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## **OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE: MIRROR OF JUSTICE**

### **Introduction**

In October of 1980, I began my studies of Canon Law, an area of studies, which, to be honest, I had not desired or chosen, but which I accepted because it was the clear desire and, indeed, the command of my Bishop. It was a challenging time to study Canon Law for two reasons, in particular. First of all, the revision of the 1917 Code of Canon Law was reaching its completion. As a result, there was an abundance of photocopies of the proposed texts of the law but not yet the definitive text. Some of the proposed texts which I studied from 1980 to 1982 were, in fact, modified, sometimes in significant ways, in the definitive text of the Code of Canon Law, promulgated by the Venerable Pope John Paul II on January 25, 1983. Practically, I carried to class, each day, the 1917 Code of Canon Law and various sets of photocopies.

The second reason why the study of Canon Law during those years was challenging was the prevailing attitude among many Catholics and especially among priests that the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council had done away with Canon Law, that, in a Church animated by freedom and love, the idea of law was out of place. During the years of my study of Canon Law, I was residing at the house of the Pontifical North American College for priests doing graduate studies, the original Pontifical North American College which is called the Casa Santa Maria dell'Umiltà. In addition to those of us doing graduate studies, each Fall and each Spring some 25 or so priests from the United States would come to stay at the same house for a three-month sabbatical course. Every September and every February, therefore, there were new acquaintances to make.

When I would introduce myself to the priests on the three-month sabbatical, one of their first questions was always about my field of studies. It used to pain me to tell them what I was studying, because, when I did, the reaction was consistently negative. The common responses were: "I thought that the Church had gotten rid of that;" or "Why are you wasting your time studying that."

I asked myself then and ask myself now how the Church got to the point at which her priests, who should be the example of respect for her discipline, now considered what had

traditionally been called “the sacred canons” to be useless and even a detriment to the life of the Church. It seems to me that a reflection on the title of Mirror of Justice, given to the Blessed Virgin Mary, will help us to have a good and sound respect for discipline in the Church. At the same time, coming on pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, it seems especially appropriate to reflect on how the apparitions and message of Our Lady of Guadalupe show the Mother of God to be indeed the Mirror of Justice.

First of all, I will try to set the reflection with the context of the current state of Canon Law in the service of justice in the Church, the Body of Christ. In the context of the life of the Church, marked so profoundly by a rebellion against discipline and law, I will attempt to describe briefly what has caused the current state of crisis of faith and of the practice of the faith, and then reflect upon the essential service of the Church’s discipline, her Canon Law, in confronting and overcoming the critical situation. In specific, in the context of our pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, I will underline how the Blessed Virgin Mary both teaches us the irreplaceable service of canonical discipline in the Church and constantly intercedes for the Church, so that her members may practice obedience to the norms of the Church’s discipline, thus also practicing the virtue of justice in the Church, which it is the minimal requirement for the practice of the virtue of charity, of love of God and of our neighbor without boundary.

### **Rejection of Canon Law in the Post-Conciliar Church**

Those who are of a certain age experienced, in a variety of ways, the revolt against and outright rejection of the Church’s canonical discipline, beginning in the late 1960s and continuing well into the 1980s. It is still going on among a few who are caught in the “time-warp of 1968” and, therefore, refuse to let go of what has come to be called the “Spirit of Vatican II,” according to which the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council had constituted a “new Church,” the post-Conciliar Church which ideally has no relationship to the Church as we had known her up to the time of the Council.

At the time of the Council and following its closing, the Sacred Liturgy which had been so carefully disciplined as the most sacred gift of Christ to His Church suddenly became the arena of experimentation based on the notion that the Sacred Liturgy was no longer a gift from Christ but rather an activity which we create and develop. Catechesis, which had a secure foundation in the content of the Catechism of the Council of Trent and its daughter in our nation, the Baltimore Catechism, and in the methodology of memorization of the answers

to the essential questions regarding faith and morals, suddenly became the locus of various experiments in self-discovery and self-affirmation with little or no attention to the content of the Church's teaching regarding faith and morals. The discipline of the clergy and of consecrated religious, which had been articulated over centuries to safeguard and foster these essential states of life in the Church, suddenly was called into question, even as the distinctness of the states of life of the clergy and of consecrated persons were questioned with the advent of what was called "the age of the laity." At the same time, the devotional life, especially the ancient devotions to the Most Blessed Sacrament and to the Blessed Virgin Mary were spurned as expressions of an infantile Christian life and a hindrance to an adult participation in the Sacred Liturgy and true prayer. Many more examples of the manifestations of the so-called "Spirit of Vatican II" could be cited.

