

The Forge

caritas christi

in our daily life



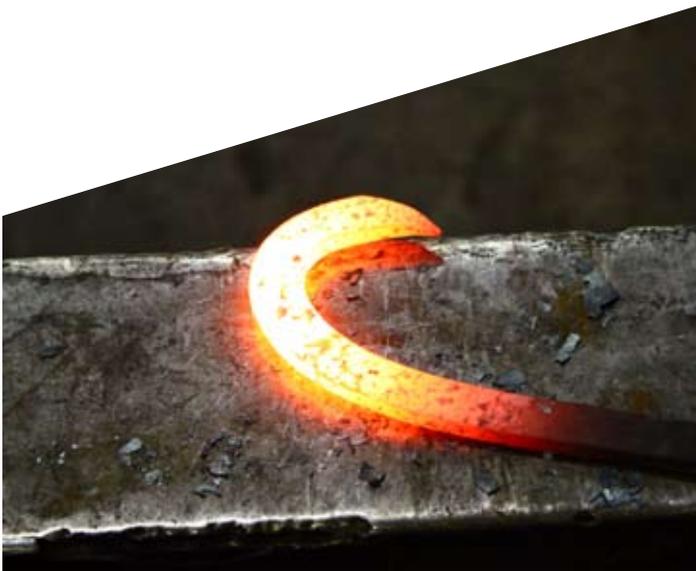
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Chaste for the kingdom of heaven

Ordinary Time II

CARITAS CHRISTI

2013



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

OBJECTIVES

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

BOOKLETS

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

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1. Introduction

Once again we are back on to the ordinary time of the liturgical year after living meaningfully, both at a personal and pastoral level, the joyful experience of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus whose faithful imitators we constantly strive to be in consecrated living. Interestingly, this period of the liturgical year coincides also with number of major feasts like **the feasts of the Body and Blood of Christ, of the Most Holy Trinity, of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary**. They assume a special significance when seen under the light of the theme of Celibate Chastity that the Forge project recommends for our reflection in this liturgical season. These feasts, in a special way, are also a reminder of the infinite love of God and the Blessed Virgin for each one of us. It is in fact, the fire of love of Christ that impels us to become imitators of Him in consecrated living. The Immaculate Heart of

the Blessed Virgin is also a symbol of the perfectly chaste consecration to God in love. In addition, during this period (on 13th June) we also commemorate **the 178th ordination anniversary of our Founder Anthony Mary Claret**. Seen against the backdrop of these important celebrations, the theme we have for our reflection in this period is very pertinent and meaningful.

Celibate chastity forms a fundamental dimension of our lives as consecrated persons. It involves our whole person, our sexuality, affectivity, and our relationships. It may be worthwhile to ask yourself at this stage: How far has the experience of the Forge in the past two stages (*Quid Prodest, Patris Mei*), helped you in better integrating this dimension of your life? What has your experience been of living your celibate chastity as a consecrated religious so far? The words of St. Paul that our founder adopted -*the love of Christ impels*



us- say a lot about the passionate zeal that he felt for God and for humanity. He loved to pray thus: “My God, I want nothing of this world, nothing but your grace, your holy love and heavenly glory” (Aut 636). Claret’s heart, which burned with the fire of God’s love and his passion to save the souls of human beings, bears ample testimony to the level of affective integrity that he was able to arrive at. He constantly prayed God for the gift of chaste love and took care to safeguard himself with the help of the blessed Virgin when dangers against chastity were present. **Chastity is that spiritual energy capable of defending love from the perils of selfishness and aggressiveness, and enables us to advance towards full realization of love.**

Our celibate chastity as religious is a charism that we have received and is not an ecclesiastical imposition. It is rooted in our religious experience of the awesome attractiveness and power of God’s love that invite us to become His spouses. It is this distinctive companionship with God alone that makes celibacy genuinely religious and adds to a celibate life style the possibility of fidelity. It is lived in a relationship of shared life and faith in religious community and in relationship in ministry with many other people. As said earlier, celibate chastity necessarily involves our sexuality, affectivity and our relationships. However, it sometimes

is an area that people approach with some degree of discomfort partly due to their own unresolved issues and partly due to society’s generally negative approach towards it.

The very title of the present stage of Forge is *Caritas Christi*, which refers to the experience of being consumed in the fire of Christ’s love. It is this love that impels us to offer the gift of our sexuality, our relationships, our passions, and the fire in our heart, to Christ and to His people in a loving and joyful consecration. Here is yet another opportunity for you to revisit the dimension of your celibate chastity and identify your limitations and possibilities for further growth and integration to make your celibately chaste living a joyful experience to you and to those around you. Discard whatever resistances or embarrassment you may still feel about examining your sexuality and affectivity, because the Lord who has loved us into being was not ashamed to be human, to be sexual and celibate for the Kingdom.

2. Reflection

2.1. Living chastity in a hyper-sexualized world

In a world which is increasingly becoming a global market that sexualizes nearly everything, the human body is one of the objects that present the maximum commercial and exploitative potential. **Sex has become the new golden calf at the altar of modern society.** More than ever, the challenges that modern society throws up in the form of weakening moral values, liberal views on sexual behaviour and orientation, easy access to sexually provocative material on the internet, films and press, and growing distaste among youth for long term life commitments of fidelity, and the tendency for prolonged adolescence among youth etc. have a significant bearing on how present day religious face and live the vow of chastity. To make things worse, there has been a spate of scandals involving



catholic clergy and religious in sexual abuse of minors, making a huge dent on the credibility and moral standing of the ministers of the church. Reluctant to talk about our experience of living celibate chastity when asked to explain our choice to remain celibate, we often fall back on a familiar set of responses like “for the sake of the kingdom”, “in order to love everyone and not just one person,” or even “to be more available to others.” After explaining so far, we take a collective deep breath and hope that no one asks any further questions. It is no wonder that a number of young people have come to think of celibate chastity as asexuality—not being sexual, a sort of neutered existence! In the absence of serious reflection and integration these are sufficient to easily discourage and

demotivate us in our efforts to grow in psychosexual maturity and integration. A correct understanding of human sexuality and its respectful integration with other areas of our lives is imperative to joyfully live our consecration as celibately chaste religious.

Sexuality is often the most graced as well as wounded area of our lives and though for some the wounded aspect is more immediate yet for others the aspect of grace is more evident. However, both aspects somehow seem to form part of our psychosexual journey through various phases of development. For us Christians, sexuality necessarily has to do with who we are and how we relate to God as we gradually grow into psychosexual maturity. As persons who are created in the image and

likeness of God we also partake, though imperfectly, in the dignity of the divine. Our sharing in the image and likeness of God reminds us that we are called to live the sacred gift of our sexuality in a manner that honors our self, others and above all God our creator. The need for intimacy and love is a constant part of our everyday living. In common parlance, intimacy is often wrongly identified with sexual intimacy.

There is no evidence yet that physical sexual intimacy is necessary for mature development but there is ample evidence that having close friends, feeling cared for and loved, and being able to relate to others without unnecessary barriers are essential to human happiness. Emotional and affective maturity is a challenge that begins with

identifying, understanding and expressing a wide array of emotions that foster healthy relationships. This implies cultivating openness to others in mutual respect and a growing willingness to develop skills of self-disclosure, listening and empathy. My growth in affective maturity will flow out of a genuine awareness and appreciation of my strengths and limitations and the capacity to open myself up more deeply to others.

Our Constitutions tell us, “For through this gift of chastity, the Lord Jesus manifests the power of his glory in the weakness of our flesh, thus drawing all people to hope in the life to come” (CC 20). **Chastity truly consists in the long-term integration of one’s thoughts, feelings, and actions in a way that values, esteems, and respects the dignity of oneself and others.** The attractive personality of Jesus is the concrete witness that one can be both truly human and celibate at the same time. To learn how to love others maturely requires God’s help. We cannot achieve it by our own effort or willpower alone. The irony is that one often asks God for the gift of chastity only in times of desperate helplessness.

It is quite likely that many of us have begged God for help to be made chaste only to find ourselves repeatedly challenged and coming short of our ideal in actual life. It could prove to be more helpful if we are able to talk with the Lord in prayer about our desires, hopes, fantasies, failures and successes in this dimension of our lives. Such conversations enable us to develop a greater trust in God’s help and sustaining presence as we engage in life’s every day struggles and relation-

ships. We would then gradually discover that we do not walk alone as we mature, that the Spirit guides and moves us on, that we walk with Jesus who knows what it is like to be human and sexual because he himself shared our human condition and grew into his own mature human and sexual identity. In the process our desires and impulses become more ordered, and we grow in the ability to love maturely. As we progress in such prayerful conversations, we will be able to speak more frankly about sexuality with our spiritual directors. Moral formation of our person involves a journey of interior transformation that deepens our personal conversion to Christ. We are not able to lead the moral life on our own. God helps and transforms us from within by the power of his grace. In freedom, we are invited to cooperate with God’s grace. If we fail to ask for God’s help and fail also to listen to our own woundedness, we run the risk that authors like D. Cozzens suggest, of compensating our unnamed and unacknowledged pain and woundedness ‘through distorted exercise of power and authority’ (*Sacred Silence: Denial and Crisis in the Church*, 2002).

Sexuality is a testing ground of the integration or fragmentation of our personalities. The very power of sex makes it impossible for it to be a neu-

tral reality. Wrongly directed sex tends to be compulsive and destructive. But the opposite is true of a joyful and balanced sexual awareness. Equality, mutuality and reciprocity are the hallmarks of a mature, free, non-possessive, and non-abusive love. **A healthy sexuality is the experience of feeling whole and worthy as a sexual person.** From a spiritual point of view it is an ability to engage in a relatively mature relationship with the Mystery we call God and to be



able to foster this relationship in others. Any growth process naturally is a matter of trial and error. The only way to grow is to be honest with trusted guides like our spiritual directors about the ups and downs of gradually moving toward the ideal of celibate chastity.

