

# A Life Fulfilled

BY MARY BETH NEWKUMET

The time is finally here: the holiday season and the Great Jubilee of the birth of our Lord. In the midst of the celebration, it is good to take some quiet moments to contemplate our lives. Are we happy and at peace? Are we joyful? Are we fulfilled? Or is there still an emptiness in our hearts, a hole that leaves us longing for more?



## LONGING FOR FULFILLMENT

Perhaps we find ourselves in the same situation as the rich, young man of the Gospel who is doing his “religious best,” yet is still unsatisfied (*Mark 10:17-22*). His heart longs for more personal happiness and fulfillment. So, he comes to Jesus and asks him the question: “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“For the young man, the question is not so much about rules to be followed, but about *the full meaning of life*,” observes Pope John Paul II (*Veritas Splendor* #7). The young man is empty enough to know that there has to be more to life than he is currently experiencing. He assures Christ that he has been following the commandments and other rules of Jewish law since his youth. Yet, he can go no further.

“The young man, having observed all the commandments, shows that he is incapable of taking the next step by himself alone,” says the Pope (*VS* #17). *Christ, himself must bring him there.* The Lord invites the rich, young man to a new way of life by telling him what he is still lacking: “Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”

## A CHALLENGING INVITATION

Like so many of us, the young man hears but cannot accept Christ’s invitation to a perfect life.

First of all, it seems to require too much sacrifice and hard work. Secondly, the poverty part doesn’t sound very fulfilling! What would his friends and family think of him? In the Gospel account, the rich, young man walks away sadly, “for he had many possessions.”

What happened to him? We can only speculate, yet it is probably the same thing that happens to so many of us. The rich, young man probably continued to follow his religious duties, fulfilling his obligations and obeying the rules as best he could. But he settled for an earthly life that could go no further – and therefore was dry, impoverished and unfulfilling. “We are speaking of a mentality which affects, often in a profound, extensive and all-embracing way, even attitudes and

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behavior of Christians, whose faith is weakened and loses its character as a new and original criterion for thinking and acting in personal, family and social life,” observes Pope John Paul II (*VS #88*).

We can go no further with this kind of surface, dutiful faith. As we enter the new millennium, isn't it time that we considered more thoughtfully the Lord's offer to pour himself into our empty hearts?

## SO MANY POSSESSIONS

To fill his need for more, the Lord asks the rich, young man to sell — to detach himself — from his possessions because they are keeping him back from the fullness of life he seeks. His possessions have become an idol, something the young man admires and clings to in order to give his life meaning.

These same things that give so much meaning to our own lives — our jobs, our clothes, our money, our power, our position in the community — are the possessions the Lord invites us to “sell” so they do not take up room in our hearts. While he has certainly promised to take care of our earthly needs, the Lord of the Universe wants to be *our only fulfillment*. He alone wants to fill our empty hearts with an eternal life that surpasses all understanding. Our finite possessions can never provide the same peace of mind, security and fulfillment as the infinite love of the triune God!

Once we are detached from our possessions, it is easier to share what we have with other people.

In fact, the more detached we become, the more we seem to have to give away. The glorious mystery unexplored by so many people is that the Lord does not leave us sad and impoverished as we follow this path of love. The comfort, joy and abundance he sends in our “poverty” is astonishing.

## COME FOLLOW ME

Christ's offer to the rich, young man is neither threat nor admonishment. It is an invitation to an intimate relationship of love. Although the Lord alone can invite us to the next step in our journey of life, it is our choice whether or not we will go his way. Christ respects our freedom to say yes or no.

If we follow, the rules and commandments of the Catholic faith — especially the teachings that used to get under our skin — will suddenly take on new meaning and life. Attached to a living Presence, we can freely follow the way of life the Lord has set before us, because now it is the way of the One we know and love.

It has been about 2000 years since the conversation took place between Christ and the rich, young man. Yet the call is ever new. How does the Lord invite us to follow him today? By offering us a genuine encounter with his living Presence. This encounter may come in an unexpected way such as a moment in prayer, an event, reception of the Eucharist or friendship with another person. Either way, you will recognize him with an interior certainty that will

astound you. “Sell” the possessions you cling to and follow him in these moments of grace. The desire to be completely fulfilled is in our hearts for a reason. It is the first step on the path to an amazing life. Go. ❖

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### President

John M. Capobianco

### Vice President

Mary Beth Newkumet

### Executive Assistant

Jessica K. Love

### Theological Advisor

Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete

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### Lumen Catechetical Consultants, Inc.

