

**Conference of**  
**Monsignor Jacques PERRIER**

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X<sup>th</sup> International Gathering  
of the Teams Of Our Lady

## Jesus-Christ, Centre of the Christian Life

Since you had the good idea to choose Lourdes for your International Gathering and that you did me the honour of asking me to give a conference, I could not fail to accept your invitation.

You have chosen, yourselves, the theme of my talk:

*Jesus-Christ, Centre of the Christian Life.*

In fact, I prefer not to choose the theme myself when I am to give a talk. If you choose your theme yourself, you run the risk of repeating yourself through familiarity: whereas, a subject that is set obliges one to break new grounds.

On the other hand, the title given for today's talk seems so obvious! It would be suitable for a meditation. But for a conference...? Nevertheless, despite appearances, we will see that this title presents a few problems.

We will proceed therefore in a classical way in three stages. In the first stage, we consider how well founded is the expression: "Jesus Christ, Centre of the Christian Life". In the second stage, we will ask a few questions so as not to limit ourselves to that expression. We will then revert to it since it applies admirably to the family founded on the sacrament of marriage

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Saint Peter and Saint Paul are agreed that Jesus Christ is the centre of the Christian life. Their agreement is important when one considers how different these two persons are. After Jesus' discourse on the Bread of life, when people - and even some of the disciples - were inclined to be scandalised and to leave him, Saint Peter said to Jesus: "*To whom would we go, Lord? You have the words of eternal life!*" (Jn 6: 68). As for Saint Paul, he has an expression that makes further debate superfluous: "*It is no longer I, but Christ living in me*" (Gal 2: 20); "Life to me, of course, is Christ" (Ph 1: 21).

The expression "Jesus Christ, Centre of the Christian life" has the advantage of saying that it is not a book that one finds at the centre of the Christian life, as in the case of Islam, or a principle as in the case of philosophical or religious schools of wisdom. People like Socrates or Buddha are admired by their followers, but what is essential for them is to follow their teaching such as the "know yourself" of Socrates or the "noble truths" of Buddhism.

Please note that many people say: "In truth, I do not know who Jesus was but the Gospel is admirable". As you see, when speaking of Jesus, these people express themselves in the past tense: "Who was Jesus?". For people who express themselves in the past tense, Jesus is definitely dead. Yet, unless one is mentally deranged, a dead person that one has never personally known and loved, cannot be at the centre of one's life. Besides, I am not sure that such people have really read the Gospel, since what is left of the Gospel if one excludes the person of Jesus? The second Gospel that of Saint Mark, begins with the words: "*The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus, the Son of God*" (Mk 1: 1). The Gospel, as in the case of the Kingdom, is Jesus Christ himself.

When we say that Jesus Christ is at the centre of the Christian life, we are saying that the Christian religion is about a relationship with a person. This living person communicates with us and gives us the ability to live of his life. Christ cannot give us the ability to live "*through him, with him and in him*" unless he is himself alive. We find in this connection a pithy

expression of Saint Paul: *“If Christ has not been raised, then... our faith is without substance”* (1 Cor 15: 14).

In French, the words “Christ” and “chrétien” do not have the same resonance. But in most languages [such as English], there is the same resonance, as in Latin, the language of the New Testament: “Christos” and “christianos”. The Christian is one who acknowledges Jesus as the Christ. Such was Saint Peter’s profession of faith. When Jesus asked his disciples: “Who do you say I am?”, Peter replied: *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”*. (Mt 16: 16).

Jesus fully acquired the dignity of “Christ” when the Father raised him from the dead. Let us listen again to Saint Peter on the day of Pentecost. He ends his first sermon, announcing the resurrection, with these words: *“God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified”* (Acts. 2: 36). And, since it is always pleasing to draw Peter and Paul close together, let us point out that the latter gives himself the title of *“Servant of Jesus Christ”* (Rom 1: 1). He begins his most solemn epistle, that to the Romans, by saying that the proclamation of the Gospel consists in announcing “Jesus Christ our Lord”, titles he has fully acquired *“by [his] resurrection from the dead”* (Rom 1: 4).

There is no point in piling up quotations. It is obvious that it is the person of Christ that creates a distance between Jews and Christians. Some Jews, especially today, recognise that Jesus was a Rabbi of the first order. As one of them said in a friendly mood, speaking to Christians, “he is my master and your God”. Indeed, the way the New Testament speaks of Jesus contrasts sharply with what one finds in the Old Testament, even in relation to Moses, the most important personality of the Old Covenant. This applies as much to the way Jesus expresses himself and the way he acts than to his disciples’ attitude to him.

