

THE FORGE

in our daily life

PATRIS MEI
“THE KINGDOM
OF GOD
IS AT HAND”

3

Ordinary Time I

Patris Mei

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

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 ready 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)

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

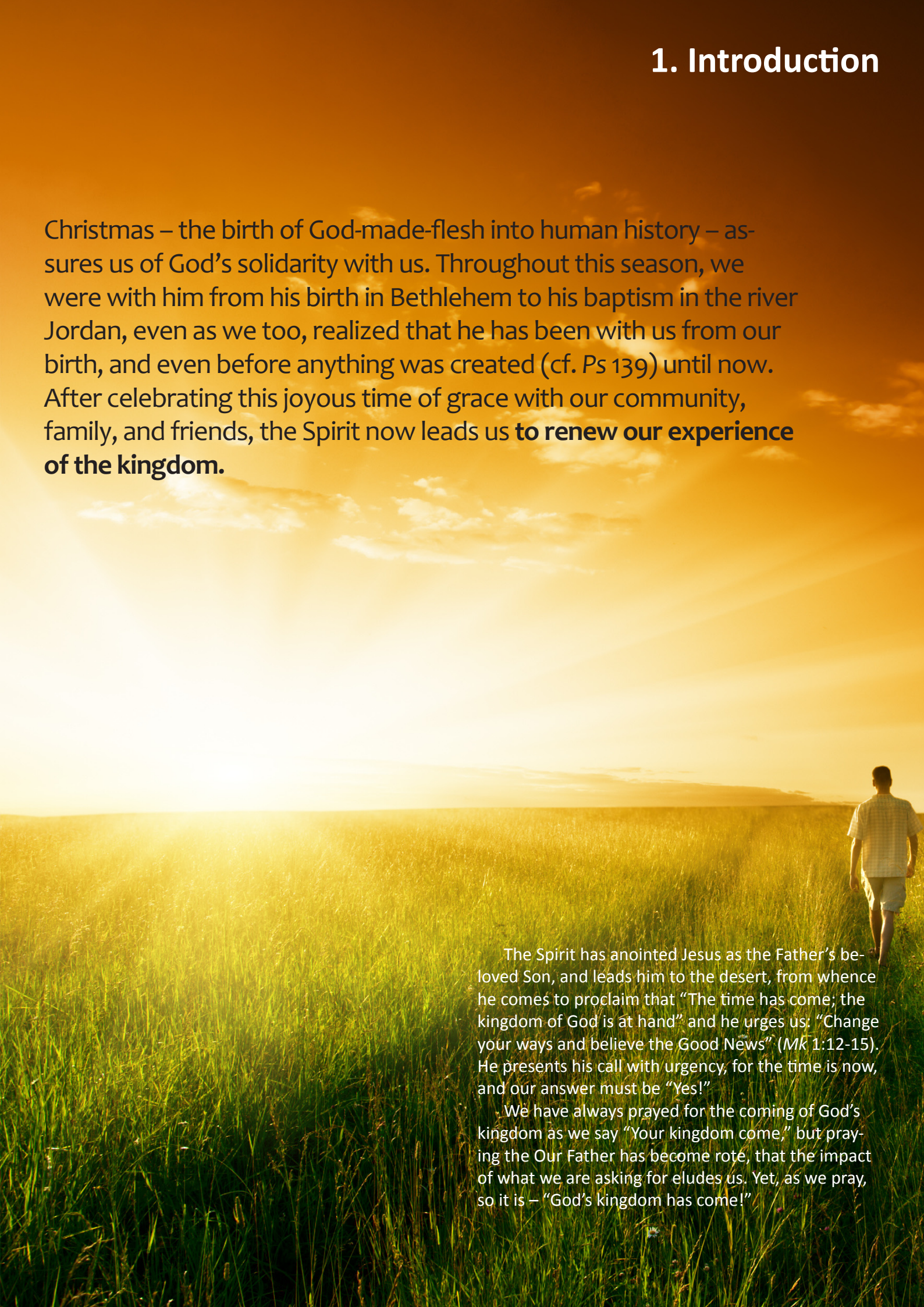
PATRIS MEI - 2012

CARITAS CHRISTI - 2013

SPIRITUS DOMINI - 2014

1. Introduction

Christmas – the birth of God-made-flesh into human history – assures us of God’s solidarity with us. Throughout this season, we were with him from his birth in Bethlehem to his baptism in the river Jordan, even as we too, realized that he has been with us from our birth, and even before anything was created (cf. *Ps 139*) until now. After celebrating this joyous time of grace with our community, family, and friends, the Spirit now leads us **to renew our experience of the kingdom.**

A person is walking away from the viewer through a vast field of tall, golden grass. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow across the entire scene. The sky is filled with soft, wispy clouds. The person is wearing a light-colored shirt and shorts. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

The Spirit has anointed Jesus as the Father’s beloved Son, and leads him to the desert, from whence he comes to proclaim that “The time has come; the kingdom of God is at hand” and he urges us: “Change your ways and believe the Good News” (*Mk 1:12-15*). He presents his call with urgency, for the time is now, and our answer must be “Yes!”

We have always prayed for the coming of God’s kingdom as we say “Your kingdom come,” but praying the Our Father has become rote, that the impact of what we are asking for eludes us. Yet, as we pray, so it is – “God’s kingdom has come!”

