

# The Forge

caritas christi

in our daily life



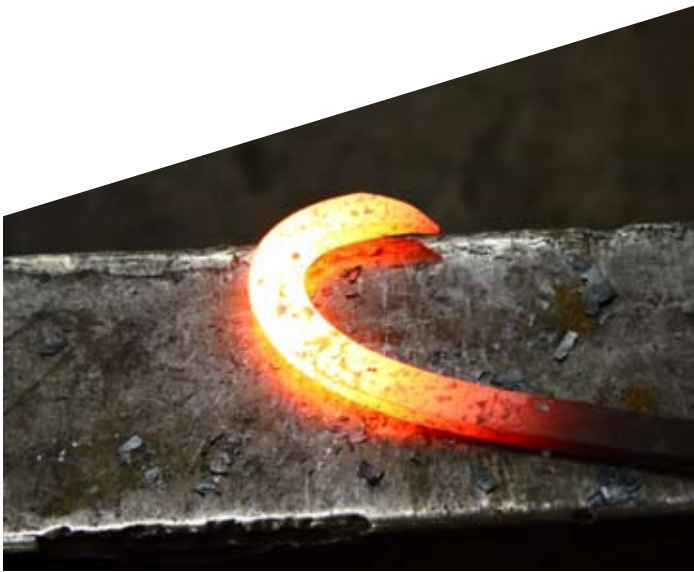
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Encountering Jesus

Advent - Christmas

# CARITAS CHRISTI

2013



This stage of the forge -focused on the activity that makes the blacksmith on the anvil- **symbolizes the process of being conformed to Christ.**

## OBJECTIVES

- Moving from individualistic and self-centered attitudes to self-giving attitudes.
- Going deeper into the knowledge of the person of Jesus.
- Growing in the experience of following Jesus Christ through the vows and apostolic virtues, in the style of St. Anthony Mary Claret.
- Rediscovering the Eucharist as a “meeting place” with Christ.
- Improving the capacity for community life and dialogue.

## BOOKLETS

1. Encountering Jesus  
(*Advent - Christmas*)
2. Consecrated to God and to people  
(*Ordinary Time I*)
3. Poor in fact and in spirit  
(*Lent*)
4. Seekers of God’s will  
(*Easter*)
5. Chaste for the Kingdom of heaven  
(*Ordinary Time II*)
6. Until Christ live in us  
(*Ordinary Time III*)
7. United so that the world may believe  
(*Ordinary Time IV*)
8. Transformed by the Eucharist  
(*Ordinary Time V*)
9. Impelled by the love of Christ  
(*Ordinary Time VI*)



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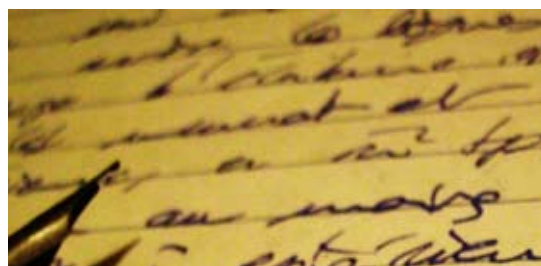


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# 1. Introduction



**You are opening** the first booklet in a new stage on the journey of *The Forge in Our Daily Life*. This is the third year of *The Forge*, and we have arrived at its core, *Caritas Christi*, which focuses on the process of conformity to Jesus Christ, the title, in fact, of Chapter VI of our Constitutions and the subject of Booklet 6. **This year we combine in the same booklet the tasks of Advent and Christmas**, promise and its fulfillment, awaiting and appearance. The experience of previous years has led us to combine these two short and intimately related liturgical seasons. **On page 2, you will see the objectives and the outline of the stage *Caritas Christi*.** Like a map, this will chart your progress along the way.

The tomb of St. Anthony Mary Claret in the shrine at Vic is protected by a skylight above the small coffin which contains his remains. Above the skylight are these words in Catalan, the moth-

er tongue of Father Founder: *Enamoreu-vos de Jesus Christ*, (“Fall in love with Jesus Christ”). The complete phrase is: “And you will understand all and you will do greater works than I have done.” One cannot understand the life of our Founder without reference to Jesus Christ: “I live by Jesus’ own life. In possessing me He possesses nothing, while I possess everything in him” (*Aut* 754). The motto on his archepiscopal shield, for which this chapter of the Forge is named, certainly captures the energy which animated him: *Caritas Christi urget me* (“The love of Christ impels me”).

Our Constitutions recognize that “to us, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, called in the likeness of the Apostles, has also been given the gift of following Christ in communion of life and proclaiming the Gospel to every creature throughout the world” (n. 4). **Our strange lifestyle focuses on and is inspired and nourished by Jesus Christ.** So, the Church asks all consecrated persons “to adhere ever more closely to Christ, the centre of consecrated life and once again take up the path of conversion and renewal which, like the initial experience of the apostles, before and after the resurrection, was a starting afresh from Christ. Yes, one must start afresh from Christ” (*Starting Afresh from Christ*, 21).

Neither the objective nor the method of the third year of the Forge differs from those of the first two years. It is quite possible that both you and your community and your organism have made significant progress, with which you are satisfied and for which you are appreciative. It is, however, also possible that the gap between the desirable and what has been accomplished is too great and you see no point to remaining involved. Nonetheless, based on your experience, might it be possible to assume, once more, the outlook of the journeyor, who in spite of difficulties along the way, keeps his/her eyes and heart on the goal?

The experience of fire, in the forefront of *Patris Mei*, is an integral part of our spiritual journey. There is no interior transformation without the energy of love. Still, as the allegory of the forge reminds us, fire by itself cannot forge an object. **Also required are the blacksmith, steadily working with hammer and anvil.** Knowing we are loved by God (*Patris Mei*), we are disposed to continue to be configured to Christ (*Caritas Christi*) until it is no longer we who live but Christ who lives in us. (cf. *Gal* 2:20). This mystical experience enables us to set out on a long ascetical path, along which we will be delivered gradually from our selfishness and transformed into missionary arrows (*Spiritus Domini*), into the Christ sent by the Father to proclaim the Gospel.

The hammer and anvil are not symbols of violence and destruction, though sometimes they are seen in that light and, as a result, elicit rejection. They are tools, which in the blacksmith’s skilled hands, can transform a bar of iron into a beautiful, useful object.

From a spiritual perspective, **there is no conformity with Christ without participation in the paschal mystery, that is without experiencing his passion, death and resurrection.** Too light a spirituality, which resists the death of the old self, and ignores the world’s suffering, cannot sustain an authentic missionary commitment.

You might not find all the reflections and exercises in this booklet relevant to your age or personal situation. Don’t worry. They are only means to an end. What is important is that each day you continue to open yourself to the Word of God through *lectio divina*, that you allow yourself to ask questions, accompany it, and try to respond with fidelity. Everything else is secondary: “Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build...” (*Psalms* 127:1). Embarking on this new stage, we continue to pray humbly for the renewal



of each one of us and the entire Congregation according to our charism:

*“Lord, renew in our Congregation the spirit that animated St. Anthony Mary Claret, our Father, so that filled and invigorated by it, we may be strengthened to love what he loved and to put into practice what he taught us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

**2012 has been an extremely trying year for millions of people around the world.** Many have been devastated by the world economic crisis. Yet all of these have a name and a unique face. Some are actually our neighbors. In many places, there is a climate of fear in the face of predictions of the end of the world, as if the end of the Mayan calendar signalled the end of an exhausted civilization, founded on irresponsible consumption rather than personal growth, fraternal relations, solidarity and justice, and respect for the planet.

**Is it possible in this situation to live a life based on faith in Jesus Christ?** At the start of every new liturgical year, we recall that the Lord *has come* (the first coming), *is coming* (intermediate coming)] and *will come definitively* (final coming) to judge and save this world, wounded as a consequence of a sin beyond our human ability alone to repair. In his góspel, Luke admonishes us: “When these things begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand” (Lk 21:28). There is no reason, then, to be afraid. Be hopeful and stand firm. There is always something we can do. We have every reason to hope.

**Advent and Christmas are Marian seasons.** Mary of Nazareth is the woman of hope as well as welcome. In her heart the hopes of her own people and of all humanity are met. She responds to God with confidence, then joyfully welcomes the fulfillment of his promise. Commend to her the initiation of this new stage. Ask her to continue shaping you in the forge of her mercy and love.



## 2. Reflection

### 1.1. “But you, who do you say that I am?” (Mk 8:29)

We begin the *Caritas Christi* stage with our eyes on Jesus: *Oculi nostri ad Dominum Jesum*. (“Our eyes are placed on the Lord Jesus”). From time to time, he looks our way and asks: “And you, who do you say I am?” Jesus’ question to his first disciples at Cesarea Philippi is as relevant and important today as ever. **We want to know who Jesus is, and he also asks who we are.** To speak of Jesus is to speak of ourselves. His identity reveals ours, because he is Man par excellence: *Ecce homo* (Jn 19:5).



“Sublimity as well as simplicity, greatness as well as humility, holiness as well as nearness to sinful humanity, elevation as well as withdrawal, intense communion with God as well as diligent concern for humanity, tenderness and prophetic indignation without limits, dramatic realism and serene optimism, gravity and candor, knowledge of the evil innate in the human heart and trust in the possibilities for conversion, the capacity to dominate men and things and silent impotence before his judges... All in him appears governed by a thread of paradox, later to be unified with spontaneous harmony in his person, so authentic and simple, which appears to be one of many. No human figure known in history and literature throughout all time can be compared with the man of the gospels. Even before he provokes us with his question: “Whom do you say that I am?” (Mt 16:15), we ourselves are already asking: “but... who is this?” (Francesco Duci).

**Three centuries of critical study of Jesus of Nazareth have led us to purify an overly naive vision of his person and message**, but it is possible they have also undermined somewhat our experience of faith in him. Behind every confession there is a program of life. Each name we apply to him indicates a path. Over the course of history, every imaginable adjective has been associated with the name of Jesus of Nazareth: prophet, preacher, healer, wise man, master, marginal Jew, wizard, revolutionary, charismatic leader, hippie, mythic figure. Every era has felt the need – and, at times, the obligation – to “re-read” his life, whether in an effort to reconstruct it according to historical-critical methods, or to sketch its basic silhouette. We may not always be interested in the latest findings, yet we experience their impact. You might find it interesting to read what

*Wikipedia*, the internet encyclopedia consulted by millions each day, has to say about Jesus.

