

THE FORGE

in our daily life

PATRIS MEI
"I BELIEVE IN YOU
LORD"

7

Ordinary Time III

Patris Mei

THE NATURE OF THE STAGE

The experience of fire in the symbolism of the Forge refers to the experience of God's love, maternally mediated by the immaculate Heart of Mary, and by the action of the Holy Spirit pouring into us the gift of love.

The fire warms, cleanses, softens, glows. Our Fr. Founder often uses this symbol to speak of love and missionary zeal. The "men of God" have always their face glowing with fire, like Moses.

The *Patris Mei* stage expresses the relationship of Claret with God the Father. It condenses the experience of God's love that warms the cold iron and prepares it to receive a new shape. It is, in short, a call to be "in my Father's business" (cf. Lk 2:49).

- 1 The search for God
(*Advent*)
- 2 The incarnation of God
(*Christmas*)
- 3 The God of the Kingdom
(*Ordinary Time I*)
- 4 The fatherhood of God
(*Lent*)
- 5 The God of life
(*Easter*)
- 6 The Word of God as the source of life
(*Ordinary Time II*)
- 7 Faith as an answer to the love of God
(*Ordinary Time III*)
- 8 Prayer as our encounter with God
(*Ordinary Time IV*)
- 9 The Claretian experience of God
(*Ordinary Time V*)

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

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

OBJECTIVES OF "PATRIS MEI" STAGE

- Moving from superficial attitudes to deeper attitudes.
- Growing up in the experience of the love of God as a foundation of our missionary lives.
- Studying the issue of the images of God that underpin our behaviour, and the experience of the God of Jesus as a profound experience of grace.
- Developing, theoretically and practically, the experience of prayer.
- Understanding more deeply the Claretian dimension of the experience of God as Father.


QUID PRODEST - 2011

PATRIS MEI - 2012

CARITAS CHRISTI - 2013

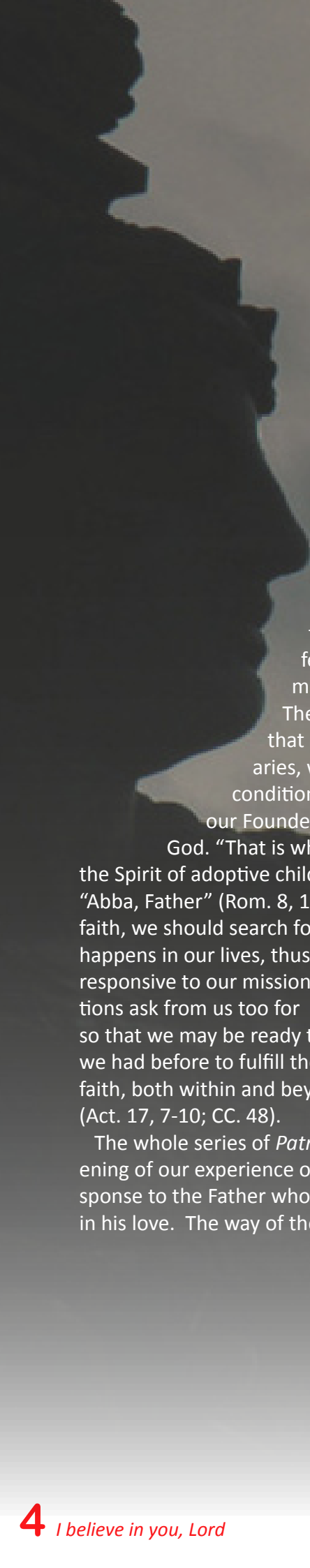
SPIRITUS DOMINI - 2014

1. Introduction



Many Claretians have made their profession during the months of August or September, coinciding with some of the Marian feasts celebrated –or that were celebrated– in these months. The ASSUMPTION (August 15), THE HEART OF MARY (August 22), or THE NATIVITY OF MARY (September 8). Maybe these are your anniversaries. In any case, besides the specific date, all of us committed ourselves in our formula of profession “to live in the apostolic community of this Congregation of Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, according to its constitutions”.

It is precisely in the Constitutions where we find an explicit reference to the virtue of faith, as foundation of our missionary life: “While our missionaries need all virtues, they must first of all have a lively faith, in order to be able to respond to their own vocation. It was faith that burned in the prophets, the Apostles and the martyrs, and it was faith that led so many preachers of God’s word to accept gladly poverty, self denial and sacrifice in the cause of spreading Christ’s Kingdom. Therefore the novices should be well grounded in the faith and really live by faith, especially when they are troubled by doubts about remaining faithful to their vocation” (CC 62).



It is said of our missionaries in formation that “they should acquire an adequate knowledge of contemporary human, social and political situations, so that in dealing with circumstances of the modern world they may judge wisely in the light of faith and act with burning apostolic zeal to help their fellow human beings more effectively” (CC 74).

The faith is truly the light that helps us all as missionaries, whatever our age or conditions, to look always –as our Founder did- for the will of God. “That is why we have to cultivate the Spirit of adoptive children that makes us cry “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8, 15). “Led by the light of faith, we should search for signs of his will in what happens in our lives, thus growing daily more responsive to our mission” (CC 34). The Constitutions ask from us too for “a sense of availability, so that we may be ready to abandon everything we had before to fulfill the duty of spreading the faith, both within and beyond our native land ” (Act. 17, 7-10; CC. 48).

The whole series of *Patris Mei* is really a deepening of our experience of faith as a grateful response to the Father who heats up our “iron bar” in his love. The way of the Forge as a whole re-

sponds to the faith dynamic that looks for its own understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*) at this particular moment of our personal and collective history. We want in this Booklet 7 to deepen its meaning for us. How can we live today the experience of a “living faith” in different circumstances, taking seriously the dialogue between the faith and the various cultures and religions? How can we confront the crises we are facing now that of which often we are not even sufficiently aware? In brief, how can we protect with special care the theological and mystical dimension of our missionary vocation” (MFL 54) to be “men burning in love”?

To start we have to recognize that it is “difficult to find in our religious, theological or popular language a word suffering from more misinterpretations, distortions or questionable definitions as the word “faith”. It belongs to that group of words that have to be purified before we use them to heal others. In reality, the word ‘faith’ creates more difficulties than clarity. This word confuses, distorts, creates alternatively skepticism and fanaticism, intellectual resistance and emotional loneliness, rejection of authentic religion and submission to false substitutes” (*Paul Tillich*). The Christian tradition with its complex history of experiences and reflections is a good proof of that. The questions and answers about faith of that tradition with its testimonies and distortions, are affecting the way that today we approach it. We are not left indifferent.

What is exactly, then, this mysterious and at the same time intimate reality? Is it above all a loving act of the will (as the Augustinian-Franciscan tradition underlines)? Or is it, rather, an act of



the reason and intellect (as the Thomistic tradition seems to stress?). Is it an attitude of trust in the THOU of God (*subjective dimension*)? Or is it, above all, the acceptance of the truths revealed by God and transmitted by the church (*objective dimension*)?

If we express in a more actual language: Is faith made true in a correct thinking (*orto-doxia*) or does it consist more in a more logical behavior (*orto-praxis*)? The temptation to deal with these unavoidable contrasts in a separate way runs through the whole history of the church. We have witnessed great tensions in this respect. Nevertheless, the best tradition has never separated –simply because it is impossible to do it– the

fides qua (personal adherence) from the *fides quae* (accepted contents of the faith), because it has understood well that “to cross from the beliefs (*fides quae*) to faith (*fides qua*) could be a beautiful plan if we understand that it is not enough to have beliefs, to accept truths, to be Christians, but that we have to give life to our personal beliefs and unify them in an act that commits the whole person. But if by that we understood that we have to abandon the first to find the second, that is, to replace them by a faith that had no content or object, that would be a deception” (*Henry De Lubac*). You yourself might have been shaken by other contrasts in your journey of faith. How many times have you heard



that the important thing is to love those in need and not so much to believe in the dogmas of the church or, on the contrary, that faith cannot be constrained to a commitment to change society? Beyond the theological and cultural discussions, you probably have experienced in your life as a believer the deep connection of both dimensions. Perhaps the most joyful experience comes to you from seeing that faith is the foundation of your life, far from “alienating” you (as “the masters of suspicion” have denounced) actually is humanizing you in the deepest sense of the word. In fact, when we make faith our ultimate goal, this goal gives us depth, direction and unity with other goals and with our whole being. It is because of this gift that we feel deeply happy and grateful.

During these next two months you will have the opportunity not only of continuing to deepen this gift, but above all, of thinking of what it means to you. You can make yours the words of the psalmist: “Pleasant places were measured out for me; fair to me indeed is my inheritance.” (Ps 16:6) Faith is, definitively, an alliance, the experience of an encounter, which goes on developing in the history of each person. It has something to do with our ideas, feelings, options, relations, searches, doubts, etc. We are talking, then, about **a faith “tested” (1)** by the socio-cultural factors that encourage and threaten it and, above all, by the same internal dynamics of the professing individual. That is why it is always an **accepted**

faith (2), the faith that brings together in one single experience the gratuitous call of God in Christ by the Spirit (*faith as gift*) and our free personal response (*faith as option*). This dynamic interpretation of the faith makes it not so much a fixed reality that can formally be described as **a living faith (3)**, always in a meaningful journey.

As in every personal relationship we can say that faith is capable of growth and betrayal, but it only reaches fulfillment in faithfulness. To believe is, then, to be faithful. We are going to explore together these different dimensions. You will come to realize that your personal experience is inseparable from the community of believers to which you belong (the Church) and from the world in which you live. You will affirm that, beyond all the explanations that you encounter, faith belongs to the area of mysterious realities, that might be problematic and, for that reason, uncontrollable.

Exercise 1: The faith panorama

In this first exercise you may read some sentences related to faith. These come from persons with diverse experiences. They reflect different social positions that you might be able to identify in people within your own environment. Try to go deeper into the meaning of those sentences. After that, write concisely your own personal reactions.

1. "The fruit of silence is prayer. The fruit of prayer is faith. The fruit of faith is love. The fruit of love is service. The fruit of service is peace" (Mother Theresa of Calcuta).
2. "Without faith there is no life. Faith is the knowledge of the meaning of the human life. Faith is the force of life. If the one lives it, it is because he believes in something" (Leon Tolstoy).
3. "Believe me, there is more faith in an honest doubt than in half the other beliefs" (Alfred Tennyson).
4. "We should not lose faith in humanity which is like the ocean: the ocean doesn't get dirty because some of its drops are dirty" (Mahatma Gandhi).
5. "To rationalize the faith? I wanted to master it and not be its slave, and so I reached slavery instead of freedom in Christ" (Miguel de Unamuno).
6. "Faith that we ourselves were able to determine; absolutely this is not faith" (Benedict XVI)
7. "I do not believe in anything. For me faith is something so hateful as sin is for believers. He who knows cannot believe. He who believes, cannot know. Blind faith is a needless repetition, because faith is always blind" (Ernest Bornemann).
8. "Faith is the virtue that makes us feel the warmth of the home while we are still chopping firewood" (Miguel de Cervantes).
9. "It is not enough to be a believer, we have to be believable" (Pedro Casaldaliga).
10. "A human being who has faith has to be prepared not only to be a martyr but to be a fool" (G.K.Chesterton).

2. Reflection

Faith tested

How many times have you experienced how difficult –and at the same time how easy– it is to believe? How many times, at least in certain environments, have you felt or thought that those who are little cynical and announce, "Probably God does not exist" might be right. Therefore the best thing is not to worry about it and enjoy life? Every believer carries within a possible atheist or, at least, an agnostic. You have a chance now to explore these apparent contradictions examining the reasons that affect our faith. It is true that faith, as a gift from God, is a light that does not know sunset, because God never takes back his gifts (cf. *Rm 11:29*), although He might commit the believer to a passive purification, as the mystics teach us. It is true too that faith, as a human response, is not free from the circumstances

and limitations affecting the human being. That's why faith can be harassed and promoted at the same time, that we may experience it as close to us and distant, as truth and doubt, as light and darkness. The whole life of Jesus is a proof of that. The temptations that the synoptics place at the beginning of his public life (cf. *Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13*), seem to be concentrated at the critical moment of his death. Mark even puts in Jesus mouth that frightening sentence that brings together all the doubts, anguish and frustrations of human beings in relation to the mystery of God (and maybe ours too): "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (*Mk 15:34*). Faith is, definitely, a dynamic personal act and it participates from the intelligence and emotion and will dynamic. That is why even in the most shin-

ing moments, we can always recognize ourselves in the words of the epileptic boy : “I do believe, help my unbelief” (Mk 9: 24). On the contrary, the more aware we are of the difficulties and possibilities coming our way, the more we will be able to overcome the obstacles and to bring forth a generous response.