As followers of Jesus, we are called to live out the coming of God's kingdom, to build it up and make it a lived reality in the world. As Claretian Missionaries, "we...have been called to follow the Lord and we collaborate with him in the work assigned him by the Father" (CC 39). "Following Jesus means accepting and making our own the new order of values that he sets forth as the 'kingdom,' the absolute reality in view of which all the rest acquires its proper relativity.... Starting from the manifestation made in Jesus, the Son, we have been offered an experience of the fatherhood of God (paternity) which gives meaning to our life," as we live "our sonship in God (filiation), the merciful Father...impels us to extend brotherhood among men" (MCT 143-145), which comes from our deep communion with our brothers (fraternity), with whom we share the one calling "to be witnesses and heralds of the Good News" (mission) (MCT 133).

Exercise 1: Seeing the signs

- How do you see the coming of God's kingdom in **yourself, in your community and in the world around you?**

"Those who sincerely accept the Good News, in virtue of this acceptance and shared faith, therefore gather together in Jesus' name in order to jointly seek the kingdom, build it up and live it. They make up a community which is, in its turn, evangelizing." (EN 13)

Praying for the Coming of the Kingdom

Write a Claretian prayer for the coming of God's kingdom.

2. Reflection

The Kingdom is within you (Lk 17:21)

Where and When. Before proclaiming in words and deeds what the kingdom of God is, Jesus points out where and when this kingdom is.

"The kingdom of God is in you."

God's kingdom is where the King is and he is in you and me:

- not tied to buildings of wood or stone,
- nor to names or titles,
- or times and plans,
- or to any language and expressions,
- or to our abilities or inabilities,

but only to the possibility of living in you and me as the Lord of life.

Are we in the kingdom or is the kingdom in us?

Are we tied to a visible kingdom?

Even if we talk of the kingdom

but don't carry it in us, we will be talking in the wind.

It is never more important
to do something for God
than it is to be in God." (U. Schaffer)

As Christians, the kingdom of God is in us **through our baptism**. Are we in the kingdom or is the kingdom in us?

God's kingdom is present:

- wherever injured people forgive those who have injured them,
- wherever love and care for one another overcome fear and distrust of each other,
- wherever the hungry are fed, the thirsty given a cup of water, the naked clothed, the homeless housed and prisoners are visited,
- wherever, in other words, there is a community where everyone is accepted for who they are,

As Claretians, the kingdom is in us **through our missionary life and mission**. Are we in the kingdom or is the kingdom in us?

The kingdom becomes present in us when we

- become aware of God's action in our daily lives and witness to it,
- prayerfully read the Word of God and the signs of the times,
- live as brothers and become a community called together for mission,
- engage in dialogue of life, faith and culture.

"Those who sincerely accept the Good News, in virtue of this acceptance and shared faith, therefore gather together in Jesus' name in order to jointly seek the kingdom, build it up and live it. They make up a community which is, in its turn, evangelizing." (EN 13)

The kingdom is God's offer of Life and Love

Reflect on these points before you read the following paragraphs:

1. *Why am I a Claretian?*

2. *Have my ideals and dreams changed as I continue living my Claretian vocation? How?*

God's dream

The kingdom of God in Jesus' proclamation is not a geographical territory; neither is it an institution nor a structure or a system for a homologous world. In Jesus' vision, people find fulfillment in God, in fellowship with one another, and in union and harmony with the whole universe. With the time fixed by God coming to an end (Gal 4:4; Eph 1:10), Jesus calls us to faith, to rid ourselves of all that prevent us from seeing that we may believe!

Our Claretian vocation is a response to this coming of God's kingdom, which is God's offer of life and love in our wounded and damaged world. This is the Good News we believe as Christians and have accepted as Claretian Missionaries in our "following of Christ as set forth in the gospel... our supreme rule" (CC 4). "Our word and preaching of the God of Life and Love will [then] be a consoling and hope-filled announcement, especially for his wounded people. Our service of the Word will be prophetic whenever it is backed by actions that tend to heal the ills that afflict our brothers and sisters" (IPM 43).

We make the message and the values of Jesus our own as we place "all our trust in the Lord... [and] see before all else the kingdom of God" (CC 24), and "we readily offer to join efforts with all who strive to transform the world according to God's plan" (CC 46). In this way, we participate in hastening the coming of the kingdom, and filling the cosmos with the reality of God.

Points for personal reflection

1. In what concrete actions do we share in the dream of God?
2. How do we put the kingdom of God above all else in our life?

God-image

Our spirituality is rooted in who God is for us. One aim of the *Patris Mei* stage of the Forge is to help us discover the images we have of God to see the idols we have forged of the false gods in our life instead of the One True God. We have to shatter and destroy them that we may be healed and be whole again. Then, we will be forged as missionaries for the kingdom of God according to the spirit of the apostles, like Father Claret.

*“Lord, I want to know nothing
but your holy will, that I may do it,
and do it, Lord, as perfectly as possible.
I want nothing but you yourself, Lord,
and in you—and only through and for you—
all other things.
For you are all I need.
You are my Father, my Friend, my Brother,
my Spouse, my All.
I love you, my Father, my Strength,
my Refuge, and my Consoler.
Make me love you, Father,
as you love me and wish me to love you.
I know, my Father, that I do not love you
as I ought,
but I am quite sure that a day will come
when I will love you as much as I desire to
because you will grant me the love I ask
through Jesus and Mary.”*

(Aut 445)

How we relate with God is influenced by the image we have of him. Some may see God as a vengeful and punitive lord, or an angry deity who always keeps in sight transgressions against him, or a grand architect like an expert watchmaker, or a sovereign who likes to be appeased. Others may see God as a pampering granddaddy, or a whimsical monarch, or even a playful infant.