P.O. Box 1761

Silver Spring, MD 20915

1-800-473-7980 or

301-593-1066

Fax: 301-593-1689

[www.lifeaftersunday.com](http://www.lifeaftersunday.com)

# The Fulfillment of the Plan of Salvation

BY JOHN M. CAPOBIANCO

**R**ight from the start of creation, God the Father had a plan to send his Son into the world. The Son is the fulfillment of the Father's plan for each one of us. "Jesus is the genuine newness which surpasses all human expectations and as such He remains forever, from age to age," says Pope John Paul II in *Incarnationis Mysterium* (#1).

## INCARNATING THE PLAN OF SALVATION IN YOU

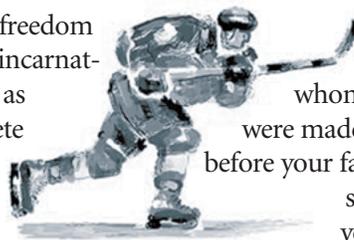
Yet, how do we make this "newness" that "remains forever" our own? The Pope continues, "the Incarnation of the Son of God and the salvation which he has accomplished by his death and Resurrection are therefore the true criterion for evaluating all that happens in time and every effort to make life more human" (*IM* #1). When we accept the Father's plan of salvation in our hearts and make his Son the "true criterion"

for our life – when we in freedom allow the Son to become incarnated in us – our fulfillment as human persons is complete and the effort to "make life more human" bears real fruit. This is total human fulfillment! It is a taste of the infinite "forever new" human life offered to us in Christ. We know we have tasted it, when we are able to say like St. Paul, "yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (*Gal. 2:20*). This act follows the path of Mary, who was the first in freedom to say "yes," allowing the infinite presence of life to live beneath her heart.

Every human heart was created for this outrageous, mysterious encounter with the presence of God. To go through life and miss this personal rendezvous with your destiny is so, so sad. It's like spending an entire career as a professional hockey player and *never touching the puck*. You've missed an elementary experience of the game if this happens, haven't you? In the same way, missing "the puck" of human life is never allowing the presence of Christ to encounter your heart.

## THE MASS: POINT OF ENCOUNTER

This encounter with your heart is what life on Sunday is all about. The Mass exists as the point of encounter where the Infinite Presence of God touches your finite being. It is, so to speak, where the puck of eternal life is not only touched but gets slapped into your destined goal. It is where the summation of the cosmos –



"the One through whom all things were made" – is placed before your face and offered specifically to you. Yet, so

many people seem to miss this point of encounter. They simply miss Mass, or dismiss Mass, or sometimes just wander obliviously through Mass. In this way, they fail to take advantage of the gift of the Holy Spirit, the One who fills our hearts with the "awe" of the infinite presence of God.

Next time you're about to receive Communion and a hand reaches into the ciborium and holds before your face the awesome Bread of Life, the precious Sum of the Cosmos, your personal Eternal Fulfillment, remember to follow the path of Mary. Say in your heart "yes," to the incarnation of the Father's Plan of Salvation for you. And don't be surprised if you see flashing lights and hear a distant roar from an angelic crowd, led by Mary, yelling "score!" ❖

## The Jubilee of Jesus Christ

"The period of jubilee introduces us to the vigorous language which the divine pedagogy of salvation uses to lead man to conversion and penance," proclaims Pope John Paul II in *Incarnationis Mysterium* (#2). "These are the beginning and the path of man's healing, and the necessary condition for him to recover what he could never attain by his own strength: God's friendship and grace, the supernatural life which alone can bring fulfillment to the deepest aspirations of the human heart." ❖

## Getting There...

**P**ray the liturgy of the hours. Even if you can't get to Mass every day, reflecting on the daily readings and prayers will help you grow in your relationship with Christ and enable you to recognize his presence in your life. We use and highly recommend *Magnificat*, a monthly missal with the liturgy of the hours and daily readings. To subscribe, call (301) 853-6600, [www.magnificat.net](http://www.magnificat.net) ❖

# Extreme Fulfillment

“Fulfillment” is a fabulous holiday buzzword generously sprinkled about by the marketing community at this time of year. Fulfill your holiday wishes. Fulfill your fantasies and dreams. Fulfill your heart’s desire. Full fill.