Let us look again for a moment at the few texts we have quoted. You will note that the name of Jesus is always used. The person who is the Christ, the Son of God, is one of us, someone who has a man’s name. His name is Jesus and his mother is called Mary. He was born during the reign of Herod and suffered his Passion under Pontius Pilate, that dishonest man whose name Christians will mention until the end of time when saying the Creed. You were right in calling “Jesus Christ” the centre of the Christian life. Being historical is a fundamental characteristic of the Christian faith. This raises a few problems today for people who prefer a non-time related spirituality; but that is another matter!

Let us leave the Scripture and turn to the liturgy. Between the first Sunday of Advent and the Sunday of Christ the King, the liturgical year goes, surprisingly, from the Second Coming of Christ to the Second Coming of Christ. Why start with the Second Coming of Christ? It is in order to call to mind, right from the beginning of the liturgical year, the end towards which we journey through succeeding ages.

Advent, the time of Christian expectation, is not without the presence of Christ: he has already come in humility; he will return in glory. The Christmas and Easter cycles (I include Lent as much as Easter Time in the Easter cycle) are dedicated to his birth, death and resurrection and to the fruit of his resurrection: the sending of the Holy Spirit. In between, we follow Christ through various moments of his public life.

We can say legitimately that Jesus Christ is at the centre of the liturgical year. The same may be said about the sacraments. Each of them has meaning only in relationship to Christ. Baptism is an immersion in his death and resurrection. Reconciliation is available to us because he has redeemed us from sin. Christian marriage has its origin in the wedding feast of Christ and his Church. The deacon, the priest and the bishop, in their various ministries, are

called to act in Christ's name, servant and pastor. By the anointing, the sick are identified with Christ the Saviour in hope and resurrection. The Eucharist is supremely, according to his own words, the memorial of Christ.

You will tell me that I excluded confirmation, a sacrament that Christ has ceded to the Holy Spirit. In fact, the action of the Holy Spirit is always to make Christ present as he did in Mary at the Annunciation, as he does at every Mass when the priest calls for his coming by the prayer called the "epiclesis". By confirmation, the baptised becomes a "soldier of Christ", to use Saint Paul's expression (2 Tm 2: 3), and is confirmed in his baptism that made him a Christian.

Let us change territory and let us consider morality or, to use a less aggressive expression for delicate ears, "Christian behaviour". We find Jesus Christ at the centre again.

In Saint John, mention is made of "living" in Christ and of Christ "living" in us. This expression appears several times in the discourse on the Bread of Life (Jn 6) and in the parable of the vine (Jn 15). It is even more frequent in Saint John's first epistle. Saint Paul uses another image which is just as expressive: "*to be clothed in*" Christ. "*Every one of you that has been baptised has been clothed in Christ*" he writes to the Galatians (3: 27). This image no doubt draws its inspiration from the baptismal rite in which the newly baptised is clothed in white.

The Christian's behaviour is based on that of Christ. Let us glean a few words from Saint Paul. When he tells the Corinthians to give generously to the collection, he quotes the generosity of Christ as a model: "*You are well aware of the generosity that our Lord Jesus Christ had, that, although he was rich, he became poor for your sake, so that you should become rich through his poverty*" (2 Cor 8: 9). "*Whatever you say or do let it be in the name of the Lord Jesus*" (Col 3: 17). The presence of Christ does not relate to our soul only: "*Do you not realise that your bodies are members of Christ's body; do you think one can take parts of Christ's body and join them to the body of a prostitute?*" (1 Cor 6: 15).

The Christian must be imbued with Christ in all aspects of his life. This applies to each individual and to a community. Speaking to the Christians of Philippi, Saint Paul said to them: "*Be of the same mind among yourselves that was in Christ Jesus*".<sup>1</sup> And he goes on with the hymn that is sung in Holy Week: "*Who being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped*". There follows mention of the Incarnation, of the death on the Cross and the Resurrection (Ph 2: 5-11).

What is original about this passage is that it contains side by side, on the one hand, a piece of advice on how to get on within a community ("*be of the same mind among yourselves that was in Christ*") and on the other hand a very fundamental statement about Christ ("*Who being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped*"). In fact, there is a logical connection between these two quotations: namely, they make the point that, since Christ acted in this way, we too must act in this way. Saint Paul bases this simple logic on the grace of baptism: a Christian is someone who is called to live in accordance with the grace of his baptism in all situations, and the Holy Spirit gives him the necessary strength. Sin does not come into it.

