

BILL HUEBSCH

PROMISE  
— AND —  
HOPE

PASTORAL THEOLOGY  
IN THE AGE OF MERCY

Discerning *and* Becoming  
*a Parish of Accompaniment*

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## INTRODUCTION

# Promise and Hope in Pastoral Theology

With the inspiration of St. John XXIII and the guiding hand of St. Paul VI, the Church concluded a pastoral and ecumenical council in 1965. Before the Council even ended, Church leaders began in earnest to implement reforms in order to preach the gospel more effectively in the modern world. The clear calls to *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement* sounded at the Second Vatican Council are continuing to resound in the Church. St. John Paul II's consistent invitation to us to center on Christ and give witness to the self-giving love that he demonstrated on the cross continues to guide us. And Pope

Emeritus Benedict XVI has added strength to that by urging us to cling to the profound and absolute truth of God's love for us, even in an age where absolutes are shunned and people are left to fend for themselves in their search for meaning.

In the second decade of the millennium, Pope Francis awakened within the Church the call to renewal so that, as we move into the third decade, the promise and hope of a renewed pastoral theology stirs the people of God. Building on the work of the Council and post-conciliar developments, the Church has begun to formulate and enact this renewed theology. This pastoral theology is not derived; indeed, it is taking its place as a branch of theology unto itself, not merely the application of doctrine, moral theology, or canon law. It is built on theological principles flowing from the style and approach of Christ and reflecting the continuous tradition of the Church. These principles have provided points of orientation for the pastoral ministry of the Church since the earliest years, even if, for certain periods of our history, we were temporarily disoriented. One of the driving forces behind this theology today is the call of *The Church in the Modern World*, 4, to "scrutinize the signs of the times," both an ecclesial and a Scriptural mandate. This prepares pastoral theology to respond effectively and faithfully to people in the modern world.

Thus, flowing directly from Scripture and the pastoral ministry of the Lord, in continuity with the Church's long history and tradition, and in touch with the needs of modern women and men in today's world, this renewed pastoral theology presents itself. Pope Francis' first apostolic exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel* (2014), provides insights, dreams, and renewed mission for this theology. Embraced and warmly re-

ceived by bishops' conferences, the academy, and lay men and women around the world, that exhortation takes its place in the ordinary magisterium of the Church. Pope Francis continued to build on that initial statement with *The Joy of Love* (2016) and *On the Call to Holiness in Today's World* (2018). Drawing on those apostolic exhortations along with the gospels, the Fathers, the continuous teaching of the Church, the work of the Second Vatican Council, and other sources, the current renewal in pastoral theology offers modern men and women the opportunity to be attentive to their consciences and discern what God may be asking of them in their particular, concrete situations.

Pastoral theology is always concerned with persons and their real experiences, and it is shaped by a person, Jesus Christ. Hence, in pastoral theology and ministry, there are points of orientation but no fixed propositions; there are guidelines for operating the parish as a field hospital but no strict rules; there is a methodology for enacting accompaniment, but the only fixed outcomes are its goals: to heal people and restore their hope, to invite and welcome people into the Church in Jesus' name, and to help people become adult Christians of mature faith.

This book is composed of six parts. In the sections that follow, we will treat in some depth each element that comprises pastoral theology and ministry.

In Part One, we will consider seven points of orientation that guide and direct pastoral theology. In short, all pastoral ministry is oriented around Jesus. This will set the stage for our study because, again, pastoral theology is person-centered. The pastoral ministry of Jesus sets us on course for understanding how pastoral ministry should unfold among the people

of God today. That ministry is enacted by ministers who are keenly aware of the endless divine mercy that God has offered to them. Pastoral ministry, in short, is enacted by sinners.

In Part Two, we will consider a dozen guidelines for a parish ministry of accompaniment. To begin this more practical section, we will study the theology of availability as understood through the lens of the gospels. We will then turn to the theological idea of mercy as it was practiced by Jesus and taught by the Church throughout its history. In particular, we will study mercy itself as a pastoral guide, how mitigating circumstances in people's lives lead us to treat them with mercy, the principle of putting people ahead of law, and the law of gradualism. We will then turn to practical guidelines for enacting pastoral ministry, including accompaniment and its companion, the art of sacred inquiry. We will consider how the power of darkness can be addressed, the primacy of conscience in pastoral theology, and how we answer the call to holiness.

