

The Forge

in our daily life



SPIRITUS DOMINI

Advent-Christmas

1 THE SPIRIT IS
UPON US

SPIRITUS DOMINI - 2014

The
ar-
row
forged
on the anvil

is not saved in a museum. Its destiny is to be launched, although nicked with the passage of time. We are called to be missionary arrows: "The ministry of the Word, through which we communicate the total mystery of Christ to humanity, is our special calling to the People of God. For we have been sent to proclaim the Lord's life, death, and resurrection, until he comes, so that all who believe in him may be saved. (CC 46).

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To help individuals, communities, Provinces and Delegations to be consciously aware of their present reality, rekindling their experience of Fire and missionary zeal following the methodology of the Forge.



OBJECTIVES

- To pass from passive attitudes to creative attitudes.
 - To believe in the experience of the Spirit who anoints us to be ministers of the Word in the prophetic mission of the Church.
 - To deepen in the Cordimarian dimension of our missionary spirituality.
 - To personalize the significance of our belonging to the Congregation today and to value its charismatic diversity and universal mission.
 - To recapture the experience lived throughout the Forge Project to continue progressing in the missionary life.

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2. We Have Been Anointed to Evangelize (Ordinary Time I)
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4. As Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Easter)
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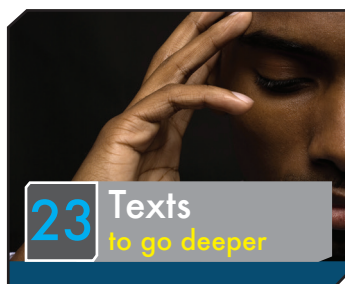
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1. Introduction

The title of the fourth and last stage of "The Forge in Our Daily Life" - *Spiritus Domini*, The Spirit of the Lord - is taken from Isaiah 61.1-2a, cited by Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth (Lk 4:18-19), and by our Founder, when he describes his first inklings of a missionary vocation (*Autobiography*, henceforth Aut 118, 687). The objective during this stage is to open ourselves to the experience of the Holy Spirit, who anoints us, as well, as missionaries. The icon for this stage of The Forge is the arrow. The metal placed in in the forge during the *Patris Mei* stage, and shaped by the anvil during the *Caritas Christi* stage, is finally prepared to serve as the bearer of the Good News of Jesus.

Those who have actively participated in the earlier stages of The Forge are invited, as missionaries, to reflect on the metaphor of the arrow. "The ministry of the word, through which we communicate the total mystery of Christ to humanity, is our special calling among the People of God. For we have been sent to proclaim the Lord's life, death and resurrection, until he comes, so that all who believe in him may be saved" (*Constitutions*, henceforth CC 46.)

You will find the objectives of this fourth stage on the third page of each booklet:

- To move from an attitude of passivity to one of creativity.
- To grow in our experience of the Spirit, who has anointed us as ministers of the Word in the prophetic mission of the Church.
- To identify more deeply with the cordimarian dimension of our missionary spirituality.
- To appreciate the distinctive significance of our belonging to the Congregation, and to appreciate how its diversity of charisms advances its universal mission.
- To reflect on our experience of The Forge as an impetus to progress in our missionary life.

Take a few moments to peruse these. Does something strike you as particularly relevant at this point in time? On what should you focus during the coming year?

This stage focuses on the Holy Spirit and Mary, the directress of our mission (cf. Aut 5), the Church, and our vocation as hearers and servants of the Word among the People of God (cf. CC 46.) It is meant to bolster our enthusiasm for the mission of living and proclaiming the Gospel as men on fire with love. **The 24th General Chapter (2009) emphasized the primacy of spirituality in our missionary life:** "Called to be listeners and servants of the Word, we are aware that life in the Spirit must occupy first place in our life project (cf. take first place in our plan of life (cf. *Men on Fire with Love*, henceforth MFL, 8, also *The Consecrated Life* 93). Earlier, the 21st General Chapter (1991) acknowledged that "the Spirit of the Father and the Son – and also the Spirit of our Mother (Autob 687) – is the integrating center of all the dimensions of our life and mission (*Servants of the Word* 13).

For the Church at large, 2013 has been a year of surprises. On February 11, Benedict XVI resigned the petrine ministry, and on March 13 Pope Francis was elected his successor. After centuries of European popes, the cardinals were prepared to go "to the ends of the earth" in search of the next pope. They chose the cardinal archbishop of Buenos Aires. (The Catholic population of Latin America is larger than that of any other continent, and the Congregation has exercised a significant role there since 1870, in Argentina since 1901.) **World Youth Day, celebrated in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, July 23-28,** was a beautiful expression of the faith of the continent's youth.

For the Claretian Missionaries, 2013 has been an especially blessed year. **On October 13, in Tarragona, Spain, twenty-three of our martyred brothers were beatified.** Three months earlier, *A Forbidden God*, a film about the Fifty-One Blessed Martyrs of Barbastro, was released. Clearly, in this time of testing the Lord calls us to be as valiant and faithful as our martyrs. In them, in spite of separation in time and space, we see the quintessential features of our Claretian vocation. Their memory never ceases to inspire us, and they never cease to intercede for us.

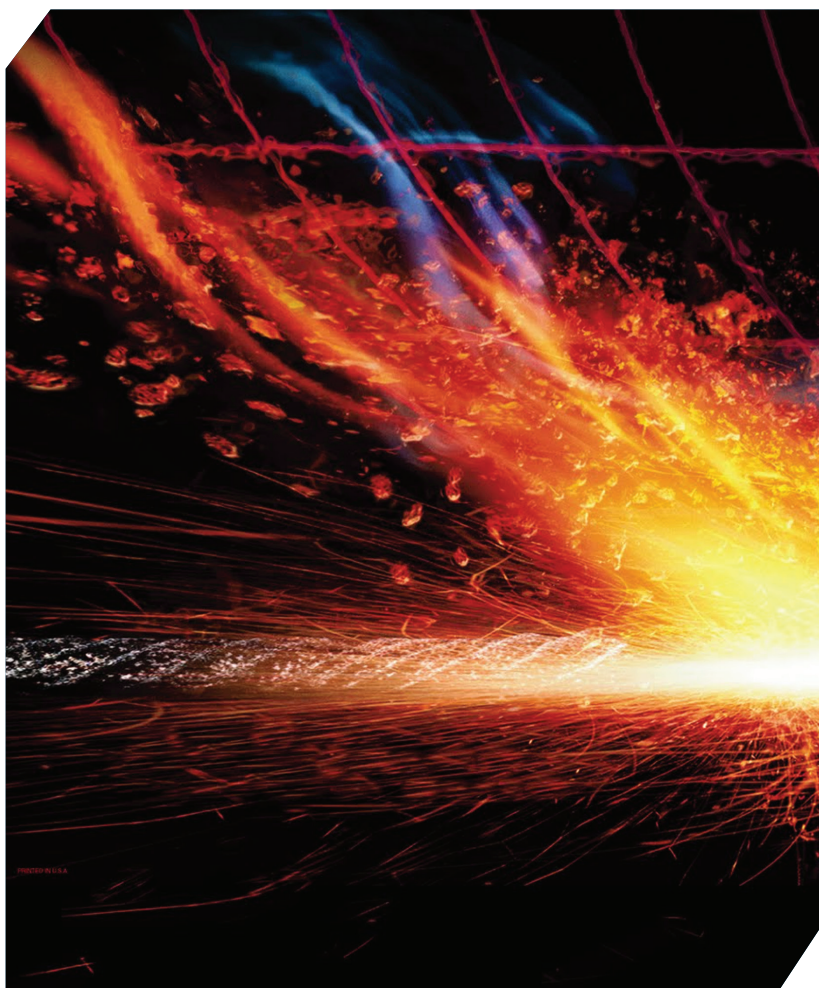
Meanwhile, the world continues to change – everyday more quickly and profoundly, it seems. Thanks to social communication media, between the time of our preparing this booklet and the time of your reading it, you are bound to witness any number of momentous events. Perhaps, the avalanche of information, much of it disheartening, tempts you to avoid the

media altogether, lest the overload of information and opinion overwhelm you. Even if you do attempt to keep abreast of news, how do you distinguish the ephemeral from the momentous? **We hope the experience of The Forge leads you to view all that happens from the perspective of the Word of God.** Thus, as we begin this stage, you should renew your commitment to the daily *lectio divina*, in hopes of its becoming a habit, to which you remain faithful for the rest of your missionary life.

In this context of rapid change it is not easy to restart The Forge for the fourth consecutive year. You can have the impression that all has been said or that it is something worn. However, the novelty of this year is to focus less on ourselves, as we have often done in the previous stages, in order to focus our eyes on the world around us, on the mission entrusted to us.

Pope Francis insists that it is preferable an injured Church by going out to meet people in the ways of the world than a sick Church closed in her own business, too worried about her health. Church hypochondria is a bad counselor for evangelization. Let us take the *Spiritus Domini* stage an opportunity to promote our missionary commitment in tune with the options of local churches. **The circular letter of Fr. General -Missionaries- will be a good guide.** On the back of each booklet you will find a brief excerpt.

Mention the Holy Spirit and most Catholics might think of Pentecost rather than Advent and Christmas.



Yet, the same Spirit who descended on the Apostles at the beginning of the Church (cf. Acts 2:1-11) swept over the waters at the beginning of creation (Gen 1:2) and inspired the prophets, whose message – in particular that of Isaiah – permeates Advent. That Spirit overshadows Mary in such a manner that “the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (Lk 1:35). Christmas is precisely the celebration of the mystery of the Incarnation and birth of Jesus Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit: “and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man.”

John Paul II said: “With the birth of the Lord, the Holy Spirit ushers in a new creation, which reaches perfection in the Resurrection, with the victory of Christ over sin and death. The Nativity is also the beginning of the Church, the people of the New Covenant, represented before the manger by Mary, Joseph and the shepherds” (*Angelus*, December 21, 1997).

Given the missionary focus of this final stage of The Forge, could you reflect on Advent and Christmas this year from more of a missionary perspective than you may have in the past? Who might need our help? What gifts might we give, apart from the customary Christmas cards or increasingly popular e-cards?