We have just spent a few moments with Saint Paul. Let us return to the Gospels, and more particularly to Saint Mathew's Gospel. When Jesus announces his Passion for the first

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<sup>1</sup> This is what the French Jerusalem Bible says which is different from both the English Jerusalem Bible and the Revised Standard Version that do not have the '*among yourselves*'

time, he immediately associates his disciples with what he will experience himself: “*If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me*” (Mt 16: 24).

The Beatitudes are not a list of moral obligations. They are, first and foremost, a proclamation of the Kingdom that is henceforth operative. They sketch out, however, a particular way of life. But is what they paint a portrait of the disciple or of the Master? There is no doubt that it is a portrait of a disciple of the New Covenant, since, in Saint Luke, Jesus is speaking to his followers: “*Then fixing his eyes on his disciples he said: ‘How blessed are you who are poor’.*” (Lk 6: 20). But who, apart from Jesus himself, has ever measured up to this ideal? The Beatitudes, especially in Saint Mathew where they are more developed, are, first and foremost a portrait of Christ.

Let us conclude this first part by going back to baptism. We are baptised “*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” (Mt 28: 19). This is in accordance with the order given by Jesus to his disciples during his last apparition, as related by Saint Mathew. It is a formula that best expresses the equal status and oneness of the divine Persons. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are mentioned side by side. But the repetitive use of the word ‘and’, that is grammatically objectionable and which is, alas, sometimes omitted, stresses the utterly unique bond that links the divine Persons mutually together; it is impossible to think of one Person without being referred back to the others.

Nevertheless, it is to one of the three Persons that we are identified by baptism: Jesus Christ. We do not become either the Father or the Spirit. We become sons and daughters in the Son. We are not immersed by baptism in a bath of impersonal divinity. The joint deed of the Father, of the Son and of the Spirit is to make us brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, or else, according to an expression of Saint Paul, that Christ should be “*the eldest of many brothers*” (Rom 8: 29). Besides, it is said in the Acts of the Apostles that the new brothers have been “*baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus*” (Ac 8: 16). The Church was indeed aware that Jesus Christ was the centre of the Christian life.

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In short, from whatever angle we look at it, Jesus Christ is truly at the centre, not only of Christian faith but of Christian life. What I am going to say now is not intended to sow doubt in your minds or to criticise the formula-type title that you have given to my conference. I simply wish that we did not allow ourselves to be tied to a formula. Christ is most certainly too great and too free to be tied to a formula, even if it is correct.

Since I have already referred to the liturgy, I invite you to enter a church at a time when it is best fulfilling its purpose, that is to say during the celebration of the Eucharist. A church is not simply a building for meditation, even Christian meditation, but a place built and equipped to make the meaning of the Eucharist understandable.

The focal point of a church is therefore the altar and the priest celebrating the Eucharist. The altar and the priest are equally signs of Christ: the altar by virtue of its consecration, the priest by virtue of his ordination, which one could well call a “consecration”.

Now, depending on the particular church, the altar and the priest are differently located. In the traditional western church, the altar was situated at the far end of the sanctuary, at the head of the building. This location is not without meaning since Christ is Head of the Church (Eph 1: 22). More recently, the altar has been brought forward and the celebrant is on the other side of the altar, facing the congregation. This is a “face-to-face” arrangement. It is

legitimate since Christ does not merge with his Church. He is the Bridegroom and the Church is the Bride (Eph 5: 25-32). A dialogue takes place between them of which the liturgy is the summit.

Even more recently, churches have been built in the shape of an arc of a circle, or even in a semi-circle of which the altar is the geometric centre. The builders of the Pius X basilica have gone further. They have boldly broken new ground by placing the altar at the heart of an immense ellipse; the chief celebrant is thus surrounded on all sides. This third architectural solution is the one that represents the most directly the fact that Jesus Christ is at the centre of the Christian life. It can be supported by a very bold statement of Jesus himself : *“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them”* (Mt 18: 20). This statement is one of these statements that, as I have said before, contrasts sharply with those of any outstanding personality in the Old Testament. But let us go on...

“At the head”, “face-to-face”, “at the centre”: three liturgical layouts, but also three different perceptions of our relationship with Christ. I stress: “different perceptions” and not “different relationships”. Relationship with Christ is the same for all Christians, since it is created at baptism by the one and same Spirit.

