

TEAMS OF OUR LADY

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INTRODUCTION

Who is Jesus Christ to you?

If someone asked you today: **Who is Jesus Christ to you?** What would you answer? How would you answer?

You may remember Peter's answer when Jesus asked his disciples: "But who do you say that I am?" and Peter answered: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." (Matt 16,13-20).

To speak of Jesus Christ is to speak of the heart of Christianity. The transmitting of the Christian faith is after all, the transmitting of Jesus' good news. In other words, at the center of Christian catechism we essentially find the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, like the catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us. (CCC, 422-429)

Christ is at the center of the catechism. That is why, to catechize is "to reveal in the Person of Christ the whole of God's eternal design reaching fulfilment in that Person. It is to seek to understand the meaning of Christ's actions and words and of the signs worked by him". The purpose of Holy Eucharist is to put "people . . . in communion . . . with Jesus Christ: only he can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity." (CCC, 426)

The Catechism teaches us who Christ is, but that is not enough. Pope Francis, asks us for prayer, adoration and recognizing ourselves as sinners, in order to truly know Jesus.¹

Taking the letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians, Pope Francis reminds us that it must be Christ who dwells in our hearts. He reminds us that Christ is at the center and asks us, "How can we know Christ? How can we understand His love that is beyond all knowledge?"

Francis affirmed that Christ is present in the Gospel and we know Him, by reading the Gospel, or when we hear it at Mass. "And studying the catechism teaches us who Christ is," he said. "But this is not enough," Francis said, noting, "In order to understand the breadth and length and height and depth of Jesus Christ we need to enter into the habit, firstly of praying, as Paul did on his knees: "Father send me the Holy Spirit to know Jesus."(cf. Ef 13,14-19)

¹ Homily of Pope Francis at the morning Mass celebrated in the chapel of the House of St. Martha on October 20, 2016.

Pope Francis affirms that prayer is necessary to know Jesus but on its own is not enough because “We cannot know the Lord without this habit of worship, to worship in silence, adoration. If I am not mistaken, I believe that this prayer of adoration is the least known by us, it’s the one that we do least. Allow me to say this, waste time in front of the Lord, in front of the mystery of Jesus Christ. Worship him. There in silence, the silence of adoration. He is the Savior and I worship Him.” he added.

Finally, the third requirement for truly knowing Christ was to know ourselves and as a result be accustomed to describing ourselves as sinners. Because, continued Pope Francis, “We cannot worship without accusing ourselves. In order to enter into this bottomless and boundless sea that is the mystery of Jesus Christ, this thing is necessary. (Firstly), prayer: ‘Father, send me the Holy Spirit so that he leads me to know Jesus.’ Secondly, worship the mystery, enter into the mystery and worship Him. And thirdly, accuse ourselves. ‘I am a man of unclean lips. May the Lord give us too this grace that Paul implored for the Ephesians, this grace to know and earn Christ.”

Therefore, what does it mean today to believe in Christ? To believe in his life, his person, his lifestyle and destiny. Do these questions say something to me today? To enter the heart of this sense of belief in Christ today, implies to respond to these questions.

What is then Christology? What topics does it address? And why is it important for each Christian to study Christology?

Christology is an area of Christian theology² that deals with the study of the person and actions of Jesus, that is, his divine and human nature, his incarnation, his revelation of God, his miracles, his teachings, his death, resurrection and ascension, his intercession on our behalf, his role as judge, his position as Head of all things, his central role in the mystery of God’s will.³

What is the etymology of the word “Christology”?

Christos is a word that comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew term “Messiah”, which means anointed. Jesus is the “Messiah”, in other words, “God’s anointed one”. In this way,

² Theology is divided into specific subjects to be studied, such as: Christology, Mariology, Dogmatics, Liturgy, Eschatology, Ecclesiology, Trinitarian, Bible, etc. Since Jesus Christ is the center of revelation and Christian life, it seems right to understand Christology as the central matter to justify and legitimize the study of other matters, since everything speaks of Jesus Christ.

³ CHAMPLIN, R. N. **Enciclopédia de Bíblia, teologia y filosofia**. V. 1, São Paulo: Editorial Hagnos, 2002.

Christos is one of the titles the primitive Christian community used that expressed the faith they proclaimed in Jesus of Nazareth, Savior of humanity.

Logia, means the study of the doctrine, concerning and reflection of.

Therefore, the Word Christology means the study and reflection of the person of Jesus, of his message, his actions, his death and resurrection. It is a reflection of faith, that is born within the community of the apostles and disciples that lived with Jesus and the ones that first believed, the first witnesses, it grows, is nourished and it is maintained alive and effective until today.

The reflection of catholic Christology is necessary, since the Catholic Church is Christ-centered, in other words it has Jesus Christ as the center of its existence and mission. As the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium* says about the Church, Christ is the light of the world. Therefore, "All men are called to this union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and toward whom our whole life strains."⁴

The center of the Christian faith is, without a doubt, Christ. To know who Jesus is and to have knowledge of his proposal, this is the authentic path we must follow in order to choose Him in every situation in life, until the final decision at our death. Jesus, the Christ, is he who divides time, since throughout the world history is written as "before Christ" and "after Christ".

Christology is also responsible for what the Catholic Church teaches. The mission of the Church throughout time is to proclaim Jesus the Christ. Catholic teaching always wants to promote a personal encounter with the living Christ. Therefore, it is necessary to know Jesus in order to authentically present him to all of humanity.

The Messiah is the great hope of the Israelite people in the Old Testament. This hope is given to all of humanity with the coming of Jesus, that is, the one that was sent to fulfill this promise. He is a man. He is historic.

Yet, He is also divine. He is God's anointed one. His actions reveal him as Christ and He reveals God's will: that all humanity is free from slavery and the darkness of sin. He crushed the serpent's head, was an example of obedience to God and rescued humanity, making it possible for everyone to return to communion with God.

Throughout this Course/Hostel we will find the following Chapters or Tables:

⁴ Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* on the Church, n^o 3.

- 1) Access to Jesus of Nazareth in Hope of the Salvation History of Israel
- 2) Jesus of Nazareth's Public Ministry
- 3) Jesus' Passion and Death on the Cross
- 4) The Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus
- 5) The Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God
- 6) Jesus the profession of faith and teachings of the Church
- 7) Jesus and his relationship with ...
- 8) Mary, Mother of Christ and Our Mother

This Course/Hostel about Christology contains a reflection about Jesus, which has as a main objective to help us respond to the initial question made by Jesus to his disciples, "**But who do you say that I am?**" (Matt 16:15).

TABLE 1

ACCESS TO JESUS OF NAZARETH IN THE HOPE OF THE SALVATION HISTORY OF ISRAEL

As we sit at this table, the first thing we want to know is its objective. In order to understand Jesus, his humanity, his message and his salvific action, it is important to consider the religious environment of Israel. This context of faith and hope of the Israelites is what Jesus and his disciples lived. Returning to these paths is how we can come to know it better. It is by recognizing the development of God's revelation in the salvation history of Israel and its traditions where we can discover how the Old Testament points towards Jesus, as well as how He fully completes the Law and the Prophets.

1.1- The question Of Jesus of Nazareth

The question of Jesus, his history, his person, his acts and message, have been present since the beginning of the first Cristian communities.

During Pentecost, the Holy Spirit gives the disciples a sudden revelation of all of the acts and person of Jesus. Peter concludes his Pentecost discourse with a solemn definition: Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified (Acts 2,36). From that day on, the first Christian communities began to re-read the life of Jesus, his death and resurrection in a different way; everything was clear, as if a vail had been lifted from their eyes (cf. 2Cor 3,16).

The Church, without the power of the Holy Spirit would not be able to penetrate the deep mystery of its Lord, Jesus Christ. Saint Paul affirms that «no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit» (1Cor 12,3). He attributes to the Holy Spirit «insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets» (cf. Eph 3,4-5); and also says that the believers will be able «to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge» only if they are «strengthened with might through his Spirit» (cf. Eph 3,16-19).

In the Gospel of John, Jesus himself announces this work of the Paraclete in relation to himself. He will take what is his and will announce it to the disciples; he will remind them of all He has said; he will lead them to the full truth about his relationship with the Father and will give witness (cf. John 16, 7-15).

This allows us to understand that the New Testament, the story of Jesus, cannot be understood as a biography, as understood in modern times. The Gospels, inspired by the Holy Spirit, are testimonies of faith from privileged witnesses who at the same time want to give rise to the faith in Jesus, in his full being as Christ and Lord.

Since the XVIII century, dominated by the spirit of the Enlightenment, questions like the following arose: Is the historic Jesus the same Jesus preached by the apostles and the Church? Are the Gospels historical narrations or an invention of Jesus' disciples?

From these questions, the results were a division between the "Jesus of History" and the "Christ of Faith" that reached great popularity. In other words, the interest is not in knowing who Jesus is, but rather in knowing who Jesus has been in history.

Benedict XVI, in his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, concerned for the faith, confirms that this debate has left the impression that we have very little certain knowledge of Jesus and rather, the apostles' and the Church's faith in his divinity is what has formed his image. In order to understand this idea better, we can say that for those that searched for Jesus in history, the common understanding was that in order to find the true Jesus, they needed to search outside of the Church. They believed they needed to untie him from the ecclesiastic dogma and therefore the true testimony is the historical one and not the apostolic testimony of the Church.⁵

Benedict XVI, critiquing the "historical-critical method", affirms that the historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth is the only reason that explains the origins of the Gospels. These are naturally, the "memories" of individuals within the Cristian community, guided by the Holy Spirit. He affirms that the Resurrection is the event that awoke these "memories" of the history of Jesus and allowed entrance into the heart of these events, that is in that relation between the facts and the words of the Lord.

⁵ Ver Joseph Ratzinger – Bento XVI. **Jesus de Nazaré: do Batismo no Jordão à Transfiguração**. São Paulo: Editora Planeta do Brasil, 2007, p. 12-15.

In Catholic Christology, it is believed that the only possibility to enter in contact with the true Jesus of Nazareth, is through the faith of the Church guided by the Holy Spirit, only through this faith can one reach the original source.

1.2- The Relationship between the Old and New Testament⁶

Let's remember that to know Jesus of Nazareth better it is fundamental to place him in the scope of faith in the salvation history of Israel. The Old Testament is not just necessary but essential in order to understand the person, the message and the actions of Jesus in the New Testament. Of which, all of the books of the New Testimony give witness to.

1.2.1- Jesus in the Old Testament

In the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, Jesus is presented as the One in whom the Scriptures are fulfilled. Jesus himself presented this interpretation of himself, referring to the Scriptures in the synagogue in Nazareth (cf. Luke 4, 14-30).

As he preached, Jesus announced the coming of the kingdom of God with his presence. As well, after the Passover, on the way to Emmaus Jesus warns his disciples that it is necessary to know the Scriptures in order to understand that they all point towards Him and that in Him they are fulfilled (cf. Luke 24, 25-27, 44-45).

Finally, there is consensus among scholars that Jesus himself used the titles present in the Scriptures when referring to himself. Titles like: «Son of David» (Mark 12, 35-37), «Servant of the Lord» (Luke 4, 16-30), «Son of Man» (Luke 12,8).

We can briefly describe some of the characteristics of the interpretation of the Scriptures that Jesus gives as follows:

- Jesus when interpreting Scripture in relationship to himself, clearly indicates that all that was announced by Moses and the prophets, reaches its fulfillment in Him. (cf. Matt 5, 17). As well as, enlightens and gives meaning to each stage in the history of Israel.

⁶ Cf. ANGELO AMATO. *Jesús el Señor*. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid, 2002, p. 59-69; cf. GERALD O'COLLINS. *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus*. Second Edition, Ebook, 2009, p. 22-24; cf. BRUNO FORTE. *Gesù di Nazaret, storia di Dio, Dio della storia. Saggio di una cristologia come storia*. San Paolo Edizioni, 2007, p. 67-74. Let us remember that when Jesus and the NT refer to the "Scriptures", they allude more exactly to the Law, to the Prophets and to other books, such as the Psalms.

- Jesus, using the Scriptures when he is tempted or during the discussions with the scribes and Pharisees, reaffirms that the Old Testament maintains its own value of revelation. (cf. Mark 12, 29-31).
- A third characteristic is the novelty of the Jesus event. In relation to the Scriptures, Jesus also reveals the power of his words and actions as something that surpasses previous understanding. For example, the controversy surrounding the Sabbath, the idea of the Messiah, the servant of the Lord and the Son of man, which through Jesus acquire a new meaning and definite fulfillment.

1.2.2- The primitive Christian community and the Old Testament

For the primitive Christian community and the authors of the NT, the OT was the main source for articulating their beliefs about Jesus, his message, his work, his death and resurrection and enlightening the news of the event. As we examine some texts, we see that Christians read the OT in light of Jesus' death and resurrection.

- In the Gospel of Luke, the Resurrected Jesus explains everything referring to Himself when he speaks with the disciples at Emmaus (cf. Luke 24,32).
- Peter, in his first discourse, tells the Israelites: "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it (Acts, 2,22-25).
- Paul also refers to the scriptures when he says: «that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures» (cf. 1Cor 15,3)
- As well, the primitive Christian catechism constantly referred to the Old Testament. (cf. 1Cor 5, 6-8; 10,1-11).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church remembers that since the times of the apostles the Church has traditionally read the OT in light of its fulfilment in Jesus that through many images and events in the history of the OT, in a prophetic way, announced what would be realized in Jesus.

For example, the image of the new Moses referring to Jesus; Jesus as the high priest prefigured by Melchizedek; Isaiah the suffering servant as anticipation of Jesus' obedience until death.

This helped in discerning «God's works of the Old Covenant» as «prefigurations of what he accomplished in the fullness of time in the person of his incarnate» (CCC 128).

A. Amato emphasizes the preparatory function of the OT in the following way. He insists that when the New Testaments proclaims Jesus as Christ, it refers us to the Old Testament. Here, is where we must learn what it means to be “Christ”, “Son of David” and “Son of God”, “Son of Man” and “Servant of God”. In the OT is where we learn what atonement, reconciliation, salvation and redemption truly mean.⁷

This mutual enlightenment between the OT and the NT:

- a) affirms the preparatory function of the OT in relation to the coming of Jesus Christ;
- b) avoids pretending to understand the Jesus event without the OT; and
- c) warns of the difficulties of a literal and immediate interpretation of the OT.

1.3- The God of Promise and the People of Hope⁸

For Israel, its future was always guided by the hope in the fulfilment of the promises made by God. Abraham heard the voice of God and departed as God had told him to (cf. Gen 12,1-9), grounded only in the promises of his God. From that instant, Israel was always a nation of pilgrims waiting for the promise to be fulfilled.

This relationship between God and his people was not always calm and harmonious. The history of Israel is marked by the constant tension between the promises of Yahve and the waiting of that future. B. Forte says that in the tension between agreement and disagreement, between

⁷ A. AMATO, *Jesús el Señor*, 68.

⁸ Cf. A. AMATO, *Jesús el Señor*, 59-107; cf. B. FORTE, *Gesú di Nazaret, storia de Dio, Dio della storia*, 67-74.

experience and promises, this is where the deepest expression of the soul of the OT can be found, in the messianic hope.⁹

The role of “messianism” was to conserve alive the memory of God’s promise in each moment in the history of Israel. Therefore, the messianic hope is the spine of the OT, which throughout its history took various forms as prophets, kings, priests and the wisdom of God.

1.3.1- The Prophetic Messianic Hope ¹⁰

Moses is the prototype of a prophet. To him was entrusted the original covenant that remained alive and effective through the prophets in the various circumstances of the people of Israel.

A new prophet, similar to Moses becomes part of this original promise: « I will raise up for them a prophet[c] like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him» (Deut 18,18).

In this text, Moses himself draws the main characteristics of this prophet:

- a) Called by god personally, and
- b) His mission is to be the voice of God to his people and the voice of his people to God (cf. Deut 18,15.18).

The hope of Israel acquires different shapes depending on the historic situations. Therefore, in the times of peace, this hope awakens the conscience of the people of God in Israel. In times of exile, their hope is encouraged with the news of a prophet that will restore Israel, a prophet of the last days, someone like Elijah (cf. Mal 3,23) or a new Moses.

In times of Jesus, within the Jewish people there is a great expectation of a new prophet, a prophet like Moses that will reestablish the Law of God and a definite alliance.

In the NT, Jesus is recognized not only as one of the prophets of the OT, but as the anointed one in whom God fulfills all of his prophesies (cf. Luke 9,8; Luke 24,44-45). In this way Benedict XVI emphasizes that: «Mathew puts together a picture of Jesus as the new Moses in

⁹ B. FORTE, *Gesú di Nazaret, storia de Dio, Dio della storia*, 73.

¹⁰ For the following, see: B. FORTE, *Gesú di Nazaret, storia de Dio, Dio della storia*, 74-77.

precisely the profound sense that we saw earlier in connection with the promise of a new prophet given in the book of Deuteronomy ». ¹¹

1.4- The Royal Messianic Hope¹²

In the OT the hope for salvation is closely tied to the lineage of King David. This hope has its historic roots in the promise of God that the prophet Nathan announced to King David: «And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established forever » (2Sam 7,16).

The testimony of Jeremiah, in the years that precede the destruction of Jerusalem, announce a new beginning in which God will give rise to « David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land» (Jer 23, 5). Ezequiel, prophet during times of exile does not give up waiting for a new David (cf. Ezek 37,24s; 34,23; 17, 22-24). After the exile, the hope for the reign of the future Messiah is announced as a scatological event, imminent and universal.

In the NT, during the annunciation in the Gospel of Luke, the Angel presents Jesus with the characteristics of a royal figure, which naturally draws the reader back to that “royal messianic hope” of the OT. It says: “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end. (Luke 1, 32-33). Also, the promise of Zechariah 9,9, helps Mark (11,1-1) and is clearly quoted by Mathew and John in order to better understand “Palm Sunday”: “Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of an ass” (Matt 21,5; cf. John 12,15). ¹³

¹¹ BENEDICTO XVI, *Jesús de Nazaret I*, 92.

¹² Para lo que sigue, B. FORTE, *Gesú di Nazaret, storia de Dio, Dio della storia*, 78-81; A. AMATO, *Jesús el Señor*, 70-78.

¹³ Cf. BENEDICTO XVI, *Jesús de Nazaret II*, XXX; J. GNILKA, *Jesús de Nazaret*, 334-336.

1.4.1- The Priestly Messianic Hope¹⁴

One finds a priestly messianic hope flowing throughout the OT. In the NT, the first Christians consulted the priestly image to express their experiences and faith in Jesus. The following are some examples of how it was embedded in the OT:

- a) Starting with Moses and throughout the OT, priesthood is closely linked to the family of Levi, which is why they are called Levites. They are entrusted to offer the sacrifices and to be mediators during worship, between God and his people. (cf. Deut 33,8-11).
- b) When the monarchy is established, the King remains as the true priest of Israel. (cf. Sal 110). His priesthood is according to the orders of Melchizedek, priest of "God most high": "You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." (Ps 110,4; cf. Gen 14,17-20).
- c) After the fall of the monarchy, the priesthood began to also absorb royal functions. The high priest becomes the only authentic representative of the people of Israel and the true mediator of salvation. (cf. Lev 4, 3.5.16). As well, the priestly messianic hope starts to develop, as can be seen in Ezequiel (cc. 40-48), and in the vision of Zechariah (around 520 ACE) that introduces the figure of Joshua as high priest (cf. Zech 3,1-7).
- d) About the last phase, A. Amato says that in the century prior to the Christian era, the messianic hope was renewed, tied to a priestly Messiah of the last days. This was definitely fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who as Son of David, is also a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.¹⁵

1.4.2- Apocalyptic Messianism Hope

We now have to examine the waiting for a mediator that comes completely from up high. B. Forte says that this messianic hope is that of pure and absolute hope, of waiting for divine intervention, this therefore justifies the most radical and contradicting expectations.¹⁶

¹⁴ A. AMATO, *Jesús el Señor*, 78-83; B. FORTE, *Gesú di Nazaret, storia de Dio, Dio della storia*, 81-83.

¹⁵ A. AMATO, *Jesús el Señor*, 82-83.

¹⁶ B. FORTE, *Gesú di Nazaret, storia de Dio, Dio della storia*, 84.

There are three central figures in God's participation in the eschatological messianic hope of Israel: the angel of Yahweh, God's wisdom and the figure of the Son of Man from the prophet Daniel 7,13-14.

1.4.2.1- The Angel of Yahweh

From the Patriarchs until the exile, this figure is often identified with Yahweh, other times, it acts on his behalf and is different to him. The Angel of Yahweh has the role of revealing the will and the Salvation of God (cf. Exod 3,2) and to act as an intercessor before Him (cf. Zech 1,12).

After the exile, it becomes an object of messianic hope according to the passage in Malachi, written around 470 BCE: "Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts" (Mal 3,1).

1.4.2.2- God's wisdom

Wisdom is another figure in the OT that prepares the understanding of the person of Jesus of Nazareth, «Wisdom of God», as the evangelist Paul refers to it (cf. 1 Cor 1,24-30). Through the figure of God's wisdom, salvation becomes near in the here and now.

God's wisdom has prophetic (cf. Prov 1,20-23), priestly (cf. Prov 9,1-6) and royal characteristics (cf. Prov 8,12-36). God's wisdom participated in the creation of the world (cf. Wis 9,9; Prov 3,19-20; 8, 28-29). The salvific mediation and benevolence of God's wisdom is directed to Israel and all of humanity (cf. Sir 24,6-8; Sb 10,15). This way, the figure of God's wisdom receives the messianic stroke of a mediator that descends from the heavens.

1.4.2.3- The Son of Man

This expression of Hebrew origin used frequently in Ezequiel which simply means a man, to be weak and mortal, in the prophet Daniel appears to refer to a man that surpasses the human condition, and instead is a celestial and apocalyptic figure (cf. Dan 7,2-27). This mysterious Son of man, of celestial origin is enthroned by God as king with universal and eternal power.