You will notice that, unlike earlier ones, **the booklets for this stage are illustrated with feature photographs of Claretians from around the world.** These tie in with the missionary character of this *Spiritus Domini* stage and foster awareness and appreciation of the present-day reality of the Congregation. We may not see ourselves or our community, but the pictures of other Claretians should remind us that we are all members of one family. It is not unusual for images in these booklets to speak more eloquently than the text. So, take time to enjoy them.

This first booklet has four parts, from which you are free to pick and choose, as you wish, during Advent and Christmas. Rather than a Claretian pneumatology, it is a short symphony, which orchestrates the principal themes of this final stage. References to subsequent booklets give you an idea of how all the elements eventually come together.

Of course, remember to pray for the success of The Forge:

Virgin Mary,

As Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we have been shaped in the forge of your love. Accompany us with your motherly protection in the course of the renewal we have undertaken. Help us to rekindle the flame of our calling, and help us to pursue more faithfully and with more vigorous commitment our mission of setting the whole world on fire with the fire of God’s love. Amen.



2. Reflection

1.1. First movement: a spirituality with God and Christ.

Believers in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, may find it strange, but for decades there has been much talk of spirituality without God. As the introductory booklet of The Forge explains, interest in spirituality has intensified around the world. As early as 2001, our Congress on Spirituality acknowledged this development: "...Today we prefer a more modest and complex approach to reality. Thus we are more open to a pluralism of values. We adopt an ethics for the journey – contextualized in each moment – and make use of a humble and malleable way of thinking. And in all this we perceive a strong desire for spirituality, without knowing how to configure it. It is because of this that inter-religious dialogue has become an indispensable tool for knowing how to discern the winds and whisperings of the Spirit within humankind" (*Our Missionary Spirituality Along the Journey of God's People* 1,2,a).

There are more and more people, who refuse to be trapped in a consumerist culture, and are in search of the transcendent. Unfortunately, many pursue their quest on the margins of institutionalized religion and may even consider the rejection of institutionalized religion essential to their finding the authenticity they seek.

As a rule, spirituality is understood as the interior experience of unity and harmony with all reality, which alleviates feelings of imperfection and finitude inherent to the human condition. According to Wikipedia, the well-known online encyclopedia, "social scientists have defined spirituality as the search for the sacred, for that which is set apart from the ordinary and worthy of veneration, a transcendent dimension within human experience... discovered in moments in which the individual questions the meaning of personal existence and attempts to place the self within a broader ontological contexte."





Christians are unlikely to find this description satisfactory. It does, however, speak to the aspirations of those, who wish to go further, unhampered by belief in a personal God or adherence to a community of believers. Most of us know family members, friends and people we have met in our pastoral work, who fit that category. How has their search affected the way you live your spirituality?

Though published ten years ago, the document *Jesus Christ, Bearer of the Water of Life, a Christian Reflection on the New Age* (2.3.4.2) sheds much light on this phenomenon, which affects, albeit unconsciously, our manner of understanding and practicing spirituality. You will find the entire document on the web site of The Forge. It explains the conflict between spirituality and religion - Christian spirituality in particular. The following citation, though lengthy, provides an enlightening description of the New Age: "New Age has a marked preference for Eastern or pre-Christian religions, which are reckoned to be uncontaminated by Judaeo-Christian distortions. Hence, great respect is given to ancient agricultural rites and to fertility cults. Gaia, or Mother Earth, is offered as an alternative to God the Father, whose image is seen to be linked to a patriarchal conception of male domination of women. There is talk of God, but it is not a personal God; the God of which New Age speaks is neither personal nor transcendent. Nor is it the Creator and sustainer of the universe but an impersonal energy immanent in the world, with which it forms a cosmic unity: All is one. This unity is monistic, pantheistic, or more precisely, panentheistic. God is the life principle, the spirit or soul of the world, the sum total of consciousness existing in the world. In a sense, everything is God. God's presence is clearest in the spiritual aspects of reality, so every mind/spirit is, in some sense, God. When it is consciously received by men and women, divine energy is often described as Christic energy. There is also talk of Christ, but not alluding to Jesus of Nazareth. Christ is a title applied to someone who has arrived at a state of consciousness where he or she per-

ceives him- or herself to be divine and can thus claim to be a universal Master. Jesus of Nazareth was not the Christ, but simply one among many historical figures in whom this Christic nature is revealed, as is the case with Buddha and others. Every historical realization of the Christ shows clearly that all human beings are heavenly and divine, and lead them toward this realization. The innermost and most personal (psychic) levels, where divine cosmic energy is heard by human beings is also called Holy Spirit."

You are likely to absorb New Age sentiment from the music you hear, the opinions expressed by well-known personalities, including scientists, and the jargon of many younger people. To some degree, it is the zeitgeist or spirit of the time. **Yet, the actual number of true believers is probably far smaller than the ubiquity of New Age argot in cinema, music and on the internet might suggest.**

Nonetheless, the situation should prompt us to review our Catholic teaching. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the article devoted to the Holy Spirit states: "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3). "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal 4:6). This knowledge of faith is possible only in the Holy Spirit: to be in touch with Christ, we must first have been touched by the Holy Spirit. He comes to meet us and kindles faith in us. By virtue of our Baptism, the first sacrament of the faith, the Holy Spirit in the Church communicates to us, intimately and personally, the life that originates in the Father and is offered to us in the Son" (683).

A little further on, the *Catechism* states: "No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 2:1). Now God's Spirit, who reveals God, makes known to us Christ, his Word, his living Utterance, but the Spirit does not speak of himself. The Spirit who 'has spoken through the prophets' (Nicene Creed) makes us hear the Father's Word, but we do not hear the Spirit himself. We know him only in the movement by which he reveals the Word to us and disposes us to welcome him in faith. The Spirit of truth who unveils Christ to us 'will not speak on his own' (Jn 16:13). Such properly divine self-effacement explains why 'the world cannot receive [him], because it neither sees him nor knows him,' while those who believe in Christ know the Spirit because he dwells with them (Jn 14:17) (687).

The contrast between spirituality without God - advocated, for the most part, by New Age devotees - and Christian spirituality, understood as the fullness of life in the Spirit, and by its very nature open to a Trinitarian experience, is obvious. **To live in the Spirit means to recognize Jesus as the Christ, who in turn reveals to us the merciful countenance of the Father.**

The trinitary circuit has deep roots in the Scriptures and the faith of the Church. Our Father Found-

er lived it intensely. **Christian spirituality is not a spirituality without God but, precisely, an experience of communion with the Father, revealed in the Son, through the Holy Spirit.** Without disparaging the ecological emphases in New Age spirituality, we must resist tendencies to reduce spirituality to a mere sentiment of communion with the cosmos. We must not overlook history. Ours is an incarnate spirituality, prolonging in time the initiative of the Father: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

How do we bridge the divide between the millions drawn to a spirituality without God and those who hold dear our Christian tradition. The 24th General Chapter reminded us that "if we open ourselves to the Spirit in a continual process of formation, we can name our infidelity, enkindle the fire of our vocational gift, be attentive to the clamor of our people and find with them creative responses to the changing needs of our world" (MFL 45).

Possibly, the most expressive biblical image, in terms of building bridges, is **Jesus in his encounter with the Samaritan woman (cf. Jn 4:1-42).** Our Founder was fond of this story and emphasized underscored the personal nature of their interaction. "I am ever more deeply impressed at the thought of Jesus moving from town to town, preaching everywhere – not just in big cities, but in little villages and even to a single woman.. When he spoke to the Samaritan woman, he was tired and thirsty from traveling, and the moment was as inconvenient for him as it was for the woman" (Aut 221). But above all, he saw Jesus as the giver of the water of faith and conversion: "March 21. While meditating on Christ's words to the Samaritan woman, *Ego sum qui loquor tecum*, I understood some great, very great things. He gave the woman faith and she believe; He gave her sorrow for her sins and she repented; He gave her grace and she preached Jesus. He has done the same in my case, giving me faith, sorrow, and a mission to preach him" (Aut 681).

Why is this story so stirring and inviting? *Jesus Christ, The Bearer of the Water of Life* observes: "The fact that the story takes place by a well is significant. Jesus offers the woman 'a spring...welling up to eternal life" (verse 14). The gracious way in which Jesus deals with the woman is a model for pastoral effectiveness, helping others to be truthful without suffering in the challenging process of self-recognition ('he told me everything I have done', verse 39). This approach could yield a rich harvest in terms of people who may have been attracted to the water-carrier (Aquarius) but who are genuinely still seeking the truth. They should be invited to listen to Jesus, who offers us not simply something that will quench our thirst today, but the hidden spiritual depths of 'living water'. It is important to acknowledge the sincerity of people searching for the truth; there is no

question of deceit or of self-deception. It is also important to be patient, as any good educator knows. A person embraced by the truth is suddenly energised by a completely new sense of freedom, especially from past failures and fears, and new sense of freedom, especially from past failures and fears, and 'the one who strives for self-knowledge, like the woman at the well, will affect others with a desire to know the truth that can free them too' (Helen Bergino)." An invitation to meet Jesus Christ, the bearer of the water of life, will carry more weight if it is made by someone who has clearly been profoundly affected by his or her own encounter with Jesus, because it is made not by someone who has simply heard about him, but by someone who can be sure 'that he really is the saviour of the world' (verse 42). It is a matter of letting people react in their own way, at their own pace, and letting God do the rest."

How can you live this today? Have you learned to seek and adore God – who is Spirit in Spirit and truth (Jn 4.23-24)? Can you identify the various cultural influences of spirituality without God in light of our faith in the Father, in his Son Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life? St. Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians, makes this bold statement: "Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:7). The following exercise should help you explore these questions.



Exercise 1: In what sense am I a spiritual person?