Each of the three perceptions mentioned, seen in isolation and taken to extreme does not create an awareness of a faith relationship. If we see Christ only as Head of the Church, we are liable to transform ourselves into an army corps. The face-to-face arrangement could become a confrontation but the central position presents the opposite danger, namely that Christ is so much integrated, assumed, surrounded that he disappears. In a circle, the centre is only a point and a point has no dimensions. But we must hold on to our concept of Christ's personal reality and freedom. Christ is a person: Jesus. He is not the principle around which the circle is drawn. Christ dwells in the Church but is not limited to the Church.

Whatever the merits of what I have just said, I do not regret this little architectural incursion since we no longer know sufficiently well what a church is. The building of a church must, of course, correspond to what is technically possible (which is constantly increasing) and to the economic considerations of the time (which are constantly more restrictive). But it must correspond just as much, and even more, to the meaning of what is accomplished in it: in this instance, the celebration of the Mystery of faith, to use the expression used by the priest after the consecration.

Since we have begun to think in terms of images (Jesus Christ as ‘head’, as ‘face to face’ or as ‘centre’), let us point out that Christ is just as much on the periphery than in the centre. “Periphery” is not the right word: it might even scandalise. What I mean is this: the more we centralise on Christ, the more we look outwards towards all the brothers and sisters that Jesus gives us, all those human beings like us whom Jesus asks us to treat as neighbours: *“In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me”* (Mt 25: 40). If Jesus Christ is at the centre, let us admit that the centre is everywhere.

Notes taken during the conversations that Saint Vincent de Paul had with the Daughters of Charity have been preserved. Although they are not religious sisters strictly speaking, the Daughters of Charity consecrate some time everyday to quiet prayer, as lay people, moreover, are invited to do and your Movement encourages you to do.

Let us return to Saint Vincent de Paul and to the Daughters of Charity. In his conversations with them, the holy founder answered questions they were asking him. Among these questions there was one that troubled them particularly: “what must we do when, at the

time set for quiet prayer, we are called to a sick person?" Other people than Saint Vincent would have said: there is a conflict of duties. But he, as a good follower of Saint Francis de Sales, but also, quite simply of the Gospel, answered: do not be troubled, since, by going to the sick man who is calling you, you are going to Christ. When leaving quiet prayer to go to one of the least of the brothers of Jesus Christ, you are not leaving Christ.

Going from praying to serving, the Daughter of Charity went from Christ to Christ. It is up to the Superior to ensure that the Sister does not miss the opportunity to pray. If not, she will no longer leave Christ to go to Christ, but will only be performing an act of generosity - not that this is negligible, but you don't have to be a Christian to be generous.

What I have just said to you needs to be properly understood. The New Testament does not consist in replacing the love of God with the love of neighbour. What is original about the Gospel, is that it unites the two commandments indissolubly. They are united in the person of Jesus Christ: in him we see and touch the Father, the Lord God who revealed himself to Israel. But the Son of God, by his incarnation, is one with every human being and particularly with all who are in need.

True Christianiy combines a spirituality centred on God with service to fellow human beings in the very areas where human dignity is least recognisable. Admittedly, vocations in the Church are varied: contemplatives, apostolate, charitable work etc... But I notice today that religious communities that take the risk of committing themselves to the most dangerous humanitarian work are also those that practise the most fervent and frequent Eucharistic adoration. Charles de Foucauld has shown the way: spending hours praying before the Blessed Sacrament and helping his Touareg brethren in total detachment. The Little Sisters of Jesus follow his example today.

In conclusion, Jesus Christ is truly the centre but he can send us very far from all that we have been used to. Many offers on the "spirituality market" invite us to become fully in control of ourselves and to improve our capabilities; but Jesus says: "*Anyone who wants to save his life will loose it*" (Mt 16: 25). By becoming the centre of our life, Christ does not settle us in a fixed point but sends us on a pilgrimage that will not end on earth. I'll grant you that all this is said in a figurative language that one might consider inadequate or even false. But we have nothing to loose in looking at the obvious under all its aspects; provided we do not throw our reader or listeners into total confusion. This is why there will be a Part 3.

However, before starting on this third part, I would like to suggest another thought to you. I experience a certain unease when I hear that Jesus Christ might be the centre, because he has always refused to be the centre. Saint John is clearest on this point: Jesus is sent by the Father. He came, not to do his will, but the will of he who sent him (Jn 5: 30; 6:38). Expressions of this kind are found everywhere in Saint John.