According to the Synoptic gospels, Jesus himself used this figure to talk about his life and ministry (cf. Mt 8,20; 11,19), his death and resurrection (cf. Mark 8,31), and of his glorious coming

at the final judgement (cf. Mark 8,38; 13,26-27). In the gospel of John, the «Son of Man», gains a new definition in the words of Jesus, that of an individual preexisting figure (cf. John 3, 13; 6, 62).¹⁷

1.5- Names and Titles of Jesus

In order to illustrate the contribution of the OT to the Christological message of the NT let's look at some titles and names with which Jesus appears in the NT: the names of Jesus Christ, Son of God and Lord.

1.5.1- Jesus

Biblical names generally contain a theological meaning, and this is exactly what we find with the name of Jesus.

At the Annunciation, the angel Gabriel asks Joseph to name the child that is to be born “Jesus” and he explains its significance “he will save his people from their sins” (Matt 1,21).

In Hebrew the name Jesus means «God Saves» the name Jesus contains the name of God revealed to Moses «Yahweh». The Salvation that God brings to his people is not only freedom from slavery in Egypt but also freedom from sin.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says: “The name ‘Jesus’ signifies that the very name of God is present in the person of his Son, made man for the universal and definitive redemption from sins. It is the divine name that alone brings salvation (...) (cf. Acts 5,41; 3John 7).” (CCC, 432)

1.5.2- Christ

The word “Christ” comes from the Greek translation of the term «Messiah» which means anointed. In Israel the term Messiah referred to those that were anointed and consecrated by God for a specific mission: the kings, the priests and on occasion the prophets.

Like “Christ”, Jesus is prophet, priest and king. In this way the catechism of the Catholic Church helps us to understand what we were studying earlier on, about the Messianic hope in

¹⁷ Cf. G. O’COLLINS, *Christology*, 62-67; B. FORTE, *Gesù di Nazaret, storia de Dio, Dio della storia*, 84-86; A. AMATO, *Jesús el Señor*, 100-103.

Israel when it says: "Jesus fulfilled the messianic hope of Israel in his threefold office of priest, prophet and king". (CCC, 436)

In the NT, Jesus is presented from birth as the Messiah promised to Israel (cf. Luke 2, 11). From the moment of his baptism Jesus is consecrated: « God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power» (Acts 10, 38). The first Christians identified Jesus very early on as the Messiah. This was not a result of a late development, as it is found in the early formulas of the kerygma,¹⁸ confessions and hymns (cf. 1 Thess 1, 1; Phil 2, 6-11).

The word "Christ" named his identity and his activities, and therefore became a proper name for Jesus, since "he accomplished perfectly the divine mission that Christ signifies". (CCC, 436).

1.5.3- Son of God¹⁹

In the OT, this title is given to the angels, to the chosen people (cf. Hos 11,1), also to characters like the Kings (cf. Ps 82,6; 2S 7,14) or a just man. This title indicates the particular characteristic of the relationship that God has, with the chosen person.

In the NT, the voice from heaven at his baptism and at the Transfiguration, and the very personal and intimate way that Jesus addresses God as father, and his own Resurrection (cf. Rom 1,4; Gal 1,16), contributed to establishing this expression as a title of Jesus himself.

Jesus accepts the profession of faith from Peter as " the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt 16, 16) and he responds with solemnity: " flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matt 16,17)

Yet, this revelation comes through Jesus himself, like the Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that if: "Peter could recognize the transcendent character of the Messiah's divine sonship, it is because Jesus had clearly allowed it to be so understood". (CCC, 443)

This title occupies a central place in the gospels, for example, Mark starts and ends his gospel proclaiming Jesus as «Son of God» (cf. Mark 1,1; 15,39), and is used throughout the gospel of Paul (cf. Gal 1,15-16) and John (cf. John 20,31).

¹⁸ Kerygma is a word used in the New Testament with the meaning of message, preaching, announcement or proclamation.

¹⁹ Cf. G. O'COLLINS – E. G. FARRUGIA, «Hijo de Dios», *Diccionario abreviado de teología*, 171.

The confession of Jesus as “Son of God”, “from the beginning (cf. 1Ts 1,10), this acknowledgment of Christ's divine sonship will be the center of the apostolic faith (cf. Jn 20, 31), first professed by Peter as the Church's foundation (cf. Mt 16,18) » (CCC, 442).

The meaning of this confession of faith is summarized by W. Kasper as follows: “The profession of faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God is a summary that expresses the essential and specific of the totality of Christian faith. Without the confession of faith in Jesus as the son of God there can be no Christian faith”.²⁰

1.5.4- Lord

In the Hebrew Bible Yahweh- the name of God revealed to Moses, which the Jews avoided saying out of respect-was called Adonai “My Lord”.

In the Greek translation, this word changed to Kyrios which means Lord.

In the OT, Lord is the most common way to assign the divinity of the God of Israel.

In the Gospels, very often, Jesus is called “Lord” (cf. Matt 8,2; 14,30; 15,22). By giving Jesus the title of “Lord” that was originally given to Yahweh, the Creator and God of Israel, the power, the honor, the glory and the divinity of God the Father is being recognized as belonging to Jesus.

For Paul, God the Father, by resurrecting Jesus from the dead and raising him to his glory, gives him his own name and manifests his divine sovereignty: “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2, 9-11).²¹

²⁰ W. KASPER, *Jesús, el Cristo*, 4ª Edición, Ediciones Sígueme, Salamanca, 1982, p. 189.

²¹ Cf. *CATECISMO DE LA IGLESIA CATOLICA*, 446-451; J. L. GRESHAM, *Jesús. God and Man*, First Edition, Liguori Publications, p. 50-53.

Questions for Reflection

- The word Christ comes from the term Messiah, which means anointed. In Israel, Messiah was designated to a person who was “anointed” for a mission. As a couple, member of the Teams of our Lady, do you consider yourself anointed, ready for any mission that your team or the movement calls you for? Why or why not? How have you demonstrated this? What are you still missing to be true Messiah?
- If Jesus is presented as the one in which the scripture is fulfilled and we believe in that Jesus of Nazareth, his history, his person, his ministry and his message, are we allowing the scriptures to be fulfilled in our lives?

TABLE 2
THE PUBLIC MINISTRY OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

To know someone, it is necessary to meet with them, share with them, and know their thoughts, their plans and their ideals. However, when the person that we want to know is no longer among us, we need to turn to the testimonies of those that have known them, those that shared their destiny and have preserved their memory.

Jesus lived in a specific time and place in history. Many men and women knew him, they heard his message, and they followed him. Those men and women followed Jesus as disciples and formed a community.

The Church is that community that follows Jesus, that preserves his memory, offers his testimony to the world and has their hope in Him. The church is unified and sustained through Him, in order to fulfill the mission of letting others know him as the Savior of all humanity, present in our history.

This is the objective of Table 2: to know Jesus by examining the Gospels and reading about some of the central moments in his public life, starting with his Baptism, his Temptations, his teachings about the Kingdom of God and his power to perform miracles.

2.1- The Baptism of Jesus²²

Jesus, through his baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, inaugurated his public Ministry. (Cf. Luke 3,23; Acts 1,22) In order to understand the baptism of Jesus, it is necessary to know the meaning of the baptism carried out by John.

John proclaimed, as we read in Luke, “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 3,3). This is intimately tied to the relentless preaching of God’s judgment.

It is important to point out that the preaching of John and his baptism, are a continuation of the Messianic hope of the people of Israel in the OT, presented in Table 1.

²² Cf. Joseph Ratzinger - Bento XVI. **Jesus de Nazaré: Do Batismo no Jordão à Transfiguração**. São Paulo: Editora Planeta, 2007.

In the time of John, the Baptist, sacred baths were common, as well as purification rituals with water. However, John's preaching brought with it something new, the urgency for repentance and the need to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins.

All of this is represented through the stages of baptism. It is a complete bathing of the body. The immersion in the flowing waters of the Jordan River is above all, a symbol of life. It is about purification from the sins of the past, in order to be ready for the kingdom of God, which is near.

The Gospels give testimony that a multitude of sinners, publicans and soldiers (cf. Luke 3,10-14), Pharisees and Sadducees (cf. Matt 3,7) and prostitutes (cf. Matt 21,32) come, in order to be baptized by John.

It is undeniable that Jesus was baptized by John and the gospels give testimony to this fact. (cf. Mark 1,9-11; Matt 3,14-15; Luke 3,21-22; John 1,29-30. 33-34).

The baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, is first of all an event of revelation of the mystery of the Son of God and of his Messianic mission, anointed by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus does not need to be baptized by John to change his life, nor does he need to confess his sins, as he was without sin. However, he lined up with the rest of the multitude of people that waited for the forgiveness of their sins. In order to be submerged in a common destiny, he becomes one with them and one of them. From that moment on, he carries the guilt of all Humanity.

In this way, through his own baptism, Jesus inaugurates the mystery of our redemption. Jesus takes the place of the sinners; he allows himself to be included with the sinners (cf. Isa 53,12).

Therefore, the baptism of Jesus is the early acceptance of his death for the sins of humanity. The Voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son" (Matt 3,17), is also the acceptance from the father of the redeeming death of his Son, that will reach its completion in the Resurrection.

As well, the Gospel of John connects the baptism of Jesus with the sacrificial redemption of the Lamb of God. John the Baptist presents Jesus to his disciples as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1, 29). In fact, in the liturgy these words are pronounced

right before communion. This expression, coming from John the Baptist after the baptism of Jesus, anticipates and sheds light to the redeeming meaning, of Jesus' death on the cross (cf. John 1,29).

At his baptism, Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit for his triple Messianic mission of prophet, priest and king. Jesus received the Holy Spirit for all of us, in order to fully give this Spirit, to those that believe in Him, and become one with Him through baptism (cf. Acts 1,5; 2,38). This moment is the first testimony to the free will of Jesus, in his sacrifice for the Salvation of others.

At his baptism, the Holy Trinity is also manifested. The four Gospels shed light to the Trinitarian mystery of Jesus's baptism. The son is baptized and at the moment that he leaves the waters, the sky opens and the Holy Spirit descends and remains suspended above Him in the form of a dove, and finally the father, from heaven, acknowledges Jesus as his beloved Son.

These events are of great importance. The fact that the sky opens above Jesus, shows that intimate communion with the father. Jesus makes his choice, in complete support to the will of the father. Then, that same father proclaims Christ's mission, a mission that apart from being a mission of doing, is a mission of being his beloved Son full of his Spirit. (cf. CCC, 536).

2.2- The Temptations of Jesus²³

The three synoptic Gospels tell us that immediately after Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, he fasted for forty days and nights in the desert. During this time Satan appear to Jesus and tried to tempt him three times.

The goal of these temptations is to propose to Jesus a different way to be the Messiah, the Son of God in favor of humanity. At the center of these temptations is the image of the "Messianic choice" of Jesus.

The first temptation tells us that "He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished." (Mt 4,2), Satan said to him: "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." (Mt 4,3)

In the Gospels, there are other accounts related to bread that helps us to understand the severity of this first temptation.

²³ Cf. Papa Benedicto XVI, **Jesús de Nazaret**.

First, there is the story of the multiplication of the loaves of bread for the thousands of people that had followed Jesus to an isolated location. Why, does what at one time had been rejected by Jesus as a temptation, come true at this time? The people had arrived to listen to the word of God and in order to do that, they had to have left everything behind. Therefore, as people who had opened their hearts to the word of God proclaimed by Jesus, they were now ready to receive bread that Jesus multiplied.

The second account is from the Last Supper that becomes the Eucharist Celebration of the church and the permanent miracle of Jesus in the form of bread. Jesus himself has become the grain that after death, gives many fruits. He himself has become bread for us, and this multiplication will last forever, until the end of times. In this way, we understand the words that Jesus takes from the OT to answer the one who tempts.

In the second temptation, once the devil understood that for Jesus satisfying physical hunger was not necessary, he offered him the pleasure of intense, exciting emotions. This temptation brings a special risk for the human Jesus, in his mission and condition of Son of God. First of all, the devil references Psalm 91,11-12, that speaks about the protection that God offers the loyal man: "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."

Jesus's answer also comes from the scriptures (Deut 6,16) it is: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test!". This passage makes reference to the difficulties of the Israelites that facing the danger of death by thirst in the desert, rebelled against Moses the prophet of God. This Rebellion against God is described in the Bible the following way: "the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" (Ex 17,7).

This scene at the pinnacle of the Temple also directs our vision towards the cross. Christ does not throw himself from the pinnacle of the Temple. He does not jump into the abyss; he does not tempt God. But he has descended into the abyss of death, to the night of abandonment, to the self-neglect of the defenseless. He has dared to make this jump as an act of love for God and for Humanity. Therefore, he knew that by jumping he could only fall in the arms of a loving father. Therefore, the true understanding of Psalm 91 is revealed.

In the third and last temptation, the devil guides Jesus towards a vision on a high mountain. He shows him all of the kingdoms of the Earth and offers him dominance above the world if he kneels before him and adores him.

There are two notable scenes equivalent in the life of Jesus that helps us to understand this last temptation. The resurrected Lord reunites his people and says on “the mountain” (cf. Matt 28,16) “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Mt 28,18).

There are two new and different aspects here. The Lord not only has power on earth and what can be seen, but also in heaven. The second point that can be added, is that Jesus received this power from the father through his resurrection. This confirms that this power of the resurrected Jesus pre-exists the cross, pre-exists his death, pre-exists the other mountain in Golgotha, where he died nailed to the cross.

The other scene occurs when Peter pronounced in the name of the disciples his profession of faith in Jesus the Messiah and Christ, the son of the Living God. But exactly at this crucial moment, the tempter presents himself with the danger of turning everything backward.

The Lord explains immediately that the concept of Messiah must be understood from the totality of the prophetic message: it does not mean worldly power, but rather the cross and the new community that is completely different and which is born of the cross. Peter had not yet fully understood. “And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” (Mt 16,22).

Only by reading these words in relation to the temptations will we understand Jesus's incredibly harsh answer to Peter: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” (Mt 16,23).

But Jesus also tells us how he objected Satan, in what he said to Peter and what he explained once again to the disciples on the road to Emmaus: none of the kingdoms of this world are the Kingdom of God, none of them will ensure the complete salvation of humanity. The human Kingdom remains human and those that affirm that they can raise the world according to the deception of Satan, will make the world fall in his hands.

The Gospels reminders that the temptations faced by Jesus, relive the temptations of Adam in paradise, as well as the temptations of Israel in the desert and also indicate the salvific

meaning of this mysterious event (CCC 539). In conclusion, let's take a look at how they express the salvific meaning of this moment in Jesus's life:

- Jesus like the new Adam overcomes with his obedience the Disobedience of the first Adam.
- The 40 days of fasting by Jesus, reminds us of the 40 years of Israel's Rebellion against God in the desert. Jesus on the other hand perfectly fulfilled the vocation of Israel (CCC, 539)
- Where Adam and Israel failed, Jesus overcomes and opens for humanity a new path of obedience and fidelity.
- Christ is revealed as God's servant completely and totally obedient to the father's will (CCC, 539)
- Jesus' victory is a preview to the victory of the Pasion, supreme act of obedience and love from the Son to the Father (CCC, 539)

The catechism of the Catholic Church explains the messianic nature of Jesus when faced with the temptations, it affirms: "Jesus' temptation reveals the way in which the Son of God is Messiah, contrary to the way Satan proposes to him and the way men wish to attribute to him. This is why Christ vanquished the Tempter for us" (CCC, 540).

2.3- The Kingdom of God, Jesus' Central Message²⁴

The central idea of Jesus's preaching was the theme of the "Kingdom of God". Therefore, we can only understand it by looking at the total message.

Jesus begins his public life, as if proclaiming a summary of the fundamental content of his message, by announcing that the Kingdom of God is near: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." (Mark 1,15).

Matthew summarizes the words and activities of Jesus in the following way: "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom" (Matt 4,23).

²⁴ José Ramón Busto Saiz. **Cristología para empezar**. 4ª edición, Santander: Editorial Sal Terrae, 1995.

From the historical perspective, the content of Jesus's message about the Kingdom of God has its foundation in the OT and it raised the deepest aspirations and expectations of Israel.

Let's remember what was mentioned in Table 1.

In Judaism, in the time of Jesus, the idea of the sovereignty of God was part of the liturgy of the temple and of the daily prayer life of a devout Jew. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. The Lord your God you shall fear; him you shall serve, and by his name alone you shall swear..." (Deut 6,4; 11,13; cf. Nm 15,37-41)

Israel lived from this faith, therefore when they heard someone speaking about the coming of God, the hope awakened in their heart. The hope that God would soon liberate Israel from foreign oppression and would restore among them justice, peace and dignity.

Jesus was a true Israelite. However, by proclaiming that the Kingdom of God was near, inside of you or had reached you, he claimed something new. The novelty of Jesus's announcement of the coming and the breakthrough of the Kingdom, is the work of Jesus.

The Gospels show how surprising Jesus' proclamation was to Israel. "The Kingdom of God is near". His certainty caused confusion in some and enthusiasm and others.

Let's be clear, **in Jesus, the great novelty in the announcing the Kingdom of God, is simply God himself.** God is the center and in his sovereignty over the world in a new way, becomes a reality in history. Theologians call this but the expression that of the Kingdom.

Benedict explains the centrality of God in the proclamation of the kingdom in the following way:

"When Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God, he is quite simply proclaiming God, and proclaiming him to be the living God, who is able to act concretely in the world and in history and is even now so acting. He is telling us: "God exists" and "God is really God", which means that he holds in his hands the threads of the world. In this sense, Jesus' message is very simple and thoroughly God-centered. The new and totally specific thing about this message is that he is telling us: God is acting now-this is the hour when God is showing himself in history as its Lord, as the living God" (Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth I*, p. 56).

Yet this great novelty in the sovereignty of God, which in a new way makes itself close to humanity has a deep relationship with a person and mission of Jesus.

The Catechism teaches us the significance of this relationship: "Jesus accompanies his words with many "mighty works and wonders and signs", (Acts 2,22) which manifest that the kingdom is present in him and attest that he was the promised Messiah" (CCC, 547) they give testimony that Jesus is the Messiah. Theologians recognize this as the "Christocentric" relationship of God's Kingdom.

Jesus is the one that announces and reveals a Kingdom. In other words, the Kingdom of God becomes present with Jesus and in Jesus. Jesus, in order to carry-out the father's will, inaugurated on Earth the Kingdom of Heaven. (Cf. CCC, 541)

This way, we understand that the reign of God is what God accomplishes through Jesus and that this will not exist outside of Jesus. He is the place where the Kingdom of God is realized for humanity and it is made accessible to all men through their relationship with Jesus.

Pope Benedict XVI writes the following about the "Christocentric" dimension of the Kingdom of God:

"The new proximity of the Kingdom of which Jesus speaks – the distinguishing feature of his message- is to be found in Jesus himself. Through Jesus' presence and action, God has here and now entered actively into history in a wholly new way. The reason why *now* is the fullness of time (Mark 1,15), why now is in a unique sense the time of conversion and penance, as well as the time of joy, is that in Jesus it is God who draws near to us. In Jesus, God is now the one who acts and who rules as Lord- rules in a divine way, without worldly power, rules through the love that reaches "to the end" (John 13,1) to the Cross." (Benedicto XVI, Jesús de Nazaret I, p. 88).

Jesus also guides is reality of the Kingdom towards the future, towards its full realization. The definite establishment of the Kingdom of God passes through the Cross and all of humanity is invited to receive the message of the Kingdom, which will come and will reach its completeness when Christ redeems all of creation and humanity to the father. (Rom 8,18-25; 1Co 15,24-28)

What we have said, warns us that the Kingdom cannot be understood through definitions. Also, Jesus speaks constantly of the Kingdom of God but never really explains directly what it

consists of. Yet he calls us to enter the Kingdom through the Parables, a very common characteristic of his teaching.

When describing the Kingdom of God through different Parables, Jesus introduces us to the realization that through his demands, he expects the radical choice for Him in order to reach the Kingdom, in other words **to become his disciple**.

One of the most common parables used by Jesus in order to describe the Kingdom of God, is the one about the guests at the banquet. According to this parable, there are some guests that are chosen by their own right: the people of Israel, those that fulfill the law. Yet, those guests don't want to go to the banquet. Therefore, the king sends someone to invite others to the banquet, the needy, the poor, the sinners, in order to receive the gift of the Kingdom.

They are all called to the Kingdom to enjoy the free and conditional love of God. To this, Matthew adds a detail about the guest that does not have the appropriate dress for the party, with this he would like to point out the necessity of answering this invitation.

Jesus' message about the Kingdom also affirms the insignificance of this Kingdom in history: it is like a grain of mustard the smallest of all seeds. It is like the yeast, a small part in comparison with the entire dough but necessary in order for the final product.

In conclusion let's recall some of the characteristics of the kingdom of God:

- The kingdom of God is closely linked to the presence and activities of Jesus.
- The kingdom of God is available to everyone and is free. All men are called to enter the Kingdom. It is destined to welcome all men from all nations. (cf. CCC, 543).
- The first guests to the Kingdom of God are the poor and the small, in other words, those that come with a humble heart. The catechism of the church teaches us that: "Jesus shares the life of the poor, from the cradle to the cross; he experiences hunger, thirst and privation. Jesus identifies himself with the poor of every kind and makes active love toward them the condition for entering his kingdom." (CCC, 544).
- The first that are called to participate in the Kingdom are the sinners: "I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." (Mark 2, 17). He invites them to

repent and convert, showing them the word and the infinite mercy that God the Father has towards them. (cf. CCC, 545).

2.4- Miracles, symbols of the Kingdom of God

In the Gospels, we find many references to the miracles of Jesus. In the first part of the Gospel of Mark for example, the proclamation of the kingdom of God surrounds the miracles of Jesus.

It is difficult, when talking about Jesus, not to talk about the Miracles he performed. Christian sources unanimously agree that: “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.” (Matt 4,23; cf. Mark 1,39; Luke 6,18; Matt 9,35).

We are not saying that you can historically prove each one of the miracles, as found in the Gospels. Yet there is consensus that historically, Jesus was undeniably considered by his contemporaries as a healer and exorcist of great prestige.²⁵

In the period after the Resurrection, the memory of the miracles performed by Jesus were recorded with the first Christians, as Peter said: “ God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.” (Acts 10,37-38).

When faced with this undeniable fact we must ask ourselves, in relation to the totality of the message and the work of Jesus, what is the place and significance of these miracles?