Socio-cultural tests

Faith is not lived in the same way in countries more imbued in spiritual values and with a higher percentage of religious practice (as for example: India, the Philippines, Brasil, Nigeria or Congo) and other countries where faith is always questioned (great part of Europe and some places in America). After all, faith can be tested as much by situations of indifference, agnosticism or atheism, as in those situations where it is taken for granted, where many people never come to question

“**Even if Israel’s faith fail or faith on earth fail, be encouraged, I will never lose heart.**”

themselves about the authenticity of their faith experience. This is a very complex subject and we will not be able to develop it exhaustively in this workbook seven. If you want to go deeper into it, you can use the materials of the workshop held in Poland in 2007 on the “Transmission of the faith”. Also, you can use the pamphlet “May You Be Known” where those materials are collected; it is published by the General Prefecture of Apostolate. You may find them too on The Forge Website.

Concerning the Western World, all the studies seem to agree that the threats to faith are born from the cultural changes in the last three centuries, although the roots may be traced way back. We have passed from the theocentric model of the Christian medieval times, to a secularized interpretation of humanity, world and history. This model is seriously questioned today by post-modernity or beyond modernity. The highly exalted anthropocentrism of the first illustration has developed into a very modest anthropocentrism of the second and, little by little, it is changing into nihilism. In spite of this, very few propose a re-

turn to faith as the unifying factor that modernity irrevocably had wooed away: the unity of being, truth, goodness and beauty. In pluralistic societies, fragmentation is well imposed. Conscious “plans” like faith which restore a broader vision of life are seen as inviable. What we can mostly hope for is a change into a language game of many possibilities, a private experience.

Claret lived in a societal context that was very different to the one in which we live today. But he clearly perceived a deterioration of a society based on religion and the progressive loss of faith in the lives of many people. This is bitterly expressed in one of his prayers: “O Immaculate and Virgin Mother of God, Queen and Mistress of Grace: deign out of charity to cast your glance upon this lost world. Consider how all have abandoned the way that your most holy Son deigned to teach them. His holy laws have been forgotten and so much has been perverted that one might

well say: there is not one who does good, not even one” (Ps 53:4). The virtue of faith has been extinguished in them, so that it can be scarcely found upon the earth. Ah, and once this godly light goes out, it is dark and shadowy and men cannot see where they are falling.” (Aut 157).

Even with the heavy, negative tone that this prayer seems to show, Claret never loses hope or his missionary passion: “Even if Israel’s faith fail or faith on earth fail, be encouraged, I will never lose heart.” (Aut 735).

For him, the cultural and worldly difficulties were incentives for his missionary work. The causes were examined and he looked for solutions that he judged suitable. His words were the Catholic apologetics of his time: “Society is perishing for no other reason that it is withdrawing from the Church’s word which is the word of life and the word of God” (Aut 450). For this reason, he centered his mission on the proclamation of the Word: “O my God, I give you my word that I shall do this: I shall preach write and circulate good books and pamphlets in abundance, so as to drown evil in a flood of good” (Aut 453). The enemy today is greater than classical atheism; the enemy today is the ambiguous characteristics of postmodern culture.

Such ambiguity is a consequence of superficiality, selfishness and the possible results of “productive” cultures which are, in reality, the concrete forms that have reduced the anthropological ideals of the French Enlightenment.

If humans become the Creator instead of a “being of love”, then the will to dominate will be imposed on people. Perhaps this is one of the keys that will better explain the increase in pushing aside faith as an alienating human projection (*Feuerbach*), an oppressive ideology (*Marx*), sickly dependence (*Nietzsche*), illusion without a future (*Freud*), or untrue speech (*Bertrand Russell*).

Now then, if God is the “Absolutely Real Absolute” (*Zubiri*) that we discover in the depths of our being (*Tillich*), this is love, just as it was shown to us in Christ Jesus (cf. *1 Jn 4:8*); it is only Him as the revelation of God as “the Way, the Truth and the Life” (*Jn 14:6*).

How do we notice love—and welcome it in faith—from superficiality (which marks the “apparent” as real), from ego-centrism (which closes the infinite into the “I”) and from passivity (which reduces humanity and our history to immanent programming)? The true threat to Christian faith is not the criticism from the questioning in the name of other faiths (these being from “positive matrix”, Marxism, Freudianism, or existentialism) but more likely from the suppression of the conditions that help humanity gain access to our profound nature and to go beyond ourselves. To be concerned about a minor formalized threat that can pass unnoticed, can confound the spirit of the present age. Most of us through critical formation are habituated to the confrontations of the classical stances and will have to move the struggle to the proper place of argumentation. But we are not always conscious of the other more subtle

threat which has a more radical growth at the same center of the bourgeois culture that is alive in the west.

In the cultural contexts in which an intense religiosity lives (especially in Africa and Asia), the evidence comes from another source. We have to see the risk that confuses culture and religion with the difficulty of understanding the authentic Christian significance in inter-religious contexts with the temptation of syncretism and combining the necessary respect to the religions with the intervention of Christianity with fundamentalism, etc. In some cases the evidence is converted into true persecution against Christians as observed in recent years in some African and Asian countries.

Personal Tests: Distortions and Doubts

Perhaps the greater difficulties, for some, are to advance the internal aspects of their faith—these are directly more personal. Frequently, one’s faith is subjected to distortions and doubts that are born from an over identification with a minor aspect of faith that they build for themselves.

The three most common types of distortions are:

- *The Intellectualistic Distortion*: one who tends to view faith as an act of knowledge that only counts because of evidence; is supported, above all, by God’s authority as well as the authority of the Church. Now while it is clear



that faith implies an assent to revealed truth and therefore while there is a cognitive dimension, faith cannot be reduced to a mere intellectual venture.

- *The Voluntaristic Distortion*: one who maintains that the lack of proper evidence of faith must be compensated with an act of the will. The motives of credibility do not matter. This position, which normally degenerates into dogmatism gives rise to irrational and inhuman blindness or to an obedience of faith that instead of being a responsible self giving is an arbitrary betrayal.
- *The Emotionalistic Distortion*: this type of person is very pronounced in places of spiritual rebirth and puts the faith in the realm of emotions. There is a mistrust of the cognitive dimension of faith and feelings become a refuge for faith. In this way, they look for battles between religion and science and mark out with clarity each position. In reality, each comparison consists of rejecting the proper objectivity of faith as if it were intrinsically impossible. It is certain that, "faith as an act of the whole person contains, in the heart, strong emotional elements. Emotion always expresses the commitment of one's full per-

sonality in life and spirit. But emotion is not a fountain of faith" (P. Tillich).

Do you believe that your faith experience has been affected significantly by one of these distortions? Do you believe that in the missionary context in which you work, sufficient clarity is given in order to perceive these distortions? Are there ongoing questions that you may ask regarding these distortions?

As it is now, the way of the "Forge" can aid you to make a deeper discernment that can help you understand your lifestyle and, above all, to mature in your faith.

Given that faith is in a constant dialectical tension, in addition to the distortions we must confront *doubts*. To doubt is not so much a threat as it is an intrinsic dimension of faith. We already are aware that the most fervent recognitions of faith cannot exhaust the depths of the mystery of God. For this reason, that which is close is also far; the answer is the question; the water is thirst; the light is darkness. Only the mystics have lived the depth of these paradoxes. So, "it is through this remoteness from God that makes up an essential aspect of faith that searches for God. One can live at a superficial level with doubt, darkness and

Exercise Two: Trials and Opportunities in my Faith Life

The objective of this exercise is to help you so that all trials can be converted into opportunities of growth when you learn to go through them with wisdom.

- 1) In your Forge notebook, draw two big squares. Entitle the first "Trials"; the second "Possibilities."
- 2) Be centered in the present. Think of how you currently live your life of faith. Identify the main trials that you are experiencing. Some will come from your social-ecclesial context; some will come from your interior life. Make a list of these difficulties in the square entitled "trials". Briefly describe them in order to better know how they affect you.
- 3) In the square entitled "Possibilities" describe the ways each trial has been converted—or can be converted—into a possibility of purification, deepening or growth in your faith life. Maybe you will be surprised at what seemed, at first glance, to be negative or unmanageable, can actually contain many possibilities that you can take advantage of if you know how to wisely manage them.
- 4) Share the results of this exercise with a brother in community.

insecurity. To see this as a threat to one's faith would imply a fundamental misunderstanding of our being" (*L. Boros*). In the words of Paul Tillich, "Faith is certainty in the measure of the holy experience. On the other hand, it is not certain that the measure of that which is infinite can be in relation with what is received as finite."

If it is understood that only faith is a belief in something true (intellectualistic distortion), then doubt is incompatible with the act of faith and a threat to one's security. But if faith is grasped to understand the ultimate—to live in loving relationship with God—then doubt remains within the same dynamic. Perhaps these explanations can seem too abstract to you but if you embrace them, you will see how they can help you understand your lifestyle. But to what doubt do we refer?

- *Methodological Questioning*: This is proper scientific investigation and it consists in considering how preliminary or how hypothetical the achieved result is. Through this method, the constant search is an active one.
- *Skeptical Doubt*: This doubt can lay out a systematic disbelief of a known certitude through being more than just an attitude that a proposition cannot be logically refuted. Generally, although there can be a timely review of indifference, disintegration will occur because there is no possible human development with the basic faith in reality. Chronic skepticism leads to nihilism. Maybe this is one of the current characteristics of the cultural time in which we live.

Although in the faith process there are notable doubts (for example, when doubts concerning God being three and one or if there was really a "creation" of the world), the proper faith response, strictly speaking, is not methodological questioning or skepticism: it is *existential doubt*. In the first place, do not worry about the truth or falsehood of a concrete faith proposition but highlight the disparity that exists between ultimate and secondary preoccupations and the risk of confidently abandoning the secondary. It is understood that "doubt is not a permanent experience within an act of faith. Nevertheless, it is always present as a structural element of the same faith" (*P. Tillich*). All in all, doubt within faith is the fear that all humans have of an absolute surrender that seems to fall into emptiness.

The Possibilities of Faith

Although at first glance something may be seen as a threat, it can be transformed into an opportunity if faith is lived in a favorable context. At various times in history, faith has been handed down; was given an identity with the world and the Church. It would lose its character as a free option to be changed into an essential aspect: and it would be just a cultural aspect. On the contrary, when faith is lived dialectically, which is a clash of what is given, it becomes refined.

From this point of view and through the resulting paradox, known threats are also possibilities or key moments. Let us not confuse faith as a simple cultural tradition or as a strong but superficial assent to central dogmas or moral teachings. We are obliged to connect within a human structure (*the anthropological dimension*) and, at the same time, to recognize that it specifically comes through the revelatory event (*the biblical dimension*) welcomed by the Church (*the ecclesial dimension*). All in all, it propels us to understand faith as a type of a deep sentiment which is also self-giving and creative. These three dimensions will develop and show us a true and existential way. What we have said about the socio-cultural domain can be said of the personal dimension.

Also, the distortions and doubts can be converted into possibilities if we know how to interpret them as true crises. "A crisis can bring about ruin but can also bring about a true 'kairos'" (*W. Kasper*). When we come closer to the reality of faith, it is from this perspective that we discover and encounter through various experiences and evidence of God's presence—signs of the Holy Spirit. As of our faith in Jesus Christ who has died and is risen, we can:

- *go beyond the intellectualistic distortion*: "We preach Christ crucified, a scandal to the Jews and foolishness to the gentiles" (*1 Cor 1: 23*),
- *unmask the self-sufficiency of the voluntaristic distortion*: "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him." (*Mt 11:27*),
- *go beyond mere sentiment*: "What good is it my brothers and sisters if you say you have faith but do not have works?" (*James 2:14*).

