

The Forge

in our daily life

SPIRITUS DOMINI

Lent

3 THE ACTION OF THE SPIRIT TODAY
IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE WORLD

SPIRITUS DOMINI - 2014

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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.



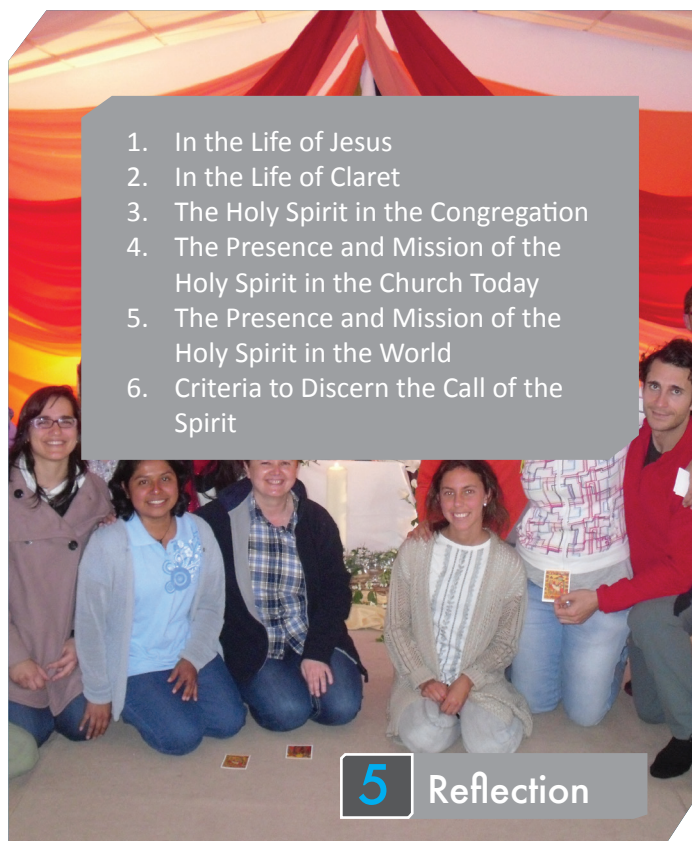
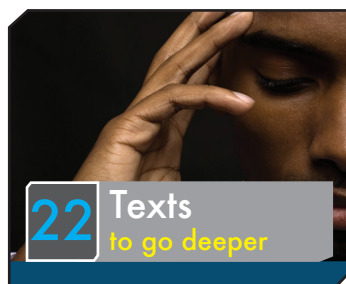
OBJECTIVES

- 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.

BOOKLETS

1. The Spirit of the Lord is Upon Us (Advent-Christmas)
2. We Have Been Anointed to Evangelize (Ordinary Time I)
3. In the "Today" of the World and the Church (Lent)
4. As Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Easter)
5. Servants of the Word in the Church (Ordinary Time II)
6. In the Style of Claret (Ordinary Time III)
7. In the Missionary Congregation (Ordinary Time IV)
8. Open to the Whole World (Ordinary Time V)
9. Progressing in the Missionary Life (Ordinary Time VI)

contents



1. Introduction

Welcome to the **Lenten period of our spiritual itinerary of the Forge** in its fourth stage *Spiritus Domini*! Let us live this Lenten period with a deep sense of our life as being immersed in the Spirit and learn to discern the action of the Spirit in ourselves within us, in the church and in the world.. We will fine tune our sensitivity will become docile to the transforming power of the Spirit in us and in the world by making the discernment of the Spirit a regular practice in our everyday life. The life of our Founder is a wonderful example of discerning the will of God in the light of the Word and letting the Spirit guide the course of one's life.

How do you, as a Claretian, discern the will of God for you and read the signs of the times? During this Lenten season you are invited to give a serious thought to how you seek the will of God in your life and the way you interpret the events in the Church and in the world. How do you let the Word of God illumine your mind and heart to discern the spirits that move you and the world around you?

In the Catholic tradition the process of discernment is of principal importance in spiritual growth and pastoral commitment. It entails the gift to sift out, to separate and distinguish good from evil, the true from the false, and the apparent good from what is truly good. Wisdom and sound judgment goes with discernment. Without discernment we can easily be carried away by the passing passions within us and fanciful fads from without. According to St. John Damascene, discernment is the "queen and crown all the virtues." It is by discerning the will of God that we can pull through the storms of life. The Lenten liturgy invites us to learn from Jesus how to seek and do the will of the Father amidst the harsh trials of life.

2. Reflection



2.1. In the Life of Jesus

Jesus lived his life in total surrender to the guidance of the Spirit. It is this trust and confidence in the Spirit of his Father that enabled him to stand up to the test in the desert (Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13) and face various trials during his ministry. We have already reflected on how Jesus faced the temptations in the desert as the Son seeking to do the will of the Father (cf. *Patris Mei*, **Booklet 4**). It is the spirit of sonship that marks our true identity which keeps us rooted in God and enables us to sift out the real from the false. The choices of Jesus were in keeping with his own identity as the Son and in fulfillment of his mission. "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (Jn 4:34).

Jesus' life shows how to conform to the will of the Father and tune oneself to the action of the Holy Spirit even amidst the most dreadful moments of life. In his agony in the garden of Gethsemane he was aware of his deep inner suffering and he could say, "My soul is sorrowful, even to death" (Mk 14:34). He would even plead to the Father, if it were possible, for the hour to pass from him (Mk 14:35). The Gospel of Mathew points to Jesus' awareness of the clash between the Spirit and the flesh: "The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak" (Mt. 26:41). Jesus did not give in to the flesh but discerned the will of the Father, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done" (Mt 26: 42).

In this Lenten season we take a good look at Jesus to imbibe his Spirit to discern the action of the Holy Spirit in today's world and the Church. Like Jesus, we first have to be aware of the various inner movements (spirits) that influence our mind and heart. It is then that, conscious of our identity as children of God, we can willingly embrace our way of the cross in union with the crucified Lord and make decisions which bring life and love in abundance.

The Spirit of the Lord is present in the brokenness of the world which is the result of the greed and

selfishness of humans and effects healing and wholeness in unexpected ways. Our faith empowers us to look at the events in the Church and the world with the eyes of hope. For that we need to cultivate mindfulness to recognize the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in ourselves.

Exercise 1: Awareness of the Holy Spirit

The best time to do this prayer exercise is towards the end of the day since we reflect on what happened during the day. It is good to do it at approximately the same time every evening when possible. The exercise may take about 15 minutes.

There are 5 steps in this prayer. Step 3 forms the core of this prayer, but if the Spirit moves you to pause longer in any of the other steps, you may do so. The five steps are: Thanksgiving, Light, Review, Response and Tomorrow.

The purpose of this exercise is to increase your awareness of the Spirit working in your life and to provide you with the enlightenment needed to co-operate and respond to this presence.

1) Thanksgiving

Take a comfortable posture suitable for prayer. Remember that you are in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Thank the Holy Spirit for your existence and ongoing life, your vocation, the sacraments, your talents and abilities, the significant relationships in your life, the air, the sun — whatever comes to your mind. You don't have to think of what you are grateful for; rather, let it come forth in your mind. Allow gratitude to take hold of you. Praise and thank God for all that you have received (1 Cor 4:7).

2) Light

Ask the Holy Spirit for the spiritual and interior light to experience His indwelling within you. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what God wants you to see. We need to ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten us about what has transpired during the day because we are often blind to see Him in the people and events we encounter in the course of the day. We can be ignorant of the movements of our heart, rationalize our motives, and deceive ourselves about what is going on in and around us. We need to ask the Holy Spirit for the light to reveal our own selves to ourselves. Knowledge of God necessarily involves knowledge of the self.

3) Review

Review the day to see the working of the Holy Spirit in all the events of the day. Recall the persons, events and circumstances of the day, allowing the Holy Spirit to show you where He was encountering, challenging or consoling you. Begin by recalling the persons, then, the events and the circumstances. In each of these, focus first on your words and actions, and then on your thoughts and feelings. Where and what were the signs of the Spirit? How did you respond? Which interior events were significant to you? Notice whatever stands out: joy, pain, turmoil, increase of love, anger, harmony, anxiety, freedom, enchantment, loneliness, etc. Which ones led you to the Holy Spirit, and which led you away from the Spirit? Where and when did you sense you were being led by God's Spirit? How did you respond to these persons, events and experiences?

The review of the day is not simply an introspection; it is a prayer, reviewing our day with the Holy Spirit. When you sense the presence of the Holy Spirit in this exercise, pause and savor the experience to allow the feel of His presence to grow within you. If you find any difficulty sensing the presence of the Holy Spirit, simply raise the person, event or circumstance involved to the Holy Spirit and wait. Through this awareness exercise the Holy Spirit becomes our constant companion and guide.