With those factors in mind, we turn our attention in Part Three to ask about the people who are seeking to be accompanied. We will consider both the "regulars" and the "irregulars" in terms of the status of their primary household relationships. Afterward, we will consider how people discern what God is asking of them in other areas of their lives, apart from those primary household relationships. In this second group, we will consider those seeking help, those who are present but silent, those who are absent, those who are morally self-assured, and those who are religiously self-assured about their spiritual lives.

The primary method for accompaniment is theological reflection, which is our next area of study in Part Four. Theological reflection is proposed as the method for reach-

ing discernment in accompaniment. We will consider what we call “the sources of wisdom,” which inform the theological reflection of both the accompanist and the seeker. These sources include Scripture and Church teaching—known together as our Tradition—along with careful scrutiny of the signs of the times. We will survey the various methods for theological reflection put forth over the past several decades before describing the blended method I propose here for use in the enactment of accompaniment. And, since all of this theological reflection and accompaniment activity leads into discernment where decisions are reached, we will consider how we recognize consolation and desolation as factors in discernment well done.

After this, we will change gears in Part Five to study the application of accompaniment in the real world of parish ministry. We will consider *how* people might bring their situations in life to an accompanist and also *what* the accompanist does with that: applying the material garnered from those sources of wisdom: Scripture, Church teaching, and the signs of the times. The goal is to help seekers interpret their experiences based on a carefully honed hermeneutic or “sacred inquiry.”

In Part Six, we will conclude our study by considering what it means to put pastoral theology into practice on the parish level. How is it enacted in real parish settings? How does it affect how we celebrate the liturgy, write the homily, celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation, provide faith formation, pastoral care, and ministry to the dying? Here we will also study how a parish prepares for the ministry of accompaniment and trains people to be ready to provide it.

PART ONE

# Points of Orientation for Pastoral Theology



ENCOUNTER WITH THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST

SINNERS LEADING OTHER SINNERS

A PERSONALIST THEOLOGY

LITURGY AS THE SOURCE AND SUMMIT

THE PASCHAL MYSTERY: SELF-GIVING LOVE

GOD IS STILL SPEAKING

GRACE IS SUFFICIENT

## 1. ENCOUNTER WITH THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST

*Our first point of orientation leads to an encounter. Pastoral theology turns and pivots on the presence and grace of Jesus Christ in all we teach and do.*

All pastoral theology flows from the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. He is the primordial pastor, the exemplar of accompaniment, and therefore the model for how we envision and articulate pastoral theology. Jesus is not only the model but also the Lord, and we in pastoral theology are invited to give our hearts to him. We are called to act like Jesus when we discuss pastoral theology or enact pastoral ministry on his behalf.

### *The Kerygma: The core message*

The core of our faith is believing that God loves us without end, even when we act selfishly and allow darkness into our lives. In those times of darkness, it is Jesus who guides us back to streams of living water. He forgives our sins and saves us. He is the one, in short, who time and again brings life out of death for us. Jesus invites us to learn the art of self-giving love, to die to ourselves as we love others. In each act of pastoral ministry—whether the homily, a religious ed class, a visit to the sick, a moment of accompaniment, or the sacrament of reconciliation—this good news must be evident to all.

We orient all we do around this reality. In Christ, love is stronger than hate. The light has come into the world, and the darkness cannot overcome it. As we read in *The Joy of the Gospel*, 164: “On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: ‘Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.’”

In *The Joy of the Gospel*, 3, we receive this invitation:

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her...The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms....

Let me say this once more: God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy. Christ, who told us to forgive one another “seventy times seven” (Mt 18:22) has given us his example: he has forgiven us seventy times seven. Time and time again, he bears us on his shoulders.

The word “kerygma” is not a common term. It comes to us from Greek and describes what you just read: the core message of our faith, the essential good news that we tell people. Jesus walks with each of us personally in our own lives. He speaks in the depths of our hearts to each of us. It is our personal sins and selfishness that he forgives. He sends the Spirit into each of our lives, giving each of us grace to respond to his offer of love. Only by this grace is such love possible.