We all know the fruits of these developments based not on the texts of the teaching of the Council Fathers but on a so-called "spirit" which claimed to have its origin in the same teachings. Widespread abuses, and in some cases sacrileges, in the celebration of the Sacraments and, especially, of the Holy Eucharist have been accompanied by a precipitous decline of participation in the Sunday Eucharist. At the same time, there has been a shocking loss of faith in the truth of the Real Presence of Christ in the Most Blessed Sacrament. The Sacrament of Penance has been abandoned by many.

The ignorance and error regarding fundamental teachings of the Church among Catholics is pervasive. Already by 1977, when I began to teach religion in a Catholic high school, I discovered that very intelligent students, some of whom had been in Catholic school since kindergarten, could not recite from memory the most basic prayers, had little or no idea of the Ten Commandments or the Sacraments, and, even though they received Holy Communion whenever they were at Holy Mass, seldom, if ever, went to Confession. Many adults today, who were raised on the post-Conciliar catechesis, through no fault of their own, suffer from religious illiteracy.

Many priests have left the active ministry, and many religious have abandoned the consecrated life. At the same time, it was precisely during the years of a kind of euphoric abandonment of all discipline that the greater part of the horrible crimes of sexual abuse of minors by priests, about which we have so painfully learned in these past years, were committed.

With the loss of the devotional life, the faithful no longer enjoyed the means to deepen their faith and their sacramental life. Failing to call upon the intercession of the

Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints, and to cultivate their spiritual companionship, the faithful became oblivious to their relationship to the Communion of Saints and deprived themselves of necessary spiritual helps in following Christ in their daily lives. In general, the sense of belonging to the Church Militant, Suffering and Triumphant was dulled or lost altogether.

### **The Hermeneutics of Discontinuity and the New Evangelization**

What happened after the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council to create such a crisis, when the Council was proposed by Blessed John XXIII to make the Church ever more effective in witnessing faithfully and uncompromisingly to the world of our time the teaching of the faith and its practice? Was the work of the Council the source of so much breakdown in teaching, in liturgical life and in the moral life of Catholics? If one reads the documents of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, he will be at a loss to understand what happened. It was not the Council which wrote the recipe for the crisis which followed it.

In short, I believe that the source of the crisis was a method of interpretation of the teaching of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, which His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI has described as the “hermeneutics of discontinuity.” In his historic address to the members of the Roman Curia on December 22, 2005, Pope Benedict XVI described the error of what he termed the “hermeneutics [method of interpretation] of discontinuity” in interpreting the teaching of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, even as he spoke of the only coherent method of interpreting the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the “hermeneutics of continuity,” that is an interpretation which respects the organic life of the Church in all of its aspects.<sup>1</sup>

The erroneous method of interpretation or hermeneutics was introduced already during the Council and became more aggressive after the closing of the Council. In effect, it led many to conclude that the Church had become something entirely different than what she had been for some 2000 years, that what the Holy Spirit had been inspiring in the Church for some 2000 years was no longer the work of the Holy Spirit, that today, in the words of a hymn which I have heard sung at Mass, even at solemn Masses, much to my chagrin, we are called to “sing a new church into being.”<sup>2</sup> Regarding Canon Law, for example, those who were leading the revolt against Church discipline justified their activity not by an appeal to

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<sup>1</sup> cf. Pope Benedict XVI, “Allocutio ad Romanam Curiam ob omnia natalicia,” 22 December 2005, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 98 (2006), pp. 40-53.

<sup>2</sup> “Sing a New Church” by Delores Dufner, O.S.B., published by OCP Publications, 1991.

the texts of the Conciliar teaching but by an appeal to the so-called “spirit of the Council,” which clearly had nothing to do with the Council and was of their own invention.

In Canon Law, apart from the complete disregard of the norms of the Church’s discipline on the part of some, there also developed a method of interpreting the law, which turned the clear meaning of the law “on its head.” Thus, Church law which should have restrained the confused and erroneous interpretation of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council became an instrument of the hermeneutics of discontinuity.