To the question: “Who is truly a man or a woman?” the celibate answers: **one who gives life to others.** Erich Fromm considers love as the power which produces love and impotence as the inability to produce love. Celibate chastity is the joyful



proclamation of the consecrated that the development of full humanness is more important than genital expression of sexuality and that true generativity is greater than sexual potency. When one wakes up to this vision of consecrated life, what is given up does not become a burden or a cause for frustration. Life instead becomes like the alabaster flask full of precious perfumed oil that Mary broke to anoint Christ at Bethany.

One might hesitate with the interrogative: “why would you want to give up your youth, your beauty, your strength, your dreams of the domestic paradise, the hidden desires of your flesh, and dreams of singing lullaby to your young child, for something that apparently does not make any sense?” A tremendous waste it would seem just like it seemed to Judas as he watched Mary anointing Christ with the precious oil. But then the singular preoccupation of Mary at that moment was: **“If only I had more I could have given more.”** When would your life be filled with the perfume

of joyful offering of your heart’s love to God?

Reducing the essence of celibate chastity to no more than a special relationship of solitude with God runs the risk of excessive self-centeredness and to a highly spiritualized and skewed understanding of being celibately chaste. An alive and intimate relationship with God that one develops in celibate living needs to be supplemented by a lively love relationship with brothers in community. At the same time our living as consecrated celibates can never find adequate explanation solely in the beauty of love and mutual support in community, without an intimate relationship of solitude alone with and in God. Our Constitutions remind us that the chastity we profess fosters a new kind of communion of brothers in Christ and as a symbol of perfect love; it becomes a special source of spiritual fruitfulness in the world and offers us in a unique way the freedom to love God and all human beings (cf. CC 21). We are further advised that as the observance of celibate chastity

involves some of our deepest natural inclinations and demands several renunciations from us, we need to put our trust in the Lord and humbly ask his help in prayer and need to likewise foster community life since true fraternal love that one experiences in community helps the preservation and perfection of chastity (cf. CC 22).

Exercise 1 : The people in your life

Begin with a prayer: Call on the Holy Spirit to help you examine your relationships. Ask for the grace to feel real interest in others, to get outside of yourself and see people as they are. Ask for insight into each person and into your relationship with each of them. Some of them may be growing more important to you and some may be growing away from you. Ask for the grace to know how it happens.

- Now **take a sheet of paper and make three columns.**
- In the **first column** write the names of persons with whom you relate regularly.
- In the **second column** across from each name, write the relationship you share with these persons. It may be as community member, or as intimate friend, sibling, colleague or someone with whom you experience difficulty in relating to etc.
- In the **third column** which may need more space, describe the relationship you have currently with these persons.
- How they helped shape yourself and your life positively or negatively in the past and more recently?
- Examine how you relate to them, not only how you feel about them, but especially what you have done and are doing in this relationship.
- It would demand that you take responsibility for what you have done, what you are doing and what you could do to make these relationships friendlier and holier.

The witnessing value of chastity, however, is diluted every time the world encounters a cold, frightened, angry or insensitive celibate whose growth to integration is stunted. One who lives such dried up, virtual and metallic celibacy no longer suffers or feels any passion or suffers exclusively for himself and his passions. Such a person has not let one's sexuality walk along the way of the cross to refresh it and make it more beautiful, fruitful and be a cause of joy. It is also possible that celibacy and chastity can breed an unhealthy

self-sufficiency when we ask for help from one another or others only in extreme circumstances, if ever. The vulnerability we experience in asking for help and for love can be so powerful that we often defend ourselves against reaching out at all, convincing ourselves that we can live without the love we need to thrive. Often we do not develop the capacity for asking for another's care, even in small ways. As a result, we put ourselves at risk of constructing a life of considerable loneliness and isolation and what is more, one may find

an easy outlet for compensating the unacknowledged and unnamed woundedness and pain by being excessively judgmental, by becoming addicted to self-damaging habits, by becoming workaholics, or by becoming excessively authoritarian and morally reprehensive of what others think, say or do. Many a time one hears the lament of lay people regarding the cold and unempathic attitude in some of the religious they encounter, be it at a parish or at a school or at a healthcare setting. One wonders as to how many of



such religious carry the invisible burden of a sexuality that has not been sufficiently attended to and integrated with the itinerary of their lives! In such cases living of celibate chastity becomes a counter witness, speaking of a frustrating, imposed and burdensome renunciation instead of a manifestation of one's joyful offering of self.

The Constitutions tell us that "we must keep our gaze fixed on Christ, imitate him, and be so steeped in his spirit that it will no longer be we who live,

but Christ who truly lives in us" (CC 39). "We love because God first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). Consecrated celibacy invites us to share with others something of the deep devotedness that characterizes true spousal unity. The love of Christ impels us to grow into friendship with all the members of the human family. A spousal spirituality is a freely chosen adult relationship with the person of Christ, formative of a whole new way of living. While in marriage one pledges "until death do us part" being es-

poused to Christ goes far beyond death, lasting "forever and ever". To a world that views relationships with interpersonal insecurity, the spousal meaning of the consecrated celibacy proclaims of a love that will never be found wanting. "If we are faithless, he remains faithful" (2 Tm 2:13).

Exercise 2: How well do you care about living chastely?

Living a chaste life requires lots of spiritual help but also calls for using the wisdom of our Common Sense! We live in a world that can't sell just about anything without using sex. We are surrounded all over by perversion and immorality and we can do precious little to keep ourselves immune from their evil influence without considerable effort. If you think you can have all the fun, hear music and watch movies or read material that is sexually explicit or provocative, hang out with friends for fun and go to places that degrade sex, without any of it affecting you then you are living in a fool's paradise. Wake up! It is important to heed the advice of common sense, and traditional wisdom to avoid the dangers to your desire to live a chaste life.

Ask yourself the following questions and answer them in the quietness of your heart.

- How much effort do you take to protect yourself from **the corrupting influence of the world** you live in?
- Do you maintain **friendships** that lead you to improper behaviour, or provocative conversations?
- Do you keep yourself **busy** as evil desires enter easily in the mind of the lazy man?
- How often do you go to **confession** and do you feel free to open up your heart's content completely to the person of Christ represented in the priest?
- How often do you pray for **the assistance of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph** who is the protector of the virgins in combatting sins against purity?
- Do your **struggles** in the area of sexuality become part of your dialogue with your spiritual director?
- Do you heed the advice of **traditional wisdom** to maintain the custody of senses when you move around?
- Do you feel happy and satisfied about **your spousal relationship with the person of Christ**?

Abbè Pierre, on his death bed, remarked:

"Were I to be 18 again, knowing the cost of renunciation without knowing anything else, I would certainly lack the strength for a joyful pronouncement of the vow of chastity.

But were I to know that along such a rough path I would meet God's tenderness, I would say 'yes' once again with all my heart!"



2.2. Falling and remaining in love with God

“We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. In this is love brought to perfection among us, that we have confidence on the Day of Judgment because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not perfect in love.”

(1 Jn 4:16-18)

Consecrated chastity is the result of a strange seduction by God’s love. It is God who takes the initiative as the one in love with the consecrated and entices or seduces him just like He did in the case of the prophet Jeremiah. Prophet Jeremiah says that Yahweh seduced (enticed) him into becoming His prophet. In a way the consecration of the religious in chastity is part of this strange seduction by God. However, unlike human seduction God’s seduction or enticement does not include deception, exploitation and falsehood. Instead, God seduces the soul of

the consecrated with a trial, the perspective of a choice which implies much renunciation. Just like in the vocation of a prophet who is seduced by God, it involves sacrifice, the solitude of an inner desert and the challenge to journey with mysterious and provoking moments. Certainly, it is the same seduction that Abraham, Moses, Hosea, Jeremiah etc.

experienced, loved, enjoyed or endured at different moments of their life. God’s love becomes like a seduction because as Lonergan defines it, “it is an other-worldly falling in love experience that is intense, creative, total, totalizing, limitless, without restrictions, conditions or reserve.”

One must not associate this falling in love with God as the loss of a sense of control over oneself. Instead, it is marked by an increase in self awareness and the birth of inner freedom because the person in love with God enjoys the double certitude of loving and being loved limitlessly at the same time. Love, when it becomes exclusive and mutual, assumes a shade of eternity even at a human level. It is like saying to the other and to be told by the other: “You will never die, instead live forever.” It could not be more realistic and true than when God says this to a human heart guaranteeing the absolute certainty of being able to love for ever and to be loved forever. It is this guarantee that is the source of the affective freedom that the consecrated celibate enjoys. It removes from his heart the fear of turning out to be unlovable or unworthy of

love and simultaneously also removes the pretense of expecting to be loved.

The gratification by God of the human heart’s need to be lovable and loved, enables one to let oneself be loved also by other persons. It makes one free and full of gratitude even to appreciate the seemingly small gestures of affection. The person then becomes grateful to life and to people, always willing to donate oneself with the inner certitude that no matter how much one gives of oneself to life and to others, it would never equal what one receives from life, from others and from God. This fact becomes even clearer when seen from the perspective of the one who does not really love God and also does not enjoy the certainty of being loved by God. That person will not be free to let oneself be loved, instead will keep futilely searching for expressions of love. **The reason is simply that the person, who is not in love with the Creator, is not free to let oneself be loved by what God had created!**

The consecrated celibate’s falling in love with God and remaining and maturing in that love is part of a mystery as it involves the convergence of two opposite polarities: presence and absence. Just as the saga of human development in relational maturity involves a delicate dance between presence and absence of the loved one, so is the case with the falling in love with God. The perfection of affective maturity is reached when one attains the ability to live the presence of the beloved in the absence of the beloved and vice versa. It is a typical experience for the consecrated celibate too, to feel the absence of God and feel unsatisfied in love

as he lives the mystery of the already-not yet on a daily basis. The consecrated celibate's life is a sign of the lack of ultimate fulfillment which characterizes all earthly love. His life declares to the world that every human love must remain open to further fulfillment and even greater desire. It calls for the courage to live the absence of the Beloved and the resulting void and solitude it brings. However, in some way the consecrated also lives the presence of the Beloved in that he has experienced the call of the Beloved and has been invited to follow Him. Falling and remaining in love with God

the Lord." Our founder Claret also uses the spousal imagery in describing his relationship with the Lord. For instance, he says, "Lord, I do not seek or wish to know anything but how to fulfill your holy will. I want nothing but you, and in you and for you alone all other things. You are more than enough for me. I love you, my strength, my refuge, and comfort. You are my Father, my Brother, my *Spouse*, my Friend, and my All. Make me love you as you love me and as you would have me love you" (*Aut* 755; see also *Aut* 754, and 445).

