love toward the other” belongs from the beginning to her ineradicable core. She is one before she is many. She reveals a unity that already exists because Christ, the Redeemer of all, has died for all. She requires of her members that they be exemplary agents of unity, first within the household of faith (cf. Gal 6:10), and then before the world. The late Hans Urs von Balthasar pleads for “an understanding of every particular mission in the Church as proceeding from the whole Church and destined for the growth and deepening of the life of the whole Church.” “This understanding,” the Swiss theologian believes, “can come about in the individual only from a love for the whole Church imparted by the Spirit of unity.”⁶

III. Mission and Ministry in service to Unity

The baptized faithful come to love the whole Church especially during the Eucharist, thus understanding more fully her mission and structure. The Eucharist makes present on the altars of the world the body, soul, and divinity of Jesus⁷—but also the *whole Christ* in his Mystical Body which includes the divine head and the human members.⁸ In the Eucharist God’s plan “to gather up all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:10), becomes fully actual. In this sacrament of unity we glimpse the most perfect image of the Church afforded to human frailty: heaven and earth reunited, Creator and creatures reconciled, human beings restored to peace with God and sharing their spiritual gifts with one another. Each

celebration of the Eucharist in the parishes and chapels of our diocese “lifts up” the local community into that unifying movement that reaches up to heaven, where Christ the High Priest worships the Father in his eternal gesture of self-giving love (cf. Heb 9:11-15). In fact, it is the Eucharist that both continuously expresses and forms the Church into the living organism of Christ’s body between his first coming and final return. The eucharistic body enables a people who are otherwise unknown to one another to become the ecclesial body of Christ. Saint Augustine could therefore say in his Easter sermons to the neophytes of North Africa: “There you are on the altar. There you are in the chalice.”⁹

In the Sacred Constitution on the Liturgy, the Fathers of Vatican II retrieve this ancient perspective on the Eucharist. They do so by directing our gaze at the local celebration as the occasion for discovering what the mission of the Church is, and what constitutes the structure Christ wills for that mission: “[The faithful] should be convinced that the Church is displayed with special clarity when the holy people of God, all of them, are actively and fully participating in the same celebration—when it is the same Eucharist—sharing in one prayer, at one altar, at which the bishop is presiding, surrounded by his presbyterate and his ministers.”¹⁰

First and foremost, then, the eucharistic liturgy involves the entire people of God—ordained and lay faithful—in worshiping the Father in and through the person of his Son. The priest uniquely “offers” the Eucharist. No one can substitute for him. The lay faithful share in the offering by uniting their own prayers, sufferings, and good works to Christ’s sacrifice. All in the assembly are called in this most sublime of divine works to *active participation*. Most importantly, this involves attentive listening to the word of God and fervent engagement with the prayers of the Mass.

The mission that begins within the walls of the church, however, spills out into the world. Christians continue the work of sanctification, of proclaiming the Gospel, and of caring for others by taking their place within the family as well as in the public square. When the whole community takes to heart the fullness of the eucharistic commission to “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,”¹¹ then the people of Christ are encouraged to bring the Spirit into the whole world so that it may be a dwelling place for God. It belongs to the mission of the Church, as Yves Congar has said, “to be a perpetual epiclesis,”¹² that is, a constant calling down of the Spirit who pours divine love into people’s hearts (Rom 5:5) and makes them “cry out, ‘Abba’” to their Father (Rom 8:14).

The very same Spirit invoked in the Liturgy to nourish God's people provides amply for the Christian faithful as they seek to care for one another and build a civilization of love. Who would not recognize as the work of the Holy Spirit the great flowering of lay service in the Church following the Second Vatican Council? Who does not feel gratitude for the emergence in our time of ecclesial movements which have carried the Gospel to the young and to the poor, in regions that have fallen into spiritual malaise and in areas that have been plagued by violence and injustice? Who does not acknowledge the powerful ways in which consecrated women and men are witnessing to the faith in ministries of consolation and evangelization? Despite the discord generated by the appalling crimes of sexual abuse over the last two and a half years, and notwithstanding the signs of increasing disparity between the dominant culture and the Church in regard to the defense of human life, we are living through a new springtime in which the energies of Vatican II have been flowing in surprising ways. In my own personal reflections of recent weeks, our own diocesan day of reconciliation on the Monday of Holy Week attests to the powerful workings of the Spirit who mediates God's forgiving love to our people as they turn to him in the sacrament of Penance. This was the best way possible to prepare to celebrate the Sacred Triduum of our Salvation.

When the new comes forward in the life of the Church, there is no need to renounce the old. All authentic movements of the Spirit can find their place within the ordered community of grace. Wherever there is a desire to unite with the greater Church, local initiative finds its validation and strength. Wherever this commitment to unity is lacking, impulses for reform can become destructive. The Spirit who breathes new energies into communities, who inspires new ways of expressing Christian faith and morality, never acts apart from the apostolic body instituted by Christ. In fact the pastoral office itself, as we have seen in the scriptural passages discussed above, derives its own life from the same Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the exalted Son. Christ cannot be divided from his Spirit whom he sends from the Father (cf. Jn 15:26), and neither can his work be separated from the work of the Spirit who leads believers to the fullness of truth (Jn 16:13).