4) Response

Once you have reviewed your day, you may have an awareness of God's offer and your response or lack of response to it. The fourth step is your present response to that awareness.

As you recognize God's presence and your graced yet free response of gratitude for and wonder at the work of the Holy Spirit in you, praise God for this. Thank God for the persons, events, circumstances, and the unselfish attitudes in you which have mediated His presence to you.

Conversely, when you discover your lack of response and self-centeredness during the day, respond with remorse and contrition. Contrition should not be confused with shame. Contrition moves us out of ourselves and towards God; shame simply moves us inwards ourselves. So we ask God for His forgiveness for failing to respond to His presence.

5) Tomorrow

Conclude this prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help you to be more attentive and responsive to His presence on the following day. For example, you may need to pray to God to help you overcome something, or to be more sensitive to God's activity in your life, to let go of something, to deal with some issues, to make some decisions, to be firm in your conviction, etc. Conclude this prayer in surrender to God, with trust and confidence, and by offering yourself to Him. God's love and presence will be with you again the next day and you will want to respond to him more fully.

2.2. In the Life of Claret

Claret's effectiveness as a missionary was the fruit of his intimacy with Christ. He used to ask himself in difficult situations how Jesus would have acted under similar situations (Aut 648). In times of trial (he had to face many in his life), he learned how to keep calm without allowing himself to be carried away by anger, impatience, sadness or unrestrained joy, and to surrender himself to God's design for him, and to say "Thy will be done" (Aut 650).

During the *Quid Prodest* stage (**Booklet 4**), we reflected on the various crossroads in the life of Claret. He was able to pass over these crossroads because he sought for the will of God by listening to the Word of God, praying, and consulting his spiritual guides. His being attuned to the Spirit within him—"My

spirit is for the whole world!"—led him to give up the security and recognition he enjoyed in his home parish and in the diocese of Vic to go to Rome and make himself available to preach the Word in the foreign missions. We see Claret becoming proficient in discerning the will of God as he encountered difficult situations which called for important decisions contrary to his natural inclinations (for example, in accepting to be the archbishop of Cuba, to be confessor to the queen). Claret clearly perceived what was going on in the Spanish society and the Church of his time (Aut 717-735) and he tried to remedy the ills of that society as God's instrument. Our charism prepares us to look at reality from the perspective of God.

Exercise 2: What were the actions of the Holy Spirit in my life in this year?

A. In my personal life (Please, write them down.)

1)

2)

3)

B. In my community life (Please, write them down.)

1)

2)

3)

C. In my apostolic Life (Please, write them down.)

1)

2)

3)



2.3. The Holy Spirit in the Congregation

Our Congregation has the awareness of being founded and animated in its missionary life by the Holy Spirit. The Constitutions remind us that "Our Congregation was raised up by the Holy Spirit and established by the Church" (CC 86). "Our Congregation is the expression of a gift of the Spirit, sanctioned by the Church—a gift through which we are all called to carry out our universal mission" (CC 135). We are anointed by the Holy Spirit to share in the fullness of Christ and the Holy Spirit moulds us into instruments to proclaim the kingdom (cf. CC 39). The history of our Congregation can be considered as a family chronicle of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit.

The practice of discernment is an integral element of our spiritual heritage. We jointly seek to know and do God's will so that we may fulfill our common mission in the Church amid the changing circumstances of the time, places and persons (CC 29). "We feel a special call of the Spirit to see the world with the eyes of God, to reinforce the experience of God in our lives, to live in continuous formation and to recommit ourselves to the community" (MFL 53).

Like Claret we need to cultivate a sharp sense of discernment in order to seek and do God's will at the different moments of our personal decisions, community resolutions, missionary options, revision of positions, and reorganization in the congregation. To rekindle the fire within us, we resolved in the last General Chapter that "we will value spiritual discernment and encourage its practice in our personal and community decision making processes" (MFL 54.4).

One of the callings of the Spirit for us to do is the "shared mission." We are servants and ministers who work with others to realize the project of Jesus for the world. The Congregation needs to discern what is "the most pressing, timely and effective" in the selection of missionary fronts and the means to be used for the missionary proclamation of the Word. The ecology of nature and the ecology of the Spirit compel us to dialogue with people of other languages, beliefs and culture in order to build universal brotherhood.



Exercise 3: What were the key moments in our Congregation and Province where we experienced the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit ?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

2.4. The Presence and Mission of the Holy Spirit in the Church Today

As Claretians we are attuned to the action of the Spirit in the Church. We are witnessing many events in the Church which give us joy and others which cause concern. The celebration of the year of faith, the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI, and the election of Pope Francis were significant events in the Church. The various forms of persecution meted out to Christians and the cases of sexual abuse by the clergy are causes of concern which invite us to be firm in the faith and authentic in its practice. It is by our conformity to the Spirit of Christ that we can truly be the Church of Christ.

The early Church knew how to journey with the Spirit in carrying out her mission. The disciples had the awareness that their decisions were taken in communion with the Spirit. They could honestly say about their decisions that which affected the Christian community thus, "It seemed good to the Holy

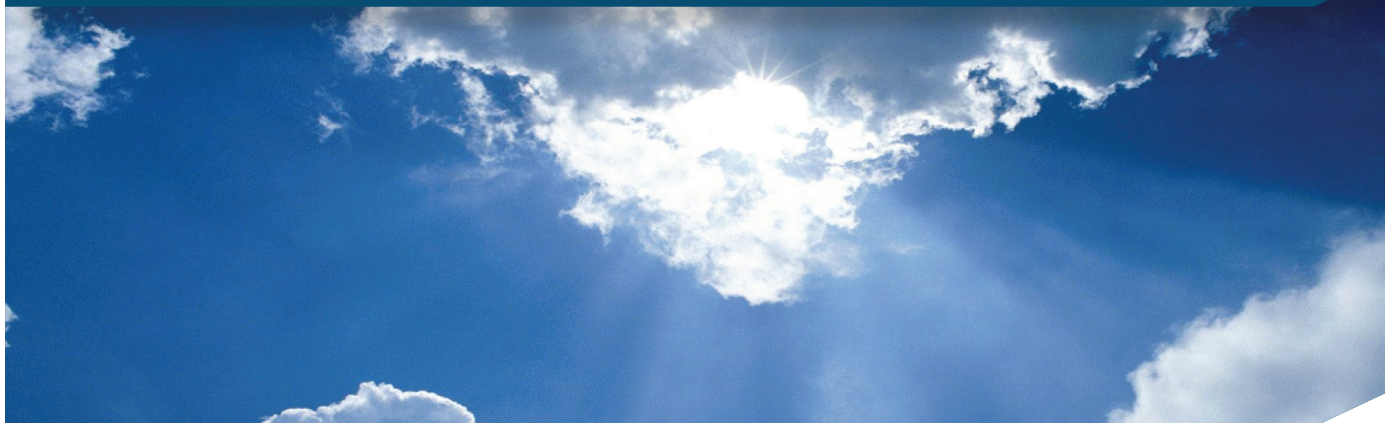
Spirit and to us" (Acts 15.28; 5.32). For them the "Holy Spirit and we" were the subjects of apostolic action. Their criteria for decision making was the unflinching obedience to God, "We must obey God, rather than men (Acts 5.29).

The conflicts in the community were addressed by giving priority to the mission above everything else. Notice the norms of discernment followed by the early Church in handling the tensions among different groups regarding the distribution of food (Acts 6.1) and the controversy over circumcision (Acts 15). In such situations, the leaders of the Church sought to give first place to the first thing for which they were called: the proclamation of the Gospel.

As Claretians we join in the mission of the Church not by anything we may devise but by tuning ourselves to the movement of the Spirit and walking on the paths where the Spirit is presently leading the Church. In the Year of Faith we heard in the Church the "summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the one Savior of the world" (*Porta Fidei* 6). The spirit Spirit calls us today to authentic proclamation and living of our faith.

Exercise 4: What for you are the significant events in the Church, which you consider as inspired by the Holy Spirit, in the past five years? How do you respond to them?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)



2.5. The Presence and Mission of the Holy Spirit in the World

Lent is also a time to take a closer look at the way the Spirit acts in the world. There are many positive signs of human openness to the promptings of the Spirit, which lead to a greater appreciation for human dignity and struggle for justice, peace and integrity of creation. There are also many signs of the longing for the Spirit to enliven the arid human condition.

