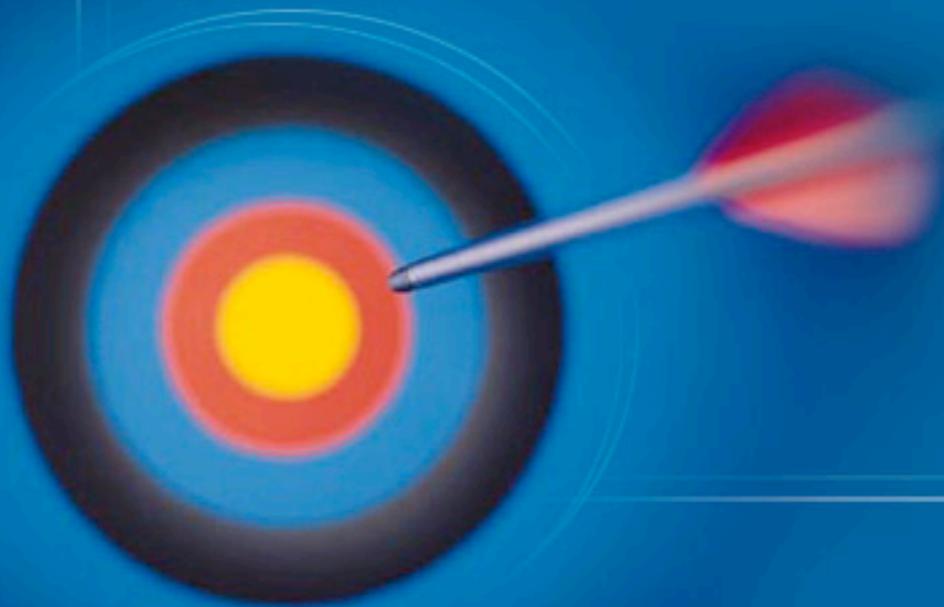


# The Gospel Message Life in Abundance

The Grace of Reconciliation



# A Shattered World

- The trampling upon the basic rights of the human person, the first of these being the right to life and to a worthy quality of life, which is all the more scandalous in that it coexists with a rhetoric never before known on these same rights.
- Hidden attacks and pressures against the freedom of individuals and groups, not excluding the freedom which is most offended against and threatened: the freedom to have, profess and practice one's own faith.
- The various forms of discrimination: racial, cultural, religious, etc.
- Violence and terrorism.
- The stockpiling of conventional or atomic weapons, the arms race with the spending on military purposes of sums which could be used to alleviate the undeserved misery of peoples that are socially and economically depressed.
- An unfair distribution of the world's resources and of the assets of civilization, which reaches its highest point in a type of social organization whereby the distance between the human conditions of the rich and the poor becomes ever greater.(2) The overwhelming power of this division makes the world in which we live a world shattered(3) to its very foundations.

# Even In The Church

- Moreover, the church-without identifying herself with the world or being of the world-is in the world and is engaged in dialogue with the world.(4) It is therefore not surprising if one notices in the structure of the church herself repercussions and signs of the division affecting human society. Over and above the divisions between the Christian communions that have afflicted her for centuries, the church today is experiencing within herself sporadic divisions among her own members, divisions caused by differing views or options in the doctrinal and pastoral field.(5) These divisions too can at times seem incurable.
- However disturbing these divisions may seem at first sight, it is only by a careful examination that one can detect their root: It is to be found in a wound in man's inmost self. In the light of faith we call it sin: beginning with original sin, which all of us bear from birth as an inheritance from our first parents, to the sin which each one of us commits when we abuse our own freedom. (Reconciliation & Penance #2)