Clearly, the retailers have identified our desire for what I call “extreme fulfillment.” Like extreme sports, extreme wealth and extreme experience, extreme

fulfillment offers a complete contentment and joy beyond compare. The consumer culture proposes that extreme fulfillment can be achieved with riches like cashmere, caviar, diamonds, leather, tropical vacations and alloy-covered wheels. Especially during the holiday season, we are promised by advertisements and displays that we will “feel full” if we are wearing, experiencing, doing,



## Our Stuff

Several years ago, my husband and I attended a comedy routine by George Carlin in which he made some brilliant observations about the way we talk about “our stuff.” Don’t touch my stuff. Have you seen my stuff? Who moved my stuff? I need to buy some more stuff! The Church reminds us that when we die, we leave this world the way we came into it – without our stuff. Our stuff is only temporal. It can never bring us the happiness that awaits us in eternity, but it can block our way to getting there. Eternal life awaits us no matter what. It is up to us to decide whether we spend it in bliss with God or in desolation without him. Is your stuff getting in the way of the bliss? — MBN❖

eating or owning this! And often, this is true. But only for awhile.

That Christmas gift will eventually lose its power to captivate. Soon we will be out looking for the next toy, purchase or adventure to sustain us. We will hunger for more.

## EXTREME LIFE AND LOVE

The secular culture (and sometimes even our mall-hungry children) look at the simple lifestyles of “religious people” and assume they are denying themselves the riches of the world by living such pared down lives. Often, this way of life is lauded as an impressive sacrifice — for those who have the strength to do it! But the reality is that people who walk with Christ can find no lasting fulfillment in anything but him. They do not scorn material abundance. Many of them still

## St. Columba

St. Columba (521-597) was a large, powerful Irishman who brought the Gospel to the island of Iona during a time of “extreme living” in the sixth century! Yet despite great hardship, “he appeared loving unto all, serene and holy, rejoicing in the joy of the Holy Spirit in his inmost heart,” observed his contemporaries. Rejecting the talismans of the pagan Celtic and Pict peoples, Columba was fulfilled only by Christ: I reverence not the voices of birds, Nor sneezing, nor any charm in the wide world, Nor a child of chance, nor a woman; My Druid is Christ the Son of God. Christ the Son of Mary, the great Abbot, The Father, Son and Holy Ghost; My Possession is the King of Kings; My Order is in Kells and Moone. ❖

shop at the mall. But they have stepped off the merry-go-round of a worldly empty-and-full. Experience has shown them that they can’t depend on material things and surface adventures for the off-the-charts fullness they crave.

The fulfillment of extreme life and love — a life and love lived intensely with family and friends — is available to each human person who opens his or her heart to the living presence of Jesus Christ. This is the promise of the Gospel. This is

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# Filling Those Who Are Empty

**W**e have some childless friends who always have a tough time around the holidays.

For years they could not come to our house at Christmas because it was just too painful to see all the kids. Their childlessness has left a deep hole in their lives that they are still trying desperately to fill. Since organized religion has never meant much to either of them, they still search for a happiness that always seems out of reach.

This is hard for me to watch, because I love them both very much. Although they seem to enjoy our friendship, my Catholic writer profession has always been the subject of much teasing. They think I've gone off the deep end! So I do what I can to stay connected to them by being as attentive as possible — and count on the Lord to do the rest. I try to be the best friend I can be by calling regularly and getting together when our schedules allow. And I pray for them. During the Agony in the Garden mystery of my daily rosary, I include them with all the other people I pray for who are deeply sad and empty. But I do not

despair over their situation because I know the Lord is at work in their lives.