All things must work together for the unity that the Blessed Trinity intends for the creatures made in the divine image (Gen 1:26). Following the constant teaching of the Church, the Constitution on the Liturgy shows us that the office-bearer who maintains the community in unity through his teaching and governance is also the one who presides at the eucharistic

celebration. Vatican II, and the early church Fathers on whom the council draws, views liturgical presidency as the *sacramentalization* of the bishop's exercise of his office within his particular Church and for the universal communion of faith.¹³ He signifies and guarantees the unity of faith, worship, and church order within his diocese. Without him present—or without his co-workers, the priests and deacons, representing his authority—the local community loses its Catholic identity. As one who, by virtue of his consecration to the “fullness” of the priesthood, stands within apostolic succession and as a member of the worldwide Episcopal College, the bishop unites his diocese to the universal Church and the universal Church to his diocese. Catholic teaching, worship, and pastoral action depend on the coordination of his episcopal ministry if they are to remain Catholic. When the priest invokes the name of the diocesan bishop in the Eucharistic Prayer—as well as the name of the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, who guards the unity of the College and of all the particular churches—it is no mere devotional ornamentation, but rather an essential affirmation of a particular community's vital connection to the universal Church.

IV. Pastoral initiatives Pastoral Challenges in the Diocese of Rockville Centre

As women and men of communion, we the people of this local church seek to build up the Body of Christ in varied and marvelous ways. Though our diocese has been in existence for less than fifty years, it has seen a remarkable growth in faith and witness. We have inherited a vibrant church that our parents and grandparents built for us, and we proudly carry on their traditions of service within our 134 parishes, our schools, and our agencies of health care, social justice, and charitable outreach to the needy. Shepherded by dedicated priests and deacons for nearly a half century, we have also been blessed by the talents and energy of numerous religious and lay women and men who model for others an outstanding love of the Church and their local parishes.

All of these signs of spiritual vitality must continue. As a way of building on past achievement and helping us to chart a promising future, I have put forward two initiatives for our diocese. The first, a **Eucharistic Congress** scheduled for January to June, 2006, affords us an opportunity to proclaim our faith in Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist. Taking its inspiration from Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, the congress aims to deepen our understanding of this most precious gift Christ left to His Church, and to celebrate this gift as the

source and summit of our unity. The other initiative, which is already underway, involves all of us in a process of discernment regarding the pastoral priorities that will guide this local church into the third millennium. Our **Diocesan Synod** invites us to share our hopes and dreams for this next phase of our journey as a pilgrim people. I am grateful for the work already begun in planning for the Synod through various committees representative of our rich diversity of cultures and forms of apostolic service. And I look forward with special joy to the Plenary Session of the Synod planned for a weekend in March, 2007, which promises to be a time of renewal in the Holy Spirit.

In ways specific to our own needs as a diocese, I as your bishop have been imploring the Spirit for an outpouring of his sevenfold gift (cf. Is 11:2). From Him who animates our life in communion, I have asked for the *Gift of Wisdom*. This gift is already manifest in the work of our Synod; this gift is challenging us to develop parish pastoral councils and a diocesan pastoral council that would together enhance the coordination of our ministries. The *Gift of Understanding* is already manifest in the positive experience of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults; this gift is challenging us to a renewal of catechesis and religious formation. The *Gift of Right Judgment* is already manifest in inspiring our efforts in protecting children through programs like VIRTUS; this gift is challenging us to guide our decisions as faithful citizens in the political arena. The *Gift of Courage* is already manifest in the works of bringing God's word to those eager to hear it—like the faithful in our Mission of El Cerado in the Dominican Republic—and to those who find its challenges difficult to accept; this gift is challenging us to become protagonists of the new evangelization. The *Gift of Knowledge* is challenging us to help us understand the needs of families with children and young people who seek joyful and meaningful encounters with Christ; this gift is already manifest in the preparations and plans for this summer's Diocesan Youthfest 2004. The *Gift of Reverence* is manifest in the work of respect life ministries; this gift is challenging us to deepen our respect for all of God's creation, and most especially for human life from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death. And finally, the *Gift of wonder and awe in God's presence* is already manifest in our great commitment to encouraging vocations to priesthood, diaconate, and religious life; it is challenging us to foster among all an attitude of stewardship that entails the generous sharing of time, talent, and treasure.

