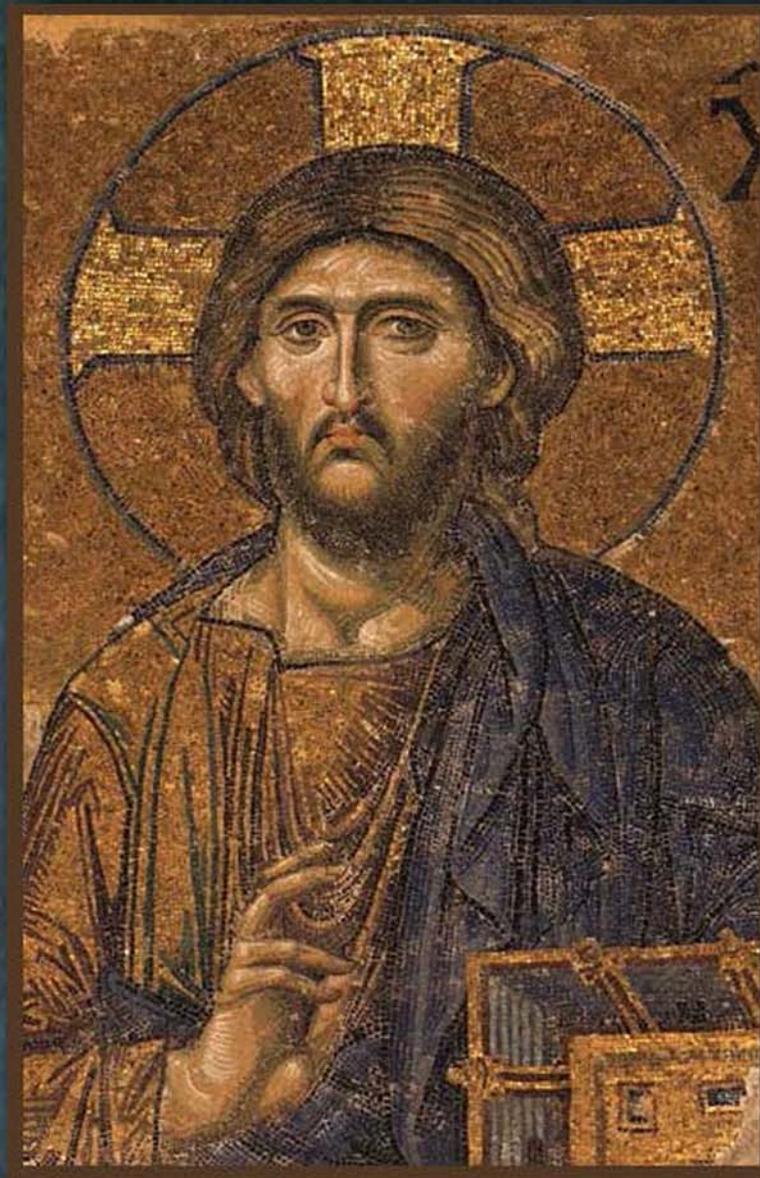


WHO do you
say that I AM?



A PASTORAL LETTER FROM
ARCHBISHOP JEROME E. LISTECKI
TO THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MILWAUKEE

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Prologue

In this, the Year of Faith commenced by Pope Benedict XVI, we who are God's People, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, and the local church of southeastern Wisconsin, seize the opportunity to reflect on the nature of the Church, attempting to recapture a few of the rich theological insights offered by the Second Vatican Council.

It has been obvious over the last few decades that there has been an effort to redefine the Church, to recreate her in the image of various ideologies, personal preferences and sociopolitical opinions. Furthermore, there have been those who, because of failed leadership in the area of clergy sexual abuse, have sought to diminish the importance and even question the existence of the Church and her primary role in leading the faithful toward holiness.

This short-sighted view of the Church's nature is countered by its history. It is precisely this drive for holiness, a proclamation and manifestation of their love for the Lord, which empowered men and women religious to boldly perform the corporal and spiritual works of mercy in newly developing areas of the Midwest. They battled against all odds to establish hospitals, healthcare facilities, orphanages, and schools — long before the State of Wisconsin even came into existence — and were able to provide many services that are today thought by some to be the exclusive domain of the government. These religious communities followed Christ and His Church and committed themselves to the task of serving their brothers and sisters even before the government was established. They continued to do so afterwards, striving to compensate whenever the basic needs of individuals could not be met by civic means alone.

The lay faithful, who came to settle the territory, built parishes that provided the sacraments and formed communities that supported the growth of the local area and the common good. They accomplished these ministries, not in isolation, but in conjunction with the Church and for the Church, which is the Body of Christ.

Now, at this point in the history of the Archdiocese, the People of God again profess their belief in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. We refocus our attention on the Church, which challenges all believers to live fully the Gospel message, to rediscover the theological insights that contribute to our patrimony of

Faith, and to follow the direction of Pope Benedict XVI to examine the Church's doctrinal convictions regarding her own nature and mission.

It has been our goal to make this Pastoral Letter readable and accessible. It does not exhaust all doctrinal or theological insights, but I hope it will prompt and inform further discussion and study, which will reinforce the theological and spiritual richness of the Church. However, our ultimate goal is for believers to renew their own spiritual fervor and reconnect to the supernatural source and transcendent power that has already motivated so many believers to build up the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, and indeed, change the world.

**A PASTORAL LETTER FROM
ARCHBISHOP JEROME EDWARD LISTECKI
TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MILWAUKEE**

Introduction

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Priests, Deacons, Consecrated Men and Women, Catholic Families, Lay Ecclesial Ministers, all the Baptized, Fellow Believers, and our Many Friends throughout the Archdiocese:

“Who do you say that I am?” (Mt 16:15). These were the words that Jesus addressed to His closest followers in Caesarea Philippi, even as His earthly life was approaching its end. His days were numbered and Jesus appeared preoccupied with this deceptively simple question. His concern may have been whether or not there was anyone who had understood Him. Did anyone really grasp His personality and purpose, did anyone apprehend who and what He was? When His appointed time would come, would His preaching and ministry be carried on and continue to resonate? Or, would His memory and His mission fade into the recesses of history? In other words, with the different Christian communities not yet fully organized, who would labor for His Kingdom and how would they do so?