God asks us: "Will you be mine? Will you accept me and

not only invites our response but also makes it possible for us to become lovers of Him. And in being loved we become lovers! It is also an invitation to enter into the paschal mystery because being espoused to Christ also involves becoming spouse of the Christ crucified. True love demands it. But the story does not end there as Christianity did not end on the cross rather began from it. Similarly, the spousal unity with Christ goes beyond death and the cross into fuller life to see what "eye has not seen and ear has not heard" and the heart cannot conceive what "God has prepared for those



touches these two fundamental aspects of love experience – presence and absence, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, fulfillment and lack of fulfillment.

2.3. Spouses of the Divine

God promises to Israel in *Hosea* 2:21-22: "I will espouse you to me forever; I will espouse you in right and justice, in love and in mercy; I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know

love me in return? I have loved you into being and so will you let me give myself to you?" God does not force a response from us; instead he waits patiently and persistently like a faithful suitor. When and if we say yes, we do promise God prior rights to our lives and our hearts. Being espoused to Christ in consecrated chastity is also an immense responsibility and often we feel disheartened by our limitations. But by calling us "beloved", God

who love him."

A deep spiritual life lies at the heart of genuine celibate and chaste living. An intimate relationship with the person of Christ and humble acceptance of the love of Christ for us is necessary for celibate chastity. Loving Jesus involves the embracing of the paschal mystery. Fidelity to love is always a paschal experience as it involves necessarily the asceticism of choice. The appropriate channeling of love's



warmth through right choice becomes painful sometimes because of the human instincts that work against such choice. Unlike the repression of feelings, that imprisons one in the struggle of unexpressed emotions, the practice of the asceticism of choice involves an experience of greater freedom and is a constant call to growth in love. Jesus does not need admirers rather he needs imitators.

Dedicating one's celibate life to Jesus, necessarily involves some degree of suffering and death. Lasting relationships are cultivated over a long time. To maintain the closeness to the person of Christ and to make his love radiate our loving moments of prayer need to become a regular part of our daily living. In the life of a celibate religious the successful negotiation of *adolescence* results in physical celibacy which is the ability in being wholly human without being sexually active and without feeling deprived or frustrated, and the successful negotiation of *early adulthood* issues results in generative celibacy which is the ability to be productive and responsible without becoming a parent and or feeling deprived or incomplete due to such renunciation, and the successful negotiation of *mature adulthood* would lead to intimate celibacy i.e. the ability to be a life-sharing friend of God and others without violating one's self-gift to God, either physically or psychologically.

Exercise 3: Your celibate intimacy with Christ

Take some time off to reflect on the current level of your intimacy with your divine Spouse.

- How did you first find **Jesus in your life** and how did He call you to be a Claretian?
- Do you feel **Jesus is as close as ever** or is He now more distant, less accessible, silent or even absent?
- How do you **initiate, support, and sustain this relationship** and how does Christ initiate, support, and sustain His relationship with you?
- How has your **prayer** evolved over the years?
- What are the **predominant longings and desires** of your current life?
- How prominent is **Jesus present** in those longings?
- How do you rely upon or take advantage of the **usual supports for our Claretian religious life** –spiritual direction, annual retreat, prayer, faith sharing, and community liturgy?
- Do you spend **leisure time with God**? When, how, and how often?
- Do your **struggles in the area of celibate chastity** become material for prayer or do you wish to pretend that even God did not know about them?

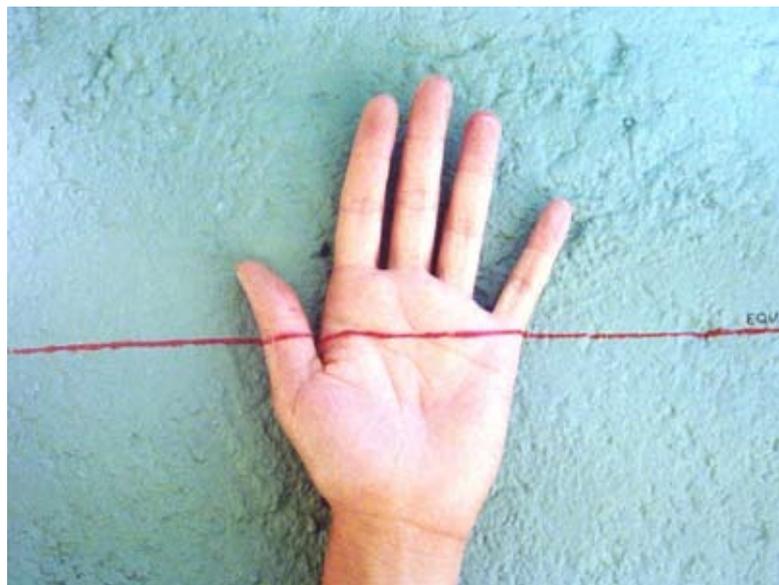
2.4. The gift of relationships

Our vocation as religious is a call to experience ourselves as the beloved of God and to embrace others just as we have ourselves been so intimately loved by God. It is possible for us to meet and reveal God who is love only through one another. This gift of intimacy is not only a mark of maturity but also a fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is a psycho-sexual itinerary that involves growing skills and capacities for more mature loving, even as it is also a divine mystery and a gift of God. Our capacity to relate well to others and to God also flows from a genuine self-love.

The various skills of intimacy like self-disclosure, trust, openness and mutual respect emerge from one's personal growth in intimacy with one-self. To put it differently, you need an authentic self to give sincerely of yourself in acts of love and care for others. It calls for a growing comfort in embracing your wounds, struggles and limitations along with your strengths. The inner freedom that flows from it would allow you to feel more spontaneous and less self-conscious in relating.

Any healthy adult intimacy involves the capacity to share more of one's real self with a trusted and loved other. Such close relationships of reciprocal trust and respect free us to be more real and let go of the need to wear masks of appearance. Yet one may feel difficulty to do so as a result of

past hurts and betrayals. Any relationship also involves some degree of risk. Without facing the pain, loss and challenges of growing up in our relationships, we can stay muddled in our old, familiar, and distorted patterns out of fear, anxiety and shame. Genuine intimacy works like a mirror allowing us to see ourselves as we are. It is challenging as it also reflects back to us areas we may not wish to know of ourselves, let alone others.



Exercise 4: Your relationships

Your celibate and chaste existence depends a lot on the kind, intensity and number of your relationships. Ask yourself the following questions to identify the quality and contribution of your relationships to your commitment as a celibately chaste religious in the Claretian family.

- Who are **the people in your lives** – Claretians, family, or friends – that you feel you can depend upon for help in small everyday matters and in times of great need?
- To what extent the relationships that are available to you address **your need for intimacy, acceptance, and affirmation**?
- How do you **initiate, support, and sustain** your relationships?
- Have your relationships **grown or diminished** in quality or number over time?
- Which relationships **claim your attention and time** and why? Do these relationships include family, friends, colleagues, and Claretians - as well as relationships that might challenge you inter-generationally and multi-culturally?
- What is **distinctive** about your Claretian relationships in friendship and community?
- Are you **satisfied** with the relationships you enjoy – what are you most grateful for, what would you wish to change?
- What **permanent loving relationships** do you claim for yourself? How do you understand these friendships and hold on to them?
- Do the people you love know **what place they have** in your life? How would you let them know of it?
- Do you allow the love of others to free you from sin and shame?
- What relationships **remain still unresolved** or what needs healing for you to continue to choose life and love wholeheartedly?
- How are **prayer and the sacraments** a way of ritualizing, renewing, and making the grace of the relationships you enjoy ever more explicit?

“Whether you chose your change or not, there are un-lived potentialities within you, interests and talents that you have not yet explored. Transitions clear the ground for new growth. They drop the curtain so the stage can be set for a new scene. What is it, at this point in your life that is waiting quietly backstage for an entrance cue?” (*William Bridges*).

2.5. Impact of stress on chaste living

An important part of any person’s developmental journey is coping with the impact of stress, especially when it is understood in its broadest and most human terms. Stress manifests as strain, frustration, suffering, anger, pain, sadness, distress, anxiety, worry, and or depression in all its various combinations. Despite its pervasive presence in our lives stress can be difficult to identify. To hit the nail right on its head, we can ask ourselves, “What worries us?” or even more to the point, “What has hurt us?” What hurts or worries us becomes evident in a number of ways.

Behaviorally, one might turn to food, alcohol, drugs, or sex for solace and comfort. One can become lethargic and withdrawn or desperately careless about one’s behaviour. Psychophysical symptoms may include anxiety, arousal, sleeplessness, and exhaustion, proneness to recurring bodily illnesses, and even accident proneness. Cognitively, one could be preoccupied with rigid and obsessive thoughts and ideas. With some effort

one could even be aware of vague to intense feelings of guilt, helplessness, hopelessness, anger, or depression. Thus the stress we experience has the potential to impair our lives significantly.