The catechism of the Catholic Church offers us a summary of the key ideas.

- The miracles are symbols of the closeness of the kingdom of God: “Jesus accompanies his words with many "mighty works and wonders and signs", which manifest that the kingdom is present in him and attest that he was the promised Messiah.” (CCC, 547).
- The miracles reveal and give testimony of Jesus as the Messiah “and attest that he was the promised Messiah.” (CCC, 547); and adds: “The signs worked by Jesus attest that the Father has sent him.” (CCC, 548).

²⁵ Cfr. Jose Antonio Pagola. **Jesús: Aproximación histórica**. Editorial: PPC, eBook, 12ª ed., 2013, p. 161.

- The miracles invite us to believe in Jesus as the Son of God: “To those who turn to him in faith, he grants what they ask. So, miracles strengthen faith in the One who does his Father's works; they bear witness that he is the Son of God.” (CCC, 548).
- The miracles are symbols of the Messianic and liberating mission of Jesus: “By freeing some individuals from the earthly evils of hunger, injustice, illness and death, Jesus performed messianic signs. Nevertheless, he did not come to abolish all evils here below, but to free men from the gravest slavery, sin, which thwarts them in their vocation as God's sons and causes all forms of human bondage. (CCC, 549).

The miracles are definitely symbols of the presence of the Kingdom of God in Jesus. For Jesus, the healing of the sick and the liberation of the possessed are not isolated events, instead they form part of his proclamation of the kingdom of God. This is his way of announcing to everyone the good news that God is already acting among them.

In the Gospels the expression “miracle” is not used to describe the marvelous actions of Jesus. Instead, it is used to demonstrate the healing power and strength of God.²⁶ The first part of John's gospel is also called “The Book of Signs”.

In the Bible, a miracle is an unusual, unexplainable, incomprehensible and unexpected event. A way for God to take people out of their indifference and get them to focus their attention on him.²⁷

The miracles of Jesus, rather than extraordinary events, must be considered primarily as powerful reinforcement of the strength given by God to nature and humans.

In this context, it is important to keep in mind that God never intervenes in the world in such a way that he disregards the laws of nature, the freedom and independence of man, or replaces what humans must do with his actions. The miracle does not destroy the order of nature or the nature of things, instead it takes them to its fullness. The same thing happens with the Grace of God which does not destroy man's action but makes it possible for it to be a truly liberating and independent reality.

²⁶ Cf. Hans Kessler. **Manual de Cristología**. Barcelona: Editorial Herder, 2003.

²⁷ Cf. Gerhard Lohfink. **Jesus of Nazareth: What He Wanted, Who He Was**. Paperback, 2015.

This is visible in the healing miracles that Jesus performed, these were only possible when someone believed and had faith. Faith like God's grace elevates all human capabilities: freedom, conscience and intelligence to accept the person of Jesus and his salvation.

One example is the woman that "had been subject to bleeding for twelve years", Jesus tells her "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease." (Mc 5,34). Her faith has healed her, her faith in Jesus as Savior. Without faith, the woman would not have been healed. For this reason, Jesus does not heal large groups of people, instead he heals individuals. We could say that his miracles have one condition, they are dependent on the faith of each person that truly opens up to him.²⁸

A miracle is not performed so that people have faith. On the contrary, the people that have faith will be able to see the miracle but for those that do not have faith, a miracle will perhaps only be seen as an extraordinary event. If faith is not present, the miracle cannot happen.

In Nazareth, Mark explicitly says that Jesus was not able to do any miracles there because of the incredulity of the people. A miracle is experience only as an action of God through faith. In other words, it does not force faith, the miracle asks for and confirms faith.

Finally, following Gerhard Lohfink's work, let's observe some of the characteristics of the miracles of Jesus:

- Jesus did not act with magic or used amulets or magical words.
- Faith is part of the miracle, Jesus asked for Faith so that the miracle could take place.
- The miracles are for others, Jesus never performed miracles for himself.
- The mercy that Jesus shows for others, is not simply sympathy for them instead it is an image of the mercy of God with his people.
- Each miracle reveals a sample of the new Heaven and Earth

²⁸ Cf. Gerhard Lohfink, **Jesús of Nazareth**, 140-142.

Questions for reflection:

- Which temptations have you faced and continue to face in your life? What do you do to overcome them?
- In your process of conversion, are you conscious of the infinite mercy of God the Father?
- A miracle is not produced so that people have faith. If faith is not present, the miracle will not take place. Have you ever experienced a miracle in your life? When? How have these moments affected your conjugal spirituality?

TABLE 3
THE PASSION AND DEATH BY CROSS OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

The entire life and ministry Jesus had one goal, the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom is not something abstract or vague, we have already seen this in Table 2. In Jesus, the Kingdom of God is evident in the power of his word and through his healing actions. The “miracles and signs “that accompanied Jesus’ words, reveal that he is the Messiah, the Son of God.

In Table 3, the reality of the Kingdom of God, is made historically visible through the Passion and Death of Jesus of Nazareth. Here is where we find the words and the decisive events in the life of Jesus. For the primitive Christian community, Jesus, through his passion and death on the cross opens the possibility of salvation for all of humanity (cf. Matt 26,28). Saint Paul writes: “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures” (1Cor 15,3).

This is the goal for Table 3, to retrace the path of Jesus towards the cross, a path of obedience where he gave himself to the Father. A path, which included the unconditional gift of the Son to humanity, with its consequences, including the passion and death, in order to reconcile with God.

3.1- Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem²⁹

3.1.1- The announcement of his passion through the journey to Jerusalem

“From the day Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Master “began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things. . . and be killed, and on the third day be raised...(Matt 16,21).” (CCC, 554).

First of all, let's emphasize how the profession of faith by Peter in Caesarea Philippi, opens a new stage in the story of Jesus (cf. Matt 16,13-20; Mark 8,27-30; Luke 9,18-21). Jesus’ conversation with Peter becomes a manifesto of the central problem, the identity of the Messiah.

The messianic idea of Peter is still that of a glorious, earthly Messiah. We could say, that this is the same idea that is still popular among the people that have heard Jesus’ message and have witnessed his miracles. Jesus reprimands Peter and invites him to take up his cross and

²⁹ Gunther Borkman, *Jesús de Nazaret*, Ediciones SÍGUEME Salamanca, 1975.

follow him to Jerusalem: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Matt 16,24; Mark 8,34; Luke 9,23).

Jesus indicates a new stage in the pedagogy of his messianic message and his preaching of the kingdom of God. He introduces his disciples to a messianic message that is deeply marked by the experience of a suffering servant of Yahweh.

The decision to go to Jerusalem is without a doubt a decisive moment in the history of Jesus. He starts the journey with his disciples because it was also necessary to bring their message of the imminent Kingdom of God to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was for Jesus, as it was for all the Jewish people, not only the capital of the nation but also a place that was bound to Israel's destiny and God's salvation.

This first aspect allows us to move to a second point, the motives that pushed Jesus in his decision to make the journey to Jerusalem. The catechism of the Catholic Church emphasizes the obedience, the freedom and the awareness of Jesus, as he faces death. It says: “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9,51). Through this decision, he acknowledged that he was going to Jerusalem prepared to die. (CCC, 557)

It is in Jerusalem where all prophets must confirm their mission: “Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.” (Luke13,31-33).

Even though he foresees his death, Jesus goes to Jerusalem, demonstrating his will to redeem us: “Jesus recalls the martyrdom of the prophets who had been put to death in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, he persists in calling Jerusalem to gather around him”. (CCC, 558).

Jesus is aware that his people don't want to recognize the timing of his coming and of their denial of the Salvation that he offers them. This awareness is clear when Jesus tells the parable of the landowner, that sent his own son to collect his fruit, but the tenants threw him out and killed him. (cf. Matt 21,33-41).

The Gospels make clear the connection between:

- The profession of faith of Peter;
- The decision of Jesus to go to Jerusalem; and,

- His own announcement of his passion, three times, on his way to the holy city (cf. Matt 20,17-19).

It is precisely Luke, who establishes a rigorous connection between Peter's profession of faith and Jesus' foretelling of his passion (Luke 9,18-22), the invitation to take his own cross and follow him (Luke 9,23-27) as well the story of the Transfiguration, seen as the preview of his glorious Resurrection.

3.1.2- Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem

The story in the Gospels, relating to Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem and above all, the story recalling Jesus' passion and death, stands out above all previous stories because of the details and the way in which all of these events are linked together. The gospels tell the story in a way that the hand of God is made visible and in order to show that Jesus is the one that fulfills the scriptures.

The narrations are full of direct quotations from the prophets and the psalms, as well as allusions to these in many of the details throughout the texts.

When we read about Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, we must first pay attention to a detail that may not be evident to a modern reader. It is the fact that Mark's narration of events is in fact describing a Royal entrance. The scene describes the entrance of a king to his City, the arrival of the Messiah to Zion. Here, we see Jesus taking possession of his city.

This explains the presence of the donkey, that no one had ridden before, the one in which Jesus enters the city. "To today's reader, this may seem fairly harmless, but for the Jewish contemporaries of Jesus it is full of mysterious allusions. The theme of the kingdom and its promises is ever present."³⁰ It refers to the words in Genesis 49,10 and to the passage from Zachariah 9,9 that Matthew and John directly quote: "Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Matt 21,5)

³⁰ Joseph Ratzinger - Bento XVI. **Jesus de Nazaré: da entrada em Jerusalém até a Ressurreição**. São Paulo: Editora Planeta do Brasil, 2011, p. 16.

Jesus wants his actions and journey to be understood according to the promises of the Old Testament, which become a reality in him. His demands are based on the obedience to the wishes of the Father. His steps are a journey along the path of the word of the Lord. His power, is a power of a different nature: it resides in poverty, in the peace of God, which He considers the only saving power.³¹

Other signs throughout the Gospels also refer to the theme of royalty. This is the case with the palm branches and the clothes laid down on the ground so that Jesus can walk on them, as well as the cry of Hosanna! Which was a greeting or shout of praise but actually meant Save! Or Help! “The spreading out of garments likewise belongs to the tradition of Israelite kingship (cf. 2 Kings 9, 13). What the disciples do is a gesture of enthronement in the tradition of the Davidic kingship, and it points to the Messianic hope that grew out of the Davidic tradition.”³²

Benedict XVI presents us with the following three ideas: “joyful praise of God at the moment of the processional entry, hope that the hour of the Messiah had arrived, and at the same time a prayer that the Davidic kingship and hence God’s kingship over Israel would be reestablished”.

Lastly, the catechism of the church emphasizes the connection between the triumphal entrance to Jerusalem and the Kingdom of God: “Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem manifests the coming of the kingdom that the Messiah-King, welcomed into his city by children and the humble of heart, is going to accomplish by the Passover of his Death and Resurrection.” (CCC, 570).

3.1.3- Jesus cleanses the Temple

Mark tells us that after Jesus entered the city of David as a Messianic King, he made his way to the temple where he observed everything and since it was late, he went to Bethany (cf. Mark 11,11). The next day he returned to the temple (cf. Mark 11,15). The sequence of events allows us to see that the relation between Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem and his immediate visit to the temple is not an accident.

³¹ Benedicto XVI, *Jesús de Nazaret II*, 15

³² Benedicto XVI, *Jesús de Nazaret II*, 16

Among biblical scholars, there is consensus in the understanding that by throwing the vendors out of the temple, Jesus carried out a symbolic action, as was common among prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah.

This was not the only symbolic action, Jesus carried out others, like: eating among the sinners, the selection of the twelve, the entrance into Jerusalem, and the Last Supper. In other words, the cleansing of the Temple was a prophetic action on behalf of Jesus (cf. Mark 11,15-17; Matt 21,12-13; Luke 19,45-46; John 2,13-19).

Therefore, we must ask ourselves, since we are talking about a prophetic action, what did Jesus want us to understand from it?

There have been a several interpretations of this event. Here is a brief summary of the Pope Benedict XVI's interpretation:

- Jesus himself explains his symbolic gesture. First, Mark tells us that Jesus taught: "He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'" (Mark 11,17a). Here, Jesus' doctrine about the temple reflects the universal vision of the prophet Isaiah (56,7), of a future in which in the house of God, all of the Nations will adore the Lord as the one and only God. Therefore, according to Jesus' own words, his intention is to make room in the Temple for everyone to adore the Lord.
- In Jesus' second teaching, Mark tells us: "But you have made it a den of robbers." (Mark 11,17b). Jesus merges Isaiah's universal vision with the vision of the prophet Jeremiah, who fights passionately so that the worship given to God in the temple, is not separate from the justice for all men desired by God.
- To complete the significance of the allusion to the prophet Jeremiah, Pope Benedict depends again on the Gospel of John, when it refers to Jesus' words about the temple: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (John 2,19). This will be the true sign that Jesus will give to those that ask: "His sign is the cross and the resurrection". And he concludes: "The rejection and crucifixion of Jesus means at the same time the end of this Temple. The era of the Temple is over. Anew worship is being introduced, in a Temple not built by human hands. This Temple is his body, the Risen

one, who gathers the peoples and unites them in the sacrament of his body and blood. He himself is the new Temple of humanity".³³

3.2- The Last Supper

At the Last Supper, Jesus himself anticipated his death the moment he offered himself during the Eucharist. In this way, from within he transformed his death into an act of love, of sacrifice for our sins and for the glorification of God. This moment symbolizes the entire meaning of Jesus' mission: "In this way, all the parables, the whole proclamation of God's Kingdom, are placed under the sign of the cross".³⁴

The words and the gestures with which Jesus gave himself to his disciples in the bread and the wine, are the center of the Eucharistic tradition of The Last Supper. The story of its institution of the Eucharist is found in the synoptic Gospels (cf. Mark 14,22-24; Matt 26,26-28; Luke 22,17-20), as well as in the first letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians (cf.11,23-26).

- The words of the institution illuminate the free and voluntary offer that Jesus made of himself. "Jesus gave the supreme expression of his free offering of himself at the meal shared with the twelve Apostles "on the night he was betrayed. (1Cor 11,23)" (CCC, 610).
- The words and gestures of Jesus, also show the self-awareness that he had regarding his own death as sacrifice and atonement, when he says that his body will be given and his blood will be poured for the forgiveness of sins (cf. CCC, 611). Jesus consciously unites this moment with the Cross. Taking the words that originally come from the prophets and transforming them in a personal language, Jesus expresses that He is the real and definite sacrifice.
- Also, with these prophetic gestures of the giving of the bread and wine, which he gives his disciples to be shared among all, Jesus converts that last supper into a great sacramental action, the most important of his life, the one that best summarizes his service to the Kingdom of God. Jesus wants to leave this gesture engraved forever in

³³ Benedicto XVI, *Jesús de Nazaret II*, 33-34.

³⁴ Benedicto XVI, *Jesús de Nazaret II*, 148.

the memory of his disciples. “Jesus includes the apostles in his own offering and bids them perpetuate it (cf. Luke 22,19).” (cf. CCC, 611). Jesus himself expresses his desire, that the Eucharist he instituted in this crucial moment of his life becomes a “memorial” of the new alliance, sealed with his sacrifice on the cross when he says: “Do this in remembrance of me” (cf. Luke 22,19).

- The Last Supper is not only inseparable from the Cross, but also from the Resurrection. Last Supper, Cross and Resurrection form the only and undivided Paschal Mystery. In all of the synoptic Gospels, Jesus’ prophecies of his death and Resurrection are part of the Last Supper.
- This allows us to approach the ecclesial dimension of the Eucharist. In the church's tradition, it is perfectly clear that the Church is born from the Eucharist. From the Eucharist, the church receives her unity and her mission. In this way, Pope Benedict XVI says: “She is derived from the Last Supper, that is to say, from Christ’s death and Resurrection, which he anticipated in the gift of his body and blood”.³⁵

3.3- Jesus’ death on the Cross

The fundamental event in the life and earthly ministry of Jesus is his death. In Jesus, there is no separation between the good news of the Kingdom and the acceptance of the sacrifice. Jesus refers to this relationship between his death and the Kingdom during the last supper, as we can see in Mark’s narration: “Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” (Mark 14,25).

The gospel stories reveal a surprising itinerary of Jesus towards the Passion and the Cross. His obedience and fidelity to his mission of announcing the Kingdom, take him to Good Friday. Jesus tells his disciples: “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.” (Mark 10,33-34).

³⁵ Benedicto XVI, *Jesús de Nazaret*, 165.

The fathers of the Church, loved to say that the Incarnation points towards Easter and the catechism exclaims: “his redemptive passion was the very reason for his Incarnation” (CCC, 607), this way pointing out that the Incarnation was necessary in order for the redemption of man.

3.3.1- Jesus’ death

Jesus's death is a historical event confirmed by Christian, Jewish and Roman sources. Nevertheless, even though the gospels dedicate a great part of their narrative to the passion and death of Jesus and agree in the essential parts of the events, the entire event remains under certain doubt.

In Jesus’ death many causes converge, some are close, and some are remote. The synoptic Gospels name as causes for his condemnation in the Jewish process the provocation in the temple and Jesus claiming to be the Messiah, the Son of God and Holy Son of Man (Mark 14,58-64). John emphasizes as definite causes for his accusation, that Jesus being just a man had compared himself to God’s authority (John 5,18; 10,33;19,7)³⁶

The Gospels make it evident from its first pages all of the newness that Jesus brings. The authority in his words and in the signs that he realizes, is the first that things that calls the attention of those who listen. They also bring attention to the fact that: “From the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, certain Pharisees and partisans of Herod together with priests and scribes agreed together to destroy him (cf. Mark 3,6)” (CCC, 574).

The three fundamental accusations against Jesus are the following:

- a) He went against the obedience and integrity of the Law and the written prescriptions. The Catechism associates the mission of Jesus with his fidelity to the Law. It is the servant of God who brings true justice: “In Jesus, the Law no longer appears engraved on tables of stone but "upon the heart" (Jer 31,33) of the Servant who becomes "a covenant to the people", because he will "faithfully bring forth justice” (Isa 42,6; CCC, 580).

³⁶ Cf. Olegario González de Cardedal. **Cristologia**. Editorial: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2001, p.104.

As we can see, Jesus' death on the cross has an explanation of his deepest solidarity with the Law of Israel. Therefore, the good news of the Gospel does not play down the Law, instead "The Law of the Gospel fulfills the commandments of the Law" (CCC, 1968).

- b) He opposed the central nature of the Temple in the city of Jerusalem, the place where God lives. For this reason, the event of the cleansing of the Temple was such a scandal.
- c) He is accused of blasphemy, when he acted on behalf and in the place of God. For them, Jesus is blasphemous because he is a man that pretends to be God (cf. CCC588, 589). Jesus, in his interactions with the sinners, is confirming that only God can forgive our sins and He also has the power, because only He is the son of God. This became more scandalous when Jesus identified his merciful behavior towards sinners, with the attitude God himself has for them.

3.3.2- A death by crucifixion³⁷

Jesus did not suffer the usual Jewish punishment against blasphemy, which was stoning, at the end he was condemned to death as a messianic political candidate. Thus, the reason, for the inscription above the cross with his crime of being "King of the Jews" (Mark, 15,27).

For the Romans, crucifixion was reserved for slaves and the insurgents, it was never used with Roman citizens. It was considered the cruelest and most shameful punishment. For the Jews, the punishment of hanging from a wooden post, was additional punishment for the idolatrous or blasphemous against God, after being stoned or decapitated. With this, the punished was presented publicly as someone forsaken by God (Deut 21,23b: ...for anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse...).

This path of the Cross and Crucifixion, understood as a sign of abandonment and curse by God, created moments of anguish in Jesus. This could only be relieved by God himself, whom Jesus went to in his agony, and in whom he confided in completely as the true and just Son of God.

³⁷ Hans Kessler, **Manual de Cristología**, Editorial Herder Barcelona, 2003.

3.3.3- Jesus before his death

There have been many questions surrounding the Jesus' death. From his meeting with the disciples of Emmaus, Jesus places his passion and death in the context of God's divine plan for Salvation: "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24,26). Peter in his first discourse at Pentecost, sees it as a planned part of the divine plan for Salvation: "This Jesus [was] delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God." (Acts 2,23) (cf. CCC, 599).

By looking at the Synoptic Gospels, we can be sure that Jesus in certain moments of his ministry began to consider for himself a violent death, seeing it not only like a possibility but as an inevitable and real destination.

Jesus was aware of this when he explained the parable of the householder that sent his own son to receive the fruit: "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.'" (Matt 21,38). This free will and obedience are also evident at the Last Supper and in his prayer at Gethsemane (cf. Mark 14,17-42).

Admitting that Jesus was freely and in some way conscience towards his death, has a theological foundation. To suggest the opposite, makes Christ a total and passive and involuntary victim. A suffering and simply passive death, would not be a salvation event through Christ.³⁸

For Jesus, the prediction and the acceptance of death, does not mean a completely calculated and provoked act or something similar to a suicide. The violent death that he foresaw, he accepted not only as a simple consequence of his mission, if this was true it could be interpreted as a failure.

But no, for Jesus his death is the culmination of his mission, where each action announced, promised and offered salvation. Therefore, Jesus understood his death not as a failure but rather as a definitive act of love and obedience to his father, of love and sacrifice to humankind.

³⁸ Cf. Comisión Teológica Internacional, **Cuestiones selectas de Cristología**, IV, B, 2.2.

3.4- The death of Jesus as a salvific event

“The Paschal mystery of Christ's cross and Resurrection stands at the center of the Good News that the apostles, and the Church following them, are to proclaim to the world.” (CCC, 571).

This is the way that the catechism introduces the article about the passion and death of Jesus. It completes the affirmation by remembering that the disciples and the first Christian community, from the moment of the resurrection, saw that the promise of salvation from God was fulfilled “once and for all”, through the redeeming death of his son Jesus Christ (cf. CCC, 571)

This last affirmation has led many to ask themselves whether this salvific value that the disciples saw in the death of Christ was present in Jesus himself before his death. In other words, did Jesus himself give his death a salvific value? Was Jesus aware of this?

Jesus's death was not a casual event something that took him by surprise, much less the result of a blind destiny.