Irrespective your cultural circumstances, it is all but impossible to avoid breathing the fumes of a spirituality without God. They have spread everywhere. David Spangler, an American philosopher, who describes himself as a practical mystic, lists the traits of the New Age or spirituality without God:

- **Holistic**, comprehensive since there is only one energy-reality.
- **Ecological** (Earth, Gaia, is our mother, each one of us a neuron in the central nervous system of the earth).
- **Androgenous** (the rainbow and the Yin Yang are New Age symbols, reflecting the complementarity of opposites, especially of the masculine and feminine).
- **Mystical** (recognizing the sacred in all things, in the very ordinary).
- **Planetary** (persons must be rooted at once and the same time in their own culture, yet open to the universal culture, fostering love, compassion, peace and the establishment of a global government).

1. Are you accustomed to using terms such as holistic, ecological, androgenous, planetary, etc. in your preaching? What meaning do you attach to them? Are you aware of the influence they have on many people?
2. What have you read in the last few years (scientific, philosophical, theological, literary, etc.) that may have led you to question the role of spirituality in human life? Are you familiar with spiritual intelligence?
3. Do you listen to or use New Age music (George Winston, Andreas Vollenweider, Vangelis, Ravi Shankar, Jean-Michel Jarre, Mike Oldfield, Enya, Kitaro, etc.) in your pastoral ministry? Often Celtic or Druidic in style, this music is said to foster harmony within oneself and with the world. Some New Age composers claim their music bridges the conscience and unconscious, especially when melodies are accompanied by the rhythmic, meditative repetition of thematic refrains.
4. In a few words, given your age, formation, and the culture in which you live, what do you understand by spirituality? Does it enhance your personal freedom?
5. List some words that describe your understanding of a spiritual person.
6. Do you recognize yourself in this statement of the last General Chapter: "Today, many Claretians, from all cultural origins, ages and mission contexts, show an intense desire to grow in the Spirit, joyfully cultivating, in the midst of difficulties, their response to the call they have received" (MFL 9). How do you model the "intense desire to grow in the Spirit"?

1.2. Second Movement: The Spirit makes us sons and brothers

The Holy Spirit unites us to Jesus and to the Father. He is also the paraclete, who Jesus promised would continue to guide us on throughout history toward the fullness of revelation: "I have told you this while I am with you. The Advocate, the holy Spirit, that the Father will send in my name – he will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you" (Jn 14:25). In his Autobiography, Claret cites a maxim taken from the Flemish Jesuit Cornelius a Lapide, who in contemplating the Spirit as teacher, says: "The Holy Spirit teaches us to speak little and discreetly, to do all things fervently and to praise God constantly" (Aut 653).

In times as complex as ours, we need to remember that in Baptism and Confirmation we have received the Spirit, who teaches us from within, helping us to distinguish between what is consistent with the Gospel and what is opposed to it (cf. Gal

5:16-26). The Spirit deepens our understanding of Scripture, while opening to us new horizons as we search for the truth, and allowing us to engage the sciences and arts with open minds and with respect. Where there is truth, goodness and beauty, there is the Spirit of God: "I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth" (Jn 16:2). In **Booklet 9**, speaking of progress in the missionary life, we will discuss the action of the Spirit as we continue to grow in our Christian life.

At this point, however, we focus on the fact that the Holy Spirit forges bonds of solidarity among all human beings and ties the Holy Spirit wish to emphasize that the Holy Spirit creates bonds of kinship among all human beings and with all creation. The Spirit's field of action is so broad and diversified that Scripture employs a variety of symbols to describe him (or her, given the gender of the word *ruah* in Hebrew).

Along with water, the leitmotif of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, there is oil (cf. 1 Jn

2:20.27; 2 Cor 1:21), fire (cf. Acts 2:3-4), the cloud and the light (cf. Ex 24:15-18; Lk 1:35; Lk 9:34-35) the seal, (cf. 2 Cor 1:22), the hand (cf. Acts 8:7-19), the finger (cf. Lk 11:20; 2 Co 3.3), and the dove (cf. Mt 3:6 par).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks of all these symbols (cf. 694-701). All of them express life. Thus, in the Creed, we profess the Holy Spirit as "Lord and giver of life", (*dominum et vivificantem*). Wherever the Spirit is at work there is life. On the other hand, since the opposite of life is death, where

the Spirit is absent, we are haunted by death in its various manifestations. Paraphrasing, we might apply to the Congregation at this moment what the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Ignatius Khazim de Latakia stated at the Ecumenical Council of Churches (Upsala, 1968).

WITHOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT...

- God is distant.
- We encounter Christ in the past.
- The Gospel, a dead letter.
- The Church, simply an organization.
- Authority, despotism.
- The mission, propaganda.
- Worship, empty sentiment.
- Christian morality, enslavement.
- The Congregation, a multinational of religious services.
- The Constitutions, mere regulations without soul.
- Community life, a bachelors' club.
- The vows, unhealthy commitments.
- The ministry, no more than a career.

WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT...

- Gos is in our midst.
- The Risen Christ is present.
- The Gospel gives the power to live.
- The Church, Trinitarian communion.
- Authority, liberating service.
- The mission, Pentecost.
- Worship, memorial and anticipation.
- Human work, deified.
- The Congregation, a community at the service of the Gospel.
- The Constitutions, a plan of evangelical life.
- Community life, a gathering of brothers.
- The vows, a path of liberation.
- The ministry, witness to the Gospel.

Undoubtedly, your own experience has taught you the difference between living *with* or *without* the Spirit. As often as not, when we attempt to acquire self-knowledge, we often find ourselves swamped in indicators. For science and philosophy, the human being is "a biped, earthbound mammal, a rational animal, a naked monkey, an aggressive carnivore, a genetic machine programmed to preservn it own DNA, a homeostatic mechanism, equipped with a speaking computer; a self-programmed center of conscious activity; a chemical microcosm; wasted passion; a shepherd of being; a God in process; the finite mode of being God; image of God" (J.L. Ruiz de la Peña).

We live and move between two poles. Are we, as Scripture says, "a little less than a god" (Ps 8:6), or as some others say, merely a combination of chemicals? The following appeared in a bulletin, which a supermarket distributed to its customers some years ago: "Did you know? Human beings are made up of the following: six thousand phosphorous matches, fifty small candles made of fat, fifteen bars

of soap, enough to whitewash a chicken coop, enough metal to make ten needles, each three centimeters long, twenty spoonfuls of salt, enough glycerine to produce fifteen kilos of explosives, a quarter pound of sugar, a little copper, fourteen kilos of bone, 1,100 grams of skin, about fifty liters of water and a few other things."

The season of Advent might prompt you to ask: How does the Holy Spirit help us to know who we are, why we are here, and what the future holds in store?

Do these Advent symbols have anything to do with the world today? St. Paul responds: "In the same way, the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness for we do not kow how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings" (Rm 8:26). And these groanings?

"As proof that you are children, d sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" (Gal 4:6-7). "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, 'Abba, Father! The



Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rm 8:14-16).

When you experience moments of doubt or discouragement, allow the Spirit to shout out within who you truly are. If you invoke the Spirit in faith, you will be reminded that:

- *We have roots. We are not orphans.* We are the creation of a personal love, which calls us into existence and accompanies us always as the living and provident Word.
- *We are not slaves to indiscernible forces nor victims of unconscious genetic or cultural drives.* We are equipped with the wherewithal to pursue our own destiny.
- *We are not hapless, aimless creatures with no purpose.* We are destined to return our Father's house, whence we came, though the time of the Lord's coming is not dependent on our promethean effort or human achievement. As we are reminded during the seasons of Advent and Christmas it is a gift and will burst in on us by surprise. It is, after all, an advent, not merely a future event.
- *There is a road to our destination and we are given a map for this journey between earth and heaven.* The cross of Christ is the lamp that lights up the winding paths of human existence and the transformation of this world.

In short, the Holy Spirit reminds us – rather, he cries out within us – that we are sons of God and meant to be brothers to all humanity (in symmetrical relations of fundamental equality) and bearers of new life (in asymmetrical relations of generativity). We emphasized in the *Patris Mei* stage that to be a son means to know that we are loved even before we ourselves love (this is the essence of faith), in loving (the essence of charity), and after we ourselves have loved (the essence of hope).

This is the good news, the authentic experience of Christmas, which through the grace of the Spirit we live and proclaim today. A gospel of sonship, however, is hardly credible, unless it is lived as a gospel of

fraternity. Even then, it will not produce substitute (God is not an overly protective father who spare us from having to take risks) but God is love, who creates loving persons. The Spirit assures us God is not an enemy of human adulthood but the one who makes adulthood possible.

The NT clearly teaches that what distinguishes Christian belief is that the other (lower case), whoever it might be, is seen as the image of the Other (upper case), not a rival but an *adelphós* (brother). According to Thomas Hobbes, "Man is to other men a wolf". To a Christian, on the other hand, "Man is to other men a brother". Only by the Holy Spirit's working within us can we internalize and exemplify the latter.

Our Constitutions state: "Love for God and for our brothers and sisters has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit and builds up our communion. It is the first and most necessary gift which marks us out as true disciples of Christ. Hence our entire missionary life is governed and shaped by this love" (CC 10).

In like manner, the 24th General Chapter states: "The name emphasizes our condition as sons and brothers. It shows that we are human beings loved by God the Father and by Mary, our mother, in the Spirit; called to participate in the life of God (Gn 1:26); graced by the Spirit with filial and brotherly characteristics: dignity, liberty, confidence, joy, tenderness, compassion and solidarity. This allows us to face with hope the challenges of our mission and our personal and community life and not be like those who only rely on their own strength, methods or accomplishments" (MFL 35).

As you reflect on these things, the scent of Christmas is everywhere. Once more, are confronted with shallow consumerism, while deep in our hearts we ask: What do we celebrate during this season but that the Son of God became human so that we human beings might become sons and daughters of God? That is what we hear proclaimed in the prologue to the Gospel According to John, read on Christmas day: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God" (Jn 1:1-12).



Exercise 2: Seven characteristics of sons and daughters

The declaration 'Men on Fire with Love' (cf. MFL 35), cited above, states that the Spirit is attracted by our resemblance to Jesus as son and brother. It asks you to reflect on seven features and to append each one an ejaculatory prayer to the Spirit, asking him to help you to live them more authentically.

