

Searching for Security

BY MARY BETH NEWKUMET

My friend, Joe, and his brothers run the family funeral home founded by their parents. In the past few years, they have seen a terrible trend — a whopping 30% increase in the number of families that come in to make arrangements on behalf of a loved one who has committed suicide. If this fact isn't heartbreaking enough, Joe also has seen a shift in the ages of people who are taking their own lives. "The suicides used to be mostly teenagers, which was awful enough," he told me the other day. "But in the past two years, we've seen an increase in all age groups, especially married men in their 30s and 40s with kids. It is really sad." Indeed.



Here in my parish community, this reality has hit home. In the past six months, two young family men have taken their own lives. One of them was my good friend. The mourning in our whole community goes wide and deep. As with any unexpected loss of a loved one, we ask ourselves how this could have happened. What would cause these wounded men to consider — much less go to — such extreme measures to avoid their pain and fear? We will never know.

Suicide is a desperate act of final despair. For many people it is an attempt to escape from the fear of an insecure life: that they will fail to provide for their families; that there will always be something around the corner that will upset their world; that something from their past will always haunt them; that there will never be enough money, comfort or love to fill the gaping hole in their hearts.

Who among us doesn't experience despair and fear about our future, our children, our property, our health? "We are afraid of birth, of life, of

pain, of loss, of death," writes author Caryll Houselander. "All through our life we are dogged with fear. [So] from his earliest childhood, the modern man is brought up to value money above all else and even to value himself by his capacity for getting it...Money means the safest, swiftest traveling, the speediest spoken or written word, the warmest clothing, the best medical aid. Small wonder is it that gradually, without knowing it, we have come to trust more in money than in God."

For many people today, money is security. But as every Depression-era American will tell you, money alone does not make life secure.

continued on page 2

IN THIS ISSUE

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 3

- 1** Life With Jesus
- 3** Life On Sunday
Security of a Sacred Meal
- 4** Life At Home
Providing Security for your Family
- 5** Life At Home
Living with Fear
- 6** Life In The Parish
A Secure Community
- 7** Life In The World
A Security Not of this World



Mary, the first Steward of Christ

continued from page 1

LASTING SECURITY

The quest for money is a response to one of the deepest longings of the human heart — the search for security — a lasting security that does not startle with sudden change, sickness, death or reversal of fortune. This longing for security is a universal human experience that manifests itself in everyone from the Asian peasant looking for his next meal to the investment banker watching market activity on her computer screen.

To satisfy this longing, our culture offers “failsafes” such as preventive medicine, insurance policies, air bags, alarm systems, etc. (We are not knocking these things; we have them, too!) But by depending completely on *things* for our security, we can become twice as vulnerable when something unexpected happens. And it always does.

As a result, a growing number of modern men and women live with an underlying uneasiness. Some are ridden with angst; many are angry; others despair. Perhaps this is why so many people look upon death as a final escape, a “solution” to a “problem.” In observing this Culture of Death up close, Funeral Director/Poet Thomas Lynch worries, “if we live in a world where birth is suspect, where the value of life is relative, and death is welcomed and well-regarded, [then] we live in a world vastly more shameful, abundantly sadder, and ever more perilous than all the primitive generations



of our species before us who were sufficiently civilized to fill with wonder at the birth of new life, dance with the living, and weep for the dead.”

So how, we ask ourselves, do we retrieve this full, rich, fearless life which appears to be slipping from our cultural grasp? By recognizing that a secure life can only be provided by Someone, never something.

JESUS CHRIST IS OUR SECURITY

The *fact* of the Risen Jesus is our security: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you,” Christ said. “Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid” (John 14: 27-28). A secure life recognizes, appreciates and lives peacefully with the full impact of life and death — because the calamity of death (the ultimate insecurity) has already been experienced and conquered by Jesus Christ, a living presence among us (*Presence Issue*) through the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we recognize this presence and choose to walk with him every day, we begin to live in his peace — the only peace that allows us to live intimately, richly and securely with our family and friends in a very practical, concrete way.

Finally, because we have allowed him to live in us, we can offer his peace, his security, to others. Only a life centered in Christ can fill the emptiness and temper the anxiety that confounds so many people in our culture today. “I am the life,” Jesus tells us. “He who believes in me will never die.”