For instance, it is claimed today, by the media and even by some in the Church, that the Church’s law made possible the sexual abuse of minors by the clergy and provided the means to cover up the crime, so that it could continue. The truth is that the Church’s laws have always recognized sexual abuse of a minor by the clergy to be a most heinous crime and have provided both the process by which to investigate and judge the truth of accusations of such sexual abuse, and the appropriate sanctions by which to protect the faithful from this grave evil and to impose upon the perpetrator a discipline of life in expiation and reparation for his most grievous sins. When the Church, however, had grown unfamiliar with its own discipline or even considered its discipline inappropriate in an age of so-called freedom and love, she no longer applied her own instruments of justice and, thereby, permitted what the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger called “filth” in the Church.<sup>3</sup>

The work of reform of the Church, mandated by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, remains in great part undone. For that reason, Pope John Paul II insisted on what he called the new evangelization, a living of our Catholic faith with the engagement and hard work of the first disciples and of the first missionaries to our land. The new evangelization manifests the Church in all her beauty and vitality, as she has been perfectly founded by Our Lord Jesus Christ and as she has always remained, despite the faults of some, and sometimes many, of her members.

Our life in the Church is always new, but the newness is organic and unbroken. It is the glorious Christ, “the same yesterday, today and forever,” at work in our midst, pouring forth from His Sacred Heart, pierced by the spear of the Roman soldier on Calvary, the life of the Holy Spirit into our souls.<sup>4</sup> What we discover as new today is what has always been new to the eyes of faith, what has always filled man with unending wonder and with the daily

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<sup>3</sup> The reference is to the Stations of the Cross, written by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger for Good Friday of 2005, and specifically to his meditation on the Ninth Station, in which he declared: “How much filth there is in the Church, even among those who, in the priesthood, ought to belong entirely to him.”

<sup>4</sup> *Heb* 13:8.

desire to convert his life to Christ. In fact, the teaching of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council is perfectly in harmony with the perennial teaching of the Church and invites us to discover anew the greatest gift which God has given to us, our life in Christ in the Church.

With respect to Canon Law, the new evangelization leads to the discovery of the rich canonical tradition which serves the Church also by providing the means of purifying her life of anything which is contrary to her holiness, contrary to Christ alive within her for the salvation of souls. If Canon Law was seen to be superfluous or even harmful to the life of the Church during the years of the post-Conciliar crisis, it must now be discovered again in its newness, in its perennial and irreplaceable service to the life of the Church and of her individual members.

### **The Nature of Canon Law**

What is the nature of the Church's canonical discipline as it has developed since her earliest days? Canonical discipline is understood within the context of the relationship of the Church with the world. Catholic faith teaches us that the world is the path of pilgrimage for us, as members of the Church, to our true home which is Heaven. In the words of the *Letter to the Hebrews*, "[f]or here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come."<sup>5</sup> The world is not ours, but we, rather, are stewards of God's creation, seeking, throughout the time of our earthly pilgrimage, the personal sanctification which, at the same time, changes the world and prepares it for its definitive transformation at the Second Coming of Christ, when He will inaugurate "a new heaven and a new earth."<sup>6</sup>

The Church, therefore, respects the integrity of the temporal order, while giving witness to the perfection to which it is called and for which it is destined by God. When asked whether it was right to pay taxes to Caesar, Christ responded: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."<sup>7</sup> The Church has understood Our Lord's words to command obedience to civil authorities but to the authority of God, first.<sup>8</sup> When, for example, the Jewish authorities unjustly tried to prohibit the Apostles from carrying out their mission of evangelization for the sake of the salvation of the world, Saint Peter and the other Apostles did not permit themselves to be deterred from the mission but rather responded: "We must obey God rather than men."<sup>9</sup> In other words, the

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<sup>5</sup> *Heb* 13:14.

<sup>6</sup> *Rev* 21:1; cf. *2 Pet* 3:13.

<sup>7</sup> *Mt* 22:21; cf. *Mk* 12:17; and *Lk* 20:25.

<sup>8</sup> cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2242.

<sup>9</sup> *Acts* 5:29.

Apostles saw their service of the world to be true only to the degree that they were, first, obedient to God's plan for the world's salvation.

