

The Way, the Truth and the Life

A guide to living the Resurrection

by Father Michael E. Mas, C.R.

I. THE RESURRECTIONISTS

While serving the People of God throughout North America, I've had the opportunity to meet many different families. The moments of introduction have been quite similar. The people will mention their career or school, and sometimes, their hometown. If the name sounds familiar, I'll ask if they're related to so-and-so; usually, they'll ask if I know a priest with whom they have a special relationship. If I'm able to join the family at their home, the introductions go further. The family photo album comes out, and they take me on an anecdotal tour of their family's history: how Mom and Dad first met; the embarrassment at the wedding banquet when Uncle Harry had too much to drink and led everybody in the pledge of allegiance; the time little David got lost at the shopping mall and wouldn't give his name until he was bribed with three ice cream cones.

That's just how I'd introduce my religious family, the Congregation of the Resurrection—or Resurrectionists, for short. We're a small religious community of priests and brothers who live and work throughout the world. When we introduce ourselves to people, they often mistake us for a larger and older order, the Redemptorists. In fact, a familiar quote we often hear, "We just love the Mother of Perpetual Help," refers to a popular Redemptorists' devotion to Mary. Chances are, though, you haven't heard of us unless you've attended a "CR" parish or school. Our community began in Europe in the tumultuous aftermath of Napoleon's military conquests. Throngs migrated across the continent, settling in large metropolitan areas like Paris, France, where the Congregation of the Resurrection was born. Our "family photo" album features three men who were instrumental in the founding and flourishing of the community: Bogdan Janski, a Polish economist, who had traveled to western Europe to study developing socialist systems; Peter Semenenko, a Belorussian who migrated west in search of a playboy's life; and Jerome Kajsiewicz, a Lithuanian soldier who had fled for his life after participating in an unsuccessful uprising against aristocratic rule. These three found themselves in a large Polish and Slavic enclave in Paris; with their colleagues, they found that being separated from their "roots" leads quickly to the break-down of traditional moral and religious values.

After experiencing a dramatic personal conversion, Janski became a kind of "apostle" to the immigrants. He believed that the experience of religious conversion and a strong faith community are essential for living the Christian commitment in the face of personal weakness, sin, and the allurements of an increasingly godless society. A magnetic charismatic personality, he attracted several followers, including Peter and Jerome. On Ash Wednesday, February 17, 1836, a group of eight young men decided to move into Janski 's house to live a common life, and the new community was born. In 1837, Semenenko and Kajsiewicz were sent to Rome to study for the priesthood. Janski died prematurely at 33 in 1840 but the community survived around Peter and Jerome. They were ordained to the priesthood and professed religious vows in the Roman catacombs on Easter morning, 1842 . In view of the feast of the day, they called themselves Resurrectionists, dedicated to the resurrection of individuals and society. Beyond their service as leaders of the new community, they distinguished themselves in service to the Church: Jerome as a dynamic preacher and writer, Peter as a spiritual director and consultant to the Vatican.

As the community grew, it rapidly expanded its services to immigrant communities throughout the world. Parish work and education became the pivotal apostolic ministries of the congregation. Parishes, because they could serve as apostolic communities working for the resurrection of society, and schools, because a strong Christian community would need well-educated lay teachers. This dual focus continues today. Today, Resurrectionists can be found in Australia, Austria, Bermuda, Belarus, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Germany, Israel, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Tanzania, Ukraine, and the United States. In the U.S. the Congregation serves in some 20 parishes, in seven states: Alabama, California, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Michigan and Missouri. Gordon Tech High School in Chicago, Resurrection Catholic Missions in Montgomery, Alabama, and various college and hospital chaplaincies round out the apostolic works of the Congregation in America. The American house of formation has been located on the St . Louis University campus since 1918, while the headquarters of American Resurrectionists is in Chicago.