As celibates and religious, it is quite possible that we may find our stress compounded by the particular circumstances of our religious life and apostolate. Similar to the dissatisfaction one may find in a marriage, stress in celibate and religious life can grow out of ambivalence towards the lifestyle itself and feelings of being trapped in circumstances that are seemingly impossible to change. At an earlier point in life under the influence of the ideal one may have considered celibacy as helping one’s relationship to God, encouraging greater freedom and availability in ministry, building broad and deep loving relationships, or as manifesting the power and fidelity of God’s relationship to the humanity. But now it may be experienced as a frustratingly overwhelming deprivation. This attitude leads to deepening feelings of helplessness and hopelessness within religious life.

Signs of a healthy and integrated sexuality

1. A deepening personal awareness and good self-knowledge.
2. Body comfort and adequate knowledge of sexual anatomy and physiology
3. Sustained and consistent involvement in close interpersonal relationships
4. Faithfulness to primary commitments
5. Comfort using sexual words and talking about sexual realities in appropriate settings
6. Not 'over spiritualizing' sexual realities
7. Ability to make appropriate decisions and commitments involving sexuality
8. Awareness of past hurts and traumas around sexuality and willingness to take step towards their healing.
9. Being honest with God and with one's spiritual guides about what is happening to self as one progresses toward this ideal.
10. Growing comfortable talking about one's sexual urges, desires and phantasies in prayer with God.
11. Stable close personal relationships and capacity for intimacy characterised by – fidelity, honesty and trust; awareness and openness about one's expectations; self-disclosure that is appropriate to the level of friendship; open communication of feelings; physical expressiveness that fits with one's life commitment and closeness; avoidance of control, manipulation and abuse of the other.
12. Consistency between personal behaviour and public, social commitments: a sense of integrity about one's life.
13. The ability to name and articulate our sexual story in an appropriate setting (with a friend, spiritual director, formator, counsellor) and to understand how it has influenced our life and relationships
14. An attitude of compassion towards other people's sexual behaviour and their sexual histories.
15. A deepening sense of generativity: life-giving and nurturing attitude to self and others.

As Henry Cloud and John Townsend observe in their book *Boundaries*, when one cannot acknowledge the deeply felt sexual frustration, "sexuality takes on a life of its own, unreal and fantasy driven." It goes underground and festers only to re-emerge with such devastating power. Feeling frustratingly trapped in a particular lifestyle's commitments, there would come in the temptation to absolve oneself from the responsibility for possible compromising behaviour. It may be in the form of compulsions like masturbation, addiction to pornography, using internet for cybersex, finding new adventures in love, or sexual acting out with other persons etc.

The denial and repression of conflicts involving the living of chastity would lead to feelings of guilt and dissatisfaction. Your sexual self along with its attractions and orientations needs to be identified and embraced, loved and empathically understood over and over so that the living of chastity becomes and remains the result of a conscious, free, and personal choice. It may be worthwhile at this point to ask yourself: what source evokes feelings of frustration and deprivation in your life and how do you respond to it?; what are the constructive coping strategies that you depend on in moments of stress?; are you able to identify patterns of compensatory behaviour to deal with sexual frustration and if yes in what ways do they manifest in your life and what is their impact on your person, your commitment and ideals?

2.6. The neurobiology of sexual addictions

The findings of modern science indicate that the addiction to sex is, in many ways like a chemical addiction. Much like alcohol, smoking or cocaine, pornography and other various forms of sexual addiction actually create a chemical dependence in the brain. The sexual addictions are powerful because they take advantage of and taps into the intense emotional, biological and chemical connections throughout the brain and the entire body. Researchers claim that we are born with many of these connections “pre-wired” or “pre-set” to switch on at certain times in our development. Sexual addictions ignite, excite and exploit these natural built-in urges and desires. In the sexual act, the brain narrows down its focus as it releases a tidal wave of endorphins and other neurochemicals like dopamine, norepinephrine, oxytocin and serotonin. These neurochemicals produce a tremendous feeling of high and satisfaction in those who experience sexual pleasure. When these chemicals are released during healthy marital intimacy they are referred to as “the fabulous four” because of the multiple positive benefits they generate between husband and wife. When they are released during pornography use and other sexual addiction behaviors, these chemicals are referred to as “the fearsome four”

due to the severe addiction and many negative consequences they produce.

Actually, the neurochemical release triggered by pornography viewing is so intense, that many scientists refer to it as the most powerful drug in the history of humankind. Now look at the facts. Think of taking the most powerful drug in history and making it instantly available at the push of a button, at little or no cost. Your drug use is totally secret, and what more, the drug-pushers come to you! The likely number of victims is unimaginable. That’s precisely what the internet revolution has done with pornography. It is known as the “4 A’s of the Internet”— *Accessible, Affordable, Anonymous and Aggressive*. When pleasure is easily and instantly accessible, can be produced on demand, and experienced repetitively, (pornography coupled with self-stimulation), it becomes addictive very rapidly. In the future, when the brain experiences stress, anxiety, boredom, loneliness, burn-out, etc., and seeks relief, it searches through its memory data looking for the quickest, easiest, and most powerful solution—porn viewing and self-stimulation! This brain circuitry dynamic quickly becomes powerfully dominant with a vast set of links to thousands of images, myriad emotions, past memories, chemical release and relief. It simply becomes the “automatic” place the brain searches when life becomes unmanageable.

Exercise 5: A colloquy with Jesus about your sexuality

It might be interesting to tell Jesus about your sexual desires, fantasies and attractions. Begin by being aware that Jesus is with you at this moment, lovingly looking at you and waiting for you to become aware of his presence. Tell him something like this: “I would like to become more comfortable talking to you about my sexuality, and so please help me.” Observe yourself now and if you begin to feel any unease, share it freely to the Lord. Perhaps it might comfort you to realize that even Jesus and Mary had to come to terms with their sexuality as they matured into adulthood as any other human being.

1. **Recall someone to whom you feel attracted to** and tell Jesus what attracts you about this person. You may begin from the physical or personality features that attract you. Be honest with Jesus also about attractions which if you acted upon would be sinful.
2. Next **tell Jesus about your feelings towards your body and your sexuality**. Tell him your opinion regarding your body, your looks. Is there something about your body or looks that you are not happy with? Tell Jesus about it and listen quietly to what he has got to tell you. As time passes you may notice you have more and more things to talk about. It may regard your sexual orientation, your compulsions or your constant failures - don't let shame get in the way and inhibit you. Tell Jesus exactly what goes on in your body and in your fantasy. Are there habits that imprison you? Feeling comfortable about sharing your sexual struggles and fantasies to Jesus is a nice way of growing in your friendship with him. Don't allow shame to prevent you from being as concrete as you can be.
3. **How do you feel after the exercise?** Does it make you feel comfortable or is there a feeling of heaviness? You might as well consider seeking out someone who you trust to share your reactions from this experience.

Porn and self stimulation thus become the brain's "drug of choice" and one becomes a helpless victim! What has been said of pornography could very well be true of any other form of addictive sex behaviour due to the similar brain behaviour dynamics.

While your brain's ability to develop habits is a remarkable gift, it can also work directly against you when you attempt to break out of old habits—especially highly advanced habits like "addictions." Once your brain expends the time and energy to develop a habit, whether it's good or bad, it simply doesn't want to give it up! Hundreds or thousands of times, your brain has "practiced" turning to pornography and other sexual behaviors as the most convenient, powerful, efficient way of instantly escaping boredom, stress, loneliness and the pressures of life. These outlets thus become your brain's automatic, preferred "drug of choice." Everyone has their own "drug of choice"—some are productive and many are destructive. Consistently practicing turning to a particular drug of choice makes that choice automatic—an addiction. So, what do you

think happens when, after giving in yet again to the addiction, under the terrible weight of guilt, regret and self-loathing, you declare "That's it, that's the last time I'll ever do that!"? Your brain responds: "Hold on just a minute! Let me get this straight. Just because you're feeling guilty and depressed, you cannot expect me to abandon lots of energy and effort and simply waste this incredibly pleasurable, powerful escape and means of self-medication I've worked so hard to build? I don't think so!" Addiction is habit on steroids, and your brain does everything it can to hold on to its addictions.



Types of Affective Crises faced by the consecrated

(Amedeo Cencini)

1. No Crisis: This refers to those who apparently are never in crisis and appear very self satisfied, yet live in massive denial or maintain a split in identity between the wanton life and an apparently ordered life . There are (false) celibates who live compromising affective relations as if nothing ever mattered and do not feel any sense of guilt for their life style. They do not feel the need to change anything in their life, instead, for them things are moving fine and it is the other people who think bad.

2. Frozen Crisis: It refers to the case of those consecrated who know no crisis as they have removed affectivity and sexuality from their lives and left them to freeze. The reason is that they are either so scared of them or do not know how to handle them. The end result is the kind of robot like celibates who are unaffected by sentiments and interact in an unempathic, heartless and cold manner with everyone. Love has died in their hearts.

3. Permanent Crisis: This refers to those consecrated who are in crisis on a continued basis. Either one creates the crisis due to rigid attitudes or continues to remain in the crisis due to lax attitudes. The one who creates the affective crisis is the scrupulous perfectionist who is extremely sensitive to the slightest imperfections in him to his desire to have affective maturity. He constantly discovers new ones and remains constantly unhappy. The one with lax attitudes is able to see the inconsistency in himself but chooses to ignore it as he is unwilling to pay the price to get out of it and as a result remains with unconscious conflict perpetuating his inner crisis. He might even regard himself unable to change or leave certain addictive habits in the area of affectivity. Crisis then assumes a chronic nature.

4. 'Final' Crisis: these are those who pay least attention to what is happening to them only to realize at a late moment that they are way too deep in trouble. Little by little in small measures of compromises they get into situations that finds them in real trouble in the affective area.

