



Seton Home



Study School

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◆ *“Under the Magisterium of the Catholic Church”* ◆

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Immaculate Heart of Mary

The Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is the day after the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in June. Many Catholic home schoolers have a special devotion to the Blessed Mother under her title, “Immaculate Heart of Mary.”

This title reminds us of two key things about Mary. First, her “Heart” reminds us that Mary is a human being with emotions, who has lived in the world as we know it, a world corrupted by sin. Second, being “Immaculate” reminds us that she was created free from original sin, personal sin, and the inclination to sin. She lived without sin in a world filled with sin.

Some Christians think that freedom from sin makes Mary and Jesus less human. Actually, such freedom makes them more human. God never wanted, but mysteriously allowed, that human beings be tainted with sin and its desire. God still intends that we live free from all sin. Sin and the desire for it will be excluded from Heaven, making our complete happiness fully compatible with God’s holiness. Yet, living in Heaven will not make us less human, but more human!

The title of “Immaculate Heart of Mary” also reminds us of two key things about ourselves. On the one hand, her “Heart” reminds us that we are human beings who have emotions; on the other hand, her being “Immaculate” reminds us that we need to guide our emotions with our intellect and will. We cannot live as if we do not have emotions of love, joy, hate, and sorrow; yet, we need to guide our emotions by right reason and right choices so that we use our emotions to love what is good and be joyful in it, but hate what is sinful and have sorrow over it.

The historical existence and activity of Jesus and Mary are an emphatic protest against the widely held views that our sinful desires really define what we are and that sinful things make us happier than good things. The lives of Jesus and Mary also are beacons of light on the real nature and purpose of humanity. Their sinless lives tell us that the essence of human nature does not involve sin but openness to God and completion in Him. The purpose of human nature is not immersion in finite things but the glorification of the infinite God by completely enjoying Him in Heaven. As Saint Augustine wrote so long ago, “You made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.”

It seems that Jesus and Mary could only reveal and represent God’s goal for us—to be without sin in Heaven—by coming into this world and living within it already free from sin. In other words, Jesus and Mary anticipated here on earth the sinless state that we hope to enjoy in heaven; they gave us a pledge or down-payment of what eternal life would be like. Thus, Mary’s sinlessness is akin to her Son’s transfiguration or resurrection or her assumption: an anticipatory insight into heaven and a small taste of it.

These truths connected with the Immaculate Heart of Mary (and Jesus) remind us home schooling parents of the importance of battling sin here on earth in order to enjoy God forever in heaven. As the Church so wisely teaches, we are to stay away from persons, places, or things which lead us into sin. By avoiding these potential temptations, we keep our hearts and minds pure and free from sin and for God.

We must teach our children to avoid sin by helping them to realize that every willful sinful thought, word, or deed is a rebellion against God because it is a rebellion against His just commands. Sin is the ultimate ingratitude to the loving God Who made us and Who, in His great mercy, keeps us in existence even when we rebel against His commands.

Jesus gave the Blessed Mother Mary her Immaculate Heart so that she could not even be swayed by sin. We must ask the Immaculate Virgin Mother to intercede for us so as to obtain for us the graces from God to overcome our temptations.

Blessed Mother Mary, Mother Most Pure, Immaculate Heart of Mary, be our protector by interceding with your Divine Son. Help us to control our bodies and our senses, and also our imaginations and the inclinations of our hearts. Help us to flee moments of danger, and moments of weakness. Keep our minds, our hearts, our spirits, and our souls, pure and chaste, and, therefore, focused on God.

O Immaculate Heart of Mary, speak to my heart and the hearts of my children. Keep me close to your heart, allowing me to listen to the loving beats of your Immaculate Heart. In this sinful culture which surrounds us and attempts to corrupt us, let me hear your Immaculate Heart speak to my heart.

-MKC

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Questions We Are Asked

*by Dr. Mary Kay Clark
Director, Seton Home Study School*

How important is it to belong to a support group?