We also recognize the presence and action of the Spirit in the spiritual traditions of other religions. We marvel at the mysterious way God works not only in "minds and hearts" but also "in the rites and customs of peoples" (Lumen Gentium 17). The Holy Spirit draws all people to wholeness and holiness. (Read Appendix. 4)

In the inaugural homily of the Year of Faith, Pope

Lent is a privileged season wherein we are called to renew ourselves in faith, deepen our prayer life and practice charity. It is a time of pruning and purification in order to be rejuvenated in the Spirit of the risen Lord. The readings of Lent invite us to journey with Jesus as he prepares for the paschal mystery in total adherence to the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus was tempted, the Holy Spirit was with him. He was led by the Holy Spirit to the wilderness (Mt 4:1). Jesus remained faithful to the will of the Father because of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God (**First Week**). "Please listen to Jesus" is the passionate appeal of the Father to the disciples of Jesus. The disciples of Jesus were listening to their own flesh and were not able to sense the prompting of the Holy Spirit. They were so wonderstruck by the externals that they could not go beyond the realities and discern the action of the Holy Spirit in the transfiguration of Jesus. It is only by listening to

Exercise 5: As a believer how do you discern the presence and action of the Spirit in the following events in the recent history of the world?

- Revolutionary changes in mass communication
- Globalization and fragmentation
- Abject poverty and hunger of millions amid the affluence and waste in the same planet
- The global economic crisis
- September 11 and its after-effects
- Massive migration and displacement of people

What are the important events today in the world where you perceive the presence and action of the Spirit more vividly? How do they affect your missionary commitment?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Benedict XVI pointed to the spiritual "desertification" of our time, "It is in starting from the experience of this desert, from this void, that we can again discover the joy of believing, its vital importance for us, men and women. In the desert we rediscover the value of what is essential for living; thus in today's world there are innumerable signs, often expressed implicitly or negatively, of the thirst for God, for the ultimate meaning of life. And in the desert people of faith are needed who, with their own lives, point out the way to the Promised Land and keep hope alive. Living faith opens the heart to the grace of God which frees us from pessimism. Today, more than ever, evangelizing means witnessing to the new life, transformed by God, and thus showing the path."

Jesus that we can see the action of the Holy Spirit in our day to day life (**Second Week**). Jesus promises living water to the Samaritan woman. Here the living water refers to the Holy Spirit, the new life in Jesus. The sinful Samaritan woman believed in Jesus. So she received the Holy Spirit and understood that God is Spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth (cf. Jn 4:23-24). Since she received the Holy Spirit, her sins were forgiven and she was given a new life. Possessed by the Holy Spirit, she could not but go out to proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah. Thus, she becomes the first woman missionary in the Gospel of John, proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus and bringing many people to Jesus (**Third Week**).

The eyes of the man born blind were opened. He

believed in Jesus and received the Holy Spirit. But the Pharisees, who were born without any blindness, could not see the actions of the Holy Spirit in Jesus. Jesus sums up this teaching by saying, "Those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." In this Lenten season, each one of us is called to surrender to Jesus, so that our eyes may be opened and that we may be possessed by the Holy Spirit **(Fourth Week)**. In the final Sunday of Lent, we are called to reflect on death and life. There is no death for one who believes in Jesus. One who believes in Jesus is possessed by his Spirit and he becomes a new creation. "Behold! The old has passed away." This is the invitation for all of us **(Fifth Week)**.

If we are faithful to the Forge programme, reading the reflections, doing the exercises, being sincere in lectio divina, we too will overcome all temptations, defeat Satan and the works of the flesh with the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. We too can share in the same glorious experience that Jesus had on the high mountain; we too may be transfigured. We may as well have the same experience of transformation which the man born blind, the Samaritan woman and the dead Lazarus underwent. Let us be sincere to our Forge programme. We as Claretians have to be men of the Holy Spirit like our Founder, Father Claret, and this is possible only by the power of the Word of God.

2014 is a very important year for us, Claretians. We have various encounters in which we need the assistance of the Holy Spirit. We had the Claretian Encounter of Justice, Peace and Social Ministry in which the Holy Spirit inspired us for our new initiatives in establishing God's kingdom on earth. Then, we will have the meeting of the Biblical Team that will animate our ministry of the Word of God. In April, an encounter on the Vocation and Mission of the Missionary Brother will take place at Vic. All the prefects of the apostolate of the Congregation will gather together to discern the actions of the Holy Spirit in our Congregation, the Church and the World. Then, there is the III Claretian Congress of Educators to make our educational ministry a powerful means for evangelization. We need the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all these meetings.

2.6. Criteria to Discern the Call of the Spirit

We are moved by a complex of motives, both in the small acts in our day to day life and in our big decisions. Often we are not sure if a particular inner movement or inspiration is from the Holy Spirit

or from the evil spirit or from our own impulses. Normally every movement comes to us with the promise of happiness and well being. It is difficult at times to know if they are truly good or just seemingly good. But we can train ourselves to understand our interior movements and discern if they come from the Holy Spirit. We are free to either follow or leave them. St. Ignatius of Loyola offers some practical guidelines to discern the spirits (*Spiritual Exercises* 313-327) and Claret made best use of these rules, both in his life and in directing others.

Your internal state of consolation (joy, peace, gratitude, etc.) and desolation (depression, anxiety, fear, etc.) serves as the compass to indicate the direction of your spiritual journey. Following them you can make out where the motives for your action are coming from and where they are leading you to. St. Ignatius found out that both consolation and desolation can move you toward God or pull you away from God.

Some patterns of the working of the spirits

- The good spirit usually brings love, joy, peace, and the like; the evil spirit characteristically brings confusion, doubt, disgust, hatred and so on. If there is any attempt to take us away from Jesus Christ and destroy peace and unity, then it, certainly, is not from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3).
 - When you are living a sinful life, the good spirit will visit you with desolation to turn you away from evil; an evil spirit will keep you going in your sinful ways with many justifications.
 - On the other hand, when you are seriously serving God, the spirits change roles. The evil spirit clouds your day with desolation to lead you away from God, while the good spirit fills your day with trust in and love of God. So if you face a problem in the spirit of Christ, there should be joy and peace.
- The spirit that works in the light and openness is good, while a spirit cloaked in secrecy and deception is evil.

Some norms for discernment in decision making

- When you are moved to do something, check the direction of the motive as to where it comes from and where it is leading you. Is it caused by love for truth and goodness or self-interest? Does your action lead to greater good and glorify God?
- When you have made a good decision to serve God better and do good to others, do not change that decision when you are in crisis or state of



desolation. It's hardly the good spirit moving you.

- When you are feeling down, you would do well to pray a little more and increase the help you give to others. Beware of the temptation to close yourself within and nurture your negative thoughts and feelings.
- When, without warning or any preparatory activity, you are consoled with the love of God above all things, you can trust that it is from the good spirit. But when you are thinking or praying and grow consoled or disconsolate, well, test those movements. They could come from either spirit.

The capacity for discernment gradually grows in us as we become attuned to the Spirit of Christ. There are times when we may fail to discern, but then, in course of time, learning from past experiences, we will be able to judge wisely the movement of the spirits in ourselves, and serve God and our fellow humans with greater freedom and joy.

Exercise 6: Praying on Your Day's Experience

This meditation can be done at any time but preferably at night.

- Sit relaxed in a comfortable place.
- Be aware of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
- Read meditatively Is 43:1-5 (if needed read a few more times).
- Allow the Word of God to sink into you.
- Bring to your awareness the significant events of the day from morning till night.
- See the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit in those significant events.
- Recall the inspiration and prompting of the Holy Spirit in those events.
- Examine and see if you allowed the Holy Spirit to work in you.
- Conclude with a prayer.