DIGNITY	
LIBERTY	
CONFIDENCE	
JOY	
TENDERNESS	
COMPASSION	
SOLIDARITY	

1.3. Third movement: the Spirit builds the Church

Begin by reading the narration of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13). Place yourself in the Cenacle and imagine yourself an apostle in the company of Mary, awaiting the Holy Spirit. Luke portrays Pentecost as ushering in the era of the Spirit, the era of the Church and the era of. Following the outpouring of the Spirit in the form of a 'driving wind' and 'tongues as of fire', Peter delivers a lengthy discourse: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is made to you and your children and to all those far off, whomever the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38-39). Since Pentecost, the fulfillment of this mission has been the

Church's sole concern.

Our Founder tied Pentecost to the birth of the Church and, from the perspective of charity: mission of the outpouring of God's love. "The same Holy Spirit, by appearing in the form of tongues of fire above the Apostles on Pentecost, showed us the truth quite clearly: an apostolic missionary must have both heart and tongue ablaze with charity" (Aut 440).

In an address delivered in 1863, Claret goes into more detail: "Thus, Mary is the heart of the Church.



See why all works of charity flow from him. You know that the heart functions in two phases, the systole and the diastole. In the first phase blood the heart contracts, absorbing blood; in the second the heart expands, sending bloods through the arteries. Similarly, Mary continually works in two phases: absorbing the grace of her beloved Son and pouring it out in the hearts of sinners" (*Selected Spiritual Writings*, vol III, 581). It should not be lost on us that, among the titles Claret attributes to Mary, there is Spouse of the Holy Spirit (cf. Aut 162). Thus, the Spirit, Mary and the Church in unison have deep roots in our Founder's spirituality. **Booklet 5** expands on our status as servants of the Word in the Church.

Our Constitutions, emphasizing the spiritual and ecclesial character of the Congregation, state: "Our Congregation was raised up by the Holy Spirit and established by the Church" (CC 86). Like Claret's, our missionary calling is as our Constitutions state: "The anointing of the Holy Spirit, whereby we are anointed to preach the good news to the poor, is a sharing in the fullness of Christ" (CC 39). "Imitating Jesus Christ, who was sent to do the Father's will, and following the example of the Virgin Mary who, as the Lord's servant, devoted herself totally to the Son and his work, we too, moved by the power of the Holy Spirit, strive to fulfill the will of the Father in our Congregation" (CC 28). Our novices are instructed to be docile to the Spirit: "In their search for God's will, our young missionaries should let themselves be led by the Holy Spirit, cooperating responsibly with their novice master and superiors, and accepting their decisions out of faith and love" (CC 65).

Our profession of vows: "I consecrate myself in the Holy Spirit to God the Father, through Jesus Christ his Son, and I offer myself in special service to the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in order to fulfill the aim for which this Congregation has been established in the Church..." (CC 159). *Men on Fire with Love*: "We know that one's vocation is a mystery but we feel a strong call by the Spirit to question our way of life, the capacity for inviting and welcoming to our communities and our preparation and availability to create an atmosphere where vocations are nourished" (MFL 19).

Again, the Holy Spirit, Mary and the Church in unison in the context of the Congregation, whose significance cannot be appreciated sufficiently apart from this relationship. Thus, *Men on Fire with Love* emphasizes: "Therefore, we do not join the Congregation through a contract which we are able to rescind at will. We are not part of an association in which we dedicate part of our time and energy. We are a new family in the Spirit which is not based on flesh and blood but on love and in listening to, welcoming, and proclaiming the Word of God (cf. Mt 12:46-50, Jn 15:2)" (MFL 39). **Booklet 7** invites us to deepen our understanding of the Congregation from this perspective.

Just as the Holy Spirit enriches the Church with a variety of gifts (cf. 1 Cor 12), he enriches the Congregation as well: "We form a Congregation of priests, deacons, brothers and students who share the same vocation. All of us belong to the same community, fulfill the same mission and, in keeping with our own gift of order and the special role we perform in our Congregation, we all share rights and duties deriving from our professions: (CC 7). "However, we should freely use the diversity of gifts and ministries we have received from one and the same Spirit for the common good" (CC 17).

At a time, when the Congregation is more diverse than ever, in terms of race, culture, language, etc.), **we need to be increasingly open to the Spirit, though whom we share in the same calling, while exercising a diversity of our gifts.**

Exercise 3: Claretian Pentecost

The Congregation today does not consist of “Parthians, Medes and Elamites” as in the Jerusalem of the Apostles (cf. Acts 2:9), but of more than 3,000 brothers in Africa, America, Asia and Europe. Another 4,100 have passed from this world to the Father. As a member of this large and diverse community:

1. Are you anxious to grow in your understanding of the history and current state of the Congregation, or do you care only in your local community or organism? What are you doing to increase your understanding and appreciation?
2. Have you lived in a multicultural community? What did you find enriching? What problems did you experience? What attitude did you bring to the situation?
3. Are you satisfied with the fraternity you witness in the Congregation? Where do you see the need for greater emphasis on fraternity?

The Forge web site features a power point presentation entitled *Our Congregation Today*. If you are registered, you can download an up to date description of all the organisms of the Congregation.

1.4. Fourth movement: The Spirit opens our hearts to the world and impels us as missionaries

At last, as arrows forged on the anvil of Christ, we are prepared to be let fly as missionaries to the entire world. This is a recurring image in our Founder's writings. How our Founder understood and lived Luke 4:18, from which the name of this stage is taken, is described at some length in **Booklet 2** (Cf. Aut 118). The Congress on Spirituality (Majadahonda, 2001) asked that this text be adopted as the summation of our missionary spirituality.

Booklet 3 deals with the breadth of the Spirit's action in the Church and the world. **Booklet 8** explores Claret's awareness of the breadth of his own missionary vocation: “My spirit is for the whole world”. For the present, in the context of Advent and Christmas, we will limit ourselves to a few introductory comments.

In *El Egoismo Vencido*, written just months before his death, speaking of zeal, Claret writes: “The fire of the Holy Spirit moved the holy apostles to travel to the ends of the earth.” Our Constitutions state: “It is the action of the Spirit within us, which allows us to live in union with Jesus and to proclaim the Gospel: “We, the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, have also received a calling like that of the Apostles and have been granted the gift to follow Christ in a communion of life and to go out into the whole world to proclaim the good news to every creature” (CC 4). It is the Holy Spirit, who makes it possible to follow Jesus in a communion of life and to proclaim the Gospel: “They should proclaim the good news of Jesus to all people and so follow him

that, filled with grace and power, they may bear effective witness to his glory. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, who is love, they should strengthen the bonds of fraternal charity among the faithful and stir up in them a sense of justice” (CC 81).

The 24th General Chapter says much the same: “We feel called by the Spirit to commit our life for the sake of the Kingdom” (MFL 7). And with respect to our attitude toward the world: “We feel a special call of the Spirit to see the world with the eyes of God...” (MFL 53).

The *General Plan of Formation* sums up succinctly the role of the Spirit in our mission: “The Spirit who conforms us with Christ is the same one who calls us to follow him, who anoints us for the mission that the Father entrusts to us, and who makes us enjoy, esteem, judge and choose everything relating to Jesus and his Reign. It is the Spirit who comes to our aid in our weakness when we experience the hardship of the way. The Spirit is the inner teacher who leads us into all truth in our following of Christ and gives us the strength we need in order to give our life in proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom to the poor and to face the difficulties of evangelization” (*General Plan of Formation*, henceforward GPF, 96).

How must we do to welcome the Spirit? The *General Plan of Formation* states: “In order to receive and follow through on the Spirit's action within us, we need to develop certain fundamental attitudes. On the one hand, these include the humility, docility and bent of disciples who allow themselves to be taught. On the other hand, they include the practice of discernment in order to be able to clarify our vocation, to adjust our own formative way and to recognize the Spirit's presence in all aspects of life and history and through human intermediaries. The anointing of the Spirit, which equips us to become fit ministers for the proclamation of the Word, demands of a us

a constant commitment, one that is fulfilled in the measure that our experience of the Lord and our encounter with others, especially the poorest and most suffering, gradually transforms our life" (GPF 97).

Shortly after being elected Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis made it clear that he prefers that the Church be poor and realize that its mission is to serve the poor. He himself certainly comes across as simple and approachable. Do you harbor any doubt about the Spirit moving us in the same direction, inspiring us to proclaim to those turned away from the table in this unjust world the arrival of a year of grace? Unfortunately, Christmas is as much a scandalous display of waste as the celebration of the Lord's covenant with the poorest of the poor.

Our calling to announce a year of grace always entails considerable sacrifice on our part. Our Con-

stitutions: "Nevertheless, we must faithfully and boldly proclaim the good news of the kingdom, especially since there are many, led astray by the lure of power, wealth or lust, who oppose it" (CC 46). Claret regarded his missionaries as sons of the Woman, who defeats the dragon: "Here come the sons of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. It says seven, but seven is an indefinite number here, meaning all. They are called thunders because they will shout like thunder and make their voices heard (Aut 686)." Such is impossible, however, unless we are impelled by the Spirit: "The Lord told me both for myself and for all these missionary companions of mine, *Non vos estis qui loquimini sed Spiritus Patris vestri, et Matris vestrae qui loquitur in vobis.*" (It will not be you, who speak. The Spirit of your Father – and of your Mother – will speak through you)" (Aut 687).

The Spirit is at work always and everywhere

(John Paul II, *The Mission of the Redeemer*, n. 28)

"The Spirit manifests himself in a special way in the Church and in her members. Nevertheless, his presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time. The Second Vatican Council recalls that the Spirit is at work in the heart of every person, through the "seeds of the Word," to be found in human initiatives-including religious ones-and in mankind's efforts to attain truth, goodness and God himself.