Each home schooling parent needs to decide the pros and cons of belonging to a local group. The advantages are the continual support and helpful ideas from other parents, as well as the opportunity for children to relate to other Catholic home schooling children. These groups sometimes sponsor curriculum fairs for parents, science project fairs or sports events for students. Some groups even sponsor a weekly "class" for a subject, such as science or a foreign language.

However, some parents believe that the demands of the group seriously impinge on the family's ability to keep a routine home schooling schedule. These parents find that it is not just a matter of attending the events or activities, but they are often called upon to help work at the events or prepare for the events. Maintaining a home schooling group is definitely a labor-intensive activity, and like most such things, a few people often end up doing most of the work.

My suggestion is that if you are new to home schooling or if you are moving to a new area, seek out the local home schooling group. These are people who have been home schooling and can help you understand what to expect. After a time, you can make a decision whether the home schooling group is contributing to your success in home schooling.

Whether or not you stick with the whole group, it is helpful to make a few good friends with other home schoolers in your area. Having a

couple of people you can count on, discuss ideas, have your children play with, and just generally have some adult conversation, can relieve some of the stress of home schooling.

I have three elementary level children home schooling, but I just cannot seem to finish up, and I need a summer break. Are there any short cuts to finishing up?

At the elementary levels, it is important to focus on the main core subjects. Certain courses should be completed: religion, English, math, reading, and phonics. You could try some shortcuts with vocabulary and spelling by having the children simply study the words, definitions, and spelling, and taking the test on the lesson the next day. This would finish the lesson in two days instead of five. A handwriting grade could be based on these lessons if necessary. Science and history will be taught again in high school, so you might want to skip assignments and tests, and just have your child read through the chapters, not giving any grades. You could omit the formal art, music, and physical education lessons, but a grade could be based on other activities.

While these are possible shortcuts for this year, at the same time, you don't want the same situation to happen next year. Try to analyze what happened that made you fall behind this year. Was it a situation, such as an illness, that is unlikely to be repeated next year? Was it simply a lack of organization? If the latter, you should consider this summer how you might be better organized next year. You might want to talk with another home schooling mother who seems to have

a good schedule and get some pointers from her.

What measures can I take with a boy of 12 who talks back and won't do his schoolwork or any chores without giving me grief?

A boy of 12 who talks back to his mother is committing a serious sin against the Fourth Commandment. One of the first things that needs to be done is for him to understand the serious nature of this sin. First, you need to pray for God to help you to find the right answer for your son. You should do some reading of the catechism and other religion books about the sin of disobedience. While you could talk with your son if you must, your husband should be the one to do the talking. It should be a man-to-man talk about how gentlemen act toward their parents, and especially his mother, but it should emphasize also the fact that this is a serious sin.

At the elementary levels, it is important to focus on the core subjects: religion, English, math, reading, and phonics.

If you are not already doing so, you should be taking your son to confession once a week. As you do, you or your husband should discuss this sin with him and encourage him to tell the sin in confession. You are, after all, looking out for his eternal welfare, and this disrespect for his mother can lead to disrespect for all authority. It is a lack of self-discipline and needs to get under control quickly since he is not far from being an adult.

You may need to consider other consequences, such as not going someplace this week or needing to do

an extra chore around the house. If he plays computer games, you need to deny him that privilege any day he talks back. You may need to take away his basketball or another favorite item any day he talks back. Constantly reinforce the fact that all these things are helping him to mature into a responsible and God-fearing adult.

The fact your son refuses to do chores as well as his school work brings up an important point. Some people quit home schooling because their children won't do their school work. However, this does not address the real problem. The underlying problem is the lack of discipline in the child. If a family gives up on home schooling for discipline reasons, that discipline problem is still there and needs to be addressed.

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Seton Educational Media carries several good books on family discipline. Try *Discipline That Lasts a Lifetime* by Ray Guarendi, *Legacy: A Father's Handbook for Raising Godly Children* by Steve Wood, or *Lifetime: The Religious Upbringing of Your Children* by James Stenson.