As in Israel's case, we also are called to pass *from idolatry* (being fixated on passing things) *to faith* (clinging to the Ultimate). More than temporary help that can bring us to a good place through reflection and pastoral work is the great possibility of the gift of faith as a gift of the Holy Spirit that has been given to us through baptism.

Faith Accepted

Above all, faith is a gift from God that we accept freely. Through it we enter into the participation in the mystery of God—the Father, Son, and Spirit. Looking at the different aspects of the “symbol of faith” that the Church proclaims, we can reconstruct the essential dimensions of this received and accepted faith.

“I believe in God the Father”

Faith and Gift—Foundation and Roots

The beginning of faith—its first principle—that is repeatedly seen in the liturgy is actuated within the *Patris Mei* stage of the Forge. Behind this proposition, we can find the radical and gracious aspects of faith.

Contrary to existing religion or rationalistic stances, faith is a *gift* from God—the foundation and root of all justification. The dogmatic affirmations of Vatican I and Trent, respectively, connect us to the original, biblical sense. Indeed, the Greek terms in the New Testament which were used to refer to faith (the substantive *pistis*; verb *pisteuein*) do not correspond with the unique Hebrew concept used in the Old Testament which were accustomed to faithfully translate the root *ʿmn* which primarily refers to the strength and stability of something (although the translations vary greatly depending on the context and language). We can find complete security only in God and say “Amen” recognizing the only foundation “Unless your faith is firm, you shall not be firm” (*Is* 7:9).

The believer is the one who will forever say “Amen” to God who has been discovered as a rock and fortress (cf. *Ps* 18:3). In this sense, he reproduces within himself the trajectory of Abraham (cf. *Rm* 4:11). Like him we ought to hear God’s call that invites us to leave our land and home (cf. *Gen* 12:1). In the origins of faith, God’s call and vocation are given to us. The response assumes a risk: a breaking off and accepting an uncertain future. When it seems that the drive and confidence do not exist, then faith is made more authentic because we must rely on God as our foundation. “Abram put his faith in the LORD, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness” (*Gen* 15:6). This image of God as the Depth, Foundation and Root is present in many religions. Far from being a special metaphor, these images underline the character of origin and possibility.

The believer’s response to God as the Foundation who calls is not primarily to accept objective content, but accept the unconditional surrender to God. Benedict XVI reminded us at the beginning of the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*: “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” (No. 1). The believer says, “I believe in you” (i.e. I am centered in you; I put my trust in you) before affirming, “I believe that” (i.e. I recognize that what you say is true). In practice, both of these aspects are inseparable in that “there are many propositions that we cannot abolish without faith collapsing and with it the whole orientation of the human person to God. If I deny the truth that determines the propositions of faith, my journey to God would have no point of departure. There is a type of reciprocity between *to believe* and *to believe that.*” (*H. DeLubac*).

This total surrender, done in faith, embraces as an attitude all dimensions of life. Our religious profession as Claretian Missionaries can only be understood upon this type of foundation of faith experience.

“I Believe in Jesus Christ”

Faith as a Free Response to the “Witness”

Faith, as an experiential encounter, is not only a gift, but also a *response*. Through faith “man commits his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals,” (*Dei Verbum* 5). This shows us that faith is not an act like other acts; it is not the same as believing in work, play or writing. As such, only the faith that is converted into a fundamental option as a basic attitude of one wrapped up in faith and constitutionally conforming his life to it can reach a more authentic human existence.

As humans, through our essential and free condition, we do not find ourselves absolutely determined by our environment. In order to become what we ought, we have to look for a way and life plan from God, as we reflected on Booklet 1 of Advent. We must recognize that God is the only one that can give us the way, not as a final point of an already laid down decision, (like the most extreme dialectical theology attempted to do) but an option which is not imposed nor arbitrary but founded on reality.

Now, in conjunction with the signs and indicators that make this option credible and humanly



reasonable, the believer recognizes Christ as the “Proto-Sacrament” in the encounter with God. In order that the question regarding the existence of the Absolute be now resolved through questioning the “Witness” “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” (*Mt* 11:3). An intrinsic connection between believing in Christ and following Christ is then established. It was not in vain that Jesus’ first disciples were named believers (cf. *Heb* 2:44; 4:32)

To choose Jesus as the response to the question through experience and call and to believe in Him is to follow Him. This clearly appears in the synoptic Gospels. Jesus first invites people to hear. “Anyone who has ears to hear ought to hear.” (*Mk* 4:24). Hearing leads to understanding, “Hear me, all of you, and understand.” (*Mk* 7:14) and finally we should follow Jesus. It is not enough to listen to Jesus, one must leave all behind (cf. *Mk* 10: 28); love him above all things (cf. *Lk* 14: 26; *Mt* 10: 37) and generously take up your cross and follow (cf. *Lk* 14:27). In the Christological realm, faith appears like a *road*, a personal connection, a radical following.

It is good to highlight faith as trust and discipleship or as the first saving principle as shown in the *synoptic Gospels* as opposed to the works that *St. Paul* highlighted in his letters or the apostolic messages about Jesus in the pastoral letters or the recognition of God’s love in Christ as shown in the writings of *St. John*. We always try to interpret the life of the One who was one with the Father (cf. *Mt* 11:27; *Jn* 14:6). Understood in this way, faith demands a total change until the believer is converted into a new creation (cf. *Gal* 6:15; *2 Cor* 5:17).

“I believe in the Holy Spirit” *Faith as a Refuge of the Revealed Message*

The Trinitarian dimension of faith is seen abundantly in the scriptures and Church tradition. It is only possible through the Holy Spirit to recognize Jesus as Lord: “No one can say Jesus is Lord except through the Holy Spirit” (*1 Cor* 12:3). Accordingly, through this important understanding, there is no discipleship of Jesus without the action of the Holy Spirit. Only through the Spirit do we understand other essential aspects of the complete reality of faith. Only by the Spirit’s strength do we remain unwaveringly one with God in Christ (*fides qua*). In addition, it is only under the Spirit’s drive that it is possible to believe, “with divine Catholic faith that all these things are

contained in the written word of God or in tradition and are propositions of the Church in order to be confident as divine revealers (DS 1792) (*fides quae*). Actually, according to Jesus' promise, the Spirit will guide us to complete truth: "The Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming" (Jn 16:13).

This oneness with the truth is something more profound than an attitude of uncritical surrender or ungentle fidelity. Faith is surrender, not mere sentiments, to a personal reality that is enveloped in belief in the truth. It is not possible to separate both aspects from one another. Then what is truth? It may be said that the truth is communicated through one who has given/surrendered himself. In the case of divine faith, this is to believe what God said -*credere Deo*- as Augustine taught. But this is not enough. The deciding factor is not to believe what a person says but to believe in that very person himself -*credere in Deum*. Faith is totally unified: it is a love that is enveloped intrinsically in belief; it is a faith that is enveloped intrinsically in love. So, this is possible if the faith to which we refer is not the faith communicated through a person in whom we believe, but the truth within that person. Faith then is the surrender to an intimate reality which contains that same truth.

The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus passes on one of the questions that the bishop formulated for the catechumens before they received baptism, "Do you believe in the holy, good, life-giving, all-purifying Spirit which is the holy Church?" Within these brief words is a great dogmatic teaching. To believe is to believe only in God because only God ought to grant the total oneness that faith implies. Because of this, the Christian tradition distinguishes between *credere in Deum* (with the proposition "in") and *credere ecclesiam* (without the preposition). The Church is not an object of faith in the same way that God is. A new creation of the Spirit is made in continuity with the coming of Christ. Therefore, the Church must understand the pneumatological key as a derivative of the faith in the Spirit. From these premises, to interpret the ecclesiastical nature of faith from the pneumatological significance shows that to comprehend that there is no authentic faith in Jesus Christ (nor a simple admiration to him or his cause) outside the community to whom Jesus sent his Spirit. But if this community cannot assert within itself the absolute character that belongs only to God, as a

consequence, it should be conscious of its condition as a sign and instrument (cf. LG 1). From the second notebook from Christmas time, we had the opportunity to reflect on this theme. One of the most conflicted and urgent dimensions today depends on a correct understanding of one's ecclesiology. The Church scandals from recent years and their enormous consequences sensationalized by the media have made worse the lethal divorce for the life of faith: *Yes to Christ; No to the Church*. The head cannot exist if it is separated from the body and vice versa.



Exercise 3: The Creed that gave meaning to my life

During the Sunday liturgy we recite the Apostle's or Nicene Creed. As expressions of our ecclesiastical faith. The exercise proposes to you that for a long time now, you have lived out your own creed. Do not try to invent another faith but express the faith of the Church in words that correspond to the experiences that you have had in your life. Express it in another way and try to embrace the meaning of what we profess with our heart and lips.

1. Situate yourself in a place of faith and prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you be able to discover God's path for your life.
2. Then, gently recite the Creed. You can read it aloud in order to better perceive its words.
3. On a piece of scratch paper separate from your Forge notebook, begin to write your own creed. Let your heart speak. Your intent is to compose your creed, not from theory, but from what gives you meaning in your life. Support your options; and write what has sustained you during the trials in your life.
4. Return to your creed at the end of the day. Correct, edit or add to it until you feel that it expresses what is inside you. Take as much time as you need. The goal is not to write a literary piece, but to be conscious of the gift of faith that you have been given in your life.
5. When you believe that you have the final and best version of your creed, copy it completely in your Forge notebook. It can help you in the other parts of the Forge.
6. Do not forget to end this exercise with a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the gift of faith. Also, ask God to illumine your path and the way for which you are searching but not finding; and at least ask Him to put you on the right road. Pray too for all who are frustrated, scandalized or deceived.

A Living Faith

Faith, as seen in all our previous examinations does not exist in and of itself. It exists only, "where one risks the truth of the coming of the Kingdom of God" (*W. Kasper*). Our living experiences can and should be developed and organized. This classic teaching can be explained in many ways. We want to contemplate two different perspectives. The first, the itinerary of a valid humanization in all times and places (but with a eye on one's particular cultural situation). The second is as a "martyrdom." This is a testimony before the world that adopts the vertical dimension of prayer and the horizontal form of service.

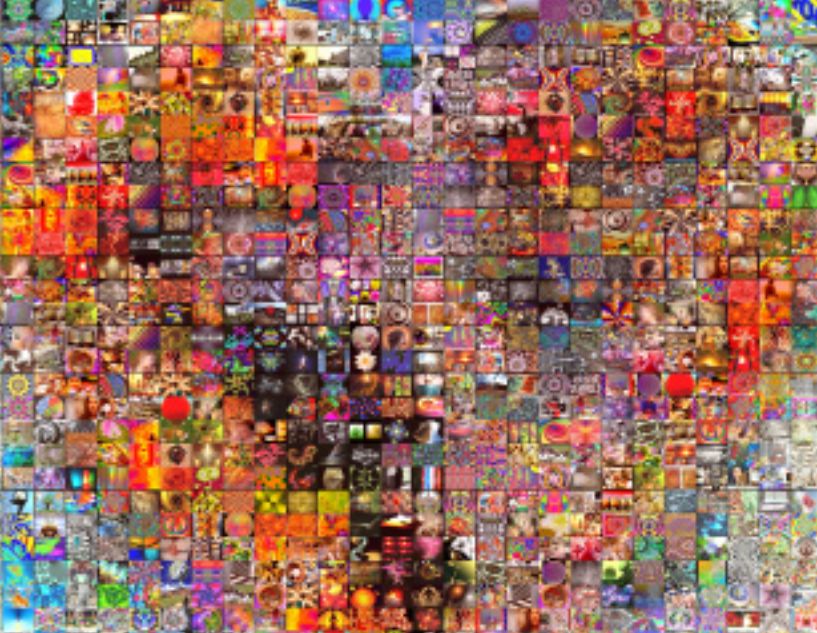
Faith as itinerary

As a human experience, faith is the ultimate concern and experience of depth (*profundity*), it is personal adherence (*self-oblation*), humanizing energy (*creativity*). All these dimensions are like crossroads where grace becomes freedom, where gift becomes task. We can then talk of three stages in the life of faith, logically different, but synchronous in life.