In the same line, at his trial on July 1, 1535, Saint Thomas More held firmly to the living Tradition of the Church, which forbade him, in conscience, to acknowledge King Henry VIII with the title of Supreme Head of the Church. When the Duke of Norfolk accused More of malice in his response to the Chancellor, during the trial, at which he was condemned to death, he responded: "What I say is necessary for discharge of my conscience and satisfaction of my soul, and to this I call God to witness, the sole Searcher of human hearts."<sup>10</sup> On the scaffold before his execution, Thomas More rightly declared: "I die the king's good servant, and God's first."<sup>11</sup> The Saint served his king well by obeying God Who revealed His truth to him through Thomas More's conscience formed by the Church's Magisterium.

The members of the Church are called to live fully in the world but not to be of the world. In other words, they are devoted to establishing a just order for the sake of the common good, while understanding that it is only by obedience to God's law that justice and peace is established in the political and social order, anticipating the perfection of justice and peace in the eternal life of Heaven. The world as we know it, to quote Saint Paul, "is passing away."<sup>12</sup> During the time of our earthly pilgrimage, in the words of Saint Peter, "according to [the Lord's] promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."<sup>13</sup>

The Catholic faith understands law to be "a rule of conduct enacted by competent authority for the sake of the common good."<sup>14</sup> According to the Church's understanding, all law is ultimately meant to give expression to the right order with which God has created the world and, in particular, man whom He has endowed with reason, so that he can know what is right and good, and with free will, so that he can do what is right and good. All laws, therefore, are necessarily related to one another. In the words of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,

There are different expressions of the moral law, all of them interrelated: eternal law – the source, in God, of all law; natural law; revealed law,

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<sup>10</sup> Gerard B. Wegemer and Stephen W. Smith, eds., *A Thomas More Source Book*, Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004, p. 354.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 357.

<sup>12</sup> *1 Cor* 7:31.

<sup>13</sup> *2 Pet* 3:13.

<sup>14</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1951.

comprising the Old Law and the New Law, or Law of the Gospel; finally, civil and ecclesiastical laws.<sup>15</sup>

The Church understands that the civil state, in accord with its integrity, makes laws to guarantee the right order of secular society, even as she, in accord with her integrity, makes laws for the right order of her life as the Mystical Body of Christ. The right order secured and served by the law is the minimum but essential requirement for the attainment of the common good which, according to the Church's understanding, "is comprised of the sum of the conditions of life in society, by which men, families and associations may achieve more fully and more promptly their perfection."<sup>16</sup> Perfection is understood in the objective sense of the fulfillment of God's plan for the individual and society.

What then is the specific nature of Canon Law, as distinct from civil law? Canon Law is the body of disciplinary norms which serve the good order of the Church, so that she can fulfill her mission of the sanctification of man and of the world. Canon Law provides a humble but essential service to the life of the Church and of her individual members. The teaching of the faith, the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy, and the witness of holiness of life are clearly the highest and most beautiful expressions of the life and mission of the Church, but the effective exercise of these offices which are essential to her mission requires a just order which is secured through the Church's canonical discipline.

The Venerable Pope John Paul II, in the Apostolic Constitution *Sacrae disciplinae leges*, by which he promulgated the 1983 Code of Canon Law, described the service of canonical discipline, making reference to the writings of the New Testament, which, in his words, "enable us to understand even better the importance of discipline and make us see better how it is more closely connected with the saving character of the evangelical message itself."<sup>17</sup> He described the humble but essential service of Canon Law in these words:

This being so, it appears sufficiently clear that the Code is in no way intended as a substitute for faith, grace, charisms, and especially charity in the life of the Church and of the faithful. On the contrary, its purpose is rather to create

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<sup>15</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1952.

<sup>16</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, "On the Church in Today's World," 7 December 1965, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 58 (1966), p. 1096, no. 74: "complectitur earum vitae socialis condicionum, quibus homines, familiae et consociationes, suam ipsorum perfectionem plenius atque expeditius consequi possint." Translation by author.