This is not something new in our day and age. It echoes the gospels and what the authors of the pastoral letters had to say. The Fathers of the Church taught about the kerygma in this way, as did St. Gregory the Great, the Second Vatican Council, popes, lay leaders, conferences of bishops, the *Catechism*, the

*General Directory for Catechesis*, and a host of other church statements and messages from the past two thousand years.

In pastoral ministry, it is Jesus who acts through the ministry of the Church. He and he alone is the Good Shepherd. All pastoral theology flows from the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Therefore, when we enact pastoral ministry, we do so under the power of grace with Jesus acting through us. He is the power or energy that holds everything together (Colossians 1:15–19).

Our faith is not, first and foremost, in the Church itself. The Church cannot save us. It does not give itself to us in grace. It is an important means and occasion of grace for everyone, but in and of itself, the Church is only a means. It is Jesus Christ in whom we believe and around whom we orient our faith. In an important essay titled “Signposts towards a Pastoral Theology,”<sup>1</sup> Thomas Groome and Robert Imbelli survey the current renewal in pastoral theology. They quote Gustavo Gutiérrez who had declared with splendid simplicity, “I believe in Jesus Christ, not in the theology of liberation.”<sup>2</sup>

## **2. SINNERS LEADING OTHER SINNERS TO MERCY**

*Our second point of orientation in pastoral theology is that we who enact pastoral ministry are forgiven and loved unconditionally by Jesus. Since we are forgiven, in whose name would we ever withhold mercy from someone else?*

We who study and enact pastoral theology are similar to those who come seeking pastoral care from us. Our identity as Christians is oriented around how the self-giving love of Jesus on the cross sets us free. When asked about his own

identity,<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis said it quite simply and profoundly: “I am a sinner. This the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner.” Stephen Bullivant reported on this for *America Magazine*:<sup>4</sup>

Our pope’s admissions and gestures of humility have, after all, become one of his trademarks....Francis’ humility, however, is not like Uriah Heep’s: a purely formal show of being “ever so ’umble.” Instead, it expresses a central conviction of the Christian faith. As we now know, Cardinal Bergoglio accepted his election to the papacy with the words: “I am a sinner, but I trust in the infinite mercy and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Staying with this thought for a moment, it is essential for every person studying pastoral theology or enacting pastoral ministry to remember his or her own sins. Try to recall your own sins of the past; think back over the decades to some of the really rotten things you’ve done, the people you’ve hurt, the selfishness of your own life. Whenever we recall our sins like this, we remember that we have received immense, immeasurable, undeserved, and complete mercy. Remember Psalm 51, which we often pray in our liturgies. Here are the first three verses (*italics mine*):

Have mercy on me, O God,  
    according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
    blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
    and cleanse me from my sin.

*For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.*

Having our own sins ever before us, as Pope Francis seems to have, prepares us to be pastoral theologians and ministers. It shifts us away from being self-referential. It prevents us from leaping to judge others, from analyzing and classifying them. If we are among the sinners to be saved, we aren't likely to pigeonhole anyone else.

In the story of the woman caught in adultery in John 8, Jesus teaches us about this orientation to our own sinfulness. Here is the text:

Early in the morning [Jesus] came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now, what do you say?" They said this to test him so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

The guideline for pastoral theology embedded in this story is almost too obvious, yet it is one that it is good for us to recall frequently. Jesus has met this woman who, according to the

law, was indeed liable for stoning. But Jesus, consistent with all of his ministry, looked into her heart and found there a deep desire, hidden from all but God. He shifted the ground, which leads to our guideline here. He shifted from seeing “a sinner and her encounter with the law” to seeing “a sinner in an encounter with her Lord, that is, with the grace of salvation.” He employed forgiveness, mercy, and freedom in his ministry with her.

Section one of the apostolic letter *Mercy and Misery*,<sup>5</sup> in commenting on this pericope, put it this way: “The misery of sin was clothed with the mercy of love. Jesus’ only judgment is one filled with mercy and compassion for the condition of this sinner.” The gospel text continues:

And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on, do not sin again.”