Jesus was perfectly aware of what his death would be like (cf. Mark 9,30-32). Jesus saw his death, not as a dramatic consequence or a natural consequence of his mission, but rather as part of his mission. He accepted his death without deliberately and directly searching for it.

In other words, the salvific value of the Jesus' death must be considered in totality with his life and ministry, of which his death is the climax.

Following are two facts aspects that give Jesus death its salvific value:

- a) For Jesus, the wish to accept the plan redeeming love from the father drives his entire life. The son of God, from the first instant of his incarnation accepted the divine plan of salvation in his redeeming mission. This way, all of Jesus's life is a redeeming event, because his entire life was driven by the fulfillment of the father's will: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work.” (John 4,34).

His sacrifice for the sins of the entire world (cf. 1John 2,2) shows us the communion of love between Jesus and the father that he himself proclaims: “the Father loves me, because I lay down my life” (John 10,17) and reveals his perfect obedience to the will of the Father: “I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father” (John 14, 31) (cf. CCC, 606).

b) Jesus freely accepted in his human heart the redeeming love of the Father towards men, loving them to the extreme (cf. John 13,1) because “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15,13). He truly and freely accepted his passion and his death because of the love for his father and for humanity whom He wants to save. This knowledge and freedom are expressed by Jesus himself: “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” (John 10,18) (cf. CCC, 609).

Questions for reflection:

- Jesus invited Peter and the rest of the disciples to take up their cross and to follow him to Jerusalem. How do you see your cross and how are you carrying it in your daily personal and conjugal life? Does it help to think of the cross of Christ and the invitation that he makes to us?
- What does it mean to you that “Jesus transformed his death into an act of Love of sacrifice for our sins and the glorification of God”? Have you had the opportunity to live an experience related to this affirmation?

Table 4

THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF JESUS

Since the beginning of Christianity, Christians profess that Jesus, who was crucified, “rose on the third day, ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father, almighty.” This proclamation has deep roots in the New Testament.

The belief that that God has truly resurrected Jesus for our salvation, is the content and argument of the entire NT. As it is also the central argument of all the historical accounts of Jesus, of the message of Paul to the pagans, of the discussions with the Jews, of the new way of reading the Old Testament, of the Church’s existence and its mission in the world.

The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of the identity of the Christian faith.

The goal of this TABLE is to deepen in our understanding of this central and fundamental topic of our Christian faith: The Resurrection of Jesus and his Glorification with the Father. This table will allow us once more to emphasize Jesus’ death and its redeeming significance.

4.1- The Resurrection of Jesus³⁹

With the violent and shameful death of Jesus on the cross, it seemed as though everything was finished. Even Jesus's disciples understood his death as the end to all of their hopes. Disappointed, they returned to their families and their jobs. Jesus's message about the Kingdom of God, which had seemed so closed appeared to have been denied his tragic end.

Nevertheless, things continued to progress after Good Friday, it is in fact, when it truly began to move forward. The group of disciples began to meet again and the community and the church was formed, and it began its universal mission. This new beginning, with its dynamic history can only be understood from the historical point of view as a type of explosive beginning.

The New Testament does not affirm the resurrection of Jesus as something expected by the disciples, rather like a reality operated by God and revealed to a few chosen witnesses. The

³⁹ Walter Kasper, **Jesús El Cristo**. 4ta Edición, Ediciones Sígueme Salamanca, 1982.

resurrection of Jesus is not a fact that can be proven and demonstrated historically, instead it is a reality that only faith can understand and experiment.

“Christ's Resurrection was not a return to earthly life, as was the case with the raisings from the dead that he had performed before Easter: Jairus' daughter, the young man of Naim, Lazarus. These actions were miraculous events, but the persons miraculously raised returned by Jesus' power to ordinary earthly life. At some particular moment they would die again. Christ's Resurrection is essentially different. In his risen body he passes from the state of death to another life beyond time and space. At Jesus' Resurrection his body is filled with the power of the Holy Spirit: he shares the divine life in his glorious state, so that St. Paul can say that Christ is "the man of heaven". (cf. 1Cor 15,35-50).” (CCC, 646)

According to the testimony of the entire New Testament, the disciples of Jesus announced soon after his death that he had been risen by God from the dead, that the once crucified had shown himself alive and had sent them to announce the Good News to the whole world.

Unlike the tradition of the passion of Jesus, were all four Gospel's details, even though they have some small differences, generally follow a similar order, the stories and testimonies of Easter are noticeably different.

The biblical testimony diverges in two different directions: the Easter kerygma and the Easter stories. The Easter Kerygma is presented as formulas for professions of faith and in liturgical forms.

Father Jose Ramon Busto Saiz explains how these biblical testimonies should be understood according to modern historical-critical exegesis.⁴⁰

4.1.1- Professions of faith

The professions of faith are short phrases, which give testimony to the resurrection of Jesus. They were repeated and taught, they served to express the feeling and belief that Jesus lived, despite his death, of the primitive Christian community. They are the earliest literal testimonies of the resurrection of Jesus.

⁴⁰ José Ramón Busto Saiz. **Cristología para empezar**. 4ta edición, Editorial Sal Terrae, 1995.

The earliest ones can be found in Romans 10,9 and in the First letter to the Corinthians 15,3-5. In the first letter to the Corinthians (15,5) we have record in writing one of the first testimonies of Jesus' Resurrection: «For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ». Or the phrase from Romans 10,9: «Jesus is Lord». And the phrase found in Luke 24,34: «The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon! ».

4.1.2- Accounts of the empty tomb

The four Gospels agree with the account of finding the tomb opened and empty, the morning of the first day of the week, they also agree on various elements but differ in others. They agree that the tomb was found open and empty by some women. They agree that this occurred in the early hours of the first day of the week after Saturday. The reason for the visit to the tomb was to complete the funeral rituals; only Mathew says that they “went to see the sepulchre”. They must run and announce it to the disciples.

In the synoptic Gospels the women are witnesses to a holy sign, a hierophany, which does not occur in John's gospel. John centers the women's accounts on Mary Magdalene, even though the plural pronoun used by Mary Magdalene herself: “we do not know where they have laid him” takes us back to a previous text where the women were many.

On the basis of this common tradition, the interpretation of each gospel writer takes place.

In Mark, the women receive the message of where they have to search for the Lord from now on. Mark makes it clear that Jesus is not is no longer found among the dead. In Mark, the account must be placed within the context of the message that the gospel writer wants to transmit to the Christian community: that Christians will only reach the resurrection by following the path of the Cross and giving their life, as Jesus himself did.

Matthew transform the account with apocalyptic elements, recognized in the Jewish tradition, like: the earthquake, the angel that arrives like lightning, wearing white garments like the snow and rolls the stone from the tomb and sits on it. In Matthew, surrounding the tomb the

Judeo-Christian controversy arises: Has the crucified Jesus risen or have the disciples robbed his body? The account explains how the guards are astonished before the women as they receive the mission of announcing the resurrection of the Lord.

In Luke, the women first tell of the empty tomb, but then Peter officially confirms it. Jesus has disappeared from the tomb, he is alive. This completes what Jesus had foretold. There is no mention of the journey to Galilee. In Lucas Jesus appears to the disciples in Jerusalem.

In John, the account centers around one of the women that recognizes the Lord when she hears the word "Maria". The account finishes by concentrating on the writings of Peter and the beloved disciple: this represents the Johannine community and believes before Peter.

The memories of the events that occurred that Sunday morning have been oriented and interpreted by the evangelists, according to their vision of the of the Christian mystery. Nevertheless, the fact that the tomb appeared open and empty does not in itself prove the resurrection of the Lord.

On this topic Walter Kasper writes:

"To establish that there is an historical core to the empty tomb stories is not the same as providing proof of the Resurrection as a fact. Historically it can only be put forward as probable that the tomb was found empty; how it became empty cannot be established historically. Of itself, the empty tomb is an ambiguous phenomenon. Different interpretations of it exist even in the New Testament (Matt 28,11-15; John 20,15). It only becomes clear and unambiguous through the proclamation, which has its source in the appearances of the risen Christ. For the faithful the empty tomb is not a proof but a sign."⁴¹

4.1.3- Accounts of the resurrection appearances

The accounts of the resurrection appearances are the method that the first witnesses had in telling us their experiences of meeting with the Risen Lord. No other direct meeting with God has been equal to this throughout history. In order to transmit their experience, the first witnesses turned to the narration of the resurrection appearances.

⁴¹ Walter Kasper. *Jesús El Cristo*, 4ª edición, Ediciones Sígueme, Salamanca, 1982.

All of the narrations found in the NT have five structural elements. They all follow the same structure:

- a) There is a specific situation: The Apostle's or the women are there;
- b) Jesus comes to meet them unexpectedly;
- c) Jesus greets them;
- d) There's a recognition, sometimes with doubt, but the recognition occurs;
- e) They receive a mission: The Risen Lord sends them to do something.

These five elements are present in all of the accounts of the resurrection appearances.

Some narrations are elaborated with more details. We see in them these same five elements, but they also have more details added, which tell us how the original witnesses received and perceived the resurrection. Frequently, we read of someone not recognizing the Lord immediately or in the first moment.

Mary Magdalene does not recognize Jesus. The disciples on the road to Emmaus do not recognize the Lord. With that detail, we understand that since Jesus has not returned to this life, he is unperceivable as an object we see in front of us, instead he has entered the life of God and therefore one can be beside Jesus, without realizing that it is Him.

The resurrected Lord has can only be recognized with the eyes of faith. If one believes in the risen Lord, he will appear before him. The community begins to understand but there are moments in which the risen Lord makes himself present, moments in which he can be recognized. This is also expressed in the encounters.

The Lord appeared to the disciples on the road to Emmaus and they recognized him in the breaking of the bread. In John's gospel when Mary Magdalene does not recognize and believe that he is the gardener, Jesus makes himself present by saying: "Mary" it was at hearing this word that she recognized him.

According to this we can inquire into the places and forms in which the Lord will be present in the church: through the breaking of the bread, through his word, and while we follow his path guided by the Sacred Scriptures.

4.2- The resurrection as foundation of our faith

Paul tell us in a graphic way: “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins.” (1Cor 15,14-17).

Hans Kessler insists that Paul affirms the inconsistency and emptiness of our faith, if the principle that Jesus rose among the dead is not validated. For Kessler, and all of the NT, the Resurrection of the crucified Christ is the core of the Christian faith. He says that the Church has not understood it differently throughout history, as can be seen most clearly in the liturgy of the Church.⁴²

Faith in the resurrection defines the origin, the nucleus and the model of what it means to be Christian. What makes us Christian? Definitely, that we believe that God rose Jesus back to life from the dead for our salvation.

Whoever believes in the resurrection is convinced that God acts in this world and that what occurred in the resurrection of Jesus was the first example. They are convinced that this still occurs, when people truly live united, forming a community, where the Holy Spirit inspires a progressive vision about the meaning of life and where an act of loving service is converted into the present testimony of God and Jesus.⁴³

4.3- The content of faith in the resurrection of Jesus⁴⁴

4.3.1- The resurrection as God’s heroic deed

The resurrection of Jesus does not mean a return to the old life. “For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.” (Rom 6,9-10). The resurrection does not consist in returning to the previous way of life instead it is the beginning of the new creation. (cf. 1Cor 15,42).

⁴² Hans Kessler. **Manual de Cristología**, Barcelona: Editorial Herder, 2003.

⁴³ Matthias Neuman. **Cristología: Verdadero Dios, verdadero hombre**, Loyola Press, 2005.

⁴⁴ Walter Kasper. **Jesús el Cristo**, Volumen 3, Santander: Sal Terrae, 2013.

Therefore, when the New Testament talks about the resurrection of Jesus, it is signaling that with Jesus, the eschatological events have begun. Jesus is the first of the resurrected. (cf. Acts 26,23; 1Cor 15,20s; Col 1,18).

The Resurrection is the revelation and the realization of the kingdom of God announced by Jesus. In the rising of Jesus from the Dead, God has demonstrated his fidelity to love, identifying with Jesus and his cause. Faith in Jesus' resurrection is based on the possibility of creation and God's fidelity.

The Pascal faith trusts that God has possibilities that breakdown the existing reality, that it even transcends death and dares to bet on life and death for this God, "for whom everything is possible". A Christian faith that was not faith in the resurrection would be a contradiction. It is not an addition to the faith in God and Jesus, it sums up and is the essence of that faith.

4.3.2- The Resurrection of Jesus as exaltation

The Resurrection of Jesus is a unique, divine action and not even an analogy to this event exists, nevertheless this action of God developed in He who had been crucified and buried.

The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth has a historic element that makes it impossible to be understood as a mere event of faith. The continuity and the identity between the crucified and the resurrected are founded exclusively in the fidelity of God towards creation and his covenant.

In numerous passages of the old New Testament they talk about exaltation instead of resurrection. Where we see this most clearly is in the Gospel of John. Here we see exaltation or elevation as an expression with double meaning, that refers not only to the elevation on the cross as the elevation towards the Father (cf. John 3,14; 8,28; 12,32) the glorification (cf. John 7,39; 12,16).

The exaltation to the right side of the Father does not mean a movement to a kingdom far from this world, instead it means Jesus being with God, of him being in God's dimension, of His power and His glory. In this way, Jesus is not distanced from the world, instead this is a new way of being by our side; Jesus is now close to God as our intercessor.

The of the Resurrection means that Jesus through his resurrection and exaltation has entered completely into the dimension of God, he is in a new and divine way completely closed to the world, close to us and with us “to the very end of age” (Matt 28,20).

4.3.3- The resurrection of Jesus as a salvific event

For the New Testament, the resurrection of the crucified and his clothing of divine power is not an isolated event, instead the beginning and anticipation of the resurrection of the dead. The resurrection of Jesus is not a singular event, instead it is an event that opens the world to the future.

The resurrection of Jesus not only means the definite embrace of Jesus in his communion and love with God, but also that it has definitely sealed the peace and the reconciliation with the world. In Jesus and through Jesus, the love of God has turned to all of mankind.

The love and fidelity of God revealed in the cross and resurrection of Jesus are a scatological reality that determine the present and to which the future belongs. Through Jesus's relationships with people, humans are changed into a new creature. The best way to describe this new being in Christ is by using the concept of Christian freedom.

Christian freedom is described in the following way:

- Christian freedom is in the first place freedom from sin. When the realities created by God become the idols and ultimate goals, these realities enslave humanity and humanity does not use them but is a slave to them. All of these are wrong ways of ensuring life; instead of looking to God, who gives life to all the dead. For that reason, Christian freedom is above all freedom from sin.
- Christian freedom is secondly freedom from death. The price of sin is death. Death is not a punishment given by God to the sinner, instead it is an intrinsic consequence. (cf. Rom 8,13; Gal6,8)

The new salvific presence of Jesus among his disciples not only strengthens the hope and freedom, instead it creates a new union among the disciples surrounding the Lord's presence. Therefore, after Easter, the congregation of the church becomes the people of God of a new Covenant.

The resurrection of Jesus shows the disciples that the passion, death and resurrection of the crucified and the Holy Spirit is not only a new Act of God, rather the decisive and definite salvific act, the new Exodus and the new atonement.

It is a new and definite vision of the salvific project that God has, which has its center in the Resurrection of the Crucified Jesus.

4.3.4- The Resurrection as an event of revelation⁴⁵

The resurrection makes evident the intimate relation among the Revelation and Salvation, which Jesus makes of his Father, of himself and of man.

About Jesus the resurrection reveals the following:

- That his sacrifice is not a punishment imposed by God, instead it is a pleasing offer to the Father and confirms his identity as the Messiah.
- His Humanity is glorified forever. And in his Humanity, his entire life, history and message.
- The divine status and dignity of Jesus.
- It confirms the power and authority that he revealed as he announced the Kingdom of God.

About God the resurrection reveals the following:

- The identity of God in Jesus Christ. The resurrection allowed the disciples to see in the face of the crucified Christ, the human face of God.
- It helps us to recognize him not only as the one that calls to life but the one that gives us a new life. Now God is identified not only as the one that rises the Dead but as the one that rose Jesus from the dead

About men and the world, the Resurrection reveals that God has initiated the new life for men and the final transformation in history.

In summary, as far as the world and ourselves, the Resurrection means the beginning of the end of times in our history.

⁴⁵ Gerald O'Collins. **Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus**. Second Edition, Ebook, 2009.

4.4- The Ascension of Jesus⁴⁶

All of the Gospels' references to the appearances of the risen Lord, lead us to understand that they occurred for a limited time. "Jesus' final apparition ends with the irreversible entry of his humanity into divine glory, symbolized by the cloud and by heaven, where he is seated from that time forward at God's right hand. Only in a wholly exceptional and unique way would Jesus show himself to Paul "as to one untimely born"(1Cor 15,8), in a last apparition that established him as an apostle." (cf. 1 Cor 9,1; Gal 1,16)." (CCC, 659)

The meaning of the appearances is above all, the Gathering of a circle of the disciples that can give testimony that Jesus has not remained in the tomb but is indeed alive.

Their concrete testimony becomes essentially a mission to announce to the world that Jesus is alive, that he is life itself. Part of their message is also to announce that Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead and to establish the definite Kingdom of God in the world.

In the last sentences of the Gospel of Lucas he says: "Then he led them out as far as Bethany and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God." (Luke 24,50-53).

Lucas says that they were filled with joy, at a time when one would expect the contrary after the Lord had left for good. Jesus had separated from them and they had received an unconceivable task that was beyond their strength. All goodbyes leave behind some pain and sadness. How then can this be understood?

The disciples did not feel abandoned, they did not believe that Jesus had disappeared in heaven. They are certain that the resurrected is present among them and in a new and powerful way. They know that to "the right of the Father" where He is now, means a new presence that could no longer be lost, it is the only way that God can bring us close to him.

The book of the Acts of the Apostles begins with the story of the Ascension of Jesus into heaven. To the question if it is the moment to restore the Kingdom of Israel, Jesus responds with

⁴⁶ Joseph Ratzinger - Bento XVI. **Jesus de Nazaré: Da entrada em Jerusalém até a Ressurreição.** São Paulo: Editora Planeta do Brasil, 2011.

a promise and a task. The promise that they will be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit; the task is that they must be his witnesses in every corner of the world.

The text continues mentioning a cloud that will wrap him and cover his eyes. It reminds us of the cloud at the Transfiguration (cf. Matt 17, 5; Mark 9,7; Luke 9,34). It makes us think about the sacred tent of the Lord in the ancient Covenant, where the cloud is the presence of Yahweh (cf. Exod 40,34), that also forms a cloud in front of Israel during their Journey in the desert (cf. Exod 13,21).

The cloud clearly has a theological character. It represents Jesus's leaving, not in a journey towards the stars, instead as a journey in which he will enter the mystery of God.

The Jesus that says goodbye is not going far away into space. He enters into the communion of life and power with God. That is why he has not left, but now with God's own power is always present and close to us.

Since Jesus is close to the Father, he is not far but close to us. Now, he is not only found in one place in the world like before the "Ascension"; with his power that surpasses all space, he is no longer only in one place but instead present next to everyone and anyone can invoke him, anyplace and throughout history.

The text describing the Ascension continues with two men dressed in white whom give us one message: « Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.» (Acts 1,11).

With this, the faith in Jesus's return is confirmed but at the same time it is emphasized once again that it is not the disciples' job to stay put, looking to the heavens in order to understand and know the hidden moments in God's secret. Now, their job is to bring the testimony of Christ to all the ends of the Earth.

"Christ's Ascension marks the definitive entrance of Jesus' humanity into God's heavenly domain, whence he will come again (cf. Acts 1:11); this humanity in the meantime hides him from the eyes of men (cf. Col 3:3)." (CCC, 665)

Questions for reflection

- The encounter with the resurrected Christ caused an explosion and a change in the life of the apostles. What change in your married life, has the presence of the Lord caused?
- Do we recognize the resurrected Christ, each time that we receive the bread during the Eucharist and as we hear his word?
- The Ascension of Jesus left his disciples the task of taking their testimony to all the ends of the Earth. How are we fulfilling this job, of missionary disciples? Are we living this mission, with the same happiness and joy with which his disciples received it?

Table 5

THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION OF THE SON OF GOD

"Many times and in many ways God spoke in the past to our Fathers through the Prophets. In these last times he has spoken to us through the Son whom he designated as the heir of all, through whom he also made the universe "(Heb 1,1-2).

The presence of God in the world has been a Christian conviction from the earliest times; however, it is equally clear the persuasion that, from the moment of the Incarnation of the Son this closeness of God has reached the maximum and insurmountable degree. It is a unique and unrepeatable event.

"The Church calls 'Incarnation' to the fact that the Son of God has assumed a human nature to carry out our salvation through said human nature" (CCC, 461).

Faith in the true Incarnation of the Son of God is the joyful conviction of the Church from its beginning. The mystery of the Incarnation carries in itself two theological aspects that correspond to each other: the first one is the revelation, because in the incarnation of the Son and throughout his life, the mystery of God's love to men is revealed in a completely unsuspected manner, and the second, that of our salvation, because with his presence the Son has revealed us to God and brought us his salvation.

Reaffirming this conviction, the Catechism points out the mystery of the Incarnation as "the distinctive sign of the Christian faith", as Saint John says in his first letter: "This is how you can know the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ come in the flesh belongs to God" (1John 4,2) (CCC, 463).

This mystery is present in the NT and its formulation in the Church goes back to the testimony of faith proclaimed there. Saint John in the prologue of his Gospel proclaims it with all clarity: "And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1,14) and adds that: Jesus has come to take away the sin of the world (cf. John 1,29).

The universal will of God's salvation and the unique mediation of Christ, who has given himself as a ransom for all of us, are explicitly related in the NT.

This mystery is also present in the narrative of the so-called "infancy narratives" of Matthew 1,17-25 and Luke 1,26-38; 2,1-20, where the earthly birth of Jesus and its meaning are described. Both Matthew and Luke stress in the event of the birth of Jesus the intervention of God the Father, on the one hand, and the Holy Spirit on the other.

On the human side of the story, Mary is the central figure according to Luke, who freely with her "yes" opened her breast for the incarnation of the Son of God.

As can be seen, the Gospel narrative of the incarnation contemplates not only God as protagonist, who decides to incarnate and come to participate in human history but contemplates as a condition of possibility, the free participation of the human creature represented by Mary.