<sup>17</sup> Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Sacrae disciplinae leges*, 25 January 1983, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 75, Pars II (1983), pp. x-xi: "Sic Novi Testamenti scripta sinunt ut nos multo magis percipiamus hoc ipsum disciplinae momentum, utque ac melius intellegere valeamus vincula, quae illud arctiore modo coniungunt cum indole salvifica ipsius Evangelii doctrinae." English translation: *Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition*, tr. Canon Law Society of America, Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1998, p. xxix.

such an order in the ecclesial society that, while assigning the primacy to love, grace and charisms, it at the same time renders their organic development easier in the life of both the ecclesial society and the individual persons who belong to it.<sup>18</sup>

Later, in the same Apostolic Constitution, the Venerable Pope John Paul II insisted on the necessity of canonical discipline for the life of the Church and detailed the specific reasons why it is necessary, declaring:

As a matter of fact, the Code of Canon law is extremely necessary for the Church. Since the Church is organized as a social and visible structure, it must also have norms: in order that its hierarchical and organic structure be visible; in order that the exercise of the functions divinely entrusted to it, especially that of sacred power and of the administration of the sacraments, may be adequately organized; in order that the mutual relations of the faithful may be regulated according to justice based upon charity, with the rights of individuals guaranteed and well-defined; in order, finally, that common initiatives undertaken to live a Christian life ever more perfectly may be sustained, strengthened and fostered by canonical norms.<sup>19</sup>

Canon Law, therefore, is limited to the service of the right order of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ. While, as such, it should certainly provide a model of the service of order and justice for civil society, it does not pretend, in any way, to have application in matters which are governed exclusively by civil legislation.

In certain matters, the Code of Canon Law, in fact, accepts directly provisions of civil law as its own and obliges, therefore, the observance of the same.<sup>20</sup> For example, regarding the administration of temporal goods, the Code of Canon Law requires administrators, in accord with good stewardship, to “observe the prescripts of both canon and civil law or those

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi: “Quae cum ita sint, satis apparet finem Codicis minime illum esse, ut in vita Ecclesiae christifidelium fides, gratia, charismata ac praesertim caritas substituantur. Ex contrario, Codex eo potius spectat, ut talem gignat ordinem in ecclesiali societate, qui, praecipuas tribuens partes amoris, gratiae atque charismati, eodem tempore faciliorem reddat ordinatam eorum progressionem in vita sive ecclesialis societatis, sive etiam singulorum hominum, qui ad illam pertinent.” English translation, pp. xxix-xxx.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xii-xiii: “Ac revera Codex Iuris Canonici Ecclesiae omnino necessarius est. Cum ad modum etiam socialis visibilisque compaginis sit constituta, ipsa normis indiget, ut eius hierarchica et organica structura adspectabilis fiat, ut exercitium munerum ipsi divinitus creditorum, sacrae praesertim potestatis et administrationis sacramentorum rite ordinetur, ut secundum iustitiam in caritate innixam mutuae christifidelium necessitudines componantur, singulorum iuribus in tuto positos atque definitis, ut denique communia incepta, quae ad christianam vitam perfectius usque vivendam suscipiuntur, per leges canonicas fulciantur, muniantur ac promoveantur.” English translation, p. xxxi.

<sup>20</sup> cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici, Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 75, Pars II (1983), p. 4, can. 22.

imposed by a founder, a donor, or legitimate authority, and especially be on guard so that no damage comes to the Church from the non-observance of civil laws.”<sup>21</sup> The Code of Canon Law respects the norms of civil law, inasmuch as they are not contrary to the natural moral law, and even adopts as its own certain norms of the civil law.

### **The Sources of Canon Law**

Canon Law has its source in the Tradition of the Church, as it has been and continues to be faithfully handed down from one generation to the next. In describing the nature of the Code of Canon Law, the Venerable Pope John Paul II referred to its source with these words:

To reply adequately to this question [concerning the very nature of Canon Law] one must mentally recall the distant patrimony of law contained in the books of the Old and New Testament from which is derived the whole juridical-legislative tradition of the Church, as from its first source.<sup>22</sup>

Basing themselves always on the Tradition, the Supreme Pastor of the Church, the Roman Pontiff, and the other legitimate pastors, the Bishops in communion with him, especially when gathered in ecumenical councils and in particular synods, have made canonical legislation, both for the universal Church and for the particular Church.

Throughout the Christian centuries, these norms of discipline have been gathered into collections, so that they might be more readily known by all the faithful and especially by the pastors of the Church, who have the responsibility for the right ordering of Church life for the spiritual benefit of all. At times, too, the Roman Pontiff has sought the help of the great students of what have come to be called “the sacred canons,” for example, Saint Raymond of Peñafort, in order that he might fill any lacunae in the Church’s discipline and correct any contradictions in the various provisions of Canon Law.