Meditation on the Fruits of the Holy Spirit

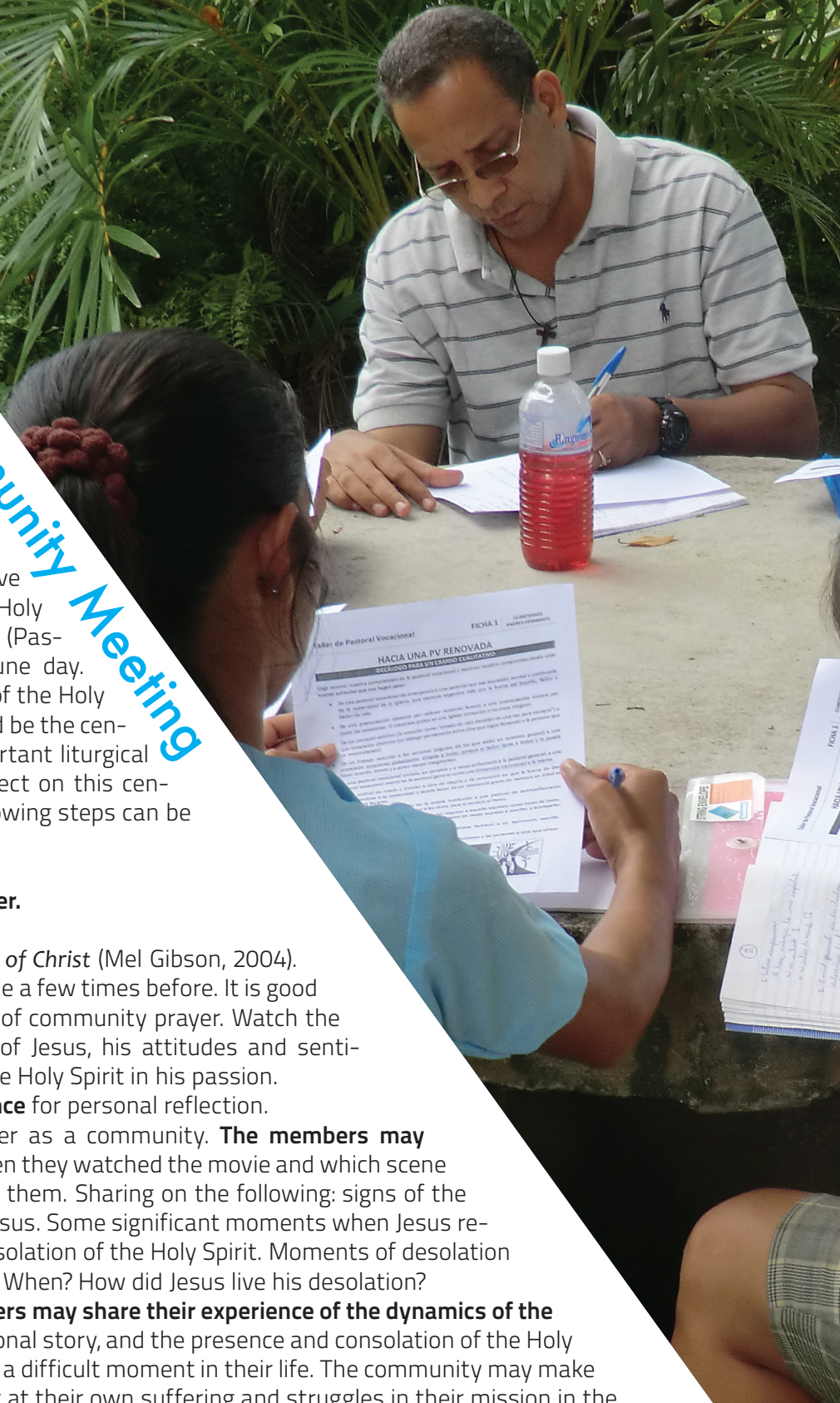
- Choose a calm, peaceful place and sit comfortably.
- Gently close your eyes.
- Take a deep breath, inhale and exhale, and quiet yourself slowly.
- As you breathe in and breathe out, relax your entire body from head to toe and from toe to the top of your head.
- If you feel some tension somewhere in your body, just be aware of it and relax that part as you breathe normally.
- Read Gal 5:22-26 prayerfully and meditatively.
- Choose any of the fruits of the Holy Spirit for meditation.
- Recall events in your life when you really felt this fruit.
- Recall events in your life when you failed to live according to this fruit.
- Make a resolution to experience this particular fruit at least three times the next day.
- Conclude the meditation with a prayer to the Holy Spirit.

You can do this exercise everyday, taking up a fruit of the Holy Spirit for each day.

3. Suggestions for Community Meeting

We are in the liturgical season of Lent. It would be good to have a community meeting during Holy Week, if possible. Palm Sunday (Passion Sunday) is another opportune day. Jesus' passion and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the paschal mystery could be the central theme. As we are in an important liturgical moment, let us take time to reflect on this central mystery of our faith. The following steps can be considered.

1. Introduction and a **short prayer**.
2. Read **Mt 26:36-46**.
3. Screen the movie *The Passion of Christ* (Mel Gibson, 2004). You might have seen the movie a few times before. It is good to see it again in the context of community prayer. Watch the movie from the perspective of Jesus, his attitudes and sentiments and the presence of the Holy Spirit in his passion.
4. Keep aside some **time of silence** for personal reflection.
5. The members gather together as a community. **The members may share their first reactions** when they watched the movie and which scene made a strong impression on them. Sharing on the following: signs of the Holy Spirit in the passion of Jesus. Some significant moments when Jesus really felt the presence and consolation of the Holy Spirit. Moments of desolation during his passion and death. When? How did Jesus live his desolation?
6. When appropriate, **the members may share their experience of the dynamics of the Paschal mystery** in their personal story, and the presence and consolation of the Holy Spirit they experienced during a difficult moment in their life. The community may make use of the opportunity to look at their own suffering and struggles in their mission in the light of the Paschal mystery and the experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit amidst the trials.
7. Prayer of **intercession**.
8. Conclude with a **hymn to Mary** who was at the foot of the cross, participating in the passion of her beloved Son.



4. Tips for Lectio Divina

One of the surest ways of living in the Spirit of God is through reading, studying, meditating on, praying and living the Word of God. Let us be reminded of Jesus' practice: "When the Sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many hearing him were astonished, saying, 'From whence has this Man these things? And what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?'" Yes, it was Jesus' custom to teach from the Bible (cf. Lk 4:16-17). **To do this, he had to continually study and meditate on the Word of God.** How can one teach about anything without first studying it? It is important that we read, meditate on and study the Word to follow Jesus closely and to discern the will of God for us. The apostle Peter says, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). We are commanded to "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thes 5:21).

For us, Claretians, the surest way to be faithful and successful in our mission is by being faithful to the Word, to *lectio divina*. Let us remind ourselves of what God told Joshua, "This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful" (cf. Jos 1:6-8).

During Lent the Church calls us to meditate on the passion and death of Jesus by *lectio divina*. Meditating on the Word, we allow ourselves to be transformed into the life of Christ and be guided by His Spirit to discern the will of God for us.



Wednesday, March 5, 2014. Ash Wednesday

- Joel 2:12-18
- Ps 50
- 2 Cor 5:20-6:2
- Mt 6:1-6, 16-18

We have just begun the season of Lent. We are called to conversion and to believe in Jesus. It is time to give up what is unbecoming of a disciple of Christ and begin a new life with the Holy Spirit. We are called to turn from evils and do only the will of God as inspired by the Holy Spirit. Let us pray more and be related intimately with God and our brothers and sisters. Let us fast and do penance for our hurtful way of living, and cultivate personal discipline and self-control. Let us generously help the poor and needy, and be visible signs of Jesus' compassion and concern for others.

Thursday, March 6, 2014

- Dt 30:15-20
- Ps 1
- Lk 9:22-25

The grain of wheat has to fall to the ground and die in order to give life to many. The old cells in our body have to die in order to give new life to us. Jesus teaches the same truth by his death on the cross. When a person is ready to renounce pleasure, he is liberated from pain and suffering. Desire is the root of all sufferings. Selfishness too gives birth to desire and consequently suffering. It is self defeating to live for oneself and for fleeting pleasures. It is the cross which helps us to destroy the palace of selfishness. It is the cross which makes us other-centered. Am I occupied mostly with my own needs? Do I have time for others around me? How do I view the cross in my life?

Friday, March 7, 2014. Memorial of Sts Perpetua and Felicity, Martyrs

- Is 58:1-9a
- Ps 85
- Mt 9:14-15

It is good to fast. It gives good results. Yet, if you fast just to keep the law without knowing its full significance, it becomes only an external sign. The Israelites were faithful in fasting, but it did not touch their lives. They did not change their lives. Even after fasting, they continued to oppress the poor, quarreled unnecessarily, did violence to others, refused liberation to the oppressed, did not give shelter to the needy. So Isaiah says that God did not accept their fasting. God wants us to live a life of justice, righteousness and compassion for others. This is true fasting and that is what God wants. What is your notion of fasting? Does fasting touch your life?

Saturday, March 8, 2014

- Is 58:9b-14
- Ps 58
- Lk 5:27-32

We were nothing once, but today we are someone because of Jesus. Jesus knows our weaknesses and frailties; he knows our sinful nature. Yet, he has called us as he called Matthew, so that we can become instruments in his hands to carry out his mission. Once called, Matthew surrendered himself totally to Jesus and became a worthy instrument in his hands. Let us reflect on our commitment to Jesus. Are we at the service of God's mission in spite of our weaknesses and frailties?

