

COMMUNIO IN CHRISTO

*Our Life -
Our Works*

Digital Spiritual Letter No. 10, 15 June 2021

Theme: Church of sinners

SEAT IN LIFE

In September 1987, a month before the death of the Cardinal Höffner, Mother Marie Therese gives her contemplation the title of Höffner's pastoral letter „Die Kirche ist eine Kirche der Sünder“ (The Church is a Church of sinners). The confession of that famous clerical person to be “nothing” and “a sinner” touched her strongly as she judged herself being the same.

This confession was the access requirement to have a mystical encounter with God. Mother Marie Therese allowed a spiritual vacuum in herself meant for God's Spirit to stream in. The term “Church of the sinners” was also used by the theologians Karl Rahner and Josef Ratzinger, the later Pope Benedict XVI. The presented contemplation shows the following: There is a very special relation between sin, grace and mercy, as there is between sinner and redeemer...



*The author of the introduction (right)
together with the Aachen Auxiliary
Bishop Karl Reger*

Father Varughese Mathew, who wrote the commentary for this Digital Spiritual Letter, discovers Mother Marie Therese' main idea as a burning issue with Pope Francis, for the latter compares the Church with a combat support hospital on the brink of our life's social and mental battle: „The Church is no museum for Saints but a hospital for sinners.“

Manfred Lang, Deacon



REFLECTION OF MOTHER MARIE THERESE

THE CHURCH IS A CHURCH OF SINNERS

*Praise to the love
that rejoices,
when we confess our sinful condition.*

*Praise to the merciful,
whose kingdom is our eternity.*

*Blessed the Lord
who reigns in our midst.*

*Blessed the Lord
who sacrificed himself for our guilt.*

*Blessed the Lord
who has become salvation for us.*

*Blessed our Lord Jesus Christ,
who chose us as his own.*

*Praise to you, o holy Church,
sign from heaven,
diamond of faith.*

*Blessed in you God's mercy,
the justice and the forgiveness.*

*You hear our call for rescue,
the heavenly goods are yours.*

*In you, o holy Church,
the prayers rise up,
in you our soul is being sanctified.*

*Praised be you
in whom I have found you, o God,
for time and eternity.*

Cardinal Höffner's quote: 'The Church is a Church of sinners', was so topical for an encounter with God that I took it as the title for this reflection. When a simple person says of herself: I am nothing, or: I am a sinner, we take her confession for granted. When a prominent representative of the Holy Church uses this sentence in his Pastoral letter, there is something that moves inside of us and we suddenly no longer feel the distance between a high official and the simple, the unknown and the small and inconspicuous among us. All of us, without exception, are sinners who are in constant need of God's mercy and who are heading towards a final redemption. All of us without exception are sinners, who constantly are in need of God's grace and who move towards the final salvation. We all pursue the one goal: the eternal bliss in harmonious union with God.

Strangely enough the Spirit leads me in a Church of sinners. The theme of this reflection has started that revelation. I feel comfortable in that vastness, for it takes away from me the terrible fear to come before God now. Heaven gives the repentance that is asking for grace, the repentance that during this hour is in need of purification. For knowing who is asking for my love and knowing who is guilty are two realities that demand a decision. God gives me an insight in the deep abyss of my sinfulness and as a consequence demands that I better myself. At the same time he shows me his overflowing mercy demanding pure love in return. My guilt recognizes the redemption, earned through Christ who atoned for us. I confess to my weakness, commissioned to make God's presence real for our time. Pressed down to the floor I fold my hands in order to pray that my frailness will not be a reason now for me to refuse my „Yes“ to God.

The Church is becoming more alive than ever. She is life, particularly in those who represent it and who always anew have to confess themselves as sinners before God.



She is the liberating force that is not content with words or admonitions. She creates the atmosphere that gives strength. She invites to the inner life. She confirms in the statements of its teachers and saints that our soul was created in the image of God. She gives us the certainty of how exalted our soul is in knowing about God. Without interruption she reminds us of the community and that it is a reality we have to live with. She thus leads us to serve God, for whom the community is the foundation. She clearly says that one is outside the Church who distances himself from this community. In history and in time the salvation is fulfilled that keeps every one of us from going outside of time.



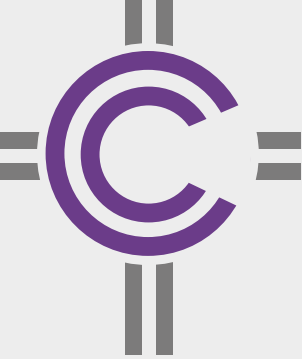
All this is what the Church, guided by the Spirit of Christ, teaches us. Sinful people have been entrusted this gift. Salvation is put in weak hands, to be realized in others.

I feel heaven to be close to me now, the more so as my nothingness, that I never felt so strong before, lets me ask to get to know everything that mercy made possible. The symphony of love is not just a series of tones, but the creative working of the Spirit. My soul handles and experiences the hopefulness, the very consequence of which is the unity in the community of believers: We are all sinners. Not words alone let me penetrate in the truths of faith. God has become a reality; he is one, who has to be taken seriously.