The images brought about by our experiences will also, in turn, affect how we relate to ourselves, to others and to the world. One who sees God as cruel and demanding will usually be cruel and hard not only on himself but on others as well. Our God-image affects how we live and how we experience reality, even as it also influences all

our relationships. A good and healthy God-image will have a positive and healthy influence on our whole being.

Points for personal reflection

1. What is the dominant image I have of God?
2. How does it affect the way I relate with him?
3. How does this affect my life as a Claretian missionary?

Images of God

There are two kinds of believers: those who search for the intellectual reason and meaning of the mystery around them, and who form their own rational understanding of God, and those who refer to the emotive and affective implications of their belief, and who form their affective images of God.

Affective images of God

Grandfather God. This image of God comes from the relationship between grandchild and grandfather. From the psychological point of view, this type of relationship is characterized by a big gratification without responsibility or with a much diminished responsibility. The grandparents usually take sides with their grandchildren against their parents. Their own experience has made them more tolerant and more understanding, and they would prefer to keep the peace with their grandchildren to imposing orders, which may be unpleasant to them. They tend to please their grandchildren by softening the seeming harshness and lack of understanding of their parents, and ensure that they are repaid by their grandchildren's love and affection, thus reducing the loneliness of their old age.

God can conveniently become a grandfather in our life – a God who always has some little goodies in store for us. We think that he does not know what we do, or even if he does, he really does not mind. Grandfather God is always ready to give us all, without expecting anything in return. Such an image of God that grants the believer limitless freedom and absence of norms can hardly build up a responsible ethical life.

Lawgiver Father God. This image of God comes from the relationship with an authoritarian paternal figure. From the psychological point of view, the father-son relationship is character-



ized by a small gratification as a response to a big responsibility. The father authority rewards or punishes according to the behavior of the son. Justice is the norm here and there is no place for leniency.

This type of relationship, common in many traditional families, makes the child follow the rules and conform to set norms, and develop his ability to distinguish right from wrong. In spite of this, it also promotes anxiety and a permanent feeling of dissatisfaction in the child for never being able to fulfill all of father's expectations. The child sees his self-worth in how well he obeys and puts into practice what his father wants, but at the same time, he also feels that he always falls short of his expectations.

This kind of relationship with God characterizes the religiosity of many believers. Seeing God as rewarding the good and punishing the evil ones spurs us to live an ethical life. But this fear of punishment and retribution is likely to cause serious affective imbalance like scrupulousity, fears, doubts, etc.

Neglectful Father God. There are fathers who just let their children be; they provide them with what they need for their material wellbeing, but are detached from and uninvolved in their life. Though such parents do not set any limits, as opposed to authoritarian parents, their child learns to be autonomous and mature beyond his age. But because of the absence of sufficient nurturing, clear objective references and defined limits, this often leads to great personal insecurity and subjectivism, and emotional immaturity.

This image of God makes us believe that after placing us in this world and giving us life, God has left us to be autonomous and be responsible for ourselves. Rules and norms become subjective and dependent on the actual situation. God is reduced to an origin, that is distant and uninvolved.

We can see that these three images of God differ from the God of Jesus, who is always "Someone different" and "Someone great." His Father is not an indulgent grandfather, or a lawgiver, or a neglectful parent. To understand who this Father is, it will be helpful to see it not from a paternal, but maternal kind of relationship. According to some theologians and mystics, the representation of God as Mother could correct the inadequacy of the image of God as Father. God is also Mother, who loves us unconditionally, nurturing and caring for us, while at the same time, correcting and raising us to be responsive and responsible.

Exercise 2: The images of God in my life journey

1. Try to discover your images of God in the different stages of your life by making an “X” in the corresponding column.

Images of God	Childhood	Adolescence	Adulthood	Third age
Grandfather God				
Lawgiver Father				
Neglectful Father				
God of Jesus				

2. What dominant image of God do you have at this stage of your life? What experiences in life could have influenced you to see God like this? How does it affect your personal, community and pastoral life?

3. See if your image of God needs “retouching” to have God’s true picture; talk about this with your spiritual guide or a brother close to you.

Rational images of God

In our experience of encounter with God, we do desire to know him and represent him with the use of symbols. Yet, the Ten Commandments give a strict injunction against representing the transcendent God, “You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them” (Dt 5:8-9). But in our desire to comprehend the incomprehensible God, we tend to confine him in what we think are precise and perfect, though unlimited, concepts, or in symbols that are meaningful to us, that we may have something to hold on to for we fear that our encounter with him might be purely fictitious.

The problem does not lie in the human desire to represent the unrepresentable One, but that whatever representation we make of him restrains our ability to open to God in a wider and more generous way according to our faith experience. When we image the Imageless and attribute an unlimited character to something deficient and of our own creation, this becomes idolatry. Idolatry includes not only the creation of idols because even the present tendency of many to do away with the traditional images of God is, in a way, creating “anti-idol” idols.



Idols

A God within boundaries (or a God of fear). It consists in being assured of the divine goodness through the scrupulous fulfilling of ethical and religious norms, so that the anger of the fearsome God, who punishes terribly, may thus be appeased. Here God is “known” more than believed. His providence is interpreted more as a result, and he is made responsible for any calamity or disasters, like earthquake, cancer, or war.

