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Mystici Corporis

The Mystical Body of Christ, the Church

Pope Pius XII - 1943

To Our Venerable Brethren, Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, Bishops, and other Local Ordinaries enjoying Peace and Communion with the Apostolic See.

Venerable Brethren, Health and Apostolic Benediction.

1. The doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church, [1](#) was first taught us by the Redeemer Himself. Illustrating as it does the great and inestimable privilege of our intimate union with so exalted a Head, this doctrine by its sublime dignity invites all those who are drawn by the Holy Spirit to study it, and gives them, in the truths of which it proposes to the mind, a strong incentive to the performance of such good works as are conformable to its teaching. For this reason, We deem it fitting to speak to you on this subject

through this Encyclical Letter, developing and explaining above all, those points which concern the Church Militant. To this We are urged not only by the surpassing grandeur of the subject but also by the circumstances of the present time.

2. For We intend to speak of the riches stored up in this Church which Christ purchased with His own Blood, ² and whose members glory in a thorn crowned Head. The fact that they thus glory is a striking proof that the greatest joy and exaltation are born only of suffering, and hence that we should rejoice if we partake of the sufferings of Christ, that when His glory shall be revealed we may also be glad with exceeding joy. ³

3. From the outset it should be noted that the society established by the Redeemer of the human race resembles its divine Founder who was persecuted, calumniated and tortured by those very men whom He had undertaken to save. We do not deny, rather from a heart filled with gratitude to God We admit, that even in our turbulent times there are many who, though outside the fold of Jesus Christ, look to the Church as the only haven of salvation; but We are also aware that the Church of God not only is despised and hated maliciously by those who shut their eyes to the light of Christian wisdom and miserably return to the teachings, customs and practices of ancient paganism, but is ignored, neglected, and even at times looked upon as irksome by many Christians who are allured by specious error or caught in the meshes of the world's corruption. In obedience, therefore, Venerable Brethren, to the voice of Our conscience and in compliance with the wishes of many, We will set forth before the eyes of all and extol the beauty, the praises, and the glory of Mother Church to whom, after God, we owe everything.

4. And it is to be hoped that Our instructions and exhortations will bring forth abundant fruit in the souls of the faithful in the present circumstances. For We know that if all the sorrows and calamities of these stormy times, by which countless multitudes are being sorely tried, are accepted from God's hands with calm submission, they naturally lift souls above the passing things of earth to those of heaven that abide forever, and arouse a certain secret thirst and intense desire for spiritual things. Thus, urged by the Holy Spirit, men are moved, and, as it were, impelled to seek the Kingdom of God with greater diligence; for the more they are detached from the vanities of this world and from inordinate love of temporal things, the more apt they will be to perceive the light of heavenly mysteries. But the vanity and emptiness of earthly things are more manifest today than perhaps at any other period, when Kingdoms and States are crumbling, when enormous quantities of goods and all kinds of wealth are being sunk in the depths of the sea, and cities, towns and fertile fields are strewn with massive ruins and defiled with the blood of brothers.

5. Moreover, We trust that Our exposition of the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ will be acceptable and useful to those also who are without the fold of the Church, not only because their good will towards the Church seems to grow from day to day, but also because, while before their eyes nation rises up against nation, kingdom against kingdom and discord is sown everywhere together with the seeds of envy and hatred, if they turn their gaze to the Church, if they contemplate her divinely-given unity — by which all men of every race are united to Christ in the bond of brotherhood they will be forced to admire this fellowship in charity, and with the guidance and assistance of divine grace will long to share in the same union and charity.

6. There is a special reason too, and one most dear to Us, which recalls this doctrine to Our mind and with it a deep sense of joy. During the year that has passed since the twenty-fifth anniversary of Our Episcopal consecration, We have had the great consolation of witnessing something that has made the image of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ stand out most clearly before the whole world. Though a long and deadly war has pitilessly broken the bond of brotherly union between nations, We have seen Our children in Christ, in whatever part of the world they happened to be, one in will and affection, lift up their hearts to the common Father, who, carrying in his own heart the cares and anxieties of all, is guiding the barque of the Catholic Church in the teeth of a raging tempest. This is a testimony to the wonderful union existing among Christians; but it also proves that, as Our paternal love embraces all peoples, whatever their nationality and race, so Catholics the world over, though their countries may have drawn the sword against each other, look

to the Vicar of Jesus Christ as to the loving Father of them all, who, with absolute impartiality and incorruptible judgment, rising above the conflicting gales of human passions, takes upon himself with all his strength the defense of truth, justice and charity.

7. We have been no less consoled to know that with spontaneous generosity a fund has been created for the erection of a church in Rome to be dedicated to Our saintly predecessor and patron Eugene I. As this temple, to be built by the wish and through the liberality of all the faithful, will be a lasting memorial of this happy event, so We desire to offer this Encyclical Letter in testimony of Our gratitude. It tells of those living stones which rest upon the living cornerstone, which is Christ, and are built together into a holy temple, far surpassing any temple built by hands, into a habitation of God in the Spirit. [4](#)

8. But the chief reason for Our present exposition of this sublime doctrine is Our solicitude for the souls entrusted to Us. Much indeed has been written on this subject; and we know that many today are turning with greater zest to a study which delights and nourishes Christian piety. This, it would seem, is chiefly because a revived interest in the sacred liturgy, the more widely spread custom of frequent Communion, and the more fervent devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus practiced today, have brought many souls to a deeper consideration of the unsearchable riches of Christ which are preserved in the Church. Moreover recent pronouncements on Catholic Action, by drawing closer the bonds of union between Christians and between them and the ecclesiastical hierarchy and especially the Roman Pontiff, have undoubtedly helped not a little to place this truth in its proper light. Nevertheless, while We can derive legitimate joy from these considerations, We must confess that grave errors with regard to this doctrine are being spread among those outside the true Church, and that among the faithful, also, inaccurate or thoroughly false ideas are being disseminated which turn minds aside from the straight path of truth.

9. For while there still survives a false rationalism, which ridicules anything that transcends and defies the power of human genius, and which is accompanied by a cognate error, the so-called popular naturalism, which sees and wills to see in the Church nothing but a juridical and social union, there is on the other hand a false mysticism creeping in, which, in its attempt to eliminate the immovable frontier that separates creatures from their Creator, falsifies the Sacred Scriptures.

10. As a result of these conflicting and mutually antagonistic schools of thought, some through vain fear, look upon so profound a doctrine as something dangerous, and so they shrink from it as from the beautiful but forbidden fruit of paradise. But this is not so. Mysteries revealed by God cannot be harmful to men, nor should they remain as treasures hidden in a field, useless. They have been given from on high precisely to help the spiritual progress of those who study them in a spirit of piety. For, as the Vatican Council teaches, "reason illumined by faith, if it seeks earnestly, piously and wisely, does attain under God, to a certain and most helpful knowledge of mysteries, by considering their analogy with what it knows naturally, and their mutual relations, and their common relations with man's last end," although, as the same holy Synod observes, reason, even thus illumined, "is never capable of understanding those mysteries as it does those truths which form its proper object." [5](#)

11. After pondering all this long and seriously before God We consider it part of Our pastoral duty to explain to the entire flock of Christ through this Encyclical Letter the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ and of the union in this Body of the faithful with the divine Redeemer; and then, from this consoling doctrine, to draw certain lessons that will make a deeper study of this mystery bear yet richer fruits of perfection and holiness. Our purpose is to throw an added ray of glory on the supreme beauty of the Church; to bring out into fuller light the exalted supernatural nobility of the faithful who in the Body of Christ are united with their Head; and finally, to exclude definitively the many errors current with regard to this matter.

12. When one reflects on the origin of this doctrine, there come to mind at once the words of the Apostle: "Where sin abounded, grace did more abound." [6](#) All know that the father of the whole human race was

constituted by God in so exalted a state that he was to hand on to his posterity, together with earthly existence, the heavenly life of divine grace. But after the unhappy fall of Adam, the whole human race, infected by the hereditary stain, lost their participation in the divine nature, ⁷ and we were all “children of wrath.” ⁸ But the all-merciful God “so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son”; ⁹ and the Word of the Eternal Father with the same divine love assumed human nature from the race of Adam — but an innocent and spotless nature — so that He, as the new Adam, might be the source whence the grace of the Holy Spirit should flow unto all the children of the first parent. Through the sin of the first man they had been excluded from adoption as children of God; through the Word incarnate, made brothers according to the flesh of the only-begotten Son of God, they receive also the power to become the sons of God. ¹⁰ As He hung upon the Cross, Christ Jesus not only appeased the justice of the Eternal Father which had been violated, but He also won for us, His brethren, an ineffable flow of graces. It was possible for Him of Himself to impart these graces to mankind directly; but He willed to do so only through a visible Church made up of men, so that through her all might cooperate with Him in dispensing the graces of Redemption. As the Word of God willed to make use of our nature, when in excruciating agony He would redeem mankind, so in the same way throughout the centuries He makes use of the Church that the work begun might endure. ¹¹

13. If we would define and describe this true Church of Jesus Christ — which is the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Roman Church ¹² — we shall find nothing more noble, more sublime, or more divine than the expression “the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ” — an expression which springs from and is, as it were, the fair flowering of the repeated teaching of the Sacred Scriptures and the holy Fathers.

14. That the Church is a body is frequently asserted in the Sacred Scriptures. “Christ,” says the Apostle, “is the Head of the Body of the Church.” ¹³ If the Church is a body, it must be an unbroken unity, according to those words of Paul: “Though many we are one body in Christ.” ¹⁴ But it is not enough that the body of the Church should be an unbroken unity; it must also be something definite and perceptible to the senses as Our predecessor of happy memory, Leo XIII, in his Encyclical *Satis Cognitum* asserts: “the Church is visible because she is a body.” ¹⁵ Hence they err in a matter of divine truth, who imagine the Church to be invisible, intangible, a something merely “pneumatological” as they say, by which many Christian communities, though they differ from each other in their profession of faith, are united by an invisible bond.

15. But a body calls also for a multiplicity of members, which are linked together in such a way as to help one another. And as in the body when one member suffers, all the other members share its pain, and the healthy members come to the assistance of the ailing, so in the Church the individual members do not live for themselves alone, but also help their fellows, and all work in mutual collaboration for the common comfort and for the more perfect building up of the whole Body.