## THE BEAUTY OF OUR EMPTINESS

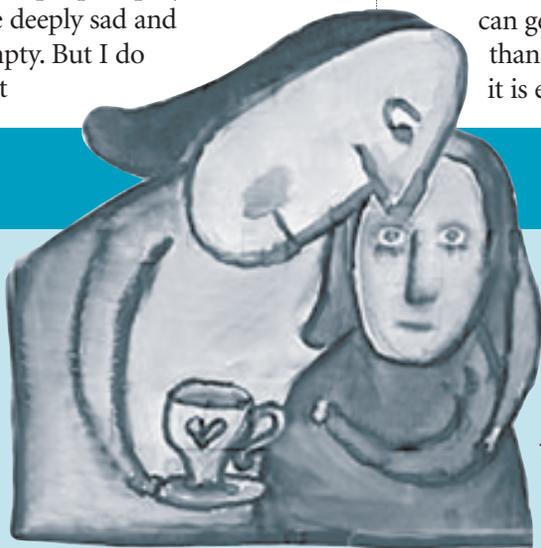
For the Lord — the One who was born into complete poverty — an empty heart is a glorious opportunity for fulfillment. This is why the poverty of sickness, trials and other troubles can often move us to a deeper relationship with the infinite God. In our emptiness, we experience what St. Thomas Aquinas called “a desire for an absent good.” We suddenly have a tremendous capacity to be filled. But we cannot fill this void by ourselves; it must be done by an Other. “For it is quite certain that, when we empty ourselves of all that is creature and rid ourselves of it for the love of God, that same Lord will fill our souls with Himself,” wrote St. Teresa of Avila.

Sometimes family and friends who are going through a tough time can separate themselves so much from our lives that we can get no closer to them than through prayer. Yet, it is essential that we stay

## Getting There...

**T**his holiday season, make a special effort to seek out and embrace the people you know who have no joy. Invite sad and lonely friends and family members to share in your family celebrations. Even if they decline in their sorrow, they will find some comfort in being remembered. Include them in your prayers at Christmas mass and ask the Lord to shine his light upon their darkness. ❖

with them — even when it looks like they are making little progress on the road to happiness and peace. *You* might be the only encounter with Christ available to them as they go through their sad and empty time. You may be his channel of grace, the vessel he uses to pour his love into an empty heart. To be his vessel in this way is the ultimate human experience, where his infinite love flows through you into those who have *no clue* that it is the presence of Christ filling their hearts with joy. ❖ — MBN



## Prayer for those who are Empty

“**C**ome now, little man! Flee for a while from your tasks, hide yourself for a little space from the turmoil of your thoughts. Come, cast aside your burdensome cares, and put away your laborious pursuits. For a little while give your time to God, and rest in Him for a little. Enter the inner chamber of your mind, shut out all things save God and whatever may aid you in seeking God; and having barred the door of your chamber, seek Him. Speak now, O my heart, O my

whole heart, speak now and say to your God: My face hath sought Thee: Thy face, O Lord, will I seek.” — St. Anselm of Canterbury (1066-1109) ❖

# Fulfilling Liturgies

**M**aking our liturgies more fulfilling is an endeavor that occupies many aspects of parish life. From the altar society to the liturgy committee to the music ministry, parishioners spend

hours and hours in meetings discussing ways to improve, embellish and make our liturgical celebrations more filling for children, young people, families, professionals, etc., (pick one!) Read on for a

commentary by one of our passionate pastors.

❖ — MBN



## Mass is Never Boring

**M**any Catholics today think that we can overcome the problem of “unfulfilling liturgies,” perhaps if only we can make the Mass and God more interesting. So they think the purpose of the music and liturgical actions are to make the Mass more interesting, and make God more attractive. They suggest we get more contemporary music in the Mass, music the kids like, and let’s get the kids more involved, get them around the altar, make them the center of attention so they feel important. In other words, let’s make the Mass interesting, which it is not in itself, unless we make it so. So countless parishes have done just that, and with good will, and the end result? The kids end up bored as ever over time, and they drop out thinking you really can’t overcome the boringness of the Mass, so why bother.

The real problem here begins with the false premise that the Mass is primarily, or even exclusively, something we are doing for God, whereas the truth is quite the reverse. The Mass is something God does for us; first, by enabling us to be part of something God does for God — providing the worship and honor due to God. Secondly, God is doing for us another marvelous thing, providing us with the food by which we share his eternal life, the fruit of that first thing he has done for us in allowing us to worship him in the only manner befitting his glory.