Traveling through the photo album and family history helps me get acquainted with people I meet. To really know them, however, I have to share with them on a deeper level, to find out "what makes them tick." To really get to know us Resurrectionists, you have to get to know what makes us tick, our spirit - our charism. I can't wait to tell you about our charism.

II. THE RESURRECTION CHARISM

In the first part, I introduced the religious family which I have been a part of since 1965—the Congregation of the Resurrection, or Resurrectionists. I told you a little bit about our founding, our history, and our spread throughout the world.

As an American I can learn about France: the Emperor Charlemagne, the building of Gothic cathedrals, the dynasty of Bourbon Kings, the Revolution. I can see pictures of the Eiffel Tower, General Charles DeGaulle, the Arc de Triomphe, and be stirred by the moving national anthem, the Marseillaise. I can even tour the country, as I did in 1979 . Despite all this, I don't really know what it's like to be French. I don't understand the fascination with elegant cooking and that delicious crusty bread, the sometimes bitter and cynical anticlericalism, the passionate nationalism sometimes interpreted as arrogance. The same is true when dealing with a religious community. Having heard about our origin, history, and work, you know a little about us . But you really don't know what "makes us tick." The best way for you to get to know our religious community— other than suggesting you work, pray, study, and play with us—is to share some reflections on our "charism." You see, we religious brothers, priests, and sisters in the Catholic Church believe that God has blessed each religious family with a special charism—a spiritual gift—which is meant to be shared with all Christians. Each community is called to center its life around the gift, serving as a "billboard" that calls attention to the gift. For example, the Franciscans, who trace their traditions to that beloved medieval figure, Francis of Assisi, have been given the charism of poverty. By living a simple life free of material attachments, Franciscans remind us of the danger of becoming enslaved to our possessions, and the invitation received from God to find joy in the simple gift of life itself.

Dominicans, the Order of Preachers founded by Dominic, have been entrusted with the charism of preaching, reminding us in the Church of the invitation to become articulate in sharing our faith experience. Jesuits, the Society of Jesus founded by Ignatius of Loyola, have focused their lives around the charism of obedience, calling us to the need for discernment of the will of God in our life experiences. Religious communities were challenged by the bishops of the Second Vatican Council to search through prayer for the unique charism God had entrusted to them. In 1981, at a solemn international meeting (called a General Chapter), Resurrectionist delegates articulated the results of our prayerful search. We call this document our "Charism Statement." Here's what they had to say:

We desire to be faithful to the grace received by our founders, a grace we now share by our call to the Congregation of the Resurrection. We recognize certain truths to be especially important for our life and work

as Resurrectionists because they give expression to this grace and call.

We believe that God's love for us is merciful and unending. We have not earned his love. We are nothing, have nothing, and can do nothing without God. We are attracted to evil. We are sinners. Yet, God continues to draw us to himself.

We believe that in his love the Father calls us to conversion: to personal resurrection in union with Jesus, to a new life filled with the power of his Spirit. With Jesus, we die to ourselves when we surrender our lives to the Father, renouncing anything that separates us from him. The power of the Spirit forms Christ in us, and moves us to respond with love to the Father's great love for us .

We believe that God calls us to live together as brothers - sharing the gifts that we have received, supporting one another, praying and working together for his glory. He has called us to be a community which is a living sign of the Gospel values of justice, truth and love.

We believe that God calls us to work together for the resurrection of society, bringing his life and love to all: through our personal witness, through the witness of our life in community, and through our community apostolates, primarily through parish work and teaching. This also requires that we build, and teach others to build, a Christian community in which all can experience the hope, joy and peace of Christ's Resurrection.

We believe that Mary is our model for all that we are called to be and do as Resurrectionists.

In short, our Resurrectionist charism is to experience and share the transforming power of God's unconditional love in the context of a vital Christian community. All Christians are called to this experience. We Resurrectionists have been invited to be the "bill-board" on which this gift is displayed to the Church. When speaking with groups of people, I often notice that a word or a phrase can cause eyebrows to rise, eyes to dart from one person to another, and chuckles to bubble up . You see, there are many "inside jokes" and Paul Harvey-type "the rest of the story" episodes that lie just beneath the surface. Even more than what they say, knowing these can help us really know someone.