5. Fatal Crisis: These are the religious who are unable to identify the crisis and who at a certain point in crisis think there exists just one exit: to get out! In this group belongs the one who at a certain moment declares, " I have found my love" and leaves immediately without resorting to examine closely his experience and make a judicious decision.

6. Useless Crisis: In here belongs the one who passes from one affective dependency to the next without learning anything from the experience and leaving a trail of damage and damaged in every place they have been before. They may live ambiguous relations, or seek relationships to avoid feeling alone, or may suffer fears of losing the loved one or gossip about own adventures. The routine is often simple: same expectations, same need, same requests, same spiritualizing (at the start) of the relation, same justifications with heroic constancy and blessed innocence!

Guidelines for personal accompaniment

In order to help yourself gradually progress into greater psychosexual integration and maturity it is important for you **to first accept the hurts and struggles you may have had so far in this area.** As suggested in some of the exercises earlier, it is necessary to examine the amount of personal effort you put in to lead a joyfully chaste religious life. Do you value the wisdom of the advice of common sense and of spiritual tradition?

It might be helpful to do some journaling, **to write your sexual story in the presence of the Lord with brutal honesty.** You could consider making your sexual struggles also part of your personal prayer, in addition to sharing the progress or decline you experience in the area of chaste living with your spiritual guide. If there are serious affective vulnerabilities present like sexual trauma or addictions, it could be advisable for you to also get some professional help from someone who has a strong catholic faith background, preferably a priest or religious who is professionally competent.



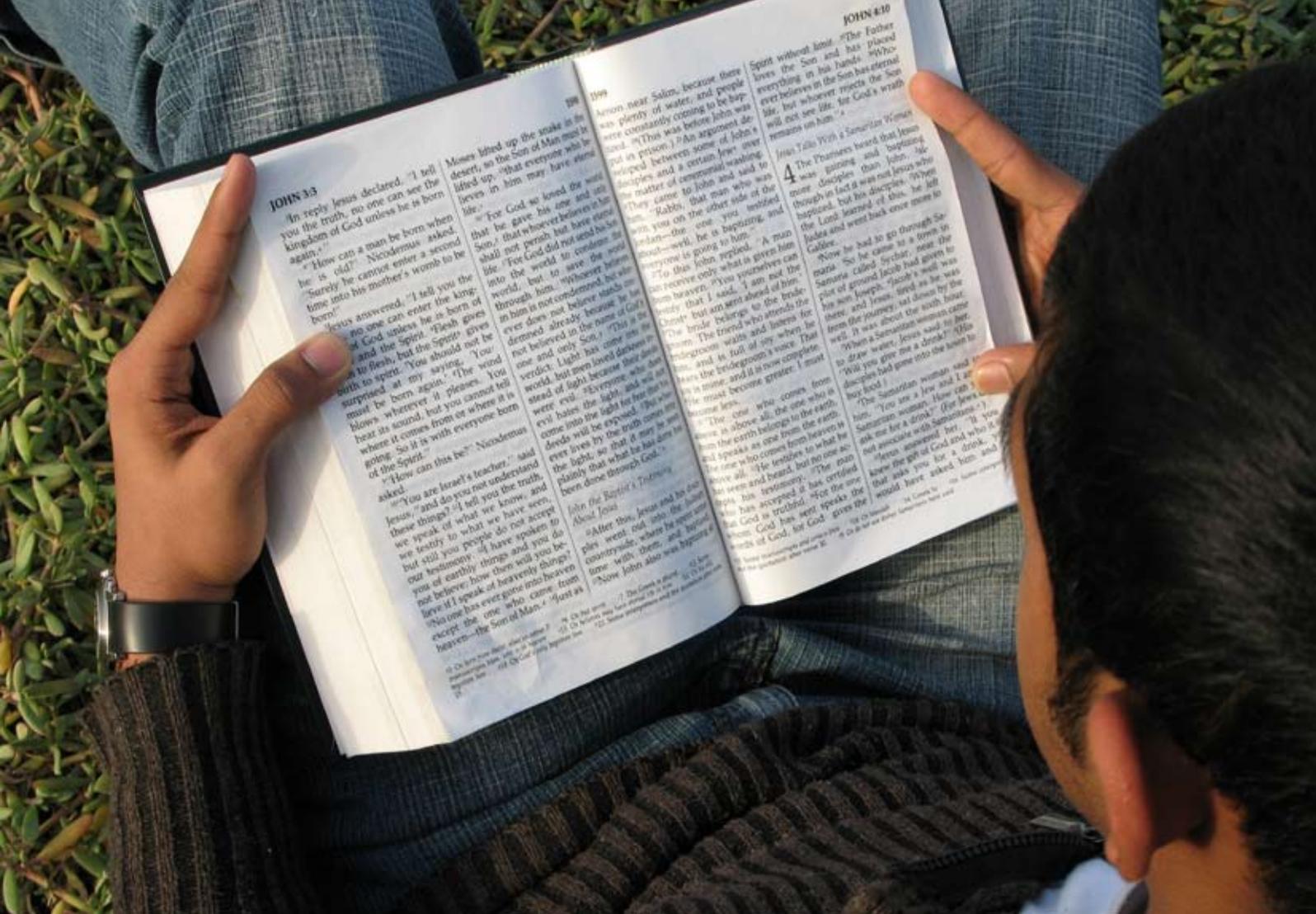
3. Suggestions for the community meeting

The community sharing on the theme of sexuality and celibacy could present various levels of difficulties depending on the level of comfort the members feel about it. However, in an atmosphere of mutual trust and genuine desire and interest in each other's growth, some of the following themes could be picked up for the common sharing.

1. How do you find the experience of friendships in your life as helping or hurting the joyful living of your celibate consecration?
2. Prayer life as an important means for celibately chaste living.
3. Spiritual accompaniment as another important means for celibately chaste living.

Activities suggested

1. Organize a moment of relaxation after meals where all members can find themselves together to share some fun to encourage greater community interaction.
2. Watch a religious film that deals with the theme of sexuality and have a moment of common sharing of views and reactions after watching it.



4. Guidelines for the *lectio divina*

The Chapter declaration *Men on Fire with God's Love* in some ways reminds us of our relationship with the Word of God. Reading it can motivate us to a better practice of *lectio divina*:

- 5. a) Having received the grace of *God's Word* and sent to proclaim it, we try to pass it on without reflecting on it, praying over it, adequately internalizing it, consequently failing to offer a credible and effective message to contemporary society.
- 9. Also at this time, in accord with the guidelines of the Constitutions and of previous General Chapters, there has been a deeper listening to and a growing appreciation for the *Word of God*.
- 34. Our charismatic name expresses the new mission to which we are called: to be the "arms" of the Woman who is still defeating the dragon (cf. Rev. 11:19 – 12:18) through the *Word of God, of which we are listeners and servants*.
- 38. We are a new family in the Spirit which is not based on flesh and blood but on love and in listening to, welcoming, and proclaiming the *Word of God* (cf. Mt 12: 46-50; Jn 15:12).
- 44. Like the disciples of Emmaus, we too can overcome the lack of enthusiasm and zeal when we allow ourselves to be accompanied by the Master along the way of the missionary life. He hears our frustrations and questions and gives us what we need to rekindle the embers of a weakened vocation: *the Word that "makes the heart burn"* and the Eucharist that "opens our eyes" (cf. Lk 24, 31-45).
- 54.1. We commit ourselves to give priority in our lives to *the listening of the Word*.
- 59. To ensure that the *Word of God* nurtures our mission in all its forms. 1) We will transform our communities, formation centres and apostolates into "*schools of the Word*" following the guidelines of the Synod on the Word of God.

Monday, May 20, 2013

- Sir 1:1-10
- Psalm 92
- Mk 9:14-29

“Lord I believe, help my unbelief”. These words of the father of the son with the dumb spirit is a lesson for each of us in our moments of uncertainty in faith. May this be our prayer when we face our helplessness and fragilities in our struggle to remain faithful to Him.

Tuesday, May 21, 2013

- Sir 2:1-13
- Psalm 36
- Mk 9:30-37

Human ambition has no limits. The apostles were no exception to this rule. To those who wish to be on top of the rest Jesus advises the way of humility and recognition of one's littleness. When would you wake up to this truth?

Wednesday, May 22, 2013. St. Joaquina de Vedruna, Foundress (Cal CMF, 149-155)

- Sir 4:12-22
- Psalm 118
- Mk 9:38-40

“Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he was not following us.” The intolerance of the disciples explains their jealous possessiveness of the person of Jesus and his power. Jesus invites them to a broader vision. Does your vision of the world and your ministry in the name of the Lord exclude anyone for what they do or believe?

Thursday, May 23, 2013

- Gen 14:18-20
- Psalm 109
- Lk 9:11b-17

Jesus asks for our little share of the bread and fish too that he may multiply them. Are you a joyful sharer of your little gifts so that the Lord can multiply them? The love of Jesus for the people does not let him send them away upon the recommendation to do so by the disciples. Do the needs of those around you take priority over your needs in real *Caritas Christi*?

Friday, May 24, 2013

- Sir 6:5-17
- Psalm 118
- Mk 10:1-12

Jesus placed such importance on the unity of the marriage vow saying “What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.” It speaks volumes about spousal fidelity. As celibately chaste religious these words of the Lord are an invitation to us for greater spousal fidelity to our Lord.

Saturday, May 25, 2013. St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi, Virgin (Cal CMF, 157-162)

- Sir 17:1-13
- Psalm 102
- Mk 10:13-16

“Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” Spirituality is about the nostalgia for and rediscovery of our original childlike innocence before the Lord. Perhaps the process of growing up has taken some of the innocence off our souls... May the desire to be childlike grow again in our hearts.

