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AOS World Congress
Tuesday of the Thirty-third Week in Ordinary Time

In these final two weeks of Ordinary Time, the Church reads from the Book of Revelation. That inspired text is not without references to water, the sea and the ocean. On one level the waters represent chaos, darkness and evil, the “waters” spewed from the mouth of the dragon. Simultaneously this same text gives us one of the most beautiful symbols of the life of God, of the life of grace, in the flowing river of life that flows through the heavenly Jerusalem. Those who are thirsty respond to the cry of the Bride of the Lamb and the Spirit who say: “Come!” They are nourished. The river flows from the throne of God and the Lamb and flows throughout history and time irrigating the hearts of all those who still live in expectation of the Lord who is coming. The seals of history have been broken open by the sacrifice of the Lamb; the final banquet is ready and the river of life prepares the fruits for all to be nourished.

Today the Book of Revelation, in two of the seven Letters to the Churches that opens its pages, reminds us of the travail all Christians must face in responding to the One who holds all the spirits of the Churches, the One who rules all history but suffered in history and exhorts all the Churches to live faithfully so as to be invited to the Supper of the lamb that is being prepared. The sacred author has no praise for either Sardis or Laodicea as he does for the other churches. Both churches are in grave danger, one for a lapse from faithful Christian practice, the other for complacency and a superficial life of faith. Both Churches need repentance for FAITHFUL WITNESS. The one is half dead and needs repentance; the other is lazy and too comfortable with the surrounding pagan culture. How strongly the prophetic words of this Book describe the Lord as a thief who will surprise lethargy and compromise by judgment!

Pope Benedict XVI has called the whole church into a Year of Faith, of deepening our study of the Faith of our knowledge of the beautiful content of the faith. But even more urgently the Pope has asked for a renewed appreciation of the Call to Holiness by all the members of the Church. If the task of the new evangelization is certainly an outreach to those who have never heard the faith, it is first of all a call to all the Churches to recognize the need for holiness inside the Church, the need for a vital rehearing of the Word of God, of a more zealous sense of the gift of Faith and of the need for outreach in Charity.

For those in the apostleship of the sea, the call is equally important. We come from so many churches, poor and rich, zealous and complacent. The Church that stretches out to those who work the seas and oceans knows that the symbol of water as both chaos and life giving river is apt to describe who we are and what we face in giving new witness to the Catholic Faith. Today’s Reading is a summons to genuine renewal, and, yes, to repentance. It is also a summons to hope. We need to have God’s Word refined in us much more completely so that we will be dressed anew in our baptismal garments of purity of heart!

The Message of the Gospel is always that of hope. The admirable figure of Zacchaeus who showed repentance and change of heart in his use of worldly goods because he had discovered the banquet of the Lamb is a striking image for each of us to climb everywhere to look for Jesus, even in his disguises. Even more importantly the extraordinary beauty of Jesus Christ who today in the Gospel stops everything to invite a new Son of Abraham to the Kingdom and offers a personal invitation to each human being to come to Him and receive both mercy and challenge reminds us that Jesus is the first “new evangelizer.” May his love and grace continually be like a river that flows over us, nurturing us, giving us his life and sending us out in faithful witness to the truth and love of his Gospel.