

Dominica VI Paschae A

Salus Catholica

Lectio Divina by Fr. Randy Soto

I. Lectio

A. One of the most important principles sustaining our Salvation History is that *God is always in control*. He is the one taking the initiative; He is the one setting forth his “mighty arm” to enact salvation on behalf of those whom he created with love; He even makes use of our failures as providential occasions to bring forth redemption and life; His patience is everlasting for He awaits with magnanimity for our positive response to the offering of his love.

B. Our First Reading from the Acts is another piece in this salvific puzzle of God; persecution befell on the primitive community of the Apostles in Jerusalem. Young Saul began a brutal persecution against Christians, he had them arrested and even killed. Such is the case of Deacon Stephen. Paradoxically, the result of this anti-Christian movement was not annihilation or suppression of Christianity. On the contrary, God used the occasion to impulse many Christians to flee from Jerusalem and to go into other regions of Judea, Samaria and beyond Palestine. Persecution, in the hands of God became the instrument through which the Church began its expansion to the whole world. Persecution made the Primitive Christian Community to become the **Catholica**.

C. It is in this context that we read today how Phillip, another of the original seven deacons ordained by the Apostolic College, went into different towns of Samaria preaching the Gospel and baptizing those who wished to embrace the faith. The Apostles Peter and John followed him to Confirm the neophytes and thus making it possible for them to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit: “*They prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit [...] Then they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.*”

D. God’s **Universal Plan of Salvation** was announced in many ways and forms in the OT. One of the most appreciated venues was the Liturgy, for Israel always acknowledged the *omnicausalitas* of YHWH. Ps 66 invites us all to proclaim Him as Lord and Savior to all the nations: “*Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.*”

E. In the Second Reading, Peter teaches the entire Church that we must be prepared to *give reason of our faith* to anyone who asks. He goes on to instruct us to say that this must be done in *a spirit of gentleness and reverence*, giving always example in our lives of what we preach even if this makes us suffer like Christ: “*Christ was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit.*” This programmatic discourse of Peter must be always at the basis of any evangelization effort; because in following Peter’s instructions we set forth the **Catholica** and thus, we fulfill better Jesus command to go and make disciples all peoples (Mt 28:20).

F. During the Last Supper Discourse, Jesus declares that in the **Economy of Salvation** flows exclusively through him; and that we must remain in him if we want to have some part in this outpouring of God' love. To love Jesus is to keep his commands and to keep his commands is to surrender our lives to his loving care and to act consequently: *"Whoever loves me will keep my word, says the Lord, and my Father will love him and we will come to him [...] If you love me, you will keep my commandments."*

III. *Meditatio*: The *Catholica* some in the Church Fathers

A. St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Smyrneans*, 8:2, AD 107.

Let no one do anything of concern to the Church without the bishop. Let that be considered a valid Eucharist, which is celebrated by the bishop or by one whom he ordains [i.e., a presbyter]. Wherever the bishop appears, let the people be there, just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.

B. St. Polycarp, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 8:1, & 16:2, AD 156.

When at last he had finished his prayer, in which he remembered all who had met with him any time, both small and great, both those with and those without renown, and the whole Catholic Church throughout the world. . .

And certainly the most admirable Polycarp was one of these [elect], in whose times among us he showed himself an apostolic and prophetic teacher and bishop of the Catholic Church in Smyrna.

C. Tertullian, *Against the Heretics*, 20, AD 200.

Where was [the heretic] Marcian, that shipmaster of Pontus, the zealous student of Stoicism? Where was Valentinus, the disciple of Platonism? For it is evident that those men lived not so long ago – in the reign of Antoninus [AD 138-161] for the most part – and that they at first were believers in the doctrine of the Catholic Church, in the church of Rome under the episcopate of the blessed Eleutherus [AD 175-189], until on account of their ever restless curiosity, with which they even infected the brethren, they were more than once expelled. . . . Afterward . . . Marcian professed repentance and agreed to the conditions granted to him – that he should receive reconciliation if he restored to the Church all the others whom he had been training for perdition; he was prevented, however, by death.

D. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 7:17:107:3, aft. AD 202.

From what has been said, then, it seems clear to me that the true Church that which is really ancient, is one; and in it are enrolled those who, in accord with a design, are just. . . . We say, therefore, that in substance, in concept, in origin and in eminence, the ancient and Catholic Church is alone, gathering as it does into the unity of the one faith which results from the familiar covenants, - or rather, from the one covenant in different times, by the will of the one God and through the one Lord, - those already chosen, those predestined by God who knew before the foundation of the world that they would be just.

E. St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Letter to all His People*, 43 (40), 5, AD 251.

They who have not peace themselves now offer peace to others. They who have withdrawn from the Church promise to lead back and to recall the lapsed to the Church. There is one God and one Christ, and one Church, and one Chair founded on Peter by the word of the Lord. It is not possible to set up another altar or for there to be another priesthood besides that one altar and that one priesthood. Whoever has gathered elsewhere is scattering.

F. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 18:23, AD 350.

[The Church] is called Catholic, then, because it extends over the whole world, from end to end of the earth, and because it teaches universally and infallibly each and every doctrine which must come to the knowledge of men, concerning things visible and invisible, heavenly and earthly, and because it brings every race of men into subjection to godliness . . .