In recent times, in response to the desire of the Fathers of the First Vatican Ecumenical Council, the Church employed the form of codification, in order to make the normative or dispositive part of each act of canonical legislation more easily accessible to all. After twelve years of labor, with the help of the Bishops throughout the world and many experts, Pope Benedict XV was able to promulgate the 1917 Code of Canon Law. Following

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 220-221, can. 1284, § 2, 3<sup>o</sup>: “praescripta servare iuris tam canonici quam civilis, aut quae a fundatore vel donatore vel legitima auctoritate imposita sint, ac praesertim cavere ne ex legum civilium inobservantia damnum Ecclesiae obveniat.” English translation: p. 397.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. x: “Cui interrogationi [de natura ipsa Codicis Iuris Canonici] ut rite respondeatur, mente repetenda est longinqua illa hereditas iuris, quae in libris Veteris et Novi Testamenti continetur, ex qua traditio iuridica et legifera Ecclesiae, tamquam a suo primo fonte, originem ducit.” English translation: p. xxix.

the Second Vatican Council and in accord with the express desire of Blessed Pope John XXIII and the Servant of God Pope Paul VI, the 1917 Code of Canon Law was revised, over a period of many years, so that the Venerable Pope John Paul II could promulgate the revised Code of Canon Law on January 25, 1983. A concise history of the development of Canon Law, in fidelity to the Tradition, can be found in the Preface to the 1983 Code.<sup>23</sup>

The Roman Pontiff is the Supreme Legislator in the Church. It is he who promulgates the Code of Canon Law and other laws, for example, liturgical laws, for the governance of the universal Church.<sup>24</sup> Others who have received Sacred Orders and, therefore, can exercise legislative power, which, together with executive power and judicial power, makes up the power of governance or jurisdiction in the Church, only validly do so in union with the Roman Pontiff and the Bishops in communion with him, that is, in accord with the norm of law.<sup>25</sup> Canon 135, § 2, declares:

Legislative power must be exercised in the manner prescribed by law; that which a legislator below the supreme authority possesses in the Church cannot be validly delegated unless the law explicitly provides otherwise. A lower legislator cannot validly issue a law contrary to higher law.<sup>26</sup>

The hierarchical communion of the Church is fully respected in her legislative activity.

Judicial power is distinct from legislative power in the Church. In accord with the norm of can. 1400, § 1, judicial power is exercised for two purposes: first, “the pursuit or vindication of the rights of physical or juridic persons, or the declaration of juridic facts;” and, second, “the imposition or declaration of a penalty for delicts.”<sup>27</sup> Judicial power may not, in fact, be used in the Church for the purpose of legislation. Rather, the ecclesiastical judge applies the canonical legislation in force to particular questions which are brought before the Church’s tribunals.

In summary, the ultimate source of Canon Law is Christ Himself. The Roman Pontiff and the Bishops in communion with him, together with their co-workers, the priests, are sacramentally configured to Christ Head and Shepherd of the flock, so that they may act in His person as Head and Shepherd in every time and place of the Church. Even as Christ

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<sup>23</sup> cf. *Ibid.*, pp. xvii-xxx. English translation: pp. xxxiii-xliii.

<sup>24</sup> cf. cann. 331; and 333, §§ 2-3.

<sup>25</sup> cf. cann. 129, § 1; and 135, § 1.

<sup>26</sup> can. 135, § 2: “Potestas legislative exercenda est modo iure praescripto, et ea, qua in Ecclesia gaudet legislator infra auctoritatem supremam, valide delegari nequit, nisi aliud iure explicitate caveatur; a legislatore inferiore lex iuri superiori contraria valide ferri nequit.” English translation: p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> can. 1400, § 1, 1<sup>o</sup>-2<sup>o</sup>: “personarum physicarum vel iuridicarum iura perseguenda aut vindicanda, vel facta iuridica declaranda.... delicta, quod spectat ad poenam irrogandam vel declarandam.” English translation: p. 439.

declared that he had come not “to abolish the law and the prophets” but “to fulfill them,” even so those who act in His person as Head and Shepherd have the duty to make laws by which the faithful may more readily do the will of the Father in all things, fulfilling Our Lord’s command: “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”<sup>28</sup>

### **The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mirror of Justice**

The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, teaches her children obedience to the Church’s discipline. By her example and through her prayers, she helps the faithful who have recourse to her in order that they may hear the call to daily conversion to Christ by overcoming the rebelliousness of their fallen nature and by submitting to that discipline which fosters their growth in the life of Christ and fosters the practice of justice and charity within the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. As a good mother disciplines her children and helps them to grow strong in the virtue of obedience, so the Mother of the Church leads the faithful to make their hearts ever more like her Immaculate Heart, totally one with the Heart of Jesus, free of the rebellion of sin and free for the love of God and neighbor.