Our Resurrectionist charism statement is a summary of who we are. Between the lines is quite a bit of serious reflection and prayer about our lived

experience as Christians and as Resurrectionists. I'd like to share some of these reflections with you.

III. THE RESURRECTION OF SOCIETY

"The world is going to hell." I was stunned when I first heard someone say that to me after a Sunday Mass. Yet, the signs of it are seemingly all around us .

In places like Beirut, Lebanon, civil war and the resulting chaos have become the rule rather than the exception for nearly two decades. Even Christians fight each other—in places like Belfast, Northern Ireland—all in the name of the Prince of Peace! Drug use is epidemic, gangs control major cities even in "civilized" countries like the U .S . Statistics which project increases in crimes of personal violence are truly frightening. Runaway epidemics like AIDS have shattered the confidence of the formerly smug scientific world. Even if they devoted their entire national economy to the task, Third World countries like Brazil couldn't pay even the annual interest on their foreign debt. Covert—and even immoral—activities by our American intelligence agencies can disillusion even the most fervent patriots. And what about discoveries of satanic cults and human sacrifices—too much! You talk about community in a world like this? That's a laugh. What-ever became of the "good old days"?

In the face of all this, God hasn't given up on the world. St . John tells us that "God so loved the world that he sent his only Son" that we might have life, abundantly so . That God's love and life might toughen the hearts of all people is the task to which we are dedicated. We are not resigned to lay a dying world to rest; we are Resurrectionists in the truest sense of the word. Webster defines a Resurrectionist as a "grave robber." With Jesus, we want the tombs of the world emptied. We proclaim the hope of resurrection to a world disfigured by death in all its forms!

We Resurrectionists proclaim this hope through parish work and education. Our task is to establish the parishes we serve as viable Christian communities, centers from which a new life can spread to the surrounding neighborhoods. We want our parishioners to experience their parish as a community they can truly call home, a place where they can find the fulfillment of their highest Christian aspirations. We want them to feel loved and respected for them-selves, included in parish social organizations, needed (as indeed they are) in parish liturgical, educational, and helping ministries, and inspired to "share with others the gift they have received" through Christian community. When we see our parishioners becoming real "apostles" working for the transformation of the world in which

they live, our Resurrectionist dream comes true. The goal of our educational endeavors is the development of the entire person, touching not only the intellectual but also the spiritual dimension of our students. We hope to instill in them a hunger for the search for truth. We want them to encounter their personal dignity and freedom, and to be inspired with a sense of mission: to become leaders in a world aching for the life and love of God, not only to "fit in" but to transform it .

When our parish or educational ministries fulfill these ambitions, the influence of our charism—our special God-given gift—extends far beyond the limits of our relatively small religious community. But these ambitions are not simply a practical solution to our practical limitations.

From the beginning, Bogdan Janski envisioned our community as a small "inner circle" within larger Christian communities: a hub from which emanates a powerful apostolic thrust to change the world. The people who join us in prayer, support, and apostolic goals are like an "extended" Resurrectionist family. He called early lay people who joined this mission "external brethren". In some instances, these external brethren, inspired by this vision, served as forerunners of our community ministry for an entire generation! We modern-day CRs hope that the collaboration of lay women and men in the Church can become a vital aspect of our community life and work once again. No one in the Church rejoiced more than Resurrectionists when the Bishops of the Second Vatican Council declared that all baptized Christians are called to labor in the Church's apostolic mission. Our founder, Bogdan, must have been bristling with delight in the eternal embrace of the Risen Christ! If you are among those touched by our apostolic services, you can expect that, more and more, we will be creating opportunities to share our spirit, life, and work with you. This series of articles is an early step in that direction.