We can see at work here the model of pastoral ministry on which we base what we teach today. Jesus took on the care of this woman as a shepherd would a lost lamb. The encounter with her was personal, unlike the crowd of church insiders who stood ready to stone her. He didn’t impose a legal solution on her; he enacted a pastoral solution in her life. His hermeneutic was one of mercy and accompaniment: he asked the key question that set her free. His clear goal was

to save her, to integrate her into the community—hence, his call that she should amend her life. He accompanied her with tenderness and had reverence for the action of God in her life. By looking into her heart and calling forth her goodness, Jesus offered this woman a pathway out of sin. He sought and summoned her to new life, expressed in his own non-judgmental, loving posture toward her. “Neither do I condemn you,” he said.

What strikes me in this story is the amount of silence the storyteller includes. Jesus twice bent down, writing on the ground silently. The two lengthy periods of silence were purposeful on Jesus’ part.<sup>6</sup> I suspect that he wanted to allow the voice of God to echo in the depths of both this woman and her accusers. In that silence, the forgiveness and mercy of God became the resounding message.

This story is reminiscent of other stories from Jesus’ life and ministry. One such story is about the woman in Luke 7 who washed Jesus’ feet and anointed them with oil. Jesus’ answer to the scandalized religious leaders who worried about the presence in the room of this woman, a sinner, was to remind them that this woman was forgiven (verse 47). This is the good news that pastoral theologians always want to announce. It is the kerygma that Pope Francis reminds us to have on our lips first and foremost in every moment of Church life (*The Joy of the Gospel*, 165). We should not judge ourselves any less harshly than we do anyone else. We who are forgiven ourselves no longer hold others’ sins against them. Let none of us throw that first stone. We are, after all, sinners leading other sinners to recognize God’s forgiveness.

### **3. PERSONALIST THEOLOGY**

*Our third point of orientation in pastoral theology is personalist.*

*The encounter with Jesus is always a person-to-person experience.*

Pastoral theology is personalist, flowing from our encounter with the person of Christ. God speaks to each of us, calls each of us to holiness, and attends to each of our sorrows, joys, and hopes. Therefore, the enactment of pastoral theology in a real ministry setting will succeed in a personalist, one-on-one setting.

In Christian personalism, we believe that we should always treat persons with respect and love. We regard the conscience of each person as a privileged meeting place between God and each human. Each person is on a unique journey of faith. For this reason, we do not apply the law of the Church to everyone equally, for example, but we consider each case in light of the individual's conscience.

"I know my own and mine know me" (John 10:14), Jesus reminds us. It was this personalist style of Jesus' ministry that captivated the people of his day. They were entranced by it. The image of the shepherd is a very personal one. As Jesus taught, a good shepherd knows each sheep, each lamb—he recognizes the sound of each one's voice and knows each one's face. Jesus conducted his ministry with this same style and approach. Jesus' ministry was personal, immediate, and intimate. He was radically present to each person who came to him. They encountered the person of Jesus Christ, and he encountered them. It was always person-to-person. He did not shield himself or create a distance between himself and the person seeking his help, nor did he allow law or custom to stand in the way.

Examples of Jesus' personalist style abound. It's difficult to find an example of his ministry that doesn't follow this guideline. In Mark 1, for example, the earliest account of his ministry, he called his disciples one by one. He lifted up Simon's mother-in-law by taking her hand in 1:31, and he responded to a leper in 1:40 also by touching him personally. In Mark 2, he spoke directly and personally to the paralytic who had been lowered through the roof, spoke to Levi one-on-one and had dinner in his house, and claimed the Sabbath as a day for people, not for the law.

He acted in the name of God to offer peace, healing, and comfort. He touched each one, spoke to each one, offered himself to each one. The task of the minister is to enter into the same kind of person-to-person relationship. When people come to us for pastoral help, we do not want them to merely encounter "the Church" as an institution. Instead, we want them to encounter "a person of God" or a member of the people of God. We want them to encounter a real, living, breathing pastoral minister. We who enact pastoral theology now stand in place of Jesus for those seeking our help, and it is our task to help people recognize God's presence and hear God's voice, not to replace God's voice with our own.