SUNDAY, MARCH 9, 2014: FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

- Gn 2:7-9, 3:1-7
- Ps 50
- Rm 5:12-19
- Mt 4:1-11

Just before beginning his public ministry, Jesus is tempted. The devil does not want Jesus to carry out God's will. He tempts Jesus with bodily satisfaction, vainglory and power. Interestingly, the devil even quotes the Scripture in tempting Jesus. Jesus is not going to be attracted by momentary pleasures or cheap popularity or passing power. Jesus defeats the devil and his cunning design by having recourse to self-emptying, by fasting and adherence to the Father's will by contemplating the Word. God's Word becomes a powerful tool with which Jesus drives the devil away and overcomes temptation. Are we self-disciplined? As ministers of the Word, do we have recourse to the Word of God in times of trial? The devil will try to stop us from doing God's mission, but we have the light of the Word of God to dispel the darkness!

Monday, March 10, 2014

- Lev 19:1-2, 11-18
 - Ps 18
 - Mt 25:31-46
- Our God is holy and he wants us to be holy. How can we be holy? We cannot be holy without being compassionate like God. We cannot be holy without tangible acts of charity. We can be holy only by loving our neighbor, treating the poor justly, giving a just wage to the workers, showing special concern to the unfortunate, leading a life of justice, righteousness and truth, avoiding and ceasing from gossip, refusing to hate others, generously helping the poor, the sick, the prisoners and the strangers. My God is holy. Am I holy like my God?

Tuesday, March 11, 2014

- Is 55:10-11
 - Ps 33
 - Mt 6:7-15
- The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb 4:12). As the rain does not return until it has watered the earth, so does the Word of God. It will not return empty without accomplishing its task. Even the dry bones got life listening to the Word of God (cf. Ez 37:5). Are we listening to the Word of God? As ministers of the Word, how committed are we in reading, meditating on and living the Word of God?

Wednesday, March 12, 2014

- Jonah 3:1-10
 - Ps 50
 - Lk 11:29-32
- The prophet Jonah himself needed conversion before he could convert the people of Nineveh. He refused to go to a pagan territory and preach the word of God. So he was punished. He accepted his mistakes and changed his attitude. Thus, he became the instrument for the conversion of the people of Nineveh. Jesus is much greater than Jonah. His preaching is much more powerful than Jonah's. We are preachers of the words of Jesus. Are we touched by Jesus' words? Are we aware of our own mistakes? Are we ready for our own conversion before converting others?

Thursday, March 13, 2014

- Es 4:1-17
 - Ps 137
 - Mt 7:7-12
- Esther submits all her worries, anxieties and sufferings to Yahweh in the form of a prayer. She was convinced that God would not forsake His people in time of trials and tribulations. Jesus too teaches the same. When we pray to God with confidence and perseverance, He will certainly hear our prayer. Where do we go when we have problems in our personal and community life, in our missions and relationships? Do we go to God like Esther? Yes, that is the best way for us, missionaries, to deal with our problems! Prayer can do wonders.

Friday, March 14, 2014

- Ez 18:21-28
 - Ps 129
 - Mt 5:20-26
- We are missionaries, but we are also human. As persons, we are weak beings. God who called us by name knows this very well. So he is ready to forgive us whatever mistake we commit, provided we go to him with a sincere and contrite heart. More is expected from the one who is given more. Certainly, more is expected of us as missionaries. True, we do not kill anybody physically. But let us be honest and look at ourselves. How many times have I damaged my brother's good name? How many times have I uttered uncharitable words towards my brothers? Have I lived with hatred, enmity and jealousy towards my brothers?

Saturday, March 15, 2014

- Ex 26:16-19
 - Ps 118
 - Mt 5:43-48
- Jesus gives to love a new dimension. Love others without making any distinction between friends and enemies because all are created in the image of God. It is very easy to love those we like and who are our friends. But it is very difficult to love someone who hates us, who assassinates our character, who spreads rumors and gossips about us, who saddens us, who rejoices in our suffering, who is jealous of us, etc. But the uniqueness of Christian love consists in loving even those people. We may have this kind of people even in our own community or province. We have an opportunity to show that we are Claretian Missionaries by courageously loving them in the style of Jesus!

SUNDAY, MARCH 16, 2014: SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

- Gn 12:1-4
 - Ps 32
 - 2Tim 1:8-10
 - Mt 17:1-9
- There is no joy without suffering. There is no pain without gain. There is no Easter without Good Friday. There is no resurrection without the crucifixion. Peter experienced the stunning glory of Jesus, and he wanted to make a tent and remain there in glory. But Jesus invites him to come down and go to Jerusalem, to glory after suffering. Peter spoke according to his human nature, feelings and desires. But God the Father asks him to listen to Jesus and to follow his way of the cross. Are we looking for a crown without the cross like Peter? Are we listening to our own human nature, feelings and desires rather than to Jesus?

Monday, March 17, 2014

- Dn 9:4-10
- Ps 78
- Lk 6:36-38

The city of Jerusalem which was destroyed by the Babylonians would be restored after 70 years, Jeremiah prophesied. This prophecy touches Daniel. He meditates on this Word deeply and prayed to Yahweh. Being in the temple of God, he acknowledges his sins and asks for forgiveness. His sins we are forgiven. We are also sinners in many ways. Let us feel sorry for all our wrongdoing and ask for God's forgiveness. Let us be convinced that we have no right to ask for forgiveness if we refuse to forgive our brothers and sisters. How long do we carry in ourselves grudges, ill feelings and hatred towards our brothers unnecessarily? Do we realize that it is a cancer of our being which ruins us gradually?

Tuesday, March 18, 2014

- Is 1:10, 16-20
- Ps 49
- Mt 23:1-12

The Sadducees and the Pharisees were the religious leaders who were supposed to lead the people in the right path. But they did not live according to their vocation. They were more particular in pleasing people with the external than doing what was pleasing to God. So Jesus rebuked them and asked the people not to follow them, even as he also asks us today. Prophet Isaiah invites us to cease to do evil and learn to do good. Do we seek justice, free the oppressed, defend the orphan and plead for the widow? God does not accept offerings presented with hands full of blood!

Wednesday, March 19, 2014. Solemnity of St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary

- 2 Sam 7:4-16
- Ps 88
- Rom 4:13-22
- Mt 1:16-24

Joseph had the privilege of becoming the husband of the mother of God and the foster father of Jesus. He was very simple, hardworking, faithful, kind, compassionate, and obedient to Jewish laws. He readily discerned and accepted the prompting of the Holy Spirit. When he was convinced that Mary had conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, he accepted her willingly and was ready to suffer for God's plan. Joseph is a model missionary. We should learn commitment and sacrifice from Joseph to carry out God's plan. Like him, let us be simple and humble as God's instruments.

Thursday, March 20, 2014

- Jer 17:5-10
- Ps 1
- Lk 16:19-31

Riches are also God's gift to us. For us missionaries, riches, wealth and property have value only if they are at the service of our mission. We need them not for ourselves but for our mission of serving the poor. The more we have, the more possibility we have to serve the poor. What is our attitude towards riches? Are we craving for money? Are we attached to wealth?

Friday, March 21, 2014

- Gn 37:3-4, 12-13, 17-28
- Ps 104
- Mt 21:33-43, 45-46

Our lack of awareness of being jealous, can harm our relationships and community life. Cain was jealous of his brother Abel. He went to the extent of killing him. Jacob loved his younger son Joseph, which made his other sons jealous of Joseph. They threw him into a pit and sold him for 20 silver coins. They informed their father that a beast had killed his beloved son. Yes, the beast of jealousy "killed" Joseph. Let us pray to God for the grace to overcome jealousy if it prevails in our lives.

Saturday, March 22, 2014

- Mic 7:14-15, 18-20
- Ps 102
- Lk 15:1-3, 11-32

We are weak and fragile human beings. God who created us in His image wants us to be holy like Him. But we often fail to live as God wants us to live. We tend to live according to our own whims and impulses. We end up disobeying God's Word and going astray. The compassionate and loving Father does not reject us, but continues to love us and is always ready to forgive us and welcome us back home. Where am I now? Am I with God obeying his His words? Or have I gone away from Him like the prodigal son?

SUNDAY, MARCH 23, 2014: THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

- Ex 17:3-7
- Ps 94
- Rom 5:1-8
- Jn 4:5-42

Jesus broke the social distinction that existed between male and female. He removed the racial distinction that existed between Jews and Samaritans. He also confronted religious fundamentalism. Jesus looked at everyone as human beings created in the image of God, who deserved love, dignity and respect. Jesus respected everyone, but not according to any social categories, as Paul would later say, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). How do I view my fellow human beings? Am I able to view others as Jesus did? Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus (Phil 2:5).