16. Again, as in nature a body is not formed by any haphazard grouping of members but must be constituted of organs, that is of members, that have not the same function and are arranged in due order; so for this reason above all the Church is called a body, that it is constituted by the coalescence of structurally united parts, and that it has a variety of members reciprocally dependent. It is thus the Apostle describes the Church when he writes: “As in one body we have many members, but all the members have not the same office: so we being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.” ¹⁶

17. One must not think, however, that this ordered or “organic” structure of the body of the Church contains only hierarchical elements and with them is complete; or, as an opposite opinion holds, that it is composed only of those who enjoy charismatic gifts — though members gifted with miraculous powers will never be lacking in the Church. That those who exercise sacred power in this Body are its first and chief members, must be maintained uncompromisingly. It is through them, by commission of the Divine Redeemer Himself, that Christ’s apostolate as Teacher, King and Priest is to endure. At the same time, when the Fathers of the Church sing the praises of this Mystical Body of Christ, with its ministries, its variety of ranks, its officers, its

conditions, its orders, its duties, they are thinking not only of those who have received Holy Orders, but all those too, who, following the evangelical counsels, pass their lives either actively among men, or hidden in the silence of the cloister, or who aim at combining the active and contemplative life according to their Institute; as also of those who, though living in the world, consecrate themselves wholeheartedly to spiritual or corporal works of mercy, and of those who live in the state of holy matrimony. Indeed, let this be clearly understood, especially in these our days: fathers and mothers of families, those who are godparents through Baptism, and in particular those members of the laity who collaborate with the ecclesiastical hierarchy in spreading the Kingdom of the Divine Redeemer occupy an honorable, if often a lowly, place in the Christian community, and even they under the impulse of God and with His help, can reach the heights of supreme holiness, which, Jesus Christ has promised, will never be wanting to the Church.

18. Now we see that the human body is given the proper means to provide for its own life, health and growth, and for that of all its members. Similarly the Savior of mankind out of His infinite goodness has provided in a wonderful way for His Mystical Body, endowing it with the Sacraments, so that, as though by an uninterrupted series of graces, its members should be sustained from birth to death, and that generous provision might be made for the social needs of the Church. Through the waters of Baptism those who are born into this world dead in sin are not only born again and made members of the Church, but being stamped with a spiritual seal they become able and fit to receive the other Sacraments. By the chrism of Confirmation, the faithful are given added strength to protect and defend the Church, their Mother, and the faith she has given them. In the Sacrament of Penance a saving medicine is offered for the members of the Church who have fallen into sin, not only to provide for their own health, but to remove from other members of the Mystical Body all danger of contagion, or rather to afford them an incentive to virtue, and the example of a virtuous act.

19. Nor is that all; for in the Holy Eucharist the faithful are nourished and strengthened at the same banquet and by a divine, ineffable bond are united with each other and with the Divine Head of the whole Body. Finally, like a devoted mother, the Church is at the bedside of those who are sick unto death; and if it be not always God's will that by the holy anointing she restore health to the mortal body, nevertheless she administers spiritual medicine to the wounded soul and sends new citizens to heaven — to be her new advocates — who will enjoy forever the happiness of God.

20. For the social needs of the Church Christ has provided in a particular way by the institution of two other Sacraments. Through Matrimony, in which the contracting parties are ministers of grace to each other, provision is made for the external and duly regulated increase of Christian society, and, what is of greater importance, for the correct religious education of the children, without which this Mystical body would be in grave danger. Through Holy Orders men are set aside and consecrated to God, to offer the Sacrifice of the Eucharistic Victim, to nourish the flock of the faithful with the Bread of Angels and the food of doctrine, to guide them in the way of God's commandments and counsels and to strengthen them with all other supernatural helps.

21. In this connection it must be borne in mind that, as God at the beginning of time endowed man's body with most ample power to subject all creatures to himself, and to increase and multiply and fill the earth, so at the beginning of the Christian era, He supplied the Church with the means necessary to overcome countless dangers and to fill not only the whole world but the realms of heaven as well.

22. Actually only those are to be included as members of the Church who have been baptized and profess the true faith, and who have not been so unfortunate as to separate themselves from the unity of the Body, or been excluded by legitimate authority for grave faults committed. "For in one spirit" says the Apostle, "were we all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free." ¹⁷ As therefore in the true Christian community there is only one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one Baptism, so there can be only one faith. ¹⁸ And therefore if a man refuse to hear the Church let him be considered — so the Lord commands —

as a heathen and a publican. ¹⁹ It follows that those are divided in faith or government cannot be living in the unity of such a Body, nor can they be living the life of its one Divine Spirit.

23. Nor must one imagine that the Body of the Church, just because it bears the name of Christ, is made up during the days of its earthly pilgrimage only of members conspicuous for their holiness, or that it consists only of those whom God has predestined to eternal happiness. It is owing to the Savior's infinite mercy that place is allowed in His Mystical Body here below for those whom, of old, He did not exclude from the banquet.²⁰ For not every sin, however grave it may be, is such as of its own nature to sever a man from the Body of the Church, as does schism or heresy or apostasy. Men may lose charity and divine grace through sin, thus becoming incapable of supernatural merit, and yet not be deprived of all life if they hold fast to faith and Christian hope, and if, illumined from above, they are spurred on by the interior promptings of the Holy Spirit to salutary fear and are moved to prayer and penance for their sins.

24. Let every one then abhor sin, which defiles the mystical members of our Redeemer; but if anyone unhappily falls and his obstinacy has not made him unworthy of communion with the faithful, let him be received with great love, and let eager charity see in him a weak member of Jesus Christ. For, as the Bishop of Hippo remarks, it is better "to be cured within the Church's community than to be cut off from its body as incurable members."²¹ "As long as a member still forms part of the body there is no reason to despair of its cure; once it has been cut off, it can be neither cured nor healed."²²

25. In the course of the present study, Venerable Brethren, we have thus far seen that the Church is so constituted that it may be likened to a body. We must now explain clearly and precisely why it is to be called not merely a body, but the Body of Jesus Christ. This follows from the fact that our Lord is the Founder, the Head, the Support and the Savior of this Mystical Body.

26. As We set out briefly to expound in what sense Christ founded His social Body, the following thought of Our predecessor of happy memory, Leo XIII, occurs to Us at once: "The Church which, already conceived, came forth from the side of the second Adam in His sleep on the Cross, first showed Herself before the eyes of men on the great day of Pentecost."²³ For the Divine Redeemer began the building of the mystical temple of the Church when by His preaching He made known His precepts; He completed it when He hung glorified on the Cross; and He manifested and proclaimed it when He sent the Holy Ghost as Paraclete in visible form on His disciples.

27. For while fulfilling His office as preacher He chose Apostles, sending them as He had been sent by the Father²⁴ namely, as teachers, rulers, instruments of holiness in the assembly of the believers; He appointed their Chief and His Vicar on earth;²⁵ He made known to them all things whatsoever He had heard from His Father;²⁶ He also determined that through Baptism²⁷ those who should believe would be incorporated in the Body of the Church; and finally, when He came to the close of His life, He instituted at the Last Supper the wonderful Sacrifice and Sacrament of the Eucharist.

28. That He completed His work on the gibbet of the Cross is the unanimous teaching of the holy Fathers who assert that the Church was born from the side of our Savior on the Cross like a new Eve, mother of all the living.²⁸ "And it is now," says the great St. Ambrose, speaking of the pierced side of Christ, "that it is built, it is now that it is formed, it is now that it is molded, it is now that it is created . . . Now it is that arises a spiritual house, a holy priesthood."²⁹ One who reverently examines this venerable teaching will easily discover the reasons on which it is based.

29. And first of all, by the death of our Redeemer, the New Testament took the place of the Old Law which had been abolished; then the Law of Christ together with its mysteries, enactments, institutions, and sacred rites was ratified for the whole world in the blood of Jesus Christ. For, while our Divine Savior was preaching

in a restricted area — He was not sent but to the sheep that were lost of the house of Israel ³⁰ -the Law and the Gospel were together in force; ³¹ but on the gibbet of his death Jesus made void the Law with its decrees, ³² fastened the handwriting of the Old Testament to the Cross, ³³ establishing the New Testament in His blood shed for the whole human race. ³⁴ “To such an extent, then,” says St. Leo the Great, speaking of the Cross of our Lord, “was there effected a transfer from the Law to the Gospel, from the Synagogue to the Church, from many sacrifices to one Victim, that, as our Lord expired, that mystical veil which shut off the innermost part of the temple and its sacred secret was rent violently from top to bottom.” ³⁵

30. On the Cross then the Old Law died, soon to be buried and to be a bearer of death, ³⁶ in order to give way to the New Testament of which Christ had chosen the Apostles as qualified ministers; ³⁷ and although He had been constituted the Head of the whole human family in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, it is by the power of the Cross that our Savior exercises fully the office itself of Head in His Church. “For it was through His triumph on the Cross,” according to the teaching of the Angelic and Common Doctor, “that He won power and dominion over the gentiles”; ³⁸ by that same victory He increased the immense treasure of graces, which, as He reigns in glory in heaven, He lavishes continually on His mortal members it was by His blood shed on the Cross that God’s anger was averted and that all the heavenly gifts, especially the spiritual graces of the New and Eternal Testament, could then flow from the fountains of our Savior for the salvation of men, of the faithful above all; it was on the tree of the Cross, finally, that He entered into possession of His Church, that is, of all the members of His Mystical Body; for they would not have been united to this Mystical Body through the waters of Baptism except by the salutary virtue of the Cross, by which they had been already brought under the complete sway of Christ.

31. But if our Savior, by His death, became, in the full and complete sense of the word, the Head of the Church, it was likewise through His blood that the Church was enriched with the fullest communication of the Holy Spirit, through which, from the time when the Son of man was lifted up and glorified on the Cross by His sufferings, she is divinely illumined. For then, as Augustine notes, ³⁹ with the rending of the veil of the temple it happened that the dew of the Paraclete’s gifts, which heretofore had descended only on the fleece, that is on the people of Israel, fell copiously and abundantly (while the fleece remained dry and deserted) on the whole earth, that is on the Catholic Church, which is confined by no boundaries of race or territory. Just as at the first moment of the Incarnation the Son of the Eternal Father adorned with the fullness of the Holy Spirit the human nature which was substantially united to Him, that it might be a fitting instrument of the Divinity in the sanguinary work of the Redemption, so at the hour of His precious death He willed that His Church should be enriched with the abundant gifts of the Paraclete in order that in dispensing the divine fruits of the Redemption she might be, for the Incarnate Word, a powerful instrument that would never fail. For both the juridical mission of the Church, and the power to teach, govern and administer the Sacraments, derive their supernatural efficacy and force of the building up of the body of Christ from the fact that Jesus Christ, hanging on the Cross, opened up to His Church the fountain of those divine gifts, which prevent her from ever teaching false doctrine and enable her to rule them for the salvation of their souls through divinely enlightened pastors and to bestow on them an abundance of heavenly graces.