A God to be defended (or a God without Logos). It consists in understanding life in defense of God and the autonomy of his creation as one of his whims, which he has to correct to restore order. Believers, who have this image of God, are generally pious, but do not know what a Christian has to stand up for and what upholding the dignity of the human person is.

An imposing God (or a God without the Spirit). It consists in imposing the truth as something external. Conformity and obedience in matters of faith are the most important. Orthodoxy becomes the way to salvation, so that belonging to a religion and not faith is the response one has to make to be saved.

Seeking God in heaven (or a God with a false spirit). It consists in searching for God beyond the reality, mainly, outside the “physical.” The world and the material are not in need of redemption,

so the believer lives the faith in spiritual practices and detaches oneself from the world around him.

Making use of God (or manipulating God). It consists in using God, though usually unconsciously, in order to defend one’s own idols in life.

Anti-idols

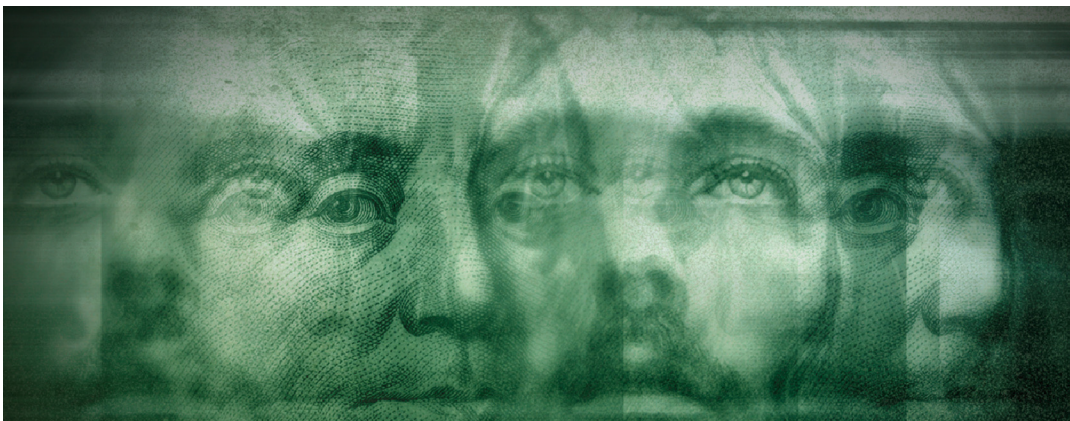
Reducing God (or a God without novelty). It sees God as absolute, and as such we cannot speak of or talk about him though we have to proclaim him.

Denying God (or a rival God). It consists in an implicit affirmation of God in one’s heart, but with an accompanying explicit denial, that is, a rejection of any image of God. God is unknowable and beyond human comprehension.

Not asking from God (or a useless God). It consists simply in remaining as you are. Suffering has to be accepted but not alleviated nor transcended.

Seeing God’s true image

God – the infinitely Other. It is true that we can find God in the ordinary things of our daily life as St. Bonaventure says that the whole creation is like a book where God has left his imprints. And when we look into ourselves, we also see find the image of God in another book – the book of life.



But God remains beyond all these since nothing and no one can ever fully express God, much less capture what God truly is, for God is the infinitely Other, completely different. God is within the ordinary and everyday, but is at the same time beyond all knowing and experiencing.

*Trinity! Higher than any being, any divinity,
any goodness!
Guide of Christians in the wisdom of heaven!
Lead us up beyond knowing and light,
up to the farthest,*

**“We respond to this grace
as we become aware of our-
selves, of the ordinary and
seemingly meaningless little
things of our daily life.”**

*highest peak of mystic scripture
where the mysteries of God’s Word lie simple,
absolute,
unchangeable in the brilliant darkness
of a hidden silence.
Amid the deepest shadow they pour
overwhelming light on what is most manifest.
Amid the wholly unsensed and unseen
they completely fill our sightless minds
with treasures beyond all beauty.*

(Dionysius the Areopagite)

We long to see the face of God as the psalmist continually sings; we desire to know and represent God in spite of God’s unknowability, but the Lord himself said to Moses that no one can see his face and live (Ex 33:18-23). Knowing God is like facing a blinding light or a dazzling darkness, where all our words and knowledge become inadequate as we cannot fully comprehend the meaning of whatever is said about God.

God is nameless, because no one can say anything or understand anything about him. Therefore a pagan teacher says: ‘Whatever we understand or say about the First Cause, that is far more ourselves than it is the First Cause, for it is beyond all saying and understanding.’ So if I say, ‘God is

good,’ that is not true. I am good, but God is not good. I can even say: ‘I am better than God,’ for whatever is good can become better, and whatever can become better can become best of all. But since God is not good, he cannot become better. And since he cannot become better, he cannot be best of all. For these three degrees are alien to God: ‘good,’ ‘better’ and ‘best,’ for he is superior to them all . . . If I say ‘God is a being,’ it is not true; he is a being transcending being and [he is] a transcending nothingness . . . [So] do not try to understand God, for God is beyond all understanding.

One authority says: ‘If I had a God whom I could understand, I should never consider him God.’ If you can understand anything about him, it in no way belongs to him, and insofar as you understand anything about him that brings you into incomprehension, and from incomprehension you arrive at a brute’s stupidity . . . So if you do not wish to be brutish, do not understand God who is beyond words.” (Maestro Eckhart).

This cannot be truer in the mediation of God par excellence, in Jesus as God’s incarnation, the Word becoming flesh, God living among us. In him is the fullness of God, yet we know him not but as a man acquainted with human weakness and suffering. He is the perfect “image” of God, but we see only a humble Man from Nazareth.