"The Spirit offers the human race" the light and strength to respond to its highest calling"; through the Spirit, "mankind attains in faith to the contemplation and savoring of the mystery of God's design"; indeed, "we are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God." The Church "is aware that humanity is being continually stirred by the Spirit of God and can therefore never be completely indifferent to the problems of religion" and that "people will always...want to know what meaning to give their life, their activity and their death." The Spirit, therefore, is at the very source of man's existential and religious questioning, a questioning which is occasioned not only by contingent situations but by the very structure of his being.

"The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only the individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history: "The Spirit of God with marvelous foresight directs the course of the ages and renews the face of the earth." The risen Christ "is now at work in human hearts through the strength of his Spirit, not only instilling a desire for the world to come but also thereby animating, purifying and reinforcing the noble aspirations which drive the human family to make its life one that is more human and to direct the whole earth to this end." Again, it is the Spirit who sows the "seeds of the Word" present in various customs and cultures, preparing them for full maturity in Christ."

Exercise 4: Christmas Dinner

During Advent, we read: "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and choice wines" (Is 25:6). Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a wedding banquet (cf. Mt 22:1-4, to which all are invited: "Go out, therefore, into the main roads and invite to the feast whomever you find" (Mt 22:9).

Christmas dinner is a rehearsal of the messianic banquet, when God "will destroy death forever. The Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces. The reproach of his people he will remove from the whole earth, for the Lord has spoken" (Is 24:8). This exercise invites you to prepare spiritually for this banquet.

1. If it were up to you, whom would you invite to Christmas dinner this year? Why?
2. Prepare a menu to respond to the most pressing needs of your neighborhood. Which dishes would reflect these needs?
3. **Write the invitation. Be sure to say what has been on your mind during Advent and prompts you to send this invitation.**
4. Finally, write the toast you will make.

If it is opportune, do at least a step or two of this exercise at the community's Christmas dinner.

The 24th General Chapter reminds us: "The experiences of the Spirit are not received only to be preserved, but to be deepened and developed, with an openness towards an ever new and creative action" (cf. *Starting Afresh with Christ 20*) (MFL 28). The community meeting provides us an opportunity to reflect on and share our experience of the Spirit. We suggest the following agenda for this phase of The Forge.

1. Opening prayer.
2. Reading from Isaiah 25:6-10. Shared reflection.
3. Discussion in response to the following questions:
 - Am I enthused as we begin the last stage of The Forge, *Spiritus Domini*? What is holding me back? What encourages me to jump in?
 - What is the most important lesson I have learned from working through Booklet 1?
 - Based on Booklet 1, what would I like to share with my community about the meaning of Christmas?
4. We suggest ending the meeting with a moment of prayer and a meal, during which some of the suggestions in exercise 4 might be discussed.

3. Suggestions for the community meeting

4. Suggestions for Lectio Divina

Sunday, December 1, 2013 is the **First Sunday of Advent**. The readings during the coming liturgical year are those of **Cycle A**, with which we began "The Forge in Our Daily Life" in Advent, 2010.

During this stage, we will focus on the presence of the Holy Spirit as it is manifested in the course of the liturgical year. During the season of Advent, for example, the prophet Isaiah tells us that in the messianic age the Spirit of God will fill the earth to overflowing with the gift of knowledge: "There shall be no harm or ruin on all my mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord, as water covers the sea" (Is 11:9). Over the sprout of the stock of Jesse "the Spirit of the Lord will rest: a spirit of wisdom and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord" (Is 11:2).

It is the Holy Spirit, who overshadows Mary at the moment of the Incarnation, enabling her to conceive the Son of God. It is the same Holy Spirit, allows us to have Christ present within us, whenever we ask.

It is not a star, which guides us toward Christmas - the fullness of Christ in our midst - but the very Spirit of God, who accompanies us as we hear listen to the Word. As Jesus, "full of the Holy Spirit", reminds us (cf. Lk 10:21-22), only the simple, who allow themselves to be led by the Spirit, can recognize the Son and the Father.

Advent is the season of the Holy Spirit, the precursor of Christ at his first coming precursor of his return in glory. The Spirit spoke through the prophets, inspired messianic oracles, and provided Zachary, Elizabeth, John and Mary a foretaste of the joy to be experienced at the Lord's coming. Indeed, the first chapter of Luke's gospel, particularly the *Magnificat* and *Benedictus*, is a harbinger of Pentecost to those awaiting the fulfillment of the Old Covenant. And, awaiting a new advent, the Church, the Spouse guided by the Holy Spirit, cries out, "Come, Lord!" (Rev 22:20). The role of the Spirit is shared with charismatic men and women of the Old Covenant, a bridge between the Old and New Covenants. Accordingly, we honor the precursors of the Messiah, while acknowledging the pre-eminence of the Precursor, the Holy Spirit of Advent.

Paul VI made it clear that Advent is par excellence the Marian season of the liturgical year (*Marialis Cultus*, nn. 3-5). Historically, the liturgical commemoration of Mary originated with the reading of the gospel account of the Annunciation on the Sunday before Christmas, and the Sunday came to be called the prenatal Marian Sunday. Today, the liturgy conveys this in a number of ways, which follow:

- From the beginning of Advent there are elements, describing the expectation and welcoming of the mystery of the Christ by the Virgin of Nazareth.
- The solemnity of the Immaculate Conception is celebrated as “the basic preparation (cf. Is 11:1,0) for the coming of the Savior and the happy beginning of the Church without spot or wrinkle” (*Marialis Cultus* 3).
- During the last week of Advent, the overarching liturgical role of the Virgin pervades the biblical readings and is also given expression in the third preface for Advent, which recalls Mary’s awaiting the birth of Jesus; several prayers, such as one on December 20 from an ancient text of Rótulo of Ravenna; and the prayer over the gifts on the fourth Sunday, a kind of epiclesis, joining the Eucharistic mystery with that of the Nativity in a parallel between Mary and the Church as instruments of the one Spirit.

Mary is presented to the Church as the Immaculate Virgin of Advent. As is always the case in the liturgy, her memory is honored in a twofold way: her presence and her exemplarity. She is liturgically present in the Word and in the prayers as the one who brings waiting to its fulfillment in presence, and promise to fulfillment in gift. Mary will always be the exemplar par excellence for the Church, striving to proclaim in the world of today the always new presence of Christ in Advent and Christmas.” (J. Castellano, *Oración de las Horas* 11 (1989).



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2013. FIRST SUNDAY OF ADENT

- Is 2:1-5
- Ps 121
- Rom 13:11-14
- Mt 24:37-44

The coming of the Lord marks the end of time. The word of God descends from Mount Zion, so that, guided by it, all people may ascend to Him. What will happen at the end is clear: "All will come to the mountain of the Lord". The Holy Spirit pushes history toward its end, in which the nations "will no longer engage in war". Along the way, he continues to show us the path of justice, so that, responding to Paul's exhortation, we cloth ourselves in the Lord. However, since we are prone to fall into a routine, Advent begins with a clarion call to wake up, to be watchful and to pray, because the Son of Man will come "when we least expect". Are you prepared to be led by the Spirit to the mountain of God over the course of the liturgical year that begins today?

Monday, December 2, 2013

- Is 4:2-6
- Ps 121
- Matthew 8:5-11

Jesus lauds the faith of a pagan, who also represents the occupying Roman power. Faith does not depend on one's country of birth, race or education. Rather, it is a free response to the Spirit, who moves in the heart of every human being. There are no limits to the Spirit's activity. So, Jesus challenges the narrow-minded Jewish leaders, and prophesies that "many will come from the east and the west and in the kingdom of heaven will be seated at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (Mt 8:5-11). Can you accept the dignity of all human beings or are you hampered by prejudice and resistance? Let yourself to be caught up in the freedom of Jesus.

Tuesday, December 3, 2013. Memorial of St. Francis Xavier, Priest

- Is 11:1-10
- Ps 71
- Lk 10:21-24

In the desert, God plants a green shoot, which will be the Spirit's possession. Today, the promise of the Spirit stands firm. In the midst of a desert of disbelief and injustice, God reveals himself to the simple-hearted, who welcome the Spirit. Jesus tells us this because he himself, as the shoot of Jesse, is filled with the joy of the Spirit. Are you among the wise and learned or the simple, who are willing to learn.

Wednesday, December 4, 2013

- Is 25:6-10
- Ps 22
- Mt 15:29-37

The banquet is a beautiful of communion and celebration. In Zion, God prepares a banquet for all peoples. That eternal banquet is foreshadowed in Jesus' feeding a multitude of lame, deaf, blind and mute. Out of compassion, he gives them the blessed bread and fish. In its ritual form and its influence in our lives, our daily Eucharist is the banquet, at which Jesus continues to feed to us, who are blind and deaf. How can you live the daily Eucharist more deeply?

Thursday, December 5, 2013

- Is 26:1-6
- Ps 117
- Mt 7:21;24-27

As images, rock and sand represent blessing and curse, wise choices and poor ones. Our consumerist culture has the appearance of an impregnable city, but its foundations rest on the shifting sands of superficiality and exploitation. Sooner or later, it will collapse. As believers, we are told to build the house of our lives on the firm rock of the Word of God. It may appear to be shabbily constructed, but its strong foundations allow it to withstand storms or earthquakes. Is the Word truly the foundation of your life?

Friday, December 6, 2013

- Is 29:17-24
- Ps 26
- Mt 9:27-31

Isaiah continues to speak of that day, when God will transform everything: the blind will see and the poorest will rejoice in the Lord. This beautiful prophecy – utter foolishness to those biased in favor of science, politics or the economy – is realized in Jesus, who heals the blind and sends them as witnesses to his power to transform. Advent reminds us that those who believe in Jesus have received the Spirit and are meant to exercise it in the woof of daily life. The power of love accomplishes what no human project can. Do you share in Jesus' power to heal?

Saturday, December 7, 2013. Memorial of St. Ambrose, Bishop and Doctor

- Is 30:19-21,23-6
- Ps 146
- Mt 9:35;10:1,6-8

Isaiah assures us that prayers is heard, even when its results are not obvious. God, the teacher, teaches with Word. Jesus hands on that teaching, going from one village to another, preaching and healing. He is filled with compassion for a people that is like sheep without a shepherd. As Lord of the immense harvest, he makes disciples and sends them out in his name. They share in his ministry of teaching and healing. God never ceases to raise up collaborators, who witness to his compassion for people in need. Do you remember to ask God to send and accompany laborers for the harvest?