In this context, heightened by the strong tendency today to separate – perhaps we should say “sever” – Christ from his community the Church (Jesus yes! – the Church no!), how do we respond to the question Jesus continues to direct to us? Do we surrender to the way of multiple hypothesis? Do we repeat the conventional formulas, more out of routine than personal conviction? Or do we say, as Peter did, in the name of the Church: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”? If this last response is not that of flesh and blood (that is, our merely human investigation, as penetrating as that might be), but the gift of God, are we prepared to ask for the gift of faith in Jesus and to accept the consequences? Nothing is as important as believing in him. The Gospel of



Christmas day proclaims: “But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God” (Jn 1:12).

When we become wrapped up in our personal problems or disheartened by life’s difficulties, we may tend to think of Jesus as a ghost hovering over us (cf. Mt 14:26), rather than a living being concerned with our anxieties and sufferings: “But how do we recognize in the reflection of history and at the present time the signs of the Spirit and the seeds of the Word, present now as always in human life and culture? How do we interpret the signs of the times in a reality such as ours in which areas of darkness and mystery abound? As with the disciples on the walk towards Emmaus, the Lord himself must be our travelling companion and grant us his Spirit. Only the Lord, present among us, can help us to fully understand and

carry out his word, he can enlighten minds and warm hearts.” (*Starting Afresh from Christ*, 2).

The image of Jesus as “companion on the journey” (cf. Lk 24:15) is certainly one that is especially appealing to our sensibilities as human beings, who seek, who do not have everything figured out, who are ‘on the way’. The story of Emmaus clearly indicates the stages of our encounter with Jesus. Along the way we will encounter the indicators we need in order to shed light on our human experience (cf. MFL 44). This can be said even more concisely. Bishop Fulton Sheen reduces to just two words the dynamic of an encounter with Jesus: “Come” (Jn 1:39) and “Go” (Mt 28:19). Every disciple is invited to approach Jesus and to be with him, in order to then be sent “to make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19).

## Exercise 1: Where do you live?

*The market is flooded with “lives of Jesus”, christologies and writings of every kind about Jesus of Nazaret. Pope Benedict XVI has published two volumes – and is preparing a third – about Jesus. It is possible that some of the works you have read have helped you dispel doubts, lay solid foundations, and nourish your faith. This exercise asks you to make an initial off the cuff inventory. But it invites you, above all, to open your eyes to “living christologies”, those human beings around you who are like icons of the Master.*

1. Begin by **reading the following phrases about Jesus**. Choose three that catch your attention and ask yourself why.

- “I tell the Hindus that their lives will be imperfect, unless they study respectfully the life of Jesus” (*Ghandi*).
- “All succeeding stages of theology have encountered in Jesus their own ideas and only in that way have the been able to give him life. And it was not just the eras that appeared reflected in him: each person also created him in the image of his own personality. Truly, there is no work more personal than to write a life of Jesus” (*Albert Schweitzer*).
- “Doubt about the existence of Christ is so lacking scientific foundation, that it doesn’t deserve one word of refutation” (*Rudolf Bultmann*).
- “I do not believe in the resurrection, but I will not deny the emotion I feel before Christ and his teaching. Before him and his history I feel nothing but respect and veneration” (*Albert Camus*).
- “Today, the difficult thing is not to accept that Christ may be God; the difficult thing would be to accept God, if he weren’t Christ” (*Joseph Malègue*).
- “We communists do not criticize Christians for being followers of Christ, but precisely for not being his followers” (*Milan Machovec*).

- “These Christians ignore who Jesus is and are condemned by their own religion to never discover him” (*Marcel Légaut*).

2. Now recall **the books you have read about Jesus**. Point out three that have had particular impact. Why? What did you find in them? What did they contribute to your relationship with Jesus?

3. Today *Jesus is seen in the faces of those on the side of the road*. This song describes Christmas in daily life:

*Christ is born each day  
In the face of the tired worker,  
In the faces of children laughing at play,  
In every older person at our side.  
Christ is born each day  
And as much as we may wish to kill him,  
He will be born day after day, minute by minute,  
In every person who wishes to accept him.*

Looking around you, **in which faces do you see today the living presence of Jesus?**



## 2.2. “Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever” (Hb 13:8)

At the start of a new liturgical year, this verse from the Letter to the Hebrews resonates powerfully. The world changes. You change. The Lord of time is always the Lord of each season. He is always the same and, at the same time, different. He speaks every dialect in the world. He makes it possible for us to recognize him.

Through him and in him we are Christians. **Christian existence is Jesus Christ.** No other religion regards its key personality as Christians regard Jesus Christ. This means that to be a Christian is not, principally, to accept a *credo* composed of dogmas, or to observe strictly a *moral code* founded on the gospel and enunciated by the Church’s magisterium, or to scrupulously observe established *rituals*, or even to be a *member* juridically to the ecclesial community. All these are aspects of a mature Christian life, but none of them constitutes its core. **To be a Christian is, above all, entails personal commitment to Jesus Christ through faith in the bosom of the community, which is the Church.** Benedict XVI summed it up in this way in the beginning of his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*: “We have come to believe in God’s love: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (n. 1).

The centrality of Jesus Christ makes Christianity particularly attractive and, at the same time, problematic for Christians. If to be a Christian entails a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, to meet Him, what do we make of an encounter with someone, who no longer exists or, at least, not in the same way as persons we encounter in everyday life?

- Obviously this encounter with Jesus is not merely *physical*. Nobody has seen Jesus at home, dressed in a simple tunic and sandals, as he appears in most sacred art. It is impossible to encounter *physically* someone, who ceased to exist physically twenty centuries ago. Going down that road, we run into two men in dazzling clothing, who ask us: “Why do you seek the living one among the dead?” (Lk 24:5).
- Nor, according to the faith of the Church, is this encounter with Christ a merely *sentimental* or *symbolic* one, such as one experiences on hearing Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony* or reading Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*.
- And much less, is it some kind of *transpersonal* encounter. Jesus is not a ghost or phantom. To view him in that light merits the same response as his response to his disciples after the resurrection: “Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, that it is myself [egó



*eimi autos*]. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you can see I have" (*Lk 24:38*).

Undoubtedly, any mature believer will describe his/her own experience of faith as: "I have met the Lord". Our Constitutions speak of *following* him (cf. *CC 4*), *contemplating* him (cf. *CC 39*), *imitating* him (cf. *CC 20, 23, 28, 33, 39, 42*), *having his sentiments* (cf. *CC 41*), *uniting* ourselves with him (cf. *CC 35, 45, 53*), and coming to *full maturity* in him (cf. *CC 51*). There are countless ways to express the effects of encountering Jesus. Clearly, there were "encounters" in the beginning

and they continue today. Otherwise, Christianity would not exist. Jesus would be a brief historical footnote. The New Testament is replete with stories describing transformative encounters with Jesus: the shepherds (cf. *Lk 2,16*), Mary Magdalen (cf. *Jn 20:10-18*), the first disciples (cf. *Jn 1:31-51*), Matthew (cf. *Mt 9:9-13*), the rich young man (cf. *Mk 10: 17-31*), the Samaritan woman (cf. *Jn 4:1-42*), Zaccheus (cf. *Lk 19:1-10*), the pagan woman (cf. *Mk 15:21-28*), Bartimaeus the blind man (cf. *Mk 10:46-52*), the Roman centurion (cf. *Lk 7:1-10*), the elderly Pharisee Nicodemus (cf. *Jn 3:1-21*), and so many other sick, poor and needy persons.

### The story of a convert

- So you have been converted to Christ?
- Yes.
- Then you must a lot about him. Tell me: in what country was he born?
- I don't know.
- At what age did he die?
- I don't know.
- Would you at least know how many sermons he preached?
- Well, no I don't.
- The truth is you know very little for one who claims to have been converted to Christ.
- You're absolutely right. I'm embarrassed to know so little about him. But I know this: Three years ago I was a drunkard. I was in debt. My family was falling apart. Every night, my wife and children looked foward to my coming home as if preparing for bad weather. But I have stopped drinking. We are out of debt. Our household is a happy one. My children look forward every night to my coming home. All this is what Christ has done for me. And this is what I know about Christ!

To really know is to be transformed by the one we know.

(Tony De Mello, *The Song of the Bird*)

### 2.3. "We have seen the Messiah" (*Jn 1:41*)

Granted an "encounter" with Jesus is problematic today, it was as problematic for the first Christians. Like believers in the 21st century, few members of the primitive community had known the historical Jesus of Nazareth. Then, as well as today, believers had to deal with the tension between searching and finding, described by Jesus himself in the gospel: "...Seek and you will find... [for] the one who seeks, finds..." (*Mt 7:7*).

Today, with so many people desperate to make sense of their lives, it might be said: "Everyone is

looking for you" (*Mk 1:37*). And perhaps, even we who have seen so many signs of his presence, see ourselves in the Greek pilgrims to Jerusalem: "Sir, we would like to see Jesus" (*Jn 12:21*). And, like the disciples of John the Baptist, we dare to ask Jesus directly: "Master, where do you live?" (*Jn 1:38*).

While we search for responses to enlighten the mind and inflame the heart, we would be glad to have an angel speak to us, as to the shepherds: "You will find an infant wrapped in swaddling



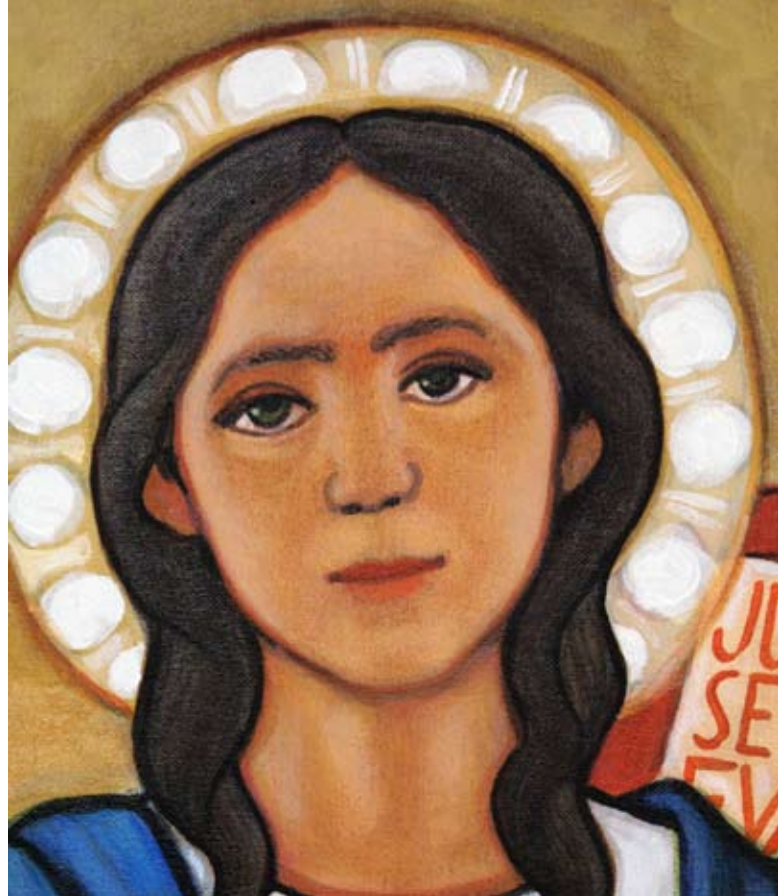
clothes” (Lk 12). Even more, we would like to be with him and be able to say, as Andrew said to his brother Peter: “We have found the Messiah” (Jn 1:41). Or as Phillip said to Nathanael: “We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth” (Jn 1:45). This is also the experience of Mary Magdalene who, after encountering the Risen Lord, announced to the disciples: “I have seen the Lord” (Jn 20:18). In none of these instances is it a matter of passing on what one has heard but in every case bearing witness to a personal experience: “We have found”; “I have seen”.