How can you get more secure than that? Is there a better foundation on which to build a truly Catholic culture? With this conviction, Pope John Paul II asks us to “be not afraid” as we boldly live the Gospel of Life.

Stay with us through this issue of *Life After Sunday* as we explore the ways that our journey with Christ is our security in this world — and the security that we can help bring to others. ❖

Life After Sunday

President

John M. Capobianco

Vice President

Mary Beth Newkumet

Executive Assistant

Jessica K. Love

Theological Advisor

Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete

Life After Sunday is a catechetical tool for parish life created by Lumen Catechetical Consultants, Inc., a 501(C)3 not-for-profit educational consulting firm that helps Catholic organizations communicate a life with Christ lived fully through his Church. © Copyright 1998, 2002. May not be reproduced without permission granted.

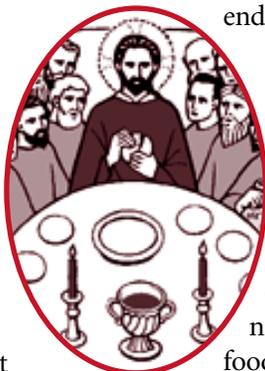
Lumen Catechetical Consultants, Inc.

P.O. Box 1761
Silver Spring, MD 20915
1-800-473-7980 or
301-593-1066
Fax: 301-593-1689
www.lifeaftersunday.com

The Security of a Sacred Meal

The times in your life when you probably feel most secure are when you are sharing a meal with people you care about. This communion is a basic human experience that transcends all cultures and peoples. The family party. The dinner with friends. The neighborhood potluck supper. These meals bring both the companionship and nourishment that sustain our lives.

Ancient peoples considered the act of eating together sacred. Yet they recognized that even this togetherness was not enough to make life completely secure. Seated around the fire amid the chaos of the cosmos, they offered sacrifice (sometimes even one among them!) to the



“something out there” to quell their fears and assure their security. The Lord of creation had already planted deep in their hearts the longing for companionship and sustenance — and the search for a peace that never ends.

Scripture shows how the Father made us for a companionship that is eternal, for a meal that is real food. By sending — and sacrificing — his only Son, the Father offers everything we need: “For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink,” Jesus said. “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him” (*John 6:55-56*).

The Last Supper began as a meal among beloved companions and gradually became so much more. By offering himself to the Father as the sacrifice, and to us as the food and the eternal peace, Christ provides the most secure experience offered to the human person. This experience can only be found in the Mass.

People who live in places where the Mass is outlawed know the pain of missing the communion of companions, the true food, the sacrifice and security of the sacred meal. Do the rest of us realize how well the Mass provides for our every need?

Sometime this month, ask the Holy Spirit to help you begin to experience the Mass in a new way. Begin with a small prayer before Mass — then take the time to listen to the Lord’s Word, remember

THE ALTAR

The altar in your parish church is both the place where the priest offers the sacrifice of Jesus to the Father and the table where he prepares the Eucharistic meal. It is also the place that recalls Christ’s death and resurrection. During the persecutions of the early Church, believers gathered in underground catacombs and said Mass at the tombs of their beloved dead. As a result of this practice — which linked the death and resurrection of Christ to each believer — most altars in Catholic churches all over the world today contain the relics of a saint in a small box inside. Thus each altar reminds us of the table, tomb and place of sacrifice. ❖

THE FEAST OF THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST



St. Thomas Aquinas said that the Eucharist “does for the spiritual life all that material food does for the bodily life, namely, by sustaining, giving increase, restoring, and giving delight.”

At the request of Pope Urban IV St. Thomas Aquinas wrote his timeless Eucharistic hymns for the first celebration of the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ in 1264. Formerly known as Corpus Christi, this feast celebrates the Eucharist as both meal and sacrifice. Following are lyrics written by St. Thomas (1227-1274) that contain the beautiful theology of the Eucharist presented in the Gospels and taught by the Church. The Pange Lingua is still sung today in churches all over the world:

“On the night of the Last Supper, Seated with His chosen band, He the Paschal victim eating, First fulfills the Law’s command; Then as Food to all His brethren Gives Himself with His own hand.” ❖