Sunday, May 26, 2013. Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

- Prov 8:22-31
- Psalm 8
- Rom 5:1-5
- Jn 16:12-15

The communion of love that exists in the triune God is what inspires our efforts to remain as loving persons. It is the same affective union of triune God that has loved each of us into being. Jesus, keep me close to you and the Father in the Spirit.

Monday, May 27, 2013

- Sir 17:20-28
- Psalm 31
- Mk 10:17-27

The instance of the rich young man is an invitation to each of us to review the objects of our attachments. Is Jesus the most important attachment figure yet in your affective relationships? Following him in celibate chastity calls for a keeping Christ at the center of all our affective engagements.

Tuesday, May 28, 2013

- Sir 35:1-15
- Psalm 49
- Mk 10:28-31

“Lord, we have left everything and followed you.” Peter was able to say this to Jesus. Are you able to sincerely say the same? Have you left ‘everything’ to follow Him? The promise of the hundred fold is for those who have left everything for the Lord. Jesus help us in our efforts to leave our lingering attachments that still hurdle following you sincerely.

Wednesday, May 29, 2013

- Sir 36:1-2a; 5-6; 13-19
- Psalm 78
- Mk 10:32-45

The desire for positions has always been a temptation for clergy in the church just as it had been in the case of James and John. But the very same James and John are radically transformed in their desires after the resurrection experience. Have you let the resurrection experience transform your desire for worldly glory and power and embrace the way of the cross that Jesus shows?

Thursday, May 30, 2013

- Sir 42:15-26
- Psalm 32
- Mk 10:46-52

“Master, let me receive my sight.” May this prayer of the blind beggar Bartimaeus be mine too this day. Often enough I too strut about the world blind to the things that are essentially important. May I too receive the right vision to see things for what they really are.

Friday, May 31, 2013. Feast of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary

- Zep 3:14-18
- Psalm (Is)
- Lk 1:39-56

Mary received her call with gratitude and responded soon with a spirit of service to the one who needed her presence the most. Does your living of the gift of religious vocation demonstrate a spirit of loving service or do you regard it as a privilege unto yourself and delimit the extent of your disponibility for others?

Saturday, June 1, 2013. Memorial of St. Justin, Martyr

- Sir 51:17-27
- Psalm 18
- Mk 11:27-33

“By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?” The authority that Jesus commanded over the people emerged from his deep integrity as the son of God. People do respect persons of deep integrity. How much is integrity of character a part of your personality as a religious?

Sunday, June 2, 2013. Solemnity of the The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

- Gen 14:18-20
- Psalm 109
- 1 Cor 11:23-26
- Lk 9:11b-17

The holy Eucharist is the source of our daily nourishment of the spirit. In it Jesus offers himself to us. Our founder drew his strength for all his apostolic work from the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and adoration of the Eucharistic presence. Are you conscious of the tremendous transformative power of the Holy Eucharist in your life?

Monday, June 3, 2013. Memorial of St. Charles Lwanga and Companions, Martyrs

- Tob 1:3; 2,1b-8
- Psalm 111
- Mk 12:1-12

The parable of the wicked tenants reminds us of the need to receive the precious gift of our vocation with deep humility, fidelity and gratitude. How often does our attitude demonstrate a sense of entitlement and arrogance both of which fly in the face of the true nature of our vocation as religious!

Tuesday, June 4, 2013

- Tob 2:9-14
- Psalm 111
- Mk 12:13-17

Jesus cleverly slips out of the trap laid by the tricky question of the Pharisees with the reply, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Do we give God what is rightfully His? How sincere are we in meeting our obligations to the state we live in as honest citizens?

Wednesday, June 5, 2013. Memorial of St. Boniface, Bishop and Martyr

- Tob 3:1-11a, 16-17a
- Psalm 24
- Mk 12:18-27

We hold within ourselves the breath of eternity as we are children of the God of the living and not of the dead. How often does your own eternal existence become a subject of your contemplation? You hold traces of eternity within you already! Isn't that reason enough for you to celebrate the gift of life with joy?

Thursday, June 6, 2013

- Tob 6:10-17; 7,1,9-17;8,4-9a
- Psalm 127
- Mk 12:28b-34

Loving God our spouse with all our heart, mind and strength must be our principal pre-occupation as celibate religious. It is from this love experience that we are strengthened to love and accept our brethren with all their brokenness and limitations.

Friday, June 7, 2013. Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

- Ez 34:11-16
- Psalm 22
- Rom 5:5b-11
- Lk 15:3-17

The sacred heart of Jesus is the symbol of his immense love for humanity. The words "they shall look upon him whom they have pierced" gently invites us to enter the mystery of Christ's immense love to become lovers of God and men. Claret adopted the Pauline phrase, "Caritas Christi urget nos." Does the love of Christ urge you on like our founder?

Saturday, June 8, 2013. Solemnity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

- 1 Kings 17:17-24
- Psalm 29
- Gal 1:11-19
- Lk 7:11-17

We are in the forge experience where we are formed in the heart of Mary by the fire of the experience of God's infinite and merciful love. The heart of Mary is the place of refuge of every Claretian. It inspires us to contemplate the Word of God and be aflame with love and to set the world on fire with the same love.

Sunday, June 9, 2013. 10th Sunday in Ordinary Time

- 1 Kings 17:17-24
- Psalm 29
- Gal 1:11-19
- Lk 7:11-17

And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." Compassion was the signature emotion in Jesus. We find the gospels repeating reference to it across multiple occasions. How often do you feel moved by the suffering of people and are able to console them saying "do not weep"? You may not be able to raise their dead but you sure can raise their spirits with a kind word or gesture, or empathic listening or offering a shoulder to lean on.

Monday, June 10, 2013

- 2 Cor 1:1-7
- Psalm 33
- Mt 5:1-12

Jesus blesses different categories of persons in his sermon on the mount: the pure in heart, poor in spirit, the merciful, the meek, the peacemakers, those who hunger and thirst for justice etc. Are you blessed according to Christ's criteria? In addition, are you a blessing to other's lives?

Tuesday, June 11, 2013. Memorial of St. Barnabas, Apostle

- Acts 11:21b-26; 13,1-3
- Psalm 97
- Mt 10:7-13

"You received without paying, give without pay." Pastoral charity that does not count the loss must be the hallmark of every missionary in the footsteps of Christ. There are countless blessings we have received for which we ought to be humble and generous. It would be sinful and unjust to retain our gifts to ourselves based on Christ's criteria of mission.

Wednesday, June 12, 2013

- 2 Cor 3:4-11
- Psalm 98
- Mt 5:17-19

The approach of Jesus to the law was fulfilling it in giving it its full meaning. He stressed on the spirit of the law and complete commitment to it instead of the hypocritical external acknowledgement and obedience. The law of the gospels needs to be interiorized in order to establish gospel culture. What is your attitude to the laws and regulations?

Thursday, June 13, 2013. Memorial of St. Anthony of Padua. Claret's ordination (Cal CMF, 165-169)

- 2 Cor 3:15-4,1;3-6
- Psalm 84
- Mt 5:20-26

This passage of the gospel is a good reminder of our responsibilities in relating to our brethren. Our relationships need to be always qualified and informed by genuine interest in and deep respect for the person of the other and must never be the occasion for degrading, insulting or injuring the other because they are bearers of the same flame of divinity that we carry within us.

Friday, June 14, 2013

- 2 Cor 4:7-15
- Psalm 115
- Mt 5:27-32

Jesus exhorts his followers to assume the right attitude to sexuality in seeing it as a gift of oneself to one's loved one in fidelity and not as an occasion for lust and unfaithfulness in love. How careful are you in handling the precious yet fragile gift of your sexuality?

Saturday, June 15, 2013. St. Maria Michaela of the Blessed Sacrament (Cal CMF, 171-177)

- 2 Cor 5:14-21
- Psalm 102
- Mt 5:33-37

In his warning against swearing in God's name, Jesus reminds us about the need to respect the truth and guard ourselves against falsehood, because often what is sworn in God's name to impress the other could be a falsehood to hide the real truth. How much do you respect sincerity and truth in your interpersonal interactions? Is there anything you could do to improve yourself on that score?

Sunday, June 16, 2013. 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

- 2 Sam 12:7-10;13
- Psalm 31
- Gal 2:16;19-21
- Lk 7:36 - 8,3

"Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much." The criterion Jesus uses here for forgiveness is love. How often have we become prisoners of the attitude of self-righteousness in condemning the behaviour of other people while not having a trace of love within ourselves? The Kingdom of God belongs to those who sincerely love and not to the self-righteous observant of the law who prides in self condemns the rest! Where do you find yourself?

Monday, June 17, 2013

- 2 Cor 6:1-10
- Psalm 97
- Mt 5:38-42

Forgiveness and generosity are two important hallmarks of a Christian. How important are these two values in the concrete living of community life where one finds people of different temperaments, growth histories, characters, preferences etc. Fraternal life in community calls for a good measure of generosity and forgiveness to make it an enriching experience for all.

Tuesday, June 18, 2013

- 2 Cor 8:1-9
- Psalm 145
- Mt 5:43-48

Jesus invites his disciples to bring down the walls of separation and discrimination when he talks about his Father who showers rain on the good and wicked without distinctions. We need to aspire for perfection of charity that knows no bounds. Can you honestly admit of a love that includes everyone?

Wednesday, June 19, 2013

- 2 Cor 9:6-11
- Psalm 111
- Mt 6:1-6; 16-18

Doing good without being recognized for it could be little hard for some of us. Yet Jesus invites us to grow into that attitude of doing good simply for its own sake and not for reward or recognition. The heavenly Father who sees you in secret will reward you. What good can you do today concretely without the hope of a reward?