1) From Superficiality to Depth (*Patris Mei*)

Many of the difficulties we have to live our faith come not only from the environment or from lack of an ascetic spirit but from the lack of knowledge of our own self, from the customary installation in superficiality, that is, in that attitude that makes real what is only apparent and that is not able to go within the depths of the personality. And if God is "more intimate to me than I am to myself" (*Agustin*), "what ultimately concerns the man" (*Tillich*), the person who lives in the superficiality is not humanly prepared to welcome the gratuitous gift of grace.

It is very difficult to contemplate the stars at night from the center of a big city. The luminous pollution will impede even a glimpse of the little points of light in the black sky. The night men who look out at the sky from the underground are the best ones to watch the stars. It is necessary to go down deep to be able to see what's up there. From the surface one is seduced by the ads of the neon lights (close but poor) and one is unable to see the light (distant but rich) of the stars.



Superficiality is that: to be happy with the light observed from the surface.

Many persons are settled at this level, regardless of their cultural level or their social condition. To a great extent, superficiality is the matrix that shapes our vision of reality. We are very capable of going very far in the microscopic as well as in the macroscopic world, at the level of the conscious ideas as in the world of the unconscious impulses, but it becomes culturally very arduous to move out of the simply “problematic” to enter into the orbit of “mystery” or, as some ecological thinkers say, we move much easier in the world of the “complicated” (*material mechanisms*) than in the world of the “complex” (*living organisms*). That’s why it is very difficult for us too to get into the Mystery of God, or rather, we can say we are not well prepared to welcome his coming. While we spend a lot of energy trying to face Him as a problem, we are not paying attention to His hints as mystery. The problems (God’s problem included), though complicated, are always superficial. These problems refer only to what we can control, to what sooner or later we can solve (that means “destroy”). And God is, by nature, the one who no one can control nor destroy. There is no possible way to encounter Him without key changes.

It is impossible to believe on this level, unless we limit the faith to its next to the last form or deform it making of it simple knowledge, a fleeting desire or an ordinary feeling. This means that, frequently, the spiritual poverty we suffer does not come so much from our forgetting some religious or devotional practices as from an impoverished human infrastructure. If—as it was noted at the beginning of this workbook—actual culture favors superficiality, the predominance the form over content, it will be understood how important

is the learning of deepness as the way for a religious experience. In other words, it is necessary to remove all those additions that block the experience of the profound and the discovery of what is beyond the first glance: God is the most ontologically rich reality and at the same time, the least perceptible empirically, but He is the root of what we are.

Activism, the abuse of stimuli that develop sensory experiences to the detriment of creativity, the incapacity for retreat and recollection are some of the actual attitudes and behaviors that curb or delay the entrance into that depth where God is discovered as the Absolute Thou. Sometimes it becomes very uncomfortable to unmask these additions because they appear as socially relevant like: intense dedication to work, continual use of internet, etc. You have the opportunity through the journey of the Forge to deepen the roots that feed your life so you are not controlled by external stimuli.

2) From from Self-Centeredness to Self-Oblation (*Caritas Christi*)

We discover that God is love in the gratuitous sending of the Son: “God is love, and who remains in love remains in God and God in him” (1 Jn 4:16). These words from the first letter of John express clearly the heart of the Christian faith: the Christian image of God and also the consequent image of the man and his journey” (Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, n.1). That is why the one who does not love, does not know God. The theology of St. John makes a clear connection between faith, knowledge and love. This is the reason why the overcoming of the egocentrism is, at the same time, the condition and the fruit of the faith. Again, it is possible to find in this world the explanation for the weakening of the believers’ response that we regret sometimes and, at the same time, a way to strengthen it.

Man, because of his personal structure, is a unique and unrepeatable being and finds himself cut off from his environment and ontologically alone. All his life is an effort to overcome this solitude (we could rather call it *separateness*, as Erich Fromm does). Many of the forms man uses, because they are self centered and egocentric, reinforce his indigent condition. Sometimes these experiences are experiences of *pleasure* (stimulants, sex, speed, music, play, power) *conformism*, *activism* and even *violence*. All these are false an-

swers to the problem because none of them tackles it in his personal root. All of them reinforce our lack of satisfaction. Loneliness ends up strengthened. Only *love*, when it is understood as gift, as a going out to others with a capability of giving, can overcome the solitude because it is the only human experience where the two essential ingredients needed for our realization are united: *Closeness* (there is no better proximity than the closeness of two people who love one another) and *Distance* (love is always the recognition of the mystery of the other). If we only had Closeness (care, affection, concern) we would run the risk of being possessed by the other person. If there was only Distance (respect, courtesy, etc.), we would continue feeling alone and deprived)

Love is shaped in diverse forms that, although substantially identical, go from filial feelings to feelings of erotic passion. Under a Christian perspective we discover that love –as it is manifested in Jesus Christ– is not the versatile *eros*, not even the noble *philia*. Love is *agape*, that is: personal surrender even to the giving of one's life (cf. *1 Jn* 3:16). In case this understanding could become excessively abstract, chapter 13 of the first letter to the Corinthians gives us a description with fourteen different features of the essence of Christian love, even to the point of designing a project of life that recreates the living journey of the same Jesus. To take up this eccentric way is, again, the way to widen the threshold of the faith. It does not look too excessive to affirm that at the bottom of our religiously unenthusiastic attitudes we may find unresolved affective conflicts or attitudes of plain egocentrism. The egocentric person does not believe because he can not come out of himself, he is simply using God to reinforce his own ego.

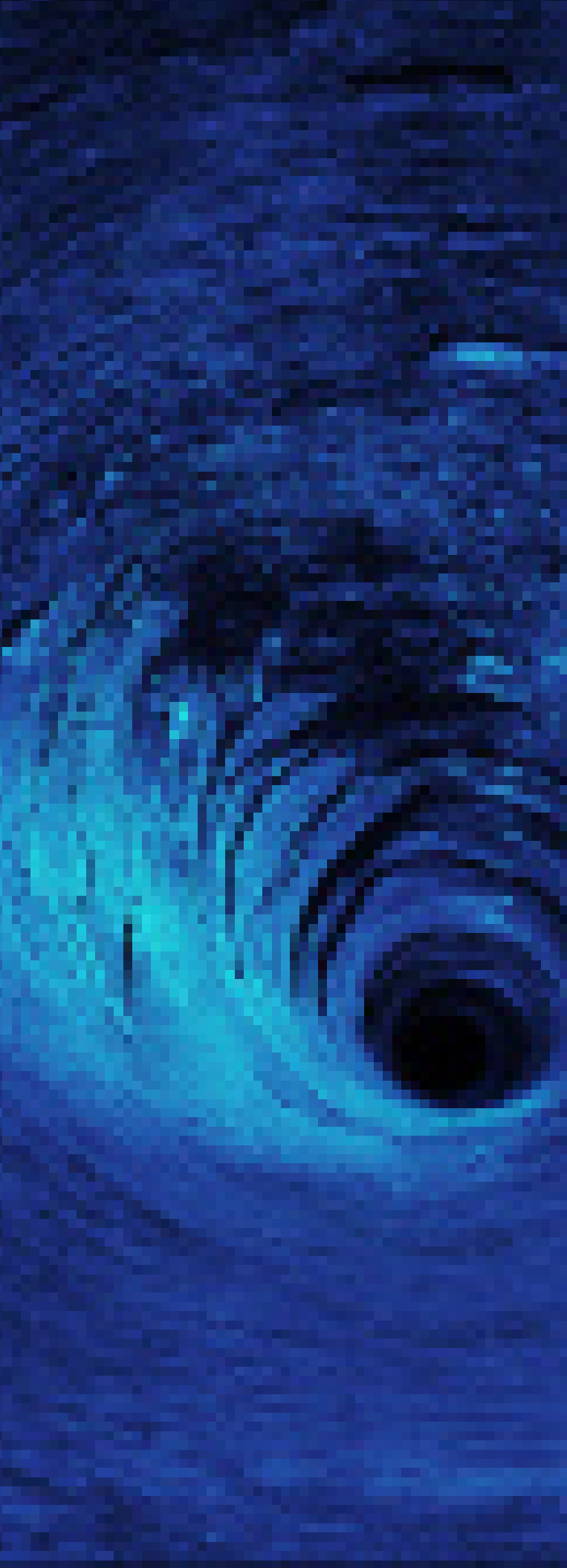
There are many persons who live in the labyrinth of their affectivity with deep wounds. These wounds are not only consequences born from family conflicts, traumatic sexual experiences or from difficulties to accept solitude. Most probably these persons are deep down burnt by the egocentric mark of our culture. History shows us that, after the fall of the great tales and myths (religious, scientific, political or cybernetic) we always come back to our ego, that stronghold we

“**God is love, and who remains in love remains in God, and God in him.**”

consider reality par excellence, because it is the closest and the most unquestionable. However, what we are actually experiencing is not simply a turn to the ego, an anthropocentric turn as the one initiated by modernity, but an authentic egocentrism that can affect us too and that can be reinforced by our cult to privacy, by our personal access to information (internet) and by our virtual relations (social networks). The ego is not only the starting point but, frequently, the finishing line, the criterion by which we measure any other reality. It becomes very difficult to experience the faith in this climate as an encounter with the Thou-God or with the other in the church; it is not impossible, though, because the journey from egocentrism to self giving is our constant challenge.

3) From Passivity to Creativity (*Spiritus Domini*)

Reality, multifaceted and complex as it is, does not impose on us a sole direction. Even more, in the cybernetic culture where we find ourselves, it is the logic of computer that is imposed on us: all the combinations are possible, not one of them is the only one. We may experience too that faith is not but one of the many possible games. We may even come to think that to join Jesus as the only way, the only truth, the only life (cf. *Jn* 14:6) is a critically unjustifiable aspiration. In face of this challenge, the response must not be primarily a refined argumentation in struggle with others but, rather, the account of the presence of God in our own story. This is the perspective of the Old Testament. Israel does not state abstract thoughts about God or the world. Israel announces historical statements: “My father was a wandering Aramaean... The Egyptians maltreated us and humiliated us and made us slaves... but the Lord



“

Passivity is a deficit of memory. And there is no memory without obligatory depth.”

listened to our cry. The Lord took us out of Egypt with a strong arm... and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (*Dt 26:5-9*).

The actual “globalized culture” has turned skeptical in respect to the possibilities of reason and does not show great enthusiasm for discovering the meaning of reality in spite of the many partial scientific investigations. We could talk of fragmentation, tiredness and even certain passivity. On the contrary, faith, as creation of the Spirit, is dynamism, newness, creativity, synthesis, search for the beyond. In this sense the efforts to overcome the symptoms of tiredness and to be open to what is needed, prepare the man to welcome the gift of God. It is here where narrative, as subversive memory (*Metz*) can become an incentive. To remember the past is to cross the present and to be open to the future.

Passivity is the attitude of the one who receives something without actively cooperating. Passivity is a deficit of memory. And there is no memory without obligatory depth. Then, we can not be creative without first having plunged ourselves into the depth and without first having journeyed into oblation. In fact, the journey can be started in any of the three dimensions because three are interwoven. In summary, they are like a reflection of the triune God in the mirror of our minute anthropology.

The “globalized culture” is on one side the result of huge creative processes. Be it enough to look into the field of communications. On the other side, though, this culture is a factory of passivity. We consume a lot with very little cooperation although more and more information technologies are eliminating boundaries between transmitters and receivers. We, men and women, continue being genetically creative. If we were not, we would die. This is our equipment to face the complex world. As we investigate what human creativity is we find out that the new answers have their roots in the learned answers. The Spanish Philosopher Ortega y Gasset said that in order to have a great imagination we must have a great memory. The works we called creative are to a great extent based on a skilful exploitation of memory. If this is the case, the lack of roots, of depth, the lack of “memory” will definitively impede creativity. Creativity will be a mere happening. The emptiness created will have to be filled with pleasure, with the consumption of other peoples work. The “entertainment society” keeps us permanently distracted and takes care of our immediate needs, but it disregards the most important: the meaning of life. That’s why it is so difficult to find the way of the faith.

1) Prayer

Faith becomes witness (this is the meaning of the word “martyrdom”) through prayer. Prayer is the definitive decision of the existence or non existence of faith: “Prayer is the most important and most essential expression of our faith in God: it is the faith that answers, or, in other words, that is lived with absolute seriousness” (*German Catechism*). You will have the opportunity in Workbook Eight to reflect on the meaning of prayer in the life of the Claretian missionary.