Encountering Jesus Christ is a complex process – but, at the same time, a simple one for the humble of heart (cf. Lk 10:21) – involving a number of intimately related factors. **During the weeks of Advent and Christmas, you may reflect on each one of these.** While having no direct connection with the essence of the liturgy, they constitute the stages of a journey toward an encounter with Jesus Christ, leading from *search-hope* (Advent) to *recognition-adoration* (Christmas).

### 1) *The mysterious action of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary*

Without the action of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible for a person of any age, place, time or condition to “encounter” the Risen One –who no longer exists in temporal-spatial conditions. **The Spirit alone is able to transcend spatial-temporal coordinates and put us in touch with Risen One.** This is the message of the fourth gospel, written at the end of the first century for “long distance” believers, in other words persons who had not known the historical Jesus. In this gospel the Holy Spirit is portrayed as continuing to remind believers down through the ages what Jesus said (cf. Jn 14:26), and leading believers to the fullness of truth (cf. Jn 16:12-13). He is not a person on the margins of Jesus, because “he will take from what is mine and declare it to you” (Jn 16:15).

Paul finds himself in a similar situation: “No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3b). The First Letter of Peter conveys a message, which appears directed to us today, who languish between faith and doubt, commitment and indifference: “Although you have not seen him, you love him; even though you do not see him now yet you believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, as you attain the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Pt 1:8-9). When you examine your relationship



with Jesus, are you aware that your faith is the effect of the Holy Spirit and not simply the result of your education or personal searching?

To assert that our encounter with Jesus must necessarily be *spiritual* is not to say it is insubstantial or unreal. The spiritual is not opposed to the material nor synonymous with the psychic. It means coming from the Spirit, and, as such, not the result of human effort or any other immanent instance. Without this frontal reference to the action of the Holy Spirit, Christianity has no soul and Jesus Christ ceases to be the Living One, the “contemporary of every man” (Karl Barth). He is just one more illustrious human being. **Without the Holy Spirit, the transformative encounter with Jesus is merely sapiential inspiration, ethical motivation or aesthetic enjoyment.**

**Our encounter with Christ is also mediated through Mary.** The ascetical principle *Ad Jesum per Mariam*, originated by St. Louis Mary Grignon de Monfort, is not simply a devotional axiom. It expresses a truth of faith, corroborated by the experience of many believers, who have come to believe in Jesus through Mary’s mediation. In the Creed we confess – particularly during the Christmas season – that the Son “by the power of the Holy Spirit...was born of the Virgin Mary and became man.” On January 1 we celebrate the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. The Church confesses that Mary, as mother of the faith, continues to beget Christ in the hearts of believers. Our Founder attested to this in his Autobiography:

“...Mary Most Holy is my mother, my patroness, my mistress, my directress and my all, after Jesus” (Aut 5).

Dare to humbly beseech the Spirit and Mary to reveal to you the countenance of Jesus hidden in the many ways in which he is present (cf. *Sacro-sanctum Concilium*, 7):

- **The Word:** “Whoever who loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him” (Jn 14:23).
- **The sacraments:** “Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:24).
- **The community:** “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20).
- **The pastors of the community:** “Whoever listens to you listens to me” (Lk 10:16).
- **The little ones and those in need:** “Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me” (Mk 9:37).
- **History:** “...And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Mt 28:20).

*Holy Spirit,  
Perfect the work which Jesus  
Has begun in me.  
Hasten for me the time  
Of a life full of your love.  
Mortify in me  
the natural presumption.*

*I wish to be simple,  
Full of love of God  
And always generous.*

*May no human influence  
Keep me from honoring  
My Christian vocation.  
May no interest, through my neglect,  
Go against justice.  
May no selfishness reduce in me  
The infinite spaces of love.  
May all be great in me.*

*Also the worship of the truth  
And readiness  
To do my duty until death.  
May the pouring out of the Spirit of love  
Come upon me, over the Church  
And over the entire world.*

(Inspired by a prayer of Pope John XXIII)

## 2) The historical-critical approach

How do we recognize a true experience of the Spirit and an encounter with Mary? To avoid confusing a spiritual or Marian experience with a simple psychic phenomenon and to avoid illuminationist or fideist shortcomings, **a critical approach to the historical Jesus of history is imperative.**

The Christ of faith is the historical Jesus. While some contemporary critiques attempt to separate the two dimensions, one cannot ignore the faith of the Church, the experience of the mystics and, certainly not one’s own personal experience.

As we know, present-day historiography rejects attempts to write a biography (in the technical sense) of Jesus of Nazareth. Still, it is possible to enunciate useful conclusions about what Jesus said and did, allowing us even to sketch a historically creditable and humanly extraordinary silhouette, which provides a foundation and validity to an authentic interpersonal encounter. In this way, kerygmatic theology overcame the shortcomings of both liberal and dialectical theology. It must not be forgotten that, from a theological perspective, **the Christian faith is a faith that welcomes God’s self-revelation in history.** By historical acts (not psychic introspection or magical practices), man, who is essentially historic, can comprehend the word God directs to him. The present-day bibliography is so immense that it would be impossible to sum it up in a few lines. On the Forge web site there are listed documents to help you explore this sphere of study.

**Advent and Christmas, on the other hand, are times conducive to reflect that “the Word was made flesh” (Jn 1:18),** God became human, he entered human history (*Cur Deus homo*). Any gnosticism, ancient or modern, coarse or subtle, any effort to reduce the mystery of the “incarnation of God” to myth is rendered impotent before the naked fact of “an infant lying in a manger” (Lk 2:16).

*In the midst of shadow and hurt  
They ask me if I believe in you. And I say  
That I have all when I am with you:  
Sun, light, peace, well-being, life.*

*Without you, the sun is discolored light.  
Without you, peace is cruel punishment.  
Without you, there is no good nor friendly heart.  
Without you, life is repeated death.*





*With you the sun is light in love  
And with you peace is flowery peace.  
With you the good is a settled house.*

*And with you life is blood warmed.  
So without you I have nothing'  
Neither sun, nor light, nor peace, nor good,  
nor life.*

(José Luis Martín Descalzo)



In recent decades, the so-called “third quest”, promoted mostly in Anglo-Saxon settings, has expanded the sphere of study. In addition to manuscripts, there are archeological data, the sociology of primitive Christianity, etc. All contribute to consolidating our knowledge of the Jesus of history. Perhaps you yourself have benefitted from some of the christological works published in recent years. One of the questions of *Exercise 1* invited you to recall them.

Now, then, for believers the critical approach to the New Testament and to related disciplines cannot be separated from our approach to the community, which itself maintains his presence alive in history and produced the writings about him. **The body cannot be separated from the head, nor the head from the body.** To presume to arrive at Jesus, while disregarding his community or taking seriously only its primitive stage – as those do who insist on Christianity without a church, as if “nothing authentic about the church survived the fourth century” – is a vain undertaking. Scripture and the Church exist in mutual dependence. Both are “creations of the Spirit”, living realities, not fossils. Without the Church there is no Scripture (The New Testament did not fall like rain from heaven, nor did it arise by spontaneous generation, nor was it produced by wise men outside the community!). At the same time, Scripture is always a source and critical instance for the community, within which it developed with the assistance of the Spirit of Jesus (The Church is always the community which arises from the Word and lives from it!).

### *3) The need to search and hope*

History allows us to see Jesus as a man of flesh and bone, not a mythic figure, upon whom to project our shifting interpretations of reality. Faith allows us to recognize in the Son of God, the Lord and Messiah. Still, although we have a spiritual experience, which is historically founded **we**

can always be shocked by Jesus and fail to understand that one must view this man (and his offer of salvation) from the perspective of our most profound existential concerns. In other words, we can always live our relation with Jesus as non-essential, the absence of which would not significantly affect our life. Indeed, there are people who “have believed” in Jesus, then ceased to believe in him and gone on living apparently normal lives. The earth did not swallow them.

So, to gauge the depth of our encounter with Jesus, and for him to be the response to our concerns, **we need the outlook of explorers, an attitude of expectation.** Each year, Advent encourages us to foster the outlook of explorers, vigilance and hope. Jesus presents himself as “the way, the truth and the life” (cf. *Jn* 14:6), but what sense does it make to speak of Jesus as *way* to those who are content with their situation and are not disposed to strike out on a journey? What value does Jesus have as *truth*, when relativism is rampant and many people have no stable point of reference? How can experience Jesus as *life*, while clinging to possession? One must seek in order to find, and question one’s lifestyle in order to grow. This, precisely, is the *Quid Prodest* experience, the focus of the first year of the Forge. So, the first words Jesus in the Gospel according to John are a question: “What are you looking for?” (*Jn* 1:37). To the disconsolate disciples going down from Jerusalem to Emmaus, Jesus says: “What are you discussing as you walk along?” (*Lk* 24:17). In other words, “What worries you? What does life mean to you? How do you seek happiness? These are the questions, which give consistency to the encounter with Jesus. Only when we live at this depth, is our encounter with Jesus meaningful.

To speak in this way might appear to underestimate the gratuity of our encounter with Jesus, as if faith in Jesus were the reward of our searching.

In reality, **every encounter with Jesus is an experience of grace**, an unprecedented event, a seed which Someone sows in our field and which grows without our knowing how. Jesus himself took pains to explain, with regard to the efficacy of the word, that, although the word be powerful, the fruit derives not just from the word but from the condition of the terrain as well (cf. *Mk* 4:3-20). It makes quite a difference whether the seed lands “along the side of the road” (cf. *Mk* 4:15), “on rocky ground” (cf. *Mk* 4:16-17), “among thistles” (cf. *Mk* 4:18-19) or “on good soil” (cf. *Mk* 4:20). What kind of terrain are you?