Monday, March 24, 2014

- 2Kg 5:1-15
- Ps 41
- Lk 4:24-30

God's ways are mysterious and often incomprehensible to us. God often makes use of ordinary people and ordinary events to do wonders. Naaman, the commander of the army of the king of Aram, comes to Israel to seek for prophet Elisha at the request of a young girl who served in his house. Elisha the prophet asked the commander to do one small thing, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." Though Naaman was angry in the beginning, he did as the prophet had said and experienced the great healing of God. Do we see God in ordinary people and ordinary events?

Tuesday, March 25, 2014. Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

- Is 7:10-14; 8:10
- Ps 39
- Heb 10:4-10
- Lk 1:26-38

Mary hesitated in the beginning saying, "How can this be since I am a virgin?" But once she was convinced that it was God's doing, she totally surrendered herself to God's mission saying, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Why do I hesitate in doing God's mission? What holds me back? Am I able to surrender and commit myself totally, like Mary, to the mission of God after my initial doubt and hesitation?

Wednesday, March 26, 2014

- Dt 4:1, 5-9
- Ps 147
- Mt 5:17-19

Laws are essential for smooth social living. Even Jesus was faithful in following the laws. He did not come to destroy the laws. But he indicated the limitations of laws and gave new meanings to the law. Love is the basis for all laws. He taught us to approach each law with love. Human beings should follow the law with full freedom because laws are for people, and people are not for laws. We should not become slaves to laws and lose our freedom. How do I look at laws? Do I have the same approach to the law as Jesus had?

Thursday, March 27, 2014

- Jer 7:23-28
- Ps 94
- Lk 11:14-23

The Lord loved the people of Israel so much that he established a covenant (*berith*) with them. By this covenant, they became God's people and the Lord became their one and only God. But they went away from the true God and worshipped other gods. Even then, the Lord sent his only Son and by his blood on the cross, he renewed the covenant with the entire humanity. What are the other gods that we blindly seek? Power? Qualifications? Money? Sex? Internet? Cell phones? Illicit relationships? Momentary physical pleasure? All that take us away from God, community and mission are petty gods!

Friday, March 28, 2014

- Hos 14:2-10
- Ps 80
- Mk 12:28b-34

There is only one thing we need to do: to lead a life of love—to love God and our fellow humans. We cannot love God without loving our brothers and sisters. Those who say, "I love God" and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or a sister, whom they can see, cannot love God whom they have not seen (1 Jn 4:20). Can I truly say the following about how I love?: My love is patient, my love is kind, my love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. My love does not insist on its own way. My love is not irritable or resentful. My love does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in truth. My love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (cf. 1 Co 13:4-7).

Saturday, March 29, 2014

- Hos 6:1-6
- Ps 50
- Lk 18:9-14

True prayer is seeking God in humility and simplicity and being aware of our sinfulness and weakness. What the Pharisee does in this unique parable of Luke is not prayer but an act of pride, a mere list of accusations and self-glory. His prayers does not get the attention of God. God instead listens to the prayer of the tax collector because he prays in sincerity, humility and simplicity. Above all, he prays, aware of his sinfulness and asks pardon for his wrongdoing. How do we pray? Who is our model? The Pharisee or the tax collector?

SUNDAY, MARCH 30, 2014: FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

- 1 Sam 16:1-13
- Eph 5:8-14
- Ps 22
- Jn 9:1-41

Jesus opens not only the physical eyes but also the spiritual eye of the person born blind. As he begins to see the external world gradually, he also believes more and more in Jesus. He sees Jesus first as a man and he, finally, proclaims him as the Son of Man and Lord. Who is Jesus for me? Is my spiritual eye opened? Are my spiritual eyes open enough to see God acting in my life? Do I see Jesus everyday in the faces of the poor, the needy and the marginalized?

Monday, March 31, 2014

- Is 65:17-21
- Ps 29
- Jn 4:43-54

Someone who held a high position in the palace of King Herod came to Jesus and asked him to heal his son. He did not mind about his position or fame but wanted only Jesus' healing. Jesus sent him back with his living word, "Go, your son will live." The official fully believed in the word of Jesus, and his son was healed and had life. As a minister of the Word, do I believe in the words of Jesus? How much love do I have for the Word of God? "Lord Jesus, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life?" (Jn 6:68).

Tuesday, April 1, 2014

- Ez 47:1-9, 12
- Ps 45
- Jn 5:1-16

The compassionate Jesus heals a person who had been suffering for 38 long years. Jesus was moved by his suffering. He wanted to alleviate the suffering of this person. Though it was the Sabbath, for Jesus now is the time for healing. Once again the powerful words of Jesus immediately healed the person. We can identify ourselves with this crippled man. Though we are healthy, we cannot move forward in our commitment and mission. We have been suffering internally with our own negativity and ghetto mentality. We are not able to stand up and march forward. We need Jesus' healing touch. We need to be touched by Jesus' powerful words.

Wednesday, April 2, 2014

- Is 49:8-15
- Ps 144
- Jn 5:17-30

Jesus was totally one with the Father. He had such a deep filial relation with the Father that he could confidently say, "The Father and I are one." Since Jesus had such a deep and intimate relationship with the Father who sent him for mission, he was able to carry out the mission with courage and commitment. We too need such a deep and intimate relationship with Jesus and his words to be committed missionaries. Am I able to say like Paul, "It is no longer I who live but Jesus Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

Thursday, April 3, 2014

- Ex 32:7-14
- Ps 105
- Jn 5:31-47

We know very well that Jesus is the only one who can give us the living water and eternal life. But we are often like the people of Israel, we go away from him and make our own golden calves and worship them. It can happen that things or persons or money takes the place of Jesus in us and we worship them as a golden-calf! What golden calf do I worship?

Friday, April 4, 2014

- Wis 2:1, 12-22
- Ps 33
- Jn 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

Jesus had to face opposition from different groups of people. The Jews looked for the possibility to kill him. Even his own brothers did not accept him. The "world" hated him. There were many who accused him of being a lawbreaker, sinner, possessed, cheat, glutton, etc. But nothing daunted Jesus. He was unwavering and steadfast in fulfilling God's will and mission. It is normal to have opposition and discouragement in our missionary life. Not all will accept and appreciate us. But what is more important is commitment and sincerity to go forward in doing God's mission.

Saturday, April 5, 2014

- Jer 11:18-20
- Ps 7
- Jn 7:40-53

As Caesar concluded his speech, people would comment, "How wonderfully he spoke!" When Demosthenes was finishing his speech, the audience would comment, "Come, let us follow him." After hearing Jesus, the people wondered, "Never has anyone spoken like this!" In every speech, three things are important: Who spoke? How did he speak? What did he speak about? The discourses of Jesus pierced the hearts. There was no dichotomy between what he preached and what he practiced. How do we respond to Jesus' words as ministers of the Word? Is there inconsistency between what we preach and what we practice?

SUNDAY, APRIL 6, 2014: 5TH SUNDAY OF LENT

- Ez 37:12-14
- Ps 129
- Rom 8:8-11
- Jn 11:1-45

The whole episode of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is the tangible expression of Jesus' compassionate love for others and his deep friendship with the family of Lazarus, Maria and Martha. The passage clearly says that Jesus loved Martha, her sister and Lazarus. The very fact of Jesus visiting the family after knowing the death of his friend Lazarus testifies to his love for this family. A good friend is with his friends at their hour of need. The sufferings of Mary and Martha as well as the death of Lazarus pained Jesus so much. The real human side of Jesus is at its best in this scene. As missionaries, we are invited to be human with those who are part of our mission. Do we show compassionate love for the needy like Jesus?

Monday, April 7, 2014

- Dn 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62
 - Ps 22
 - Jn 8:1-11
- We wonder sometimes if we are worthy to be called to this way of life as Claretian missionaries. Sometimes we ask ourselves if Jesus would have accepted us at all. Jesus is more compassionate and understanding than many of us think. What matters most is not what we are but what we want to can become. "Go your way, and from now on do not sin again." Am I as compassionate as Jesus in accepting others, specially my brothers in the community with their own failing, weaknesses and limitations?

Tuesday, April 8, 2014

- Num 21:4-9
 - Ps 101
 - Jn 8:21-30
- Moses was one of the greatest leaders of the Jews. We can learn a lot from him. Since the Israelites forgot the true God and murmured against him, God was angry and wanted to punish them. But though Moses was also ill-treated by those same people, he pleaded for them and asked God to change his decision. How much are we committed for the recipients of our mission? How much do we pray for the people entrusted to our care?

Wednesday, April 9, 2014

- Dn 3:14-20, 91-92, 95
 - Dn 3
 - Jn 8:31-42
- Who can be the disciple of Jesus? Who can be the minister of the Word? Who can be the mouth-piece of God? Jesus gives the answer today to each of us very personally. You are my disciple only if you continue in my Word. You will be free only if you remain in my Word. What amazing words they are! You cannot be a minister of the Word and go on preaching the Word if you do not remain in Jesus' Word, and if you have not been liberated by the Word of God. Are you free? How? These are fundamental questions we need to ask ourselves.