— from the Pange Lingua

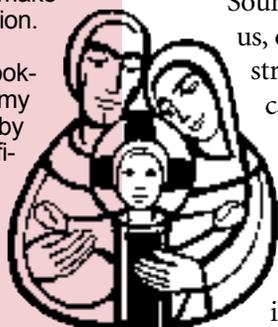
his sacrifice, extend his peace to your neighbor and savor the sacred meal that never ends. ❖

Providing Security for your Family

On Sunday, the priest tells us to “go in peace” from the Eucharistic celebration. But what he also means is “go live this Mass”: take the peace of this secure life, this meal, and share it with the people in your life — your family first and foremost, but also your friends and co-workers. People who live with the secure bond of family and many friends know that there will always be someone there to help them through a crisis. People who don’t have this same sense of personal security often are lost and adrift.

Getting There

Eating dinner as a family makes our life secure. Amidst the homework, sports schedules, work and evening meetings (phew!), it is our time to regroup and enjoy each other’s company. We make sure there is no television. We don’t answer the phone. Whether the cooking has been done by my husband (splendid) or by me (plain, easily identifiable, nothing touching anything else on the plate), we begin by thanking God for our many blessings. We have a tablecloth and always a candle. During the course of the meal, we have some good conversation, at least one belly laugh, several sibling squabbles, the usual corrections on manners, a glass of spilled milk, etc. But these are the times that bind us together. These are the times that keep our love for each other strong. ❖
— MBN



A SECURE FAMILY

Unfortunately, the pace of modern life has become so hectic that many of us now work during times traditionally set aside for the people in our lives. Yet our yearning for a secure family never subsides. In a *New York Times Magazine* special issue on the often hollow life experienced by people who travel on business, a divorced mother who goes out of town frequently talked about how she tries to create some sense of ritual and consistency in her life: “I no longer make friends,” she said, “because I’m constantly jerked in and out of my life.... I’ll take a candle for the hotel room. I’ll take books and poetry.... Whatever I do, my life feels all turned around, as if I can’t focus on what really matters to me.”

Sound familiar? For many of us, our jobs, our pace, our striving for secure *things* can make us more isolated from the people we care about the most, and therefore, even less secure. In the wake of this growing isolation, our very human need for a connection with other people manifests itself in many modern ways. Internet chat rooms, health club memberships, even our place of employment, can give us a sense of belonging to something bigger than ourselves. But there are still many lonely people going through the motions — even in the midst

of living with other family members — who miss out on the deeper peace and love that comes from the secure bonds of marriage, family and friendship.

The security of family takes time. Real time. If we are too busy, the security of our presence is lost. People who have discovered how to balance toil with real time for “the people for whom we are toiling” have a rich life indeed.

BE NOT AFRAID

But how do we overcome our fear that if we cut back on our material quest, there will be less security, less money? “If God so clothes the grass in the field that grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow,” Jesus reminded his worried disciples, “will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith?” (*Lk. 12:28*) No doubt you have heard this passage before. But do you believe it?

The Lord has asked us to trust him with not only our spiritual needs, but our material needs as well. During June, the month when the Church celebrates devotion to Christ’s Sacred Heart, ask him to be present with you not only when you pray as a family, but also when you pay the bills. Trust him when he says that he will take care of you — especially if you decide to risk more money for time with your family. According to St. Teresa, “The Lord will not be outdone in his generosity.” ❖

Living with Fear

Perhaps the most difficult fears we live with are the fears of the heart: the fear of broken relationships, the fear of building bridges to heal real wounds, the fear of saying the wrong thing. These are the worst storms of daily life.

My baby, Patrick, enjoys the spectacle of a storm when I am holding him in my arms. Safe there, he is not afraid as he watches the dark sky, the lightening and the rain. But if I put him down and go into another room, he gets frightened. So it is in our relationship with Christ. If we stand with him, the King of our hearts, we do not try to handle our fears alone. Our ability to reach out during the times when we feel most paralyzed can only come from him.