This passage from Matthew’s Gospel has long been considered a central Christian text. Some context will help us understand the depth of the encounter described. There, in the territory of Phillip the Tetrarch, Jesus gathered the Twelve closely together and He began to engage them in a sustained and deeply interpersonal period of teaching. Jesus’ question went to the heart of the matter, because it implied that there is something more to be known regarding Him other than what appeared to be the case; something that could only be seen through the eyes of Faith. His followers’ own encounters with that mystery led them to a certain kind of commitment or conviction. That *something more* was the mystery of the Incarnation, which is the crucial interpretive key for those who would embrace or seek to explain the Church of Christ today.

It is also important to notice *where* Jesus chose to gather with the Twelve: Caesarea Philippi, a region with a wide variety of cults, temples, and believers. This location was near the source of the River Jordan, making it highly evocative for the Jewish People. It was here that Herod the Great built an overwhelmingly impressive white marble temple to the “godhead” of Caesar. His superior strength and the godlike stature of secular rulers seemed virtually omnipresent. “At the time

of Jesus, a fertility cult was thriving in the pagan temple to Pan at this location on the northern border of Israel and Syria at the foot of majestic Mount Hermon. It was here, in this center of sexual excess and pagan worship to the Greek god *Pan* that Jesus asks about the disciples' understanding of his Messiahship. It was here that Peter acclaims Jesus as the Messiah of the one true God.”¹

Here stands Jesus Christ, on His way to the Cross, surrounded by the monuments to the Syrian deities, in the playground of the Greek gods, a place where the memory of Israel hangs heavily in the air, and the spot where the hero worship of Caesar was emphatically proclaimed by an unrivaled glistening temple.

Nevertheless, Jesus sets Himself — a poor, even if astounding, carpenter whose ministry would be consummated in crucifixion — in contrast to the backdrop of human power and all other claims to transcendent authority. He asks his Apostles: “Who do you say that I am?” This is a Jesus confident of His divine mission, providing for His beloved brothers and sisters just as His Father had planned from all eternity, planting the seeds that the Holy Spirit would soon begin to harvest. He stands and begins to teach these followers, for one of the last times, about the ministry of reconciliation He had received from the Father, about the mission that His life-giving Spirit would sustain, which would outshine and outlast the various cults, the spiritualist splendor, and the secular vulgarities arrayed behind Him.

We live in a world that is not altogether unlike the one Jesus faced. People continue to answer the question posed by Jesus in a multitude of ways. There are those who would readily accept Jesus as a true humanitarian whose ethical principles challenge the existing culture and offer moral or spiritual advice. There are others who see Jesus as a prophet who boldly proclaimed an unworldly vision, but like many prophets — who captured the imagination of the masses and challenged the *status quo* — was executed by the governing authority who viewed Him as a threat. Still others fashion an image of Christ and His Gospel that merely reinforces their own preconceived social and political commitments. Yet, what they want to achieve politically or advocate ideologically should not determine their interpretation of Christ and His Church; Christ and His Church must determine how they see themselves and the world, as well as the way in which they understand what truly contributes to the common good and human dignity.

Today, the Church continues to ponder the same piercing question asked of the Twelve. As contemporary Catholics we must consider: Who do *we* say that Jesus really is? In Matthew’s Gospel, the question is first posed in order to get a sense of public opinion, to gauge the view of the larger community: “Who do people say

that the Son of Man is?” (Mt 16:13) The things people were saying appear to heap praise on Jesus by claiming that He is John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. These responses reflect the high regard in which many people held Jesus. It is an indication of their human desire for a kind of leadership that would establish an earthly kingdom in terms of power and prestige. However, these responses fail to capture the mystery at the heart of His identity. It would take the Church Herself hundreds of years to proclaim in a more explicit and nuanced fashion: Jesus Christ is the Only Begotten Son of God (Nicene Creed), the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, one person in two natures, “perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity” (Council of Chalcedon).

Jesus then directs and personalizes the question to the men standing in front of Him: “But who do *you* say that I am?” It is then that Simon answers, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.” It is not a coincidence that this disclosure of the spiritual mystery is articulated by Simon. This is the Simon who would be renamed Peter and would become the rock upon which Christ’s Church would be built. Jesus affirms this response by saying: “Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my heavenly Father.” Peter is confessing his belief in Jesus Christ, true God and true man. His receptivity or openness to the gift of the Faith allowed him to perceive in Jesus that which is beyond human intellect alone. And so he is renamed by Jesus — in much the same way new names are given at Baptism, Confirmation, or Religious Profession — signaling the fact that both divine revelation and the supernatural virtue of Faith lay claim to one at the very core of one’s being. Peter, who will lead the Church through the misunderstanding, persecution, and martyrdom that characterized early Christianity, is responding to Christ’s critical question and Our Lord is affirming his answer. For generations to come it will be the Church who will reveal and declare to the world the person of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the Living God. It will promote and protect the deposit of the Faith in its entirety. It will be the Church who from age-to-age will protect that confession made by St. Peter. There will be no authentic freelance Christianity. Without His Church, there is no Christ.

For several reasons, the time is right for us to consider the nature and identity of the Catholic Church in itself, especially as we prepare for the possibility of an Archdiocesan Synod. We are observing the Year of Faith, proclaimed by Pope Benedict XVI, mindful of the Church’s great commission from Christ: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19).