32. If we consider closely all these mysteries of the Cross, those words of the Apostle are no longer obscure, in which he teaches the Ephesians that Christ by His blood made the Jews and Gentiles one “breaking down the middle wall of partition . . . in his flesh” by which the two peoples were divided; and that He made the Old Law void “that he might make the two in himself into one new man,” that is, the Church, and might reconcile both to God in one Body by the Cross. ⁴⁰

33. The Church which He founded by His Blood, He strengthened on the day of Pentecost by a special power, given from heaven. For, having solemnly installed in his exalted office him whom He had already nominated as His Vicar, He had ascended into Heaven; and sitting now at the right hand of the Father He wished to make known and proclaim His Spouse through the visible coming of the Holy Spirit with the sound

of a mighty wind and tongues of fire.⁴¹ For just as He Himself when He began to preach was made known by His Eternal Father through the Holy Spirit descending and remaining on Him in the form of a dove, ⁴²so likewise, as the Apostles were about to enter upon their ministry of preaching, Christ our Lord sent the Holy Spirit down from Heaven, to touch them with tongues of fire and to point out, as by the finger of God, the supernatural mission and office of the Church.

34. That this Mystical Body which is the Church should be called Christ's is proved in the second place from the fact that He must be universally acknowledged as its actual Head. "He," as St. Paul says, "is the Head of the Body, the Church. ⁴³ He is the Head from whom the whole body perfectly organized, "groweth and maketh increase unto the edifying of itself." ⁴⁴

35. You are familiar, Venerable Brethren, with the admirable and luminous language used by the masters of Scholastic Theology, and chiefly by the Angelic and Common Doctor, when treating this question; and you know that the reasons advanced by Aquinas are a faithful reflection of the mind and the writings of the holy Fathers, who moreover merely repeated and commented on the inspired word of Sacred Scripture.

36. However for the good of all We wish to touch on this point briefly. And first of all it is clear that the Son of God and of the Blessed Virgin is to be called the Head of the Church by reason of His singular pre-eminence. For the Head is in the highest place. But who is in a higher place than Christ God, who as the Word of The Eternal Father must be acknowledged to be the "firstborn of every creature?" ⁴⁵ Who has reached more lofty heights than Christ Man, who, though born of the Immaculate Virgin, is the true and natural Son of God, and in virtue of His miraculous and glorious resurrection, a resurrection triumphant over death, has become the "firstborn of the dead?" ⁴⁶ Who finally has been so exalted as He, who as "the one mediator of God and men" ⁴⁷ has in a most wonderful manner linked earth to heaven, who, raised on the Cross as on a throne of mercy, has drawn all things to Himself, ⁴⁸ who, as the Son of Man chosen from among thousands, is beloved of God beyond all men, all angels and all created things? ⁴⁹

37. Because Christ is so exalted, He alone by every right rules and governs the Church; and herein is yet another reason why He must be likened to a head. As the head is the "royal citadel" of the body ⁵⁰ — to use the words of Ambrose — and all the members over whom it is placed for their good ⁵¹ are naturally guided by it as being endowed with superior powers, so the Divine Redeemer holds the helm of the universal Christian community and directs its course. And as to govern human society signifies to lead men to the end proposed by means that are expedient, just and helpful, ⁵² it is easy to see how our Savior, model and ideal of good Shepherds, ⁵³ performs all these functions in a most striking way.

38. While still on earth, He instructed us by precept, counsel and warning in words that shall never pass away, and will be spirit and life ⁵⁴ to all men of all times. Moreover He conferred a triple power on His Apostles and their successors, to teach, to govern, to lead men to holiness, making this power, defined by special ordinances, rights and obligations, the fundamental law of the whole Church.

39. But our Divine Savior governs and guides the Society which He founded directly and personally also. For it is He who reigns within the minds and hearts of men, and bends and subjects their wills to His good pleasure, even when rebellious. "The heart of the King is in the hand of the Lord; whithersoever he will, he shall turn it." ⁵⁵ By this interior guidance He, the "Shepherd and Bishop of our souls," ⁵⁶ not only watches over individuals but exercises His providence over the universal Church, whether by enlightening and giving courage to the Church's rulers for the loyal and effective performance of their respective duties, or by singling out from the body of the Church — especially when times are grave — men and women of conspicuous holiness, who may point the way for the rest of Christendom to the perfecting of His Mystical Body. Moreover from heaven Christ never ceases to look down with especial love on His spotless Spouse so

sorely tried in her earthly exile; and when He sees her in anger, saves her from the tempestuous sea either Himself or through the ministry of His angels, ⁵⁷ or through her whom we invoke as the Help of Christians, or through other heavenly advocates, and in calm and tranquil waters comforts her with the peace “which surpasseth all understanding.”⁵⁸

40. But we must not think that He rules only in a hidden ⁵⁹ or extraordinary manner. On the contrary, our Divine Redeemer also governs His Mystical Body in a visible and normal way through His Vicar on earth. You know, Venerable Brethren, that after He had ruled the “little flock” ⁶⁰ Himself during His mortal pilgrimage, Christ our Lord, when about to leave this world and return to the Father, entrusted to the Chief of the Apostles the visible government of the entire community He had founded. Since He was all wise He could not leave the body of the Church He had founded as a human society without a visible head. Nor against this may one argue that the primacy of jurisdiction established in the Church gives such a Mystical Body two heads. For Peter in virtue of his primacy is only Christ’s Vicar; so that there is only one chief Head of this Body, namely Christ, who never ceases Himself to guide the Church invisible, though at the same time He rules it visibly, through him who is His representative on earth. After His glorious Ascension into heaven this Church rested not on Him alone, but on Peter too, its visible foundation stone. **That Christ and His Vicar constitute one only Head is the solemn teaching of Our predecessor of immortal memory Boniface VIII in the Apostolic Letter Unam Sanctam;** ⁶¹ and his successors have never ceased to repeat the same.

41. They, therefore, walk in the path of dangerous error who believe that they can accept Christ as the Head of the Church, while not adhering loyally to His Vicar on earth. They have taken away the visible head, broken the visible bonds of unity and left the Mystical Body of the Redeemer so obscured and so maimed, that those who are seeking the haven of eternal salvation can neither see it nor find it.

42. What We have thus far said of the Universal Church must be understood also of the individual Christian communities, whether Oriental or Latin, which go to make up the one Catholic Church. For they, too, are ruled by Jesus Christ through the voice of their respective Bishops. Consequently, Bishops must be considered as the more illustrious members of the Universal Church, for they are united by a very special bond to the divine Head of the whole Body and so are rightly called “principal parts of the members of the Lord”;⁶² moreover, as far as his own diocese is concerned, each one as a true Shepherd feeds the flock entrusted to him and rules it in the name of Christ. ⁶³ Yet in exercising this office they are not altogether independent, but are subordinate to the lawful authority of the Roman Pontiff, although enjoying the ordinary power of jurisdiction which they receive directly from the same Supreme Pontiff. Therefore, Bishops should be revered by the faithful as divinely appointed successors of the Apostles,⁶⁴ and to them, even more than to the highest civil authorities should be applied the words: “Touch not my anointed ones.”⁶⁵ For the Bishops have been anointed with the chrism of the Holy Spirit.

43. That is why We are deeply pained when We hear that not a few of Our Brother Bishops are being attacked and persecuted not only in their own persons, but — what is more cruel and heartrending for them — in the faithful committed to their care, in those who share their apostolic labors, even in the virgins consecrated to God; and all this, merely because they are a pattern of the flock from the heart ⁶⁶ and guard with energy and loyalty, as they should the sacred “deposit of faith” ⁶⁷ confided to them; merely because they insist on the sacred laws that have been engraved by God on the souls of men, and after the example of the Supreme Shepherd defend their flock against ravenous wolves. Such an offense We consider as committed against Our own person and We repeat the noble words of Our predecessor of immortal memory Gregory the Great: “Our honor is the honor of the Universal Church; Our honor is the united strength of Our Brethren; and We are truly honored when honor is given to each and every one.”⁶⁸

44. Because Christ the Head holds such an eminent position, one must not think that he does not require the help of the Body. What Paul said of the human organism is to be applied likewise to the mystical Body: “The

head cannot say to the feet: I have no need of you.” ⁶⁹It is manifestly clear that the faithful need the help of the Divine Redeemer, for He has said: “Without me you can do nothing,” ⁷⁰and according to the teaching of the Apostle every advance of this Mystical Body towards its perfection derives from Christ the Head. ⁷¹ Yet this, also, must be held, marvelous though it may seem: Christ has need of His members. First, because the person of Jesus Christ is represented by the Supreme Pontiff, who in turn must call on others to share much of his solicitude lest he be overwhelmed by the burden of his pastoral office, and must be helped daily by the prayers of the Church. Moreover as our Savior does not rule the Church directly in a visible manner, He wills to be helped by the members of His Body in carrying out the work of redemption. This is not because He is indigent and weak, but rather because He has so willed it for the greater glory of His spotless Spouse. Dying on the Cross He left to His Church the immense treasury of the Redemption, towards which she contributed nothing. But when those graces come to be distributed, not only does He share this work of sanctification with His Church, but He wills that in some way it be due to her action. This is a deep mystery, and an inexhaustible subject of meditation, that the salvation of many depends on the prayers and voluntary penances which the members of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ offer for this intention and on the cooperation of pastors of souls and of the faithful, especially of fathers and mothers of families, a cooperation which they must offer to our Divine Savior as though they were His associates.

45. To the reasons thus far adduced to show that Christ our Lord should be called the Head of Society which is His Body there may be added three others which are closely related to one another.