God-among-us. Jesus is the Way we see the truth about God, who is life for us. When we contemplate him, our senses and reason are silenced, and we realize our utter poverty before the mystery that is God. We see that all is grace. It is grace that we have come to our faith in God; it is grace that we have been called – and even our response to the call is grace! – to be a son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Mother of God. It is also grace that will heal us of our blindness and rid us of our idols and false images that we may see the true face of God.

We respond to this grace as we become aware of ourselves, of the ordinary and seemingly meaningless little things of our daily life. As we become truly present in the now of our life, God’s face too becomes present before us. Our eyes become open to those around us, specially our brothers in our community and the people around us – the least whom the Lord spoke of (cf. Mt 25:31-46).

Accepting this grace also means becoming at peace with ourselves, and opening up to the great possibilities God has in store for us. We are then able to sit quiet and still before the Lord in our times of prayer and reflection, as Father Claret insists that we may not turn from idol to another and become enslaved to them (cf. *Ascetic Letters*). Thanks to God's grace, our hearts become attentive to his voice (in his Word and in the signs of the time), his face (in the people around us), and his kingdom's becoming a reality in our world.

Exercise 3: Smashing the idols in your life

1. What idols take the place of the true God in your life?
2. What prevents you from smashing those idols?
3. Reflect on how the Word of God, prayer, spiritual accompaniment, life in community can help you turn away from those idols and lead you to the one true God.

The kingdom is conversion

Repent and believe. Jesus' proclamation that God's kingdom is at hand comes with the call to conversion. To convert does not mean to return to the Law and make amends for one's transgressions of the Law, nor does it only mean turning away and leaving one's life of wrongdoing and sin. To convert, first of all, means "to turn towards" – to turn towards God and respond to his invitation to change one's ways and believe – to repent and believe! One is asked to let this new unheard-of message – the Good News Jesus came to proclaim – change one's life and let oneself be enfolded by it.

"Why do you never preach repentance?" said the preacher.

"It's the only thing I teach," said the Master.


"But I never hear you speak of sorrow for sin."

"Repentance isn't sorrow for the past. The past is dead and isn't worth a moment's grief. Repentance is a change of mind: a radically different vision of reality."

(Anthony de Mello)

Claret on conversion. Drawing his inspiration from the three denials of Peter and the glance of Jesus that opened Peter's heart to conversion, Claret writes: "I knew that I would have to preach again and again and the same time pray that the Lord would turn his kind and merciful eyes on worldly people that they might tremble, shudder and be converted" (*Aut* 697).



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The Claretian preaching aims at arousing a new and liberating experience of God in people's hearts, an experience that can make them feel the immense tenderness of the Father's love, and awaken in them an irresistible desire to consecrate themselves to the realization of the kingdom. "Our missionary service of the Word achieves its aims whenever it raises up or consolidates the kind of faith-communities in which the Eucharist is celebrated, and in which each believer feels like a person, lives in solidarity and acts as an evangelizer (cf. CC 47)" (SW 11; cf. MCT 99).

Exercise 4: Take the Jesus Challenge

1. Read the following text calmly and see how Jesus challenges you.

*I am FURIOUS, and he tells me: FORGIVE!
I am AFRAID, and he tells me: TAKE COURAGE!
I have DOUBTS, and he says to me: HAVE CONFIDENCE!
I feel RESTLESS, and he says to me: BE CALM!*

*I prefer to go MY OWN WAY, and he tells me: COME AND FOLLOW ME!
I make MY OWN PLANS, and he says to me: FORGET ABOUT THEM!
I aim for MATERIAL GOODS, and he says: LEAVE THEM BEHIND!
I want SECURITY, and he says: I PROMISE YOU ABSOLUTELY NOTHING!*

*I like to live MY OWN LIFE, and he says: LOSE YOUR LIFE!
I believe I AM GOOD, and he tells me: GOOD IS NOT ENOUGH!
I like to BE THE BOSS, and he says: SERVE!
I like to COMMAND OTHERS, and he says: OBEY!*

*I like to UNDERSTAND, and he says: BELIEVE!
I like CLARITY, and he speaks to me in PARABLES.
I like POETRY, and he speaks to me in REALITIES.
I like my TRANQUILITY, and he likes me to be DISTURBED.*

*I like VIOLENCE, and he says: PEACE BE WITH YOU!
I draw the SWORD, and he says: PUT THAT AWAY!
I think of REVENGE, and he says: OFFER THE OTHER CHEEK!
I speak of ORDER, and he says: I HAVE COME TO BRING DIVISION!
I choose HATRED, and he says: LOVE YOUR ENEMIES!*

*I try to sow HARMONY, and he says:
I HAVE COME TO CAST FIRE UPON THE EARTH!
I like to be the GREATEST, and he says:
LEARN TO BE AS SMALL AS A CHILD!
I like to remain HIDDEN, and he says:
LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE!*

*I look at the BEST PLACE, and he says:
TAKE THE LAST SEAT!
I like to be NOTICED, and he says:
PRAY IN YOUR ROOM BEHIND LOCKED DOORS!*

*No, I don't understand this Jesus. He provokes me. He confuses me.
Like so many of his disciples, I, too, would like to follow another master
who would be more certain and less demanding.
But I experienced almost the same as Peter: "I do not know of anyone else,
WHO HAS THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE!"*

(Fr. Zezinho)

2. After listening to this voice of the Lord in your inner self, identify the realities in your life that need a change; write these down.