We are also taking this as yet another opportunity to plumb the depths of the Second Vatican Council's authoritative documents. The Year of Faith was convened exactly fifty years after the opening of the Second Vatican Council, in which both Blessed Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI took part. We are not only to remember the Council, but beyond commemorating it we are also to make it our own and develop its teaching according to its true meaning. "And its true meaning," according to Benedict, "was and remains faith in Christ, the Apostolic Faith, animated by the inner desire to communicate Christ to individuals and all people, in the Church's pilgrimage along the pathways of history." ²

Finally, we have approached the 20th anniversary of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which in some way could be referred to as Vatican II's final offering to the Church and the world. It reminds us of the beauty and the simplicity of the one Faith: received, preached, lived, and shared in every era and corner of the globe. The Archdiocese of Milwaukee has many reasons for gratitude, reflection, celebration and an examination of conscience since Vatican II issued its central dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, on November 21, 1964. That document set forth the normative ecclesiology of the Roman Catholic Church and today it retains both its relevance and depth of teaching.

In response to Blessed John XXIII's inspired invitation, the Council participants explicitly set out to speak more clearly and more effectively to the modern world, not changing the Gospel, but refining the manner in which it was being proclaimed. Thus, the faithful continue to study, meditate, and conduct dialogue so that we are better able to cultivate our own appreciation and discernment of God's Word. In this way, the Council's immediate intention was not to condemn, but to engage, guide, caution and direct modernity. Broadly speaking, at their worst, the atheistic ideologies of the 20th Century (e.g., Communism, Fascism, and Nazism, etc.) treated religion as a threat to the body politic. They sought to subjugate the individual to the interest of the collective or the political community, reducing the person to a cog in a bigger, and more important, machine.

But by the time of Blessed John Paul II's papacy, the grand ideologies and overarching narratives manipulated by dictators and autocrats in western and central Europe — sometimes accepted by the masses, and celebrated by the members of the dominant political parties — had, for all intents and purposes, collapsed; the Soviet Union approached its final days in the face of popular demands for human rights. Generally speaking, these ideologies failed to produce the earthly utopia that they had promised. The fundamental reason for the fall of such regimes came about, not just because central planning failed to produce the

desired economic effects, but because their theories denied God and did violence to universal human rights and the inherent dignity of all men and women. When a system is wrong about God it will necessarily be wrong about humanity. And so, these attempts to organize society without reference to the divine, or a place for religion in the public square, produced the bloodiest century in all of human history.

As modern ideologies were found, at best, to be empty, human beings began to lose confidence in the human intellect and in their ability to know the truth. Eventually, the objectivity of truth itself was called into question. Absolute claims regarding knowledge of the truth, especially religious truth, were seen with skepticism and thought to threaten pluralism and democracy. Today, some of the most prominent post-modern difficulties have to do with unanswered contradictions. For example, the only truth is that no one ever really knows the truth; the only meaning is to be found in meaninglessness. In this context, language itself can no longer be relied upon as a fixed means of communication.

The digital revolution and the global village are simultaneously spreading and contracting, and it somehow seems more difficult to make real, human, intimate connections with other people. For instance, while social media is broadening in that it permeates the globe, its effect is often restrictive such that one can be drawn more and more deeply into virtual relationships that quite often fail to facilitate authentic interpersonal interaction, whether it be with the people with whom one is communicating digitally or with the people present in person who are often disregarded during any number of digital interruptions.

A subtle shift has begun to take place: Whereas modernism subjugated the individual to the collective, the post-modern condition, disillusioned and having lost its bearings, exalts the individual at the expense of the community. That hyper-individuality, and the corresponding sense of isolation and alienation, is the hallmark of the post-modern condition. "The growth of our possibilities has not been matched by a comparable development of our moral energy. Moral strength has not grown together with the development of science; rather, it has diminished, because the technical mentality relegates morality to the subjective realm, while we have need, precisely, of a public morality, a morality that is able to respond to the threats that weigh down on the existence of us all. The real and gravest danger in these times lies, precisely, in this imbalance between technical possibilities and moral energy."³ In other words, what one *can* do and what one *ought* to do are two very different things, and the well-being, indeed the very existence, of our

communities depends on our ability to discuss questions of public life and agree on absolute principles and unconditional values.

The loss of confidence in reason or intellect — the imagined inability to know with certainty the truth about oneself or the world — has led to the prevalent philosophies or set of assumptions known as *relativism* and *subjectivism*. These also affect the way one looks at morality and religion. From this point of view, there are no absolutely impermissible moral choices. Likewise, there is no spiritual truth that demands obedience. Allegedly, it all depends on one's intention or surrounding circumstances. There are no exception-less or transcendent claims to be made.

Cardinal Ratzinger boldly delivered a celebrated homily during the Mass opening the conclave that would elect him pope in which he responded to these false ideas, famously referred to as *the dictatorship of relativism*.⁴ He likewise warned in later years about aggressive forms of secularism stating that, "there are some who now seek to exclude religious belief from public discourse, to privatize it or even to paint it as a threat to equality and liberty."⁵ Christians must continue to assert their rightful place in society, resisting those who would bleach culture free of any and all religious color.

Men and women are human precisely insofar as they possess reason or intellect (and can learn the truth with certainty) and free will (which means that they can freely choose to do good and avoid evil). Human persons are not just capable of logic. As St. Cyril of Jerusalem exhorted, "Know yourself for what you are: That you are a man, two-fold in nature and God is the creator of the soul and the body." He continued, "Know also that this soul of yours is free, self-determining, the fairest work of God, made according to the image of its Creator, immortal because of God who makes it immortal."⁶ We see the principle of the Incarnation dimly reflected in the human being's union of body and soul, which is at the heart of the Church's own mysterious nature, whereby the seen and unseen, and the perishable and the eternal are brought together such that the finite is taken up into the infinite without losing its individual character. In this way, the Church calls men and women to the high significance of their destiny, which, from a strictly secular point of view, so many people dare not even imagine.