Thursday, June 20, 2013

- 2 Cor 11:1-11
- Psalm 110
- Mt 6:7-15

Do not say "Father" if you don't behave like His son, do not say "our" if you isolate yourself in egoism, do not say "who art in heaven" if your mind is focused only on earth, do not say "hallowed be thy name" if do not honor Him, do not say "you kingdom come" if you link it with material success, do not say "your will be done" if you cannot take it when it is painful, do not say "give us today our daily bread" if you don't care for those who hunger, do not say "forgive us our sins" if you hate your brother, do not say "do not bring us to temptation" if you wish to continue in sin, and do not say "deliver us from evil" if you ally yourself with it!

Friday, June 21, 2013. Memorial of St. Luigi Gonzaga, Religious

- 2 Cor 11:18; 21b;30
- Psalm 33
- Mt 6:19-23

The real treasure is God and his Kingdom. One who finds deep intimacy with God has found it and would not trade it for anything less. How much do you value the treasure of the Kingdom?

Saturday, June 22, 2013

- 2 Cor 12,1-10
- Psalm 33
- Mt 6,24-34

One who has developed a trusting dependence on the providence of the Lord has not many worries. Take stock of the number of worries that are currently giving you a hard time in your life and relationships. Imagine how much lighter you would feel if you had been able to trust God and his providence just a little more?

Sunday, June 23, 2013. 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cal CMF, 179-185)

- Zec 12:10-11;13,1
- Psalm 62
- Gal 3:26-29
- Lk 9:18-24

"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Following Christ is a daily lesson in emptying ourselves of the false and inflated part of our ego. Have you allowed yet the experience of God's love to help you grow out of your own self-centered living?

Monday, June 24, 2013. Solemnity of the Nativity of John the Baptist

- Is 49:1-6
- Psalm 138
- Acts 13:22-26
- Lk 1:57-66;80

Each of us is born to communicate a special message to the world. In it consists the very purpose our being present on earth. So was the case with John the Baptist when he was born. His mission was to announce Christ to the world and so he did as he grew up. Have you found the reason for your continued existence on earth yet? What messages are you refusing to deliver?

Tuesday, June 25, 2013

- Gen 13:2; 5-18
- Psalm 14
- Mt 7:6; 12-14

“So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them.” Imagine how harmonious life would have been if everyone practiced this golden rule of life! We who are religious must lead the rest in actualizing this rule beginning right from our communities. Let us be people who ‘pay it forward’ without expecting for rewards and certainly to our surprise goodness will come searching for us too.

Wednesday, June 26, 2013

- Gen 15:1-12; 17-18
- Psalm 104
- Mt 7:15-20

The vocation of the true prophet is bound to be mix up of suffering and persecution. The only satisfaction he has is that he suffers all of it for the right cause. The world has never been merciful to the true prophets right unto our day. But then that is our vocation! Following the footsteps of Claret who was a great and true prophet of his times, let us announce the good news and denounce the evil.

Thursday, June 27, 2013

- Gen 16:1-12;15-16
- Psalm 105
- Mt 7:21-29

We are invited to build our houses on the rock that is God and his Word. Too many are the temptations out there to build our lives on the sands of immediate gratification, of vain glory, and worldly ambition. On what foundation have you been building your life so far?

Friday, June 28, 2013. Memorial of St. Irenaeus, Bishop and Martyr

- Gen 17:1-9;15-22
- Psalm 127
- Mt 8:1-4

The slightly diffident prayer of the leper “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean” reveals the embarrassed recognition of his unworthiness and littleness before God to be an object of healing. But the response of Jesus removes all doubt in his heart. Yes, God wants to heal you, take you out of your uncleanness and make you healthy in body and spirit. Are you willing to ask for help?

Saturday, June 29, 2013. Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul, Apostles (Cal CMF, 187-194)

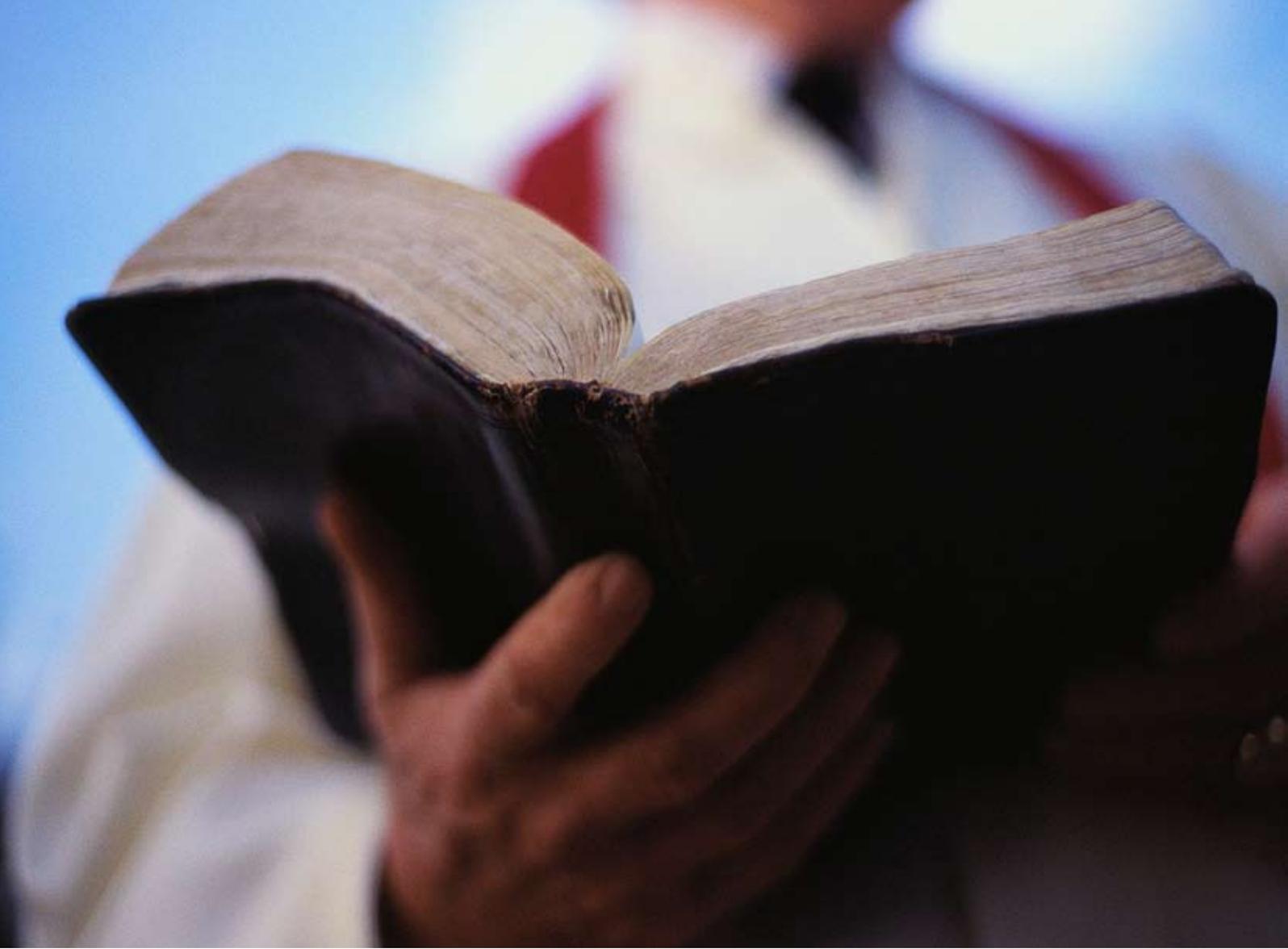
- Acts 12:1-11
- Psalm 33
- 2 Tim 4:6-8;17-18
- Mt 16:13-19

Simon Peter’s response, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” needs to become our personal response to Christ too. It would come from the depth of our heart only when we recognize in Christ the foundation of our lives.

Sunday, June 30, 2013. 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

- 1 Kings 19:16b-19;21
- Psalm 15
- Gal 5:1;13-18
- Lk 9:51-62

The reaction of James and John at the apparent refusal of Samaritans was, “Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?” It is in many ways similar to what we feel when others do not agree with our plans and projects. But Jesus rebukes them for their impetuous behaviour. Violence needs to be replaced with empathic understanding that asks for the why behind people’s lack of cooperation to our projects.



5. Texts for reflections

Appendix 1: The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena (Th. Roosevelt)

It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat.

Appendix 2: Love (Khalil Gibran)

Then said Almitra, Speak to us of Love.
And he raised his head and looked upon the people, and there fell a stillness upon them.
And with a great voice he said:
When love beckons to you, follow him,
Though his ways are hard and steep.
And when his wings enfold you yield to him,
Though the sword hidden among his pinions may wound you.
And when he speaks to you believe in him.
Though his voice may shatter your dreams as the north wind lays waste the garden.
For even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you.
Even as he is for your growth so is he for your pruning.
Even as he ascends to your height and caresses your tenderest branches that quiver in the sun,
So shall he descend to your roots and shake them in their clinging to the earth.
Like sheaves of corn he gathers you unto himself.
He threshes you to make you naked.
He sifts you to free you from your husks.
He grinds you to whiteness.
He kneads you until you are pliant;
And then he assigns you to his sacred fire, that you may become sacred bread for God's sacred feast.
All these things shall love do unto you that you may know the secrets of your heart, and in that knowledge become a fragment of Life's heart.
But if in your fear you would seek only love's peace and love's pleasure.