One of the titles by which we address Our Blessed Mother in the Litany of Loreto is Mirror of Justice, *Speculum Iustitiae*. Simply put, the title reminds us that we see in Mary the image of how to live in obedience to God’s law and so grow in the likeness of Christ, that is, grow in the pure and selfless love of God and of our neighbor. It should not surprise us that, when the faithful have a strong devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, they are also strong in their obedience to Christ and to those who act in His person as Head and Shepherd of the flock in every time and place, namely, the Holy Father and the Bishops in communion with him, together with the priests, their co-workers.

At the same time, any devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary which manifests disobedience and leads to rebellion against Church authority cannot be from God and cannot be true devotion to Our Blessed Mother. One is struck, for instance, in the apparitions of the Mother of God to Saint Juan Diego by her insistence that the devotion, the place of pilgrimage, which she desires can only be initiated and fostered under the authority of the Bishop. One recalls, too, the steadfast obedience of Saint Bernadette of Soubirous in carrying out the mission given to her by Our Blessed Mother at Lourdes in 1858, even though in the beginning she was seriously misunderstood by her parish priest, by other priests and even by the Bishop.

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<sup>28</sup> Mt 5:17 and 48.

Perhaps, we have not been accustomed to consider the relationship of Our Blessed Mother to the Church's discipline, but it is real and essential. By her Immaculate Conception, the Mother of God participates in the justice of God, which finds the fullness of its expression in the Redemptive Incarnation, in the sending of His only-begotten Son into the world, in order that He might suffer and die to save us from sin and everlasting death. God the Father predestined Mary from all time to be the chosen instrument of the Redemptive Incarnation, the sinless vessel in which God the Son could fittingly take our human flesh. He, therefore, granted that, from the moment of her conception, she would be preserved from all stain of original sin. In other words, He granted to her the privilege of receiving, in anticipation, the grace of the Redemption which Her Divine Son would win for us by His Passion and Death. The Blessed Virgin Mary is, in the words of the Archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation, "full of grace."<sup>29</sup> There is no stain of sin, original or actual sin, in her. She, therefore, does the will of God in all things, even as she responded to the Archangel Gabriel, when he announced to her that she was to be the Mother of the Savior: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word."<sup>30</sup>

When the Mother of God appeared to Saint Juan Diego, she identified herself immediately as "the perfect and ever Virgin Holy Mary."<sup>31</sup> She then announced her mission, namely to have a chapel built, in which she would manifest God's mercy and love to those who would come to her on pilgrimage.<sup>32</sup> (cf. *Nican Mopohua*, nos. 27-28). In fact, by God's miraculous writing of her image on the mantle of Saint Juan Diego, Our Lady continues her mission. The miraculous image provides, in fact, a catechism on the mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation. It is a most eloquent sign of her participation, as the Mother of God and the Mother of the Church, in the great Mystery of Faith.

In the Blessed Virgin Mary, we see the perfection of the disciple of Christ who, in the words of the Apostle James, looks into the mirror of "the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts."<sup>33</sup> In other words, when Mary looks into the mirror of justice, the mirror of holiness of life, she recognizes Christ, and, at the same time, she recognizes herself, as His first and best disciple, as the one who, by God's favor, shared in His Redemption even before she had conceived Him in her womb.

As the Mirror of Justice, she leads her children to look into the mirror and to

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<sup>29</sup> *Lk* 1:28.

<sup>30</sup> *Lk* 1:38.

<sup>31</sup> *Nican Mopohua*, no. 26.

<sup>32</sup> cf. *Nican Mopohua*, nos. 27-28.

<sup>33</sup> *Jas* 1:25.

recognize their true identity in Christ and not to forget that identity but to strive to reflect it in every thought, word and deed. In the Blessed Virgin Mary, we see the model of the steadfast pursuit of holiness of life, the perfection of the Father's mercy and love, which we behold in His only-begotten Son, God the Son Incarnate, Son of God and Son of Mary. We behold in Christ our true identity as sons and daughters of God, called to life in His only-begotten Son.