46. We begin with the similarity which we see existing between Head and body, in that they have the same nature; and in this connection it must be observed that our nature, although inferior to that of the angels, nevertheless through God’s goodness has risen above it: “For Christ,” as Aquinas says, “is Head of the angels; for even in His humanity He is superior to angels. . . Even as man He illumines the angelic intellect and influences the angelic will. But in respect to similarity of nature Christ is not Head of the angels, because He did not take hold of the angels — to quote the Apostle — but of the seed of Abraham.” ⁷² And Christ not only took our nature; He became one of our flesh and blood with a frail body that should suffer and die. But “if the Word emptied himself taking the form of a slave,” ⁷³it was that He might make His brothers according to the flesh partakers of the divine nature, ⁷⁴through sanctifying grace in this earthly exile, in heaven through the joys of eternal bliss. For the reason why the only-begotten Son of the Eternal Father willed to be a son of man was that we might be made conformed to the image of the Son of God ⁷⁵and be renewed according to the image of Him who created us. ⁷⁶ Let all those, then, who glory in the name of Christian, look to our Divine Savior as the most exalted and the most perfect exemplar of all virtues; but let them also, by careful avoidance of sin and assiduous practice of virtue, bear witness by their conduct to His teaching and life, so that when the Lord shall appear they may be like unto Him and see Him as He is. ⁷⁷

47. It is the will of Jesus Christ that the whole body of the Church, no less than the individual members, should resemble Him. And we see this realized when, following in the footsteps of her Founder, the Church teaches, governs, and offers the divine Sacrifice. When she embraces the evangelical counsels she reflects the Redeemer’s poverty, obedience, and virginal purity. Adorned with institutes of many different kinds as with so many precious jewels, she represents Christ deep in prayer on the mountain, or preaching to the people, or healing the sick and wounded and bringing sinners back to the path of virtue — in a word, doing good to all. What wonder then, if, while on this earth she, like Christ, suffer persecutions, insults and sorrows.

48. Christ must be acknowledged Head of the Church for this reason too, that, as supernatural gifts have their fullness and perfection in Him, it is of this fullness that His Mystical Body receives. It is pointed out by many of the Fathers, that as the Head of our mortal body is the seat of all the senses, while the other parts of our organism have only the sense of touch, so all the powers that are found in Christian society, all the gifts, all the extraordinary graces, attain their utmost perfection in the Head, Christ. “In him it hath well pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell.” ⁷⁸He is gifted with those supernatural powers that accompany the

hypostatic union, since the Holy Spirit dwells in Him with a fullness of grace than which no greater can be imagined. To Him has been given “power over all flesh”;⁷⁹ “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in Him”⁸⁰ abundantly. The knowledge which is called “vision” He possesses with such clarity and comprehensiveness that it surpasses similar celestial knowledge found in all the saints of heaven. So full of grace and truth is He that of His inexhaustible fullness we have all received.⁸¹

49. These words of the disciple whom Jesus loved lead us to the last reason why Christ our Lord should be declared in a very particular way Head of His Mystical Body. As the nerves extend from the head to all parts of the human body and give them power to feel and move, in like manner our Savior communicates strength and power to His Church so that the things of God are understood more clearly and are more eagerly desired by the faithful. From Him streams into the body of the Church all the light with which those who believe are divinely illumined, and all the grace by which they are made holy as He is holy.

50. Christ enlightens His whole Church, as numberless passages from the Sacred Scriptures and the holy Fathers prove. “No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”⁸² Coming as a teacher from God⁸³ to give testimony to the truth,⁸⁴ He shed such light upon the nascent apostolic Church that the Prince of the apostles exclaimed: “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life”;⁸⁵ from heaven He assisted the evangelists in such a way that as members of Christ they wrote what they had learnt, as it were, at the dictation of the Head.⁸⁶ And for us today, who linger on in this earthly exile, He is still the author of faith as in our heavenly home He will be its finisher.⁸⁷ It is He who imparts the light of faith to believers; it is He who enriches pastors and teachers and above all His Vicar on earth with the supernatural gifts of knowledge, understanding and wisdom, so that they may loyally preserve the treasury of faith, defend it vigorously, and explain and confirm it with reverence and devotion. Finally it is He who, though unseen, presides at the Councils of the Church and guides them.⁸⁸

51. Holiness begins from Christ; and Christ is its cause. For no act conducive to salvation can be performed unless it proceeds from Him as from its supernatural source. “Without me,” He says, “you can do nothing.”⁸⁹ If we grieve and do penance for our sins, if, with filial fear and hope, we turn again to God, it is because He is leading us. Grace and glory flow from His inexhaustible fullness. Our Savior is continually pouring out His gifts of counsel, fortitude, fear and piety, especially on the leading members of His Body, so that the whole Body may grow ever more and more in holiness and in integrity of life. When the Sacraments of the Church are administered by external rite, it is He who produces their effect in souls.⁹⁰ He nourishes the redeemed with His own flesh and blood and thus calms the turbulent passions of the soul; He gives increase of grace and prepares future glory for souls and bodies. All these treasures of His divine goodness He is said to bestow on the members of His Mystical Body, not merely because He, as the Eucharistic Victim on earth and the glorified Victim in heaven, through His wounds and His prayers pleads our cause before the Eternal Father, but because He selects, He determines, He distributes every single grace to every single person “according to the measure of the giving of Christ.”⁹¹ Hence it follows that from our Divine Redeemer as from a fountainhead “the whole body, being compacted and fitly joined together, by what every joint supplieth according to the operation in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in charity.”⁹²

52. These truths which We have expounded, Venerable Brethren, briefly and succinctly tracing the manner in which Christ our Lord wills that His abundant graces should flow from His fullness into the Church, in order that she should resemble Him as closely as possible, help not a little to explain the third reason why the social Body of the Church should be honored by the name of Christ — namely, that our Savior Himself sustains in a divine manner the society which He founded.

53. As Bellarmine notes with acumen and accuracy, ⁹³ this appellation of the Body of Christ is not to be explained solely by the fact that Christ must be called the Head of His Mystical Body, but also by the fact that He so sustains the Church, and so in a certain sense lives in the Church, that she is, as it were, another Christ. The Doctor of the Gentiles, in his letter to the Corinthians, affirms this when, without further qualification, he calls the Church “Christ,”

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following no doubt the example of his Master who called out to him from on high when he was attacking the Church: “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”⁹⁵

Indeed, if we are to believe Gregory of Nyssa, the Church is often called simply “Christ” by the Apostle; ⁹⁶ and you are familiar, Venerable Brethren, with that phrase of Augustine: “Christ preaches Christ.”⁹⁷

54. Nevertheless this most noble title of the Church must not be so understood as if that ineffable bond by which the Son of God assumed a definite human nature belongs to the universal Church; but it consists in this, that our Savior shares prerogatives peculiarly His own with the Church in such a way that she may portray, in her whole life, both exterior and interior, a most faithful image of Christ. For in virtue of the juridical mission by which our Divine Redeemer sent His Apostles into the world, as He had been sent by the Father,⁹⁸ it is He who through the Church baptizes, teaches, rules, looses, binds, offers, sacrifices.

55. But in virtue of that higher, interior, and wholly sublime communication, with which We dealt when We described the manner in which the Head influences the members, Christ our Lord wills the Church to live His own supernatural life, and by His divine power permeates His whole Body and nourishes and sustains each of the members according to the place which they occupy in the Body, in the same way as the vine nourishes and makes fruitful the branches which are joined to it.⁹⁹

56. If we examine closely this divine principle of life and power given by Christ, in so far as it constitutes the very source of every gift and created grace, we easily perceive that it is nothing else than the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and who is called in a special way the “Spirit of Christ” or the “Spirit of the Son.”¹⁰⁰ For it was by this Breath of grace and truth that the Son of God anointed His soul in the immaculate womb of the Blessed Virgin; this Spirit delights to dwell in the beloved soul of our Redeemer as in His most cherished shrine; this Spirit Christ merited for us on the Cross by shedding His own blood; this Spirit He bestowed on the Church for the remission of sins, when He breathed on the Apostles; ¹⁰¹and while Christ alone received this Spirit without measure,¹⁰² to the members of the Mystical Body He is imparted only according to the measure of the giving of Christ from Christ’s own fullness.¹⁰³ But after Christ’s glorification on the Cross, His Spirit is communicated to the Church in an abundant outpouring, so that she, and her individual members, may become daily more and more like to our Savior. It is the Spirit of Christ that has made us adopted sons of God¹⁰⁴ in order that one day “we all beholding the glory of the Lord with open face may be transformed into the same image from glory to glory.”¹⁰⁵

57. To this Spirit of Christ, also, as to an invisible principle is to be ascribed the fact that all the parts of the Body are joined one with the other and with their exalted Head; for He is entire in the Head, entire in the Body, and entire in each of the members. To the members He is present and assists them in proportion to their various duties and offices, and the greater or less degree of spiritual health which they enjoy. It is He who through His heavenly grace is the principle of every supernatural act in all parts of the Body. It is He who while He is personally present and divinely active in all the members, nevertheless in the inferior members acts also through the ministry of the higher members. Finally, while by His grace He provides for the continual growth of the Church, He yet refuses to dwell through sanctifying grace in those members that are wholly severed from the Body. This presence and activity of the Spirit of Jesus Christ is tersely and

vigorously described by Our predecessor of immortal memory Leo XIII in his Encyclical Letter *Divinum Illud* in these words: “Let it suffice to say that, as Christ is the Head of the Church, so is the Holy Spirit her soul.” ¹⁰⁶

58. If that vital principle, by which the whole community of Christians is sustained by its Founder, be considered not now in itself, but in the created effects which proceed from it, it consists in those heavenly gifts which our Redeemer, together with His Spirit, bestows on the Church, and which He and His Spirit, from whom come supernatural light and holiness, make operative in the Church. The Church, then, no less than each of her holy members can make this great saying of the Apostle her own: “And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me.” ¹⁰⁷

59. What We have said concerning the “mystical Head” ¹⁰⁸ would indeed be incomplete if We were not at least briefly to touch on this saying of the same Apostle: “Christ is the Head of the Church: he is the Savior of his Body.” ¹⁰⁹ For in these words we have the final reason why the Body of the Church is given the name of Christ, namely, that Christ is the Divine Savior of this Body. The Samaritans were right in proclaiming Him “Savior of the world”; ¹¹⁰ for indeed He most certainly is to be called the “Savior of all men,” even though we must add with Paul: “especially of the faithful, ¹¹¹ since, before all others, He has purchased with His Blood His members who constitute the Church. ¹¹² But as We have already treated this subject fully and clearly when speaking of the birth of the Church on the Cross, of Christ as the source of life and the principle of sanctity, and of Christ as the support of His Mystical Body, there is no reason why We should explain it further; but rather let us all, while giving perpetual thanks to God, meditate on it with a humble and attentive mind. For that which our Lord began when hanging on the Cross, He continues unceasingly amid the joys of heaven: “Our Head” says St. Augustine “intercedes for us: some members He is receiving, others He is chastising, others cleansing, others consoling, others creating, others calling, others recalling, others correcting, others renewing.” ¹¹³ But it is for us to cooperate with Christ in this work of salvation, “from one and through one saved and saviours.” ¹¹⁴

60. And now, Venerable Brethren, We come to that part of Our explanation in which We desire to make clear why the Body of Christ, which is the Church, should be called mystical. This name, which is used by many early writers, has the sanction of numerous Pontifical documents. There are several reasons why it should be used; for by it we may distinguish the Body of the Church, which is a Society whose Head and Ruler is Christ, from His physical Body, which, born of the Virgin Mother of God, now sits at the right hand of the Father and is hidden under the Eucharistic veils; and, that which is of greater importance in view of modern errors, this name enables us to distinguish it from any other body, whether in the physical or the moral order.