3. Write down 10 short invocations to the Lord to help you effect a change in your life.

The kingdom is compassion

A community of compassion. As Claretian missionaries, we share in the compassion of the prophets for God's people, who "see historical reality with the eyes of God...[and] feel with his heart (cf. *1 Sam* 12:7-25) and proclaim a message of renewal with the authority of his Word.... Anointed by the power of the Spirit, Jesus was the definitive prophet of God and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (*Lk* 14:21; *Mt* 5:17; *CC* 3 and 40)" (*IPM* 2).

We too, chosen by Jesus and anointed by the Spirit, feel called to carry on "today" this admirable missionary and prophetic tradition. Prophecy only becomes persuasive when there is coherence between our announcement and our life (cf. *VC* 85). Our personal and community life is, then, our first prophetic act. We only live authentically when we live "in Christ Jesus." Hence, 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 desire "to set nothing above our personal love for Christ and for the poor in whom he lives" (*VC* 84)" (*IPM* 19).

In our ministry of proclaiming the kingdom of God, we build and live out what we announce, first of all, in our communities (cf. *CC* 16), where we let God's love, forgiveness and compassion become the wellspring of our life with our brothers and the people around us. We love because we know that we were loved first; we forgive for we know that we have been forgiven much.

*If Jesus were to open our eyes,
what might we see?
A vision that is new of self and others,
of the world and of God.
We might look on God's creation
with the eyes of God.
God is inside us, looking out
rather than outside us looking in,
and we see ourselves as children of God:
a son or daughter who is loved,
a sinner forgiven and called,
and we see others the same
– a gift, not a threat:
all God's people crying with his cry,
hungering for food, hungering for
a voice to console,
a hand to comfort and being granted
all and even more.*



With our brothers and sisters. The whole creation groans with us for the full realization of the dream of God (cf. *Rom* 8:22) that we be daughters and sons of God, sisters and brothers to one another. It is for this that God has spoken his Word through whom all things were created (cf. *Jn* 1:3) – a word your father and mother echoed when you were conceived that God might speak to you his word of life, which we share with all creation and our fellow human beings in God's universal plan.

This is the same word God spoke to us when he called us to be Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary that he may feel with our hearts the same love for all our sisters and brothers. As Claretian Missionaries, we are one with our Mother in saying, "Be it done to me according to your word" (*Lk* 1:38). When we answered that calling, we brought before God not only ourselves but the entire human family. It was as if we stood before him in the name of all creation as we said, "Here I am; send me" (*Is* 6:8).

*Send me to be your eyes
that I may see the earth as a mother I
have to care for and cherish,
send me to be your lips
that I may echo your creative and healing
word in our broken world,
send me to be your heart
to beat of love and mercy in the midst
of anger and strife,
send me to be your hands
to reach out to give bread and bind wounds,
send me to be your son among*

*my sisters and brothers
that with them we may live as your family
to build with you the kingdom you dream for us.
Send me.*

*An old rabbi once asked his disciples how they
could tell when the night ended and the day was on
its way back.*

*"Could it be," one student asked, "when you see
an animal in the distance and know whether it's a
sheep or a dog?"*

"No," replied the rabbi.

*"Could it be," another asked, "when you look at
a tree in the distance and can tell whether it is a fig
tree or a peach tree?"*

"No," said the rabbi.

*"Well, then, when is it?" his pupils demanded to
know.*

*"It is when you can look at the face of any man or
woman and see that he is your brother or she is your
sister. Because if you cannot do this, then no matter
what time it is, it is still night."*

(Willi Hoffsümmer)

An evangelizing and evangelized community. "Recalling the primacy given by Jesus to brotherly love (cf. Jn 13:34-35; Mt 25:40), ...fraternal life in community is our first missionary statement (cf. EN 21; FLIC 54; IPM 28). We have received a grace that brings us together" (MFL 16).

Our mission in the Church is not specified by a name and ideology, or a structure, but by a grace which reaches us and congregates us in a community of faith, life and service to the Gospel. And for this very reason, a Claretian's first and principal belonging must be his deep communion with his brothers, who are called and sent, as he is, to be witnesses and heralds of the Good News. (MCT 133)

"'First,' 'principal' and 'deep' are very clear terms." (MFL 16).

Points for reflection:

- *As a Claretian, where does my first and principal belonging lie?*
- *How deep is my communion with my brothers in the community?*
- *How does individualism impact my life in community with my brothers?*

Today we are reminded that God has gathered us to be a family with Mary, our Mother. As sons of her Immaculate Heart, we form a community of disciples, who in our life and relationship with one another,

reconnect and deepen the ties that bind us and help build up the Body of Christ (cf. MFL 16). We have responded to the Good News in shared faith with our brothers in community, and with them we "seek the kingdom, build it up and live it....and [we] make up a community which is, in its turn, evangelizing" (EN 13; cf. MCT 147); live our community by being signs that create unity, peace and brotherhood in a divided and selfish world, where violence and getting ahead at any cost are the reigning values; by being open to co-responsibility in fulfilling our mission; by living in friendship and unselfish charity with persons who differ from us in age, status, race or economic background (cf. MCT 149).