**The Advent liturgy invites you to prepare the way of the Lord.** It is the opportunity to ask yourself if, in reality, your heart continues seeking him or, on the contrary, have you become accustomed to him and nothing any longer surprises you. Perhaps, in times of difficulty and doubt, you have had the same experience as Mary Magdalen: “They have taken my Lord, and I don’t know where they laid him” (*Jn* 20:13). This feeling is increasing in those places which live in a culture of the “day after”, as if the matter of Jesus outside was an already read page from the book of history and does not merit attention.

Last year, at the beginning of the stage *Patris Mei*, you were able to reflect on your search for God. This year your attention is being directed to Jesus who comes, who knocks on your door: “Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door [then] I will enter his house and dine with him and he with me” (*Rev* 3:20). Are you prepared to open to him or, like the poet, do you prefer to respond: “Tomorrow we will open to him for the same response tomorrow”?

*What have I that my friendship you should seek?  
What wealth from it, my Jesus, could you gain  
so that at my front door, bedecked with dew,  
you spend dark winter nights in snow and sleet?*

*How hard was I within my deepest core  
to never let you in! How strangely mad  
if of my callousness the frigid ice  
dried up the bleeding wounds of your pure feet!*

*How many times the angel said to me,  
“Soul, come now to the window and look out:  
you’ll see with how much love he knocks again!”*

*And oh, how many times, beauty divine,  
“Tomorrow he may enter,” I’d respond,  
only tomorrow to respond the same!*





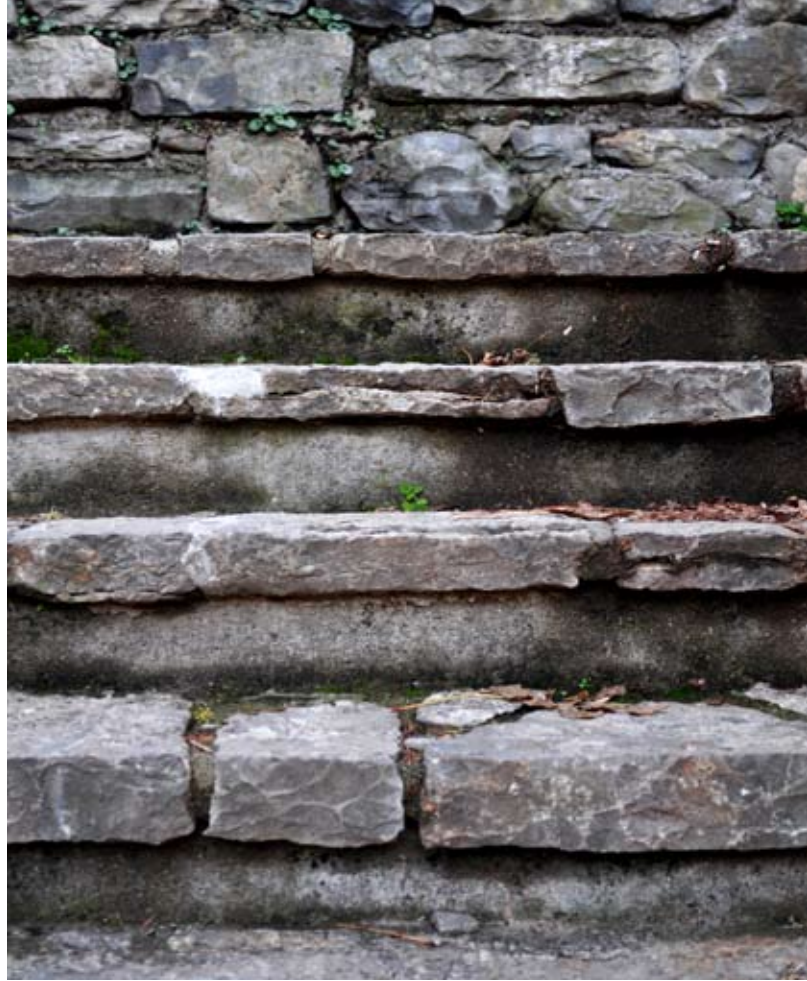
#### 4) Revelatory Signs

To find Jesus, we must understand the importance of the *signs or miracles*, which are intrinsically related to searching and expectation. These are emblematic and authenticating deeds of Jesus, which serve as guideposts along the way. **They do not demonstrate the veracity of the faith, but they can help to demonstrate its consistency** and, above all, help to recognize its possible misinterpretations. The miracles (which are signs as a function of the faith rather than mere demonstrations of power to Jesus' own benefit), the extraordinary consistency of his life (manifested in word and deed), the astonishing experience of his resurrection (which can be acknowledged only by faith), and the humanizing potential produced in the believer, are the principle signs.

Looking around, **what signs help you to recognize the presence of Jesus in our world and in your life?** It's likely you encounter them in the intimacy of your family, your community, or your pastoral assignment. Take some time to reflect on some of them. **During Advent, the liturgy speaks of the signs of the Messiah who is to come.**

We can imagine ourselves being asked by John the Baptist: "...Are you the one who is to come or should we look for another?" (*Lk 7:19*). This question strikes closer to home, when asked in the context of your own living situation: "Are you the one who is to come or, rather, does all depend on advances in technology? Are you the one who is to come or should we invest in psychotherapy? Are you the one who is to come or is what we need a profound change in the world economic system? The response of Jesus is neither yes or no. He offers no ideology nor plan for global action. He invites people to open their eyes and recognize signs of transformation in the lives of those most in need: "...Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense in me" (*Lk 7:22-23*).

Today there are many, who dedicate their lives to easing the pain of the those who suffer: undocumented immigrants, long term unemployed, addicts, broken families, refugees, exploited children, adolescents involved in gangs, and the elderly without a pensión, etc. Do you recognize them? Are you one of them or do you prefer not to deal with them?



**The Christmas liturgy is also replete with signs.** In the middle of the night, an angel of the Lord appears to the shepherds, saying: "...Do not be afraid, for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David as savior has been born for you, who is Messiah and Lord" (*Lk 20:10-11*). When the shepherds are astonished and do not understand, the angel says: "And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger" (*Lk 2:12*). The simple reality of a child becomes a sign of salvation from God. The magi set out on their journey because "...We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage" (*Mt 2:2*). After their meeting with Herod, they set off: "...And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star" (*Mt 2:9-11*). The shining star is a sign, pointing them in the direction they must travel to find the child Jesus.

It is true that in some parts of the world today we find ourselves in the midst of a dark night, a veritable eclipse, making it difficult to see the light of Christ. The truth is that an established model of religious life appears to be in decline. Nonetheless, in the midst of this cultural darkness there are angels who continue to proclaim the good

news, and there are stars, which still lead to Jesus. It does not matter whether we are as simple like the shepherds or wise like the magi. **What matters is that we be humble seekers, who recognize the simple signs in which Jesus reveals himself today and that we set out on our journey.**

Among these simple signs, we are asked to reflect on our own style of consecrated life as a remembrance of Jesus for the Church itself and for the world: “Consecrated persons —monks and nuns, contemplatives, religious dedicated to the works of the apostolate, members of Secular Institutes and Societies of Apostolic life, hermits and consecrated virgins—truly deserve the gratitude of the ecclesial community. Their existence witnesses to their love for Christ as they walk the path proposed in the Gospel and with deep joy commit themselves to the same style of life which he chose for himself. This praiseworthy fidelity, while not seeking any other approval than that of the Lord, also becomes a living memorial of Jesus’ way of living and acting as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in relation to the brethren” (*Starting Afresh from Christ*, 5).

#### 5) An attitude of commitment

It might seem strange but, in addition to the preceding conditions, a true encounter with Jesus demands a robust vigorous response to his message. Or, to put it another way, it is difficult to encounter Jesus if we are not on the same path or we are content with a merely intellectual

search. The gospel is replete with such examples. The *parable of the Good Samaritan* (cf. *Lk* 10:25-37) portrays Jesus as the wounded man at the side of the road as well as the Samaritan who approaches the wounded man, heals his wounds with oil and wine, binds his wounds, mounts him on his animal, takes him to the inn, cares for him and pays the innkeeper, so that the innkeeper can do likewise. Seven phrases underscoring strength and commitment.

It may be the text of *Matthew* 25:31-46, however, which leaves no doubt as to where to encounter Jesus today: “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for the least of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (*Mt* 25:40). Where does that leave us? Jesus’ response is to the point, easy to understand, and down to earth: “For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you care for me, in prison and you visited me” (*Mt* 25:35-36).

Might not this Christmas during the *Caritas Christi* stage of the Forge be a special, more authentic and brilliant one, if these words of Jesus were taken to heart? Looking around you, whom can you feed or give drink, dress or visit? Simple gestures signs, inspired by a renewed heart, change the world. Do not look too hard for Jesus today. **He has told you clearly where to find him. Set out.**

Since Christianity is not simply a doctrine but a relationship with a person, it requires a personal commitment to get to the heart of it. Jesus

## Exercise 2: To believe in Jesus, the Living One

*The article of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed dedicated to Jesus is recited thus: “I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages: God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.”*

1. Begin by reading **this article of the Creed**. How many times in the course of your life have you recited it? Does something grab your attention today in a particular way?

2. Based on personal experience, how would you express your faith in Jesus of Nazareth? **Write in your own creed in your booklet.**



can be known only by...following him. **A life based on the gospel constantly casts light on reasons to believe and prompts us to accept grace with the responsibilities it entails.** To believe that we must reform our lives only when we have discovered in his entirety is to misunderstand the laws of Christian growth.

### 3. Suggestions for the community meeting

*Since many communities have difficulty meeting during the Christmas season, it might be a good idea to meet toward the end of Advent. Here are two approaches.*

#### Approach 1

1. Begin by discussing **various situations of need** in the surrounding neighborhood. Ask if this entails going beyond domestic problems and “enlarging the space of your tent” (cf. *Is* 54:2).
2. Based on the conditions and possibilities, **choose several.**
3. Then, two by two, **members of the community visit these sites:** hospitals, senior residences, jails, hostels, individual households, etc. What matters is spending time listening, providing small services and bringing a Christmas gift as a token of neighborliness.
4. Back at home, members of the community **share their experiences.**
5. End the meeting with a **short prayer** based on the visits to persons in need and on the community discussion.

#### Approach 2

1. After an opening prayer and a brief introduction by the facilitator, **spend time discussing responses to the second question of Exercise 2.**
2. The meeting might end with a **moment of prayer** prepared beforehand, taking sufficient time to present to the Lord the immediate needs of the community.