My contemplation does not distance me from God, however, the Spirit lets me turn back to the world, that I overlook and see linked with sin. I have to pray for a while. A great distance separated me from God; equally the distance between heaven and world is increasing immensely. Neither with my eyes nor my ears can I fathom the love that God has for us. Only because I am trained in praying, I put God at the right place. I want to put him in the center, the one who deserves all glory.

PRAYER

*God so very majestic,
so wide, unequaled your kindness.
The coat of your mercy embraces my guilt.
You let me rest close to your heart,
you comfort me, when I forget you.
You liberate me,
when I go mad because of your sufferings.
You take over the responsibility,
when I promise you my loyalty
by confessing my guilt.
You are the food when I am hungry.
You are the life,
flowing to me so undeservedly in faith.
You are the strength,
when your will causes me to almost break.
When I fear to meet you,
you make it so easy for me,
that I feel almost ashamed not to receive you.*



*When you show me heaven, o God,
there is a great spiritual force in me pushing me
to fight for you and your honor.
I do no longer dare to say:
I am no one or I am nothing.
You have made me a troublemaker,
you have given me your love,
that lives and spreads your law.
God, your kindness is enough for me
to advocate for you,
for you,
so that all may find their way home to you,
the Savior from our guilt.*

Flow, dear source, make me happy. Your rushing makes my tears flow. O, how being in company of the love itself demands for the ultimate amalgamation. The source of my longing for God to peace and beyond is God himself. Especially in fraternizing with guilt it appears gigantic. We neither need to have fear nor inhibitions. The certainty that before God each one of us without exception is guilty makes the awareness of community grow so much. Unity is no unreality. In the confession of guilt it becomes real and visible.

Thus the representatives of the Church may only help us if they themselves in their sinful condition bring us to the one who alone can give help. Each stands in the other's debt so that the path may not lead to further darkness. It is important to say together: I, too, am dependent upon the salvation of God.

*Baptized into your death on the cross,
I participate in your sacrifice.
I seize the energy of this hour,
in which I recognized myself and the world,
Vice blossoms into Virtue.
Adorned with the crown of
life's refreshing grace
I enter into the depth of your goodness.
Joy breaks in on me,
over the realm*

which planted its heavenly foundations in the midst of the world.

*The vastness of love
embraces all guilt with infinite ardor,
invites to return home.
All who are burdened,
caught in sins,
lost in despair and fear
you poor and destitute,
come to my home.*

It leads to victory over Satan.

*O God, how much I love the Church,
the place of quiet for me here on earth,
where I find you as the one who awakens to life,
as giver of all gifts, as consoler of my misery,
as life for my death.*

*My honor for you rises up high
to glorify your Incarnation,
that captured me.*

*I am not afraid of your love,
given to me so undeservedly.
I greet you a thousand times
for all the mercy given to me.*

*Let us walk together
towards him,
who has become salvation for us.
Glory to him alone, forever. Amen.*

(Taken from **Mother Marie Therese**, „Ein Charisma in der Kirche
– Die Hoffnung für schwere Zeiten“ (A charism in the Church –
Hope for difficult times), publishing house Paul Pattloch 1987, pp 238 ff)



COMMENTARY

by Fr. Varughese Mathew

„The Church is not a museum for Saints but a hospital for sinners,“ said Pope Francis in his interview with the Jesuit magazine „La Civiltà Cattolica“. In it he stated that what the Church needs most today was the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful: „She needs nearness, proximity! I see the Church as a field hospital after battle.“

In the present reflection Mother Marie Therese recommends to all people that they may look for that „field hospital“. We all are sinners and dependent on salvation. It is important for all of us to understand this whether you are great or allegedly meaningless or an authority within the Church.



Fr. Varughese Mathew, here together with Pope Francis in Rome, born in 1976, Priestly ordination in 2003 belongs to the Indian Archdiocese Thiruvalla of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, Master's degree in Malayalam, Bachelor's degree in Education; licentiate at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Rome (Angelicum)

Also the Pope desires to have a Church who is „a mother and a shepherdess. The ministers of the Church must be merciful.“ Mother Marie Therese sees the reality of such a „Mother Church“ and she loves her wholeheartedly. She is the place of quiet here on earth for her: „where I find you as the one who awakens to life, as giver of all gifts, as consoler of my misery, as life for my death...“

In this Church she feels „baptized into [his] death on the cross.“ She „participates in [his] sacrifice“, „seizes the energy of this hour in which [she] recognized [herself] and the world.“ Mother Marie Therese does not exclude herself from the group of sinners: „My guilt recognizes the salvation.“ Whoever denies their own sinfulness and covers it up, she writes, is threatened with a „path that leads into darkness“.

Also the representatives of the Church may not deny but „in their sinful condition bring us to the one who alone can give help“. And this is Jesus. Together with us Mother Marie Therese prays: „The coat of your mercy embraces my guilt. You let me rest close to your heart.“



Our Mother Marie Therese writes that the Holy Church is more alive than ever. These are strange findings of this Holy Church who is holy, indeed, but who carries everlasting/eternal in fragile containers through the times. She is a liberating force despite all her shortcomings and sins who is not content with words or admonitions. The Church gives us the certainty that our prayers rise up to God in her. And Mother Marie Therese says: „Praise to you, o holy Church, sign from heaven, diamond of faith. Blessed in you God’s mercy, the justice and the forgiveness.“

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