Thursday, April 10, 2014

- Gn 17:3-9
 - Ps 104
 - Jn 8:51-59
- The Word of God is alive and active; it gives life and nourishes. Jesus says, "I tell you, whoever keeps my Word will never see death." The Word of God has given life to so many people who lived as dead even before dying. The Word of God is life-giving. "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." As Claretians, our special calling in the Church is to give life to as many people as possible through the life-giving Word of God. Let us honestly ask ourselves: To how many people have I been life-giving by my presence and mission?

Friday, April 11, 2014

- Jer 20:10-13
 - Ps 17
 - Jn 10:31-42
- One who has the Word of God is a god. It is an incredible statement. It also speaks about the power of the Word. The Word of God can pierce our heart, purify us and make us like God. As servants of the Word, who are created in the image of God, we have to be touched, purified and formed by the Word of God. We cannot be disciples of Jesus and ministers of him without becoming more and more like him by listening, meditating on and living the Word. Are we becoming more and more like Jesus?

Saturday, April 12, 2014

- Ez 37:21-28
 - Jer 31
 - Jn 11:45-57
- In the name of the Jewish religion, the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus who dedicated his life to uplift the poor and the marginalized in the society. From the time of Jesus, many innocent people have been tortured and killed in the name of religion. One who believes the true God can never give pain to others in the name of God or religion. What type of Jesus are we sharing to others?

SUNDAY, APRIL 13, 2014: PALM SUNDAY

- Is 50:4-7
 - Ps 21
 - Phil 2:6-11
 - Mt 26:14ff.
- Today Jesus enters Jerusalem triumphantly. People welcom him, singing hosanna. They seem to have accepted Jesus as the Messiah. But within a few days, they rejected Jesus. Let us enter Jerusalem with Jesus. Let us be with him in the last few days of his life, reflecting and meditating on all that happened to him there. Let us also share in his passion, a passion for others.

Monday, April 14, 2014. Monday of Holy Week

- Is 42:1-7
- Ps 26
- Jn 12:1-11

There are many ways we can show our genuine love for others. In today's Gospel, Mary, one of the friends of Jesus, wanted to express her genuine and deep love for him as he was nearing his death by anointing his feet with costly perfume and wiping them with her hair. A great sign of love! How do I express my love for Jesus?

Tuesday, April 15, 2014. Tuesday of Holy Week

- Is 49:1-6
- Ps 70
- Jn 13:21-33, 36-38

Lust for money can often make people go mad. It can fool them to such an extent that they forget God. Judas was so much attached to money that he considered it as a god and betrayed the real God. We, as Claretian missionaries, commit ourselves to live the vow of poverty. How is my attitude towards money? Am I faithful and sincere about how I use the money that I receive? Do I faithfully give to the community all the income that I receive in different forms? Or am I like Judas in giving more importance to money than to Jesus?

Wednesday, April 16, 2014. Wednesday of Holy Week

- Is 50:4-9
- Ps 68
- Mt 26:14-25

Friendship always comes with the danger of betrayal. But when a person whom we trust most betrays us, the pain becomes so intense and unbearable. Jesus experienced the terrible pain of being betrayed by his own companion and friend. What made Judas to sell and forget his good friend? Greed? Money? Shrewdness? There are many occasions in our life where we too have sold Jesus, like Judas, and given him the kiss of betrayal. Am I always a good friend of Jesus?

Thursday, April 17, 2014. Maundy Thursday

- Ex 12:1-8, 11-14
- Ps 115
- 1 Cor 11:23-26
- Jn 13:1-15

Choose a comfortable place. Close your eyes. Visualize the scene where Jesus washes the feet of the disciples. He washes the feet of Peter who would deny him not once but three times. He washes the feet of the apostles who would desert their good friend when he needed them most. He washes the feet of Judas who would betray and sell him for thirty pieces of silver. Jesus knows that those friends of him would not be there at the foot of the cross during his time of unbearable pain. By washing their feet, Jesus washed their sins and forgave all that they would do to him. Am I able to forgive my brothers in the community? Let his great example of Jesus enable us to forgive all those who sin against us.

Friday, April 18, 2014. Good Friday

- Is 52:13-53
- Ps 30
- Jn 18:1-19, 42

Today is the saddest day in the history of humanity. Today is the most cruel day in the annals of human history. Today is the day the most innocent and sinless man who ever walked the earth was subjected to the most terrible death one can ever imagine. It is a day to remain in silence and awe before the cross to contemplate the depth of God's love for us. The culmination of the event is in the words of Jesus, "It is finished" and in his final act of bowing his head and giving up his spirit. It is this Spirit of love that endures to the end which he has conferred on us. It is this spirit that moves us to endure hardships and sufferings for the cause of Christ. His death opens the door to new life in the Spirit. Lord, grant me your Spirit to see you today in those who are being betrayed, sold, tortured, humiliated and killed. Let me see your face in my brothers and sisters so that I do not hurt them by my words or deeds.

Saturday, April 19, 2014. Holy Saturday

Today is a day of silence, a day of contemplation. It is a day of mixed emotions, a day of sadness and a day of joy. We are so sad because our Master Jesus is no more with us. The tabernacle is empty. The crucifix is covered. We are very sad that we are not able to see the face of Jesus today. On the other hand, we are happy because death could not kill Jesus. He defeated death, the last enemy. Within a few hours, our Master will be with us again. He will rise again, dying no more. As we share with deep pain in the passion of Jesus, let us also celebrate with great joy his resurrection.

SUNDAY, APRIL 20, 2014. EASTER SUNDAY

- Gn 1:1-31
- Ps 117
- Rom 6:3-11
- Mt 28:1-10

The Lord is Risen! Newness is born in everything. Once again we are ushered to a cave which now is empty! His story began in a cave in Bethlehem where the shepherds and the magi came to see the new born babe. They saw and believed. Now the disciples and Mary have come to a cave in Jerusalem and have seen it empty and have believed. He was born to be one with us in our humanity. He is risen to make us one with him in his divinity. Human beings can now find him present in the empty cave of their hearts. There is no darkness that his light cannot illumine. "He is not far from each one of us, for In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). What is the impact of the resurrection in my life? What difference does the Pasqual mystery make in my everyday life?

5. Texts for further reflection

Appendix 1: On Consolation and Desolation

We look for interior experiences of consolation and desolation, which enable us to discern the presence of the Trinity and how we are to respond. It is important to know whether we are in consolation or desolation because when we are in consolation we are likely to make good decisions, and when we are in desolation we are likely to make bad decisions.

Am I experiencing spiritual consolation? One or more of the following phrases can help you to determine this:

- There is an experience of moving towards God.
- It leads you to an interior acceptance of others.
- There is sensitivity and gentleness.
- It leads to a realistic knowledge of self.
- There is a sense of God's presence with a deeper faith perspective.
- If it is painful or dry or sad, it is somehow oriented toward God: for example, it is associated with the realization of how one's compromise with evil has been contributing to the suffering of Jesus in his people, or there is an appropriate concern over something that needs God's help, etc.
- There is meaningfulness and a sense of hope.
- Tension may still exist, but underneath there is a sense of faith, hope or love.
- It is not turned in on the self.

Am I experiencing spiritual desolation? One or more of the following phrases can help you to determine this:

- Turned in on the self.
- God is not part of my consciousness in my activities.
- The experience moves towards the sensual and the material.
- I feel alone and separated while at the same time desiring to be with God. I feel sad, separated as it were from God.
- Lack of concern for anything; everything seems hard and difficult.
- I feel hyperactive and happy, but there is a lack of sensibility; a fanatical quality in my disordered tendencies influences my actions.
- It is a cover-up for seeking myself.
- The experience moves me away from God.
- I do not experience the flow of happenings with clarity or perspective.

If I am in desolation, I might begin to examine myself with God's Spirit and attempt to wait patiently until God's presence returns. The following questions may help you to identify the causes:

- Is my sinfulness getting in the way again?
- Have I been negligent in my dealings with God, and taken God for granted?
- How might God be helping me to grow in maturity through this?
- Is there something that I am resisting against? Am I refusing to grow?
- Am I being taught that all is gift; that God, not I, is the source of true consolation? Was I being dependent on the consolation of the Giver rather than the Giver of the consolation?
- Am I perhaps being invited to carry the cross or to be rejected with Jesus?