For a witnessing community life, Father Claret calls us to have the heart of a mother to be sensitive to do anything for the welfare of our neighbor, who is our brother/sister (*Selected Spiritual Writings* (III), p. 501). We see his concern for others, specially the poor and the marginalized, as he defends his stand for the farmers of Cuba, "Perhaps some may feel strange to see me speaking of agriculture and admonish me telling, 'Why should a prelate be concerned with these matters, while his subject matter is the sacred theology, canon laws and Christian morals?' Certainly this is my main obligation, but I don't think that my concern to propagate and perfect agriculture as unreasonable since it has a powerful role in developing the customs, which is my main mission, and brings prosperity and joy to the people. I am obliged to strive for them because I am their prelate and spiritual father, and I love them" (*Delicias del Campo, Escritos Pastorales*, pp. 293-294).

Points for reflection:

Read the following paragraphs from "The Mission of the Claretians Today" (148) and place before it your life and your community, as if before a mirror. What do you see?

"A community is evangelized, to the extent that it maintains itself in a state of permanent conversion. It always takes God's Word as its touchstone from which it goes on to conduct the dialogue which puts it in an attitude of service to others, in order to offer them our trust and help them remain faithful to the commitments they have undertaken; from which it goes on to discern events and to allow itself to be evangelized by the things that happen to other human beings, especially to the poor and the most needy to whom we have been sent."

Exercise 5: Compassion and Love

1. As beloved sons of the Father and brothers of the Son, living in a missionary community, how do we put into practice compassion and love as signs that the kingdom has come?
2. Think of the faces of the people you find difficult to forgive or serve: see their faces in your imagination, just be aware of what you feel, and present them to God
3. Take time to make doodles on your Forge Notebook. Hold a pencil or a pen, and just let your hand slide it without really intending to make any particular image. When you are done drawing, look at it for some time.
4. Now, highlight the part that seems like a heart to you; you may shade or color it. Then, reflect on this question while looking at your sketch: "Where is God's heart in our Claretian community?"

Challenges to the kingdom

Anti-kingdom "History contains the true God (of life), God's mediation (the kingdom) and its mediator (Jesus) as well as the idols (of death), their mediation (the anti-kingdom) and mediators (oppressors)" (J. Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, p. 161). The kingdom comes as God's intervention in human history; Jesus proclaimed the kingdom "in the presence of the anti-kingdom. Its purpose is to overcome and destroy the anti-kingdom by upholding the true God. This is carried out in the midst of conflict, and therefore implies struggle. And if the mediator appears to be vanquished in this struggle, then the very structure of reality is what becomes the question of the meaning of history. Why did the anti-kingdom reject the kingdom and its mediator, Jesus? In other words, this raises the question of why sin has power, power meaning that the tragedy of history certainly includes putting the mediator to death, but going beyond this. The anti-kingdom determines the whole structure of society and puts many human beings to death." (*Ibid.*, p 162)

The salvation brought by the kingdom—though this is not all the kingdom brings—will, then, be being saved in history from the evils of history. What the benefits of the kingdom might be is determined above all by the actual situation of oppressed human beings and not by an a priori

decision about what salvation might mean. "Salvation is always salvation of someone, and in that someone, from something." The salvation brought by the kingdom comes, therefore, in history. So with Jesus, the content of salvation was dictated by the reality of his listeners, and his actions (miracles, casting out of devils, welcoming sinners) were beneficial because they brought good where there had been specific ills. These benefits brought by the kingdom are a direct contradiction of the anti-kingdom and this makes the kingdom liberating. It not only has to produce benefits, but to liberate from ills. The anti-kingdom is not just the absence or the not-yet of the kingdom, but its formal contradiction. Building the kingdom means destroying the anti-kingdom; saving human beings means liberating them from their slaveries. This is the liberative aspect of Jesus' actions against oppressors in history (the rich, the scribes, the Pharisees, the rulers) and against the transcendent oppressor, the evil one. (*Ibid.*, p. 125-126)

Denouncing evil. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to denounce and unmask the anti-kingdom and to proclaim and witness to the kingdom of God. The Good News of the kingdom is that the final victory is assured. Because of that, evil can

be defeated even now in our daily life. The power of the evil one is already broken. Our mission is to manifest the power of the kingdom as it overcomes and destroys the anti-kingdom in the world through the commitment of those who, in Jesus' name, continue the struggle. Our proclamation of the kingdom is a liberating message. It aims at setting people free from whatever may bind them to the powers of evil that they may have life and live it to the full.

Claret on the maladies of the society. Looking at the reality of his time, Claret saw the forces of the anti-kingdom. He wrote, "Seeing that the Lord, out of sheer good will and no merit on my part, was calling me to stem the torrent of corruption and cure the ills of a moribund society, I thought that I should dedicate myself to studying and gaining a thorough knowledge of the maladies of this social body" (*Aut* 357). Even on the day of his diaconate, he understood that he had to struggle against the evil powers of this world (cf. *Aut* 101). This missionary call to face the challenges of the society led him to identify himself as a powerful weapon – an arrow – placed in the hands of Mary to be launched against the evil one (cf. *Aut* 270). He was reminded of this missionary mandate to fight against the evils of society in his mystical experience of union with Jesus (cf. *Aut* 694).

With his deep experience of God, he plunged into the reality of his time as an apostolic missionary – the vocation that was central in his life – to announce the Gospel of the kingdom and denounce the anti-kingdom. He kept reading and

re-reading his missionary life in the light of the challenges of reality, which he saw with a critical eye and a compassionate heart. Out of his deep communion with God, he poured himself out for human beings; hence his life and action had a truly prophetic character.