Thus, men and women, by their nature, are able to find the truth, choose goodness and appreciate beauty. The absolute claims regarding, for example, universal human rights, which can be discovered and understood by reason or intellect regardless of one's culture or era, find their origin and highest justification in the

Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this way, the human person is able to uncover the meaningfulness of humanity's existence and we are capable of understanding the world around us.

The Church as Mystery

According to the Second Vatican Council, *the Church is first and foremost a mystery (Lumen gentium 1-8)*. It is also true, as the Council's participants emphasized in *Gaudium et spes*, that *only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light (Gaudium et spes 22)*. A mystery is something to be contemplated and lived. It is valuable, in and of itself, as a source of endless wonder. Although a mystery transcends human knowledge, it is not meaningless. To meditate on a mystery is to enter ever deepening realms of meaning. It is not a puzzle to be solved, but a deeper truth into which one may enter by way of silence, contemplation, and humility. When Pope Benedict XVI visited the United States of America in 2008, he addressed this point in his homily during Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. The steeples of St. Patrick's, sometimes referred to as "America's Parish Church," seem to almost strain upward, defiantly insisting that the Cathedral has every right to stand tall right where it is, in the middle of all the stores, offices, sky scrapers and media bureaus that surround it. In that context, the Pope spoke about the Church's mysterious identity, reflecting:

...The stained glass windows, which flood the interior with mystic light. From the outside, those windows are dark, heavy, even dreary. But once one enters the church, they suddenly come alive; reflecting the light passing through them, they reveal all their splendor. Many writers... have used the image of stained glass to illustrate the mystery of the Church herself. It is only from the inside, from the experience of faith and ecclesial life, that we see the Church as she truly is: flooded with grace, resplendent in beauty, adorned by the manifold gifts of the Spirit. It follows that we, who live the life of grace within the Church's communion, are called to draw all people into this mystery of light.... These words summon us to ever deeper faith in God's infinite power to transform every human situation, to create life from death, and to light up even the darkest night. And they make us think of another magnificent phrase of Saint Irenaeus: "Where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and all grace."⁷

"The Church is in history, but at the same time she transcends it. It is only 'with the eyes of faith' that one can see her in her visible reality and at the same time in her spiritual reality as bearer of divine life."⁸She cannot be adequately understood or described by way of sociological, political, or secular forms of analysis alone; the transcendent mystery at the heart of Christianity would be lost. That is because it is in word and sacrament — which together could be considered Christianity's

native tongue — that the Church opens up the mystery of the Incarnation and its implications, recognizing it as an event rather than a concept, allowing men and women to participate in it. Reflecting on the Year of Faith, Pope Benedict XVI wrote that, “faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy.”⁹

As we know, the Church has traditionally celebrated the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Apostles on Pentecost as a significant moment in the origin of the young Church. That is because, while the Father planned the Church, and as Jesus Christ laid its foundation, it is the Holy Spirit who gathers together the People of God, forming them into a living spiritual community, the Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit descends upon the bread and wine on the altar during the Eucharistic prayer and transforms them into the Body and Blood of Our Lord. In much the same way, during the Sacred Liturgy the Holy Spirit descends on Christ’s Pilgrim People, shaping them into a new reality: The Mystical Body of Christ. This is why some have made the point that the Eucharist creates the Church and the Church creates the Eucharist.¹⁰ It is impossible to imagine one without the other, because their relationship is necessarily mutual.

“The earthly Church and the Church endowed with heavenly riches are not to be thought of as two realities. On the contrary, they form one complete reality which comes together from a human and a divine element. For this reason the Church is compared, not without significance, to the mystery of the incarnate Word. As the assumed nature, inseparably united to him, serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a somewhat similar way, does the social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ who vivifies it, in the building up of the body (cf. Eph. 4:16).”¹¹ The Church is a concrete reality that must be encountered on her own terms, rather than as an abstraction that could all too easily be manipulated to meet one’s personal preferences and opinions.

Through our own local archdiocesan history, the paschal mystery has motivated vocations to the priesthood, which found nurture at the venerable Saint Francis de Sales Seminary. The living mystery of Christ’s Incarnation and Resurrection has inspired countless men and women to raise the myriad of mission stations, chapels, and churches of suitable elegance that have dotted the landscape of Wisconsin. It has inspired concern for the stranger, the orphan and the sick through the sponsorship of ethnic associations, educational institutions, orphanages such as St. Rose and St. Aemilian’s, and health care facilities, all founded by dynamic consecrated women such as the Daughters of Charity, the Franciscan Sisters, the

Dominicans, the Agnesians, the School Sisters of Notre Dame, and others. These initiatives, and many more, have translated the Church's mysterious identity, whereby the human and the divine come together, into concrete works of Faith and Love. Having experienced God's mercy and compassion in the intimacy of their own hearts, these missionaries were impelled to take on and carry forth the very same ministry of reconciliation that had already changed their own lives forever.

“The unity of Christ and the Church, head and members of one Body, also implies the distinction of the two within a personal relationship. This aspect is often expressed by the image of bridegroom and bride.”¹² St. Paul described this relationship as mysterious.¹³ It is an expression of the Church's transcendent nature, the mystery of love that is at the core of her being. This mystery is sustained in grace, poured forth in the Church, and made manifest in the sacraments.

The Church as Sacrament

Many of us are familiar with the traditional definition of a “sacrament”: a sacred sign, instituted by Christ, to give grace. Much theological scholarship has been dedicated to illuminating this seemingly simple doctrine. Most emphasize that a sign always points to something real beyond itself. For example, sacred scripture refers to the miracles Jesus performed as “signs,” because sacraments teach by a sort of “sacred sign language.” Others indicate that sacraments instruct, and they lay bare, the workings of God's grace, which is an essential aspect of their purpose. The sacraments are entrusted to the Church by Christ.¹⁴

The Second Vatican Council recovered an ancient image to help explain the nature of the Catholic Church. The image they employed in *Lumen gentium* was the longstanding concept of the Church herself being understood as a “sacrament.” The Latin word for *sacramentum*, which translates the Greek word *mysterion*, is rendered in English as “mystery and sacrament,” or as “hidden reality.” The Church is a mystery because she is a sacrament. *Lumen gentium* uses that term in an analogous sense to underscore the Church's dual nature, existing in time and space yet pointing to the eternal and transcendent.