Appendix 2: Presence of Holy Spirit in the Life of the Christian (Benedict XVI)

For Paul, therefore, the Spirit penetrates our most intimate personal depths. ..We can see, therefore, that the Christian, even before acting, already possesses a rich and fecund interiority, which has been given to him in the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, an interiority that introduces him in an objective and original relationship of being a child of God. Our great dignity consists in this: We are not only images but children of God. And this constitutes an invitation to live our filiation, to be ever more conscious that we are adoptive children in the great family of God. It is an invitation to transform this objective gift into a subjective reality, determinant for our way of thinking, for our acting, for our being. God considers us his children, as he has raised us to a similar, though not equal, dignity to that of Jesus himself, the only one who is fully true Son. In him we are given or restored the filial condition and trusting freedom in our relationship with the Father.

In this way we discover that for the Christian the Spirit is no longer the "Spirit of God," as is usually said in the Old Testament and as Christian language repeats (cf. Genesis 41:38; Exodus 31:3; 1 Corinthians 2:11,12; Philippians 3:3; etc.). And he is not just a "Holy Spirit," understood generically according to the manner of expression of the Old Testament (cf. Isaiah 63:10,11; Ps 51:13), and of Judaism itself in its writings (Qumran, rabbinism).

Proper to the Christian faith is the confession of a participation of this Spirit in the Risen Lord, who himself has become the "life-giving Spirit" (1 Corinthians 15:45). Precisely for this reason St. Paul speaks directly of the "Spirit of Christ" (Romans 8:9), of the "Spirit of his Son" (Galatians 4:6) or of the "Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:19). It seems as if he wished to say that not only God the Father is visible in the Son (cf. John 14:9), but also the Spirit of God is expressed in the life and action of the crucified and risen Lord.

Paul also teaches us another important thing. He says that there can be no authentic prayer without the presence of the Spirit in us. In fact, he writes: "In the same way, the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because it intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will" (Romans 8:26-27).

It is as if saying that the Holy Spirit, namely, the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, becomes the soul of our soul, the most secret part of our being, from which rises incessantly to God a movement of prayer, of which we cannot even specify the terms. The Spirit, in fact, ever awake in us, makes up for our deficiencies and offers the Father our adoration, along with our most profound aspirations. Obviously this calls for a level of great vital communion with the Spirit. It is an invitation to be ever more sensitive, more attentive to this presence of the Spirit in us, to transform it into prayer, to experience this presence and to learn in this way to pray, to speak with the Father as children in the Holy Spirit.

Appendix 3: The Holy Spirit in other Religious Traditions

(Excerpt from the *Dialogue and Proclamation*, Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, 19 May 1991)

Other religious traditions are to be approached with great sensitivity, on account of the spiritual and human values enshrined in them. They command our respect because over the centuries they have borne witness to the efforts to find answers “to those profound mysteries of the human condition” (NA 1) and have given expression to the religious experience and they continue to do so today.

Orientations of Vatican II. The Second Vatican Council has given the lead for such a positive assessment. The exact meaning of what the Council affirms needs to be carefully and accurately ascertained. The Council reaffirms the traditional doctrine according to which salvation in Jesus Christ is, in a mysterious way, a reality open to all persons of good will...The Council teaches that Christ, the New Adam, through the mystery of his incarnation, death and resurrection, is at work in each human person to bring about interior renewal.

“This hold true not for Christians only but also for all persons of good will in whose hearts grace is active invisibly. For since Christ died for all, and since all are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the Paschal mystery” (GS 22).

The effects of divine Grace. The Council proceeds further. Making its own the vision and the terminology of some early Church Fathers, *Nostra Aetate* speaks of the presence in these traditions of “a ray of that Truth which enlightens all” (NA 2). *Ad Gentes* recognizes the presence of “seeds of the word”, and points to “the riches which a generous God has distributed among the nations” (AG 11). Again, *Lumen Gentium* refers to the good which is “found sown” not only “in minds and hearts”, but also “in the rites and customs of peoples” (LG 17).

The action of the Holy Spirit. These few references suffice to show that the Council has openly acknowledged the presence of positive values not only in the religious life of individual believers of other religious traditions, but also in the religious traditions to which they belong. 4). From this it can be seen that these elements, as a preparation for the Gospel (cf. LG 16), have played and do still play a providential role in the divine economy of salvation. This recognition impels the Church to enter into “dialogue and collaboration” (NA 2; cf. GS 92-93): “Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral good found among non-Christians, as well as their social and cultural values” (NA 2).





Appendix 4: The Holy Spirit and the Youth (Benedict XVI)

(Address of Pope Benedict XVI during the Vigil with the young people, Australia 19 July, 2008)

Tonight we focus our attention on how to become witnesses. We need to understand the person of the Holy Spirit and his vivifying presence in our lives. This is not easy to comprehend. Indeed the variety of images found in scripture referring to the Spirit – wind, fire, breath – indicate our struggle to articulate an understanding of him. Yet we do know that it is the Holy Spirit who, though silent and unseen, gives direction and definition to our witness to Jesus Christ.

You are already well aware that our Christian witness is offered to a world which in many ways is fragile. The unity of God's creation is weakened by wounds which run particularly deep when social relations break apart, or when the human spirit is all but crushed through the exploitation and abuse of persons. Indeed, society today is being fragmented by a way of thinking that is inherently short-sighted, because it disregards the full horizon of truth– the truth about God and about us. By its nature, relativism fails to see the whole picture. It ignores the very principles which enable us to live and flourish in unity, order and harmony.

What is our response, as Christian witnesses, to a divided and fragmented world? How can we offer the hope of peace, healing and harmony to those “stations” of conflict, suffering, and tension through which you have chosen to march with this World Youth Day Cross? Unity and reconciliation cannot be achieved through our efforts alone. God has made us for one another (cf. Gen 2:24) and only in God and his Church can we find the unity we seek. Yet, in the face of imperfections and disappointments – both individual and institutional – we are sometimes tempted to construct artificially a “perfect” community. That temptation is not new. The history of the Church includes many examples of attempts to bypass or override human weaknesses or failures in order to create a perfect unity, a spiritual utopia...

Dear young people, we have seen that it is the Holy Spirit who brings about the wonderful communion of believers in Jesus Christ. True to his nature as giver and gift alike, he is even now working through you. Inspired by the insights of Saint Augustine: let unifying love be your measure; abiding love your challenge; self-giving love your mission!

Appendix 5: Anointing and Mission (Pope Francis)

The precious oil which anoints the head of Aaron does more than simply lend fragrance to his person; it overflows down to “the edges”. The Lord will say this clearly: his anointing is meant for the poor, prisoners and the sick, for those who are sorrowing and alone. My dear brothers, the ointment is not intended just to make us fragrant, much less to be kept in a jar, for then it would become rancid ... and the heart bitter...

Our people like to hear the Gospel preached with “unction”, they like it when the Gospel we preach touches their daily lives, when it runs down like the oil of Aaron to the edges of reality, when it brings light to moments of extreme darkness, to the “outskirts” where people of faith are most exposed to the onslaught of those who want to tear down their faith. People thank us because they feel that we have prayed over the realities of their everyday lives, their troubles, their joys, their burdens and their hopes. And when they feel that the fragrance of the Anointed One, of Christ, has come to them through us, they feel encouraged to entrust to us everything they want to bring before the Lord.... Jesus, surrounded by people on every side, embodies all the beauty of Aaron vested in priestly raiment, with the oil running down upon his robes....

We need to “go out”, then, in order to experience our own anointing, its power and its redemptive efficacy: to the “outskirts” where there is suffering, bloodshed, blindness that longs for sight, and prisoners in thrall to many evil masters. It is not in soul-searching or constant introspection that we encounter the Lord: self-help courses can be useful in life, but to live our priestly life going from one course to another, from one method to another, leads us to become pelagians and to minimize the power of grace, which comes alive and flourishes to the extent that we, in faith, go out and give ourselves and the Gospel to others, giving what little ointment we have to those who have nothing, nothing at all....

Those who do not go out of themselves, instead of being mediators, gradually become intermediaries, managers. We know the difference: the intermediary, the manager, “has already received his reward”, and since he doesn’t put his own skin and his own heart on the line, he never hears a warm, heartfelt word of thanks. This is precisely the reason for the dissatisfaction of some, who end up sad – sad priests - in some sense becoming collectors of antiques or novelties, instead of being shepherds living with “the odour of the sheep”. This I ask you: be shepherds, with the “odour of the sheep”, make it real, as shepherds among your flock, fishers of men.

(From the homily of Pope Francis on Holy Thursday, 28 March 2013)





“Do we feel any urgency to proclaim the Gospel? Are we convinced that it is necessary that these people need to be offered the chance of an encounter with Jesus? Are we willing to accept the consequences of a “new evangelization” that goes beyond mere recovery of lost ground by the Church and is profoundly transforming?” (Josep M. Abella, *Missionaries*)

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