The faith that started as personal friendship and later as a recognition of the message and as an ethical commitment at the end; it comes to be



Faith as martyrdom

Discontinued Continuity. Here is a noun and an adjective that can be interchanged and that express a relation that exists between being Christian and being human. To speak of faith as martyrdom, we tend to refer to a singularity that faith represents in relation to the normal human experiences. In normal situations the “martyrdom-testimony” is not realized in bloody conditions. But today, we are witnessing two phenomenon that give new understanding to this type of martyrdom: the ridiculing of the faith and of believers in secular societies and the persecution and the killing of Christians in fundamentalist societies that do not tolerate the Christian way.

The suffering dimension of the faith is expressed in two basic ways: *prayer and service.*

in prayer an adoring openness. We are not rejecting former understandings but we go beyond giving mystic density to the inevitable horizontal nature of the human life. Prayer is exactly an openness to the invisible God, an explicit affirmation of His love, thankfulness to His loving presence even when the signs confirming it seem to be absent. Prayer is a permanent prophecy, the bringing to memory that there are open windows to the transcendence in this world.

Our Founder was tied to prayer his experience of faith life: “What a faith I had attending to all the celebrations of our holy Religion” (*Aut 37*). “Besides always attending in the morning and in the evening, at sunset, when very few people were left in church, I will return and I will converse alone with the Lord. What a faith I had, what a trust and how lovely conversation I had with the Lord, with my good Father” (*Aut 40*). His life of faith was nurtured especially in the Eucharist: “I

can not express the living faith I have in front of the Blessed Sacrament. I almost feel Him in a sensitive way, and I am continuously kissing his wounds and finally I stayed embraced to Him" (*Aut 767*). From this point of view, we can understand how indispensable the Eucharist is in our life of faith. There is no way that we can believe in God and give our lives to others without nurturing this experience in the celebration of the mystery of Christ, the only one who has made the perfect synthesis between God and man. No, this is not a devotional but an existential matter.

2) Service

Faith gives witness also through service to others and a commitment to justice and peace in an unjust and violent world. Service means righteous anger, selfless giving, living a divine brotherhood with all people—especially the most in need. A

faith that does not have this understanding can never be a Christian faith simply because the Son of Man who spoke to us about his Abba was an example of extreme self giving. So it is important that you ask yourself that through your works and your experience of faith impels you to give yourself to others beginning with those closest to you: your brothers in community and others in your immediate surroundings. Speaking of the missionary priests, our Constitutions say, "And since they are taken from among men and made their representatives before God, so as to be able to serve them more effectively, they should not be strangers to their lives and circumstances but should treat them as brothers and sisters becoming all things to all people. They should show particular pastoral concern for the sick and for those who for any reason have become marginated" (*CC 83*). There is a similar teaching for missionary deacons (cf. *CC 81*) and brothers (cf. *CC 80*).

Exercise 4: The Paths To Bring Forth The Gift Of Faith

In the previous reflections, we have shared the three paths that prepare one to bring forth the gift of faith. Without this earthly preparation, faith is like a grain of wheat that falls among rocky ground or thistles (cf. Mk 4: 3-20). The following activities are minor reflections of the continual call of the daily life of faith. Take them with sense of humor as a way to know yourself—perhaps the hidden things of your life.

1. The Path from Superficiality to Depth (You may do some of the following activities alone or with your community members):

- Sit in front of a landscape. Breathe deeply. Write down all that you perceive.
- Read a poem that you like out loud. Write down what resonates within you.
- Listen to a musical piece. Be carried away by it. Write down what stirred within you

2. The Path from Self-Centeredness to Self-Giving (You may do the following exercises by yourself or with other members of your community):

- Visit a sick person in a hospital or their home. You might want to visit a Claretian in your community who is ill. Dedicate a good amount of time; do not rush. Write down what you experience.
- To your community superior, offer to do a community job that no one else wants to do. Act as a facilitator for others' work. Write down what you felt.
- Be resolved that during the day, you will only speak well of others especially those who have done bad things or in whom you see defects.

3. The Path from Passivity to Creativity

- Be resolved to spend the day without the internet, radio or television. In your free time, read a book. Write down how it felt for you.
- When you facilitate the community liturgy, try to plan certain details that will stand out from the regular way you pray together.
- Examine how the furniture in your room is arranged and change it. Throw out something old; add something new. Write down what you think about the results.

None of the previous exercises by themselves will guarantee that you will be a deeper, more self-giving or creative person, but they can help you to understand the importance of cultivating these human aspects in order that the gift of faith take root in you.

3. Exercise for Community Meetings

During this summer time (especially the month of August), many European, African and American Claretians go on vacation. Because of this, it is not easy to organize community events and meetings; we have to postpone them to September. Nevertheless, in other places the regular schedule follows. Meetings can help organize various plans. If you cannot do all of these exercises, we recommend focusing on numbers two and three.

1. Begin with a **prayer** from the *Spiritual Directory* number 134.
2. Continue **reading Hebrews Chapter 11** with music in the background, if possible. Give out a copy of the reading to each person beforehand. It is best if a different person can read aloud a different section. It is important to give the reading the proper time and reverence. This is not just a mere procedure to begin the meeting, but its prologue. After the reading, have a period of silence. Anyone who wants to share out loud can say a word or phrase from the text that stood out for him.
3. After being with the Word of God, **the members of the community can read and comment on “the creed that gives meaning to my life” from exercise number three.** The goal is to share profoundly not what we do but what sustains our lives.
4. The community gathering can conclude **by going to see and discussing a movie** that has faith as a theme such as the film *Letters to God* (2010), *Of Gods and Men* (2010), ...



4. Reflections for the “lectio divina”

Wednesday, 1st August 2012

- Jer 15:10, 16-21
- Ps 58
- Mt 13:44-46

In Booklet 3 we meditate on the Reign of God. This mysterious reality is presented today with two symbols: the hidden treasure and the pearl of great worth. In both cases the value of what is found is emphasized, the joy it brings, and the price one ought to pay for it. The Kingdom demands “to sell it all”. The treasure of God cannot be compared to anything: “The gods and the kings of this earth do not satisfy me”.

Thursday, 2nd August 2012

- Jer 18:1-6
- Ps 145
- Mt 13:47-53

The parable of the drag-net well-explains what evangelical discernment is all about. It is not about fishing only for good fish using the finest net. If this were the case, the result would be impossible. Into the drag-net enters all. Things need to take their course. The selection goes to the very end. And what an Expert does is not amateurish.

Friday, 3rd August 2012

- Jer 26:1-9
- Ps 68
- Mt 13:54-58

For the people of his village, Jesus is only the son of the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas; that is to say, a common man. And what happens is that it is difficult to recognize the presence of God in the everyday human experiences. But, this is the great novelty of the Incarnation. The “Forge in our daily life” accentuates the ordinariness of life as a manifestation of the presence of God.

Saturday, 4th August 2012

- Jer 26:11-16, 24
- Ps 68
- Mt 14:1-12

How did Jesus feel when he found out that John had been decapitated? Certainly, sad and anxious. Those who are close to Jesus are always overcome by violent death. They are, as a paradigm of his own, His precursor (John) and His Vicar (Peter). To testify for Jesus is always to place oneself at the risk of martyrdom. But death is always the beginning of something new.

Sunday, 5th August 2012. 18th Sunday of Ordinary Time

- Ex 16:2-4, 12-15
- Ps 77
- Eph 4:17, 20-24
- Jn 6:24-35

What value do we attach to spiritual goods/treasures? The answer to this Question determines the emphasis we lay on faith and the Word of God. It determines the place of Jesus in our lives. Today many people count their blessings based on their economic statutes, and physical well being. This is working for the food that does not last. The heart of man ultimately longs for permanent happiness yet one is preoccupied with and actually invests one's energy, time resources mostly on perishable acquisitions. In this way one dies in everlasting thirst and hunger for this happiness which we can only reach through virtues that unite us with the source of imperishable treasures; God! Let's seek for Jesus himself not just for what we get from Him!

Monday, 6th August 2012. Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord

- Dn 7:9-10, 13-14
- Ps 96
- 2 Pt 1:16-19
- Mk 9:2-10

At the top of the mountain Jesus appears as the beloved Son of the Father. These are His credentials. For this we need to pay attention to His word. We have also received the vocation as sons. In the midst of the darkness of life, our gaze is illuminated when we live our true identity. Then we can descend with hope into the valley of daily life, although we do not understand everything that is happening to us.

Tuesday, 7th August 2012

- Jer 30:1-2, 12-15, 18-22
- Ps 101
- Mt 14:22-36

Today's Gospel alludes to the "boat of Jesus" four times. This boat which goes from one shore to another on the lake is an image of the community of Jesus, of the Church. The text of Matthew says that the boat "was pounded by the waves because of the strong wind". But it does not say that the disciples were afraid of the waves. It says that they were afraid... of Jesus, because they thought He was a ghost.

Wednesday, 8th August 2012

- Jer 31:1-7
- Ps (Jr 31:10,11-12,13)
- Mt 15:21-28

God's apparent silence and seeming rejection or even objection to our needs should be an Opportunity to prove how convinced we are, that he is the only true source of our help. Just as delay gives us chance to practice Patience and long Endurance, Insults give us opportunity to practice and grow in Humility. These virtues are very essential for men and Women of Faith who are heaven bound. These Virtues made the Samaritan woman one of great Faith in Jesus' rating.

Thursday, 9th August 2012

- Jer 31:31-34
- Ps 50
- Mt 16:13-23

It is my conviction of who Jesus is, for me, that counts in my salvation journey not what other, even the teachers of faith say He is. It is this personal conviction that gives us a place from in the heart of house of God. Mind you that this Personal conviction flows from personal encounter with Him.

Friday, 10th August 2012. Saint Lawrence

- 2 Cor 9:6-10
- Ps 111
- Jn 12:24-26

The words of Jesus about the grain of wheat are the response to Philip, Andrew, and some Greeks who had shown great interest in knowing him. Jesus did not make good use of his popularity to present metaphorical message. He loves them enough to reveal to them where the secret to a true life resides. He says it with the parable of the wheat and also openly, so that they don't feel frustrated in their Greek rationality: "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life".

Saturday, 11th August 2012

- Hb 1:12-2:4
- Ps 9
- Mt 17:14-20

The greatest reproaches of Jesus are not usually directed to sinful actions but for the lack of faith. The cure of the epileptic child is a sign of the power of Jesus, but the people don't believe. It is also our modern sin. We have almost everything, except the confidence that presupposes faith. Because of this we continue as prisoners of our evil ways.

Sunday, 12th August 2012. 19th Sunday of Ordinary Time

- 1 Kgs 19:4-8
- Ps 33
- Eph 4:30-5:2
- Jn 6:41-51

They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? Prejudice remains one of the greatest enemies of Faith, as it fans pride by blocking the listening ear. It creates an itching-ear by, hankering for a particular opinion which corresponds with my made-up mind. This kind of heart will resist every truth that is not in line with its obsession. Since it is prone to resisting change, not even God who works with our submission, can make the one accept the news that Jesus is the true bread of Life. Let us believe that we need Him today more than we need our Material obsessions. When we go beyond our limiting sensual obsessions we discover that the son of Mary is primarily the Son of God.

Monday, 13th August 2012. Blessed Martyrs of Barbastro

- Ez 1:2-5, 24-28c
- Ps 148
- Mt 17:22-27

Jesus had good reasons to challenge their demand that he pays the temple tax, yet he chose to avoid conflict with the collectors. They chose to work so as to pay their tax to evade unnecessary conflict. If we want peace and at the same time cannot sacrifice our opinions when necessary, then we are paying only lip service to it. For there to be peace someone must at a point let go one's conviction.

Tuesday, 14th August 2012

- Ez 2:8-3:4
- Ps 118
- Mt 18:1-5, 10, 12-14

In the sight of God, our greatness depends on our purity, manifests itself on our child like docility to His Word. Our greatness is in our conformity with Christ. This is his design for us all for all of us are of equal importance in his sight. We must learn docility and flexibility which make good clays in the hands the Great Potter. These Childlike qualities make growth into that image of us in God's mind possible.