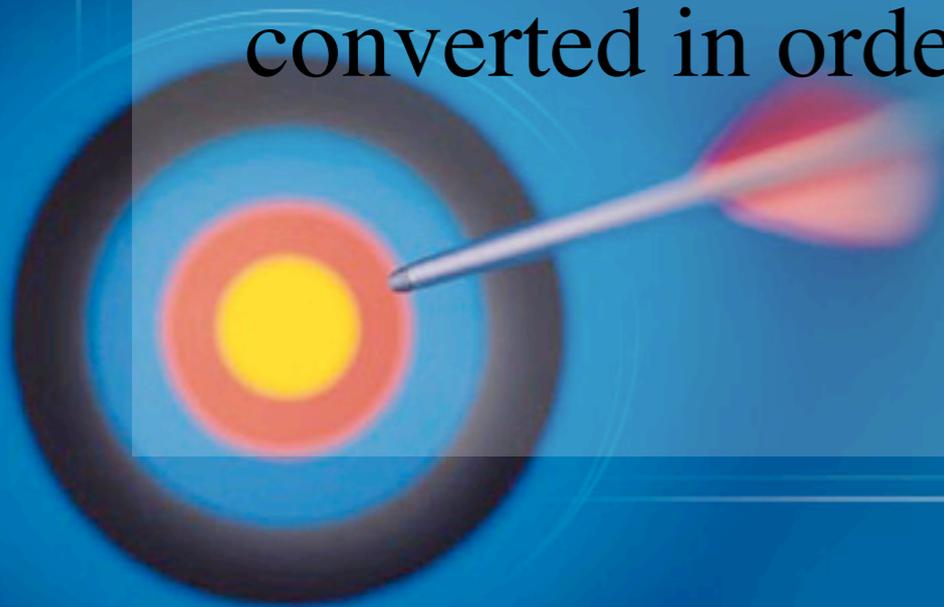


# The Prodigal Son

- This prodigal son is man every human being: bewitched by the temptation to separate himself from his Father in order to lead his own independent existence; disappointed by the emptiness of the mirage which had fascinated him; alone, dishonored, exploited when he tries to build a world all for himself sorely tried, even in the depths of his own misery, by the desire to return to communion with his Father. Like the father in the parable, God looks out for the return of his child, embraces him when he arrives and orders the banquet of the new meeting with which the reconciliation is celebrated.

# The Older Brother

- Man every human being-is also this elder brother. Selfishness makes him jealous, hardens his heart, blinds him and shuts him off from other people and from God. The loving kindness and mercy of the father irritate and enrage him; for him the happiness of the brother who has been found again has a bitter taste.(21) From this point of view he too needs to be converted in order to be reconciled.



# It is GREAT NEWS!

- God's love is real and personal.
- Jesus stands at the door and knocks. Open the door and He will come and "dine" with you. He loves you and wants to transform your life.
- The uniqueness of the Christian message as an encounter with the God who is LOVE and who has the power to bestow a gift we could never earn.
- We can't earn salvation. It is God's free gift. The more we understand this, the more grateful we are and the more we desire to share with others God's amazing love.

# Don't Miss Out!

The Evangelist Mark reports the following words of Jesus, which are inserted within the debate at that time regarding what is pure and impure: "There is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him ... What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts" (Mk 7, 14-15, 20-21). Beyond the immediate question concerning food, we can detect in the reaction of the Pharisees a permanent temptation within man: to situate the origin of evil in an exterior cause. Many modern ideologies deep down have this presupposition: since injustice comes "from outside," in order for justice to reign, it is sufficient to remove the exterior causes that prevent it being achieved. This way of thinking – Jesus warns – is ingenuous and shortsighted. Injustice, the fruit of evil, does not have exclusively external roots; its origin lies in the human heart, where the seeds are found of a mysterious cooperation with evil.

# Justification

Indeed, man is weakened by an intense influence, which wounds his capacity to enter into communion with the other. By nature, he is open to sharing freely, but he finds in his being a strange force of gravity that makes him turn in and affirm himself above and against others: this is egoism, the result of original sin. Adam and Eve, seduced by Satan's lie, snatching the mysterious fruit against the divine command, replaced the logic of trusting in Love with that of suspicion and competition; the logic of receiving and trustfully expecting from the Other with anxiously seizing and doing on one's own (cf. Gn 3, 1-6), experiencing, as a consequence, a sense of disquiet and uncertainty. How can man free himself from this selfish influence and open himself to love?