All pastoral ministry orients itself around this point. Even when we group people together in the parish as we provide formation, worship, or pastoral care, we must find ways to provide each member of the parish with a personal encounter with us, leading to the encounter with Christ.

#### 4. LITURGY IS THE SOURCE AND SUMMIT

*This is our fourth point of orientation. Pastoral theology also turns and pivots on the gathering for, and celebrating of, the Eucharist.*

*Without that, we are nothing.*

Our faith is *personal*, but that does not make it private. The way to the heart of the Lord is rarely traveled alone. We are a people of God first and foremost, a family or a community. The heart and soul of our faith journey is the liturgy, where we cannot act alone but must act in concert with our sisters and brothers. The liturgy is a fountain from which flows all we do in pastoral theology and in our Christian lives. It's also the endpoint or goal of what we do. Everything leads us time and again back to the table of the Lord.

This is so vital and important to us that we orient all pastoral theology around it. If you closed down all the parish schools and laid off the staff, if you tore down our buildings and burned all our sacred books, if you carted all Christians off to prison and forbade any talk of faith, we would still be Christian as long as we had the liturgy. But if the schools were full to the doors, if we built shining cathedrals and printed our sacred texts in gold ink, if Christianity became the legal religion of the empire but you took away the liturgy, we would no longer be the family of Christ. The Mass is that important to us. It creates us as the body of Christ. It is the moment when Christ stands among us and is present in the word, the ministry of the Church, the people who gather, and the bread and wine. It's the source and summit of our lives (*The Constitution on the Liturgy*, 10). For this reason, all the faithful are called to full, active, and conscious participation in the liturgy each week (*Liturgy*, 11).

*The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* from Vatican II is a powerhouse of a document. It can be argued that no reform enacted at Vatican II went further to enhance pastoral theology than to have called for “the full, active, and conscious participation of all the faithful” in the Mass (article 11). The overall impact of simplifying the rites and making them more edifying, prayed by the faithful who are to be well disposed, know what they’re doing, and taking part (article 14), creates a Church filled with active people ready to roll up their sleeves and get to work in pastoral ministry as well. This Constitution and the one on the Church, more than the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, shifted the ground on which lay pastoral ministry is defined.

Furthermore, everything in life—our sins as well as our success in faith—comes with us to the liturgy. At the offertory, we place on the altar our own very selves. And everything in life also comes home with us from Mass. How we live with our family and neighbors, how we raise our children, how we conduct the affairs of our business, how we vote and work for justice are all shaped in the liturgy. Just as the Church would cease to be without it, so we Christians also step away from our source and identity when we step away—or are pushed away—from the liturgy. For this reason, who is welcome at liturgy, who is invited to the table, and who plays what roles: these are all very important questions to pastoral theology. As we read in footnote 351 in *The Joy of Love* and in article 47 of *The Joy of the Gospel*:

I would also point out that the Eucharist “is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.”

## 5. THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

*The fifth point of orientation in pastoral theology is that we are each called to live and die as Jesus did. We're called to embrace the Paschal Mystery.*

In *The Constitution on the Liturgy* cited just above, the theology of pastoral ministry is described well in article 6, where it says this (inclusive language mine):

By baptism [we] are plunged into the Paschal Mystery of Christ: [we] die with Him, are buried with Him, and rise with Him; [we] receive the spirit of adoption as [children] “in which we cry: Abba, Father”  
(Romans 8:15a).

The Constitution here cites the Letter to the Romans, which goes on in 15b-17 to describe how being plunged into the Paschal Mystery prepares us for life in Christ:

When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Pastoral theology is oriented around this marvelous and incredible reality—that God is like a parent to us, that we are God’s own children, that we are even more than that because we are *heirs with Christ* of all that God gives us. Pastoral theology often comes into view in people’s lives when they are suffering: bereavement, illness, impending death, loss of love, divorce, alienation, self-awareness, and decisions—all expe-

periences and situations in life that demand our attention. At those times, we have a choice: we can suffer without meaning and lose hope, or we can recognize a call to holiness embedded within the suffering and respond with love.