## 4. Guidelines for the *lectio divina*

**December 2, 2012, the First Sunday of Advent,** ushers in a new liturgical year. While the secular new year is celebrated with all kind of fanfare, the new liturgical year is observed with reserve. Advent is a four week preparation for the great feast of the Birth of the Lord and, in general, for the Christmas season. **This year we will follow Cycle C,** which highlights the Gospel according to Luke.

Above all, Advent is a season of hope, not just that God might come – he is already in our midst – but that his Reign become more visible and that we be able to welcome it. It is a matter of believing in the gift and collaborating in the task. The Reign is God's gift. We do not bring it about, but it is not established without our cooperation. So we are admonished to wake up (*first Sunday*), to prepare the way of the Lord (*second Sunday*), to discern what we should do (*third Sunday*), with the horizon and happiness, which comes from having believed, like Mary, the mother and disciple of the Lord (*fourth Sunday*).

On the weekdays of Advent, the liturgy offers us as the foundation of the first reading the Book of Isaiah. Almost always, the gospel reading from Matthew, which focuses on Jesus as the fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures. Over the course of the four weeks, there is wise instruction, which begins not with John the Baptist's reproach and call to conversión but with a cautionary proclamation of God's promises to convert the desert into an oasis and transform spears into pruning hooks. The central personalities of Advent are **Isaiah** (promise and prophecy), **John the Baptist**

(call to conversión) and **Mary of Nazareth** (welcome to the Word).

Christmas celebrates that "...in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things..." (*Hb 1:2*), that "the Word was made flesh" (*Jn 1:18*). This year, during the *Caritas Christi* stage of the Forge, **we focus on the very person of Jesus:** the hoped for Messiah (*Advent*), the Word made flesh (*Christmas*).

What you find at the end of each booklet are not commentaries on the readings of the day but simply "suggestions for doing *lectio divina*", a reminder to keep your daily appointment with the Lord, who speaks to you through the Word.

On the home page of the Forge web site ([www.lafaguacmf.org](http://www.lafaguacmf.org)) there are links to Claretian sites with more extensive commentaries. Take advantage, though, of printed resources, such as *Bible Diary*, *The Catholic Prayer Bible*, etc., all published by the Claretians.

If you have not yet done it, the beginning of the *Caritas Christi* stage offers you an opportunity to select a helpful guide to *lectio divina*. There are several very good ones on the market. For this year we recommend this work:

Robert J. Miller, *Falling into Faith: Lectio Divina Series, Cycle C*, Sheed & Ward, 2000 (268 pages).

See also: [www.ocarm.org/en/lectiomobile](http://www.ocarm.org/en/lectiomobile).



## Sunday, December 2, 2102. First Sunday of Advent

- Jer 33:14-16
- Psalm 24
- 1Tes 3:12-4, 2
- Lk 21:25-28, 34-36

Advent arrives with a *promise*: “The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah”; as well as a *proclamation*: “And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” The cosmos and its history tremble at the coming of the Son of Man. Creation will experience universal meltdown. Nothing remains as it was. The coming of the Son, in the midst of chaos, means that our deliverance is at hand. “What should we do to prepare for that day? *Watch and pray!* These two words sum up the meaning and purpose of Advent. The serenity of a daily routine is deceptive, to say the least. We must stay awake with our eyes set on God.

## Monday, December 3, 2012. Memorial of St. Francis Xavier, Priest

- Is 2:1-5
- Psalm 121
- Mt 8:5-11

Isaiah reminds us that history is not headed for ultimate disaster but for the bestowal of God’s gift of universal peace. Jesus is amazed by the faith of a pagan, the likes of which he has not encountered among believers of Israel, his own people. What is amazing about the centurion’s faith?: *the recognition of his smallness* (“I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof...”) and *his absolute confidence in Jesus’ power to heal* (“... only say the word and my servant will be healed”). Is such faith possible in a culture or lifestyle characterized by self-sufficiency, skepticism and distrust?

## Tuesday, December 4, 2012

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

“A shoot will sprout from the stump of Jesse.” Jesus is that shoot, adorned with the gifts of the Spirit: wisdom, knowledge, counsel, fortitude, etc. Jesus continues to flourish among all peoples and cultures. He restores all that is in decline. Not everyone, however, recognizes Jesus’ relevance: only the little ones, who healed of their self-sufficiency, allow God to show them who Jesus is. It is never too late to ask for the gift of spiritual infancy and to be able to see things through the eyes of a child.

## Wednesday, December 5, 2012

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

In the future, there will be a banquet to celebrate God’s victory over all powers afflicting the human race, even death: “... he will destroy death forever”. The multiplication of the loaves is a sign and anticipation of that final banquet, to which all are invited, and at which there is more than enough food for all. If it weren’t for the light of the Word, could we possibly continue to welcome this gift and struggle to bring it to fulfillment?

## Thursday, December 6, 2012

- Is 26:1-6
- Psalm 117
- Mt 7:21,24-27

Yesterday’s banquet is followed by today’s hymn of thanksgiving. We dwell in the strong city, built on the rock of God. It is not a matter, however, of our having found a way in. It is our responsibility to throw the doors wide open to a people that is just. The more we cooperate with God’s plan, the more determined we will be to welcome all human beings. Jesus employs the image of the rock to show how a person is affected by hearing the Word. If our lives are based on the Word, rather than the shifting sands of success or superficial religiosity, nothing can take us down.

## Friday, December 7, 2012. Memorial of St. Ambrose, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

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

Isaiah reminds us that the day of the Lord entails a radical transformation of all creation and human history. The humble are the primary beneficiaries of this divinely initiated change. The two blind men, who approach Jesus, share in that experience. The gospel story emphasizes not what took place but the underlying reasons why it took place: the authority of Jesus and the faith of the blind men. Are we convinced that Jesus is able to do similarly transformative deeds today?

## Saturday, December 8, 2012. Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (Cal CMF, 463-468)

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

The one full of grace brings vindication to our corrupt world. Wherever she is invoked, Mary banishes corruption. She is the woman, who in spite of her powerlessness, trusts entirely in God, and still crushes the head of the serpent, who would draw us away from the path of life: “We are holy and immaculate as a result of her love.” Throughout Advent, the Immaculate smooths our path toward our personal encounter with the Holy One.

## Sunday, December 9, 2012. Second Sunday of Advent

- Bar 5:1-9
- Psalm 125
- Phil 1:4-6.8-11
- Lk 3:1-6

Luke introduces John the Baptist: "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Caesar Tiberius..." making it clear he does not speak on his own but because the Word of God "has come upon him." The event is played out in two scenes: *the desert* (the place of encounter with the Word) and *the Jordan* (the place where he entrusts the Word to others, while calling them to conversion). The Second Week of Advent begins with John the Baptist's call "to prepare the way of the Lord". How can you raise the valleys and lower the mountains and hills in your life to prepare for the coming of the Lord?

## Monday, December 10, 2012

- Is 35:1-10
- Psalm 84
- Lk 5:17-26

Isaiah's *Ode to Joy* is robust yet poetic. As the Lord approaches along the holy way, all creation breaks into dance and our world is transformed. The paralytic in the gospel story rejoices, not only for being healed but for experiencing in his heart God's forgiveness. Don't fail to notice the faith of his friends who, no matter what stands in their way, are bound and determined to bring the paralytic to Jesus. The final outcome is not just forgiveness and healing, but the fact that all return to their daily routines "glorifying God".

## Tuesday, December 11, 2012

- Is 40:1-11
- Psalm 95
- Mt 18:12-14

Yesterday's happiness is followed by today's consolation. Isaiah proclaims the return of the exiled to the homeland. "Then the glory of God shall be revealed and all humankind shall see it together." The shepherd experiences the same happiness at finding the lost sheep. In the midst of the trials of life, Advent reminds us that God still goes in search of us, to console us and to show us his face. Everyone of us, as well, can be *consolation-principle* for all the confused and downcast we encounter along the road of life.

## Wednesday, December 12. Our Lady of Guadalupe (in the Americas)

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

Young or old, what keeps us going is our experience of God. At times, God may seem to give us eagles' wings to keep us from being done in. It is Jesus who sustains us in these moments. He is true rest for the weary and broken. Accompanied by Jesus, we can pursue the way of the gospel. His company is calming, liberating. Do you experience it amid the tensions of life? Do you experience Jesus as the one, whose strength allows you to overcome weariness and remain committed to your missionary vocation?

## Thursday, December 13, 2012. Memorial of St. Lucy, Virgin and Martyr

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

Though at times one feels like a worm, the prophet exhorts us not to be afraid. The Lord himself has felt the weight of human misery and redeemed us. John the Baptist speaks of Jesus and Jesus speaks of John: "Amen, I say to you, among those born of woman, there has been no greater than John the Baptist." All, however, who become like children and embrace the dynamic of the Reign are even greater than the Precursor. To become like a child, to decrease, even to accept that we are like worms... allows us to experience in one more way the fatherhood of God and to accept others as brothers and sisters. Is this not the vocation we are living out today, particularly in situations where we are learning to embrace the spirituality of minorities?

## Friday, December 14, 2012. Memorial of St. John of the Cross, Priest and Doctor of the Church

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

How different would life have been, if we had heeded the Lord? The prophet Isaiah warns us to consider how much we risk when we go it alone. Jesus likewise admonishes us to observe the signs of the time. Embroiled in ideological struggles, or focused on our own concerns or those of our group, we cannot recognize the signs of Lord's presence among us. He sits down to our tables but, above all, he befriends the marginalized. Advent challenges our prejudices, our trendy ways of thinking and, especially, our choices.

## Saturday, December 15, 2012

- Sir 48:1-4.9-11
- Psalm 79
- Mt 17:10-13

Elijah and John the Baptist are not honored as figures from the past but for their importance today. Jesus would be rejected just as they were. We applaud advocates of truth and justice, then ignore their message. We accept anything that does not challenge our cherished beliefs and attitudes. Advent is a yearly rendezvous with Jesus, who comes to shake up the lives of those, who are determined to be in control.



## Sunday, December 16, 2012. Third Sunday of Advent

- Soph 3:14-18
- Psalm (Is 12:2-6)
- Phil 4:4-7
- Lk 3:10-18

The third Sunday of Advent is, traditionally, *Gaudete* Sunday. The prophet Zephaniah: "Shout for joy, O daughter of Sion!" The apostle Paul: "Rejoice in the Lord always!" The gift of joy comes from doing what we should: sharing with the needy and demanding more from the entrenched. Only those baptized by Jesus in the Spirit and by fire can do this. How can we possibly be credible evangelizers without being "men on fire with love," who have experienced and "set others on fire with love."