Without developing this theme to the same extent, the other Evangelists agree with Saint John. When his disciples ask him how to pray, he teaches them the "Our Father". His brothers and sisters are those who do the will of his Father (Mt 12: 50). On the Cross, it is to his Father that he asks forgiveness for his executioners (Lk 23: 34). He does not appropriate anything to himself, even forgiveness, although it is he who is suffering on the Cross. Immediately after his baptism, the Temptor tempted him to do his own will. Jesus answered him: "*Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God*" (Mt 4: 4) "*Do not put the Lord your God to the test*"(Mt 4: 7). "*Worship the Lord your God and serve only him*" (Mt 4: 10).

By contrast with the sentences and episodes that I have just mentioned, you could mention others in which Jesus acts with full authority. For example, in his Sermon on the Mount, he repeats: *“It was said..., but I say...”*. Also, by his own authority, he healed the sick, expelled demons and calmed the tempest. This apparent contradiction is a door into the mystery of God. The Son has received everything from the Father, but he keeps nothing for himself. In this way, he reveals to us our vocation of children of God: to ask for grace, to welcome it and give thanks for it. It is the reverse of the story of original sin. Our first parent ate the fruit because the Tempter had succeeded in persuading them that God had acted out of jealousy when he forbade it.

Who is at the centre of the Eucharist and therefore of the Christian life, be it the life of the Church or our personal life? Is it Jesus Christ whose memorial we celebrate on his instructions when we repeat his actions and his words? Yes, and yet, all the Eucharistic prayers are addressed to the Father and have been so since the beginning of the Church. They end with the great Doxology: *“Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever”*. The congregation answers *“Amen”* – it is the summit of the Eucharistic action.

A moment ago, we saw Jesus Christ sending us to the limits of human experience, telling us that it was there that he was. Now, he sends us to his Father, for he is the Mediator: he does not want to monopolise anything. Therefore if, to be a Christian, means *“living like Christ”*, the Christian will never seek to monopolise other people, and even less to use them to his advantage. He will always refuse to be the centre of attention, whatever his responsibilities.

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After having taken a broad view of the title of this conference, so as not to make it absolute, I had promised to return to it, having found new reasons for its validity.

Let us begin by expressing an objection: if we say that Jesus Christ is the centre of the Christian life, are we not isolating him and putting aside the fact that he is Son of God? Is it not overlooking the Holy Spirit, bearing in mind that Jesus said to his disciples that it was good that he should be going away so that he could send them the Spirit? In isolating Christ, in separating him, by omission, from the Father and the Holy Spirit, are we not running the risk of fixing our sight exclusively on the human aspect of his personality? We would then only see Jesus of Nazareth, an excentric Rabbi of two thousand years ago.

At certain times in history the humanity of Jesus has perhaps been minimised. Only the words from the Niceen Creed: *“God from God, true God from true God”* were remembered. Our times may err by having a onesided and opposite vision. Jesus of Nazareth is seen as a man of his time but who surpassed his time by the breadth of his vues, a religious man ‘par excellence’ liberating us from the narrowness of a religion that is too formal, an apostle of tolerance and of human rights. Such is the religiously correct image that is held in society today. It is not very far removed from the Arian heresy of the 4<sup>th</sup> century that, soon after the end of persecutions, almost won over the whole of Christianity.

The principle of Christ-centeredness has been acted upon, at any rate in France, in the teaching that followed Vatican II. The result is in fact surprising. In the letters that young people of around 15 years of age send to bishops to ask for confirmtion, the name of Jesus Christ is virtually absent. They speak of God, of drawing close to God, of getting to know better, they say, the history of God. This is all the more revealing that these letters are

personal. And so we end up with a kind of divorce: the very secularised public opinion no longer dare speak of God and the minority of young people who courageously want to be Christians, no longer dare affirm the humanity of Jesus. Why? Because, in any case, it is difficult to believe in the Incarnation: the fact that the Son of God, God himself, should have become our brother, and that the Word was made flesh.

Our Christian faith is hardly Trinitarian. We place side by side a vague belief in God and a sincere admiration for Jesus, a preacher of love. Belief in God (belief in a divine presence) can face being questioned by human intelligence and can meet the demands of the human heart. Our world is not mad; we are not abandoned beings in it. The admiration for Jesus establishes an altruistic morality that fits in well with the humanitarian tendency of our global times.