61. In a natural body the principle of unity unites the parts in such a manner that each lacks its own individual subsistence; on the contrary, in the Mystical Body the mutual union, though intrinsic, links the members by a bond which leaves to each the complete enjoyment of his own personality. Moreover, if we examine the relations existing between the several members and the whole body, in every physical, living body, all the different members are ultimately destined to the good of the whole alone; while if we look to its ultimate usefulness, every moral association of men is in the end directed to the advancement of all in general and of each single member in particular; for they are persons. And thus — to return to Our theme — as the Son of the Eternal Father came down from heaven for the salvation of us all, He likewise established the body of the Church and enriched it with the divine Spirit to ensure that immortal souls should attain eternal happiness according to the words of the Apostle: “All things are yours; and you are Christ’s: and Christ is God’s.” ¹¹⁵ For the Church exists both for the good of the faithful and for the glory of God and of Jesus Christ whom He sent.

62. But if we compare a mystical body with a moral body, it is to be noted that the difference between them is not slight; rather it is very considerable and very important. In the moral body the principal of union is

nothing else than the common end, and the common cooperation of all under the authority of society for the attainment of that end; whereas in the Mystical Body of which We are speaking, this collaboration is supplemented by another internal principle, which exists effectively in the whole and in each of its parts, and whose excellence is such that of itself it is vastly superior to whatever bonds of union may be found in a physical or moral body. As We said above, this is something not of the natural but of the supernatural order; rather it is something in itself infinite, uncreated: the Spirit of God, who, as the Angelic Doctor says, “numerically one and the same, fills and unifies the whole Church.” [116](#)

63. Hence, this word in its correct signification gives us to understand that the Church, a perfect society of its kind, is not made up of merely moral and juridical elements and principles. It is far superior to all other human societies; [117](#) it surpasses them as grace surpasses nature, as things immortal are above all those that perish. [118](#) Such human societies, and in the first place civil Society, are by no means to be despised or belittled, but the Church in its entirety is not found within this natural order, any more than the whole of man is encompassed within the organism of our mortal body. [119](#) Although the juridical principles, on which the Church rests and is established, derive from the divine constitution given to it by Christ and contribute to the attaining of its supernatural end, nevertheless that which lifts the Society of Christians far above the whole natural order is the Spirit of our Redeemer who penetrates and fills every part of the Church’s being and is active within it until the end of time as the source of every grace and every gift and every miraculous power. just as our composite mortal body, although it is a marvelous work of the Creator, falls far short of the eminent dignity of our soul, so the social structure of the Christian community, though it proclaims the wisdom of its divine Architect, still remains something inferior when compared to the spiritual gifts which give it beauty and life, and to the divine source whence they flow.

64. From what We have thus far written and explained, Venerable Brethren, it is clear, We think, how grievously they err who arbitrarily claim that the Church is something hidden and invisible, as they also do who look upon her as a mere human institution possessing a certain disciplinary code and external ritual, but lacking power to communicate supernatural life. [120](#) On the contrary, as Christ, Head and Exemplar of the Church “is not complete, if only His visible human nature is considered. . . , or if only His divine, invisible nature. . . , but He is one through the union of both and one in both . . . so is it with His Mystical Body” [121](#) since the Word of God took unto Himself a human nature liable to sufferings, so that He might consecrate in His blood the visible Society founded by Him and “lead man back to things invisible under a visible rule.” [122](#)

65. For this reason We deplore and condemn the pernicious error of those who dream of an imaginary Church, a kind of society that finds its origin and growth in charity, to which, somewhat contemptuously, they oppose another, which they call juridical. But this distinction which they introduce is false: for they fail to understand that the reason which led our Divine Redeemer to give to the community of man He founded the constitution of a Society, perfect of its kind and containing all the juridical and social elements -namely, that He might perpetuate on earth the saving work of Redemption [123](#) — was also the reason why He willed it to be enriched with the heavenly gifts of the Paraclete. The Eternal Father indeed willed it to be the “kingdom of the Son of his predilection;” [124](#) but it was to be a real kingdom, in which all believers should make Him the entire offering of their intellect and will, [125](#) and humbly and obediently model themselves on Him, Who for our sake “was made obedient unto death.” [126](#) There can, then, be no real opposition or conflict between the invisible mission of the Holy Spirit and the juridical commission of Ruler and Teacher received from Christ, since they mutually complement and perfect each other — as do the body and soul in man — and proceed from our one Redeemer who not only said as He breathed on the Apostles “Receive ye the Holy Spirit,” [127](#) but also clearly commanded: “As the Father hath sent me, I also send you”; [128](#) and again: “He that heareth you heareth me.” [129](#)

66. And if at times there appears in the Church something that indicates the weakness of our human nature, it should not be attributed to her juridical constitution, but rather to that regrettable inclination to evil found in each individual, which its Divine Founder permits even at times in the most exalted members of His Mystical Body, for the purpose of testing the virtue of the shepherds no less than of the flocks, and that all may increase the merit of their Christian faith. For, as We said above, Christ did not wish to exclude sinners from His Church; hence if some of her members are suffering from spiritual maladies, that is no reason why we should lessen our love for the Church, but rather a reason why we should increase our devotion to her members. Certainly the loving Mother is spotless in the Sacraments, by which she gives birth to and nourishes her children; in the faith which she has always preserved inviolate; in her sacred laws imposed on all; in the evangelical counsels which she recommends; in those heavenly gifts and extraordinary graces through which, with inexhaustible fecundity,¹³⁰ she generates hosts of martyrs, virgins and confessors. But it cannot be laid to her charge if some members fall, weak or wounded. In their name she prays to God daily: "Forgive us our trespasses"; and with the brave heart of a mother she applies herself at once to the work of nursing them back to spiritual health. When therefore we call the Body of Jesus Christ "mystical," the very meaning of the word conveys a solemn warning. It is a warning that echoes in these words of St. Leo: "Recognize, O Christian, your dignity, and being made a sharer of the divine nature go not back to your former worthlessness along the way of unseemly conduct. Keep in mind of what Head and of what Body you are a member."¹³¹

67. Here, Venerable Brethren, We wish to speak in a very special way of our union with Christ in the Body of the Church, a thing which is, as Augustine justly remarks, sublime, mysterious and divine;¹³² but for that very reason it often happens that many misunderstand it and explain it incorrectly. It is at once evident that this union is very close. In the Sacred Scriptures it is compared to the chaste union of man and wife, to the vital union of branch and vine, and to the cohesion found in our body.¹³³ Even more, it is represented as being so close that the Apostle says: "He (Christ) is Head of the Body of the Church,"¹³⁴ and the unbroken tradition of the Fathers from the earliest times teaches that the Divine Redeemer and the Society which is His Body form but one mystical person, that is to say, to quote Augustine, the whole Christ.¹³⁵ Our Savior Himself in His sacerdotal prayer did not hesitate to liken this union to that wonderful unity by which the Son is in the Father, and the Father in the Son.¹³⁶

68. Our union in and with Christ is first evident from the fact that, since Christ wills His Christian community to be a Body which is a perfect Society, its members must be united because they all work together towards a single end. The nobler the end towards which they strive, and the more divine the motive which actuates this collaboration, the higher, no doubt, will be the union. Now the end in question is supremely exalted; the continual sanctifying of the members of the Body for the glory of God and of the Lamb that was slain.¹³⁷ The motive is altogether divine: not only the good pleasure of the Eternal Father, and the most earnest wish of our Savior, but the interior inspiration and impulse of the Holy Spirit in our minds and hearts. For if not even the smallest act conducive to salvation can be performed except in the Holy Spirit, how can countless multitudes of every people and every race work together harmoniously for the supreme glory of the Triune God, except in the power of Him, who proceeds from the Father and the Son in one eternal act of love?

69. Now since its Founder willed this social body of Christ to be visible, the cooperation of all its members must also be externally manifest through their profession the same faith and their sharing the same sacred rites, through participation in the same Sacrifice, and the practical observance of the same laws. Above all, it is absolutely necessary that the Supreme Head, that is, the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth, be visible to the eyes of all, since it is He who gives effective direction to the work which all do in common in a mutually helpful way towards the attainment of the proposed end. As the Divine Redeemer sent the Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth, who in His name¹³⁸ should govern the Church in an invisible way, so, in the same manner, He commissioned Peter and his successors to be His personal representatives on earth and to assume the visible government of the Christian community.

70. These juridical bonds in themselves far surpass those of any other human society, however exalted; and yet another principle of union must be added to them in those three virtues, Christian faith, hope and charity, which link us so closely to each other and to God.