This is the novelty that the Gospels want to emphasize: the incarnation of the Word is cooperation between God and humanity, it is the mystery of the new Covenant. The Covenant between God and humanity, which in the OT had been realized through men: Abraham, Moses and the prophets, in its fullness is realized in Mary.

St. Paul also cites a hymn with which the Church of his time sings the mystery of the Incarnation: "Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2,5-8).

Saint Paul considers the Incarnation as the mystery par excellence that God has revealed to his saints and those elected by him, so that they can finally understand the plan of salvation and the love of God in Christ.

The "Creed" of the living tradition of the Church allows us to see the intimate relationship between the coming of the Son of God to the world and the deliverance from sin, when we confess that: "For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the work of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate of Mary the Virgin and became a man "(Creed of Nicene-Constantinopolitan).

Therefore, the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word has the strength of all the secrets and figures of Scripture. Only the Word of God incarnated can teach us the science of God.⁴⁷

5.1- The End of the Incarnation

God acted in a special way, and in fact unique, through the sending of his Son. It is a unique and unrepeatable event. The Son of God took flesh from the Virgin Mary, his human mother. In this mysterious and wonderful way, the Son of God, when born as a man from the womb of Mary, Jesus of Nazareth is at the same time fully human and fully divine.⁴⁸

At this point the question that necessarily arises is: Why has the Son of God become man? The Catechism of the Catholic Church before this question, responds by summarizing the end of the Incarnation of the Son of God in the following four aspects. Ultimately, in each of these aspects necessarily converge the revelation of God's love and the reconciliation of the world with God. Therefore, it can be observed that the primary recipient is the human creature, in favor of man, for our salvation (CCC, 456-460):

- "The Word became incarnate to save us by reconciling us with God". "God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins" (1John 4,10). Jesus has come to take away the sin of the world (cf. John 1,29); in Him, God has reconciled the world with himself (cf. 2 Cor 5,18-19). The coming of the Son of God to this world is by itself a saving event. He has come into the world only once to free us from sin. For this reason, the unique sacrifice of Christ must be seen in an inseparable relationship with the unique and unrepeatable event of the Incarnation.
- The Word became incarnate so that we would know the love of God. In the Incarnation of the Son and in all his life, the mystery of God's love for men is revealed. "The proof that God loves us is that while we are still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5, 8). "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3,16). The love of Christ is a demonstration of the love of the Father, because in Him, the image of the invisible God,

⁴⁷ Angelo Amato, Jesús. *El Señor*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid, 2002.

⁴⁸ Gerald O. Collins. *La encarnación*, Editorial Sal Terrae, 2002.

we see the Father himself who has loved us to the extreme. The Son revealing to us the loving face of the Father has brought us salvation.

- The Word was incarnated to be our model of holiness. With his Incarnation the Son of God is revealed as the model to follow: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me ..." (Matt 11,29), because He is "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John. 14,6). Jesus is the model of the new commandment of love and of the new Law expressed in the Beatitudes. The Father commands the disciples to "listen" to his Son (Mark 9,7).
- The Word was incarnated to make us "partakers of the divine nature". The NT, above all, affirms that Christ is the image of God (2 Cor 4,4, Col 1, 15). And on the other hand, it tells us that man is called to reproduce the image of Christ, the heavenly man (Rom 8, 29, 1 Cor 15, 49, 2 Cor 3, 18). St. Athanasius said: "Because the Son of God became a man to make us God." This is the reason for the Incarnation: that man, when entering communion with the Word, becomes a child of God. The perfection of human nature that takes place by the fact that the Son of God has assumed it, allows us to indicate that the perfection of man takes place in the configuration with Christ that He himself has made possible by assuming our condition in his Incarnation.

In summary we can highlight what follows:

- The uniqueness of Christ's sacrifice must be seen in an intimate relationship with the uniqueness of the incarnation.
- The Incarnation of Christ and his redemptive sacrifice in his intimate relationship do not only mean the forgiveness of sins but above all the abundance of his love and his grace.
- The Son, image of the Father, with his Incarnation realizes the true humanity, the true icon of man, according to God's plan.
- He is the firstborn of many brothers (Rom 8,20). It follows that the Son of God has become man above all to bring creation to fullness.
- From before creation, God thought of a humanity redeemed by Christ, living fully in the glory of the Kingdom of God.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Angelo Amato, *Jesús, El Señor*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid, 2002.

- Therefore, the affirmation of the Creed that the Word has become incarnate "for us and for our salvation" must be understood in this broad context of creation-redemption-fulfillment.

5.2- The pre-existence of the Word

"In the beginning there was the Word and the Word was next to God, and the Word was God [...] Everything was done by it and without it nothing was done [...] And the Word became flesh and put its dwelling among us" (John 1,1,14), with this affirmation St. John opens his Gospel.

This text from the Gospel of St. John and the entire NT assure us that for no human being it is indifferent that the Son of God has become man and has entered into the history of men. The Logos - the Word - is the light that illuminates every man when he comes to this world (cf. John 1,9). Everyone arrives, although we do not always know how, the light that is the Word incarnate.

Pope Benedict XVI, by then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, after the opinions of those who hold that "it would not have been revealed to us and manifested that the Son of God subsists from eternity in the mystery of God, different from the Father and of the Holy Spirit", he wrote:

"The statement about the pre-existence of the Word is not the result of speculative reasoning, but the simple formulation of the mystery: Jesus is truly the Only Begotten Son of the Father, loved forever, and it is the Word in which God himself communicates himself to men."⁵⁰

In this way we can understand that the confession of the pre-existence of the Word is the necessary presupposition for faith in the Incarnation. This also means that when Jesus was conceived and born, a new person did not appear on the scene. Christ did not have his origin when he was born. He exists as the eternal Son of God or as the eternal Word of God, as in the Nicene Creed we confess: "begotten of the Father before all ages".

Therefore, "Professing the 'consubstantiality' and the 'eternal preexistence of the Word' is equivalent to recognizing Jesus Christ as the one in whom the 'substance', the 'essence' of God

⁵⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, Introducción a la declaración "Mysterium Filii Dei", en: **El Misterio del Hijo de Dios**, Declaración y Comentarios; Ed. Palabra, Madrid, 27

himself, is found. This brings with it that the reality and profound intimacy of God is revealed precisely in Jesus, in as much as He is the Son of the Father.⁵¹

We find here the central motives for the affirmation of pre-existence: the divinity of the Word, its consubstantiality with the Father, its creative function and the Incarnation.

The belief in the pre-existence of the Word strongly emphasizes the divine love of human beings. God could continue to send prophets, but the personal presence of his pre-existing Son expresses in a totally unsuspected way the divine desire to be with us, to share our sufferings and redeem us from our sinful condition.

Indeed, if Jesus Christ were not himself "eternal", he could not introduce us into "eternal" life, that is, into definitive communion with God; likewise, if Christ were not similar in everything to us, except in sin, he could not redeem us from sin.

The pre-existence of the Son of God perfectly holds together the doctrines of creation, incarnation and redemption.

The Son of God who participated in the work of the Father's creation is the same one who, made man, carried out the Redemption of humanity dying on the Cross. Because, only if the delivery of Christ for humanity has its origins in God, that is, in the coeternal Son of the Father, his surrender really acquires a salvific character.

Finally, let us reaffirm the above saying that far from being an intellectual discourse the eternal pre-existence of Jesus Christ as the Word of God, constitutes the indispensable presupposition for the truth of the announcement about the "Eternal Life" and the salvific message of Jesus.

5.3- The person of Jesus Christ⁵²

The event of the Incarnation also raises the admirable mystery of the divine and human reality of the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The theological reflection of the Fathers of the Church shows that this was always a central aspect of the Church's faith.

⁵¹ Joseph Ratzinger, "Introduction to the statement **"Mysterium Filii Dei"**", in: *The Mystery of the Son of God, Declaration and Comments*, Ed Word, Madrid, 27.

⁵² Angelo Amato, **Jesús, El Señor**, Madrid Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2002.

The development of the dogma of the faith of the first centuries of the Church has insisted on the perfection of the divinity and humanity of Christ. The motives for the salvation of man that impelled the development of the dogma of faith in Jesus Christ, always in close relation with the Trinitarian mystery of God, led us to affirm the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father in the Council of Nicaea and his consubstantiality with us in his humanity in the council of Chalcedon.

In short, in order to have a fundamental idea, the Fathers of the Church developed one or another aspect underlining the double birth: of the Father in eternity as Son of God and of Mary in history as man.

In the Council of Chalcedon there is a decisive pronouncement on the problem of the union of the divine nature and human nature in the one divine person of Christ. The Incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus Christ is partly God and partly man. This union does not suppose a confused mixture between the divine thing and the human thing, nor an extrinsic union of the same ones. It includes the integrity of human nature, the reality of its divine nature and a duplicity of wills.

To the question about "what is Jesus Christ", it is answered that it is of two natures: human and divine. And to the question "who is Jesus Christ", it is answered that He is the divine person of the Son of God made true man.

Fruit of the theological and philosophical reflection, the term person has several aspects. The term person is used to express the mystery of the Trinity of God (one God and three divine persons), the mystery of the Son of God made man (a divine person in two natures), and the mystery of every human being, who is a human person.

In the Gospel of John: "I and the Father are one and the same thing" (John 10, 6), it can be seen that to distinguish the uniqueness of nature in God - "we are one" - of the duplicity of the relationship - "I and the Father" - uses the term "thing = person".

That is why the term person is understood as the "relationship" that constitutes the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as unique persons and at the same time they share the common participation in the divine nature. The term person in the Trinity is the principle of distinction and in Christ is the principle of unity.

In **Table 6**, the divinity and humanity in a person in Jesus Christ will be elaborated in more detail.

5.4- The conscience of Jesus Christ⁵³

This theme introduces us even more into the mystery of the person of Jesus Christ and of the Christological faith of the Church.

The existence of the human conscience of Jesus is a new confirmation of the integrity and perfection of his human nature that has its own will and authentically human operations (Councils of Constantinople I, Chalcedon and Constantinople III). Perfection that, far from distancing us from our condition, allows us to be more intimately united with it, because, in obedience to the will of the Father, it allows us to bear on ourselves the sins of all and thus redeem ourselves from the slavery in which they placed us.

Jesus' awareness of his unique filial relationship with "his Father" is the foundation and presupposition of his mission. But also, from your mission you can infer your conscience. It is from the human attitudes, words and actions of the historical Jesus that one can draw useful indications about the consciousness that he had of himself and of his mission. Jesus asks for an answer to his question: "And you, who do you say that I am?" (Matt 16,15).

The question addressed to the disciples assumes that from their coexistence with the Master they have been able to obtain sufficient elements to give an adequate response, even before the Easter event.

The historical Jesus manifests above all the awareness he had of being in a filial relationship with God (Father and Son). Jesus addressed God as his Father, in a unique and authentic way equivalent to the awareness of the reality and truth of this affirmation.

But Jesus has not only called God "Father" or "my Father" in general, but, addressing him in prayer, invokes him with the designation of Abba, indicating that there is an absolutely new relationship there (cf. Mark 14, 36; Rom 8,15; Gal 4,6). All the Gospels provide testimony of this.

Jesus was conscious of being the Son of the Father, of being an envoy from Father, with a power similar to that of the Father. His contemporaries captured the unheard-of gravity of this

⁵³ Angelo Amato, Jesús, **El Señor**, Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2002.

claim. In fact, this is why the Jews sought him to kill him: because he not only violated the Sabbath, but he called God his Father, making himself equal with God (John 5,18). Through his human conscience, Jesus manifests his unique relationship with God, his Father.

In the narrations of NT, it also appears that Jesus has a salvific intention. Jesus' awareness of his unique filial relationship with "his Father" is the foundation and presupposition of his mission.

He is aware of being the only and definitive savior. His whole life is a mission. Jesus is aware of having come and been sent to announce the kingdom of God (Luke 4,43, Mt 15,24), to bring the law to fulfillment (Matt 5,27), to serve and give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10,45; 14,24), to seek and save what was lost (Luke 19,10).

The whole life of Christ, from his "entrance into the world" (Heb 10,5) to the gift of his life, is a unique "yes" to the will of the Father "for us", for our salvation. This is what the Church has preached from the beginning (Rom 5,8; 1Thes 5,10; 2Cor 5,15; 1Pet 2,21; 3,18).

The awareness that Jesus has of his mission implies, therefore, the awareness of his "pre-existence". Jesus is aware and manifests the divine origin of his mission on behalf of the Father: "I have come out from God; I have not come by myself, but he has sent me" (Jn 8:42). To put it another way, the human conscience of his mission translates into the language of a human life, his eternal relationship to the Father.

The saving conscience of Jesus is also shown with his will to found the Church and to save all men by convoking them in the people of God.

There are therefore two essential contents of Jesus' human conscience: his "filial" self-consciousness in his relationship with God as his Father, and his "messianic" consciousness in relation to the salvation of humanity. It is his only human conscience, whose content manifests its divine origin, as the Father's envoy to manifest his word (John 3,34; 12, 42) and fulfill his salvific will. (John 5,30; 6,38; 9,4)

5.5- Freedom in Jesus ⁵⁴

Despite the temptations, the hostility of Satan, the incomprehension, the abandonment, the betrayal, crucifixion and death, Jesus has remained holy, without blemish, separated from sinners (Heb 7,26).

Jesus is aware of having come not to be saved, but to save. In fact, his perfect holiness is the source of salvation. Jesus did not commit sin; He carried our sins in His body on the cross so that we might live for justice.

There is a perfect relationship between the sanctity of Jesus and his salvific mission. Fulfilling the will of the Father, Jesus has come to overcome the origin of sin and to destroy the works of the devil (1John, 3,5-8).

The sanctity of Jesus, the total surrender of his humanity in the divine person, are translated into impeccability, which is not only the absence of sin, but the impossibility of sin. It is the union of human nature and the divine nature that makes the Son oriented towards good. On the other hand, biblical sources attest to Jesus' great freedom and dominion over his actions and his destiny.

At first glance, it seems difficult that there is a relationship between impeccability and freedom, but to be more appropriate, the definition of freedom is the possibility to choose and determine the action itself. This is the freedom of God. This is the freedom of Jesus Christ to determine his own action and his own choice of good.

The freedom of Jesus Christ consists in his determination to obey the will of the Father. It can be concluded that instead of opposing freedom, the impeccability of Christ makes that freedom more perfect. Christ had the most complete faculty of orienting oneself to obedience to the will of the Father.

5.6- The Holiness of Jesus Christ ⁵⁵

"Holy" is a title applied to Jesus from his conception in the bosom of the Virgin. In fact, the angel explains to Mary that "he who is going to be born is holy" (Luke 1,35). Jesus will be

⁵⁴ Angelo Amato, *Jesús, El Señor*, Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2002.

⁵⁵ Angelo Amato, *Jesús, El Señor*, Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2002.

known as "Holy of God" by impure spirits (Mark 1,24; Luke 4,34). As such, it will also be confessed by Simon Peter: "We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6,68).

In the story of the annunciation, "Saint" is the name of Jesus. Saint, referred to Jesus is not an attribute, but his own name. The sanctity of Jesus consists in the total belonging of his human nature to the divine person of the verb. It is the radical consecration of his humanity by God and in God. Jesus himself defines himself as "the one whom the Father has consecrated and sent to the world" (John 10,36).

The sanctity of Jesus is given in his conception, but he receives his growth and his progressive realization during all his earthly life, "Jesus grew in wisdom, age and grace" (Luke 5,52), until the summit in the paschal mystery.

Jesus prays to the Father: "and I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth" (John 17,18). The consecration includes the surrender on his death. This is the sacrificial dimension of the sanctity of Jesus. Your growth in holiness does not mean going from less to more. Its development consists in the correspondence with the different moments of its earthly existence that finds its fullness in the Passover.

Questions for reflection:

- As team partners we are called to walk towards Holiness. Jesus is the model for Christians to follow. As a marriage, what do we do to make sure we have Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life? How do we put into practice the Listening that the Father asks of us with the Son? And how is the listening to our partner?
- God gave humanity the freedom to make our own decisions. How are we using that freedom to obey the will of the Father? We are called not to commit sins; does this make us feel really?

TABLE 6

JESUS CHRIST IN THE CONFESSION OF FAITH AND TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

After the Ascension of the Lord, the Apostles began the preaching of the Gospel according to the mandate of the Risen One. Through the evangelization of the Apostles and their successors, Christianity grew and expanded to many remote cities and towns throughout the Roman Empire. But, before long, the differences in interpretation of the biblical facts and particularly about who Jesus is in his human-divine identity and his salvific mission, also emerged.

Examining this road of the development of the faith in the person of Jesus in the Church, the purpose of this **Table** is to offer a simple approach to the content of faith in the person of Jesus defined and confessed by the Magisterium in the first Councils of the Church.

In a certain way, it is about the progression of the truth of the revelation in the Sacred Scriptures and in the Tradition of the Church about Jesus Christ to the truth of faith of the Christological dogma of the Church, in substance of the believer binding.

6.1- From the Apostles to the Fathers of the Church⁵⁶

The New Testament and the Tradition of the Church explain that the Apostles used to choose and elect their successors – the Bishops – to direct and transmit the truth of the Catholic faith to the following generations.

Because of their foundational role of faithfully communicating the teaching of the Apostles' faith, a group of Christian ecclesiastical pastors and writers, mostly bishops, spanning the period from the first century through the eighth century, are known as "Fathers of the Church". They are notable for their holy lives and their fidelity to the faith of the Church in the firm teaching and defense of the truth about Jesus Christ in new cultural, philosophical and religious environments.

During the first centuries of the Church, in some of the early Christian communities, there began to emerge some particular problems that would in time greatly affect the unity and

⁵⁶ John L. Greshman. **Jesús 101: God and Man**. First Edition, Liguori Publications.

communion of faith of the Church. These manifested in the area of forms of worship, daily customs, particular expressions of certain communities or groups, but mainly, in what was said about the person of Christ and his redemptive mission.⁵⁷

From the earliest times of the Christian faith, the certainty of the salvation received from God through Jesus Christ is the fundamental fact. Therefore, to sustain the truth about Jesus Christ is to affirm the certainty of the salvation of humanity in Christ.

However, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church emphasizes, during the first centuries, the Church had to defend and clarify this certainty of faith about Jesus Christ as true God and true man against heresies that falsified it (cf. CCC, 464). These early Christological heresies denied, not so much Christ's divinity, but his true humanity (cf. CCC, 465).

Most of the following heresies arose during the second century and before the Council of Nicaea (AD 325):

Ebionism: This heresy arose in late first-early second century in the purview of Judeo-Christian communities that lived according to Jewish law. It recognizes Jesus as a simple man, the human son of Joseph and Mary, on whom the Holy Spirit descended upon in baptism, and endowed Him with extraordinary prophetic and charismatic virtues, but denied His pre-existence and divine filiation.

Bishop St. Irenaeus of Lyon condemned this heresy by affirming that Christ is true man and true God. He is true God because only God can save and restore union with men. And, true man because it is up to man to repair his own fault. Thus Christ, being God, repaired the infinite offence committed by man against God, and because he was man, he redeemed man from his guilt.

Adoptionism: This second century heresy affirmed that the sole and unipersonal God did not have a natural child. God could adopt any child as a son. It says that Christ is a simple man that God would have adopted as his own son, making him the bearer of an exceptional divine grace in the baptism of the Jordan. It denies the incarnation of the Word and the divinity of Christ.

⁵⁷ Mathias Neuman. **Cristología: Verdadero Dios, verdadero hombre - Fundamentos de la fe católica.** Series Ministerio Pastoral, Loyola Press, 2005.

Alluding to this heresy, the Catechism of the Catholic Church asserts that “already in the third century, the Church had to affirm against Paul of Samosata, in a council meeting in Antioch, that Jesus Christ is the son of God by nature and not by adoption” (CCC, 465).

Gnosticism: This philosophy has its roots in gnosis, a Greek word meaning “wisdom.” This dualistic religious movement - which exalts the spiritual and rejects the material - achieved considerable importance in the second century. These groups, having taken in Jewish, Christian and pagan doctrines, conceived salvation as liberation from the spirit of the matter that represented evil for Christian Gnostics.

Hence, they consider Jesus Christ as a spiritual “principle” that existed between God and the world and reject the true incarnation of Christ and the salvation of the flesh. They maintained that Jesus was not really a human being, and most Gnostic Christians did not believe that he had actually died on the cross. For them, Jesus was a kind of semi-divine revealer who brought the hidden and true knowledge about God, the world and human beings.⁵⁸

Docetism: It comes from the Greek word “*dokein*”, which means “to resemble”. This heresy spread in the first century. Among its main promoters are Marcion, Valentino and Basilides, who were also Gnostics. Hence, they taught that Jesus only “looked” like a human being and denied his true humanity. Christ had a body only apparent, heavenly, angelic or otherwise. Thus, they denied the actions unworthy of his divinity, such as, for example, suffering.

Contradicting Docetism and Gnosticism, the Church has made it clear that Christ took from Mary a true human body, like ours, and suffered in a truly human way. In this regard, the Catechism teaches: “From apostolic times the Christian faith has insisted on the true incarnation of God’s Son ‘come in the flesh’” (cf. 1John 4,2-3; 2Jn7) (CCC, 465).

In opposition to these groups and their heresies, we have the group of those who remained faithful to the Tradition received from the apostles. They believed in an expression of the unique and universal faith, that is, **Catholic**.

This expression appears in the early years of the Church. They called themselves “**apostolic**” or “**Catholic Christians**.” The differences between the different Christian factions led

⁵⁸ Mathias Neuman. **Cristología: Verdadero Dios, verdadero hombre - Fundamentos de la fe Católica**. Series Ministerio Pastoral, Loyola Press, 2005.

the catholic Christians to establish an ecclesial Tradition that would be in charge of consolidating and transmitting that apostolic faith.

Four pillars formed the basic support of Christian Tradition:

- a) They reached an agreement on a Canon of the books of the Holy Scriptures that became the “New Testament”.
- b) The formulation of a Creed, a brief summary that lists the fundamental aspects of the Christian faith to which the Christian-Catholic Churches adhered.
- c) The Sacraments, as sacred and public actions, formed a third pillar, considered as the liturgy and public prayers of Catholic Christians.
- d) Stable leadership of the Pope and the College of Bishops.