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2013. SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

- Is 11:1-10
- Ps 71
- Rom 15:4-9
- Mt 3:1-12

Once more, the liturgy presents the evocative image of the new shoot, springing from the old stock of Jesse. Isaiah calls forth beautiful images to describe the fruits of the Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge and fear of the Lord (Is 11:2). John the Baptizer foreshadows the mission of Jesus, the true shoot, to all humanity. John baptizes with water, a symbol of purity. Jesus, the Spouse, will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire, because in him resides fully and eternally the Spirit proclaimed by Isaiah. Are you unwittingly a disciple of John, clinging to the old, rather than a follower of Jesus, led by the Spirit?

Monday, December 9, 2013. Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

- Gen 3:9,15-20
- Ps 97
- Eph 1:3-6,11-12
- Lk 1:26-38

Mary is Immaculate because she is a woman totally possessed by the Holy Spirit of God, who fills her with grace and covers her with his shadow. The fruit of her womb Jesus, will be holy and will be called Son of God". As we journey through Advent, Mary reminds us that, no matter how decadent the environment, anyone willing to be swept up in the Spirit makes Jesus present and is made his missionary. As Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we are all of us have been called to be holy and immaculate in his presence. Do you have the strength to be a Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in the midst of the decadence surrounding us? Do you believe that, guided by the Spirit, you can play a part in transforming this environment?

Tuesday, December 10, 2013

- Is 40:1-11
- Ps 95:1-3,10-14
- Mt 18:12-14

To the exiles in Babylon, the Lord sends a prophet to offer solace. As hopeless as things appear, God never turns a deaf ear to his people, especially not to those who feel abandoned and cast aside. Jesus is the fulfillment of this prophecy, the shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep, because the Father wills that no human being be lost. Are you convinced you can face the trials of life more effectively, when you realize that God never forgets you?

Wednesday, December 11, 2013

- Is 40:25-31
- Ps 102
- Mt 11:28-30

Those who hope in the Lord will always have the strength to fight life's battles. The Spirit, dwelling within every human being, is invincible. The solace, promised by Jesus to all who feel overwhelmed by the difficulties of everyday life, is not just momentary relief, but the dulce refrigerium (sweet anointing) of his own Spirit.

Thursday, December 12, 2013. Our Lady of Guadalupe (in the Americas)

- Is 41:13-20
- Psal 144
- Mt 11:11-15

Through Isaiah the prophet, God tells us not to fear. He is our redeemer, always at our side and prepared to rescue us from any kind of enslavement. Are you convinced the Lord will never forsake you? What signs do see of his loving providence? Who are the John the Baptizers, who have led you to a deeper understanding of the place of God and Jesus in your life?

Friday, December 13. Memorial of St. Lucy, Virgin and Martyr

- Is 48:17-19
- Ps 1
- Mt 11:16-19

Both Isaiah and Jesus warn of the consequences of hearing the Word but not obeying it - hearing the music but not dancing to it. We quickly tire of following the Lord and begin looking elsewhere for the fulfillment and happiness, which come only from him. As one who lives in a throw away culture, do you treat the gift of faith as you would a mere commodity? Do you grow tired of the Lord or do you remain faithful, in spite of difficulties along your way?

Saturday, December 14, 2013. Memorial of St. John of the Cross, Presbyter and Doctor

- Sir 48:1-4,9-11
- Ps 70
- Mt 17:10-13

Though they are figures from the past, Elijah and John the Baptizer remain relevant. If we have difficulty accepting their testimony, or that of the other prophets the Lord sends throughout our lives, how can we accept the testimony of Jesus, the definitive revelation of God? Wake up! Recognize and appreciate all those the Lord places at your side to guide and support you in times of darkness and risk.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2013. THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

- Is 35:1-6a,10
- Ps 145
- Mt 11:2-11

On *Gaudete* Sunday, we are reminded by the words of the prophet Isaiah that, amidst the trials of life God comes to save us. We must be patient, however, just as the farmer is patient, while awaiting the harvest. Only in Jesus do we see things clearly. He is the one who bids the crippled to walk, the blind to see and the deaf to hear. We might wonder if Jesus is, indeed, the definitive response to our questioning. We might be tempted to turn to science and technology. It is enough, however, to look around us and see that Jesus continues to transform the lives of millions of human beings. Do you experience the joy born of faith in him? How has Jesus healed you, that you are so joyful?

Monday, December 16, 2013

- Num 24:2-7,15-17
- Ps 24
- Mt 21:23-27

We can easily get bogged down in questions which appear consequential, but which actually prevent us from making an absolute faith commitment. Why isn't the church poorer? Why is there so much evil in the world? Why are celebrities less religious than other people? Only when we allow Jesus to look us straight in the eye, when we no longer consider conscience our sole arbiter, can we accept the authority of Jesus. Do you pray to believe more deeply or to be spared the risk of faith?

Tuesday, December 17, 2013. [The major feat days begin.]

- Gen 49:2,8-10
- Ps 71
- Mt 1:1-17

In immediate preparation for the birth of Jesus, Advent shifts into high gear, while maintaining but maintains the peacefulness of Advent – except, perhaps, in the shopping malls. Jacob, surrounded by his sons, is a prophecy, which comes to fulfillment in Jesus. The obvious purpose of Matthew's artful genealogy is to show that all of ancient history, including the most shameful episodes, converge on Jesus called the Christ. Teilhard de Chardin said: "No, I am not shocked by the interminable hope and long preparation. We witness them also in people today who, from light into light, journey toward what is the light". Do you have a convergent vision? Do you believe in Jesus as the one who fulfills all of humanity's expectation, as the one sent by the Father, who is the fulfillment of our human dreams and searching?

Wednesday, December 18, 2013

- Jer 23:5-8
- Ps 71
- Mt 1:18-24

The prophet we might associate with fire and brimstone proclaims a message of hope: "Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David. As king he will govern wisely, he shall do what is right in the land" (Jeremiah 23.5). But to say the least, the Holy Spirit complicates the simple lives of Joseph and Mary, who are engaged to be married. Everything is up for grabs. Things could end up a total mess. Still, Joseph and Mary deal with their reluctance and insecurities and continue trusting in the Lord. Because of them, Jeremiah's dream comes to fruition: God will be God with us. Jesus will be a true king and the eternal king of his people. Were it not for the faith of this young couple, what might have become of you?

Thursday, December 19, 2013

- Jdg 13:2-7,24-25a
- Ps 70
- Lk 15:25

Throughout the Old Testament, an annunciation is an intervention by God in human history. Annunciations to Samson and John the Baptizer foreshadow the annunciation by the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary. In each instance, the recipient, at first astonished and afraid, embraces the promise and accepts God's call. What is the Lord saying to you? Are you open to surprises, or do you prefer that nothing interrupt the monotony of your faith life, let alone upset your daily routine? Can you handle a new Nativity?

Friday, December 20, 2013

- Is 7:10-14
- Ps 23
- Lk 1:26-38

With the annunciation to Mary, we are on the threshold of God's all but unbelievable breakthrough into human history. Some say there is no God. Others say God exists but keeps hands off, whether in the governance of the cosmos or the daily affairs of human beings. Isaiah and Luke, on the other hand, speak of Emmanuel, God with us. A teenage woman says, "Yes". There is no magic involved, yet, in this instance, God outdistances biology and human engineering. Can you spend a little time today, amazed by this story? Let this biblical text play a larger role in your thinking.

Saturday, December 21, 2013

- Song 2:8-14
- Ps 32
- Lk 1:39-45

"Hark, my lover – here he comes!" (Songs 2:8). Today's liturgy picks up the pace, quickens the beat. The beloved arises because her lover comes, leaping over the hills. She cannot contain herself. Mary sets out in haste, not simply to care for Elizabeth, but because she is pregnant with the Beloved, the desired of the ages. More than that: the young Mary, visited by the angel, is now the visitor, the missionary of her own Son, even before giving him birth. Her happiness is beyond all telling. Jesus is not only her son but the patrimony of all humanity. Do you feel the urgency to set out and share with others your encounter with Jesus?

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2013. FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

- Is 7:10-14
- Ps 23
- Rom 1:1-7
- Mt 1:18-24

Paul begins his letter to the Romans saying that the good news promised by God "... is about God's Son, descended from David according to the flesh, but established as Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness through resurrection from the dead" (Rom 1:3-4). Matthew's gospel describes how events unfolded, acknowledging Mary the mother and Joseph her betrothed, but more concerned with the mystery of the birth of Jesus, the Emmanuel foretold by Isaiah, is the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus will not be born in you by your reading a new Christology, let alone by your involvement with people. Like Mary, you must allow yourself to be led by the Spirit. Can you handle surprises?

Monday, December 23, 2013

- Mal 3:1-4,23-24
- Ps 24
- Lk 1:57-66

The refiner's fire or the fuller's lye. Strange but appropriate descriptions of John the Baptizer's prophetic calling. As foretold by the prophet Malachi, John is the precursor, who prepares the way of the Lord. Why the entire world rejoices at the birth of this child, born of aged parents, is clear. His name is John, which is to say God grants his grace and mercy. People wondered what would become of this child. Signs of God's being at work always elicit amazement and confusion – and expectation. As Rabindranath Tagore said, every newborn "reminds us that God has not given up hope in humanity". Have you lost hope?

Tuesday, December 24, 2013

- 2 Sam 7:1-5,8b ...
- Ps 88:2-5,27,29
- Lk 1:67-79

A dwelling fit for the Lord? David was thinking of a material dwelling, fit to house the one, who had stood by him in battle. The Lord, however, prefers to be among his people, as Zacharias acclaims in his Benedictus: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has visited and brought redemption to his people" (Lk 1:68). God remains among us. It is Christmas eve. Are you prepared for his arrival? In the peacefulness of this night, you might suspect there is truth to the rumor of angels, leading you to Jesus. Like Mary, you announce his coming. You cannot keep the good news to yourself. Spread it.