The Mother of Christ, whom He gave to us as our Mother, the Mother of the Church, at the very moment of the culmination of the work of our Redemption, leads us constantly to the mirror in which we, with her, see the reflection of Christ and the reflection of our own true self. The vocation and mission of Our Blessed Mother is seen, in a most striking way, at the Wedding Feast of Cana. In the moment of great difficulty, of crisis, for a newly married couple, she exercises her maternal concern by going to her Son to plead for His help and by leading the wine stewards to Him with the confident instruction: "Do whatever He tells you."<sup>34</sup> Our Blessed Mother is constantly caring for us, especially when we experience some crisis, and she faithfully leads us to Christ with the same confident instruction, for she knows that by our obedience to the will of God as it is taught to us by Christ in His Church we will overcome every crisis and reach finally our eternal salvation.

Our Lady of Guadalupe bids us to come to her, so that she may bring us to her Divine Son, the source of all justice, the font of God's immeasurable and unceasing mercy and love. In the time following her apparitions at Tepeyac, she led countless Native Americans to Christ, while she led the European explorers and settlers to a conversion of life. These two races of people, who were bent upon destroying one another, were led to Christ by the Mother of God, and Christ made them one people in Him, under the guidance and protection of His Immaculate Mother.

Both the Native Americans and the Europeans gazed upon her miraculous image and pondered the account of her apparitions by Saint Juan Diego, and understood the mystery of God's love and mercy in Christ, her Son. They came to know and love Christ, receiving from the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus the outpouring of the Holy Spirit by which they became messengers and agents of divine mercy and love in the world. Our Lady of Guadalupe was the Mirror of Justice for them, the mirror in which they beheld the incomparable beauty of Christ, all holy and just, and understood their own identity in Him, their own call, in Christ, to do the Father's will in all things, to be, as Christ teaches us, "perfect as [our] heavenly

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<sup>34</sup> *Jn 2:5.*

Father is perfect.”<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusion

Our Lady of Guadalupe, Star of the Evangelization, teaches us a new appreciation and respect for the Church’s discipline. She shows us that, in accord with the wisdom taught to us by Our Lord in the Gospel, our obedience in small things is the necessary precondition for our obedience in greater matters.<sup>36</sup> In drawing our hearts to her own Immaculate Heart, she leads us to look into the Mirror of Justice and to see any even small lack of coherence with the Church’s teaching and discipline in our lives, which would hinder us in being the reflection of divine justice in the Church and the world.

Let us pray to Our Lord, through the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, for the work of the new evangelization, so that all the members of the Church may know the newness of their life in Christ and live in Christ with a new engagement and hard work, like the first disciples and the first missionaries to our nation. Let us pray, in particular, for a new obedience to the Church’s discipline among all members of the Church, in order that, in the words of the Venerable Pope John Paul II,

[the Church’s] hierarchical and organic structure be visible; in order that the exercise of the functions divinely entrusted to [her], especially that of sacred power and of the administration of the sacraments, may be adequately organized; in order that the mutual relations of the faithful may be regulated according to justice based on charity, with the rights of individuals guaranteed and well-defined; in order, finally, that common initiatives undertaken to live a Christian life ever more perfectly may be sustained, strengthened and fostered by canonical norms.<sup>37</sup>

May Our Lord, through the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, grant a new springtime to the Church, in which obedience to Canon Law will assist all of the faithful to know and teach the faith in its integrity, to worship God as He desires to be worshiped, and to live a good and

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<sup>35</sup> *Mt* 5:48.

<sup>36</sup> cf. *Lk* 16:10.

<sup>37</sup> Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Sacrae disciplinae leges*, 25 January 1983, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*. 75, Pars II (1983), p. xii-xiii: “eius [Ecclesiae] hierarchica et organica structura adspectabilis fiat, ut exercitium munerum ipsi divinitus creditorum, sacrae praesertim potestatis et administrationis sacramentorum rite ordinetur, ut secundum iustitiam in caritate innixam mutuae christifidelium necessitudines componantur, singulorum iuribus in tuto positis atque definitis, ut denique communia incepta quae christianam vitam perfectius usque vivendam suscipiuntur, per leges canonicas fulciantur, muniantur ac promoveantur.” English translation: *Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition*, tr. Canon Law Society of America, Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1998, p. xxxi.

holy life.

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