My seventh grade student is struggling with the English assignments. Do you have any suggestions to make it easier for her?

Seton does have two elementary academic counselors who could help you or her with a specific problem, such as a grammar concept or writing

a topic sentence. However, we have found that one of the major problems is that some students do not stay on track with their English and reading assignments. The quarter comes and goes and they have not finished up their work. What makes difficult courses easier is to do it day by day, and not wait and let things slip until it becomes a serious problem.

Your daughter should be doing these assignments at the best time of day for her to study, and with no interruptions. The majority of students are most alert and do their best in the morning. Schedule a time when, without fail, she can do the English assignments. You should give her "homework" for the evening to finish up any assignment she did not complete. If there is still remaining work by the weekend, then she should finish up on Saturday morning.

Though she is in seventh grade, you may need to spend class time with her to help her through these studies. If you have several younger children and cannot take enough time with her, perhaps an older child could help. Consider, at least on a temporary basis, having a tutor come in once a week to help her stay on schedule, or to help her understand whatever concept or assignment is giving her a problem. The tutor could be a retired teacher, or a college student, or maybe an older student from a local support group.

When you start next year, do some pre-planning. Look over the year's assignments with your daughter, plan the best time of day, and plan on having someone help her to accomplish her goals. English is very important in the 7th and 8th grades because it will determine how successful she will be in high school. English skills are vital for high school success in all the courses.

The nearest Catholic home schooling conference is two hours away. Is it really worth the time away from my

family obligations to attend such a conference?

I believe that attending a Catholic home schooling conference once a year is a huge help for home schooling parents. Home schooling is a big and challenging job, there is no question about that. There can be a feeling of isolation sometimes, and an internal questioning of whether your effort is worthwhile. The Catholic home schooling conferences can help to encourage you as you see the excitement and the desire of other parents who value their home schooling as you do. Meeting the other parents is perhaps the best benefit of the conferences. Attending a conference once a year can energize you and give you back your initial enthusiasm.

The vendors' hall is usually helpful to see what supplemental materials are available and might help to interest your child in learning. All kinds of extra children's books on various science topics or science projects, as well as picture books on historical events, can give more interesting details about their textbook topics. Of course, the vendors are home-schooling friendly and eager to help you.

Most of the conferences also have speakers. Many are home schooling parents who talk about teaching specific subject areas, or who talk about how to make home schooling easier. A favorite topic is discipline in the home. The most popular speakers are usually priests who help parents to be inspired about what they are doing, and often help parents to improve their own spiritual lives so they can be better examples of holiness within their own families.

Of course, a final incentive is that Seton offers a \$30 per child discount on enrollment (grades 1-12, full enrollment) when you enroll at certain conferences. So, you can be inspired and save money at the same time.

Starting Pre-School at Home

by Ginny Seuffert

One of my many jobs here at Seton is to contact parents who are considering home schooling for the first time to offer them information and encouragement. After years of conversations, I still grin when I speak to younger moms, who are looking to home school for the “pre-school” years, and ask for workbooks and other materials. They are, to a woman, committed and well-meaning, so I refrain from asking them the question that often pops to mind, “Why do you need help teaching colors and shapes?” Is a formal preschool, at home or in the community, really necessary?

It should be evident that no one of normal intelligence needs help teaching children early primary skills like counting, colors, shapes, and the like. Suspicious people—like me—suspect that the whole idea of preschool is some sort of plot to secure jobs for union teachers, who have planted seeds of doubt in responsible parents by claiming that it requires professional teachers to ensure a good start in academics. Actually some evidence indicates that an institutional preschool often does little to enhance overall academic achievement and a loving home is still the best place to learn all the skills necessary for a successful school experience.