<u>Gift of the Holy Spirit</u>	<u>Pastoral Initiative</u> (current manifestations of the action of the Spirit)	<u>Pastoral Challenge</u> (movement of the Spirit in preparation to begin a new church year)
<u>WISDOM</u> <i>discernment, decision making</i>	Synod 2007	Parish Pastoral Councils Diocesan Pastoral Council
<u>UNDERSTANDING</u> <i>discovering the truth</i>	RCIA	training of catechists; religion teachers, all those involved in religious formation
<u>RIGHT JUDGMENT</u> <i>judging properly</i>	Virtus Training	Faithful Citizenship; Political Responsibility
<u>COURAGE</u> <i>standing strong in the Lord</i>	Diocesan Mission in the Dominican Republic	Preaching and Evangelization in the Diocese of Rockville Centre
<u>KNOWLEDGE</u> <i>in service of the Lord</i>	Youth Day 2004	Outreach to families with very young children
<u>REVERENCE</u> <i>all created things come from God</i>	Respect Life	Consistent ethic of life
<u>WONDER AND AWE IN GOD'S PRESENCE</u> <i>reverence due to God and those created in God's image</i>	Volunteers: stewards of time, treasure, and talent	Vocations

In the nine days leading up to this Feast of Pentecost, many of us have been praying a Novena to the Third divine Person of the Holy Trinity for the grace of healing and renewal in our diocese. We have suffered the terrible hurts of the sex abuse crisis, and have endured the anguish, anger, and breakdown of trust that have followed in its wake. We continue to call upon the Paraclete who heals us of our wounds, reconciles us to one another, and leads us to all truth. By the gifts that this same Spirit generously pours out on us, may we be renewed and be ever more the Church of Jesus Christ. May our unity of faith, our togetherness in hope, and our bonds of love—the sure signs of the Spirit’s presence among us—be always the “level path” (Ps 143:10) on which we walk in the years to come.

V. *Final thought*

In this, my third pastoral letter to you, beloved sisters and brothers, I have been led once again to stand before the Cross, and this time to ask our divine Savior “What is it that you want from us? What is it that you want from me as Shepherd to the people of this diocese on Long Island?” The words that keep coming back to me in prayer are those which Jesus spoke to his Father on the night before he died: “May they be one.” What does the Lord ask of me—and of you—at this juncture of our pilgrim journey, and at a time when the world seems yet again to be torn by strife? I believe that Jesus wills us to be ever more *his Church*—the sign and instrument of that perfect unity in love which he has always known as the divine Son. In fact, I think he wants us to be jealous for the unity of the Spirit, to make peace and reconciliation with one another and with all our neighbors the deepest desire of our hearts. After all, he has made us and remade us not observers but participants in the plan of bringing all of humanity back to our Father’s house.

There is an ancient legend that says that Adam, the first human being, was buried on the site of Golgotha where Jesus was crucified. As the Lord hung upon the cross, the water and blood that flowed out of his pierced side seeped into the ground and reached the mortal remains of the first man. In the moment when Christ, the “new Adam” (Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 15:45), poured out his life, the first Adam—whose name in Hebrew means “humanity”—was “baptized.” The first of our race who had forfeited communion with God becomes the first to receive the “abundance of life” from Christ Jesus. Adam lives in all of us, for we share his human nature. If this legend conveys a truth, it is that Adam’s redemption begins a process of healing and of freeing all of humanity from the slavery of sin and death. In an ancient homily for Holy Saturday the risen Savior is made to say to the first Adam: “I am your God, who for your sake have become your son...I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead.”¹⁴

As baptized members of the new Adam’s race, we Catholics have a tremendous role to play in holding out hope to a fractured world. As partakers of the Lord’s eucharistic mystery, we have been sent with a great commission here in the Church of Rockville Centre to be “ambassadors of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:20) and instruments of his peace. Let us avoid every semblance of discord and strife that frustrates God’s plan to make us all one. “Let us then lay

aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” (Rom 13:12) Sisters and brothers,
“Christ, that Morning Star, who came back from the dead, has shed his peaceful light on all
mankind, [the Father’s Eternal] Son, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.”¹⁵

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+Most Reverend William Murphy, S.T.D.

Bishop of Rockville Centre

Endnotes:

¹ *Lumen gentium*, no. 1; in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. II, ed. Norman P. Tanner, S.J. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1990), 849.

² Saint John Chrysostom, Catecheses 3, xiii-xix; cited in *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. II (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1976), 473-75.

³ See *Lumen gentium*, no. 5; Tanner, 851.

⁴ See “Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion” [*Communio notio*] in *Origins* 22 (June 25, 1992): 108-112, at 109f.; nos. 7-10.

⁵ See *Lumen gentium*, no. 8; Tanner, 854.

⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology. II Spouse of the Word*, trans A. V. Littledale (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 12.

⁷ See Council of Trent (Session 13, 1551), “Decree on the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist,” chap. 1; Tanner, 693-94.

⁸ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 795 (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 2000), 210.

⁹ Saint Augustine, Easter Sermon, 6, II; *Patrologiae Latinae*, Vol. 46, p. 835, II.

¹⁰ *Sacrosanctum concilium*, no. 41; Tanner, 829.

¹¹ Rite of Dismissal, the *Roman Missal*.

¹² Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 267-74.

¹³ See *Lumen gentium*, nos. 20-27; Tanner, 863-72.

¹⁴ Office of Readings for Holy Saturday, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. II, 496-98.

¹⁵ *Exsultet* from the Easter Vigil, the *Roman Missal*.