Wednesday, 15th August 2012. Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

- Rv 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab
- Ps 44
- 1 Cor 15:20-27
- Lk 1:39-56

Corruptibility is a consequence of sin, it follows then that the sinless Mother of God has nothing to do with. The process of burial and corruption which all men and women must undergo before resurrection is not Mary's lot. Her perfect belief "that the Lord's word will come true", her fiat, gives credence and meaning to her assumption. Just like Jesus, her son, She had no need of the grave, nor has she any need of the transformation, which Paul spoke of in 1cor 15: 51-56. This transformation is due to sin. After let's ask; what would have become of our salvation had she not said yes to God's design. Hence our constant yes to God's Word is therefore what identifies us with her and her Son as heirs of God Kingdom.

Thursday, 16th August 2012

- Ez 12:1-12
- Ps 77
- Mt 18:21-19:1

Anything short of the constantly forgiving Father-heart of God is not worthy of Children of God. Unforgiving spirit is already a self imprisonment. On the other hand, making forgiveness my habit is living God's life; a life of permanent freedom and peace. The contrary is self destructive. God's mercy is our only hope since we have all sinned and deserve condemnation. Hence refusal to have mercy on our fellow sinner has no justification.

Friday, 17th August 2012

- Ez 16:1-15,60,63 or 16:59-63
- Ps (Is 12:2-6)
- Mt 19:3-12

Divorce is a contradiction of the essence of marriage, love. This is because marriage is an affirmation of love and love is eternal as it is God himself. Its permanence is sacred, divine and should be promoted as such against all odds. It is man's/women concrete way of telling the other; 'I love you'. Note that this statement in the present continuous tense. Thus Divorce empties this statement of its true meaning. The same can be said of infidelity in other kinds of vowed life like religious consecration.

Saturday, 18th August 2012

- Ez 18:1-10, 13b, 30-32
- Ps 50
- Mt 19:13-15

Simplicity, sincerity, and authenticity must define the Life of all who are heaven bound. This is our original state in which God made us and to which we must return. Children keep reminding us of this end. When we forget this growth becomes most difficult. We acquire all these necessary virtues via sincere life of service in true humility.

Sunday, 19th August. 20th Sunday of Ordinary Time

- Prv 9:1-6
- Ps 33
- Eph 5:15-20
- Jn 6:51-58

Jon 6:57, "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me". The Faithfulness of Christ, our Model, who lived because of His Father remains a daily Challenge to us who have accepted to eat Him regularly. Do I truly believe he is the one I receive daily? How much do I live because of Him? How much of me can I identify with him?

Monday, 20th August 2012

- Ez 24:15-24
- Ps (Dt 32:18-21)
- Mt 19:16-22

The great sin of possession is not in how much we possess but how attached we are to what we have. Can we let go when the time comes. When we get too attached to what we have those things now become our possessors and we become their possessions. When this is the case those things now will be dictating our Choices. That is how wealth creates social classes of discrimination keeping the gap between the rich and the poor unbridgeable. As we make the distinction between having and being attached to what we have let us always remember that; the more we acquire the more difficult it becomes to let. The difficult does not take time to reach the height of impossibility. When riches dictate for one whom to accept or reject, how then can we all belong to a Kingdom where we are all first born?

Tuesday, 21st August 2012

- Ez 28:1-10
- Ps (Dt 32:26-30,35-36)
- Mt 19:23-30

Journey to the Kingdom of God where we need nothing earthly is impossible without complete freedom. In fact nothing is more enslaving than material possession, worse still when we make them indispensable in our life. It not only makes the journey difficult but even most times impossible. Hence the rich man's difficulty will be as hard as a Carmel passing through the eye of a needle. The call here is both shading off the load and accepting the dispensability of even the necessary one when the Word demands it.

Wednesday, 22nd August 2012

- Ez 34:1-11
- Ps 22
- Mt 20:1-16

Jesus challenges us. What counts in the Kingdom is grace not worthiness. It is good to work. Good to have wine-growers at all hours, but it is God who pays the salary. In productive times such as ours, the Gospel that gives grace is disconcerting, but it is the only thing that saves. We understand it better when in the journey of life we come to the end of the race. Then we are closer than all of the disinherited. And we give thanks that the Wine-grower welcomes and rewards us.

Thursday, 23rd August 2012

- Ez 36:23-28
- Ps 50
- Mt 22:1-14

God's alternatives are infinite, thus it becomes clear that his choice of man who keep rebelling against him is pure gratis. In this vein a choice to respond positively to his invitations remains the wisest decision anybody can take. Still my response must be selfless, sincere, in accordance to his directives. It is not enough to accept and attend the wedding; the proper garment is indispensable too. Making a vow is good but when it can't be lived, Ecclesiastes 5:4. Says; "When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. 5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay".

Friday, 24th August 2012. St. Bartholomew

- Rv 21:9b-14
- Ps 144
- Jn 1:45-51

Most destructive prejudices that mislead our judgements come from hearsay, unverified rumours. The solution remains the invitation of Philip: “come and see”. It is only by drawing close to Jesus that we can truly know him. Other people’s accounts most time need interpretations and most times need sifting to distinguish the massager from the messenger. Our accounts are always coloured by our weaknesses and exaggerations. If we remain with Him then, his glory becomes ours. We will not only know him but become his bearers.

Saturday, 25th August 2012

- Ez 43:1-7b
- Ps 84
- Mt 23:1-12

The most we can be is the Channel of God’s grace and never the source of it. We are only being fare to our true selves by being servants that we are meant to be. No amount of pretence, in good works or in authority and power exercise, can make one (man or woman) the God of others. Should men/women then try to make us their God, it is wise to discourage them, for it is mere self deceit to accept what we are not and cannot be. The true wisdom and Humility is awareness of one’s rightful place and taking it. Man is father to the other only in participation to God’s fatherhood.

Sunday 26th August 2012. 21st Sunday of Ordinary Time

- Jos 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b
- Ps 33
- Eph 5:21-32
- Jn 6:60-69

Jon 6:69 “and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” If we truly believe His Word which we hear each day we shall come to know Him enough as to remain with him even when the world around us opposes Him and all that He stands for. Then we shall truly be servants of the message, the Word, of eternal life. Our fidelity to Him, His Word, defines our stewardship. Our lack of faith can only make us betray him, since we cannot know him enough as to stand by him unto our eternal salvation.

Monday 27th August 2012. St. Monica

- 2 Thes 1:1-5, 11-12
- Ps 95
- Mt 23:13-22

Jesus gave a good piece of mind against the teachers of the law and the pharisees. Among the seven reproaches, today’s Gospel present the first three. The pharisees are wicked because they close the doors of the Kingdom of heaven (they neither open nor leave open), perverting the converted as blind guides and hypocrites. Jesus is very concrete so as not to be misinterpreted. The attitude of the pharisees run throughout history of the Church, as well as in ours.

Tuesday 28th August 2012. St. Augustine

- Jr 15:10,16-21
- Ps 58
- Mt 13:44-46

Sell everything, wage it all... It is necessary to have the audacity of he who has encountered the only thing that is worthwhile: the hidden treasure, the pearl of great worth. In the face of thgis, anything else is “trash” and for this Jesus Himself goes to the extremes to give His life. “Occupy yourselves with the things of the Father” which will mean to place all of your energy in reaching the Kingdom of God and His justice.

Wednesday 29th August 2012. The Martyrdom of St John the Baptist

- Jr 1:17-19
- Ps 70
- Mk 6:17-29

The beheading of John the Baptist represents the fleeting triumph of the fearful and the cowards. When one voice makes you uncomfortable it is easy to silence it; what is most difficult, but also most liberating, is to accept the truth it contains and carry it out.

Thursday 30th August 2012

- 1 Cor 1:1-9
- Ps 144
- Mt 24:42-51

We are mostly taken unawares in the everyday coming of the Lord, which is meant to prepare us for his final coming. A tree falls towards the direction it is bent unless drawn or pushed away from it. At each moment of Challenge when truth, light, and/or love is demanded of us, it is actually the Lord who has coming knocking to be witnessed to. When we live up to the Word, we are temporally experiencing a foretaste of the eternal Wedding feast. I believe that Love, truth and faith are the oils that burn to produce the light with which to welcome the Bridegroom when he comes, either in his daily coming or the end-time coming.

Friday 31st August 2012

- 1 Cor 1:17-25
- Ps 32
- Mt 25:1-13

For the Word of God to make meaning and be fruitful in our lives, our hearts must be a new one. The newness here is not about time/age, but about character/ quality. It implies docility and availability, agility with flexibility and elasticity. Remember that what marks an aging heart is usually rigidity and bunged up state with great difficulty in welcoming new ideas. A new heart must be one that is highly accommodating without complacency. In this manner, the heart readily unites with the ever-new Word of God, thus keeps bearing fruits required of Children of the Kingdom.

Saturday 1st September 2012

- 1 Cor 1:26-31
- Ps 32
- Mt 25:14-30

The talents that are truly ours are those we consciously put to work. After all it is the fruits that we bear that reveal our talents. We do not truly deserve those talents we refuse to use/develop, unto fruit bearing. Justice demands that those gifts/talents be given away to those who will fulfil the purpose of the giver. God has endowed us with many gifts so that we build the kingdom with them. Hiding them therefore, insults or mocks the giver. Obviously hiding our talents amounts to betrayal of the trust the Lord the giver of all, has in his people who received them. Now, what are my talents? Do I know them? Do I development?

Sunday 2nd September 2012. 22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

- Dt 4:1-2, 6-8
- Ps 14
- Jas 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27
- Mk 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Today's Gospel offers us some words of Jesus about the true cleansing. It is much easier to wash one's hands than to purify the heart, to keep up appearances than to change inside. The battle between good and evil is judged in the center of our person. Only when we are "clean of heart" are we able to see God.

Monday 3rd September 2012

- 1 Cor 2:1-5
- Ps 118
- Lk 4:16-30

This text from Luke is what most inspired the prophetic vocation of our Founder. In this are contained all the elements that help us to understand our own missionary vocation: anointed by the Spirit, announcing the Gospel, preference for the poor, preference of grace over vengeance, persecution because of the Word, etc.

Tuesday 4th September 2012

- 1 Cor 2:10b - 16
- Ps 144
- Lk 4:31-37

When we stop at knowing and recognising Jesus we are not better than the demoniac He met in the synagogue of Capernaum. He knew Jesus but rejected Him just like a PhD Christian minister who lives by discrimination, exploitation and oppression of other people. No matter how high this kind of minister reaches in ecclesiastical hierarchy, he cannot speak with the authority that saves those in the bondage of our sinful world. Our knowledge of Jesus must lead to a sincere hunger for union with him, all authority in heaven and on earth and under the earth become our too.

Wednesday 5th September 2012

- 1 Cor 3:1-9
- Ps 32
- Lk 4:38-44

When a missionary becomes popular the temptation of attachment heightens. This necessitates one to recall one's ultimate end as a missionary. Am I called to popularize myself or to popularize Jesus who chose and sent me?

As long as there are those who are yet to hear about, know and receive Jesus, the Missionary keeps moving. His main Question is; where does the Master need me now? Not; where will I get more acclamation?

Thursday 6th September 2012

- 1 Cor 3:18-23
 - Ps 23
 - Lk 5:1-11
- If there is a generation that needs to 'put out into the deep water', it is ours. In the past it was easier to make decision regarding spiritual matters. Now we have innumerable and contradictory opinions due to civilization and modernity, many of which though attractive, are empty and void of substance. Today, to make a choice, to reach an authentic spiritual good one needs a deeper search directed by the Master Himself, otherwise we toil and toil and catch nothing. Blessed is that one who will listen and obey the Master's directive. He will never toil in vain.

Friday 7th September 2012

- 1 Cor 4:1-5
 - Ps 36
 - Lk 5:33-39
- For the Word of God to make meaning and be fruitful in our lives, our hearts must be a new one. The newness here is not about time/age, but about character/ quality. It implies docility and availability, agility with flexibility and elasticity. Remember that what marks an aging heart is usually rigidity and bunged up state with great difficulty in welcoming new ideas.
- A new heart must be one that is highly accommodating without complacency. In this manner, the heart readily unites with the ever-new Word of God, thus keeps bearing fruits required of Children of the Kingdom.