In addition to the development of these four foundations, pastors and bishops met in councils to reflect on the Bible, the Creed, the cult of the people and the new contributions of the theologians.

In the second and third centuries, these meetings took place at the regional level, but for the fourth and subsequent centuries, particular events prompted the introduction of a broader and more novel system called “ecumenical council”. This council included all the bishops of the Catholic Church.

Since the writing of the “Symbols of Faith” or Creeds”, the person of Christ occupies the centre of outmost relevance of the reflection of the dogma of the Church; to the question about the identity of the person of Jesus, in issues such as: whether Jesus is truly Son of God and truly man; how to understand in Him the relationship between his divinity and his humanity; the question of his salvific mediation was always necessarily unified, that is, of how Christ frees us from sin and gives us the filial communion of the divine life.

The certainty of the salvation received from God in Jesus Christ is the fundamental reality of the New Testament and the great conviction of the early days of the Christian faith. Therefore, when studying the first Christological councils, we must remember this close link between the question of the identity of Christ and his complete solidarity with us; that is, the way in which Christ saves us is a fundamental truth of the Christian faith around which revolve the definitions

of faith about Jesus Christ. After this brief information, let us proceed to the history of the Council of Nicaea (325).

6.2- Jesus, true God. Council of Nicaea (AD 325)

During the years of the Catholic tradition (AD 150 to 300) prior to the Council of Nicaea, some Christian thinkers tried to answer the question of the possibility of salvation in Christ for all men in a way that was more understandable to the Greco-Roman culture, very different from the Jewish environment in which Jesus had lived.

Concerned about giving a valid Christian answer to the philosophical and religious demands of their time of the second and third centuries, mainly within the Greek thought, some thinkers like Justin and other apologists, followed later by Origen of Alexandria, introduced the theology of the “Logos”.

In calling Jesus, the “Logos of God,” they had come up with a valid answer to the question of the possibility of salvation for all men, Jews and pagans, along with demonstrating the Christian faith as the true philosophy.

This element agreed with the aspirations of Christian intellectuals who wanted to show a faith that wants to make sense of reason.

In relation to Jesus Christ, the central question at the end of the third century AD and beginning of the fourth, was how to understand the origin of the Son in the framework of the eternal Trinity.

In this sense, the theology of the “Logos” allowed, at that moment, to better explain the divine-human nature of Christ. It also allowed to express with greater clarity that Christ existed before all creatures, as stated in the Gospel of John, according to which, the “Logos” - the pre-existent Word of God - had become flesh. It also allowed to clearly emphasize that Christ was not a name or an angel, but the Son of God himself, who had redeemed humanity.⁵⁹

However, this Christology conceived from the “Logos” was not exempt from ambiguities and problems. Originally developed, as we pointed out before, as an answer to the question of

⁵⁹ BASIL STUDER, *Dios Salvador, en los Padres de la Iglesia. Trinidad – Cristología – Soteriología*, Salamanca 1993, pag. 145.

the salvation of all men, it was dominated by a cosmological perspective interested in explaining the relationship between God and the world.

Consequently, the Christology based on the image of the “Logos” has to explain the place and role of the Son in the relationship between God and the creation out of nothingness. The central question can be summarized as follows: “we had to decide rather if we wanted to include the Logos, whereby all things have been created, completely in the divine sphere of the Creator or in the created world.”⁶⁰

As a result, some Christians began to hold conflicting views; some considered the eternal Son as the Father. Others judged that the Son was inferior and created by the Father.

Thus arose, by AD 318, the Christological controversy known as the “Arian controversy.” Arius was a priest of Alexandria, Egypt. Arius spread his particular way of understanding the transcendence and oneness of the Christian God and the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Trinity.

Let us try to summarize the arguments of the Arius doctrine:

- He is convinced, following the monotheistic principle, of the absolute transcendence and unity of the Christian God. God is the only eternal God, without beginning and uncreated. Therefore, the Son to be generated - created (*for Arius these two terms have the same meaning*) cannot be equal to God-Father and it is impossible to derive from his being. He maintains that the Son is from another substance than that of the Father.
- If God is eternal, without beginning and uncreated, the Son did not exist before he was begotten-created. The Son had a beginning, was rather created, made out of nothing as all creatures. But, he is the first of the creatures and created before time. This is what supports the superiority of the Son and that he can be called God. The other creatures were created in time and through the Logos. Arius, ignoring the distinction between the eternal origin of the Son of the Father and the creation in time of all things, put the Son on the side of creatures, separating Christ-Word of God the Father.

⁶⁰ Basil Studer, *op. cit.*, pag. 151.

- He does not deny the deity of the Son, but this is only a God who occupies a second place or degree in the mystery of God. The true and only God is the Father. The Son can be called God, but it is only a name. In reality, he is a created God, inferior to the Father by nature, by rank, by authority and by glory.
- He is also convinced, considering the incarnation and life of Jesus, that the Son, who became flesh to be a model of divine filiation and obedience, is subject to hunger, thirst, fatigue, humiliations and sufferings of the cross; that is, to changes that already prevented him to be considered equal to God, who is immutable. The Son, by nature, is not immutable.
- The Son, intermediary of creation, was also an intermediary of redemption. The Father God, unique and eternal, created and redeemed the world through the Logos as an intermediary.⁶¹

The other faction, headed by Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, held the idea of the eternal generation of the Son of the Father and who was at the same level of the Father; therefore, fully God.

To resolve this division, the Emperor Constantine convened the Council of Bishops, who met in the city of Nicaea in AD 325. It was necessary to give a clear answer to the question of whether the Logos was on the side of creation or of the Creator. In short, the question referred simply to the true divinity of Christ.

The Bishops at the Council of Nicaea heard the two positions, debated the issue, voted overwhelmingly in favor of the position of Bishop Alexander, affirming the divinity of Christ. The position of Nicaea was, in essence, contrary to Arius's conceptions.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church contains the heart of the Nicæan Profession of Faith, which says: "The first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, in the year AD 325, confessed in its Creed that the Son of God is 'begotten, not created, of the same substance [*homoousios*]' as the Father' and condemned Arius, who affirmed that 'the Son of God came to be from things that were not,' and that he was 'from another substance than that of the Father'" (CCC, 465).

⁶¹ John L. Greshman. **Jesús 101: God and Man**. First edition, Liguori Publications.

The Bishops gathered at Nicaea, relying on baptismal formulas and symbols of faith already existing in traditions such as Jerusalem, Antioch, Caesarean, established the new Christological affirmations and promulgated the new formula of the creed for Catholic Christians.

The Nicene Creed had impacted the Liturgy of the Church and the life of the faithful by proclaiming that praying to Christ and worshiping Christ is to pray and adore the true and only God: ... **God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father...**

The bishops in Nicaea used the Greek word "*homoousios*" as a formula. This word (which is rendered in Latin by consubstantial) is composed of "homo", which means "equal" or "of the same", and the word "*ousia*", which means "substance" or "essence", denoting that "he is of the same essence".

6.3- Jesus is totally Man. Council of Constantinople I (AD 381)

After a few decades, and when the firm declaration and definition of faith of the Council of Nicaea on the divinity of Jesus Christ was still being implemented, two new heresies broke into the theological realm.

The first, promoted by Apollinaris (AD 315-392), bishop of Laodicea, in Syria, and known as "Apollinarianism", relying on the Nicene affirmation about the Divinity of Christ, puts forth the question about the true humanity of Jesus Christ.

The second, called "Macedonian", supported by Macedonio and his disciples, following Nicaea in defense of the consubstantiality - of the same nature or essence - of the Son with the Father, recognized a kind of subordinationism of the Holy Spirit. They recognized him as superior to angels, but not equal to the Father and the Son, because he is not of a divine nature, but created. The Holy Spirit could not be glorified as are the Father and the Son.

In the context of the Christological discussion, some theologians held that Jesus had a body like ours, but not a human mind capable of deciding. Their objective was to ensure the impeccability of Jesus. Others objected saying that it was necessary for Jesus to be a complete

and real human being like us, with body, mind and soul because, otherwise, we would not have been saved.⁶²

Those who claim in Jesus a true human body like ours, but without a mind capable of deciding, maintain that the divine “Logos” would occupy in Christ the place of the human soul and, therefore, the human nature of Jesus would not have a soul of his own. Apollinaris is known as the one who defended this theory up to the ultimate consequences.

Apollinaris affirms that the Divine Logos assumed a human nature, deprived of its rational soul. He sees it in this way: the divine person of the Son took the place of the rational soul in the body of Jesus. Thus, Christ is composed of the divine Logos and a human body. Christ uses humanity, which consists only of his body, as an inert instrument.

In conclusion, Apollinaris affirmed the unity and holiness of Christ, but diminished the integrity of his human nature. Christ is a unitary combination whose only principle of decision and action is the divine Logos, which completely dominates human nature.⁶³

To confirm the true faith of Nicaea and to respond to the post-Nicaean heresies, especially the “Apollinarianism” about the humanity of Christ and the “Macedonian”, the emperor Theodosius the Great convened in 381, in Constantinople, a council only for Eastern bishops. Among them, eminent theologians, such as Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa and his brother Basil the Great, known as the Cappadocian fathers, since they were from the region of Cappadocia; in addition, Cyril of Jerusalem and Diodore of Tarsus.

The central argument of the Council of Constantinople is based on the certainty of salvation in Christ; thus, by denying a true and complete human nature in Christ, his salvific mediation of man is also denied.

The bishops gathered in Constantinople reaffirmed the common principle between the Fathers and ecclesiastical writers: “The Son has come to save the whole of man; that is why he assumed a full humanity; he saved what he himself assumed; he did not save what he did not assume”.⁶⁴

⁶² Mathias Neuman. **Cristología: Verdadero Dios, verdadero hombre - Fundamentos de la fe católica**. Series Ministerio Pastoral, Loyola Press, 2005.

⁶³ Angelo Amato. **Jesús el Señor**. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid, 2002.

⁶⁴ B. Sesboue. “**Cristología y Soteriología. Efeso y Calcedonia – siglos IV y V**”. In: B. Sesboue & J. Wolinski. **El Dios de la Salvación**. Historia de los Dogmas, Salamanca, 1995, p. 272.

From this Ecumenical Council, the Church confesses the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. Properly, the Council of Constantinople was not intended to formulate a new symbol of faith, but to confirm the dogmatic definition of Nicaea, by introducing the opportune and necessary clarifications of faith on the true and total humanity of Jesus Christ, and the Divinity of the Holy Spirit, in the face of the new heresies.

In response to the above questions, the Council adds the following affirmations to the Nicene Creed, thus broadening the biblical and theological dimension in the presentation of the mystery of Christ and the Holy Spirit:

- “(begotten) born of the Father before all the ages”;
- “(came down) from heaven”;
- “By the power of the Holy Spirit (incarnate) of the Virgin Mary”;
- “And for our sake he was crucified in the time of Pontius Pilate”;
- (on the third day) in fulfillment of the Scriptures;
- “and is seated at the right hand of the Father”;
- (and he will come again) in glory;
- “And his kingdom will have no end”.

The third part of the Creed is totally dedicated to the Holy Spirit. Beyond an affirmation against the “Macedonian” heresy, the Council carries out a decisive definition of the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, intimately linked to the affirmation of the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

This constitutes a fundamental fact of Trinitarian theology, according to which a person of the Trinity cannot be understood or defined except in relation to the other two.

On the teaching of the First Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, the Second Vatican Council emphasized that Jesus, in assuming our humanity, dignified the humanity of every human person. In the same way, the Catechism of the Church states:

Since in the mysterious union of the Incarnation “human nature has been assumed, not absorbed” (GS 22,§2), the Church has come to confess throughout the centuries, the full reality of the human soul, with its operations of intelligence and will, and of the human body of Christ. But, in parallel, it had to remember on each occasion that the human

nature of Christ belongs properly to the divine person of the Son of God who has assumed it...⁶⁵

6.4- Jesus Christ, a person: The Son of God. Council of Ephesus (AD 431)⁶⁶

After the first two Ecumenical Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople affirmed as true content of the Christian faith the true divinity and true humanity of Jesus Christ, the debate that arises puts the question in how the union between the divinity and the humanity in Christ takes place.

The principle that the unity of these governs the unique salvific mediation of Christ is widely accepted doctrine within the theology of the Fathers of the Church. The bishops and theologians of these first centuries, from the reflection on the Incarnation, warned that every separation between humanity and divinity in Christ would make the passageway between man and God insurmountable.

A similar issue had already emerged in the past with the heresy of “Adoptionism”, which the Church had rejected because it denied the truth of the Incarnation; that is, that the Son of God became truly man. Adoptionism held that the man-Jesus was adopted by the Son of God, who came upon him at the baptism. The Son’s divinity came to dwell in the man-Jesus, but He did not truly share the human condition. Therefore, they do not acknowledge an authentic unity between the divinity and the humanity in Christ.

The question of how the union between Christ’s divinity and his humanity emerges once more at the beginning of the fifth century in the East, in the teaching of Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople in 428.

There are two opposing Christological schools in the East: that of Alexandria and that of Antioch. Each of these has its own limits and its own unilateralism in regard to the mystery of Christ. In this matter, the one of Antioch has in Nestorius its main representative, and the one of Alexandria has Cyril (AD 370-444), patriarch of Alexandria, as the great opponent of Nestorius.

⁶⁵ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 470.

⁶⁶ Angelo Amato. **Jesús el Señor**. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid 2002.

Nestorius began the controversy with his preaching on the Virgin Mary. He never accepted the legitimacy of the expression used by most of the fourth century Fathers of the Church, and already very dear to the Christian people, of Mary “Mother of God” (*theotókos*), which he rejected, replacing it with “Mother of Christ” (*Christotókos*). This shocked the Christian people and produced a great upheaval that spread rapidly.

Nestorius believes that the expression “Mother of God” is not appropriate because Mary is only the mother of the man Jesus. For this reason, he only accepts that Mary be called *Christotókos*, the one that leads to Christ. Nestorius argued that the Fathers of the Church convened at Nicaea had only said that “our Lord Jesus Christ has become flesh through the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary”, and also added that the scriptures refer to Mary as Mother of Christ, but not as Mother of the Logos God.

With this language, Nestorius means to understand the existence of two distinct subjects in Christ: (*lógos-anthropos*) the Logos and the man, who are closely united by a bond of habitation that brings into discussion the communication between God and humanity. In this way, he introduces a separation between the divine nature of the Word and the human nature of Christ, although he affirms that this is not his intention.

This position of Nestorius is also reflected in his insistence that certain titles and names correspond to man (such as: Jesus, servant and Son of Man), whereas others belong exclusively to the divinity of the Son (such as: The Son of God, Word and Lord).

The great opponent of this Christology was Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria. His Alexandrian theological training prevented him from accepting the divisive Christology of the Antiochians. Cyril affirms the integrity of the human nature of Christ but considers the divine Logos as the center of action of Christ. For him, “in the incarnate Word, man is the Word, but the Word as united to the flesh”.

This perfect unity and communication between the human nature and the divine nature of Christ enables the possibility of attributing properties or characteristics, both human and divine, to the divine person of the Word. It can be said, for example, that God has suffered and died, although this suffering and death properly only occur in his humanity.

Cyril explains that, based on this concept, it can be correctly spoken of Mary as Mother of God; not because the nature of the Logos or his divinity has begun to exist in the Virgin Mary, but because the holy body has been begotten from it and it is united in perfection to the Logos.

The Emperor of the East Theodosius II convened a council in Ephesus for Pentecost in 431, with the aim of restoring the peace and tranquility of the Church, disturbed by the controversy of Cyril and Nestorius.

Under the leadership of Cyril, the bishops assembled in Ephesus condemned Nestorius. Similar to the other councils, the concern of the bishops was placed on salvation. Our salvation is rooted in the mystery of the true unity of God and man in the Incarnation.

Cyril contends that the Body and the Blood of Christ that we receive in the Eucharist are divine because the human body is the body of the Divine Son. We receive salvation as a gift of the divine life shared with our humanity through the Incarnation of the Son of God and given to us in the sacraments.⁶⁷

Nestorius spoke of the incarnation as the union of the divine Word and the human body of Jesus, inevitably dividing Christ into two persons: a human person along with the divine person of the Son of God.

In contrast, Cyril insisted that in Christ, the divine person of the Word has united to himself the complete human nature he has assumed. This means that in Christ there are not two subjects, but only one: the divine person of the Son of God.

In an extraordinary synthesis, the Catechism of the Catholic Church alludes to the confession formulated in the Council of Ephesus:

The Nestorian heresy regarded Christ as a human person joined to the divine person of God's Son. Opposing this heresy, St. Cyril of Alexandria and the third Ecumenical Council, at Ephesus in 431, confessed that "the Word, uniting to himself in his person the flesh animated by a rational soul, became man" (Council of Ephesus: DS, 250). Christ's humanity has no other subject than the divine person of the Son of God, who assumed it and made it his own, from his conception. For this reason, the Council of Ephesus proclaimed in the year 431 that Mary truly became the Mother of God by the human

⁶⁷ John L. Greshman. **Jesús 101: God and Man**. First edition, Liguori Publications.

conception of the Son of God in her womb: “Mother of God, not that the nature of the Word or his divinity received the beginning of its existence from the holy Virgin, but that, since the holy body, animated by a rational soul [...] united to the person of the Word, of whom the Word is said to have been born according to the flesh” (DS, 251).⁶⁸

6.5- Christ, a person in two natures - Council of Chalcedon (AD 451)

In Nicaea, the true divinity of Jesus Christ was reaffirmed, whereas in Constantinople, the integrity of his human nature, and in Ephesus, his perfect unity, were also reaffirmed.

Despite the consensus reached in Ephesus, the question about how the union between divinity and humanity in Christ remained open. The twenty years elapsed from Ephesus to Chalcedon served to specify the language and to clarify the content of the affirmation of the union of the two natures in Christ.

The monk Eutyches of Constantinople argued that there were two natures, one human and one divine before the Incarnation, but only one nature after it. In the formulation of Eutyches, the human nature of Jesus was lost in the divine nature, as a drop of water in the sea. In his thought, the divine absorbs the human. As a result, the flesh of Christ is no longer consubstantial to ours.

A new Council was initially convened in Nicaea but transferred to Chalcedon in 451 primarily to answer the position of Eutyches. This Council’s aim was to give a new answer able to clarify the problem of the unity of Christ in the totality of his human and divine condition.

A significant contribution in Chalcedon came from Pope St. Leo I, who opposed Eutyches. Pope St. Leo I affirmed that the Word has a double nature and is consubstantial to the Father and to us. It clearly indicates the communion of these two natures; that is, made in the concrete unity of a single person, of one and the same subject, Christ mediator.

Pope St. Leo I introduced his Christological concern with a notion on the salvation of man through Jesus Christ. His salvific argument is based on three inextricable points: “the truth of the divinity of Christ, the truth of his humanity and the truth of his integration in the unity of the same person.”⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 466.

⁶⁹ B. Sesboue & J. Wolinski. *El Dios de la Salvacion. Historia de los Dogmas*. Salamanca, 1995, Vol. I, p. 316.

No doubt, the Christological definition of Chalcedon is the most celebrated of all dogmatic definitions. This formula is the “vault key “, that is, “definitive” of the ecclesial expression of faith in Christ.

After Chalcedon, this formula became the mandatory point of reference for all reflection on Jesus. As a whole, the Chalcedonian formula appeals to the tradition of faith that comes from the teaching of the prophets, from Jesus Christ himself and from the Symbols of faith promulgated in Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus. The structure of this formula is very well articulated.

Accompanying the confession of faith of Chalcedon that brings Catechism No. 467, you can appreciate each of its parts:

- a) It begins by affirming the concrete unity of Christ by mentioning his titles: “Following the holy Fathers, we unanimously teach and confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: ...”;
- b) The second part affirms the distinction and analyzes the two aspects: divine and human, of Christ himself:
 - Perfect in the divinity, and perfect in the humanity;
 - Truly God and truly man, composed of rational soul and body;
 - Consubstantial with the Father as to his divinity, and consubstantial with us as to his humanity, ‘like us in all things, but sin’ (Hb 4,15);
 - He was begotten from the Father before all ages as to his divinity, and in these last days, for us and for our salvation, was born as to his humanity of the virgin Mary, the Mother of God.”
- c) To complete this sequence on the distinction of the divine nature and the human nature of Christ himself, the formula returns to affirm unity by repeating the titles heard at the beginning: “One and the same Christ, our Lord, only Son ...”
- d) The Chalcedonian formula offers here what is its great contribution, the new element of the definition. The Council Fathers strove to reconcile unity and distinction in Christ with new concepts. That is to say, that after the union of the divine nature and human nature in the Incarnation, “Christ remains one and the same, on the one hand, while on the other

hand, he is known 'in two natures': therefore, it is worth to point out in him two natures after the union": "In two natures, without confusion, change, division or separation. The distinction between the natures was never abolished by their union, but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved ..."

- e) To conclude, the formula returns to the affirmation of unity through the concept of "person" and "hypostasis" understandable to both Romans and Greeks; thus, affirming the unity of "person" in Christ: "And they come together in a single subject and in a single person".⁷⁰

Let us reinforce once more the movement that occurs within the Chalcedonian formula. Part of the unity in Jesus Christ and from this, and without losing sight of it, analyzes and affirms the distinction to return to it, as we have in the formula summarized: "a person or hypostasis in two natures".⁷¹

Let us conclude by saying that the Council of Chalcedon affirms not only the perfection of the humanity of Jesus, since the Son has assumed full humanity, but also in complete solidarity with us, with the exception of sin; that is, that he shares our condition to free us of sin, and to transmit to us his own divine life.

6.6- The human Will of Christ. Council of Constantinople III (680-681)⁷²

The Council of Chalcedon confessed that Jesus Christ is of the same substance as God the Father in his divine nature, and consubstantial with us in his human nature. The two natures united in one single person, the divine person of Christ, that of the Son of God.

Through four negations, the Council held the distinction of the two natures and their unity in the person of Christ: "*In two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation. The distinction between the natures was never abolished by their union, but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved ...*"

⁷⁰ B. Sesboué, op. cit., p. 322.