I once read of the famous painter, Vincent Van Gogh: "He dared to look the sun in the face and rob its brilliance." We Resurrectionists dare to look death in its face and rob its power! Imagine what we can accomplish, together, under the banner of the Risen Christ. Good old days? The weary world hasn't seen anything yet!

IV. LIVING AS A COMMUNITY

The other night I heard the term "community" three times on a national news broadcast. The reporter first referred to the reaction of the "economic community" to the new president's first 100 days in office. Later, he described the "local community's" relief that a neighborhood burglar had been caught by

the police. Finally, he wondered, how would the "gaming community" of Las Vegas cope with the growth of state lotteries in the Southwest? Are these uses of "community" what Christians or Resurrectionists mean when we use the term? Not a chance.

For us, a community means more than just a gathering or group of people, even people who might have a common interest or common objective. It's not just a glamorous-sounding synonym for a club, an organization, a neighborhood, a political or business alliance, an ethnic group, or a clique of friends. In the Christian world, a community is a network of committed relationships, with Jesus Christ at its center.

We Resurrectionists believe that God has called us to live together as a community of brothers. We are invited to an unconditional acceptance of each other—not because we have chosen each other, but because Jesus has chosen us. In community, we love the "unlovable", forgive those who hurt us, challenge the comfortable, comfort the weak and suffering, and offer personal and ministerial support to each other. We work, play, study, and pray together for God's glory. It's not always easy.

People are people and we Resurrectionists are first of all broken people living in a broken world. It's not a "piece of cake" to live the ideal of what it means to be a community. Sometimes we want to—and actually do—tell each other off, close our doors (and our eyes and ears) to each other's needs, and remove the welcome mat to our homes and hearts. Forget about changing the world; it's often too frustrating to change ourselves!

Bogdan Janski understood these difficulties when he placed community life at the center of what our Congregation is all about. He and his colleagues came from different backgrounds, had unique personalities, and lived and worked in an environment that militantly opposed any true sense of Christian community. Controversies were many in the early years, and many chose to part company. Yet he never let go of the ideal. I think Bogdan's favorite books in the Scriptures were the Acts of the Apostles and the First Letter of John, which he quoted frequently. And it was in those books that God revealed to him the importance of community. St. John tells us that "we know that we have passed from death to life when we love the brothers." Community life is the "acid test" of our personal yielding to the unconditional love of God. After all, says John—and Bogdan—an unloving person who claims to love God is a liar. What's more, in experiencing a community's unconditional love, a person is prepared to receive the unconditional love of God. The early Christians knew that their faith in Jesus and commitment to his way of life couldn't survive apart

from a supportive community. "The whole group of believers was united, heart and soul."

Early Resurrectionists had the same experience. Their life in Paris showed them that Christian values deteriorate or die unless believers have a community of their own. If they were to survive in their commitment to Christ, community was the only way. Contemporary Resurrectionists try to live this ideal in many ways. As a small Congregation, we tend to know each other's strengths, weaknesses, hopes, and fears quite well. It's rare to find a "CR" who lives alone; instead, we usually group together in "houses" to pray and work together. We gather for meals, prayers, community meetings, and retreats. We go out together, often take vacations together and usually find one or a few brothers to whom we bare our soul. When travelling, if we arrive at the home of fellow Resurrectionists, we are truly welcomed as a brother.

Building this experience of community takes effort and time. Sometimes, we're tempted to look upon the effort and time as an inconvenience, or as a distraction from our important apostolic work. But, like the early Christian community, whose common life was the most attractive feature of the message they proclaimed, we are convinced that a strong community life can be the most powerful tool that we can bring to our apostolic work. In our personal lives transformed by the Spirit, we hope to be living signs of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen; in our community lives, we hope to be living signs of the gospel values of justice, truth, and love.

"Veritas et Caritas" - "Truth and Love" - is our community motto. We hope that's what others see when they see our community live and work together.