We personally experience that reality of the Church. The Church commemorates the institution of Holy Orders at the bishop's annual celebration of the archdiocesan Chrism Mass. At that Mass, priests renew their vows before their bishop, as they continue to take part in his priestly office. The holy oils for Baptism and the Anointing of the Sick are blessed, while the Chrism for Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders is consecrated. The deacons of the archdiocese also

draw near, ordained clerics who proclaim the Word, assist at the altar, and take part in various forms of social outreach. They approach the altar along with families, those called to single life, the consecrated religious, seminarians, and various ministers. This unique Eucharistic celebration most poignantly displays the full and visible array of the heavenly liturgy, in which every celebration of the Eucharist takes part.

The Church makes manifest the presence of Jesus Christ, who brings forth the presence of God, and it is for that reason that she is not only an institution, but also both a mystery and a sacrament. Examples of the “Word Made Flesh” abound in the particular history of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. From the simple Mass celebrated in the cabin of Solomon Juneau in 1835, through the erection of Washington County’s beloved Basilica Shrine to Our Lady at Holy Hill, to the devotional street processions of German, Polish, Italian and many other ethnic Catholics in Milwaukee and Kenosha, and to the Irish, who were crucial in erecting the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in its early days, the abiding presence of Him who is “with us always” has embodied the dynamic interplay of the visible and invisible Church in our midst. That phenomenon is ongoing, and today the Archdiocese of Milwaukee must thank God for the many ways in which new members of Christ’s body, immigrating from Latin America, Africa, Asia and elsewhere, bear testimony to the fact that the Church is young, living, diverse, growing, and blessed with many different sources of cultural patrimony.

Jesus Christ is the perfect example and the ever flowing source of sanctity. The purpose of the sacraments, then, is to sanctify men and women, to build up the Body of Christ, and to give worship to God. Jesus Christ is present, not just as the origin of the sacraments, over 2,000 years ago, but really present and active in them today. “In them Christ himself is at work: it is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies. The Father always hears the prayer of his Son's Church which, in the epiclesis (or calling upon the Spirit) of each sacrament, expresses her faith in the power of the Spirit.”¹⁵

“If Christ is the Sacrament of God, the Church is for humanity the Sacrament of Christ; she represents Him, in the full and ancient meaning of the term; she really makes Him present.”¹⁶ Once again, the visible Church and the invisible Church coalesce to form one mysterious reality.¹⁷ Even though the Holy Spirit animates the Church and, through the Church Christ directly continues to engage humanity, it is not the case that the life of the Trinity is in any way conscribed or limited to either the Church or the sacraments. Christ’s mission and identity — both of

which are at the heart of the Church's ministry — in a sense transcend, even as they nourish, the visible Church.

“The sacrament of charity, the Holy Eucharist is the gift that Jesus Christ makes of himself, thus revealing to us God's infinite love for every man and woman.”¹⁸ An important and well-recognized part of the Eucharist's impact is the experience of ecclesial unity; i.e., keeping the members of the Church united in the bond of charity professing one and the same creed. In this way, the Church came to be seen as the Mystical Body of Christ. The Church's sacramentality joins the visible and the invisible, but it is also made manifest in the local and the universal. That is because, in a sense, the local churches visibly embody the Universal Church.

Reflecting on the insights of theologian Henri de Lubac, whose scholarship offered important assistance to the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, another eminent theologian, Cardinal Avery Dulles, maintained that the Church's sacramental nature was relevant in the modern world. “The divine and the human in the Church can never be dissociated. An excessively spiritual or individualistic view [of the Church] leads to a merely secular and sociological understanding of the Church as an institution. The notion as sacrament on the other hand harmoniously combines both aspects,” the spiritual and the institutional.¹⁹

To identify the Church exclusively with its spiritual, invisible, or individually private manifestations threatens to obscure the necessary connection between the Church and that which is hierarchically or structurally ordered by the Church's apostolic authority. Her institutional characteristics serve and protect the Church's communal integrity.

As we have said, losing sight of the mystery that creates and sustains the life of the Church renders one unable to employ anything more than human standards of measurement or evaluation that are, at best, superficial and incomplete. This is the challenge the Church faces whenever she is in dialogue with those who approach her only as a secular or political institution, without the benefit of Faith. In her humanity, she is subject to corruption. In her transcendence, she is assured of the Holy Spirit's guidance and that the gates of hell shall never prevail against her. But from a purely human point of view, there is little to distinguish her from other charitable or idealistic institutions. When her members stray, when they sin or commit crimes or in any way betray the life, love and grace that they have been offered, they make it more difficult to perceive the Church's spiritual nature and easier to overemphasize her human makeup, which is always imperfect.

Fault lies, first and foremost, with those Catholics who obscure the Church's high calling by their own sinfulness and failure. Today, the phenomenon of, and the inadequate response to, clergy sexual abuse come immediately to mind. We must also be aware of the other distinct ways in which Christians create scandal and mar their baptismal identity: racism, indifference to the poor, inhumane medical experimentation, the high numbers of divorce and invalid marriages among Catholics, the rates of contraception and abortion, participation in human trafficking, and the objectification and unjust treatment of the world's laborers, not to mention morally impermissible forms of discrimination, or the neglect of the globe's orphans, AIDS sufferers, and the hungry. Nonetheless, in the face of the imperfect character of the Church's human constituents, we must insist on proposing a more nuanced understanding of the Church's complex identity. Even in the wake of scandal, and especially in the midst of having to defend religious liberty and freedom of conscience, we cannot allow the Church or the Christian experience to be defined by others or subjected to reductive descriptions.