⁷¹ B. Sesboué, op. cit., p. 323.

⁷² Angelo Amato. **Jesús el Señor**. Biblioteca de autores cristianos, Madrid, 2002.

The Christological formula of Chalcedon was far from reaching an immediate unanimous consensus. History proves that the unity of the Church paid the price of the struggles in favour or against the “two natures”.

Even today, some of these ruptures need to be healed; for example, with the so-called Monophysite churches, which maintain that in Christ there are two natures, “without separation,” but “mixed up”, so that the human nature is lost, absorbed in the divine.

As soon as the definition of Chalcedon was accepted without difficulty in the West, serious disputes and deep divisions arose in the East. However, the subsequent evolution will help to further specify the content and scope of the perfection of the humanity of Christ, who is free from the stain of sin that affects all mankind.

The Council of Constantinople III, held in 681, had to face the doctrinal questions raised about the activity and the will of Jesus Christ. The story of the agony of Jesus in the Garden at Gethsemane is of paramount importance to the debate: “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will.” (Mt 26,39). This debate refers to an important point in the anthropology of Jesus Christ and its consequences with the fundamental data of the salvation of humanity.

The problem of the perfect humanity of Christ is raised by the heresy known as “Monothelitism,” which held that Christ had only one will.

Patriarch Sergius I of Constantinople, seeking conciliatory formulas to attract Monophysite fractions to agreement, and considering the case of the agony and passion, concludes that the human will of Christ could not but resist. From there, he then proposes the formula that affirms in Christ “a single one and only one will in two natures”.

In short, his formula was that in Christ there is only one will in his human-divine reality. In 634, Pope Honorius, without grasping the background nor the transcendence of the question, pledged his support to the formulas of Sergius, which would later be deemed heretical, at the Council of Constantinople III.

The effect of these affirmations in the true humanity of Jesus is fundamentally the reduction of his humanity to a merely instrumental and external role. The human nature of Jesus would cease to be a vital principle of action and would be only a moving object. That is, it reduces

the value of Jesus' freedom and human obedience. Hence, it follows that the salvation performed by Christ is no longer the fruit of a truly human act.⁷³

The Monothelism heresy was condemned by Pope John IV in 641, while St. Maximus the Confessor (580-662), a monk native of Constantinople, but established in Carthage, defended in Africa the doctrine of the two wills.

St. Maximus the Confessor affirmed:

“Christ, who is the two natures, possesses what is proper to each: the will and the divine operation, and the will and the human operation; it is not one excluding both, nor another besides the two, which would give three operations and three wills”.⁷⁴

Maximus the Confessor highlights the acceptance of the passion from the human will of Christ. In the words of Jesus “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done” (Lk 22,42), St. Maximus sees no resistance, fear or disagreement, but obedience, courage and perfect consensus.

What the Father wants is for the Son to drink the cup of passion to save us. This is what the Son wants with the same and unique common divine will; besides, He also wants it with the human will that is only His. For St. Maximus the Confessor, the work of salvation does not come only from the divine will of Christ, but also from his human will.

The Council of Constantinople III was convoked by the Emperor Constantine VI and lasted from 7 November 680 to 16 September 681. It evolved in 18 sessions and was dedicated to the condemnation of Monothelism and its followers, and the elaboration of a formula of faith. It confirms the doctrine of faith of St. Maximus the Confessor, who affirmed that in Christ there are two natures and, therefore, two wills.

The existence of the two wills does not mean time resistance or disagreement at all. In Christ, as the council of Chalcedon says, the divine nature and human nature are united in the one person of Christ “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.”

Similarly, Constantinople III, using the same negative terms of Chalcedon, affirms that in Christ, by assuming our human nature, soul and body, he assumes a human will and unites it to

⁷³ Cf. B. Sesboue, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

⁷⁴ Maximo Confesor, *Ad catholicos per Sicilian constitutos*: PG 91, col. 117D.

his divine will. These are united, but not confused, they are different, but not separated. The human will freely submit to the divine will.

The council emphasizes that, in Jesus, the human will be in perfect agreement with the divine, since, as a man, Jesus accepts and fulfills the will of the Father, which is also his will in regard to the Word.

Constantinople III is, first and foremost, a decisive interpretation of Chalcedon, which affirms the human will of the incarnate Word and the consequent acceptance of free redemptive passion in full harmony with the divine will. It underscores the importance of Jesus' humanity. Everything has been fulfilled in obedience to the will of the Father.

If the perfection of the humanity of the Word had been affirmed in Chalcedon, in Constantinople III, with the insistence on the perfection of the humanity of Christ, which includes the human will, it deepens in a new way what the absence of sin in Christ means; that is, that the will of the Son is identical to that of the Father and, at the same time, in his human will, different from the divine, although in perfect submission to it at all times, Jesus is obedient to the Father. In this way, Jesus can surrender himself fully to the Father for us, for our salvation.

Questions for reflection:

- In this Table, we have discovered how two natures exist in a single person. In our marriage, how do we make our individual spirituality and conjugal spirituality coexist?
- Are we two people walking towards sanctity?
- How is our attitude to ensure that in this journey we go together and support each other?
- The dogmas of faith resulting from the Councils have managed to transmit the teaching of Jesus but have also caused controversy and disagreement among Christians. What is our attitude towards the people who criticize and attack the Catholic Church?
- What actions do we take to evangelize our closest circle?

TABLE 7

JESUS AND HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH...⁷⁵

The New Testament shows us the various relationships of Jesus: As a child, with His parents; as an adult, with His mother, with His circle of Twelve, with whom He has a trusting relationship. A particular friendship with the brothers of Bethany, especially with Mary. Another very close relationship becomes visible with Mary Magdalene, who shows up at His tomb after His Resurrection.

There is also the crowd: people with doubts, eager for salvation and forgiveness. From this crowd, stand out those He assists, such as the deaf-mute, the cripple, the blind, the grateful leper, the woman with blood flow, the possessed. In addition, there is an abundance of His adversaries, among them the unhospitable Pharisee, people who want to put Him in trouble, the disciple who betrays Him...

Jesus loves everyone equally, He even loves His enemies, and He loves them until his death. His love is not a passing feeling, but one of charity that contains rich and valuable features⁷⁶. It is directed towards others with an open heart, without isolating Himself or evading contact; He goes to meet all whom He loves (Mt 11,28):

- He heals, comforts, forgives, gives food, tries to give rest to His close friends. He sympathizes with the one who is in need (Mt 9,36).
- He does not argue with His friends; He corrects them but does not stroke with hurtful disputes (Mt 20,20-28).
- He rejoices with them in their happy moments (Lk 10,21).
- He rejects their deviant intentions (Mt 16,23).
- He desires nothing of men, does not seek to give in order to receive. And the one time He seeks solace in agony, He does not find it (Mt 26,40).
- He feels misunderstood by them, but that was part of His cross, for the Holy Spirit had not yet come to make them understand everything (Jn 12,24).

⁷⁵ Cf. Pe. Antonio Rivero. **Jesus Cristo: o mais belo entre os filhos dos homens**. Itu (SP): Ottoni Editora, 2014.

⁷⁶ Cf. Publication of P. Antonio Rivero, in: Catholic.net

- He loves them supernaturally, not because of His human qualities (Jn 13, 14).
- He keeps a distance between His friends and Himself, for His world is far beyond theirs (Jn 2, 25).

7.1- Jesus and the Apostles

To fulfill His mission, Jesus wanted to surround Himself with a group of friends, He needed them. He lives with them, eats with them, forms them, educates them. In the human realm, between Jesus and the apostles there is a beautiful stream of fellowship and fraternity. In the divine realm, there is a distance that marks the mystery of Divinity. He makes these disciples partake of His secrets, His friendship, His mission.

In his passage through Earth, Jesus wanted to form a community with which He began His Kingdom, His Church. He chose them because He wanted to. To follow Jesus, they left everything behind, and they threw themselves into this world, confident in that Leader and Teacher who invited them, living under the air and the sun, and sleeping wherever they were when night fell.

He chooses them one by one, just as they are, with their virtues and flaws. Each one is different, from different towns, social condition and ideology. Some were rich, some were poor. Some revolutionaries, some collaborators, and others, opportunists. Some single, some married. Some more morally complete, others not quite... Jesus called all of them freely, not because they had done something special, but because He wanted to form a chosen group.

Jesus teaches them to open their hearts, He explains to them His deep message. He reveals to them who is the Heavenly Father. He becomes their close friend, shares with them the same table and sleeps beside them. He becomes their task and mission partner. He motivates them to preach in pairs, to announce the Kingdom He came to establish here on earth and that will reach fulfillment in heaven. In this task, He promises them assistance, but will not spare them the difficulties or the thorns along the road. They will fight, suffer, be persecuted (Mt 10,22). He does not hide the cross from them; on the contrary, He invites them to wear it every day.

He entrusted them with the mission to:

- Be with Him, live with Him, have Him as a close friend, come to think like Him, feel like Him, love like Him.

- Preach the gospel to the whole world, so that all men may come to know Jesus Christ.
- Be the light of the world, that light that illuminates every corner of society.
- Cast the demons of the body and the soul.
- Heal the sick of body and soul.
- Teach to keep all that He has commanded them, be faithful to His message.
- Baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit to make us all children of God.

7.2- Jesus and the sinners

If Jesus Christ came to Earth for someone, it is for the sinners. He hated sin, but sought and loved the sinner with great mercy, because He came to save what was lost. That was the mandate of the Father from the moment of the Incarnation. No one has comprehended the wickedness of sin as an offence to the greatness and love of God better than Jesus.

Jesus and sin are two opposite and contrasting words. Sin is the opposite of the idea of God. God is strength, sin is weakness. God is unity, sin is scattering. God is the covenant, sin is the rupture. God is depth, sin is frivolity. God is eternal, sin is the provisional and fleeting.

And yet, sin is a fundamental part of Jesus' life. He probably wouldn't have become a man if it weren't for sin. The struggle against evil, against what hinders the arrival of the Kingdom, is what constituted the central task of His earthly life. Jesus had no sin, but no one understood the severity of sin like Him, because being the son of the Father, He could measure what is an offence to His love.

Jesus makes a marked distinction between sin and sinner. With sin, He is demanding and uncompromising. With the sinner, He is tender and merciful. In every sinner, he sees a son of God who has gone astray. His words soften, His tone softens, He forgives even before the sinner shows clear signs of repentance.

He has a special dedication to sinners (Lk 4,18-19; 7,22-23; Mt 15,24; 9, 35-36; Mc 2,17) be they rich, publicans or poor. He cares about them with very special gestures, like eating with them, since eating with someone was a sign of mutual communion. He eats with them to bring them closer to the banquet of God. Jesus first loves the sinners and then invites them to conversion.

Jesus makes clear His position towards sinners with these three statements:

- Since all men sin, all must be welcomed (Jn 8,7)
- He is the incarnation of God's mercy, and God is the God of all (Mt 5,45)
- Sinners need to be welcomed to save them (Lk 19,10)

But Jesus' attitude toward sinners goes even further:

- All must recognize themselves as sinners, so that He can approach them and bring them salvation (Mt 9,13)
- He has no resentment against the powerful, discriminating against them, but instead interest for the needy, which explains the tendency to worry more about them.
- Jesus approaches the sinner but does not accept the fault committed. He recognizes that sins should not be accepted (Jn 8,11); that is why he always invites the sinner to conversion.
- Jesus does not prefer some over others; He has come to seek what was lost. His goal is the man to save him, whoever he might be (Lk 7,50).

The culmination of Jesus' attitude towards sinners is his death "... for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins." (Mt 26,28)

7.3- Jesus and the sick

As we read the Gospels, we discover the world of pain that surrounds Jesus. He called himself the Doctor who came to heal those who were sick. Jesus' love for men, is love for those who suffer and for the oppressed. The Good News that he came to preach greatly reached the sick.

Pain and suffering are not a curse. Human suffering arouses compassion and respect, but also frightens. Suffering is a mystery that man cannot fully understand with his intelligence. Only in the light of Christ is this mystery illuminated.

Since Christ assumed pain in all its facets, suffering has salvific and redemptive value, if it is offered with love. In addition, all suffering leads to human maturity, expiates sins and unites to the redeeming sacrifice of Christ.

The Jews believed that the disease was a sin that materialized. That is to say, they thought it was a consequence of some sin committed against God. Therefore, curing diseases was the task

almost exclusively of priests, who were resorted to so that, based on rites, exorcisms, prayers and amulets, they forced evil to abandon the sick body.

Of all the diseases, the most frequent and dramatic was leprosy, which affected not only the body and physical plane, but also the psychological and affective ones. The leper feels discriminated against, separated from society. Everyone shunned the lepers, and even threw stones at them to keep them at a distance.

Jesus has compassion for the sick person. The healing of the body is linked to the salvation of the soul. Jesus identifies himself with the mentality of the Jewish community, which saw the disease as a consequence of sin; therefore, his task as a physician of the bodies is a part and symbol of the redeeming function of souls. Physical healing is a symbol of a new inner life.

Jesus before the sick:

- Feels compassion. Jesus admits the sick, does not discriminate against them. Someone approaches him and he takes care of him, has a heart always open for any sick person (Lk 7,13).
- He sees deeper, behind the pain. He sees sin, evil, the absence of God. Illness and pain are a consequence of sin; so, Jesus in healing the sick wants to heal, above all, the deep wound of sin. His healings bring the patient closer to God; they are the arrival of the Kingdom of God to the heart of the sick (Lk 4,18).
- He cures if it is the will of His Father, and if the sick person approaches with humility, trust and faith. And in curing someone, He desires the integral, physical and spiritual good (Jn 6,40).
- He does not stay far from the pain. He also wanted to take the pain upon Himself, He took upon Himself all our pains. To those who suffer, He gives His example by suffering with them (Mt 11,28).

That way, Jesus walked through the streets healing men, healing souls, curing diseases and preaching as He healed them. And people followed Him, partly because they believed in Him and partly because they expected His healing. He asked for nothing in return, but a change of life ...

7.4- Jesus and His friends

Friendship is a beautiful human experience, enriching, humanizing and worthy of the highest praise. It is a value among humans and one of God's highest gifts. God Himself presents Himself as a friend of men; He seals a pact of friendship with Abraham (Gen 18,17), with Moses (Ex 33,11), with the prophets (Am 3,7).

Through the Gospels, we know that Jesus gave God's friendship a human face, coming to be a friend of men. But He had, of course, special friends and lived the rewarding experience of friendship, by being truly human.

Jesus loves all men and considers them friends. His love for all men is neither transient nor of outward expressions; His love is one of charity, dedication, openness, disinterest and shared joy.

But it is also true that He had special friends:

- John, the beloved disciple. In this friendship, we discover that Jesus shared with someone, in a special way, His inner and reserved experiences. It is an intimate friendship. Manifestation of this intimate friendship is the Gospel that John wrote.
- Three of his apostles: Peter, James and John. In this friendship, we discover that Jesus seeks companionship to share special moments: happy like the transfiguration (Mt 17,1-13) or sad like Gethsemane (Mt 26,37). This is a shared friendship.
- The three siblings of Bethany: Lazarus, Martha and Mary. Bethany was one of those places where Jesus rested and where He opened His heart as a friend. There, Christ always had the door open, He had the key to enter; He felt at ease among people He loved and who esteemed Him. In them, we discover the friendship of Jesus that corresponds with the same measure that is offered to Him. Grateful friendship.

Jesus had friends in all social classes and in all professions; from people of great social prestige, such as Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea, to beggars, like Bartimaeus. In most cities and villages, He found people who loved Him and who felt loved by the Master; friends that not always the Gospel mentions by their names, but whose existence is glimpsed.

The Gospels mention what it takes to be friends with Jesus: "*You are my friends if you do what I command you*" (Jn 15,14). And what He commands us is to love one another as He loves us (Jn 13,34), to pray and watch (Lk 21,36), to be meek and humble of heart (Mt 11,29), to bear his

yoke (Mt 11,29), to be perfect as His heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5:48) ... If we fulfill His mandate, we will be His friends.

Jesus does not want friends of convenience, who are only with Him until the breaking of bread, but who leave Him alone and flee when the shadow of the cross approaches (Mt 26,50). Jesus does not want friends who take advantage of Him to get the best positions in heaven (Mt 20,20-28).

Jesus wants humble, peaceful friends, of pure soul and free of sensual attachments. We must love Jesus with a love of surrender, of sacrifice, of fidelity. With a love shown through deeds. Only to these will Jesus draw near to His divine heart.

7.5- Jesus before His enemies

During his earthly life, Jesus had people who did not want to accept His saving mission. The position He adopted before them was to convert them and attract them to His divine heart, sometimes with soft words, sometimes demanding words; sometimes, he preferred respectful silence; others, the wise and intelligent phrase.

He could not conquer everyone for his Father, because He respected freedom. But He came to save everyone. Jesus did not consider anyone as His enemy. He loved all and He shed His precious blood for all. They would be the ones who did not accept him, those who considered themselves His enemies.

In the religious field, most of the scribes, Pharisees and high priests considered Him an enemy and a danger (not all) because he attributed to Himself the authority to carry out the law to the full, because He rejected certain interpretations that were made of it, because He unmasked legalism and hypocrisy in their relations with God and with men.

St. Matthew, in chapter 23, describes how the accusations of Christ are directed not against the Pharisees as such, heirs of the prophets or against their doctrine, really elevated, but against their hypocritical attitudes and against the external formalities to which they had reduced the religion.

In the civil field, He was considered enemy by Herod, because he believed that the newborn child endangered his kingdom; and by Pilate, from the moment they presented Jesus as a seditious and enemy of Caesar.

In front of the scribes, Pharisees and high priests, Jesus certainly badgered their legalism and hypocrisy, unmasked their false religiosity and hardness of heart, showed how they deformed the will of God and how they allowed themselves to be led by vanity and love for riches, He defended His divine mission, etc. They could not stand Jesus saying, *"I am the Truth."*

His rejection of Jesus Christ was not for reasons of honesty. They rejected Him for being precisely Him, with His singular way of life, with His specific and new doctrine, with His particular teachings never heard before. That is why Jesus said to them: *"I have come in my Father's name and you do not receive me."* But He welcomed those who humbly approached Him, as happened with Nicodemus (Jn 3,1-15) and praised the scribe who answered correctly (Lk 10,28).

Christ's trust in His Father was like a wake-up call to their smugness. The truth of Christ hurt their duplicity. The detachment of Christ clashed against the Pharisaic greed. The humility of Jesus was a difficult lesson to their pride and loftiness. Many things about Christ bothered the Pharisees: His security, His love for the poor and sinners, His authority, His ability to win people over, His simplicity, His distinguished bearing, His serene smile, the brightness of His eyes ...

In front of the political leaders, Jesus is respectful with them. He makes them see what His mission is, received from Above. He puts them in their place: to Caesar what is Caesar's (Mk 12,17). Try to open them to the truth of His message. He even excuses them, as He did Pilate. He is not reduced to the unhealthy curiosity of Herod.

Jesus' only true enemy is Satan; against him and against his plans, He fights firmly (Mk 1,12-13) because Jesus seeks to overcome him (Lk 4,1-13). The fight against Satan is the fight against evil and the temptations of this world.

In general, Jesus knew how to face His enemies without fear. He continues with His definite position, although uncomfortable for them (Jn 11,14-16), guided by the goal that the Father entrusted to Him, which is of a supernatural essence (Mk 8,33).

7.6- Jesus and the children

It is a good idea to go into the Gospels to see how Jesus behaved with the children. Living in a time that put perfection in old age and despised childhood, Jesus was passionate about children, dared to put the children as models.

Jesus feels a great predilection for children, and puts them as an example of innocence, simplicity and purity of soul. Moreover, He identifies with them by saying that whoever receives one of these little ones receives Him. To enter heaven, you have to become a child.

His position before them was:

- Jesus knows the children. He knows about their games and their graces, He talks about them with joy, He knows the illusion they have of running, making healthy pranks, screaming (Mt 11,16).
- Jesus values children. He says that out of the mouth of the children comes praise that pleases God (Mt 21,16). He puts them as a model of purity and innocence. They are the ones who know, the intelligent ones, because it is to them that God has given His word and the depth of His mysteries (Mt 11,25).
- Jesus loves them. He gives signs of caresses directed at children (Mk 9,35-36, Mt 18,1-5).
- Jesus cares for them. He reprimands those who look at them with contempt (Mt 18,10); He points out, above all, the harshest punishments for those who scandalize a child (Mt 18,6).
- Jesus heals them. He cures a twelve-year-old girl (Mk 5, 39), whom He sweetly calls Talitha, that is, "my child". He heals the demon-possessed daughter of a pagan woman (Mt 15,21-28). He heals the only son of a widow (Lk 7,11-15). He heals the son of a royal officer (Jn 4,46-54).

Children, for their part, also love Jesus. They ran towards Him. Children have a sixth sense, and they would never run towards someone in whom they would not perceive that mysterious electricity that is love.

Therefore, Jesus will dare to ask everyone for the supreme nonsense of remaining faithful to their childhood, of remaining children, of returning to being like children (Mt 18, 2-5). The

childhood that Jesus proposes is not infantilism, which is synonymous with immaturity, selfishness, caprice. It is, rather, the reconquest of innocence, of inner cleanliness, of the clean look of things and people, of that sincere and crystalline smile, of that generous sharing of my things and my time.

7.7- Jesus and women

Women, in the time of Jesus, were forced to domestic chores, they could not leave the house unless it was necessary, and then conveniently veiled. They could not talk alone with any man, under fear of being considered unworthy and even adulterous. Discrimination in the case of adultery was radical. This humiliation came in some fields, especially in the religious field, to incredible situations.

Jesus knew how to treat women with great respect and dignity, valuing all the spiritual wealth that they bring, in charge of the human and moral education of children and the formation of a home where understanding, affection and peace reign, and where God is the center.