V. MARY IS OUR MODEL

In the Vatican II's Constitution on the Church, the Bishops of the Church spoke of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as the "Mother of the Church."

We Resurrectionists have always considered Mary as the mother of our Congregation as well. The small and ancient mountain shrine of Mentorella (Italy), housing a ninth century wooden image of Mary with her Son, was entrusted to our Congregation's care in 1857; the early Resurrectionists saw this as a particular sign of God's favor and blessings upon our life and work.

In the Charism Statement of 1982, however, a new and bolder claim was made: "We believe that Mary is our model for all that we are called to be and do

as Resurrectionists."

Mary was the first Christian to undertake a lengthy personal journey of faith. As a young teen, Mary was asked to undertake an impossible task: to become the virgin mother of the Messiah, God's beloved Son. It would be remarkable indeed to find a teen today as versed in the Holy Scriptures as Mary, as shown in her beautiful prayer of praise which we call the Magnificat . In his early years at Nazareth, with Joseph and Mary, Jesus developed those personal traits that are so precious to us: his love of God's Word; his attention to the millions of miraculous details of life; his compassion for others, especially those who were suffering or looked down upon by the "respectable" upper crust of society. (Did Mary, perhaps, suffer such rejection because of her pregnancy before her marriage to Joseph?)

What was it like for Mary to see her Son leave home and begin a ministry which was at first greeted with enthusiasm, but which later met with derision, opposition, rejection and death? What—or who— inspired her to persuade Jesus to perform his first sign at Cana of Galilee, out of concern for the reputation of the newly married couple? Where did Mary get the courage to stand at the foot of his cross, when even his "rough and tough" disciples abandoned him in fear? And, after they had failed Jesus so miserably, where did Mary receive the strength to forgive them, and to join with them in prayer in anticipation of the coming of the Holy Spirit?

In her personal faith journey, Mary first encountered God as a mysterious "other"; as a small baby suckling at her breast; as a boy who spoke of a Father other than Joseph; as a man who spoke with authority unlike any other; as a rejected, crucified "criminal"; and finally as her Lord and Saviour. By comparison, our journey of faith may seem easy indeed.

There are three feasts of Mary throughout the year that are celebrated in a special way by Resurrectionists, because they tell us so much about her—and about us .

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8), the Church celebrates the grace of God that guided Mary's life of faithful obedience to God from the first moment of her existence. We Resurrectionists are reminded that all good in our lives comes not from our own efforts, but from the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, given freely as a gift.

On the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows (September 15), the Church pays reverence to the faithful woman who stood at the foot of her Son's cross. We

Resurrectionists are reminded that, as we work for the resurrection of society, we're often called to face a world disfigured by death in all its forms. And, in our inevitable personal suffering, we are invited to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

On the Feast of the Assumption (August 15), the Church honors the woman "clothed with the Sun" who joined the Risen Christ at the heavenly banquet. In a world which fatalistically declares "Eat, drink, be merry; tomorrow we die," we Resurrectionists are invited to persevere in our commitment to the Risen One. As expressed so beautifully in one of the Prefaces of the Easter season, "Christ is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead. Where he has gone, we hope to follow."

After the Council, Catholics became so fascinated with a life centered on Christ and liturgy that devotions of all sorts drifted away from our attention. Many were afraid that, along with these, traditional devotion to Mary would also go out "with the bath water." In fact, some actually did claim that devotion to Mary was an unwelcome holdover from a primitive religious attitude, which had long since outlived its usefulness.

In contrast, many respected Catholic theologians indicate that appropriate devotion to Mary can lead us into the very heart of God. We Resurrectionists have always known that. In a time-honored expression of our Marian devotion, we "follow Mary, rely on Mary, and tend to Christ through Mary." Devotion to Mary can "tenderize" our personal faith and prayer, as well as our apostolic concerns and activity.