Saturday 8th September 2012. The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

- Mi 5:1-4a or
 - Rm 8:28-30
 - Ps 86
 - Mt 1:1-16, 18-23 or 1:18-23
- The essence of our birth is the fulfilment of our destiny. This is how the birth of Jesus gave meaning to the birth of Our Mother Mary. Unless we realize and fulfil our vocation in faithfulness, then it would be better we were not born at all. This is call to diligence and fidelity to our vowed life which is a witness to the World about God's love and eternal plan of salvation for man. Today We celebrate the birth of Mary because that day began the good news that she is to Humanity. Happy Birthday Our Sweet Mother!

Sunday 9th September 2012. 23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

- Is 35:4-7a
 - Ps 145-146
 - Jas 2:1-5
 - Mk 7:31-37
- In a generation where science and technology claim to have answers to every human problem, and often lead many to despair, looking up the heaven becomes imperative. The Lord of heaven and earth is here our final resort for help. When we acknowledge this, in truth and Spirit, then our Deafness will give way to clarity in hearing and Dumbness to eloquence in speech. This is most needed in our world of today where too many contradictory and contrary messages are released to the confusion of even very serious minds. In this way Jesus the way, the truth and the life, will be proclaimed.

Monday 10th September

- 1 Cor 5:1-8
Ps 5
Lk 6:6-11
- Any opportunity to do good ought not be wasted, especially when we realize that our mission on earth is to continue God's work of creation and the maintenance of goodness wherever it is lacking in creation. That is what I understood by, "increase and multiply and conquer the earth". Every law must enhance this responsibility. More so the Sabbath day law.

Tuesday 11th September

- 1 Cor 6:1-11
Ps 149
Lk 6:12-19
- If we shall always listen to God before every project, then we can proudly say like Jesus that we have come to do the father's will. Every worthwhile project we engage in, is first His project, obviously the master is with Him. In prayers we are sure of choosing what/who He had first chosen.

Wednesday 12th September

- 1 Cor 7:25-31
Ps 44
Lk 6:20-26
- To be poor in the spirit is to refuse to be possessed by creature. This is because the end point of riches is being possessed unless one is clearly and sincerely detached. These riches include intellectual, social, economic, and even physical attributes like beauty, health and strength. When we refuse to be ruled by any/all of these, then we become true disciple of the Son of Man.

Thursday 13th September 2012

- 1 Cor 8:1b-7, 11-13
 - Ps 138
 - Lk 6:27-38
- Evil remains abhorrent in God's sight whether we did it in revenge or we initiated it. If we hate those who hate us we are still bearer of evil. And as the Scripture says nothing evil will enter the Kingdom of God. No amount of reason can justify perpetration of evil. The mission of every evil is the destruction of its perpetrators. The mission of Jesus is to return everything to initial goodness in which God the Father made them. Gen. 1:31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. Let us work with Him in this Divine mandate.

Friday 14th September 2012. The Exaltation of the Holy Cross

- Nm 21:4b-9
 - Ps 77
 - Phil 2:6-11
 - Jn 3:13-17
- The way in which our generation rejects the Cross questions the completeness of the Gospel we received. Could it mean that some preacher preached the Christ who did not carry a cross and died on it or we listened selectively and chose only the easy ways? One thing is sure; the Cross precedes the crown as far as human salvation is concerned. The earlier we train our minds and strengthen our hearts to embrace the Cross when ever God allows it on our journey to real life, the better for us. Consider this question? If we reject the Cross that comes our way in life how can we behold His Cross (Jesus') and be saved?

Saturday 15th September 2012. Our Lady of Sorrows

- 1 Cor 10:14-22
 - Ps 30
 - Jn 19:25-27 or
 - Lk 2:33-35
- Mary, the first Disciple has shown us that authentic Followership means participation both in the Master's sufferings and joys. Actually Jesus did not come only to "do it for us" but "to do it with us" as well. Did St Augustine not tell us that God who created us without our permission cannot save us without our permission/corporation? Our Mother Mary is a model in living this ideal. Those who desire to partner in joy must first accept to partner in sorrow. Oh! Mother Mary teaches us to realize and appreciate the saving power Suffering in Christ.

Sunday 16th September 2012. 24th Sunday of Ordinary Time

- Is 50:5-9a
 - Ps 114
 - Jas 2:14-18
 - Mk 8:27-35
- Jesus invites us not to take knowledge of Him for granted. One thing is sure, we can never know Him enough. The more we discover who he is the more the need to know more. God who took our flesh and became like us in all things cannot be contented the Spiritual Mediocrity of just knowing about Him in Jesus his Son. He wants us to have Him not just to know Him. People, Studies and other external media can only make us know about Him. But only Personal encounter with His Person can make us Have.

Monday 17th September 2012

- 1Cor 11:17-26, 33
 - Ps 39
 - Lk 7:1-10
- "Say the word and let my servant be healed" the Centurion challenges us to meditate on the extent we believe in the power of the Word/command of Jesus. Discovery of the Centurion built the confidence that merited him Jesus' acclamation of his faith. Faith comes by hearing, as long as we don't doubt or even reject what we hear. The moment we acknowledge the authority of Jesus His words comes alive in our day to day affairs.

Tuesday 18th September 2012

- 1 Cor 12:12-14 ...
 - Ps 99
 - Lk 7:11-17
- The power of Jesus is truly shown via his compassion. This reveals to us that God's presence, which restores life to the dead, manifests more in the compassionate heart. This is an invitation to check ourselves as regards where we lay emphasis about our growth. We may become intellectual giants, but without a compassionate heart our knowledge and power can only promote a culture of death, passively or even actively via misapplication.

Wednesday 19th September 2012

- 1 Cor 12:31-13:13
 - Ps 32
 - Lk 7:31-35
- Let the world criticise or even our piety but as long as we bear good fruits the wisdom of our activities will remain their judge. Of course, it is not popular acclamation that justifies our activities but their effects and fruits. Genuine piety will always produce fruits of Wisdom, since they are prompted by Wisdom Himself.

Thursday 20th September 2012

- 1 Cor 15:1-11
 - Ps 117-118
 - Lk 7:36-50
- When we are rid of Sin we spare nothing for love. We love little because of the effect of sin in us. Let's take a moment to evaluate how we feel when we make good confession. That is, when I feel truly forgiven. If the state of my mind is the same, both before and after confession, then I have not made a good confession. Did our Faith not reveal to us that sin kills and at the confessional we are given new life? For someone not to be excited at the reception of this new life will rather be strange.

Friday 21st September 2012. Feast of St. Mathew

- Eph 4:1-7, 11-13
 - Ps 18
 - Mt 9:9-13
- Sinners need the Saviour, as those that are sick need a physician. It was therefore proper that he should be with such, for the purpose of doing them good. And if any were really righteous, as the Pharisees imagined that they were, they did not need his presence as a Saviour. It is sometimes right to associate even with the openly vicious, for the purpose of doing them good. They are among the poor to whom we must carry the Good news of Salvation. Avoiding them can only be pharisaic. Let us meet them wherever they are and create opportunity for more "Mathews".

Saturday 22nd September 2012

- 1 Cor 15:35-37...
 - Ps 55
 - Lk 8:4-15
- When Jesus enters into a crisis His messages gives a flash of clarity. Without the crisis of Jesus, many of the crossroads that we run through would have remained in the shadows. Jesus had to pass through it badly to confirm that His liberating message was not as accepted as one would have wished. The seed of the Word is always good and overabundant, but it does not automatically produce fruit. It enters into a play of productivity with the terrain. There are very good lands and others

Sunday 23rd September 2012. 25th Sunday of Ordinary Time

- Wis 2:12, 17-20
 - Ps 53
 - Jas 3:16-4:3
 - Mk 9:30-37
- When people realize the true nature of leadership as a call to lay down one's life for one's subjects they stop fighting to take it up. Yes when we lay down our lives in sincerity definitely it will be trampled upon, even crushed by people, and then we become bread of life like our Master. Unless a grain of wheat falls down and dies, it will not multiply itself for the Many who need it to live. How many, among those who struggle to be leaders, are prepared to serve, that is, Lay down their lives for the sake of others?

Monday 24th September 2012

- Prv 3:27-34
 - Ps 14
 - Lk 8:16-18
- The attitude of hiding our lights, the truth we know, the treasure in us could be either selfish or ignorance. Whichever it is remains detrimental to the bearer. It is only when we share God's which we receive in the secrecy of our hearts that the reason for their reception is achieved. Lights can only disperse darkness when we expose it.

Tuesday 25th September 2012

- Prv 21:1-6, 10-13
 - Ps 118
 - Lk 8:19-21
- It is our common experience that not all who delight in being called Christians also delight in living Christian purely. People even force personal interpretations to otherwise ascertained Scriptural texts to justify their whims and caprices. What identifies us with Christ and all those who follow him is total submission to the Will of the Father. So the new Kingdom/Family being established by the Son of man has the Spirit (the Word that gives life) as its foundation, not natural blood relationship of the nuclear family.

Wednesday 26th September 2012

- Prv 30:5-9
 - Ps 118
 - Lk 9:1-6
- We too have been empowered to rid the world of demons and diseases of unbelief and hatred. How much do we believe this? As long as we do not instead compromise with the world, on our Sonship, the sky will be our limit in this project. Can we possibly identify with the world and still be able to witness against its ills? Well, this is a personal question and calls for a personal answer.

Thursday 27th September 2012

- Eccl 1:2-11
 - Ps 89
 - Lk 9:7-9
- If one wants peace of mind in all circumstances one must maintain a clean conscience, because conscience is the seat of happiness. We can silence people successfully but not the conscience when it has been defiled. Herod could not but be worried since lust and pride led him to imprison and behead John the Baptist. Let us then be mindful of how we form and treat this all important voice in each and every one of us. The day of commission is our but the days reckoning will be his.

Friday 28th September 2012

- Eccl 3:1-11
 - Ps 143
 - Lk 9:18-22
- What is said of Jesus today are the same things that were said in the past, only the circumstances have changed. He is called the “marginal Jew”, “wise man”, “healer”, “code of the absolute”, etc. The confession of Peter, which is the confession of the Church, continues orienting us into the sea of qualifications: Jesus is the “suffering” Son of God. With this conclusion there can be no exegesis not human science. To enter into the mystery of Jesus is only accessible through faith.

Saturday 29th September 2012. Feast of the Archangels, Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael.

- Dn 7:9-10, 13-14 or Rev 12:7-12a
 - Ps 137
 - Jn 1:47-51
- We too are destined to see greater things should we keep believing against all odds, should we not stop at the initial instant marvel that goes with the first encounter of a special person. The last things are always more glorious should one persevere in goodness. How many times have we made excitingly positive remarks on a brother in the community only to castigate and hate at the slightest manifestation of his human weakness. If we remain positive with one another we shall see the glory of God hidden in each and every one of us.

Sunday 30th September 2012. 26th Sunday of Ordinary Time

- Nm 11:25-29
 - Ps 18
 - Jas 5:1-6
 - Mk 9:38-43, 45, 47-48
- Anyone who does works of love must not be stopped because the power to do good work comes only from God. God cannot be limited to our human parameters. Belonging to Jesus' group is more spiritual than physical. Actually the conflict we experience among religions and denominations arises from our spiritual/internal dispositions not our physical/external dispositions. If everyone is honestly working for and in Love, our disagreements will only become moments of mutual enrichment. This is because the same Love will compel us to listen to and understand the opposite sides of the story we have. Could this apply to the facts of our cultural differences? If we are spiritually together physical distance is of no negative consequence.



5. For further study

Appendix I: “Being Rooted and Built Up in Christ” (Benedict XVI for WYD, Madrid 2011)

In order to highlight the importance of faith the believer's life, let us examine three terms that St. Paul uses in Col 2:7: “...rooted in him and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” We distinguish three different images here: Being rooted or grounded invokes a tree and its roots that give it sustenance. Being built up refers to its construction. Established alludes to the growth in physical and moral strength. These images are eloquent and meaningful. Before further comment, we point out that the three images in the original text are grammatically in the “passive voice”. This means that it is Christ himself who takes initiative to root, to build and to strengthen believers.