G. St. Augustine, *The True Religion*, 7:12, AD 390.

We must hold to the Christian religion and to communication in her Church, which is Catholic and which is called Catholic not only by her own members but even by all her enemies. When heretics or the adherents of schisms talk about her, not among themselves but with strangers, willy-nilly they call her nothing else but Catholic. They will not be understood unless they distinguish her by this name, which the whole world employs in her regard.

H. St. Augustine, *Against the Letter of Mani*, 5:6, AD 397.

If you should find someone who does not yet believe in the gospel what would you [Mani] answer him when he says, "I do not believe"? Indeed, I would not believe the gospel myself if the authority of the Catholic Church did not move me to do so.

I. Vincent of Lérins, *Notebooks*, 3:5, AD 434.

What then will a Catholic Christian do if a small portion of the Church has cut itself off from the communion of the universal faith? What, surely, but prefer the soundness of the whole body to the unsoundness of a pestilent and corrupt member?

K. Council of Chalcedon, *Canon 14*, AD 451.

Since in certain provinces readers and cantors have been allowed to marry, this sacred synod decrees that none of them is permitted to marry a wife of heterodox views. If those thus married have already had children, and if they have already had the children baptized among heretics, they are to bring them into the community of the Catholic Church.

III. Oratio

A. During this Easter Season we are reminded constantly what Jesus accomplished for us in the Paschal Mystery. Today we concentrate on the Universal dimension (*Salus Catholica*) of the Jesus' Sacrifice. Consequently, we begin by singing with Isaiah 48:20: *"Speak out with a voice of joy; let it be heard to the ends of the earth: The Lord has set his people free."* This **Catholicity** is manifested in the fact that the Church opens the doors to all who wish to embrace Baptism and to all who are willing to live the love of Christ *"Ever-living God, help us to celebrate our joy in the resurrection of the Lord and to express in our lives the love we celebrate."* (OP); Salvation means that our sins have been forgiven by the outpouring of Christ's blood: *"Make us worthy of your sacraments of love by granting us your forgiveness"* (PG). **Catholic** means universal. Our Church is always and everywhere the same for it centers its life in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the summit of our faith: *"As he offered his body on the cross, his perfect sacrifice fulfilled all others. As he gave himself into your hands for our salvation, he showed himself to be the priest, the altar, and the lamb of sacrifice"* (Preface). During Communion we are reminded that **Catholicity** is possible due to the power of the Holy Spirit: *"If you love me, keep my commandments, says the Lord. The Father will send you the Holy Spirit, to be with you forever, alleluia"* (John 14:15-16) (CA). Finally, we ask the Father to extend to our daily lives the **Catholicity** of the Church: *"Strengthen us by this Easter sacrament; May we feel its saving power in our daily life."* (PC).

III. Contemplatio

Prayer for the Church

We pray Thee, O Almighty and Eternal God,
who through Jesus Christ hast revealed Thy glory to all nations,
to preserve the works of Thy mercy;
that Thy Church, being spread through the whole world,
may continue, with unchanging faith,
in the confession of Thy name.

We pray Thee, who alone art good and holy,
to endow with heavenly knowledge, sincere zeal,
and sanctity of life our chief bishop, N.,
the Vicar of our Lord Jesus Christ in the government of His Church;
our own Bishop, (or Archbishop,) N.,
(if he is not consecrated, our Bishop-elect);
all other Bishops, Prelates, and Pastors of the Church; and especially those
who are appointed
to exercise among us the functions of the holy ministry,
and conduct Thy people into the ways of salvation.

We pray Thee, O God of might, wisdom, and justice,
through whom authority is rightly administered,
laws are enacted, and judgments decreed, assist,
with Thy Holy Spirit of counsel and fortitude,
the President of these United States,
that his administration may be conducted in righteousness,
and be eminently useful to Thy people,
over whom he presides,
by encouraging due respect for virtue and religion;
by a faithful execution of the laws in justice and mercy;
and by restraining vice and immorality.

Let the light of Thy divine wisdom direct the deliberations of Congress,
and shine forth in all the proceedings and laws framed for our role and
government; so, that they may tend to the preservation of peace,
the promotion of national happiness,
the increase of industry, sobriety, and useful knowledge,
and may perpetuate to us the blessings of equal liberty.

We pray for his Excellency the Governor of this State,
for the members of the Assembly,
for all Judges, Magistrates, and other officers
who are appointed to guard our political welfare;
that they may be enabled,
by Thy powerful protection,
to discharge the duties of their respective stations
with honesty and ability.

We recommend likewise to Thy unbounded mercy
all our brethren and fellow-citizens,
throughout the United States,
that they may be blessed in the knowledge,
and sanctified in the observance of most holy law;
that they may be preserved in union,
and in that peace which the world cannot give;
and, after enjoying the blessings of this life,
be admitted to those which are eternal.
Finally, we pray Thee, O Lord of mercy,
to remember the souls of Thy servants departed
who are gone before us with the sign of faith,
and repose in the sleep of peace:
the souls of our parents, relations, and friends;
of those who, when living, were members of this congregation;
and particularly of such as are lately deceased;
of all benefactors who,
by their donations or legacies to this Church,
witnessed their zeal for the decency of divine worship,
and proved their claim to our grateful
and charitable remembrance.
To these, O Lord, and to all that rest in Christ,
grant, we beseech Thee, a place of refreshment,
light, and everlasting peace,
through the same Jesus Christ,
our Lord and Savior.
Amen.

(Composed by Archbishop Carroll in 1800.)