Of course the number one reason for success, or failure, during the K-12 years is the individual student’s level of maturity. Children who can sit still, pay attention, follow directions, and apply themselves to the task at hand are ideal learners for both the classroom teacher and for the teaching mom. As a general rule, courtesy, self discipline and cooperation go a long way towards achievement in any endeavor. It only makes sense that children will learn these virtues best at home surrounded by parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and even siblings who are

older and wiser than the child, and have the child’s best interests at heart. Parents find that they do not need formal instructional materials, just their own good example and common sense.

Children grow in *self-control* by being in the company of older relatives and other adults in several ways. First, young children observe the mature behavior of others and are able to imitate this behavior. Acting “grown-up” becomes the goal, and children seek acceptance from the adults in their lives. Children who do not interrupt, for example, are not sent from the room or the dinner table. Children who can sit still and be quiet are allowed to accompany adults to restaurants and theaters. Caring adults will often improve their own conduct to properly teach a child, by refraining from inappropriate language for example, so the whole family benefits by a growth in virtue.

Children also learn *self-discipline* from loving correction. An elementary school age child with a finger in his nostril up to the knuckle represents a failure of those who love him. Long before school age, someone should have taught, in fact insisted, that civilized people simply do not pick their noses in public. They do not belch, or chew with their mouths open at the dinner table, either. In fact, there is a long list of behaviors that our society considers disgusting and it is not a kindness to allow toddlers to continue in them.

The same can be said for *learning to control emotional outbursts*. Little kids need to be taught that crying, screaming and whining will not get them the results that they want. In fact, just the opposite will occur; the only thing a tantrum guarantees is a stay in “time-out” or perhaps an early bed-time. Some younger children are just naturally cooperative and readily accept correction; others need to be corrected for the same faults again and again. No matter! Either way, correcting faults is

an important responsibility of those involved in the life of a toddler.

In addition to supplying good example and steady correction, a good home environment helps a child to mature by teaching the virtue of *order*. By following a simple regular schedule, little children learn that there is a time for work and a time for play. They are able to remain calm because they know what to expect during the day. They gain *patience* as they come to understand that if they wait their needs will be met at the proper time. By participating in household chores, they gain *confidence* in their own abilities and an early understanding of adult responsibilities. They begin to develop the virtue of *industriousness*. A well-ordered household is hugely beneficial to a pre-schooler.

Many household chores teach skills that are considered valuable training for academic work. Listening to Mom’s request to fetch a diaper for baby involves *paying attention* and *following directions*. Putting clean silverware away is *shape sorting* and helps with *small motor coordination*. Setting the table requires *counting* the number of people who will be eating and gathering the correct number of plates and utensils. Matching socks teaches *visual discrimination*; so does helping Mom weed the garden. Being a useful member of the household allows toddlers to develop *problem-solving* skills. The list goes on and on.

Mom can certainly inculcate *good nutritional habits* and actually control what the children eat. She can provide lots of fresh air and *exercise* which have been shown to increase intellectual performance. Naturally, walks in the community also provide *botany* and *zoology* lessons as the little ones learn the names of the trees and flowers that grow on the block, and of the birds and animals they see.

Of course, the most important lesson Mom and Dad can provide is introducing young children to their Catholic faith. Again, the best lessons are often informal. Little children who see older family members cross themselves and say grace before meals

will naturally try to imitate this. If Mom or Dad lead nighttime prayers, the children will memorize them at an early age. Most Catholic children from observant homes have memorized their basic prayers before school-age.

Toddlers often struggle with remaining still during Mass. Here are a few hints that have worked in my own family. First, while I think it can be a good idea to bring books for two and three year olds, try to make them prayer books or Bible stories with lots of colorful pictures. It is a good idea to limit toys to Noah's ark animals or perhaps a plastic statue of St. Joseph. Now, this may seem unnecessarily picky to some parents, but I believe that it is important to stress, at a very early age, that church is different from other places. We dress up, and speak in hushed voices, or better yet, not at all. We do not run but we do sit, stand

and kneel when everyone else does. We speak to Jesus and Blessed Mother. At all times, our thoughts are on holy people and things.

