

CHRIST IS THE LIGHT OF THE NATIONS

One of the principal documents of the Second Vatican Council – *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church – articulates the mission of the Church in our world today. It proclaims boldly a mission statement in its opening paragraph: “*Christ is the light of the nations*”. We need His light to walk through life’s dark tunnels and find hope in the midst of a world that is plagued by uncertainty and fear. As the mystical Body of Christ, the Church is called to bring His light to all humankind which is confronted by darkness. Hence, she now aspires to make her universal mission known to the faithful as well as to the wider world.

It must be noted that there is a sense of urgency to this mission, and it is binding upon not just the clergy and religious, but also on the laity and the common faithful. By the virtue of our Baptism, all of us are called to spread the light of Christ with great earnestness. The peoples of the world need to witness the light of Christ shining brightly upon the Church’s countenance. Hence, the document expounds the mission of the Church into several chapters that highlight the ideals, aspirations and principles we must emulate, as we strive to make this mission a reality. Hopefully, the following summary will contribute towards enhancing our understanding about the significant highlights of *Lumen Gentium*, and prepare us to confront the darkness in the world with a more vibrant and enlightened faith.

The Call to Holiness and a Fully Human Life

The Sacraments were instituted by Christ as Head of the Church. He continues to teach, to sanctify and to rule through these rituals that empower us to live a life of holiness. Therefore, holiness and Christian virtue are a sign to the world that God’s love is effective. By their holiness, the faithful promote a noble manner of living in this earthly society. This also empowers us to counter the accusations made by the ideology of relativism and secularism which are at odds with human dignity. As Catholics, we are called to integrate both faith as well as reason, and promote a vision of a fully human family that defends and preserves human dignity.

The Threefold Office of Christ and the Liturgy

The three messianic offices of Christ - prophet, priest, and king - realize the potential and calling of humanity to serve, pray, and seek the truth. To actively participate in the Church’s mission, we must first experience God’s merciful love in the liturgy. Liturgies are guaranteed encounters with the living Christ, as they spring from the divine will and power of God, and not from our human efforts. Hence, those who are liturgically renewed in the love of Christ become aware of their mission as prophets, priests, and kings; this bears the fruit of active participation in the new evangelization of the world.

Making use of the Gifts and Charisms of the Holy Spirit

Charism is simply the Greek word used in the New Testament for ‘favour’ or ‘gratuitous gift’. The various charisms that the Holy Spirit distributes to build up the Church help to further Christ’s mission. Most people who have heard of charisms may associate them with extraordinary abilities, such as miraculous healing of the sick. However, according to *Lumen Gentium*, charisms are extraordinary as well as ordinary gifts given to the baptized in order to complete a mission of service. A greater awareness of the common mission of the Church as

well as our individual charisms would help us accomplish our undertaking in an effective and efficient way.

A Church that is Poor and for the Poor

The Church embraces with love all those who are afflicted with human suffering, because she sees in them the image of her poor and suffering founder – Jesus of Nazareth. The SCC Vision statement of the Archdiocese of Bombay: “*No one in want*” encapsulates very well our commitment towards those who are marginalized and on the peripheries. To be poor like Christ means to rely entirely on God. It means to recognize the limitations of worldly power which can only produce temporary effects, unlike the power of Christ which produces fruits that are everlasting.

Mary, Model of the Church and of the New Evangelization

Lumen Gentium expresses Mary's maternal concern for, and closeness to, humanity in all of its needs. In this way, she personifies the Church. In her, we discover our vocation to draw close to the concerns of humankind; as Mary demonstrated when she heeded the needs of the bride and groom at the wedding at Cana. With Mary, we turn to Jesus as the only one who can provide the wine of divine life for a world that lacks it. And with Mary, we are called to deepen our own faith, have conviction in the gospel, and cultivate a willingness to share the gospel with those who are yet to encounter Christ.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- How can we live a life of holiness and demonstrate Christian virtue in our communities?
- Have you identified the personal charism that the Lord has blessed you with? How can you utilize your charism and contribute towards the Church’s mission?
- What more can we do to implement the SCC Vision statement “No one in want”?
- What is the significance of Mary, and how is she a model of the Church?

| |
|---|
| For further reading of the Constitution on the Church, please type Lumen Gentium in the search engine. |
|---|