Wednesday, December 25, 2013. Solemnity of the Birth of the Lord

- Is 52:7-10
- Ps 97
- Heb 19:1-6
- Jn 1:1-18

The world over, humanity welcome a message that will never become outmoded. "Today a savior is born to you." Even to those who feel no need of salvation, the grace of God has appeared. Many are astounded at the decision of the Word to pitch his tent on human ground. Yet it is as true today as it was then: "He came to what was his own but his own people did not accept him..." (Jn 1.11). Even more wonderful: "But to those who did accept him he gave power to become [children] of God..." (Jn 1:12). On this Christmas day, delight in your dignity as a son of the Father. Attempt to comprehend what a gift it is to have a loving Father. Share the gift of faith with your brothers and sisters, and your joy with those who are still searching. Never cease to believe that the Word was the true light, which casts out every shadow.

Thursday, December 26, 2013. Feast of St. Stephen, Protomartyr

- Acts 6:8-10;7,54-60
- Ps 30
- Mt 10:17-22

So far as we know, Stephen was the first among Jesus' followers to be born to eternal life. While we refer to him as protomartyr, we might just as well refer to him as the firstborn to full communion with God. Nothing entails greater risk than to be a disciple of a defenseless Child, yet filled by the Holy Spirit. Stephen was that to the end. Having imitated Jesus in life, he imitated him in his death as well, forgiving his persecutors and putting his life in the hands of Jesus. To this day, Christian martyrs, including our blessed Claretian Martyrs, have greeted death, invoking the words of Stephen. Paradoxically, Christmas is truly celebrated only when and where are men and women prepared to lay down their lives in witness to their Savior.

Friday, December 27, 2013. Feast of St. John, Apostle and Evangelist

- 1 Jn 1:1-4
- Ps 96
- Jn 20:2-8

The feast of John the Evangelist. The liturgy identifies John as the Lord's beloved disciple, a close companion during Jesus' earthly life and a privileged witness of Jesus' resurrection. A sprinter, he outruns Peter to the tomb, but accedes to the first of the apostles. As a friend, John is not satisfied to perform menial tasks. He is the disciple moved by love, who refuses to believe that the Lord has merely disappeared. According to tradition, John is the disciple who, like Mary, ponders all things in his heart, then later puts them in writing. Do you see something of this intrepid disciple in yourself, or are you among those used to waiting for others to test the waters and evangelize?

Saturday, December 28, 2013. Feast of the Holy Innocents, Martyrs

- 1 Jn 5:2,2.
- Ps 12
- Mt 2:13-18

Executioners are forgotten, and the names of the innocent rarely known. In this case, the children remain nameless, while Herod the executioner is a household name. How many times in human history has this been the case? The killing of the Innocents forces the family of Jesus into exile. Like the ancient people of Israel, they go to Egypt, returning only when the Pharaoh or Herod has died. Obviously, Matthew sees Jesus as the new Moses, leading his people to definitive liberation: "Out of Egypt I have called my son" (Mt 2:15).

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2013. FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

- 1 Sam 1:20-22,24-28
- Ps 83
- 1 Jn 3:1-2,21-14
- Lk 2:41-52

“To change society, change the family” – the slogan of all advocates of social reform. Change dictated from above has little chance of success. Today’s liturgy provides an alternative model: the household of Nazareth. What is important is not imitating this family but our being open to the Spirit, who guided it.

Today, neither traditionalists nor progressives feel at home with the family of Nazareth. It is an entirely new and different kind of family, with its problems, finding it’s way, and respecting each member’s particular calling. They all, however, share one thing in common: a commitment to put the will of the Father before one’s own.

Monday, December 30, 2013

- 1 Jn 2:12-17
- Ps 95
- Lk 2:36-40

Following the feast of the Holy Family, we turn to the exhortations, which the First Letter of John directs to sons and fathers. They are most enlightening. As in the case of Jesus, they focus on our knowledge of the Father. In the gospel of Luke, Anna the prophetess, along with Simeon, witnesses to the true identity of the child. Following the rite of presentation, the family returns to Nazareth, where in the most ordinary of circumstances Jesus learns to do the will of the Father. Do grey days as much as sunny days inspire me to respond to your calling?

Tuesday, December 31, 2013

- 1 Jn.18-21
- Ps 95
- Jn 1:1-18

As we did on Christmas day, we hear the prologue to the Gospel according to John. It is not as if we could ever comprehend the mystery of the Word made flesh in human history, yet we move into a new year in a spirit of gratitude, grateful to the Spirit, whose has guided us on the darkest as well as the brightest of days. We need only to continue to trust that the Spirit will bring to completion the work he has begun in us.

Wednesday, January 1, 2014. Solemnity of the Mother of God

- Num 6:22-27
- Ps 66
- Gal 4:4-7
- Lk 2:16-21

We usher in the new civil year under the protection of Mary, the Mother of God. Luke says that Mary kept all these things in her heart. If as Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, hearers and servants of the Word, we share in her silence, we will hear the Word and authentically proclaim it. Only those who do this in their hearts can be true peacemakers. Do you begin the year 2014 in this spirit? Ask our Mother to guide you toward the Child cuddled in her arms.

Thursday, January 2, 2014. St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory Nazienzen

- 1 Jn 2:22-28
- Ps 97
- Jn 1:19-28

Who are you? This is still the compelling question. Is Jesus just one more messianic figure, who dares point the way and govern consciences, even at the risk supplanting the Word, which is light and life. Like John the Baptizer, there have been countless christophers, felt led by the Spirit to reveal Christ to others. Have you encountered these messianic types, who only upset and confuse people? Do you feel called to be a christopher in the tradition of John the Baptizer, or Basil and Gregory, whom the Church remembers today?

Friday, January 3, 2014

- 1Jn 2:29-3:6
- Ps 97
- Jn 1:29-34

We are sons of God! Sons in the Son! The author of the Letter of John at the mere mention of our true identity. John the Baptizer bears witness to the true identity of Jesus – the Lamb of God, the Son of the Father, the Son of God. Yet, neither John the Baptizer, nor we have words sufficient, when it comes to saying who Jesus is. Does the Word help you know who you truly are? Do you avail yourself of your status as son during this Christmas season?

Saturday, January 4, 2014

- 1Jn 3:7-10
- Ps 97
- Jn 1:35-42

Recounting how Jesus met his first disciples, today’s gospel reading presents a rosary of christological titles: Lamb of God, Master, Messiah. Do we ever cease to be surprised by Jesus’ first words in the gospel of John, which he continues to ask each one of us? What are you looking for? Everything else follows: curiosity, being with Jesus, the invitation to others to follow, the confession of faith and being sent on mission. What do you say to Jesus, when he asks what you are looking for?

SUNDAY, JANUARY 5, 2014. SECOND SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS

- Eccl 24:1-2:8-12
- Ps 147
- Eph 1:3-6,15-18
- Jn 1:1-18

In the New Testament, the Wisdom is Jesus himself: the word, the light, the life, the truth. Yet a third time during the Christmas season, we are asked to reflect on the prologue of the gospel according to John. Why? The Letter to the Ephesians assures us that “the Father predestined us to be his adopted children through Jesus Christ”, but for us to recognize Jesus, the Father of Glory must give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation, which gives light to the eye of the heart, enabling us to comprehend the hope to which we are called. Humbly ask the Lord for the wisdom to comprehend the richness of the glory, which he gives to the saints as our inheritance.

Monday, January 6, 2014. Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord

- Is 60:106
- Ps 71
- Eph 3:2-3a,5-6
- Mt 2:1-12

No one is denied access to Jesus. The first to whom he reveals himself are shepherds, regarded as outcasts, and magi, mere pagans. Mary welcomes them with the Child, who is to be adored, in her arms. All one needs to recognize Jesus are humility and the willingness to seek him. The Herod types, on the other hand, will do their utmost to shut out the light but to no avail. The star will continue to shine and lead us to Jesus, and like the magi of old, we will be overcome with joy. Have you set out, prepared to be guided by the star through the darkness of life?

Tuesday, January 7, 2014

- 1 Jn 3:22-4,6
- Ps 2
- Mt 4:12-17:23-25

An adult, Jesus leaves Nazareth and goes to Capernaum, where he begins his ministry. The light must not be hidden in the small amphora of Nazareth, but brought to the pagans, allowing all humanity to contemplate it: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light" (Is 9:2). The light is revealed in Jesus' ministry as teacher, as the one who proclaims good news, and as healer. His fame spreads. People needed this kind of man. What has Jesus taught you? Do you feel the word you preach is good news? Has Jesus healed you of some infirmity?

Wednesday, January 8, 2014

- 1 Jn 4:1.7-10
- Ps 71
- Mk 6:33-44

Jesus studies the people and begins preaching only after considering his listeners' needs. Compassion for the people, wandering like sheep without a shepherd, inspires everything he says or does. Sharing a meal in an out-of-the-way place presages what Jesus expects of his community, the Church: the hungry, thanksgiving, an abundance of food, and people prepared to serve. Eucharist on the lawn, a sign of spring, of the Passover, which Jesus embodies for all who need to make sense of their lives. Are you ready to be a full-time waiter at the celebration of the Reign of God? Have you heard Jesus telling you, and others: "Give them something to eat"?

Thursday, January 9, 2014

- 1 Jn 4:11-18
- Ps 71
- Mk 6:45-52

A short time after Jesus, the restaurateur, feeds the multitude,) Jesus, the ghost walking on water, appears to his disciples in the middle of the night. It is not unusual for Jesus to keep his distance, to show us he is not, like a toy, in easy reach. Rather, he awakens in us the desire to encounter him, then responds to our cries for help. In all the storms of life, the more we feel Jesus is ignoring us, his word remains powerful: "Courage! It is I. Do not be afraid!" (Mt 14:27). The bark of our life, the bark of the Church is not sinking. Do you still have strength to cry out or have you given up? Which of your fears have not yet been defeated by Jesus?