Proper behavior at church is so important to a toddler's maturity that I suggest giving "formal" lessons to teach it. Take toddlers to church when there is not Mass or other devotions. (If your church is usually locked, ask for a key at the rectory. Most parishes are happy to oblige.) Practice blessing yourselves with holy water; my own children enthusiastically soaked themselves. Practice genuflecting in front of the Blessed Sacrament; toddlers love different postures. Point out the Tabernacle and explain that Jesus is in there, so we have to be especially good. Show your children statues, stained glass windows, the murals, the stations and anything else you can

think of. Once they understand some of the stories these holy items represent, little children are more likely to occupy themselves during Mass by looking at them.

By four years of age, the majority of children are capable of at least sitting still and not disturbing others during Sunday Mass. Those who are lagging behind obviously need to practice this skill at home. My husband and I found that if we had wiggly children sit in a "quiet chair" at home after Mass, behavior improved the following week.

Go back and look at the italicized skills in this article. It is an impressive list, yet not one of them required a workbook or any other educational material. Trust your Catholic home to be the best and only preschool "material" your child will ever need.



On Saturday, May 26th, Seton Home Study School held its first annual high school graduation on the grounds of Christendom College in Front Royal, Virginia. Next month's newsletter will include full coverage of the festivities.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart

Devotion to the Sacred Heart, which most Catholics associate with St. Margaret Mary, actually has its roots in Scripture and in the writings of the Church Fathers. St. Margaret Mary, however, made the devotion extremely popular. Scripture reveals that the Heart of Christ was pierced, and already in the 3rd century, Christians in Rome were recommended to meditate on the pierced side of Christ. In response to heresies such as Arianism, the Church developed devotion to the wounds of Christ. Early Christian art also depicted Good Shepherd images, and meditation on the wounded side of Christ flourished in the monasteries.

St. Bede, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and St. Anselm of Canterbury wrote of the Sacred Heart. We also see in Byzantine art the “Pantocrator” or Jesus, Ruler of All and Lover of Mankind, exhibited.

At the end of the Middle Ages, the Crucifix became a required object on the altar. The Romanesque Crucifix blended aspects of the death-resurrection scene. Jesus is represented standing with a crown of thorns resembling a royal crown. The Syrian Melkite popes in the 8th century had already added devotion to the passion and wounds of Christ and so the suffering Christ on the cross began to replace the glorious resurrected image of our Savior King.

In the age of the mystics (1200-1400 A.D.) the laity came to know of devotion to the Sacred Heart through the monasteries and convents. The Crusaders added a popular appreciation to the sufferings of Christ. The feast of Corpus Christi was introduced in 1264, connecting the Eucharist and the Sacred Heart. St. Bonaventure, St. Albert the Great, St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Clare all mention the Heart of Christ.

St. Lutgard (d. 1246) was the first mystic to have a recorded apparition of Christ revealing His Heart. St. Gertrude (d. 1302) did much to spread

devotion to Jesus’ Heart. St. Albert the Great was one of the first to connect devotion to the Sacred Heart to the Blessed Sacrament.

The Renaissance, with its interest in humanism, encouraged devotion to Christ’s sufferings. During the Protestant Revolt, devotion to the Sacred Heart implied a loyalty to the old Faith.

During the Catholic Reformation, St. Bernardine of Siena, St. Peter Canisius, St. Rose of Lima, St. John of Avila, St. Francis de Sales, and St. Jane de Chantal all supported and advanced devotion to the Sacred Heart. In this period Christ’s Heart was used frequently in decoration. A woodcarving of a heart on a shield appeared, and 14th and 15th century Book of Hours contained miniatures of the Five Wounds.