Seen from this perspective, that the Mass is the most wonderful action on God’s part for our benefit, the Mass can only be seen as “boring” if we are not interested in what God is doing for us, here and now, in the Mass. And that is the truth, the underlying problem that makes people bored at Mass, and makes them think we can overcome

that problem not through a deeper faith, but through our own efforts to make the Mass interesting.

It’s like telling a great artist that his work is boring, and here we’ll make it more interesting by touching it up here and there. God’s work is never in itself boring, but our inability to understand its value is a major problem. It is a problem of the soul, not the externals of the Mass. Surely they can be improved, but only in accord with the true nature of the Mass that it is mainly God’s work, and we cannot fundamentally improve upon it by changing its externals.

Those who have deep enough faith to understand what is really going on at every Mass never find it boring. They may or may not like the externals, but they are fundamentally interested in what God is doing, not man. The sermon may be boring due to its human elements, the skill levels of the preacher, but so long as it touches upon the Word of God, the believer will find something interesting in that aspect. The music may be wonderful, but only when it helps direct us to God’s action on our behalf, and the believer will find God in the music, not entertainment. The priest may be too dramatic or too lethargic in the way he presides, but the priest’s character is only an external itself; the believer focuses on Christ who is acting through the priest, on what Christ is doing for us through the sacred action.

Everything comes together and holds together in the Eucharistic mystery. We were created for this mystery, and it’s the ultimate meaning of our life. — Fr. Mark Pilon, St. Mark’s Parish, Annandale, VA. ❖

# Feast and Famine

“This is the time of fulfillment,” says the Lord, “The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel” (*Mark 1:15*). First spoken over 2000 years ago, these are *living words*. The kingdom of God is indeed at hand.

Today, it is up to us to steward the gifts we have received for the use of all the Lord’s children.

Many of us have much to share. In fact, “the gap between the rich and poor has grown into



an economic chasm so wide that this year the richest 2.7 million Americans, the top 1 percent, will have as many after-tax dollars to spend as the bottom 100 million,” according to the *New York Times*.

## A GENEROUS “ENOUGH”

As Catholics, we are called to reflect on how our own lifestyles are affecting this growing situation of “feast and famine.” A life lived in union with Christ gratefully accepts a generous “enough” and then shares the rest. But it is essential that this “enough” be determined by our own hearts and not a consumer culture that tries to tell us what we want instead of what we truly need.

The United States has been blessed with many gifts and much prosperity during the past decade. Now it is up to us to see how we will steward these gifts throughout the rest of the world. Sadly, “while America has enjoyed one of its most prosperous decades ever in the 1990s, it also has set a record for stinginess,” according to the *Washington Post*. “For as long as people have kept track, never has the United States given a smaller share of its money to the world’s poorest.” But it seems we are not alone in feasting while other people go hungry. The *Post* reports that “overall international foreign assistance has fallen sharply since the end of the Cold War, dropping 21 percent in inflation-adjusted terms between 1992 and 1997.”

## A NEW CULTURE

“There is... a need to create a new culture of international solidarity and cooperation where all – particularly the wealthy nations and the private sector – accept responsibility for an economic model which serves everyone. There should be no more postponement of the time when the poor Lazarus can sit beside the rich man to share the same banquet and be forced no more to feed on the scraps that fall from the table (Lk 16:19-31). Extreme poverty is a source of violence, bitterness and scandal; and to eradicate it is to do the work of justice and therefore the work of peace... May this year of grace touch the hearts of those who hold in their hands the fate of the world’s peoples.” – Pope John Paul II, *Incarnationis Mysterium* (#12) ❖

## GETTING THERE ...

I recently participated in a hunger banquet called Oxfam at my Catholic high school. It is a wonderful program that could easily be replicated at the family dinner table one night. Here’s how it works: in keeping with the resources apportioned in the world, 15% of the kids at my school had a full lunch of chicken cordon bleu, sauteed potatoes, green beans and pumpkin pie; 30% had rice with beans and 55% had just a half a bowl of rice and a small cup of water. My rather full friend Catherine was in the first group and definitely was not deprived of food that day! I was in the hungriest group and certainly was hungry when I got home at 3PM. What a great lesson for students and adults to experience right before Thanksgiving. This was a great experience that everyone should try at least once, because some people don’t experience it just one day a year, they live it. For information on Oxfam America call 800-597-FAST or visit [www.oxfamamerica.org](http://www.oxfamamerica.org). ❖  
— Kate Newkumet, age 14