# Justification

At the heart of the wisdom of Israel, we find a profound link between faith in God who “lifts the needy from the ash heap” (Ps113,7) and justice towards one’s neighbor. The Hebrew word itself that indicates the virtue of justice, *sedaqah*, expresses this well. *Sedaqah*, in fact, signifies on the one hand full acceptance of the will of the God of Israel; on the other hand, equity in relation to one’s neighbor (cf. Ex 20, 12-17), especially the poor, the stranger, the orphan and the widow (cf. Dt 10, 18-19). But the two meanings are linked because giving to the poor for the Israelite is none other than restoring what is owed to God, who had pity on the misery of His people.

# The Exodus

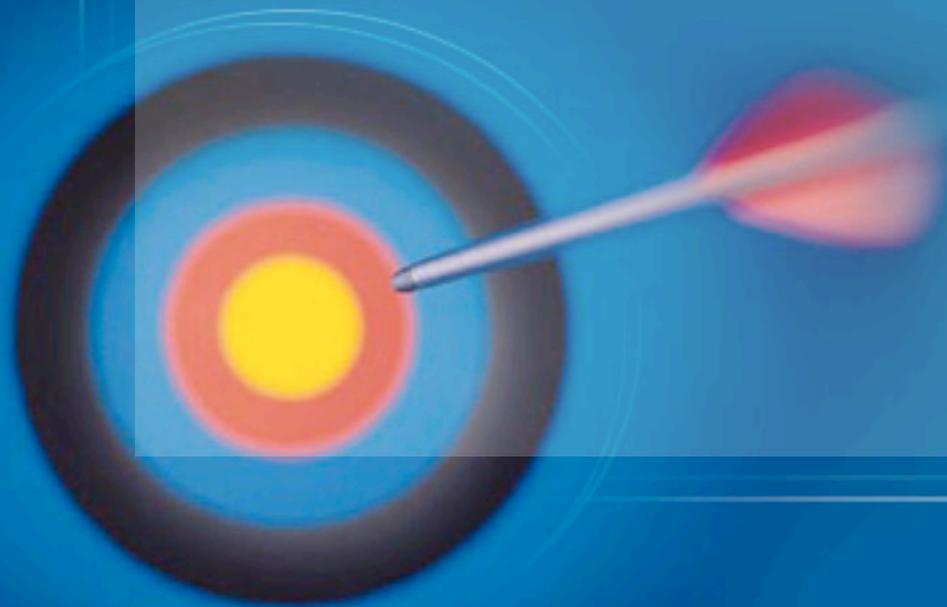
It was not by chance that the gift to Moses of the tablets of the Law on Mount Sinai took place after the crossing of the Red Sea. Listening to the Law presupposes faith in God who first "heard the cry" of His people and "came down to deliver them out of hand of the Egyptians" (cf. Ex 3,8). God is attentive to the cry of the poor and in return asks to be listened to: He asks for justice towards the poor (cf. Sir 4,4-5, 8-9), the stranger (cf. Ex 22,20), the slave (cf. Dt 15, 12-18). In order to enter into justice, it is thus necessary to leave that illusion of self-sufficiency, the profound state of closure, which is the very origin of injustice. In other words, what is needed is an even deeper "exodus" than that accomplished by God with Moses, a liberation of the heart, which the Law on its own is powerless to realize. Does man have any hope of justice then?