## Monday, December 17, 2012

- Gn 49:2.8-10
- Psalm 71
- Mt 1:1-17

We are in the home stretch toward Christmas. The words of the dying Jacob to his twelve sons, particularly to Judah, proclaim the coming of the one, whom all peoples will obey. Matthew conveys the same message in the artful genealogy at the beginning of his gospel. The history of the people of Judah focuses on this central event: "...Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of he was born Jesus who is called the Messiah." Jesus is not an extraterrestrial. He is rooted in the history of the people of Israel. As a human being, he experiences our humanity in every respect.

## Tuesday, December 18, 2012

- Jr 23:5-8
- Psalm 71
- Mt 1:18-24

Jeremiah presents two oracles: the proclamation of a wise king, a true shepherd of the people, and the return of the exiles to the homeland. Matthew sees Jesus and the wise and just king, "who will save his people from their sins". The proclamation of his birth has its impact on two upright human beings: *Mary and Joseph*. Today's gospel reading focuses on the vocation of Joseph. Like Mary, Joseph does "what the angel of the Lord has commanded". Joseph is the icon of all who are caught off guard and are frightened by God's designs, but they end up trusting entirely in his Word.

## Wednesday, December 19, 2012

- Jud 13:2-7.24-25a
- Psalm 70
- Lk 1:5-25

The announcements of the births of Samson and John the Baptist anticipate the momentous announcement of the birth of Jesus. The two are similar: the choosing of weak individuals, the child's mission on behalf of the people, a sign, and trust in the God's power and his promise. Luke's announcement of the birth of John is both similar to and different from the announcement of the birth of Jesus. Zachariah is an old man, Mary a young woman. Zachariah is in the temple, Mary in a simple dwelling. Above all, the reactions of the two subjects differ greatly. Zachariah is incredulous, Mary's initial fear gives way to absolute trust. We, too, receive the announcement of the coming of Jesus amidst the ordinary affairs of daily life.

## Thursday, December 20, 2012

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

The child, whom Isaiah announces to King Acas, is precursor of the Son announced to Mary by the Archangel Gabriel. For a second time, the Advent liturgy draws our attention to Mary's vocation. She is the dawning of the greatest event in human history: the incarnation of the Son of God. All prophecies are fulfilled. The gospel account focuses on the titles of the child to be born: Jesus, Son of the Most High, Son of David, Eternal King, The Holy One, Son of God. Mary's yes, in spite of her human weakness, changes the course of history and enables all human beings to say yes, when God calls us.

## Friday, December 21, 2012

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

In the midst of a harsh winter, the Church-Spouse awaits the coming of the Christ-Spouse springing across the mountains like a gazelle. John leaps with joy in the womb of his mother Elizabeth at Mary's arrival. Like the ancient Ark of the Covenant, Mary bears God's gift. She is full of grace, yet the woman of faith, who trusts in God's promises: "Blessed you who believed."

## Saturday, December 22, 2012

- 1 Sam 1:24-28
- Psalm (1 Sam 2:1-7)
- Lk 1:46-56

Today's liturgy highlights Mary's hymn, the *Magnificat*, layered with Old Testament motifs, which we recite daily at evening prayer. There are three stages: praising God for what he has done through Mary; acknowledging the power of God, which turns human wisdom inside out, and recalling God's faithfulness, who always fulfills his promises in favor of his people. This hymn, on the lips of Mary, is the hymn of all who believe in God, who is the source of joy, and who desires a world tailored to the poor rather than the powerful.

## Sunday, December 23, 2012. Fourth Sunday of Advent (Cal CMF, 469-474)

- Mic 5:1-4
- Psalm 79
- Heb 10:5-10
- Lk 1:39-45

Micah, during the Assyrian occupation, foretells the birth in Bethlehem of the “ruler of Israel”. The Letter to the Hebrews proclaims the *Hinneni* of Jesus on coming into the world: “Behold, I come to do your will, O God.” In Luke’s gospel, Mary sets out on a journey, carrying in her womb the author of life. In this way she is changed into the “*thetokos*”, the bearer of God. Today she continues visiting those who are in need or await their salvation. Mary is the door to Christmas.

## Monday, December 24, 2012

- 2 Sam 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14, 16
- Psalm 88
- Lk 1:67-79

The true house of the Lord is not the temple of stone David sought to build, but the womb of a young virgin, who believed in God’s Word. Like the *Magnificat*, the *Benedictus* is woven from biblical memories. The first part sums up the long history of salvation. The second introduces John, the prophet of the Most High, called to prepare the way of the Lord. The canticle acclaims Christ daybreak from on high. All is prepared for the coming of the one, who comes to shed light on the earth. And you?

## Tuesday, December 25, 2012. Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord - Christmas

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

This is Christmas day. Jesus is the Fire “made shape”, the Word made flesh, God made man. In the anvil of Mary’s womb the arrow, which carries the only news deserving of the name is forged. God has not forgotten his children. He is here. He has come. There will never again be anything like his. Grace and truth are brought together in a little child. This is not simply good news. It is the proclamation of an event, fulfilled today, in you, in the Church and the world: Christ is born. This is neither a game, nor a representation, nor childish sentiment. This is the day of universal rebirth.

## Wednesday, December 26, 2012. Feast of St. Stephen, the First Martyr (Cal CMF, 475-479)

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

To believe in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, is to become a channel of life. At his death, Deacon Stephen invokes the very words of Jesus dying on the cross. Birth is the first step in our journey toward death. Death is definitive birth. The Christmas liturgy couples these realities. Jesus warns all who will follow him through the ages: “They will hate you because of my name, but the one who perseveres to the end will be saved. The amazement and joy of Christmas are completed by anger and resistance.

## Thursday, December 27, 2012. Feast of St. John, Apostle and Evangelist (Cal CMF, 481-486)

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

Faith is handed on by witnesses and friends, not mere instruments. The apostle John is, first and foremost, a friend, who recounts is the consequence of a relationship: “... what we have heard, seen and touched”. The gospel describes the development of faith. Hearing that Jesus is risen, Peter and John set out for the tomb. Both wish to see the Lord. John, the faster of the two, allows Peter, the head of the community, to arrive first. Peter’s reaction, on arriving at the tomb, is summed up in two words: he saw and believed. To hear the good news, to get moving, to see and believe. These four words capture the experience of every true believer.

## Friday, December 28, 2012. Feast of the Holy Innocents, Martyrs

- 1Jn 1:5-2, 2
- Psalm 123
- Mt 2:13-18

Christmas sheds light on the sequence of life-death-life. Decorations and spirited celebrations cannot conceal the realities of life. Christmas is evidence of what actually happens. Wherever Jesus is, the devil is busy plotting. Innocents are siezed and killed. But to no avail. Joined to Jesus, the Life, the innocents defy the executioner and inherit eternal life. The children of Bethlehem sustain the hope of millions of innocent victims of human cruelty, bent on killing Jesus and scattering his witnesses. Every innocent is Jesus.

## Saturday, December 29, 2012

- 1Jn 2:3-11.
- Psalm 95
- Lk 2:22-35

To know is to love. To love our brothers and sisters is to live in the mystery of the light. Luke describes the presentation of the child Jesus in the temple of Jerusalem. Ritual is secondary. What matters is the mission of Jesus: the suffering Messiah and Savior of all the people. For Mary, the offering of her son in the temple presages her definitive offering on Calvary. She and Joseph share in his suffering as well as his victory. There is no room in the Christmas liturgy for mere sentimentality. It casts light on the mystery of life as experienced by the little child of Bethlehem.



## Sunday, December 30, 2012. Feast of the Holy Family

- 1 Sam 1:20-22.24-28
- Psalm 83
- 1 Jn 3:1-2.21-24
- Lk 2:41-52

Nothing about the family of Nazareth is predictable. The child is not entirely docile. To the consternation of his parents, he wanders off. It is typical of Luke's gospel, however, that things are turned upside down and inside out. Jesus' parents go looking for him, while Jesus, still a restless adolescent, is curious about his Father's business. Searchers end up finding themselves in their company. More important, they experience what ties the family together. The return to Nazareth ushers in a new way of being family, founded on the continuous search for the will of God. The adult Jesus will always recall that: Who are my Father and my brothers and sisters? Those who hear the Word of God and fulfill it. Is it possible to imagine a more revolutionary family?

## Monday, December 31, 2012

- 1Jn 2:18-21
- Psalm 95
- Jn 1:1-18

2012 ends with a new hymn to the Word. We will never fully understand the meaning of the Word becoming flesh or of the flesh becoming the Word of God. The Word reminds us, enslaved by so many things, that "to those who did accept him he gave the power to become the children of God." Whatever our judgment of the closing year, there is one thing that is never in red: our status as sons and daughters. We end this year with a litany of thanksgiving for all that the Father has bestowed on us during this year.

## Tuesday, January 1, 2013. Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

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

How do we understand who the son is without focusing on his Mother? The liturgy of the first day of the year, the octave of the feast of Christmas, assists us in this regard. When the Council of Ephesus (431) called Mary the Mother of God, it not only elucidated the reality of Jesus and his relationship to his mother but assured us that Mary continues begetting God in every one of us. She who "kept all these things, reflecting on these things in her heart" is entrusted with sharing them with us. "Star and way, wonder of love; from your hand, Mother, we find God."

## Wednesday, January 2, 2013. St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory Nazienzen, Bishops and Doctors

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

Questions about Jesus arose in the primitive church itself. The Letter of John establishes a changeless standard: "No one who denies the Son has the Father..." In the gospel, the testimony of John the Baptist is clear: "I am not the Messiah." Then as well as now, the person of Jesus continues to be debated. It is not easy to believe that God himself desired to enter into human history and become one of us. Christmas, stripped of all its commercial trappings, will always remain a scandal, compelling us to ask ourselves who really is Jesus?

## Thursday, January 3, 2013

- 1Jn 2:29-3, 6
- Psalm 97
- Jn 1:29-34

Jesus, the just one, became incarnate in order to destroy sin. Only united to him are we able to conquer sin and live as children of God. Such is the confession of John the Baptist, when he meets Jesus: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." A witness to the experience of Jesus at the Jordan adds: "Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God." The liturgy during these days presents us with the true, and often disputed, identity of the little child of Bethlehem.

## Friday, January 4, 2013

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

John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus ("Behold the Lamb of God") causes several of John's disciples to follow Jesus. This is the first link in a chain of encounters and invitations to follow Jesus. The encounter with Jesus consists of three stages: desire (What are you looking for?), questioning (Where do you live?) and calling-invitation, "Come and see." We too are invited to share our experience of the Messiah with others. The church is the history of a long chain of callings and encounters.