71. “One Lord, one faith,” ¹³⁹ writes the Apostle: the faith, that is, by which we hold fast to God, and to Jesus Christ whom He has sent. ¹⁴⁰ The beloved disciple teaches us how closely this faith binds us to God: “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God.” ¹⁴¹ This Christian faith binds us no less closely to each other and to our divine Head. For all we who believe, “having the same spirit of faith,” ¹⁴² are illumined by the same light of Christ, nourished by the same Food of Christ, and live under the teaching authority of Christ. If the same spirit of faith breathes in all, we are all living the same life “in the faith of the Son of God who loved us and delivered himself for us.” ¹⁴³ And once we have received Christ, our Head, through an ardent faith so that He dwells within our hearts, ¹⁴⁴ as He is the author so He will be the finisher of our faith. ¹⁴⁵

72. As by faith on this earth we hold fast to God as the Author of truth, so by Christian hope we long for Him as the fount of blessedness, “looking for the blessed hope and coming of the glory of the great God.” ¹⁴⁶ It is because of this universal longing for the heavenly Kingdom, that we do not desire a permanent home here below but seek for one above, ¹⁴⁷ and because of our yearning for the glory on high, that the Apostle of the Gentiles did not hesitate to say: “One Body and one Spirit, as you are called in one hope of your calling”; ¹⁴⁸ nay rather that Christ in us is our hope of glory. ¹⁴⁹

73. But if the bonds of faith and hope, which bind us to our Redeemer in His Mystical Body are weighty and important, those of charity are certainly no less so. If even in the natural order the love of friendship is something supremely noble, what shall we say of that supernatural love, which God infuses into our hearts? “God is charity and he that abideth in charity abideth in God and God in him.” ¹⁵⁰ The effect of this charity — such would seem to be God’s law — is to compel Him to enter into our loving hearts to return love for love, as He said: “If anyone love me . . . , my Father will love him and we will come to him and will make our abode with him.” ¹⁵¹ Charity then, more than any other virtue binds us closely to Christ. How many children of the Church, on fire with this heavenly flame, have rejoiced to suffer insults for Him, and to face and overcome the hardest trials, even at the cost of their lives and the shedding of their blood. For this reason our Divine Savior earnestly exhorts us in these words: “Abide in my love.” And as charity, if it does not issue effectively in good works, is something altogether empty and unprofitable, He added immediately: “If you keep my commandments you shall abide in my love; as I also have kept my Father’s commandments and do abide in his love.” ¹⁵²

74. But, corresponding to this love of God and of Christ, there must be love of the neighbor. How can we claim to love the Divine Redeemer, if we hate those whom He has redeemed with His precious blood, so that He might make them members of His Mystical Body? For that reason the beloved disciple warns us: “If any man say: I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother whom he seeth, how can he love God whom he seeth not. And this commandment we have from God, that he who loveth God love also his brother.” ¹⁵³ Rather it should be said that the more we become “members one of another,” ¹⁵⁴ “mutually careful one for another,” ¹⁵⁵ the closer we shall be united with God and with Christ; as, on the other hand, the more ardent the love that binds us to God and to our divine Head, the closer we shall be united to each other in the bonds of charity.

75. Now the only-begotten Son of God embraced us in His infinite knowledge and undying love even before the world began. And that He might give a visible and exceedingly beautiful expression to this love, He assumed our nature in hypostatic union: hence -as Maximus of Turin with a certain unaffected simplicity remarks — “in Christ our own flesh loves us” ¹⁵⁶ But the knowledge and love of our Divine Redeemer, of

which we were the object from the first moment of His Incarnation, exceed all the human intellect can hope to grasp. For hardly was He conceived in the womb of the Mother of God, when He began to enjoy the beatific vision, and in that vision all the members of His Mystical Body were continually and unceasingly present to Him, and He embraced them with His redeeming love. O marvelous condescension of divine love for us! O inestimable dispensation of boundless charity. In the crib, on the Cross, in the unending glory of the Father, Christ has all the members of the Church present before Him and united to Him in a much clearer and more loving manner than that of a mother who clasps her child to her breast, or than that with which a man knows and loves himself.

76. From all that We have hitherto said, you will readily understand, Venerable Brethren, why Paul the Apostle so often writes that Christ is in us and we in Christ. In proof of which, there is this other more subtle reason. Christ is in us through His Spirit whom He gives to us and through whom He acts within us in such a way that all divine activity of the Holy Spirit within our souls must also be attributed to Christ. ¹⁵⁷ “If a man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his,” says the Apostle, “but if Christ be in you, . . . the spirit liveth because of justification.”

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77. This communication of the Spirit of Christ is the channel through which all the gifts, powers, and extraordinary graces found superabundantly in the Head as in their source flow into all the members of the Church, and are perfected daily in them according to the place they hold in the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ. Thus the Church becomes, as it were, the filling out and the complement of the Redeemer, while Christ in a sense attains through the Church a fullness in all things. ¹⁵⁹ Herein we find the reason why, according to the opinion of Augustine already referred to, the mystical Head, which is Christ, and the Church, which here below as another Christ shows forth His person, constitute one new man, in whom heaven and earth are joined together in perpetuating the saving work of the Cross: Christ We mean, the Head and the Body, the whole Christ.

78. For indeed We are not ignorant of the fact that this profound truth — of our union with the Divine Redeemer and in particular of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our souls — is shrouded in darkness by many a veil that impedes our power to understand and explain it, both because of the hidden nature of the doctrine itself, and of the limitations of our human intellect. But We know, too, that from welldirected and earnest study of this doctrine, and from the clash of diverse opinions and the discussion thereof, provided that these are regulated by the love of truth and by due submission to the Church, much light will be gained, which, in its turn will help to progress in kindred sacred sciences. Hence We do not censure those who in various ways, and with diverse reasonings make every effort to understand and to clarify the mystery of this our wonderful union with Christ. But let all agree uncompromisingly on this, if they would not err from truth and from the orthodox teaching of the Church: to reject every kind of mystic union by which the faithful of Christ should in any way pass beyond the sphere of creatures and wrongly enter the divine, were it only to the extent of appropriating to themselves as their own but one single attribute of the eternal Godhead. And, moreover, let all hold this as certain truth, that all these activities are common to the most Blessed Trinity, in so far as they have God as supreme efficient cause.

79. It must also be borne in mind that there is question here of a hidden mystery, which during this earthly exile can only be dimly seen through a veil, and which no human words can express. The Divine Persons are said to indwell inasmuch as they are present to beings endowed with intelligence in a way that lies beyond human comprehension, and in a unique and very intimate manner, which transcends all created nature, these creatures enter into relationship with Them through knowledge and love.

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If we would attain, in some measure, to a clearer perception of this truth, let us not neglect the method strongly recommended by the Vatican Council [/note]Sess. III, Const. de fide Cath., Cap. 4. [/note] in similar cases, by which these mysteries are compared one with another and with the end to which they are directed, so that in the light which this comparison throws upon them we are able to discern, at least partially, the hidden things of God.

80. Therefore, Our most learned predecessor Leo XIII of happy memory, speaking of our union with Christ and with the Divine Paraclete who dwells within us, and fixing his gaze on that blessed vision through which this mystical union will attain its confirmation and perfection in heaven says: “This wonderful union, or indwelling properly so-called, differs from that by which God embraces and gives joy to the elect only by reason of our earthly state.”¹⁶¹ In that celestial vision it will be granted to the eyes of the human mind strengthened by the light of glory, to contemplate the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in an utterly ineffable manner, to assist throughout eternity at the processions of the Divine Persons, and to rejoice with a happiness like to that with which the holy and undivided Trinity is happy.

81. It seems to Us that something would be lacking to what We have thus far proposed concerning the close union of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ with its Head, were We not to add here a few words on the Holy Eucharist, by which this union during his mortal life reaches, as it were a culmination.

82. By means of the Eucharistic Sacrifice Christ our Lord willed to give to the faithful a striking manifestation of our union among ourselves and with our divine Head, wonderful as it is and beyond all praise. For in this Sacrifice the sacred minister acts as the vicegerent not only of our Savior but of the whole Mystical Body and of each one of the faithful. In this act of Sacrifice through the hands of the priest, by whose word alone the Immaculate Lamb is present on the altar, the faithful themselves, united with him in prayer and desire, offer to the Eternal Father a most acceptable victim of praise and propitiation for the needs of the whole Church. And as the Divine Redeemer, when dying on the Cross, offered Himself to the Eternal Father as Head of the whole human race, so “in this clean oblation”¹⁶² He offers to the heavenly Father not only Himself as Head of the Church, but in Himself His mystical members also, since He holds them all, even those who are weak and ailing, in His most loving Heart.

83. The Sacrament of the Eucharist is itself a striking and wonderful figure of the unity of the Church, if we consider how in the bread to be consecrated many grains go to form one whole,¹⁶³ and that in it the very Author of supernatural grace is given to us, so that through Him we may receive the spirit of charity in which we are bidden to live now no longer our own life but the life of Christ, and to love the Redeemer Himself in all the members of His social Body.

84. As then in the sad and anxious times through which we are passing there are many who cling so- firmly to Christ the Lord hidden beneath the Eucharistic veils that neither tribulation, nor distress, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor danger, nor persecution, nor the sword can separate them from His love,¹⁶⁴ surely no doubt can remain that Holy Communion which once again in God’s providence is much more frequented even from early childhood, may become a source of that fortitude which not infrequently makes Christians into heroes.

85. If the faithful, Venerable Brethren, in a spirit of sincere piety understand these things accurately and hold to them steadfastly, they will the more easily avoid those errors which arise from an irresponsible investigation of this difficult matter, such as some have made not without seriously endangering Catholic faith and disturbing the peace of souls.

86. For some there are who neglect the fact that the Apostle Paul has used metaphorical language in speaking of this doctrine, and failing to distinguish as they should the precise and proper meaning of the terms the physical body, the social body, and the mystical Body, arrive at a distorted idea of unity. They make the Divine Redeemer and the members of the Church coalesce in one physical person, and while they bestow

divine attributes on man, they make Christ our Lord subject to error and to human inclination to evil. But Catholic faith and the writings of the holy Fathers reject such false teaching as impious and sacrilegious; and of the mind of the Apostle of the Gentiles it is equally abhorrent, for although he brings Christ and His Mystical Body into a wonderfully intimate union, he nevertheless distinguishes one from the other as Bridegroom from Bride.¹⁶⁵

87. No less far from the truth is the dangerous error of those who endeavor to deduce from the mysterious union of us all with Christ a certain unhealthy quietism. They would attribute the whole spiritual life of Christians and their progress in virtue exclusively to the action of the divine Spirit, setting aside and neglecting the collaboration which is due from us. No one of course can deny that the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ is the one source of whatever supernatural power enters into the Church and its members. For “the Lord will give grace and glory” as the Psalmist says.¹⁶⁶ But that men should persevere constantly in their good works, that they should advance eagerly in grace and virtue, that they should strive earnestly to reach the heights of Christian perfection and at the same time to the best of their power should stimulate others to attain the same goal, — all this the heavenly Spirit does not will to effect unless they contribute their daily share of zealous activity. “For divine favors are conferred not on those who sleep, but on those who watch” as St. Ambrose says.¹⁶⁷ For if in our mortal body the members are strengthened and grow through continued exercise, much more truly can this be said of the social Body of Jesus Christ in which each individual member retains his own personal freedom, responsibility, and principles of conduct. For that reason he who said: “I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me”¹⁶⁸ did not at the same time hesitate to assert: “His (God’s) grace in men has not been void, but I have labored more abundantly than all they: yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”¹⁶⁹ It is perfectly clear, therefore, that in these false doctrines the mystery which we are considering is not directed to the spiritual advancement of the faithful but is turned to their deplorable ruin.