In bringing God's love to an often heartless world, there can be no apostolic quality more needed or more welcome.

VI. UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

In our contemporary vocabulary, we've heard a lot of expressions about "love": puppy love, tough love, sacrificial love, falling-in-love, Hollywood love, and the like. One of the most intriguing is "unconditional love." What is it?

Different authors describe it in different ways. Some say unconditional love is love "with no strings attached." Some say it is a commitment to love the other, no matter what. Some say it is loving someone whom you know intimately, in spite of (or in the face of) his or her strengths and weaknesses, virtues and vices. I once heard a preacher say that unconditional love is the decision to make the other person's concerns your concerns, the other's problems your problems. The marriage vows describe it as a faithful presence "for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, until death."

One stunning description I've encountered indicates that unconditional love is an acceptance of the other as that person has been, is, and will be—even if evil!

It's more than obvious that our experiences of unconditional love may be few and far between. When it comes to us as a gift from another (as it always must), we either treasure it as a "pearl of great price," or find it too good to be true.

Psychologists and spiritual writers tell us that the often well-meaning or sometimes cruel comments made by others, especially our parents and peers, make the experience of unconditional love an impossible dream: "Mommy doesn't like you when you do that"; "We're going to send you to China" (presumably with the uneaten leftovers on the table); "Hey, get lost, creep!" Usually we respond to these comments by trying to construct a "false front" to present ourselves as lovable: we try to cover up our weaknesses and failings (and are most disgusted by both); we try to please others to make them love us; we use power, possessions, or seduction to "gain friends and influence people." "Never let them see you sweat" and "Look like you know what you're doing" are convenient words of wisdom. Or we spend our life "looking out for Number One," pushing others—even God—out of the picture. The trouble is, the whole project is self-defeating. In our secret thoughts, we fear that if others got to know the "real" us, they wouldn't like—and definitely wouldn't love—what they'd find. These experiences highly influence our readiness to trust in the unconditional love of God. God knows us as we are our hopes and dreams, our strengths and weaknesses, our virtues and vices, our thoughts and actions. How can we possibly believe that we are loved by God as we are? And yet, that is the "amazing grace" at the heart of our faith. The eternal God, Creator of all that is, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ "so loved us that He sent His only Son ." And, while we were strangers, even enemies of God, Christ died for us! In fact, Jesus told us that God's love for him and for us is the very same! Too good to be true? Yes, very good; also very true.

The first paragraph of the Constitution of the Congregation of the Resurrection presents "God's unconditional love for us as the most fundamental fact of our lives." We are invited to place ourselves—as we are—in the presence of God, allowing this love to forgive us, to overcome our fears, and to heal the wounds that keep us isolated in our defensive emptiness and loneliness. Sound like asking too much? It is, at the start. Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither was the false self that we present to God, to others, and even to ourselves. Neither will the "opening to God" be a single, momentary event. In fact, it is a life-long process of daily dying to self, and rising with Christ. What's more, at times it'll seem like a roller coaster ride of ups and downs, with many

doubts and failures along the way. As it happens, though, we begin to savor and trust in this newly discovered face of God, as well as our own. Each day, it becomes more amazing until we are almost ready to "explode" with joy and gratitude. There's nothing we wouldn't do for this amazing Lover—not out of fear, not trying to "make an offer that can't be refused" but simply out of a heart filled with love!

This is the heart of our Resurrectionist life, and it is at the heart of our preaching and ministering. When coming face-to-face with someone who's in a living hell, we don't try to "scare the hell" out of them, nor "beat the hell" out of them... We "love the hell" out!

VII. CONVERSION

What comes to mind when you hear the word "convert"? Since this is a religious publication, you might think first of its religious application. We often speak of a "convert" as an adult who has left another Christian denomination and joined the Roman Catholic Church. "My husband became a convert when we married" is something I often hear. (Incidentally, the Bishops of the United States indicate that the term technically should be used only for those who are becoming Christian for the first time.) "Convert" as a verb is sometimes used to describe a turning away from sin. The word is also used in various worldly applications. Recently, offices have "converted" to computer systems. People are advised to "convert" their IRAs from CDs to stocks and bonds. Homeowners "convert" their garage to an extra guest bedroom. In each case, a change is being described.