# The Law of LOVE

Conversion to Christ, believing in the Gospel, ultimately means this: to exit the illusion of self-sufficiency in order to discover and accept one's own need – the need of others and God, the need of His forgiveness and His friendship. So we understand how faith is altogether different from a natural, good-feeling, obvious fact: humility is required to accept that I need Another to free me from "what is mine," to give me gratuitously "what is His." This happens especially in the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. Thanks to Christ's action, we may enter into the "greatest" justice, which is that of love (cf. Rm 13, 8-10), the justice that recognises itself in every case more a debtor than a creditor, because it has received more than could ever have been expected. Strengthened by this very experience, the Christian is moved to contribute to creating just societies, where all receive what is necessary to live according to the dignity proper to the human person and where justice is enlivened by love.

# The Church - Reconciled & Reconciling Community

- The church, as a reconciled and reconciling community, cannot forget that at the source of her gift and mission of reconciliation is the initiative, full of compassionate love and mercy, of that God who is love(41) and who out of love created human beings;(42) and he created them so that they might live in friendship with him and in communion with one another.



# A Personal Decision

- In effect, to become reconciled with God presupposes and includes detaching oneself consciously and with determination from the sin into which one has fallen. It presupposes and includes, therefore, doing penance in the fullest sense of the term: repenting, showing this repentance, adopting a real attitude of repentance- which is the attitude of the person who starts out on the road of return to the Father. This is a general law and one which each individual must follow in his or her particular situation. For it is not possible to deal with sin and conversion only in abstract terms. (#13)

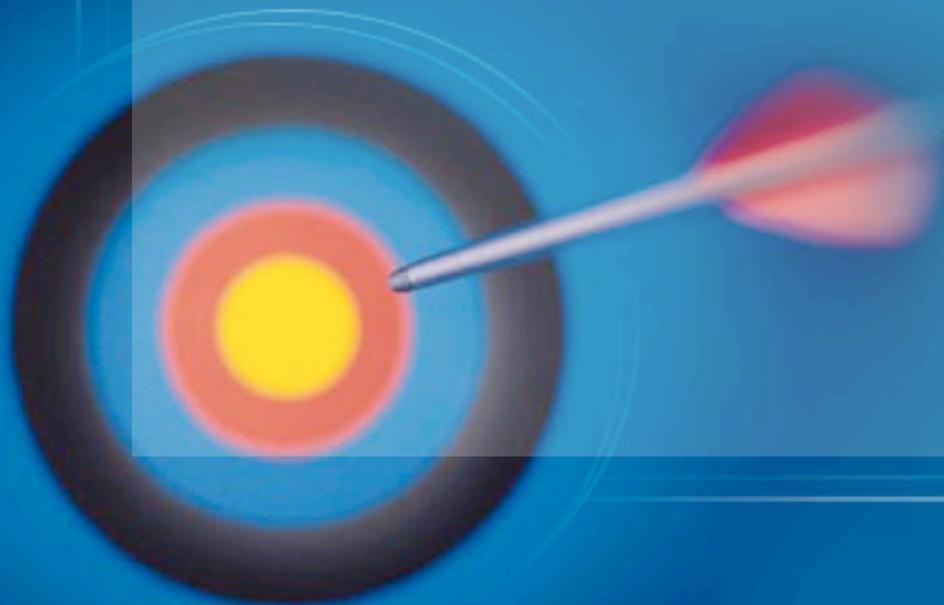
# In A Nutshell

## **God is rich in mercy!**

When we realize that God's love for us does not cease in the face of our sin or recoil before our offenses, but becomes even more attentive and generous; when we realize that this love went so far as cause the passion and death of the Word made flesh who consented to redeem us at the price of his own blood, then we exclaim in gratitude: "Yes, the Lord is rich in mercy, and even: "The Lord is mercy."