Christians, for their part, help to reveal the Church's complex and mysterious identity as they respond to what the Second Vatican Council described as the universal call to holiness (LG 39-42). This can be seen whenever they lead lives of charity, justice, and peace, finding individual approaches to sanctifying ordinary life. St. Thomas Aquinas put it this way: "To teach in order to lead others to faith is the task of every preacher and of each believer."²⁰ Whether they be contemporary models or historical examples, the lives of the saints are themselves sacramental in that they more profoundly reveal the Christian mystery, allowing themselves to become ambassadors for Christ who throughout history help to make the inner reality of the Church more clear. Certainly, today such manifestations of Christian ministry are made in individual parishes and most significantly in the Eucharistic celebration, where authentic Christian communion both begins and ends.

The Church as *Communion*

During His ministry, Jesus worked and prayed for the unity of His followers, for the unity of the Church. Today, the Church continues to join Our Lord's prayer, that they all may be one. Among the baptized there is not yet a full realization of that will of Christ. The church's labor, the task of all baptized men and women, is not merely to acknowledge a degree of imperfect communion, but to work for the full and final reconciliation of our Church in faith, sacramental life and apostolic governance.

But the unity, or communion, for which Christ so earnestly strove is not, strictly speaking, a worldly phenomenon. The Church's unity does not come from the world. On the basis of the world's own efforts it is impossible. In fact, as we can all see, human efforts are tainted by original sin and so they often lead to disunion and conflict. Authentic spiritual union — the sort of *communion* — that characterizes the Church of Christ, can only come from the Father, through the Son, sustained by the Holy Spirit. Henri de Lubac, drawing on his knowledge of the early Church Fathers, was convinced “that certain institutional structures remain essential, even though the Church finds its ultimate basis in relationship among human beings with God through Christ in the Holy Spirit.”²¹

Blessed John Paul II frequently drew on the concept of communion as being at the heart of the Church's self-understanding. “The Church is called during her earthly pilgrimage to maintain and promote communion with the Triune God and communion among the faithful.”²²The theological basis for this aspect of the Church's identity lies “in God's own way of being as a communion of persons. . . . Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dwell together in a communion of self-giving love.”²³

The dignity of the human person consists, above all, in being called to communion with God through Jesus Christ, the Universal Redeemer. According to the Father's plan for the salvation of humanity, that goal is to be achieved, not by lonely individuals finding God in isolation, but by integration into a community that takes its origin from Christ and is continually vitalized by the Holy Spirit. In Christ's Church, communion is not mere community. It can neither be fully explained nor understood by merely human modes of analysis. Its bonds are spiritual, originating in the Trinity, finding its most proximate actualization in the Holy Spirit's pouring forth faith, hope and love into the hearts of all the baptized.

We must recognize communion as a gift from God. Ecclesial communion is not merely a matter of harmony or agreement; it is a spiritual reality that is the fruit of God's initiative achieved by virtue of the paschal mystery. Ecclesial communion is not the Church gazing in on herself. “Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other...communion represents both the source and fruit of mission; communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion.”²⁴As the Holy Father emphasized in preparation for the Year of Faith, “faith without charity bears no fruit, while charity without faith would be a sentiment constantly at the mercy of doubt...Faith and charity each require the other, in such a way that each allows the other to set out along its respective path.”²⁵

Ecclesial communion is both vertical and horizontal: the vertical connection signifies the individual Christians' loving relationship with God, and that inspires the horizontal expression of communion, which is the love that abides among the baptized. In a sense, communion involves the visible and invisible, the human and the divine, and as such it is an expression of mystery. It is invisible insofar as it involves, in the first instance, the communion of each human being with the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit. But the Church's invisible communion, which begins with the interior transformation of each individual Christian, is facilitated and sustained by the visible aspects of communion with which the Church has been endowed. The Church's communion is visible in the teaching of the Apostles, in the Sacraments, and in the Church's hierarchical nature. By means of these visible realities, Christ carries out his priestly, prophetic and kingly functions for the salvation of mankind. According to *Lumen gentium* the link between the visible and invisible elements of ecclesial communion constitutes the Church as the Sacrament of Salvation.²⁶

This mystery of ecclesial communion finds its most profound expression in the celebration of the Eucharist. "Communion always and inseparably has both a vertical and a horizontal sense: it is communion with God and communion with our brothers and sisters. Both dimensions mysteriously converge in the gift of the Eucharist."²⁷

"Ecclesial communion, into which each individual is introduced by faith and by Baptism, has its root and center in the Blessed Eucharist. Indeed, Baptism is an incorporation into a body that the risen Lord builds up and keeps alive through the Eucharist, so that this body can truly be called the Body of Christ. The Eucharist is the creative force and source of *communion* among the members of the Church, precisely because it unites each one of them with Christ himself: "Really sharing in the body of the Lord in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with him and with one another. 'Because the bread is one, we, though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread' (1 Cor. 10, 17)."²⁸

Mary, Mother of the Church

In keeping with the Tradition, the Second Vatican Council emphasized the role that Mary, the Mother of Christ, plays in the life of the Church and of each individual Christian (LG 52-59). In her divine motherhood, Mary is intimately united to the Church. In fact, she is a figure, model, or archetype of the Church. And the Church is like a mother, as well, when she accepts God's Word with fidelity and brings forth new and eternal children by way of proclaiming the Word of God and

celebrating the Sacrament of Baptism. In this way, the Church could be said to look to Mary as a model of maternal care.