Bogdan Janski and the early band of Resurrectionists whom he gathered together in Paris, France, in 1836 were very familiar with the process of conversion. For each of them, a profound conversion from a sinful worldly life was the first step of their dying and rising in Christ. You know those "before-after" photos in body-building or dieting commercials? Friends and colleagues who knew our founding fathers were astounded by the dramatic contrast in their personalities and behavior before and after their conversion to Christian commitment.

The conversion journey they traveled was not simply changing into "nice" people. Like the experience of coming to know God's unconditional love, it was a lifetime process of mortal combat against the destructive influence of sin in themselves and society, and a dramatic surrender to Jesus Christ and the campaign to spread his truth and love to all they met.

During one of Bogdan Janski's spiritual retreats for his followers, he said "the essence of conversion is a change in one's dominant concern." At one time, their dominant concern was political activism, living a life that Hugh Hefner would envy, and keeping one giant step ahead of the police. Now they were called to make Jesus Christ their dominant concern.

Nowhere in our tradition is the ideal of a Christ-centered life more dramatically depicted than in a paragraph of a Resurrectionist Rule written by Peter Semenenko ten years after Janski's death: The Brothers must establish Christ our Lord as the beginning, center, and end of all their activity and of their entire life; He shall be their sum and substance, the living fulfillment of the Rule. They will have recourse to Him: for counsel in their doubts, instruction in their ignorance, and strength in their weakness. He shall be their consolation in time of adversity, their glory in time of prosperity. He shall be the one reward they desire for their labors, adversities, and sacrifices. Christ, our crucified and risen Lord, shall be the principle source of knowledge before men; from Him alone shall they derive the beginnings of divine wisdom and power. They shall look to Him as the epitome of the Law, justice, faith, hope, charity, history, and of all things. He shall always be for them: the first and last, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and Omega of all things. St . Paul tells us, in his Letter to the Philippians, that a Christ-centered person comes to "know the power flowing from his resurrection." That power is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has three "jobs" to do in the life of those who have yielded their life to Christ. First, we are led to experience an intimate personal relationship with God as Father and with Jesus as Lord and brother. Second, we are equipped with the necessary abilities to build up the Body of Christ, the Church. Finally, I'd like to focus on the third: Christ is formed in us. You are probably familiar with the Eastern Christian tradition of the "icon". Icons are images of Jesus or the saints. St . Paul looks upon Jesus as the ultimate icon, or image, of the invisible God we cannot see. We Christians are, in turn, called upon to be living icons, or images, of Jesus Christ in the world today. The world can expect to see a family resemblance between us and Jesus Christ, our brother. Does it? Unfortunately, not as often as we—or Jesus—would like. We find ourselves, like Paul, "doing the evil we want to reject, and not doing the good we want to do ." Sin, selfishness, pettiness, quick temper, bickering and phoniness are all too often the first aspects of our personalities that others encounter. Not too clear a picture of Jesus Christ, is it? When we yield to Jesus and the power of the Spirit, we allow the Holy Spirit—like a master painter—to restore the image of Jesus, in which we were created, in our personality. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control are the result. What a way to live!

When people see us in this way, they see Christ. Not a forged portrait, but the real thing—Jesus, face-to-face.



"As members of the Congregation dedicated to the renewal of society by means of life marked by the Paschal Mystery, proclaim with great fervor the presence of the Savior in the midst of the people today and of every age. The world needs your witness and apostolic zeal. I encourage you in your commitment and assure you of a remembrance in my prayers."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Paulus" followed by a stylized monogram.

John Paul II
Rome, January 4, 1987