Friday, January 10, 2014

- 1Jn 4:19-5:4
- Ps 71
- Lk 4:14-22a

For the first time in this *Spiritus Domini* stage, the liturgy presents Luke's account of Jesus reading and interpreting Isaiah's proclamation, under the power of the Spirit, of a year of grace. We return to this theme in this last stage of The Forge. Do you feel, as the Christmas season draws to a close, that the Spirit of the Lord is upon you as well? Has Christmas been for you good news"? Like the people of Jesus' hometown, you can gaze on him - Our eyes on Jesus the Lord. History is open ended, but you are free to choose: you can reject him, as the people of Nazareth did, or you can follow him. Choose.

Saturday, January 11, 2014

- 1Jn 5:5-13
- Ps 147
- Lk 5:12-16

The leper healed by Jesus is not someone out of the past. You are that leper. Think of all the leprosy that have threatened your vocation and caused you to distance yourself from the community. Put the past behind you, and prostrate at the feet of Jesus, cry out: "Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean" (Lk 5:12). He will touch you, he will heal you, and ask you something very simple: that you tend to your daily responsibilities. It doesn't matter that you do nothing out of the ordinary. Discover the joy of living in community, remain dedicated to your work, and submit with gratitude to the forge of daily life.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 12, 2014. FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

- Is 42:1-4:6-7
- Ps 28
- Acts 10:34-38
- Mt 3:13-17

The feast of the Baptism of the Lord brings the Christmas season and the first phase of the *Spiritus Domini* stage to a close. Today's gospel reading tells how John, immediately after he had baptized Jesus, by John, "saw the Spirit of God descend on Jesus like a dove and hover over him" In Jesus, the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled: "I have laid my Spirit upon him, so that he may bring justice to the nations." Bathed in the Spirit of God, Jesus understands who he is ("This is my Son, my beloved") and his mission: "to bring justice, love, salvation to the nations." Only with the help of the Spirit do we answer the question of our identity and relevance. Do you experience your status as a son of God as the source of the missionary impulse? Do you allow yourself to be baptized daily by the Spirit in the Jordan?

Appendix 1: The Experience of the Spirit and Ordinary Life (Karl Rahner)

I can now refer to the actual life-experiences which, whether we come to know them reflectively or not, are experiences of the Spirit. It is important that we experience them in the right way. In the case of these indications of the actual experience of the Spirit in the midst of banal everyday life, it can no longer be a question of analyzing them individually right down to their ultimate depth – which is the Spirit. And no attempt can be made to make a systematic tabular summary of such experiences. Only arbitrarily and unsystematically selected examples are possible.

Let us take, for instance, someone who is dissatisfied with his life, who cannot make the goodwill, errors, guilt, and fatalities of his life fit together, even when, as often seems impossible, he adds remorse to this accounting. He cannot see how he is to include God as an entry in the accounting, as one that makes the debit and credit, the notional and actual values, come out right. This human being surrenders himself to God – both more imprecisely and more precisely – to the hope of an incalculable ultimate reconciliation of his existence in which he whom we call God dwells; he releases his unresolved and uncalculated existence, he lets go in trust and hope and does not know how this miracle occurs that he cannot himself enjoy and possess as his own self-actuated possession.

There is an individual who discovers that he can forgive though he receives no reward for it, and silent forgiveness from the other side is taken as self-evident.

There is one who tries to love God although no response of love seems to come from God's silent incomprehensibility, although no wave of emotive wonder any longer supports him, although he can no longer confuse himself and his life-force with God, although he thinks he will die from such a love, because it seems like death and absolute denial, because with such a love one appears to call into the void and the completely unheard of, because this love seems like a ghastly leap into groundless space, because everything seems untenable and apparently meaningless.

There is the person who does his duty where it can apparently only be done, with the terrible feeling that he is denying himself and doing something ludicrous for which no one will thank him.

There is a person who is really good to another person from whom no echo of understanding and thankfulness is heard in return, whose goodness is not even repaid by the feeling of having been selfless, noble, and so on.

There is one who is silent although he could defend himself, although he is unjustly treated, who keeps silence without feeling that his silence is his sovereign unimpeachability.

There is someone who obeys not because he must and would otherwise find it inconvenient to disobey,

5. Texts for Reflection

but purely on account of that mysterious, silent, and incomprehensible thing that we call God and the will of God.

There is someone renounces something without thanks or recognition, and even without a feeling of inner satisfaction.

There is a person who is absolutely lonely, who finds all the bright elements of life pale shadows, for whom all trustworthy handholds take him into the infinite distance, and who does not run away from this loneliness but treats it with ultimate hope.

There is someone who discovers that his most acute concepts and most intellectually refined operations of the mind do not fit; that the unity of consciousness and that of which one is conscious in the destruction of all systems is now to found only in pain; that he cannot resolve the immeasurable multitude of questions, and yet cannot keep to the clearly known content of individual experience and to the sciences.

There is one who suddenly notices how the tiny trickle of his life wanders through the wilderness of the banality of existence, apparently without aim and with the heartfelt fear of complete exhaustion. And yet he hopes, he knows not how, that this trickle will find the infinite expanse of the ocean, even though it may still be coered by the grey sands which seem to extend forever before him.

One could go on like this forever, perhaps even then without coming to that experience which for this or that individual is the experience of the Spirit, freedom, and grace in his life. For everyone makes that experiences in accordance with the particular historical and individual situation of his specific life. Everyone! But he has, so to speak, to dig it out from under the rubbish of everyday experience, and must run away from it where it begins to become legible, as though it were only an undermining and disturbance of the self-evidence of his everyday life and his scientific assurance.

Let me repeat, though I must say it in almost the same words:

- where the one and entire hope is given beyond all individual hopes, which comprehends all impulses in silent promise,
- where a responsibility in freedom is still accepted and borne where it has no apparent offer of success and advantage,
- when someone experiences and accepts his ultimate freedom which no earthly compulsions can take away from him; where the leap into the darkness of death is accepted as the beginning of everlasting promise,
- when the sum of all accounts of life, which no one can calculate alone, is understood by an incomprehensible other as good, though it still cannot be proven,
- where the fragmentary experience of love, beauty, and joy is experienced and accepted purely and simply as the promise of love, beauty, and joy, without their being understood in ultimate cynical skepticism as a cheap form of consolation for some final deception,
- where the bitter, deceptive and vanishing everyday world is withstood until the accepted end, and accepted out of a *forcé* whose ultimate source is still unknown to us but can be tapped by us,
- where one dares to pray into a silent darkness and knows that one is heard, although no answer seems to come back about which one might argue and rationalize,
- where one lets oneself go unconditionally and experiences this capitulation as true victory,
- where falling becomes true uprightness,
- where desperation is accepted and is still secretly accepted as trustworthy without cheap trust,
- where a person entrusts all his knowledge and all his questions to the silent and all-inclusive mystery which is loved more than all our individual knowledge which makes us such small people,
- where we rehearse our own deaths in everyday life, and try to live in such a way as we would like to die, peaceful and composed,
- where – (as I have said, we could go on and on):

There is God and his liberating grace. There we find what we Christians call the Spirit of God. Then we experience something which is inescapable (even when suppressed) in life, and which is offered to our freedom with the question whether we want to accept it or whether we want to shut ourselves up in a hell of freedom by trying to barricade ourselves against it.

Appendix 2: In Creative Fidelity (taken from *Our Missionary Spirituality Along the Journey of God's People II, 1, f*)

In order to carry out the Council's demand for renewal, we have reinterpreted our own history. During the course of this we have been experiencing the presence of the Spirit.

Each General Chapter has been a time for evaluation, synthesis and projection. This ongoing process has allowed us to discover new characteristics that also make up our spiritual identity:

- **A Prophetic Spirituality:** involves cultivating a deep experience of God, listening to the Word, discerning by the light of the Spirit the challenges of our time and translating them boldly and courageously into options and projects that are both consistent with our original charism and the demands of our concrete historical situation[36]. "Prophecy only becomes persuasive when there is a coherence between our announcement and our life".
- **A Community Spirituality and a Spirituality of Communion:** The person grows and is fulfilled by opening himself to communion, entering into his moment in history. Thus, through communion and community mission, we develop our personhood as Claretians.
- **A Spirituality Rooted in the People of God:** We press for the living of a spirituality that is more committed to and shared with the People of God and with the agents of evangelization, allowing ourselves to be evangelized by the poor and by the religious and cultural values of the peoples. Like Claret, we know that our mission binds us in a special way to simple people, to 'the needy and the poor' All this makes us insert ourselves more and more into the local churches and the universal Church, collaborating with them.
- **An Integral Spirituality:** We must live a spirituality that is one of both prayer and contemplation and of apostolic activity, the way Claret did. In order to do this, we must ask the Spirit for the grace to be contemplatives in mission and avail ourselves of means like spiritual accompaniment that fosters progress in the missionary life. Care for and development of the human dimension makes us joyful, kind, understanding evangelizers, with a positive view of life, who manifest "outwardly the inner fullness of grace".
- **A Convergent Spirituality:** Not all of us express the missionary vocation in the same way: we are missionaries who are priests, deacons, brothers and students. Thus, missionary spirituality is manifested in some as priestly or diaconal spirituality and in others as a spirituality of nonordained ministers or consecrated lay spirituality. Differences also arise from the cultures, peoples and particular churches in which we are inserted. Empowering these distinctive characteristics within a single missionary spirituality benefits mission and communion because they tend toward a more complete display of the possibilities latent within the charism. The Missionary Priests help us with their ordained ministry to live our common condition of servants and to empower the charisms of all the members of the Christian community with their experience of communion and mission. The Missionary Brothers, for their part, express the fellowship that must characterize our missionary life, as well as the lay dimension of our shared mission.

"We can see that the mission comes from the experience of a God who is communion and communication, who is love and who fills us with this love, who dwells in us and wishes to communicate himself. The missionary mandate of Jesus is a resonance of the communion of trinitarian love, an invitation to give it, under the impulse of the Spirit, a concrete expression in time and space." (Josep M. Abella, *Missionaries*)

spiritus domini

The Forge in our daily life

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