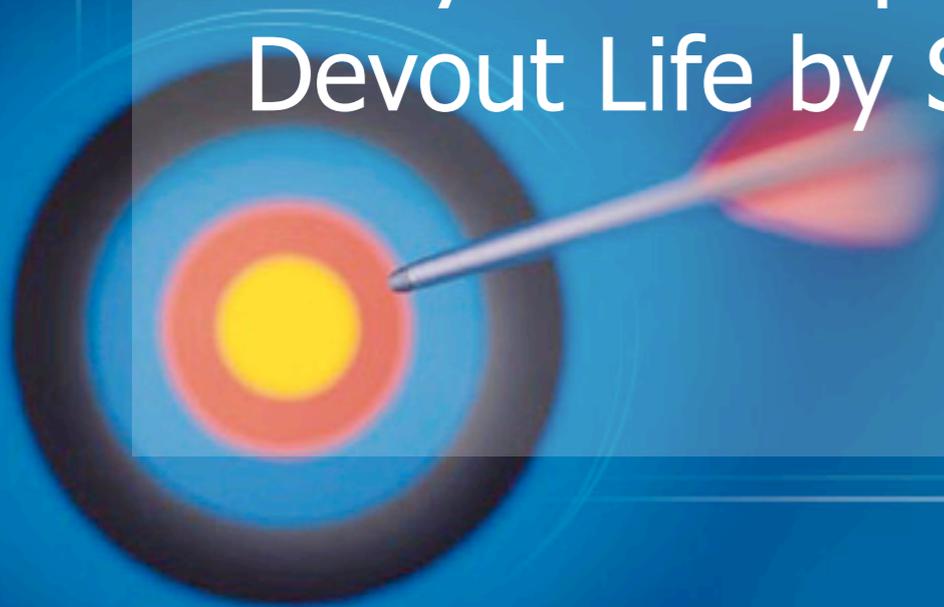
## **The Christian Message is beautiful and very unique!**

Rooted in the freedom of the human person. "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19)



# Being Merciful

- Our own ability to receive God's mercy will help us be merciful to others. (Although it is not guaranteed)
- "Do not consider what we truly deserve but grant us your forgiveness through Christ our Lord." (1st Eucharist Prayer)
- Story of Bishop Carpus from Introduction to the Devout Life by St. Francis de Sales.



# From The Imitation of Christ

## A PRAYER FOR ENLIGHTENING THE MIND

Enlighten me, good Jesus, with the brightness of internal light, and take away all darkness from the habitation of my heart. Restrain my wandering thoughts and suppress the temptations which attack me so violently. Fight strongly for me, and vanquish these evil beasts -- the alluring desires of the flesh -- so that peace may come through Your power and the fullness of Your praise resound in the holy courts, which is a pure conscience. Command the winds and the tempests; say to the sea: "Be still," and to the north wind, "Do not blow," and there will be a great calm.

Send forth Your light and Your truth to shine on the earth, for I am as earth, empty and formless until You illumine me. Pour out Your grace from above. Shower my heart with heavenly dew. Open the springs of devotion to water the earth, that it may produce the best of good fruits. Lift up my heart pressed down by the weight of sins, and direct all my desires to heavenly things, that having tasted the sweetness of supernal happiness, I may find no pleasure in thinking of earthly things.

Snatch me up and deliver me from all the passing comfort of creatures, for no created thing can fully quiet and satisfy my desires. Join me to Yourself in an inseparable bond of love; because You alone can satisfy him who loves You, and without You all things are worthless.

# How Beautiful

by Twila Paris

How Beautiful the hands that served  
The Wine and the Bread and the sons of the  
earth  
How beautiful the feet that walked  
The long dusty roads and the hill to the cross  
How Beautiful, how beautiful, how beautiful is  
the body of Christ

How Beautiful the heart that bled  
That took all my sin and bore it instead  
How beautiful the tender eyes  
That choose to forgive and never  
despise  
How beautiful, how beautiful, how  
beautiful is the body of Christ

And as He lay down His life  
We offer this sacrifice  
That we will live just as He died  
Willing to pay the price  
Willing to pay the price

How beautiful the feet that bring  
The sound of good news and the  
love of the King  
How Beautiful the hands that serve  
The wine and the bread and the  
sons of the Earth  
How Beautiful, how beautiful, how  
beautiful is the body of Christ