What can we do personally to counter this enormous disparity? The best place to start is by looking right into our own hearts. Do our own possession possess us to such a point that we are afraid to let them go? And isn’t this “cling-

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# Fulfillment

Lumen Catechetical Consultants, Inc.  
P.O. Box 1761  
Silver Spring, MD 20915



## From the Mystical Monsignor.....

### A HIDDEN FULFILLMENT

Everyone seeks fulfillment. Ful-fill-ment is to feel full. The first question is: what is to be filled up? The second question is: with what? That all of us look for fulfillment shows that we are all perpetually empty. We always need to be filled up! In this way we recognize our complete dependence on an Other for our very existence and completion. Not just at our birth, but each day, we are completely dependent on this One for being. "Our Father who art at the depths," says Msgr. Luigi Giussani in *The Religious Sense*, "who art in heaven, Our Father who art in my profound roots, Thou who art now making me in this instant, who generate my path and guide me to my destiny!" The Father is the One who fills us.

Our capacity to be completely fulfilled depends on recognizing this Father on whom we are so dependent as an intimate companion. By sending his Incarnation, the Father shows us the perfect reflection of his Image in the gaze of his Son. Through his Spirit, he seeks to fill us with the presence of his Son. Jesus Christ is a fulfillment that can be known. With his living presence among us today in the life of the Church, "everything unfulfilled in our individual moments of life receives a hidden fulfillment," says Hans Urs Von Balthasar. This hidden fulfillment is the living Christ we must recognize, embrace and bring to others through our companionship. — *Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete, U.S. Ecclesiastical Advisor for Communion and Liberation, an international movement in the Church*

**Extreme Fulfillment** continued from page 4

the experience of the saints. This is the only path to the happiness we seek.

Offer the presence of Christ — living in you — to family and friends who seem so preoccupied with their possessions. "Sell off" a few things of your own! Make more room in your heart for the One who invites you to an extreme fulfillment that lasts forever. ❖

*Life After Sunday* is a great tool for small group discussion!  
For leader's guides, visit [www.lifeaftersunday.com](http://www.lifeaftersunday.com)

## Ponder In Your Heart

Do you find yourself longing for more fulfillment from life? (p. 1 and 2)

- Have you ever asked Christ the rich young man's questions: "What must I do?"
- How detached are you from your possessions?

How do we "incarnate" Jesus as the fulfillment in our daily lives? (p. 3)

- Have you embraced the Father's plan of salvation?
- Is the Mass for you a "point of encounter" where the gift of the Holy Spirit fills your heart with awe?

Is all your "stuff" obscuring your celebration of the Lord's love for you? (p. 4)

- What possessions could you "sell off" to make more room in your heart for Jesus?
- How can we help family and friends focus on true fulfillment?

Do you know people whose lives seem empty? (p. 5)

- Do you see any beauty in their emptiness?
- What are some specific ways that you can be a channel of the Lord's grace to the people in your life?

Do you see the Mass in your parish as the fulfilling action of God? (p. 6)

- If Mass is "something God does for us" how can we appreciate that fact more fully in parish life?
- How can you invite parishioners who don't attend Mass at your parish to reconsider the fulfillment of his Presence there?

Do you believe that "this is the time of fulfillment" in our world today? (p. 7)

- How can you help fill up those who are hungry for spiritual and material nourishment?
- How can a life of stewardship bring the Lord's fulfillment to the world?

**Feast and Famine** continued from page 7

ing" — multiplied in millions of other hearts — the way we sustain a culture that is so unwilling to share its abundant gifts?

Only by "giving away" the things that keep us from Christ will we find the true comfort, security and peace our possessions can never provide. Once he is our only Possession, the Lord will give us everything else we need both spiritually and materially. We will have our "generous enough." Pray for the grace to begin your own "time of fulfillment." Allow the Lord to use you as his point of entry to transform a world that has become too full in some places and too empty in others. ❖