## Saturday, January 5, 2013

- 1Jn 3:11-21
- Psalm 99
- Jn 1:43-51

Christmas becomes credible, when through an the experience of an encounter with Jesus, we love his hidden presence in all human beings. In the gospel of John, the sequence of new callings and testimonies serves to reveal the deepest identity of Jesus. He is "...the one about whom Moses wrote in the Law, and also the prophets...", Jesus, the son of Joseph of Nazareth, Master, Son of God, King of Israel, Son of Man. Christology is nothing other than the history of the confessions of those, who in encountering Jesus, have been transformed by him. We can be new chapters in a christology that is never finished.

## Sunday, January 6, 2013. Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord (Cal CMF, 21-26)

- Is 60:1-6
- Psalm 71
- Eph 3:2-3a. 5-6
- Mt 2:1-12

The star stopped over the place where the child was, because in reality he is the star. He inspires the attitude of those wise men, who seek, then set out on their journey. He makes Herod, who hopes to take advantage of the visit of the wise men, very nervous. Gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh are moving, since taken together, they shed light on the mystery of the child. Equally moving is the example of the silent Mother who, without saying a word, presents the child for adoration. The focus, however, is on him. The most outstanding philosophies, scientists, technologists and artists are met in him: "From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace." Modern people, proud of our conquests, might humbly bend a knee and adore this child with the gift of humble faith. There is no reason to fear. The child will only smile.

## Monday, January 7, 2013

- 1Jn 3:22 - 4,6
- Psalm 2
- Mt 4:12-17.23-25

Jesus leaves his home in Nazareth and settles in Capernaum. This is the beginning of his public life. Matthew sums up Jesus' activity: "He went all around Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness among the people." His fame extends throughout the region. This is the "great light" foretold by the prophets, which enlightens those dwelling in darkness. Jesus continues his work through all who have heeded the call to follow him.

## Tuesday, January 8, 2013

- 1Jn 4:7-10
- Psalm 71
- Mk 6:34-44

Jesus is seen today the good shepherd, who shows compassion for his people, because he sees the people as "sheep without a pastor." He begins with bringing people together (community), instructing them (the Word), then feeds them (Eucharist). His disciples and the church do likewise. Behind this gospel episode is the sojourn of Israel in the desert and the structure of Eucharistic celebration in the church. Jesus gives everyone what he or she needs. The left overs, a symbol of messianic abundance, are not wasted but collected.

## Wednesday, January 9, 2013

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

That God is love has practical consequences for our life as a community. The gospel describes Jesus and his disciples, who shove off from shore. Jesus spends the night in prayer to his Father, then calms the storm for his frightened disciples. Mark emphasizes that Jesus is not a phantom, but the One who always responds to people's needs (the Lord of the winds is the same, who feeds the multitude) of whom we must not be afraid.

## Thursday, January 10, 2013

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

Recognition of Jesus is expressed and nourished in a life of love of God, oneself and others. The text narrating Jesus' visit to the synagogue of Nazareth was decisive in the vocational experience of Claret (*Spiritus Domini*). Jesus draws on the book of the prophet Isaiah to interpret his mission to his countrymen. He is anointed by the Spirit to proclaim good tidings to the poor. Anointed and sent are two words that sum up Claret's missionary vocation of Claret as well as ours. Without the Spirit, there is no mission: only propaganda. Without the proclamation of the gospel to the poor there is no transforming news: only teaching.

## Friday, January 11, 2013

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

Faith in Jesus, the only one who gives us life, overcomes the world. This is the experience of the leper. His healing is a sign of the arrival of the Messiah. Jesus forgives our sins and reunites us to the community. Luke emphasizes that Jesus himself, the healer, is the one who retires to deserted places to avoid fame. Activity and solitude are still the poles of every missionary.

## Saturday, January 12, 2013

- 1Jn 5:14-21
- Psalm 149
- Jn 3:22-30

To the themes developed in preceding days the Letter of John adds confident prayer. The Son is attentive to our requests. The gospel clarifies the difference between the ministry of John the Baptist and that of Jesus. John, the friend of the spouse, rejoices that the spouse occupies the spotlight, while he is happy to remain in the shadows. The true Messiah, however, for whom John prepares the way, is Jesus. A missionary never forgets that his role is to facilitate and accompany a direct encounter with the Lord, never to inject oneself.



- Is 40:1-5,9-11
- Psalm 103
- Tit 2:11-14; 3,4-7
- Lk 3:15-16

The Jordan marks our before and after. Like the people of old, Jesus crosses the dividing line between his hidden and public lives, between his lengthy period of steady formation and a much shorter time as an itinerant preacher, between being the son of a carpenter and his spouse Mary and becoming fully aware of his condition of the Son with whom the Father if well pleased. He goes down into the water like a sinner, in solidarity with all sinful human beings, and comes out the Anointed One, filled with the Spirit for the fulfillment of his mission. What happened? Who is this? There is no star as at the Epiphany. The dove of the Spirit is the witness of Jesus' being anointed Son and prophet. The world needs to remember this in order to realize it can put their trust in the Nazarene. He is not simply one more on the list of would-be saviors – there are so many! He is the beloved Son. There is nothing better the Father, the owner of the immense vineyard of the world, could do for us. There is only one response: listen to him.

## 5. Texts for reflection

### Appendix 1: Why is the birth of Jesus celebrated on December 25? (Juan Chapa)

It appears that early Christians did not celebrate birthdays (Cf., for example, Origen, PG XII, 495). Instead they celebrated their *dies natalis*, the entry into their eternal homeland (for example, *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 18,3), as the fulfillment of their salvation won by Jesus in his battle with death through his glorious passion. They observe scrupulously the day of Jesus' glorification, 14/15 Nisan, but not the date of Jesus' birth, which is not mentioned in the gospels.

Until the third century, there are no indications of the date of Jesus' birth. The Fathers and ecclesiastical writers suggest various dates. The first indirect reference to December 25 as the birthday of Christ is found in Sextus Julius Africanus in 221 AD. The first direct reference is the [Filicalian] liturgical calendar of 354 AD (MGH IX, I, 13-196): *VIII kal. Ian. natus Christus in Betleem Iudeae* ("On December 25, Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judah."). From the fourth century on testimonies to this date as the day of the birth of Christ are commonplace in the western tradition, while the eastern tradition favored January 6.

A widely accepted explanation is that, after 274 AD, Christians chose December 25th, the date on which Christians in Rome celebrated the *dies natalis Solis Invicti*, the Invincible Sun, and the victory of light over the longest night of the year. The Christmas liturgy and Fathers of the period established a parallel between the birth of Jesus Christ and biblical images, such as the Son of Justice (Mal 4:2) and the Light of the World (Jn1: 4ff). However, there are no reliable sources, except that it is difficult to imagine Christians of the time adapting pagan feasts to the liturgical calendar,

especially once the persecutions ended. It is possible, nonetheless, that with the passage of time the Christian feast assimilated the pagan celebration.

A more plausible explanation ties the date of Jesus' birth to his incarnation, which at times is linked to the date of his death. An anonymous tract on solstices and equinoxes says "our Lord was conceived on March 25, the day of his passion. Thus, he was conceived on the same day, on which he died." (B. Botte, *Les Origines de la Noël et de l'Épiphanie*, Louvain 1932, I. 230-33).

In the Eastern tradition, based on a different calendar, the passion and the incarnation of the Lord are celebrated on April 6, in sync with the Nativity on January 6. The connection between the passion and incarnation harmonizes with the ancient and medieval mentality, which esteemed the perfection of the universe as a whole, in which God's interventions are related.

The same mentality is encountered in Judaism, where creation and salvation are identified with the month of Nisan, as well as in Christian art, which often portrays the Annunciation of the Virgin with the child Jesus descending from heaven with a cross.

So, it is likely that Christians used the redemption, accomplished through Christ with his conception, to determine the date of his birth. "The most decisive was the relationship existing between creation and the cross, between creation and the conception of Christ." (J. Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*).



“And the Word  
became flesh”

*(Jn 1:14)*



## Appendix 2: “Caritas Christi urget nos” (St. Anthony Mary Claret)

On fire with the fire of the Spirit, the apostolic missionaries have reached, are reaching and will continue to reach the ends of the earth, from pole to pole, to proclaim the divine Word; so that they have reason to apply to themselves the words of the apostle St. Paul, *The love of Christ impels us*.

The love of Christ encourages and impels us to run and fly with the wings of holy zeal. The true lover loves God and the neighbor; the true caretaker is the same lover, but on a higher level, according to the stages of love; so that, the more love one has, greater zeal is required. And if one

lacks zeal, it is a sure sign that the fire of love, charity, has been extinguished in his heart. The zealous one desires and endeavors by all means possible, that God be always better known, loved and served in this life and the next, since this sacred love knows no limits.

He practices the same with the neighbor, desiring and endeavoring that all be content in this world and happy and blessed in the next, that all be saved, that no one be lost forever, that no one offend God and, finally, that no one find himself for even a moment in sin. As we see in the holy apostles and any one gifted with the apostolic spirit.

## Appendix 3: To Christ Crucified (Anonymous, attributed to St. John of Avila)

I am not moved to love Thee, O my Lord,  
By any longing for Thy Promised Land;  
Nor by the fear of hell am I unmanned  
To cease from my transgressing deed or word.

Tis Thou Thyself dost move me, move me to see thee  
Upon the cross from nailed foot and hand  
And all the wounds that did Thy body brand;  
And all Thy shame and bitter death's award

Yea, to Thy heart am I so deeply stirred  
That I would love Thee were no heaven on high,  
That I would fear, were hell a tale absurd!

Such my desire, all questioning grows vain;  
Though hope deny me hope I still should sigh,  
And as ray love is now, it should remain.



## Appendix 4: Who is Jesus? (Blessed Teresa of Calcutta)

For me, Jesus is  
The Word made flesh,  
The Bread of life,  
The Victim sacrificed on the cross for our sins  
The Sacrifice offered at Holy Mass  
for the sins of the world and for mine.  
The Word to be spoken  
The Truth to be proclaimed  
The Way to be walked  
The Light to be enkindled  
The Life to be lived  
The Love to be loved  
The Happiness to be shared  
The Sacrifice to be given to others  
The Bread of life to sustain me  
The Hunger to be satisfied  
The Thirst to be quenched  
The Naked to be clothed  
The Abandoned to be lifted-up

The Sick to be healed  
The Lonely to be loved  
The Undesirable to be wanted  
The Leper with wounds to be washed  
The Beggar to be given a smile  
The Alcoholic to be listened to  
The Mentally Deficient to be protected  
The Little Child to be embraced  
The Blind to be guided  
The Mute for whom to speak  
The Cripple with whom to walk  
The Drug Addict to be understood as a friend  
The Prostitute to be rescued from danger and befriended  
The Prisoner to be visited  
The Elderly to be listened to  
For me, Jesus is my God.  
Jesus is my Spouse.  
Jesus is my life.  
Jesus is my only love.  
Jesus is my all.