For Jesus, women had the following characteristics:

- Hard worker. Compares the Kingdom of God to a woman who works in the house, who puts leaven in the dough and prepares bread for the family (Lk 13,20-21).
- Careful, attentive and caring. Like a woman who sweeps the house, searching everywhere to find that lost coin, so is God the Father with us, until we meet (Lk 15,8-10).
- Affective and communicative. The woman is happy to find the lost coin and makes her neighbours share in her joy, so God the Father makes us share in His joy, when He recovers a lost son (Lk 15,8-10).
- Foresighted wife. With the oil of her love and faith she goes out to meet the husband, so we must be with God (Mt 25,1-13).
- Insistent. The woman is a model of insistent faith, until she gets what she wants (Lk 18,1-8).
- Helpful and generous. Martha and the good women who followed Him serve Jesus with delicacy and love, putting their goods at the service of Christ (Lk 10,38-42, Lk 8,1-3).
- Happy in the sacrifice. Like the mother giving birth to her son (Jn 16,21).

- Humble and hidden. Like the widow who puts into the collection of the temple what she had to live (Mc 12,41-44, Lk 21,1-4).
- Of fine sensitivity. Pours the best perfume to Christ (Jn 12,3).
- Faithful in difficult moments. There were the women on Calvary, when Jesus died (Jn 19,25).

Through the feminine condition, we perceive a special reflection of the Spirit of God and His virtue as a force of love, as a centre of communion, as the bosom of life, as a breath of hope, as a certainty that life triumphs over death, just as the spirit prevails over matter.

Women are an essential part of the Mystical Body of Christ by virtue of their femininity, which reflects the spousal nature of that Body with respect to its Head, Christ. The Church is the wife of Christ. In wanting to portray the Church, we must look at the woman from where we will draw the source of feminine tenderness to apply it analogically to the Church of Christ.

To reflect:

- Jesus chose His apostles, a group of humble men with their virtues and defects and to them He entrusted the mission of transmitting His life, teaching and faith. He has also chosen us as we are. How are we living the mission entrusted to us? As Christians, as spouses, as parents, as brothers, as workers?
- Jesus asks us to remain faithful to our childhood. Not as a reflection of immaturity, but of innocence, a clean look, a sincere smile ... Are we really living with that heart of children? What can we improve to meet these characteristics?

TABLE 8

THE MOTHER OF THE CHILD AND OUR MOTHER.⁷⁷

So far we've talked about Jesus. But this Jesus had a mother like each of us. And this mother is Mary.

The Virgin Mary was born in Nazareth. Her parents were, according to tradition, Saint Joachim and Saint Anne. Mary was a priestly family, a descendant of Aaron; Elizabeth, the mother of John and wife of priest Zechariah, was his cousin (Lk 1,5; 1,36). Mary and Joseph were of modest economic conditions, but rich in holiness and virtue, fulfilling the Law as the Gospel assures according to Saint Luke (Lk 1,22-24).⁷⁸

It is not possible to separate Mary from Jesus. Mary must always be seen in relation to Him. Everything that the Church says about Mary depends, in the last instance, on her being the mother of Jesus Christ, true God and true man. But, at the same time, it depends on the reflection of the Church. Therefore, the Virgin Mary must be understood from Jesus and from the life of the Church.

Sacred Scripture clearly expresses the most fundamental truths that the Church confers on Mary: that of being the Mother of Jesus and of being, nevertheless, Virgin; that of being full of grace and disciple who follows her Son. And, as such, she is part of the Church, as model and mother of her.

By meditating a little on the Gospel, the traits and spiritual physiognomy of Mary can be taken away. To understand this woman and mother we must think of her from the heart and with the heart.

8.1- The unexpected news of the Annunciation (Lk 1,26-28)

God spoke to Mary. And since Mary had a soul so pure, so clean, so crystalline, free from original sin by the redemptive grace of her Son that God anticipated her from the first moment of her conception, she immediately perceived the light of God, the will of God in her life.

⁷⁷ Cf. Pe. Antonio Rivero. **Jesucristo - El más hermoso de los hijos de los hombres**. Credo Ediciones, 2013.

⁷⁸ <http://www.catolicosfirmesensufe.org/>

Mary is blessed above all because she listened to the word of God and kept it, and not so much because she was the mother of God, as Jesus Christ, her Son, said to that woman who had praised her mother (Lk 8,21).

Listening to the word of God is the primordial attitude of a creature's faith. Faith, therefore, is not primarily an act of personal thought, a creation of human intelligence, but rather the acceptance in the heart of divine thought, and of a thought expressed concretely in the form of a word.

To listen is to open oneself to this word and receive all the thought and depth that it manifests. So did Mary: she listened to God's plan as exposed by the angel and by that inner voice. She did not first expose her own thought or her own decision. She did not listen to other "sirens" that invited her to an easier life without so many complications.

Mary entrusted herself fully to God and believed in God. Mary had a plan: to be a virgin all her life. This was her plan. God, on the other hand, had his plan for Mary: to be the Mother of God. How can we combine this? The point of union is in Mary's faith. Mary's faith united these two poles that humanly could not unite: virginity and motherhood in her at the same time.

This step of Mary is an act of love. Just as listening is the primordial attitude of faith, love is the condition for giving ourselves to God without haggling; because it is not true that love is always born of faith; the most common thing is that faith appears in a heart that already loves.

Mary does not understand everything, but prefers to abandon herself humbly and fully to the mystery proposed by God, because he cannot disappoint her, much less deceive her: "*I believe in you that you are the supreme Truth poured out into the world through the five wounds that bleed from your Son*".

In this way, it becomes free and available territory for God to do his wonderful Work. Just as Eden had been the Paradise of creation, the Virgin would be the Paradise, the new Eden of the Incarnation.

8.2- Deep joy in Bethlehem (Lk 2,1-7)

Mary was the true Mother of the Son of God. A mother does not generate natures, but people. That is why Mary engendered the true divine person of the Son. This is how the Council

of Ephesus defined it against Nestorius, who said that Mary was the mother of Christ, man, that is, of human nature. A mother gives birth to a person and not to a nature. A nature is not sustained by itself and in itself.

Mary's love has the privilege of being maternal and virginal. Virginity conferred an incomparable beauty on the love of Mary for her Son. This virginity placed a note of perpetual youth in Mary's maternal love.

The heart of the virgin is a fountain that is always fresh, uncontaminated, full of tenderness and sincere and clean affection. The heart of the virgin is not a dry, cold, narcissistic heart... but, on the contrary, it is full of understanding, of affection, of goodness, of sweetness.

Commonly, a mother's love is possessive. Mary, however, loved her Son, gave herself to her Son without seeking from Him the compensations that, as usual, every mother seeks. He gave himself to his Son without those temperamental imperfections of his own in which a mother manifests her anger, her impatience or her too much possessive zeal. Such was the inner harmony that reigned in Mary's soul that Jesus was never upset or disappointed by his Mother's conduct.

Mary's love for Christ was pure and selfless. She never took advantage of the privileged position of her Son, as did the disciples who competed for the best positions with that King. She knew that her Son was destined for men and did not keep him zealously to herself. Yes, she did everything for Him, but selflessly, aware that even though she was His Son, she did not belong to Him: "He would be the Savior of the people.

All that has been said so far: that her love is not selfish, nor possessive, nor exploitative... does not prevent her from loving him with a real love, that is, from giving everything to her Son: her faith, her confidence, her love, her body. The same physical inheritance of Jesus came from his Mother.... Jesus had the physical traits of Mary.

Grace had elevated Mary's maternal love to the level of the virtue of theological charity, because the term of her love was directly the same God in the divine Person of her Son.

We, for our part, have to love God through our neighbor, to the extent that God Himself considers it done to Him what we have done for our neighbor.

Of course, God grants charity to all men who freely open their souls to him, but Mary was given the form of maternal love. That is, in Mary his maternal love was identified with theological charity. The other mothers love God and their children with two different loves. Mary loves God and her Son with one and the same love.

8.3- Mary's offering in the Temple (Lk 2,22-39)

The third characteristic of Mary's soul is detachment. After meditating on her faith and love, detachment is an admirable quality of the Mother of Jesus Christ.

Mary and Joseph were happy with their Son in Bethlehem. It seemed that this happiness would not end. But no. A sword was already gravitating over this joy on the horizon. So it was.

A month later, they set out for Jerusalem to offer this first-born child to God. The first-born was the property of God. Strictly speaking, the first-born had to dedicate their entire lives to the service of God. But in reality, it was the members of the tribe of Levi who "covered" this service in representation of all the first-born of all tribes. For this they had to pay a price for this ransom.

But Mary knew that even if she rescued her Son with this "pair of pigeons," her Son would still be wholly and utterly of God. She would have it as a loan, but it would never be hers. Mary detached herself from this dear fruit of hers. To let go is not easy. It is very difficult.

To detach oneself does not exactly consist in the material and effective separation of things and creatures. The essence of detachment is the emotional separation from all that is used. It is this "spiritual detachment" that keeps the heart free from all attachment. Therefore, the essence of detachment lies in detachment from this secret nucleus that we are, each one of us, with our legitimate ambitions, with our holy illusions, with our preferences.

Until this moment everything had been joy, alleluias of angels, joy of shepherds. A child is always a joy for a mother, for a family, for a home. Mary, though she wanted to delay her trip to the temple, set out on her way. She carried her best treasure, her beloved Son, her everything, the object of her deep joy. He took it to offer it to God the Father and to men. It is not yours; it is not for her; it is not for her personal enjoyment.

Mary took him to the temple, even though his heart was bleeding. All detachment is painful, it is like pulling the blindfold from a wound that is already strongly adhered to. Painful, how painful it was for Abraham to let go of his dear son Isaac.

Mary's detachment was free and motivated. Mary, led to the temple by inspiration of the Spirit to fulfill what the law commanded, was free, without any coercion. There she was the Immaculate One, the one not bound by passions, nor by selfishness.

Mary, in the presentation of her Son to the Temple, gave herself totally and radically detached herself for a theological reason: she gave it to the Heavenly Father from whom she had received it and made it available to all men, regardless of whether or not men valued such a costly offering for their maternal heart.

The elder Simeon was prophetically cruel to Mary. Because he anticipates what she would be in life: the mother of a stone of scandal against which many selfishness, pleasures, pride, pride, potentates, kings will stumble? Your Son, a sign of contradiction! Your Son, stone of scandal! Why a sword? It was hard to accept this. And this sword of pain was gradually being introduced into Mary's heart. On Calvary, this sword was totally stuck.

8.4- Mary, Teacher and Disciple of Nazareth (Lk 2,51-52)

Mary, with her sword deep in her heart, leaves the painful temple. I had never thought it would be so hard to be the mother of God. She had to resize many of her thoughts. This holy pride that she felt in Bethlehem because she was the mother of God, because she had the Son of God in her hands, now this same pride is purified by the sword of pain.

And then he goes to Nazareth, with the child in his arms. He weighed a little more, because from this moment on he began to carry the cross of his Son, and the cross of his Son weighs a lot, because it is plowed with the sins of all men. Mary begins to be co-redemptrix and, on the cross, her Son will confirm this vocation to her.

In Nazareth, Mary formed her Son, she educated him. It could not seem like a heresy to say that a human person, however holy he may be, could have really influenced God, could have given him education, formation. And yet, it is certain: Christ was as authentically educated by Mary as he was generated by her.

The divinity of Jesus, far from hindering Mary's maternal influence, accentuated her strength. Jesus, in his humility and innocence, allowed himself to be formed and educated as the best of children. He even wanted to be an entire child, that is: defenseless, in need of the protection, care and education of his parents.

Mary contributed to the formation of the human soul of Jesus, taught him to pray. She would teach her Son the traditional prayers of Judaism. He also influenced the formation of the heart of his Son. Mary was educating the heart of Jesus in humility so that it would be directed only to God, her Father, and to men, her brothers. He directed the heart of his Son not to seek honors or earthly ambitions or desires, but to seek humility: "Learn from me that I am meek and humble of heart.

He educated the heart of his Son in charity and love for others. Why did Jesus feel compassion for the crowd, why did his sensitivity register the palpitations of the hearts of men, why did he have feelings of kindness, affection and closeness for all? Mary had much to do with this.

Mary formed the fine sensitivity and noble sentiments of Jesus. Where did this fine sensitivity, open to the beauty of nature, to the lilies of the field, to the birds of heaven, come from for Christ? From his Mother. When they went for a walk, Mary pondered all these wonders of nature to Him. She would stop and make him value the beauty of creation.

He learned gratitude from her. The "I thank you, Father..." is not the echo of the hymn of gratitude that Mary always sang in her house in Nazareth?

And his will and resistance. Jesus learned from her the joyful acceptance of God's plan, the fortitude before the sacrifice: displacements, exile, flight to Egypt, the long wait in Nazareth, his going to his apostolate. From her, he learned the resistance to the poverty that reigned in Nazareth, the tenacity to face contradictions.... How the sufferings and insults of the scaffold of the cross come to mind, suffered and supported with an integrity worthy of a son, whose mother was pierced by a sword of pain! This sword crossed the mother and the child.

On the other hand, she herself, like Martha's sister, sat at the feet of her Son, filled her soul with spiritual juice, deepened in the knowledge of her Son, without letting herself be carried away by the monotony of life. Even routine wanted to hurt Mary. But she never stubbornly lived

with her Son. Rather, she opened herself to the divine radiance that her Son poured out. That is why he meditated on all that he saw and heard from his Son. Her Son was her Master.

8.5- Mary's tears on Calvary (Jn 19,25-27)

Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation "The Joy of the Gospel" defines Mary on Calvary as "the gift of Jesus to his people" (EG, 285), and writes:

At that crucial moment, before fully accomplishing the work which his Father had entrusted to him, Jesus said to Mary: "Woman, here is your son". Then he said to his beloved friend: "Here is your mother" (Jn 19,26-27). These words of the dying Jesus are not chiefly the expression of his devotion and concern for his mother; rather, they are a revelatory formula which manifests the mystery of a special saving mission. Jesus left us his mother to be our mother. (...) At the foot of the cross, at the supreme hour of the new creation, Christ led us to Mary. (EG, 285)

Mary in Bethlehem gave birth to her Son between deep satisfaction and joy; and on Calvary she gave light, between immense sorrow, to all humanity. There she was the Mother of the Redeemer; here she was the Mother of the redeemed Church. There Mary's love flourished; here, it was purifying, growing more intense, maturing and expanding to shelter under her lap all the sick humanity.

Just as the Annunciation united Mary with the Divinity before the coming of her Son, now Calvary unites Mary with humanity until the second coming of her own Son. In this way, she became co-redeemer with her Redeemer Son.

We all have our personal, untransferable, fruitful Calvary, given by God to be co-redeemers with Christ because "without shedding of blood, there is no redemption" (Heb 9,22).

The last caresses on this terrible day were those of Mary. Once he had come down from the cross and before being placed in the tomb, the dead body of the Son rested on his Mother's lap. She surely closed his eyes a little more, caressed his wounds, smoothed and ordered his beard, and tried to recover a little the tangled-up revolt of his hair. In the end, he stopped at one of the wounds: that of the trunk.

He immediately lowered his head and his lips rested on his chest. He was kissing the heart of the Son. He paused for a moment to listen to his beat. Useless. His heart had stopped. She

kissed that mystery again, repeating everything she knew, what she had always said, what constituted the definition of her life: "*Here is the handmaid of the Lord...*". Because she also knew that, even though the lips and the heart of the Son were mute, his Word was still alive.

When someone loses a loved one, he suffers loneliness. Mary experienced physical loneliness: this absence of human companionship, because her Son died. How and with what can she now fill this void that the absence of her son has left?

He lived the psychological loneliness of feeling or perceiving that the people around him were not in agreement with her and did not accompany her with their spirit, that they were far from her spirit, did not share her faith or her love.

She lived the spiritual loneliness: this loneliness that the soul experiences before God, when it seems that God abandons us and leaves us alone with our problems and anguish; the loneliness of those who know that only he and nobody else must respond freely before God.

He lived the ascetic solitude: in the internal climate that the soul achieves, as fruit of the personal effort to isolate itself from people, events, things, thanks to detachment, recollection and sacrifice.

To conclude this Table on Mary, it should be emphasized that the Second Vatican Council warns of the need for an authentic Marian spirituality in the life of all baptized Catholics:

Let the faithful remember moreover that true devotion consists neither in sterile or transitory affection, nor in a certain vain credulity, but proceeds from true faith, by which we are led to know the excellence of the Mother of God, and we are moved to a filial love toward our mother and to the imitation of her virtues.⁷⁹

The imitation of her virtues is the real touchstone of Marian devotion, because it would be useless to visit her shrines, to pray rosaries, to light candles, to make promises, to bring flowers, if we do not end up looking like her.

For his part, Pope Francis once again remembers Mary as the "star of evangelization" at this crucial moment in the history of humanity, because, in some way, he says: (EG, 288)

There is a Marian "style" to the Church's work of evangelization. Whenever we look to Mary, we come to believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness.

⁷⁹ Dogmatic Constitution on The Church **Lumen Gentium**, 67.

In her we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong who need not treat others poorly in order to feel important themselves. Contemplating Mary, we realize that she who praised God for “bringing down the mighty from their thrones” and “sending the rich away empty” (Lk 1,52-53) is also the one who brings a homely warmth to our pursuit of justice. She is also the one who carefully keeps “all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2,19).

Mary knows how to recognize the traces of the Spirit of God both in great events and in those that seem imperceptible. She is contemplative of the mystery of God in the world, in history and in the daily life of each and every one of us.

She is a woman who prays and works in Nazareth, but she is also our Lady of readiness, the one who leaves "in haste" (Lk 1:39) from her village to go and help others. This dynamic of justice and tenderness, of contemplation and of journey for others, makes her an ecclesial model for evangelization.

We ask her to help us, with her maternal prayer, so that the Church may become a home for many, a mother for all peoples, and make possible the birth of a new world. (EG, 288)

To reflect:

- 1) Mary listened and accepted God's plan with humility and without questioning. Are we open to listen to what God asks of us? Are we always ready to accept His will? Or do we question it? What attitudes can we improve in this regard?
- 2) Mary guided the heart of her Son not to seek honors or ambitions or earthly pleasures, but to seek humility? Do we act with the same humility, compassion, sensitivity? Is our heart always focused on our spouse and our family? What do we propose to do to faithfully follow the teaching or example of Mary?

CONCLUSION

TO KNOW GOD AND TO FOLLOW HIM

As we have seen, the structure of our Christian faith is based on the existence of one event: Jesus Christ. It is in memory of Jesus of Nazareth that the Christian life is based. This is the path that we were able to travel throughout this course on Christology. It was a journey in which we returned to Jesus, it was a journey to the places, events and activities that were fundamental in his life.

By returning to Jesus' path, without a doubt, we can know him better and we can reflect on how our lives should be carried out in order to be considered disciples and missionaries of Jesus.

In this short conclusion, we will use as a starting point a reflection made by Father Manuel Hurtado about what it means to **"Believe in Jesus Christ today"**.⁸⁰

1- Returning to Jesus

Paul invites us to accept a fundamental task: "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead" (2Tim 2,8). Therefore, could there be a Christian Life without remembering Jesus? Could we believe in Jesus without a daily reminder of this man from Nazareth?

This memory travels through a specific path: the path of Jesus together with those that followed him before Easter. If we want to return to Jesus we must enter the same path that Jesus and his followers walked.

We, as a Christian community, have the responsibility of maintaining the memory of Jesus alive. This memory also includes the traditions and life of the Church.

2- Believing in Jesus is believing in the same way Jesus believed

In order to live this statement, we must first understand the way in which Jesus believed. Jesus followed a path, where acts of faith turned into a daily reality, especially in the moments of crisis. Precisely in those moments, the trust in the Father was converted in the necessary

⁸⁰ HURTADO, Manuel. "Crer em Jesus Cristo hoje". **Revista Vida Pastoral**, maio-junho de 2012, Ano 53, nº 284.

strength and support for the most difficult moments of his life: the moment of his passion and death. To believe as he believed is to believe from the deepest of our being.

To believe as Jesus believed, is to trust in the Father's guidance in moments of temptation and suffering. Trust in the Father must be very present in those moments of personal prayer, expressing words of trust and letting go: "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23,46)

3- To believe in Jesus is to believe in Jesus' God

We know who God is because Jesus revealed his identity. We only know who God is through the acts and words of Jesus. Jesus is who shows us the understanding of the divine image of God.

Jesus teaches us that his father does not want to be served, instead he wants to serve us. In the Beatitudes, we discover that God does not want us to fear Him and just be obedient to him, instead he wants us to recognize him in our moments of pain and suffering. To believe in Jesus is to believe in the God of men and for men.

4- To believe in Jesus Christ is to follow him

We know that by following Jesus, we know what a Christian life is. To follow Jesus, is to live in the same way he did. The Spirit leads us to believe that Jesus is Christ, it is the same Spirit that helps us understand that "Jesus is Lord" (1Cor 12,13). From now on, it will be necessary to recognize the Resurrected one along the way (Luke 24,13-35).

5- To believe in Jesus Christ is to carry in our bodies the marks of Jesus

As Paul says, to believe in Jesus Christ is to carry with us Jesus' marks on our own body. These marks of Jesus on our body, mean that we carry with us the seal of Jesus. That seal is the guarantee that we belong fully to Jesus. We are talking about the mark of the Holy Spirit that we receive through our baptism.

But what does it mean to carry the marks of Jesus? To carry the marks of Jesus, is equal to living the way Jesus lived. Our marks will appear when we fight for justice, when we seek

fraternity and equality, when we sacrifice for the small and the poor, when the hungry and the marginalized take a central place in our life.

6- To Believe in Jesus Christ is to believe that he is alive

The affirmation that Jesus lives is fundamental to our Christian faith. It is impossible to believe in Jesus Christ, without believing that he is the Living God forever. He is the reason for our hope. The meaning of this affirmation is that all of the inhumanity of the world, will be surpassed in the Life of Jesus.

Through the resurrection, Jesus pushes us to see the immense possibilities of our humanity and not to simply look at our own wounds. We cannot search for the Living among the dead, among the ashes of our personal or community life. On the contrary, we need to focus on our privileged path close to the one that lives among us.

In conclusion, faith in Christ is not limited to the simple doctrinal confession of his divinity, it is also not limited to the rational understanding of the exterior of his person.

To believe in Jesus Christ today, is a concrete way of living as Believers, a concrete way of following Jesus. It is a way of being man or woman in the style of Jesus, according to the demands of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

That is our fundamental faith in Jesus Christ today.

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