“Yes” is the one word for which the Blessed Virgin Mary is most acclaimed. She pondered the truth in her heart and she obeyed it, for that is what the truth always elicits: *obedience*, freely given. She may not have known the details of God’s plan or the lengths to which her fidelity would lead, but she handed over everything — her will, her understanding, her imagination, her future, her aspirations — to the God she knew and trusted. This was not an act of passive indifference, but an intrepid leap of faith that demonstrated her freely given abandonment to divine providence. Mary’s example of faith and deference to God’s will would become the prototype for those men and women who would follow Our Lord and build up His Church. Sometimes, in the face of ridicule and even grave danger, they have stood out by living lives of fidelity, moral courage, and an unassailable spirit of joy. Theirs was one of the most effective contributions made to the spread of Christianity and evangelization.

After all, the Church is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and their confession of the Faith. This must be understood in the light of the whole of Revelation, especially the life and work of Christ. Here we can turn to St. John the Evangelist, the patron of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, whose Gospel deeply forms the Church’s self-understanding.

According to tradition, St. John was the last surviving Apostle. St. Jerome tells us, toward the end of St. John’s life, he accepted an invitation from the Ephesian Church to preach and pray with them, and when he arrived he was mobbed by a large eager audience. He was so feeble that he had to be carried into the church. Following a lengthy worship service and an eloquent introduction, attendants lifted John to his feet before a hushed expectant crowd. He was unable to say any thing except, "Little children, love one another." At last, wearied that he always spoke the same words, they asked: "Master, why do you always say this?" "Because," he replied, "it is the Lord's command, and if this only is done, it is enough."²⁹

Our patron, St. John, received Mary into his home as Christ had desired. In much the same way, the Church also takes seriously the example of the Evangelist, opening her arms to the Blessed Virgin and seeing in Christ’s Mother the archetype for the Church. On November 21, 1964, during a speech at the conclusion of the third session of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI stated, "For the glory of the Blessed Virgin and our own consolation, we proclaim the Most Blessed Virgin Mary Mother of the Church, of the whole people of God, faithful and pastors, and

we call her most loving Mother." The Holy Father expressed the hope that this title of Mary, Mother of the Church would "lead Christians to honor Mary even more and to call upon her with still greater confidence."³⁰ That phrase, again, comes out of alert attention to the Church as mystery. It not only reflects the deeply significant correspondence between Christ and His Church; it also reminds us of what St. John immediately perceived when he was entrusted with the Savior's Mother. "Interpreted at times as no more than an expression of Jesus' filial piety towards his Mother whom he entrusts for the future to his beloved disciple, these words go beyond the contingent need to solve a family problem. . . Jesus completes his sacrifice by entrusting Mary to John. The words of the dying Jesus actually show that his first intention was not to entrust his Mother to John, but to entrust the disciple to Mary and to give her a new maternal role."³¹

Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, has not left us alone. Asking us to be receptive, to be open, to abandon our own willfulness in the midst of the mystery, Christ is with us, and He has also gone before us, where, with His Mother, who has been assumed into heaven in both body and soul, we can be confident that He is preparing a place for us in our Father's house. Where He and Mary have traveled, we hope to follow. All of salvation history is oriented toward the single purpose that was perfectly fulfilled in Our Lady: To conform all men and women to the image of her Son, to make humanity Christ-like. Mary shows us the high-point of God's success in his work of "saint-making" and also the summit of humanity's success, demonstrating how high humanity can rise in cooperation with God's grace.

Holiness is one of the four marks of the Church, and in the Blessed Virgin Mary the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle. But the faithful still strive to conquer sin and increase in holiness. So they turn their eyes to Mary; in her the Church is already the "all-holy."

Mary also serves as the ultimate model of humility. Do not let the world define, or distort, the virtue of humility, which is the cornerstone of all virtue and of a sound interior life. Humility is nothing more than an unflinching evaluation of one's self, with all the limitations that the human condition implies. But the virtue of humility may appear to be passé, dismissed as self-contempt or the unreasonable identification of our personal value with our own imperfections. On the contrary, humility, perhaps the single most significant virtue associated with the Mother of God, involves admitting the truth about ourselves. Fully aware of our weakness and sin, God has chosen us, just as we are, and He graciously offers to shower us with his mercy and love.

We do not know everything and we cannot do everything perfectly. Such an admission is a prerequisite for growth and understanding and virtue, for we are determined to seek something only if we know and can admit that we do not have it. One's forthright recognition of one's own limitations implies knowledge of the ideals of wisdom and goodness and one's capacity to grow in them. Only the humble can learn, and only those who acknowledge the mystery, The Truth, can achieve proper humility. Embracing the mystery of the Church in humility, we share in the love of Christ and strive to love one another.

Epilogue

As the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, the Catholic Church of southeastern Wisconsin, it is our challenge to live the truth professed by Simon Peter that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. We can only do so in humility, realizing our human limitations, confident in the fact that with God all things are possible. There is much consolation to be found in the brief remarks made by Pope Benedict XVI upon becoming Pope, when he told the throng assembled in St. Peter's Square that he took comfort in the fact that God knows well how to work with broken tools.

Lumen gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, gave the Second Vatican Council a theological foundation for understanding the Church. This allowed a work such as *Gaudium et spes* to apply pertinent theological insights to the modern world, paying careful attention to "the signs of the times," assessing all in relation to the Gospel. As we contemplate the possibility of an Archdiocesan Synod, it is our hope that this Pastoral Letter will serve as a theological lens through which the life and ministries of the Archdiocese will be viewed. We will do so understanding that the Church is rooted in a mystery that is leading us to lives of personal holiness, mindful that the Church could not carry on or fulfill her obligations without acknowledging and embracing the mystery that is at the heart of her existence.

In my role as Archbishop of Milwaukee, I have come to understand the rich, faith-filled tradition of our clergy, religious, ministers, and lay faithful. We have been blessed by believers who sacrificed their lives and resources in order to build up the Church and proclaim their confidence in Jesus Christ. Their motivation was simply the love of God. It is this love which today calls us to respond. When I was named the eleventh Archbishop of Milwaukee I claimed three priorities for the direction of our Archdiocese: Catholic Identity, Evangelization, and Stewardship.