88. The same result follows from the opinions of those who assert that little importance should be given to the frequent confession of venial sins. Far more important, they say, is that general confession which the Spouse of Christ, surrounded by her children in the Lord, makes each day by the mouth of the priest as he approaches the altar of God. As you well know, Venerable Brethren, it is true that venial sins may be expiated in many ways which are to be highly commended. But to ensure more rapid progress day by day in the path of virtue, We will that the pious practice of frequent confession, which was introduced into the Church by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, should be earnestly advocated. By it genuine self-knowledge is increased, Christian humility grows, bad habits are corrected, spiritual neglect and tepidity are resisted, the conscience is purified, the will strengthened, a salutary self-control is attained, and grace is increased in virtue of the Sacrament itself. Let those, therefore, among the younger clergy who make light of or lessen esteem for frequent confession realize that what they are doing is alien to the Spirit of Christ and disastrous for the Mystical Body of our Savior.

89. There are others who deny any impetratory power to our prayers, or who endeavor to insinuate into men’s minds the idea that prayers offered to God in private should be considered of little worth, whereas public prayers which are made in the name of the Church are those which really matter, since they proceed from the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ. This opinion is false; for the divine Redeemer is most closely united not only with His Church, which is His beloved Spouse, but also with each and every one of the faithful, and He ardently desires to speak with them heart to heart, especially after Holy Communion. It is true that public prayer, inasmuch as it is offered by Mother Church, excels any other kind of prayer by reason of her dignity as Spouse of Christ; but no prayer, even the most private, is lacking in dignity or power, and all prayer is of the greatest help to the Mystical Body in which, through the Communion of Saints, no good can be done, no virtue practiced by individual members, which does not redound also to the salvation of all. Neither is a man forbidden to ask for himself particular favors even for this life merely because he is a member of this Body, provided he is always resigned to the divine will; for the members retain their own personality and remain subject to their own individual needs.

Moreover, how highly all should esteem mental prayer is proved not only by ecclesiastical documents but also by the custom and practice of the saints.

90. Finally there are those who assert that our prayers should be directed not to the person of Jesus Christ but rather to God, or to the Eternal Father through Christ, since our Savior as Head of His Mystical Body is only “Mediator of God and men.”¹⁷¹ But this certainly is opposed not only to the mind of the Church and to Christian usage but to truth. For, to speak exactly, Christ is Head of the universal Church as He exists at once in both His natures;¹⁷² moreover He Himself has solemnly declared: “If you shall ask me anything in my name, that I will do.”¹⁷³ For although prayers are very often directed to the Eternal Father through the only-begotten Son, especially in the Eucharistic Sacrifice — in which Christ, at once Priest and Victim, exercises in a special manner the office of Mediator — nevertheless not infrequently even in this Sacrifice prayers are addressed to the Divine Redeemer also; for all Christians must clearly know and understand that the man Jesus Christ is also the Son of God and God Himself. And thus when the Church militant offers her adoration and prayers to the Immaculate Lamb, the Sacred Victim, her voice seems to re-echo the never-ending chorus of the Church triumphant: “To him that sitteth on the throne and to the Lamb benediction and honor and glory and power for ever and ever.”¹⁷⁴

91. Venerable Brethren, in Our exposition of this mystery which embraces the hidden union of us all with Christ, We have thus far, as Teacher of the Universal Church, illumined the mind with the light of truth, and Our pastoral office now requires that We provide an incentive for the heart to love this Mystical Body with that ardor of charity which is not confined to thoughts and words but which issues in deeds. If those who lived under the Old Law could sing of their earthly city: “If I forget thee O Jerusalem let my right hand be forgotten; let my tongue cleave to my jaws if I do not remember thee, if I make not Jerusalem the beginning of my joy,”¹⁷⁵ how much greater then should be the joy and exultation that should fill our hearts who dwell in a City built on the holy mountain of living and chosen stones, “Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.”¹⁷⁶ For nothing more glorious, nothing nobler, nothing surely more honorable can be imagined than to belong to the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church, in which we become members of one Body as venerable as it is unique; are guided by one supreme Head; are filled with one divine Spirit; are nourished during our earthly exile by one doctrine and one heavenly Bread, until at last we enter into the one, unending blessedness of heaven.

92. But lest we be deceived by the angel of darkness who transforms himself into an angel of light,¹⁷⁷ let this be the supreme law of our love: to love the Spouse of Christ as Christ willed her to be, and as He purchased her with His blood. Hence not only should we cherish exceedingly the Sacraments with which holy Mother Church sustains our life, the solemn ceremonies which she celebrates for our solace and our joy, the sacred chant and the liturgical rites by which she lifts our minds up to heaven, but also the sacramentals and all those exercises of piety by which she consoles the hearts of the faithful and sweetly imbues them with the Spirit of Christ. As her children, it is our duty, not only to make a return to her for her maternal goodness to us, but also to respect the authority which she has received from Christ in virtue of which she brings into captivity our understanding unto the obedience of Christ.¹⁷⁸ Thus we are commanded to obey her laws and her moral precepts, even if at times they are difficult to our fallen nature; to bring our rebellious body into subjection through voluntary mortification; and at times we are warned to abstain even from harmless pleasures. Nor does it suffice to love this Mystical Body for the glory of its divine Head and for its heavenly gifts; we must love it with an effective love as it appears in this our mortal flesh -made up, that is, of weak human elements, even though at times they are little fitted to the place which they occupy in this venerable Body.

93. In order that such a solid and undivided love may abide and increase in our souls day by day, we must accustom ourselves to see Christ Himself in the Church. For it is Christ who lives in His Church, and through

her teaches, governs and sanctifies; it is Christ also who manifests Himself differently in different members of His society. If the faithful strive to live in a spirit of lively faith, they will not only pay due honor and reverence to the more exalted members of this Mystical Body, especially those who according to Christ's mandate will have to render an account of our souls,¹⁷⁹ but they will take to their hearts those members who are the object of our Savior's special love: the weak, We mean, the wounded, and the sick who are in need of material or spiritual assistance; children whose innocence is so easily exposed to danger in these days, and whose young hearts can be molded as wax; and finally the poor, in helping whom we recognize, as it were, through His supreme mercy, the very person of Jesus Christ.

94. For as the Apostle with good reason admonishes us: "Those that seem the more feeble members of the Body are more necessary; and those that we think the less honorable members of the Body, we surround with more abundant honour."¹⁸⁰ Conscious of the obligations of Our high office We deem it necessary to reiterate this grave statement today, when to Our profound grief We see at times the deformed, the insane, and those suffering from hereditary disease deprived of their lives, as though they were a useless burden to Society; and this procedure is hailed by some as a manifestation of human progress, and as something that is entirely in accordance with the common good. Yet who that is possessed of sound judgment does not recognize that this not only violates the natural and the divine law¹⁸¹ written in the heart of every man, but that it outrages the noblest instincts of humanity? The blood of these unfortunate victims who are all the dearer to our Redeemer because they are deserving of greater pity "cries to God from the earth."¹⁸²

95. In order to guard against the gradual weakening of that sincere love which requires us to see our Savior in the Church and in its members, it is most fitting that we should look to Jesus Himself as the perfect model of love for the Church.

96. And first of all let us imitate the breath of His love. For the Church, the Bride of Christ, is one; and yet so vast is the love of the divine Spouse that it embraces in His Bride the whole human race without exception. Our Savior shed His Blood precisely in order that He might reconcile men to God through the Cross, and might constrain them to unite in one Body, however widely they may differ in nationality and race. True love of the Church, therefore, requires not only that we should be mutually solicitous one for another¹⁸³ as members of the same Body, rejoicing in the glory of the other members and sharing in their suffering,¹⁸⁴ but likewise that we should recognize in other men, although they are not yet joined to us in the Body of the Church, our brothers in Christ according to the flesh, called, together with us, to the same eternal salvation. It is true, unfortunately, especially today, that there are some who extol enmity, hatred, and spite as if they enhanced the dignity and the worth of man. Let us however, while we look with sorrow on the disastrous consequences of this teaching, follow our peaceful King who taught us to love not only those who are of a different nation or race,¹⁸⁵ but even our enemies¹⁸⁶ While Our heart overflows with the sweetness of the teaching of the Apostle of the Gentiles, We extol with him the length, and the breadth, and the height, and the depth of the charity of Christ,¹⁸⁷ which neither diversity of race or customs can diminish, nor the trackless wastes of the ocean weaken, nor wars, whether just or unjust, destroy.

97. In this gravest of hours, Venerable Brethren, when bodies are racked with pain and souls are oppressed with grief, every individual must be aroused to this supernatural charity so that by the combined efforts of all good men, striving to outdo each other in pity and mercy — We have in mind especially, those who are engaged in any kind of relief work — the immense needs of mankind, both spiritual and corporal, may be alleviated, and the devoted generosity, the inexhaustible fruitfulness of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, may shine resplendently throughout the whole world.

98. As the vastness of the charity with which Christ loved His Church is equaled by its constant activity, we all, with the same assiduous and zealous charity must love the Mystical Body of Christ. Now from the moment of His Incarnation, when he laid the first foundations of the Church, even to His last mortal breath,

our Redeemer never ceased for an instant, though He was the Son of God, to labor unto weariness in order to establish and strengthen the Church, whether by giving us the shining example of His holiness, or by preaching, or conversing, or gathering and instructing disciples. And so We desire that all who claim the Church as their mother, should seriously consider that not only the clergy and those who have consecrated themselves to God in the religious life, but the other members of the mystical Body of Jesus Christ as well have, each in his degree, the obligation of working hard and constantly for the building up and increase of this Body. We wish this to be borne in mind especially by members of Catholic Action who assist the Bishops and the priests in their apostolic labor and to their praise be it said, they do realize it — and also by those members of pious associations who work for the same end. There is not one who does not realize that their energetic zeal of the highest importance and of the greatest weight especially in the present circumstances.

99. In this connection We cannot pass over in silence the fathers and mothers of families to whom our Savior has entrusted the youngest members of His Mystical Body. We plead with them most earnestly, for the love of Christ and the Church, to take the greatest possible care of the children confided to them, and to protect them from the snares of every kind into which they can be lured so easily today.