The first image is the tree which is firmly planted in the ground because of its roots. Without roots, the wind would topple the tree and it would die. What are our roots? Naturally, the parents, the family and the culture of our country are very important aspects of our identity. The bible is another root for us. The prophet Jeremiah writes, “Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose hope is the Lord. He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretch out its roots to the stream: It fears not the heat when it comes, its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit.” (Jer. 17:7-8). According to Jeremiah, to put down roots means to return to the Lord and put one's faith in God. Our life comes from God and without God we cannot live the truth. God gave us eternal life and this life is through his Son (1 John 5:11). Jesus himself is presented as The Life (John 14: 6). Through this, the Christian faith is not only to believe in the truth, but above all is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The encounter with the Son of God provides a new dynamic to all creation. When we begin to have a new relationship with Jesus Christ, He will show us our true identity and with His friendship; His life in us grows in abundance. In our youth, we ask ourselves: What is the meaning of my life? Why am I here? How should I live? These questions trouble our souls. Sometimes the search for answers takes a long time. We wonder what kind of job we will have, what relationships will be established, what feelings for others will develop.

In this context, I return to memories of my own youth. In one way, I might have suddenly sensed that the Lord wanted me to be a priest. But later, after the war when I was in college seminary after I followed this way of life, I had to regain that certainty. I had to ask myself: Is this truly my path in life? Is this God's will for me? Will I have the ability to remain faithful to Him and have a total devotion to God in service?

To answer these caused suffering—it cannot be any other way. But afterwards, I was certain of this path, everything is fine. If the Lord wants me to do this, he will give me

the strength. By listening to the Lord and being with Him, I become who was meant to be. Realizing my own desires does not matter—what matters is God's will. In this, life becomes authentic.

Just as the roots of a tree remain firmly planted in the ground, the foundation of a house gives it lasting stability. By means of faith, we are grounded in Christ (cf. Col. 2: 7) and it is like a house built on a strong foundation. In our history of faith, we have many examples of holy men and women and saints who have built their lives on the Word of God. The first was Abraham. Our father in faith obeyed God who asked him to leave his home in order to travel to a land he did not know (Gen. 12: 1ff). To be rooted in Christ means to respond concretely to God's call, to be fixed on the Lord and to put his word into practice. Jesus himself reprimanded his disciples, “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ but not do what I command?” (Lk. 6: 46). Returning to the image of building a house he added, “I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, listens to my words, and acts on them. That one is like a person building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when the flood came, the river burst against that house but could not shake it because it had been well built” (Lk. 6: 47-48).

My friends, build your house like the man who dug deeply to lay the foundation-- over rock. Also, intend to receive the Word of God daily. Listen, as a true friend to the Lord with whom we share the Way of life. With the Lord at our side, we will be able to face our difficulties, problems, disillusionments, and failures with courage and hope. You will be offered continually easier ways but you yourselves will realize that falsehoods do not give serenity or happiness. Only the Word of God shows us the real path. Only the faith that has been passed to us is the light that illumines the way. With gratitude, welcome this spiritual gift that we have received from our families and strive to respond responsibly to God's call and be made mature in faith. Do not believe those who say that it is not necessary to build up our life of faith. On the other hand, help your loved ones in the faith—the faith of the Church-- and give thanks to the Lord who has given us faith and formed us.

Mary, as a pilgrim of the faith is the star of the third millennium. The following text from St. Luke announces the first blessing of the Gospels: “Blessed is she who believed”. This expression is “like a key which unlocks for us the innermost reality of Mary” (*Redemptoris Mater* 19) Because of this, as a crowning of the great jubilee year’s teaching, we would like to present the mother of our Lord as a pilgrim of faith. As a daughter of Zion, she follows Abraham’s footsteps, who through and obedient faith “was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; he went out not knowing where he was to go (Heb. 11:8) This symbol of a faith pilgrimage illumines Mary’s interior life as the most excellent believer. The Second Vatican Council already suggests: The Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her Son unto the cross (LG 58). The Annunciation “is the point of departure from which (Mary’s) journey towards God begins-- her whole pilgrimage of faith” (RM 14). This road of faith knew the premonition of the sword piercing her heart (Lk. 2:35); passed through tortuous roads in her exile to Egypt and the interior darkness when Mary did not understand the 12 year old Jesus’ attitude in the temple but she “kept all these things in her heart” (Lk. 2: 51).

Jesus hidden life also developed in obscurity; at which time through Elizabeth’s blessing, Mary had to resonate its meaning interiorly through a “heaviness of heart” (RM 17). Certainly, Mary’s life does not lack divine inspiration such as the wedding at Cana where despite a seeming indifference, Christ welcomed Mary’s prayer and performed the first sign which lifted up the disciples faith (Jn. 2: 1-12). With the same contrast between light and darkness, revelation and mystery, we see the two blessings to which St. Luke refers: The blessing that directed the mother of Christ as mother of many; and the blessing that destined Jesus to those who hear the word of God and observe it.

The peak of this earthly pilgrimage of faith is Golgotha. This is where Mary intimately experienced the Paschal mystery of her Son. In a certain sense, Mary died the death of her Son and the “resurrection” was opened up in a new maternal way in respect to the Church (Cf Jn. 19: 25-27). Through Calvary, Mary experienced a turning point in faith similar to Abraham on Mount Moriah. After the enlightenment of Pentecost, she followed her pilgrimage of faith in the Assumption when her Son welcomed her to heaven.

The Virgin Mary as a blessing “continues to ‘go before’ the People of God. Her exceptional pilgrimage of faith represents a constant point of reference for the Church, for individuals and for communities, for peoples and nations and in a sense, for all humanity (RM 6). She is the star of the third millennium as she was in the beginning of the Christian era; the dawn that preceded Jesus on history’s horizon. Indeed, Mary was born before Jesus, gave birth to him and brought him into the history of humanity. We are directed to her in order to be guided to Christ and to the Father. She is also there for us in the darkness of sin and in moments of doubts, crisis, loneliness and suffering.

The Eastern church lifts up its special song, the *Akathistos*, to her. The lyrics in the 24 verses of this song exalt Mary. In the fifth verse, dedicated to Elizabeth’s visit, it exclaims,

O Land yielding the untainted Fruit.
Rejoice, O Husbandry of the merciful Husbandman.
Rejoice, O birth giver to the Planter of our life.
Rejoice, O Field bearing abundant compassion.
Rejoice, O Table laden with an abundance of mercies.
Rejoice, for you make the meadow produce contentment.
Rejoice, for you prepare a haven for souls.
Rejoice, acceptable Incense of intercession.
Rejoice, Oblation for all the world.
Rejoice, Favor of God to mortals.
Rejoice, Access of mortals to God.
Rejoice, O Bride Ever-Virgin.

The visitation of Elizabeth concludes with the canticle of the Magnificat. Because of its enduring melody, it is a hymn that crosses over the Christian centuries and unites the hearts of Christ’s followers to rise above the historical divisions that we promise to overcome to a sense of complete communion. In this ecumenical climate, it is good to remember that Martin Luther, in his famous comments in 1521, dedicated this “holy canticle of the blessedness of the Mother of God”.

Through him, it affirms that “the hymn would have to be understood and kept in the memory of all... (and) Mary, in the Magificat, teaches how we ought to love and praise God...she wants to be the greatest example of God’s grace in order to urge everyone of the faith and the praise of Divine Grace (M. Luther, *Scritti Religiosi* noted in V. Vanay, Turin 1967 pp. 431 and 512).

Mary celebrates God’s primacy. Through grace, God chooses the people who are despised and last, the poor of God of whom the Old Testament speaks. Their way is changed and they are introduced as focal points of salvation history. Since God lovingly looked upon Mary, she was changed with a sign of hope for the numerous poor-- the last of the world that they would be first in the Kingdom of God. She faithfully models dedication to Christ her Son so that all the afflicted ones in history will hear, “Come to me all you labor and are burdened and I will give you rest” (Mt. 11:28). The Church follows Mary and the Lord Jesus walking through each difficult step of history in order to rise up, promote and value the unbounded procession of poor men and women, those who are hungry, the humble and those who are offended (cf. Lk 1: 52-53). The humble Virgin of Nazareth as St. Ambrose affirmed is not the “God of the temple, but the temple of God” (*De Spiritu Sancto* III 11, 80). As such, all who return to Mary will know her guidance and she will help them encounter the Trinity-- Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (*L’Osservatore Romano* 23 March 2001).

Rejoice, O branch of the unwithering Vine. Rejoice,

In order to respond to all of these challenges, we ask, "What qualities or characteristics should an authentic Christian have?"

A) Faith, as the Center and Foundation of Life

Faith cannot be relegated to the periphery of life like many other things. If God is the foundation and center of humanity, our connection with God also needs to be at the center. The Christian faith is authentic when one's whole being is structured and develops in faith. Faith is not something that is added to one's life but the primary and operating motivator of all life. Faith is converted into strength that transforms and inspires (EN #19). For this reason, we cannot consider faith as something we have once and for all; neither does faith have prefabricated answers for all situations in life. Christian faith lives in loving relationship-- that is alive and personal-- with God not only in pietistic practices or the confessional formulas. In actual crises, the Christian faith can be strengthened by listening to God, in intimacy with Him, and in obedience to his word.

B) Faith in Personal Experience

To believe in God and to live in faith is to experience God and Jesus Christ on a personal level. An experience that emerges and starts from personal encounters with God discovers that only God gives answers to our challenges, yearnings, and to our essential and intimate questions. This means that our belief is not as much concerned with truths, words or formulas, but our faith is a connection to a Person in whom we believe and in whom we put our total trust. In order to have faith experiences, we maintain an interpersonal relationship with the living and true God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This relationship nourishes our listening to His word and our prayer life.

This results in living as sons and daughters of God, doing the will of the Father and loving others as brothers and sisters. The one who has this experience is converted to be salt of the earth and light of the world (cf. Mt 5: 13-16).

C) A Shared Faith Celebrated in Community

The Christian's faith is not lived in isolation. Thanks to the Church, one is a Christian within the Church. The Church is not optional for the Christian in the sense that he can opt out and live the Christian faith on the margin or even outside the Church. Personal faith and ecclesiastical faith need each other. Certainly, faith is a personal act. As we mature in faith, we can say "I believe" because the Church proclaims, "We believe". Our faith, being formed in God's word as well as God's saving presence through the sacraments all come from the Church.

In our individualistic and fragmented cultures, our Christian faith today needs to be manifest in the community. Our faith needs to be the faith of others and needs to be expressed and celebrated in common. The Church ought to be what calls us together as a redeemed and saved People of God. The faith should believe itself to be an instrument of unity and fraternity because it exceeds normal human limits.

D) A Living and Incarnate Faith Connected to the World

It is not possible to believe in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ from the margin. It is not possible to run away from God in this world. The reason is clear: "For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son" (Jn 3:16). Vatican II expressed it beautifully, "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men and women. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every person. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with humankind and its history by the deepest of bonds." (GS 1)

Christians, called to transform the world to the Kingdom of God, do this from within the world and our history. This is the unique nature of the incarnation through the same design of the savior, in order to rescue humanity, "God made his dwelling among us." A faith that is not incarnated in the world risks becoming an ideology or becoming a theory about God but not oneness with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

E) A Faith Witness

Faith is not for the personal benefit of the Christian neither should we resort to faith only in difficult moments and much less to use it to plug holes in one's life. Faith enables us to announce and serve the Kingdom of God without a superiority complex nor with an inferiority complex such as asking permission to announce it. One cannot live faith with a shameful attitude of silence. Anyone who has heard Christ and remains with Him is converted as a witness of Christ. For this reason, the Christian witness is more necessary now than ever. "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 41)

F) Faith that Lives in Love

It is not easy to live as a Christian in a fragmented and secularized world that at times is confrontational. In this crisis of civilization with all our western technological developmental effects, interior impoverishment comes through the forgetting and marginalization of God. In these circumstances, neither the purely sociological motivations nor the illusions that are born from human plans are helpful. It is only the power of love that comes from the conviction that God is on humanity's side and precisely through today's men and women is capable of overcoming the complexes of being in the minority, being persecuted and subject to indifference. We must respond with love to this crisis of civilization. This love must be founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice and freedom. All of these are realized fully in Christ. In these changing, contemporary times, all Christians are called upon to live these actions.

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The Forge in Our Daily Life

PATRIS MEI - 2012

“

While our missionaries need all virtues, they must first of all have a lively faith, in order to be able to respond to their own vocation.”

(Constitutions 62)