Catholic identity is who we are; this is manifested in both an external and internal manner. This means living in accord with the teachings of the Church and deepening our interior lives. Evangelization is what we do. Every Catholic is responsible to spread the Faith given one's station in life. We are called to proclaim Christ to those who do not know Him or His Church. We are also called to awaken the Faith in the lives of those for whom it has become dormant, encouraging them to continue the path of on-going conversion of heart. Stewardship is how we do it, understanding that all we possess has been received as a gift from God, which is to be shared in order to further encounter divine mercy and love.

Now, as we move forward as an Archdiocese we entrust ourselves to Mary, Mother of the Church and we draw upon her holiness and fidelity as a model for our discipleship. We receive Mary, our Mother, as did our patron, St. John the Evangelist, welcoming her into our homes and hearts, hoping to fulfill the command of her Son to "love one another."

Given on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, on the 12th anniversary of my Episcopal Ordination,

The Most Reverend Jerome E. ListECKi
Archbishop of Milwaukee

Notes

- ¹ Rosica, Thomas. "Let Us Not Forget that Peter Holds the Keys," *Zenit* (August 16, 2011).
- ² Benedict XVI, Homily, Opening the Year of Faith, (Vatican City, October 11, 2012).
- ³ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. (San Subiaco, April 1, 2005).
- ⁴ "The dictatorship of relativism is confronting the world. It does not recognize anything as absolute and leaves as the ultimate measure only the measure of each one and his desires." Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Homily, Mass *Pro Eligendo Pontifice*, (Vatican City, April 18, 2005).
- ⁵ Benedict XVI, Homily, Apostolic Journey to the United Kingdom, (Glasgow, September 16, 2010).
- ⁶ *Catechesis XVIII*.
- ⁷ Benedict XVI, Homily, Apostolic Journey to the United States of America and Visit to the United Nations Headquarters, (New York, NY, April 19, 2008).
- ⁸ CCC, n.770.
- ⁹ Benedict XVI. Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*. (Rome, October 11, 2011) (*PF*), n. 7.
- ¹⁰ Blessed John Paul II. Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, (Rome, April 17, 2003), n. 26.
- ¹¹ Second Vatican Council. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, on the Church (November 21, 1964) (*LG*), n. 8.
- ¹² CCC, n. 796.
- ¹³ Ephesians 5:32.
- ¹⁴ CCC, n. 1131.
- ¹⁵ CCC, n. 1127.
- ¹⁶ De Lubac, Henri. *Catholicism* (London: Burns and Oates, 1950) 29.
- ¹⁷ *LG*, n.8.
- ¹⁸ Benedict XVI. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, (Rome, February 22, 2007), n. 1.
- ¹⁹ Dulles, Avery. *Models of the Church: Expanded Edition*.(New York: Doubleday, 1987) 64.
- ²⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. III,71,4 ad 3.
- ²¹ Doyle, D. "Henri De Lubac and the Roots of Communion Ecclesiology." *Theological Studies* (1999), p. 211.
- ²² Blessed John Paul II. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 34.
- ²³ Manion, G. *The Vision of John Paul II: Assessing His Thought and Influence*. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008) 64.
- ²⁴ Blessed John Paul II. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, (Rome, December 30, 1988), n. 32.
- ²⁵ *PF*, n. 14
- ²⁶ *LG*, n. 28.
- ²⁷ Benedict XVI. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 76.
- ²⁸ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Letter to the Bishops on some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion*, (Rome, May 28, 1992), n. 5.Citing *LG* n. 7.
- ²⁹ St. Jerome. *Commentary on Galatians*, 6.
- ³⁰ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 56 (1965) 1015.
- ³¹ Blessed John Paul II. *L'Osservatore Romano* (30 April 1997) 11.

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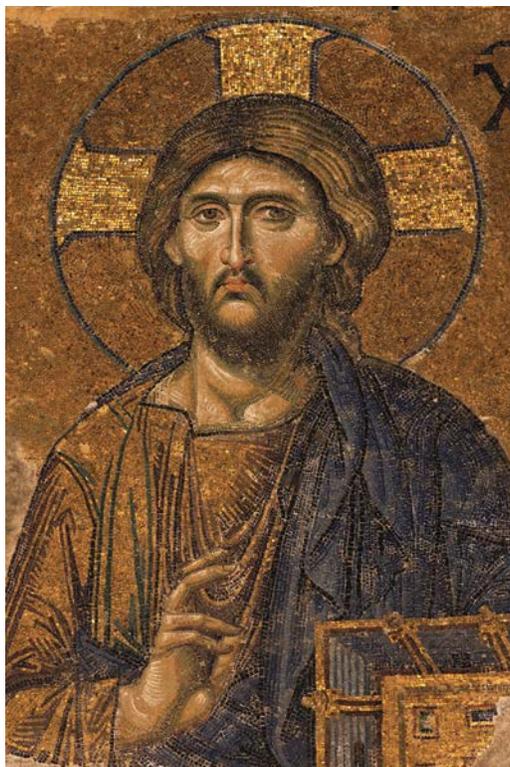
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Cover of the Pastoral Letter – Christ Pantocrator Icon

The cover uses the Christ Pantocrator Icon. The word Pantocrator is Greek, meaning "Ruler of All." The image expresses the central reality of the Christian faith; the Divine Majesty of the creator and ruler of the entire world, made flesh and therefore visible to us in the person of Christ Jesus our redeemer.

This is the 'icon of icons'. In this image of Christ Pantocrator, Jesus is presented in a half-length pose, looking directly at the viewer, with his left hand holding the Sacred Word and his right hand raised in blessing. The holding of Scripture represents that Christ the Word holds the Word. His gesture of blessing speaks of His being two natures yet one Person, and that the Trinity, though three, is one.

(Information adapted from The Printery House of Conception Abbey website.)