100. Our Redeemer showed His burning love for the Church especially by praying for her to His heavenly father. To recall but a few examples: everyone knows, Venerable Brethren, that just before the crucifixion He prayed repeatedly for Peter, [188](#) for the other Apostles, [189](#) for all who, through the preaching of the holy Gospel, would believe in Him. [190](#)

101. After the example of Christ we too should pray daily to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into His harvest. [191](#) Our united prayer should rise daily to heaven for all the members of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ; first for Bishops who are responsible in a special way for their respective dioceses; then for priests and religious, both men and women, who have been called to the service of God, and who, at home and in the foreign missions, are protecting, increasing, and advancing the Kingdom of the Divine Redeemer. No member of this venerated Body must be forgotten in this common prayer; and let there be a special remembrance of those who are weighed down with the sorrows and afflictions of this earthly exile, as also for the suffering souls in Purgatory. Neither must those be neglected who are being instructed in Christian doctrine, so that they may be able to receive baptism without delay.

102. Likewise, We must earnestly desire that this united prayer may embrace in the same ardent charity both those who, not yet enlightened by the truth of the Gospel, are still without the fold of the Church, and those who, on account of regrettable schism, are separated from Us, who though unworthy, represent the person of Jesus Christ on earth. Let us then reecho that divine prayer of our Savior to the heavenly Father: “That they all may be one, as thou Father in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” [192](#)

103. As you know, Venerable Brethren, from the very beginning of Our Pontificate, We have committed to the protection and guidance of heaven those who do not belong to the visible Body of the Catholic Church, solemnly declaring that after the example of the Good Shepherd We desire nothing more ardently than that they may have life and have it more abundantly. [193](#) Imploring the prayers of the whole Church We wish to repeat this solemn declaration in this Encyclical Letter in which We have proclaimed the praises of the “great and glorious Body of Christ,” [194](#) and from a heart overflowing with love We ask each and every one of them to correspond to the interior movements of grace, and to seek to withdraw from that state in which they cannot be sure of their salvation. [195](#) For even though by an unconscious desire and longing they have a certain relationship with the Mystical Body of the Redeemer, they still remain deprived of those many heavenly gifts and helps which can only be enjoyed in the Catholic Church. Therefore may they enter into Catholic unity and, joined with Us in the one, organic God of Jesus Christ, may they together with us run on to the one Head in the Society of glorious love. [196](#) Persevering in prayer to the Spirit of love and truth, We

wait for them with open and outstretched arms to come not to a stranger's house, but to their own, their father's home.

104. Though We desire this unceasing prayer to rise to God from the whole Mystical Body in common, that all the straying sheep may hasten to enter the one fold of Jesus Christ, yet We recognize that this must be done of their own free will; for no one believes unless he wills to believe.¹⁹⁷ Hence they are most certainly not genuine Christians¹⁹⁸ who against their belief are forced to go into a church, to approach the altar and to receive the Sacraments; for the "faith without which it is impossible to please God"¹⁹⁹ is an entirely free "submission of intellect and will."²⁰⁰ Therefore whenever it happens, despite the constant teaching of this Apostolic See,²⁰¹ that anyone is compelled to embrace the Catholic faith against his will, Our sense of duty demands that We condemn the act. For men must be effectively drawn to the truth by the Father of light through the Spirit of His beloved Son, because, endowed as they are with free will, they can misuse their freedom under the impulse of mental agitation and base desires. Unfortunately many are still wandering far from Catholic truth, being unwilling to follow the inspirations of divine grace, because neither they²⁰² nor the faithful pray to God with sufficient fervor for this intention. Again and again we beg all who ardently love the Church to follow the example of the Divine Redeemer and to give themselves constantly to such prayer.

105. And likewise, above all in the present crisis, it seems to Us not only opportune but necessary that earnest supplications should be offered for kings, princes, and for all those who govern nations and are thus in a position to assist the Church by their protecting power, so that the conflict ended, "peace the work of justice"²⁰³ under the impulse of divine charity may emerge from out this raging tempest and be restored to wearied man, and that holy Mother Church "may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all piety and chastity."²⁰⁴ We must plead with God to grant that the rulers of nations may love wisdom,²⁰⁵ so that the severe judgment of the Holy Spirit may never fall on them: "Because being ministers of his kingdom you have not judged rightly, nor kept the law of justice, nor walked according to the will of God; horribly and speedily will he appear to you; for a most severe judgment shall be for them that bear rule. For to him that is little, mercy is granted; but the mighty shall be mightily tormented. For God will not except any man's person, neither will he stand in awe of any man's greatness; for he made the little and the great, and he hath equally care of all. But a greater punishment is ready for the more mighty. To you, therefore, O Kings, are these my words, that you may learn wisdom and not fall from it."²⁰⁶

106. Moreover, Christ proved His love for His spotless Bride not only at the cost of immense labor and constant prayer, but by His sorrows and His sufferings which He willingly and lovingly endured for her sake. "Having loved his own . . . he loved them unto the end."²⁰⁷ Indeed it was only at the price of His blood that He purchased the Church.²⁰⁸ Let us then follow gladly in the bloodstained footsteps of our King, for this is necessary to ensure our salvation. "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection,"²⁰⁹ and "if we be dead with him, we shall live also with him."²¹⁰ Also our zealous love for the Church demands it, and our brotherly love for the souls she brings forth to Christ. For although our Savior's cruel passion and death merited for His Church an infinite treasure of graces, God's inscrutable providence has decreed that these graces should not be granted to us all at once; but their greater or lesser abundance will depend in no small part on our good works, which draw down on the souls of men a rain of heavenly gifts freely bestowed by God. These heavenly gifts will surely flow more abundantly if we not only pray fervently to God, especially by participating every day if possible in the Eucharistic Sacrifice; if we not only try to relieve the distress of the needy and of the sick by works of Christian charity, but if we also set our hearts on the good things of eternity rather than on the passing things of this world; if we restrain this mortal body by voluntary mortification, denying it what is forbidden, and forcing it to do what is hard and distasteful; and finally, if we humbly accept as from God's hands the burdens and sorrows of this present life. Thus, according to the Apostle, "we shall fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ in our flesh for his Body, which is the Church."²¹¹

107. As We write these words there passes before Our eyes, alas, an almost endless throng of unfortunate beings for whom We shed tears of sorrow: sick, poor, disabled, widows, orphans, and many not infrequently languishing even unto death on account of their own painful trials or those of their families. With the heart of a father We exhort all those who from whatever cause are plunged in grief and anguish to lift their eyes trustfully to heaven and to offer their sorrows to Him who will one day reward them abundantly. Let them all remember that their sufferings are not in vain, but that they will turn to their own immense gain and that of the Church, if to this end they bear them with patience. The daily use of the offering made by the members of the Apostleship of Prayer will contribute very much to make this intention more efficacious and We welcome this opportunity of recommending this Association highly, as one which is most pleasing to God.

108. There never was a time, Venerable Brethren, when the salvation of souls did not impose on all the duty of associating their sufferings with the torments of our Divine Redeemer. But today that duty is clearer than ever, when a gigantic conflict has set almost the whole world on fire and leaves in its wake so much death, so much misery, so much hardship; in the same way today, in a special manner, it is the duty of all to fly from vice, the attraction of the world, the unrestrained pleasures of the body, and also from worldly frivolity and vanity which contribute nothing to the Christian training of the soul nor to the gaining of Heaven. Rather let those weighty words of Our immortal predecessor Leo the Great be deeply engraven on our minds, that by Baptism we are made flesh of the Crucified;²¹² and that beautiful prayer of St. Ambrose; “Carry me, Christ, on the Cross, which is salvation to the wanderers, sole rest for the wearied, wherein alone is life for those who die.”²¹³

109. Before concluding, We cannot refrain from again and again exhorting all to love holy Mother Church with a devoted and active love. If we have really at heart the salvation of the whole human family, purchased by the precious Blood, we must offer every day to the Eternal Father our prayers, works and sufferings for her safety and for her continued and ever more fruitful increase. And while the skies are heavy with storm clouds, and exceeding great dangers threaten the whole of human Society and the Church herself, let us commit ourselves and all that we have to the Father of mercies, crying out: “Look down, we beseech Thee Lord, on this Thy family, for which our Lord Jesus Christ did not hesitate to be betrayed into the hands of evil men and to undergo the torment of the Cross.”²¹⁴

110. Venerable Brethren, may the Virgin Mother of God hear the prayers of Our paternal heart — which are yours also — and obtain for all a true love of the Church — she whose sinless soul was filled with the divine Spirit of Jesus Christ above all other created souls, and who “in the name of the whole human race” gave her consent “for a spiritual marriage between the Son of God and human nature.”²¹⁵ Within her virginal womb Christ our Lord already bore the exalted title of Head of the Church; in a marvelous birth she brought Him forth as the source of all supernatural life, and presented Him, newly born, as Prophet, King, and Priest to those who, from among Jews and Gentiles, were the first to come to adore Him. Furthermore, her only Son, condescending to His mother’s prayer in “Cana of Galilee,” performed the miracle by which “his disciples believed in him.”²¹⁶ It was she, the second Eve, who, free from all sin, original or personal, and always most intimately united with her Son, offered Him on Golgotha to the Eternal Father for all the children of Adam, sin-stained by his unhappy fall, and her mother’s rights and mother’s love were included in the holocaust. Thus she who, according to the flesh, was the mother of our Head, through the added title of pain and glory became, according to the Spirit, the mother of all His members. She it was who through her powerful prayers obtained that the Spirit of our Divine Redeemer, already given on the Cross, should be bestowed, accompanied by miraculous gifts, on the newly founded Church at Pentecost; and finally bearing with courage and confidence the tremendous burden of her sorrows and desolation, she, truly the Queen of Martyrs, more than all the faithful “filled up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ . . . for His Body, which is the Church”;²¹⁷ and she continues to have for the Mystical Body of Christ, born of the pierced Heart of the Saviour, ²¹⁸ the same motherly care and ardent love with which she cherished and fed the Infant Jesus in the crib.

111. May she, then, the most holy Mother of all the members of Christ, [219](#) to whose Immaculate Heart We have trustfully consecrated all mankind, and who now reigns in heaven with her Son, her body and soul refulgent with heavenly glory — may she never cease to beg from Him that copious streams of grace may flow from its exalted Head into all the members of the Mystical Body. May she throw about the Church today, as in times gone by, the mantle of her protection and obtain from God that now at last the Church and all mankind may enjoy more peaceful days.

112. Confiding in this sublime hope, from an overflowing heart We impart to you, one and all, Venerable Brethren, and to the flocks entrusted to your care, as a pledge of heavenly graces and a token of Our special affection, the Apostolic Benediction.

113. Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, on the twenty-ninth day of June, the Feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, in the year 1943, the fifth of Our Pontificate.

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