## Appendix 5: For me life is Christ, and to die is gain (St. John Chryostom)

Numerous are the waves, and great the tossing of the sea, but we have no fear of going down, for we stand upon the rock. Let the ocean rage as it will, it is powerless to break the rock. Let the waves roll, they cannot sink the bark of Jesus. Tell me, what should we fear? Death? To me to live is Christ and to die gain. Is it exile perchance? The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness of it. Is it confiscation of property? We brought nothing with us into the world, and it is clear that we can take no thing away with us. I despise what the world fears, and hold its good things in derision. I do not fear poverty, nor do I desire riches. I am not afraid of death; I do not pray to live, if it be not for your good. This is why I speak of what is now taking place, and exhort your charity to be of good cheer.

Have you not heard the word of the Lord, *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them?* And where a large number is united by the bonds of charity, will the Lord not be present there? He has assured me his protection. It is not in my own strength that I trust. I have in my hands his written Word. This my staff, my safety, my tranquil port. Although the whole world be in turmoil, I read this written Word, which I carry with me, because it is my wall of defense. What does it say to me? I am with you all days, even until the end of the world.

Christ is with me. Of what should I be afraid? Should the waves of the sea or the wrath of the powerful attack me, all that weighs less than a spider's web. If not for my love for you, I would not have waited until tomorrow to depart. In every circumstance I say: Lord, your will be done: not what so and so wishes or what you wish me to do. He is my fortress, my unshakable rock, my sure staff. If this is what God wishes, may it be done. If he wishes me to remain here, I give him thanks. Wherever he might send me, I still give him thanks.

Besides, *wherever I may be you are with me, and wherever you may be I am with you:* all together we make up one body and the body cannot be separated from the head, nor the head from the body. Even when we are separated physically, we remain united by love, and death itself cannot separate us. For even should my body die, my spirit will live and it will not forget his people.

You are my fellow citizens, my fathers, my brothers, my sons, my members, my body and my light, a light more pleasant than this material light. Because, for me, no light is better than you love. Material light is useful in the present life, but your love is preparing me a crown for the future.

## Appendix 6: The name of Jesus, light of preachers (St. Bernardine of Siena)

The name of Jesus is the light of preachers, since it is his brilliance, which allows his Word to be proclaimed and heard. Why do you think the faith spread so quickly and with such effect throughout the entire world, if not for the preaching of the name of Jesus? Was it not by this light and the pleasure of this name that God called us to his marvelous light? All illuminated and now coming the light in this light, the Apostle can say to us, *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; live as children of the light.* It is necessary to proclaim this name, so that it shines and does not remain hidden. However, it must not be proclaimed with an impure heart or an obscene mouth, but it must be guarded and preached in a vessel set apart.

Thus the Lord says, speaking of the Apostle: *That man is a chosen vessel of mine to carry my name before Gentiles, kings and the Israelites.* A vessel – he says – chosen by me like those special vessels, in which a pleasant tasting drink is put out for sale, and the brilliance and beauty of the vessel invites one to drink from it; to make my name known – he says.

So, just as fire clears the fields, burning the weeds, brambles and useless thorns, and as when the sun rises, scattering the darkness, thieves, muggers and those who wander about at night flee, when Paul spoke to the people, it was like the clap of thunder, or crackling fire, or the sun

suddenly shining more brightly, and disbelief vanished, the truth shone and error disappeared like wax melting in fire.

Paul spoke of the name of Jesus in his letters, his miracles, and example. He praised and blessed the name of Jesus.

The Apostle carried this name like a light to Gentiles, kings and the Israelites, and with it he illumined the nations, proclaiming everywhere those words: *The night is advanced, the day is at hand. Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day.* He showed to all the lamp, which burns and gives light from the lamp stand, announcing Jesus everywhere, Jesus crucified.

For this reason, the Church, the spouse of Christ, relying on his testimony, leaps with joy with the Prophet, saying: *My God, you have taught me from my youth, and to this day I proclaim your wondrous deeds,* which is to say, always. The prophet honors him also in these words: *Sing to the Lord, bless his name, proclaim from day to day his salvation,* which is to say, Jesus, the Savior he sent.



## Appendix 7: My hope (St. Thérèse de Lisieux)

Though in a foreign land I dwell afar,  
I taste in dreams the endless joys of heaven.  
Fain would I fly beyond the farthest star,  
And see the wonders to the ransomed given!  
No more the sense of exile weighs on me,  
When once I dream of that immortal day.  
To my true fatherland, dear God! I see,  
*For the first time* I soon shall fly away.

Ah! give me, Jesus! wings as white as snow,  
That unto Thee I soon may take my flight.  
I long to be where flowers unfading blow;  
I long to see Thee, O my heart's Delight!  
I long to fly to Mary's mother-arms, —  
To rest upon that spotless throne of bliss;  
And, sheltered there from troubles and alarms,  
*For the first time* to feel her gentle kiss.

Thy first sweet smile of welcoming delight  
Soon show, O Jesus! to Thy lowly bride;  
O'ercome with rapture at that wondrous sight,  
Within Thy Sacred Heart, ah! let me hide.  
O happy moment! and O heavenly grace!  
When I shall hear Thee, Jesus, speak to me;  
And the full vision of Thy glorious Face  
*For the first time* my longing eyes shall see.

Thou knowest well, my only martyrdom  
Is love, O Heart of Jesus Christ! for Thee;  
And if my soul craves for its heavenly home,  
'Tis but to love Thee more, eternally.  
Above, when Thy sweet Face unveiled I view,  
Measure nor bounds shall to my love be given;  
Forever my delight shall seem as new  
*As the first time* my spirit entered heaven.



## Appendix 8: Who Is Christ? (Hans Küng)

The Christ is no other than the historical Jesus of Nazareth. Neither priest nor political revolutionary, neither ascetic monk nor devout moralist, he is provocative on all sides.

Jesus did not proclaim any theological theory or any new law, nor did he proclaim himself. He proclaimed the kingdom of God: God's cause (=God's will), which will prevail and which is identical with man's cause (=man's well-being).

For the sake of men's well-being Jesus effectively relativized sacred institutions, law, and cult.

Jesus thus asserted a claim to be advocate of God and men. He provoked a final decision: not for a particular title, a dogma, or law but for his good news. But in this way, too, the question of his person was indirectly raised: heretical teacher, false prophet, blasphemer, seducer of the people or what?

In the last resort the conflict centers on God. Jesus does not invoke a new God. He invokes the God of Israel understood in a new way, as Father of the abandoned, whom he addresses quite personally as his Father.

Jesus' violent end was the logical consequence of this approach of his to God and man. His violent passion was the reaction of the guardians of the law, justice, and morality to his nonviolent action: the crucifixion becomes the fulfillment of the curse of the law; Jesus becomes the representative of lawbreakers, of sinners. He dies forsaken by both men and God.

Jesus' death, however, was not the end of everything. The faith of his community is: The Crucified is living forever

with God, as our hope. Resurrection does not mean either a return to life in space and time or a continuation of life in space and time but the assumption into that incomprehensible and comprehensive last and first reality which we call God.

The resurrection faith, therefore, is not an appendage but a radicalizing of faith in God: of faith in God the Creator.

Without faith in the risen Christ, faith in the crucified Jesus lacks confirmation and authorization. Without faith in the cross, faith in the risen Christ lacks its distinctive character and decisiveness. The ultimate distinctive feature of Christianity is Jesus Christ as the Crucified.

The emergence of the Church can be explained only in the light of faith in Jesus raised to life: the Church of Jesus Christ as the community of those who have committed themselves to the cause of Jesus Christ and bear witness to it as hope for all men.

The essential distinction between "Catholic" and "Protestant" today no longer lies in particular doctrinal differences but in the diversity of basic attitudes which have developed since the Reformation but which can now be overcome in their one-sidedness and integrated into a true ecumenicity.

The ecumenical basis of all Christian churches is the biblical profession of faith in Jesus as the Christ, as the criterion for man's relations with God and with his fellow men. This profession of faith must be freshly translated for each new age.





In each booklet, throughout the entire *Caritas Christi* stage, this last page will be dedicated to a topic related to the spirituality of the Eucharist.

## Listening to the Word

*Verbum Domini.*

After reading from Sacred Scripture, the expression *Verbum Domini* – the Word of the Lord! – recalls the importance of what proceeds from the mouth of God, and makes us hear it not as something “distant” from us, however inspired it may be, but as the living word by which God addresses us. We are in the context of a true “dialogue of God with his people.

✠ The *Liturgy of the Word* is a constitutive part of the Eucharist. We gather together in the liturgical assembly to listen to what the Lord has to say to us – to each and every one of us. He speaks here and now, to those of us who listen to him with faith, believing that he alone has the words of eternal life, that his word is a lamp for our feet.

**To participate in the Eucharist means to listen to the Lord so as to act in accordance with what he reveals to us, asks of us, and desires of our lives.**

The fruit of listening to the God who speaks to us through the Church when we listen to the Scriptures (cf. *SC*, 7) is matured in our day to day experience.

*Attentiveness* to the word spoken is at the beginning of the spiritual life. To believe in Christ is to listen to his word and put it into practice. It is docility to the voice of the Holy Spirit, the interior Master who guides us to the whole truth – not only to the truth to be known, but also to the truth to be lived out.

In order truly to listen to the Lord in the Liturgy of the Word, *we need to learn how to “listen with the heart”*. This capacity to “listen with the heart” requires that we set aside specific moments of the day, and not just our leftover scraps of time, to dedicate ourselves to reading Sacred Scripture. And so that the message heard in the Eucharistic Celebration not be lost the moment we leave the Church doors, it is convenient to find ways to prolong the hearing of God’s word, which he speaks to us in a thousand different ways through the circumstances of daily life, throughout the day.



# The Forge in Our Daily Life

## CARITAS CHRISTI - 2013

“

I understood, my God, how important is for a missionary's effectiveness that he not only be beyond reproach, but appear so to everyone because **people pay more attention to what they see in a missionary than to what they hear him say**. This is why it was said of Jesus, the model of missionaries, *Coepit facere et docere*. Doing comes first, then teaching.” **(Aut 388)**