Then it is better for you that you cover your nakedness and pass out of love's threshing-floor,
Into the seasonless world where you shall laugh, but not all of your laughter, and weep, but not all of your tears.
Love gives naught but itself and takes naught but from itself.
Love possesses not nor would it be possessed;
For love is sufficient unto love.
When you love you should not say, 'God is in my heart,' but rather, 'I am in the heart of God.'
And think not you can direct the course of love, for love, if it finds you worthy, directs your course.
Love has no other desire but to fulfil itself.
But if you love and must needs have desires, let these be your desires:
To melt and be like a running brook that sings its melody to the night.
To know the pain of too much tenderness.
To be wounded by your own understanding of love;
And to bleed willingly and joyfully.
To wake at dawn with a winged heart and give thanks for another day of loving;
To rest at the noon hour and meditate love's ecstasy;
To return home at eventide with gratitude;
And then to sleep with a prayer for the beloved in your heart and a song of praise upon your lips.

Appendix 3: Sex is a Mystery (Fulton Sheen)

Purity is reverence paid to the mystery of sex. If we used the Greek word we would use the word "sacrament." You remember in the supernatural order every sacrament has two elements: one material, one spiritual; one to be seen, heard, or touched and the other which is divine. In the natural order, sex is a mystery because it has these two characteristics. Sex is something known to everyone and hidden from everyone. The known element is everyone is either male or female; the invisible, mysterious element of sex is its creativeness, a sharing in some way of the creative power of God. Why can't sex be used outside of marriage? Because certain powers are to be used only in certain relationships. What is lawful in one relationship is not lawful in another. A man may kill another soldier in a just war but not in his private capacity as a citizen. A policeman can arrest someone as a duly appointed guardian of the law fortified with a warrant.

The creativeness of man and woman is lawful under a relationship sanctioned by God called marriage. Purity will never separate the two. The things which God has joined together will not be separated. When sex becomes a part of love and the purpose of life, it is a dedication and fits into

the whole. Sex is not something isolated from life. Self-control is subordination of a part to a whole to serve a higher enthusiasm. Purity properly understood matches love and the sex instinct. Frequent Holy Communion is the best guardian of chastity because sex is placed in the context of love.

We've already said chastity is the vestibule, the sacristan of love. When we become in love with our Lord, when we have a sense of this tremendous ecstasy from Holy Communion and from oneness with our Savior, then every part of us, our hunger instinct and sex instinct become a part of that love. Love awakens chastity; it is not the other way around. From the time we are children just reaching the age of reason into old age, it is the love of God that makes every other kind of love understandable, even the love of husband and wife. He who loves honesty never has to be told not to steal. He who loves his neighbor never has to be told not to cut his throat. Any of us who love God, human persons, and the mystery of creativeness never have to be told not to do something. We are in love with the mystery. Sex is the reverence paid to the mystery of creativeness.

Appendix 4: A new lifestyle: to be on fire with love (MFL 42-43)

42. The missionary, in his most explicit vocation, is a man “on fire with love” and therefore “spreads its flames wherever he goes.” The anointing of the Spirit enables us to love with prophetic zeal. The same Holy Spirit, by appearing in the form of tongues of fire above the Apostles on Pentecost, showed us this truth quite clearly: an apostolic missionary must have both a heart and tongue of fire, as expressions of love (cf. *Aut* 440). In fact, “the virtue that an apostolic missionary needs most of all is love. He must love God, Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary and his neighbours. If he lacks this love, all his talents, however fine in themselves, are for nothing. But if, together with his natural

endowments, he has much love, he has everything” (*Aut* 438).

43. In the “definition of a missionary” we find the truth about the human person in relationship with God: salvation is found in the God who sets us on fire. When we accept this truth we renounce models of individualism and self-sufficiency in life and open ourselves to new forms of relationship with God and with others. For Missionary Sons, the starting point of a consistent spirituality is knowing ourselves, nurturing the core of our personality and developing our own talents. It deals, definitively, with “being reborn” (cf. *Jn* 3:3).

Appendix 5: A new sending: to set the whole world on fire (MFL 47-50)

47. Whoever loves Jesus will feel loved by the Father, will radiate and testify to his love and will bear much fruit. Our Founder, captivated by apostolic zeal “yearns and strives...to make God better known, loved, and served” (*Works* III, p. 493, cf. *Aut* 233). This zeal of Claret, fruit of the outpouring of the Spirit (*Rom* 5:5; *CC* 39-40) knows no bounds: his spirit is “for the whole world” (*SL*, p. 179). To be on fire with love changes us into men on fire for others to the point of spreading the flame wherever we go²⁴. Thus we share in the mission that comes from God. Like Claret, we can also say: “*Caritas Christi urget nos*” (*2 Cor* 5:14). Like our Mother we are always able to proclaim the Magnificat, because that which the Lord has said will be fulfilled (cf. *Lk* 1: 45-55). The mission entrusted to us is born from an experience of love, it is nourished by caring for it assiduously, it is radiated in the world under the sign of compassion and closeness, above all, towards the impoverished and the excluded.

48. The love of God burns in us the desire to share it (cf. *Works* III, p 493). It expresses an efficacious desire and that is why we try by all possible means “to set the whole world on fire with God’s love” and to bring his Word to the ends of the earth. That desire, necessary in any process of growth and of missionary proclamation, can easily go cold. Thus we need to enkindle it time and again with the Word of fire that comes from God and fashion it on the hard anvil of the apostolic life with its struggles and contradictions. It is not enough that the iron of our life is heated: it needs the

hammering that give it “the shape the smith had planned” (*Aut* 342). Only then, forged according to the shape of Christ, can we be bold in our mission, delight in privations, welcome work, embrace sacrifices, smile at slander, rejoice in torments and glory in the cross (cf. *CC* 39-45). We need a firm determination achieved through prayer and expressed through action (*Aut* 443) to confront mediocrity, laziness and discontent.

49. When the earth is fully alight, we, humble collaborators of the One who came to bring fire to the earth (cf. *Lk* 12:49), will discover what we already knew: that the love that seduced us has a divine name and never remains anonymous (cf. *Mt* 25:35-44). All that is human and humanizes has much to do with God. When our body becomes weak and our capacity for action is limited, we, servants in the way of the Word that never ends, do not cease to be missionaries. We can then “glory in the cross of Jesus Christ” as credible witnesses of the Fire that has been lit in us.

50. The missionary love that has been granted to us is imaginative and creative. Formed in the forge of the Heart of Mary we fix our gaze on those who are excluded from the love of others and who suffer terrible consequences of injustice. Love sees to it that we get closer to them and stay with them, that we let ourselves be touched and accompanied by them. Ministering in the spirit of the Good Samaritan re-ignites our fire, inspires our transforming projects and activities and makes us, together with others, credible proclaimers of the presence of the Kingdom of God.



Communion and Charity

Una voce dicentes.

Concede, ut, qui Corpore et Sanguine Filii tui reficimur, Spiritu eius Sancto repleti, unum corpus et unus spiritus inveniamur in Cristo (Eucharistic Prayer III).

The *Ordo Missae* begins with the words, *Populo congregato*. The sign of the Cross at the beginning of the Mass manifests that the Church is the people gathered together in the name of the Trinity. They gather together, in the same place, to celebrate the sacred mysteries and to respond to the Heavenly Father who calls his children to himself in Christ, in the love of the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist is not a private action, but the action of Christ who always associates the Church to himself with an indissoluble marital bond.

In the Liturgy of the Word, we hear the same Divine Word, source of communion for all those who put it into practice.

In the Eucharistic liturgy we offer up our lives – which we offer together with the whole Church who, in its sacred mysteries, disposes us to enter into communion with Christ in our presentation of bread and wine.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ's sacrifice is made present in the offering of the Church ("Look with favour on your Church's offering, and see the Victim whose death has reconciled us to Yourself"): a spiritual offering, pleasing to the Father, through Christ, with Christ and in Christ.

The fruit of this association with the "living and holy sacrifice" is represented in sacramental communion: "Grant that we, who are nourished by his body and blood may be filled with his Holy Spirit, and become one body, one spirit in Christ" (*Eucharistic Prayer III*).

This is the perennial source of ecclesial communion illustrated by St. John with the analogy of the vine and the branches, and by St. Paul with the image of the body. The Eucharist makes the Church, filling it with God's charity and spurring it on to live this same charity. That is why the offering of other goods or money for the poor, along with the gifts of bread and wine, serves as a reminder that the Eucharist is also a pledge of solidarity and a commitment to share our goods with others.

Liturgical prayer, although always involving single participants, is always addressed to "us".

It is the voice of the Spouse which praises and pleads, *una voce dicentes*.

The same attitudes taken up by the participants express the communion between members of a single organism. "The same (physical) posture, which all the faithful should maintain, is a sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community, gathered together for the sacred Liturgy. This unity at once manifests and favors the intentions and sentiments of those who take part in it." (*IGMR*, 42).

The sign of peace before Communion is expressive of the "ecclesial communion" needed to enter into sacramental communion with Christ. This Communion builds up the Church as the visible reflection of the communion enjoyed by the Holy Trinity. Thus is grounded the spirituality of communion.

The ministry of the Church's pastors and the docility of the faithful to the magisterium are colored by the Eucharist.

The union of the sick and infirm's sufferings with those of Christ is sealed by their participation in the Eucharist.

Our sacramental reconciliation after having "lost our way" is crowned by Eucharistic communion.

The harmonious communion amongst multiple charisms, functions, services, groups, and movements within the Church is assured by the sacred mystery of the Eucharist.

Communion among the different activities, services, and associations within a parish is manifested by their participation in the same Eucharist.

The social fabric, woven together by the threads of peace, mutual understanding, and concord in the earthly city are sustained by the sacrament of "God with us and for us."

The Forge in Our Daily Life

CARITAS CHRISTI - 2013

“

My neighbor, I love and cherish you for a thousand reasons. I love you because God wants me to love you; because God commands me to love you; because God himself loves you. I love you because God has created you in his image for the life of heaven. I love you because you have been ransomed by the blood of Jesus Christ. I love you because of all that Jesus Christ has done and suffered for you. To prove my love for you, I will strive and suffer; I will undergo any work or pain, even death, if necessary, for your sake.” (Aut 448)