The name of Jesus Christ should repair this breach. As we have already said, Jesus is a man's name even if, as for most Jewish names, it has a religious significance: Jesus means "God save". Jesus, Joses, Joshua: there are almost 15 persons in the Bible that have this name. As for "Christ", it is a name that is Trinitarian in itself; it is a Greek word that correspond to the word Messiah in Hebrew. Christ, the Messiah is he who has been anointed. From whom did Jesus receive this anointing? From his Father. And what is this anointing? The Holy Spirit.

Let us read Saint Luke's narrative of Jesus' visit to Nazareth (Chap. 4). "*When he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read*". Nazareth is the place of his humanity 'par excellence', the place where he has lived thirty years among his fellow men and women. The reading is a passage from Isaiah: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me...*" There follows a list of the signs that the Messiah must perform. Luke continues the story with an acute sense of drama: "*He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them: 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing'. All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth*". But immediately after, in Saint Luke's account, the people change their mind and say that it is impossible: they know Jesus only too well; he is Joseph's son; he cannot be the Messiah.

Yet, Jesus was truly conceived by the Holy Spirit; the Spirit visibly came down upon him in the shape of a dove on the day of his baptism, as the Father's voice was heard saying: "*This is my beloved Son*". During his ministry, Jesus will go on to fulfil the works of the Spirit, particularly to expel demons. Nevertheless, we come up against the same difficulty as Jesus' compatriots: how to recognise in him both a man, as he surely is, and the one who came from the Father because, "*from the beginning*", as Saint John says, "*The Word was with God and the Word was God*" (Jn 1: 1). Elsewhere, Saint John says that Christ is "*He whom God (meaning: the Father) has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure*" (Jn 3: 34). To indicate the presence of the Spirit, Scripture uses another image than that of anointing: the image of the seal. Speaking of the Son of Man, Jesus said: "*For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal*" (Jn 6: 27).

When we speak of Christ, we must never forget that it is the whole Trinity in him that we refer to. If we are aware of this, there is no danger in saying that Jesus Christ is the centre of the Christian life. Whereas, if we forget the Trinitarian dimension of this name, we would be disciples of Jesus, but we would be Father-less children and would be liable, with time, to be more and more distant disciples of their Master. Our faith professes the opposite: the Spirit

that the Father has given without measure to Christ also makes us Christians, brothers and sisters of Christ, members of the Body of which he is the Head. We have been marked in baptism with the seal with which he has been marked. Saint Paul writes to the Ephesians: “*In him you also... were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit*” (Eph 1; 13-14).

Therefore, the Christian’s life, like that of Jesus Christ, is a Trinitarian life. Such is the vocation of human beings since they have been created in the image and likeness of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Christ, who is one with the Father, is also one with the Spirit. Provided we bear this in mind, it is perfectly legitimate to say “Jesus Christ, Centre of the Christian life”.

As I mentioned at the very beginning of this conference, what I have just said applies to marriage and the family. “*Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them*” (Mt 18: 20). Since marriage is a sacrament, the spouses are joined together in the name of Christ. It is an objective reality that is permanent as far as Christ is concerned. The spouses and the family that they found will always be able to rely on this promise of Christ.

So this is my wish: that you leave Lourdes more convinced that Christ is, by the sacrament you have received, at the centre of your life together. He is not there as an external and indiscreet person but as a force, a light, a confident. In a word, he is there as the Saviour, since all human reality needs to be saved so as not to age.

I will end this conference by suggesting to you, nevertheless, a change of word. Rather than “Centre of the Christian life”, I would prefer “Heart of the Christian life”. There is something a bit too geometrical or administrative about a centre: every town has its Inland Revenue centre. Whatever the social usefulness of the tax collector, the Inland Revenue centre is not our preferred address.

I would like to replace the word ‘centre’ by the word ‘heart’ because this word is profoundly biblical. The biblical heart has nothing to do with feelings. It is the heart of the person with his freedom and ability to give. Both the Old and New Testament say that we must love with all our heart.

The heart makes us think of Christ from whose pierced side water and blood flowed, a source gushing forth to eternal life. To a disciple who asked him “*Show us the Father*”, Jesus replied: “*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*” (Jn 14: 9). A French liturgical hymn (*God, beyond all creation*), composed by Father Didier Rimaud, says that at this time “nothing can hide your Father’s heart”.

I repeat therefore my wish of a moment ago; may Jesus Christ be at the heart of your life, may he be the heart of your life since, as he said: “*where your treasure is there your heart will be also*” (Lk 12: 34).

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