We see then that the devotion to the Sacred Heart had a long history even before the time Christ appeared to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690) revealing Himself as *The Sacred Heart*. The visions of Christ to St. Margaret Mary occurred in the Chapel of the Visitation at the convent of Paray-le-Monial in France between 1673 and 1675. Here Christ *specifically* revealed Himself as the God-man of the Heart to her. In His great revelation of June 1675, Christ told St. Margaret Mary:

Behold this Heart which has so loved man that it has spared nothing even to exhaustion and consuming itself in order to show them its love; and in return I receive from most men only ingratitude...

Christ asked St. Margaret Mary for Communions of reparation and promised spiritual favors to those who spread devotion to His Sacred Heart. He promised to bless every home in which an image of His Sacred Heart was exposed and honored. He promised also the gift of final perseverance to those who receive Communion on nine successive First

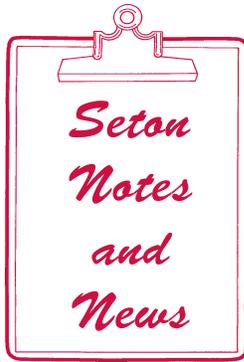
Fridays. This is not a free pass to heaven, but is contingent upon a continued devotion and obedience to His teaching. It is an assurance to the soul who is faithful to the Commandments that the love of His Sacred Heart is so intense that it will guide a *faithful* soul until the end, and will never permit a *faithful* soul to suffer eternal disgrace.

With Christ’s own promise to touch the hearts of hardened sinners, one wonders why devotion to the Sacred Heart has waned. There should be a rebirth of devotion to the Sacred Heart in every parish and in every diocese—a rebirth of weekly Benediction and a rebirth of the 40 Hours Devotion. One is fed a great deal of pabulum today about *service* and *community*. What greater service could the priest give than true devotion to the Sacred Heart, a rededication to the Body and Blood of the Crucified Savior? What greater service would be brought to the community than the message of the Sacred Heart to touch each parishioner? The community would then be ignited with such fire that we would be inundated with ideas on how to make a better community. Christ did tell us to “love our neighbor” but we have forgotten that He told us *first* to “love the Lord thy God.” If we truly loved God, we could *never* forget our neighbor, but if we love only our neighbor, it is very easy to forget God.

At least let each one of us home schoolers revive the wonderful practice of home Enthronement to the Sacred Heart. It will bring untold graces to our family. It will light our fire.

While others sleep, we can keep watch with the Heart which has loved men so much. Let us lean back upon the bosom of the Sacred Heart and contemplate His warning, “Unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink of His Blood, you will have no life in you.”

For information on home enthronement, write to National Enthronement Center, PO Box 111, Fairhaven, MA 02719, or call 1-508-999-2680, or email necenter@juno.com.



Conferences

Many state and local groups are now sponsoring their own conferences, inviting various Catholic vendors and curriculum providers. Seton is happy to participate at these conferences as a vendor. For more information, contact Mary Lou Warren at 540-636-9990.

June 8 and 9, Chantilly, VA (Washington DC area). 2007 Immaculate Heart of Mary National Home School and Parent Conference, Dulles EXPO & Conference Center (North Hall), 4368 Chantilly Shopping Ctr., Chantilly, VA. Friday 9am - 9pm (Vendor area: 12 noon - 9pm), Saturday 9am - 4:30pm (Vendor area: 9am - 4:30pm).

For information go to website: www.ihmconference.org.

June 15 and 16, Kansas City, KS. 2007 Kansas City Conference for Catholic Homeschoolers, Savior of the World Pastoral Center, 12601 Parallel Parkway, Kansas City, KS. Friday 5pm - 9pm, Saturday 7:30am - 4:00pm. For info go to website: www.kccatholichomeschooler.org.

June 15 and 16, Lansing, MI. 13th Annual "It's Great to be Catholic!" Family & Home Education Conference and Book Fair, Lansing Center, 333 E. Michigan Ave., Lansing, MI. Friday: 6pm - 9:30pm, Saturday 8am - 4:30pm. For info go to website: www.homeschoolcatholic.org.