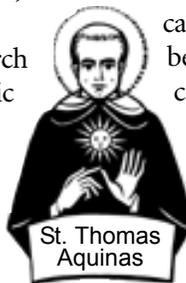
THE PEACE OF THE SAINTS

St. John Vianney preached that “God commands you to pray, but he forbids you to worry.” (Easy for him to say, we muse, he was a saint. He did not have kids or a mortgage!) But what St. John Vianney knew and we sometimes forget is that being a saint means walking through life clinging to Christ. St. Augustine wrote that the peace of the saints “is serenity of mind, calmness of soul, simplicity of heart, a bond of love, a union of charity.” The saints suffer greatly from our depiction of them as unrealistic ideals, perfect people. Rather, “by finding [Christ] and by his union with him, the saint has found the only satisfying purpose for which to live, act and suffer. He has found a happiness independent of life’s vicissitudes, a security no external disasters can shake,” writes E.I. Watkin in *Neglected Saints*.



The life of every saint was filled with the same bumps, pitfalls and catastrophes experienced by believers today. The saints were just humble enough to know that they could not get through life alone. In his *Confessions*, St. Patrick wrote about clinging to the Lord in the midst of personal isolation among the pagans of Ireland: “Daily I expect either a violent death, or robbery and a return to slavery, or some other calamity,” he wrote. “I have cast myself into the hands of Almighty God, for he rules everything.”

During thunderstorms, St. Thomas Aquinas, the great Doctor of the Church who wrote the Eucharistic hymns (see p. 3) and formidable works like the *Summa Theologica*, could often be found in front of the Blessed Sacrament in the nearest church — not because he was so holy — but because he was nervous. As a child, he had seen his little sister



killed instantly by a bolt of lightning as she slept in the room they shared. Thomas was “afraid of thunderstorms all his life,” according to the *Lives of the Saints*. But the presence of Christ calmed his fear. “It is I. Do not be afraid,” Jesus assured his disciples as he walked across the water to their storm-tossed boat (*John 6:20*). If we recognize the secure presence of the Lord in our fear, we will begin to experience that same peace as the disciples and saints, knowing that we cannot be harmed in that safe place with him. ❖ — MBN

Getting There

June is the month of the Church’s great Sacred Heart devotion; July is the month of the Precious Blood. Yet these beautiful devotions cannot fully touch our hearts if we are at war with, or indifferent to, someone in our family. During these months, try to be touched by the depth of Christ’s love — a love that continued despite betrayal, abandonment and harsh words by the people closest to him. Contemplate how the Lord shed his blood and offered it as both drink and sacrifice to save all of us — you, me and that family member who is the thorn in your side. In addition to your candles, Sacred Heart statues and other beautiful June and July traditions, try to see the presence of Christ in the person you find hardest to love and make one step forward in your relationship with them. ❖

For Worriers

If you are a natural worrier, all this talk of Christ’s peace probably sounds beautiful, but might be hard to experience right away. Give yourself time. When I am confounded by an aspect of my faith, I always think about my daughter, Zoe, holding her first spoon. She gummed it, she dropped it, she banged it on the top of her tray. It was only as she grew that she learned what it was for and how to use it well. Although Christ’s peace is available to us right now, as we grow more open to it, we will experience it more fully. ❖ — Regina McDermott



A Secure Community

A parish community founded on the stability of Christ is secure. The friendships that form this community affect the whole neighborhood where the church dwells. “You cannot pray at home as at church,” wrote St. John Chrysostom, “where there is a great multitude, where exclamations are cried out to God as from one great heart, and where there is something more: the union of minds, the accord of souls, the bond of charity, the prayers of the priests.”

These bonds form a security through friendship. They also humanize the neighborhood in which the parish is set. Neighborhood watch programs band neighbors together to watch out for each other as a way of keeping their homes and property secure. In the same way, people in a parish community bring the security of Christ into the neighborhoods where they live, providing a glimpse to others of a secure life that cannot be destroyed.

BRINGING CHRIST

Through community outreach and social justice activities, the members of our parishes bring Jesus to people who may not know him. But the original source of his presence is the community found within the parish.

In the early Church, this same care for other members of the community was a natural extension of the Mass. According to St.

Justin Martyr, a philosopher who died for the faith in 165A.D.: “A distribution and sharing of the Eucharistic oblations is made to each one; and to the absent ones a portion is sent through the deacons. Those who are well to do give voluntarily what they wish; and what has been collected is handed over to him who presides, and he will use it to help the orphans and widows, and those who are in need.”