Pastoral ministry is oriented around helping people hear the divine call embedded in everyday experiences and situations, and that call is nothing less than a call to the same self-giving love that Jesus demonstrated on the cross. In the beautiful words of *Now We Remain*<sup>7</sup> by David Haas,

We hold the death of the Lord deep in our hearts.

Living, now we remain with Jesus, the Christ.

## **6. GOD IS STILL SPEAKING**

*Our sixth point of orientation is the reality that God stands with us. All that God wishes to reveal to us is fully contained in the life and teaching of Jesus, but what the gospel demands of us is still being revealed day in and day out.*

Pastoral theology takes its lead from the fact that God is still speaking to us. It is amazing and remarkable, but God—yes, the creator of the world, Jesus the Lord, and the Holy Spirit—is communicating God’s self to each of us and, through discernment, we can hear the voice of God in our lives. Every single day. We orient all pastoral theology and accompaniment around this remarkable reality as we guide people to hear God speaking in their consciences. The question on our minds is always this one: “What is God asking of this person in this particular, concrete situation in his or her life?”

Above all else, the *Constitution on Divine Revelation* restored an important sense of balance to the Church’s under-

standing of how God speaks to us. Faith would no longer be seen as mere intellectual assent to a list of doctrines and practices but as a response to God's self-communication that involves the whole human person. Faith is a covenant that leads to discipleship and Christian living. And this leads to the final point of orientation for pastoral theology, one that is closely related to this one.

### 7. GRACE

*Our seventh point of orientation is the force of grace. Grace is offered without cost to each person, along with the freedom to accept or reject it. Grace empowers or guides us to be all that we're created, forgiven, saved, and loved to become.*

The first line of the first chapter of the *Constitution on Divine Revelation* provides us with a dramatic clue about how God speaks to us. God communicates God's own self to us, the document says. In Catholic theology, we call God's self-communication by a name: grace. The entire chapter is devoted to this great truth, summed up in this phrase from article 6, "God chose to show forth and communicate Himself." Here is how chapter 1 opens, in part (italics and inclusive language mine):

In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, [we] might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come *to share in the divine nature*. Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God out of the abundance of His love *speaks to [us] as friends* and lives among [us].

Isn't that simply remarkable and almost unbelievable? Theologians have constructed high levels of doctrine and dogma to explain this great mystery. It's easier to believe in a doctrine sometimes than to believe that God is communicating or giving God's own very self to each of us. "What I came to see during the Second Vatican Council," the late Bishop Raymond Lucker<sup>8</sup> once said, "is that revelation involved God's self-communication to us. God communicated the inner mysteries of God to us. And we can never...adequately explain or express the revelation of God."

This powerful experience of God offered to every human being from the moment of conception, this mystery of divine presence, is the basis of all revelation. It is free; the life and death and resurrection of Christ give witness to this. In Jesus, all that God wishes to reveal to us is whole and complete. We await no further word. But as I said above, the truth of what God expects of us is being revealed to us every day in our conscience through listening prayer.

Saint John XXIII's own personal life reflected the conviction that pastoral ministry speaks to all men and women. One day,<sup>9</sup> in speaking with a close confidant, he expressed his grief that so many women and men of good will thought that the Church rejected and condemned them. "But I must be like Christ," he said, referring to the crucifix on this desk. "I open wide my arms to embrace them. I love them, and I am their father. I am always ready to welcome them." Then turning to his guest, he said, "All that the Gospel requires of us has not yet been understood."

**TO SUM THIS UP**

These seven points of orientation in pastoral theology form the foundation of Christian life and the platform on which we build all our pastoral practices. We (1) orient around the person of Jesus Christ (2) who has forgiven us our many sins and (3) who addresses each one of us personally by name. (4) We meet Jesus in the liturgy of the Church where he stands among us and (5) through which we receive the grace we need to enter into the death of the Lord and so to meet him face to face. (6) God is still speaking to each of us and, (7) through grace, we can discern God's voice in the depths of our souls.

What a treasure this is for us! The light of Christ remains with us, and we remain with Jesus. Pastoral theology is oriented around this and nothing else. As we read in 2 Corinthians 4:7–10:

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.