June 21 to 23, Denver, CO. Rocky Mountain Catholic Home Educators Conference, Holiday Inn Denver Int'l. Airport - John Q. Hammons Convention Center, 15500 East 40th Ave., Denver, CO. Thursday 6pm - 9pm, Friday 8am - 8pm, Saturday 7:30am - 6pm. For info go to website: www.rmchec.org or email info@rmchec.org.

June 23, Chino Hills, CA. SCCHE (Southern California Catholic Home Educators) 7th Annual Conference

and Curriculum Fair, St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church, 14085 Peyton Drive, Chino Hills, CA. 8am - 5pm. Speakers to include Dr. Mary Kay Clark. For information go to website: www.scchehomepage.com.

July 13 & 14, Cleveland, OH. Immaculate Heart of Mary Cleveland Conference, The Plaza Hotel, 7230 Engle Road, Middleburg Heights, OH. Friday 2pm - 8pm, Saturday 8:30am - 4pm. Email: infocleveland@ihmconference.org, web-site: www.ihmconference.org/cleveland.

July 21, Indianapolis, IN. Indianapolis Catholic Home School Conference - 2007, Marian College, 3200 Cold Spring Road, Indianapolis. Speakers will include Ginny Scuffert. For more information, go to website: www.hfheindy.org.

July 28, Roswell/Atlanta, GA. The Northern Georgia Catholic Homeschool Conference, St. Andrew Catholic Church, 675 Riverside Road, Roswell, GA. Additional information to follow.

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Pope Benedict XVI's Message for World Day of Prayer for Vocations

For the coming celebration, I would like to draw the attention of the whole people of God to the following theme, which is more topical than ever: *the vocation to the service of the Church as communion*.

Last year ... I began a new series of catechesis dedicated to the relationship between Christ and the Church. I pointed out that the first Christian community was built, in its original core, when some fishermen of Galilee, having met Jesus, let themselves be conquered by his gaze and his voice, and accepted his pressing invitation: "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men." In fact, God has always chosen some individuals to work with him in a more direct way, in order to accomplish his plan of salvation. In the Old Testament, in the beginning, he called Abraham to form a "great nation"; afterwards, he called Moses to free Israel from the slavery of Egypt. Subsequently, he designated other persons, especially the prophets, to defend and keep alive the covenant with his people. In the New Testament, Jesus, the promised Messiah, invited each of the Apostles to be with him and to share his mission. At the Last Supper, while entrusting them with the duty of perpetuating the memorial of his death and resurrection until his glorious return at the end of time, he offered for them to his Father this heart-broken prayer: "I made known to them your name, and I will make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them". The mission of the Church, therefore, is founded on an intimate and faithful communion with God.

... At the centre of every Christian community is the Eucharist, the source and summit of the life of the Church. Whoever places

himself at the service of the Gospel, if he lives the Eucharist, makes progress in love of God and neighbour and thus contributes to building the Church as communion. We can affirm that the "Eucharistic love" motivates and founds the vocational activity of the whole Church, because, as I wrote in the Encyclical *Deus caritas est*, vocations to the priesthood and to other ministries and services flourish within the people of God wherever there are those in whom Christ can be seen through his Word, in the sacraments and especially in the Eucharist. This is so because "in the Church's Liturgy, in her prayer, in the living community of believers, we experience the love of God, we perceive his presence and we thus learn to recognize that presence in our daily lives. He loved us first and he continues to do so; we too, then, can respond with love".

Lastly, we turn to Mary, who supported the first community where "all these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer", so that she may help the Church in today's world to be an icon of the Trinity, an eloquent sign of divine love for all people. May the Virgin, who promptly answered the call of the Father saying, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord", intercede so that the Christian people will not lack servants of divine joy: priests who, in communion with their Bishops, announce the Gospel faithfully and celebrate the sacraments, take care of the people of God, and are ready to evangelize all humanity. May she ensure, also in our times, an increase in the number of consecrated persons, who go against the current, living the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, and give witness in a prophetic way to Christ and his liberating message of salvation.

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