Today, our parish communities still bring the Eucharist to sick or infirm parishioners who cannot come to the Mass to be with the rest of the community. We also still share parts of the collection with members of the parish who are in need. These acts extend the community meal — the communion — to those in the parish who cannot be present.

A COMMUNITY OF FRIENDS

If you do not feel a part of your parish community, chances are you don’t have many friends there. Perhaps you can join an on-going parish activity — not to overload yourself with one more task — but to come to know the people.

The real community of a parish comes from the friendships that evolve through groups or committees with specific tasks. Although the *work* of the altar society, the liturgy committee, the choir and parish council is important to the life of the parish, it takes a back seat to the human connections that are made while the work is getting done. It is these real friendships that build up the

community and bind it together. It is also these friendships that call us to love in a deeper way. It is very easy to dismiss the difficult person we don’t know; much harder to deal with the difficult person who has become your friend. Parish life calls us to not only deal with the crotchety people on our committees, but also to work out differences and care for them as an integral part of the community.

In the Letter to the Hebrews, we are reminded “not to neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some, but to encourage one another” (*Heb 10:25*). This is the important work of secure parish life. ❖

Getting There

Nothing robs our peace like sin. If you have been avoiding confession, perhaps now is the time to pray for the humility to renew your relationship with Christ through reconciliation at your local church — and retrieve the full security of a life with him.

Many Catholics see confession as a Sacrament where they have to do all the hard work; consequently many people avoid it. Yet “confession is the very place where you are decidedly being shaped,” wrote 20th century Catholic mystic Adrienne Von Speyr. “You must learn that you cannot shape everything yourself.”

During a speech in 1987, Pope John Paul II urged the faithful to look at confession in a new way: “To those who have been far away from the Sacrament of Reconciliation and forgiving love I make this appeal: come back to this source of grace; do not be afraid! Christ himself is waiting for you. He will heal you, and you will be at peace with God!” ❖

A Security Not of this World

The next time you are watching television or reading a magazine or newspaper, pay careful attention to the advertisements that tap into your longing for security. “Proper planning can guarantee a secure financial future for you and your loved ones, no matter what happens,” reads the copy of one insurance ad. “If the worst happened and you died before accumulating your life’s savings, or paying off the mortgage, or financing your child’s education, would your financial plan guarantee a secure future for your family?” intones another.

Car and tire commercials tap into our fears about security on the road. Pharmaceutical ads reinforce our concerns about sickness

and death. Of course, there is nothing wrong with this. These advertisers have simply recognized — and honed well — the words that speak to our deepest human needs. But it always makes sense to look carefully at the options and promises they offer us.

EVERYTHING CHANGES

Despite the amazing bull market on Wall Street, despite wonderful technological advancements, despite a measure of international peace, the world can never provide absolute security. The amazing technological advances of the modern age can lull us into a false sense of being in control of uncontrollable things in nature and the universe, a fact prophetically observed by the writers of the Vatican II documents: “Thinking that they have found serenity in an interpretation of reality everywhere proposed these days, many look forward to a genuine and total emancipation of humanity wrought solely by human effort....Nevertheless, in the face of the modern development of the world, an ever-increasing number of people are raising the most basic questions or recognizing them with a new sharpness: What is man? What is this sense of sorrow, of evil, of death, which continues to exist despite so much progress?...The Church believes that Christ, who died and was raised up for all can through His Spirit offer man the light and strength to measure up to his supreme destiny.”



PEACE BE WITH YOU

The next time you offer Christ’s peace to a friend at Mass, think about the gift you propose to give. Do you ever realize the security you offer with those words and that handshake of friendship? “The peace of Christ differs from worldly peace in regard to its perfection,” wrote St. Thomas Aquinas, “because the peace of the world is imperfect and fleeting, since it is for the quiet of the exterior man and not for the interior man. But the peace of Christ calms us interiorly and exteriorly.”

A secure life in Christ means we are not afraid of the world. When we see evil or a threat to our beliefs, we do not isolate ourselves from family, parish, school or community. Instead, like the Holy Family, we go out into the land where the Lord has called us, knowing that a life secure in him will keep us safe.

“Let me [call] your attention to the simplicity practiced by St. Joseph,” wrote St. Francis de Sales, “when, at the command of the angel, he went down into Egypt, a country in which he well knew that he would find as many enemies as there were inhabitants.... He makes no reflection of any sort upon the command, and so sets forth on his way full of peace and of confidence in God. In a like manner, when any charge is

Continued on back page

Getting There

We cannot offer Christ’s peace in isolation. Yet, according to a recent article in Newsweek, many people “are growing more isolated. In 1900, only five percent of U.S. households consisted of one person living alone...it stands at 25 percent today...[Our] social connections are withering on other levels as well. In 1976, Americans attended an average of 12 club meetings a year. The current average is five. Card games, dinner parties and shared family meals have all followed the same arc. We all have a good excuse — we’re too busy — but we shouldn’t be surprised when it catches up with us.” If you are not involved in a community organization, perhaps you may want to join one. Know that your presence can be a channel of the Lord’s peace in a world longing for that security. ❖

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Do you feel secure today? (p. 1 and 2)

- Is Jesus Christ the source of your security?
- Why is dependence on the “failsafes” offered by the culture an inadequate offer of real security?

What is it about a good meal, together with friends or family, that makes you feel secure? (p. 3)

- What makes the act of eating together sacred?
- How does the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass provide for your every need?

How is your family's security related to your personal relationship with Jesus Christ? (p. 4)

- How can you balance “toil for real time with the people for whom you are toiling”?
- Is it hard to put your trust in the Lord for financial and material security?

How do you live with fear? (p. 5)

- Comment on St. John Vianney's counsel that “God commands you to pray, but forbids you to worry”.
- Like St. Thomas, do you turn to Christ when you are afraid?

How does your parish offer you the security of life in Christ? (p. 6)

- How does your parish offer security to the people in your neighborhood?
- How does the humility of going to confession provide security in your daily life?

Why can the world never offer the promise of absolute security? (p. 7)

- How does the peace of Christ calm you, both interiorly and externally?
- Have you felt the security of knowing the Lord's intention for your true purpose in life?

FROM THE MYSTICAL MONSIGNOR

WHY THIS LIFE IS SECURE

Security means protection. It means assurance. There never seems to be enough of it. Danger always seems to be greater.

What is it that threatens us? Poverty, illness, loneliness, death! We protect ourselves from the first three by a ceaseless effort, and at times we succeed, but we know that when “the time” comes nothing can prevent death. No wonder some people believe that we cannot escape our fate.

Is everything really predetermined? At the moment of conception, when genetic life begins? At the Big Bang? Before creation?

Actually such impressions can't be all wrong. There is a predestination for each one of us. “Pre” and “destination”: each one has a destiny assigned before life begins. Each one is distinguished by this destiny, identified by it. To be separated from it is to really cease to exist. We are created for a purpose. As long as that purpose is realized, we have life, and our life is secure. If what we call death is part of that purpose, then it cannot destroy us, because while this purpose exists and is being realized, we are secure. Death is integrated into our purpose. The experience of insecurity is the experience of not having a pre-destined purpose in life.

Our destiny is to be reached freely. Freedom is part of it. But freedom does not create it. To think that is to sooner or

later find out that the life we have chosen to live has no purpose. Then we feel threatened, insecure.

What is our purpose? Our destiny?

It is Jesus Christ. It is the existence of the Son of God in a body created as a communion of love in Him. Corpus Christi. The Body of Christ is the purpose of creation. Whoever lives its life (whoever “eats his flesh and drinks his blood”) will never cease to exist. That is all the security we need. Nothing can destroy his body. It is kept alive forever by the Spirit of life who is the Spirit of love. That is what it means to say that Jesus Christ is our security. The only one.

— Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete

U.S. Ecclesiastical Advisor for Communion and Liberation, an international movement in the Church

A SECURITY NOT OF THIS WORLD *Continued from page 7*

given to us...go down, quite simply, into Egypt, into the midst of all the enemies whom you will find there. God, who sends you there, will also preserve you, and you will not die in that land. But if, on the contrary, you remain in Israel, where there is also an enemy, namely your self-will, it will doubtless take your life.”

The world, with all its sorrows and troubles, needs the peace of Christ and his beloved people. It is up to us to offer it. “In the world, you will have trouble, but take courage,” Jesus told his disciples. “I have conquered the world” (*John 16:33*). ❖