Freedom for. This transforming power of God's final intervention sets us free from evil and empowers us to a freedom for moving us, so to speak, into positive action. Schillebeeckx describes this experience of the kingdom now as an experience of the freedom we have received from Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit:

*The freedom to accept that,
despite sin and guilt,
we are accepted by God;
the freedom to be able to live
in this earthly world
without ultimate despair about our existence;
the freedom to commit ourselves
disinterestedly for others
in the confidence that such dedication
is ultimately of decisive significance (Mt 25);
the freedom to accept experiences of peace,
joy and communication,
and to understand them as manifestations,
however fragmentary,
of the saving presence of the living God;
the freedom to join in the struggle
or economic, social and political justice;
the freedom to be free from oneself
in order to be free for others,
free to do good for others.*



Exercise 6: Beatitudes of the kingdom

Compare and contrast the two sets of beatitudes below and list down on the third column your own beatitudes. You may also read the "Beatitudes of Reconciliation" in the Appendix for some ideas.

Beatitudes of the World	Beatitudes of Jesus	My Personal Beatitudes
Blessed are the rich and comfortable.	Blessed are the poor.	
Blessed are those in power.	Blessed are the meek.	
Blessed are those whose every want is satisfied.	Blessed are those who hunger.	
Blessed are those who get even.	Blessed are the merciful.	
Blessed are you when they accept you and pamper you.	Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you.	
Look out for yourself; nobody else will.	Give and it shall be given to you in good measure.	
Avoid pain and suffering at all costs.	Take up your cross each day and follow me.	
Success is the name of the game; you are a loser if you don't achieve it.	What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit one's life?	
The only way to peace is to have more and better weapons.	All who take the sword will perish by the sword.	
Go to church and keep up appearances, but don't be a religion freak.	Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind.	

Prayerfully read our portrait of a missionary.

A Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is a man on fire with love, who spreads its flames wherever he goes. He desires mightily and strives by all means possible to set everyone on fire with God's love. Nothing daunts him: he delights in privations, welcomes work, embraces sacrifices, smiles at slander, rejoices in all the torments and sorrows he suffers, and glories in the cross of Jesus Christ. His only concern is how he may follow Christ and imitate him in praying, working, enduring and striving constantly and solely for the greater glory of God and the salvation of humankind. (CC 9)

3. Guidelines for the community meeting

It is time to bring the message of the kingdom back to our community. We have reflected on how the kingdom relates to the Patris Mei stage of the Forge in Our Daily Life.

1. The kingdom is within us and touches our IDENTITY. The kingdom is literally near and in our hands even. It's not where, when, what, why, or how but who. The kingdom is Jesus and if we live in him, we are in the kingdom. Through Jesus, we are in the kingdom as disciples, followers of Christ, sons of the Father – as Claretians! Our vocation gives us our true identity.

2. The kingdom is God's. We need to see God as Father and we are his children. We belong to him. This is God's **PATERNITY** – how he relates to us. It's only when we have this healthy image of God as Father that we can share his dream. The kingdom is his dream for us, his beloved children.

3. The kingdom is conversion. Change is a new vision of reality. When we are in the kingdom, we die to our old self and live as a new creation – as sons of the Father, brothers of the Son, and this confirms our relationship to God our Father – our **FILIATION**.

4. The kingdom is compassion. It reminds us that we have to care for each other as brothers (**FRA-TERNITY**). Since all of us are children of God, we have to be compassionate as our heavenly Father is compassionate. This care and compassion builds and strengthens the community.

5. Finally, we realize that **the kingdom is challenged by the anti-kingdom of evil**. As sons and disciples, we announce the Good News of the kingdom as well as denounce evil and sin. In short, we have to be prophets! This is our **MISSION**.

Prayer for Community

It is clear that we are given both a gift and a task with the kingdom of God. Let us pray for its coming in and among us with the Prayer for the Community (*Spiritual Directory* 69).

Community Celebration of Reconciliation

An act of reconciliation can be done as part of a community reflection on the kingdom of God to help us experience the reality of the kingdom within us as a community of disciples.

4. Points for the “lectio divina”

The Forge offers to us *lectio divina* as a way of conforming to Christ. By daily reading the Word, reflecting on it, praying with it and acting according to it, we closely follow the Word made flesh.

Monday 9th January 2012

- 1 Sam 1:1-8
- Ps 115 (116)
- Mk 1:7-11

Jesus began his proclamation of the kingdom on that day by the bank of the river Jordan when he had the experience of the Spirit, coming to rest on him, and heard the voice of the Father. We too wait for that experience; we cannot force that moment to come. Like Jesus, we wait for the Father's will to send us.

Tuesday 10th January 2012

- 1 Sam 1,9-20
- Ps: 1 Sam 1.4-8
- Mk 1,21-28

Jesus proclaimed the kingdom in word and deed as he healed the man with unclean spirit. By healing the man, Jesus showed his authority and the awesome power of the kingdom over evil. We have been called to continue Jesus' proclamation and ministry of healing in the midst of the anti-kingdom.

Wednesday 11th January 2012

- 1 Sam 3:1-10. 19-20
- Ps 39 (40)
- Mk 1:29-39

Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law and she began to serve them the moment she was healed. Those healed by Christ begin straight away, as by some deep instinct, to serve the community. Being also healed by Jesus, we too are impelled to serve others.

Thursday 12th January 2012

- 1 Sam 4:1-11
- Ps 43 (44)
- Mk 1:40-45

Lepers were the alienated people in the time of Jesus; they had to live outside the society. We meet one in today's Gospel. There are times that we also feel alienated and alone. When you feel alone and find life meaningless, feel the healing touch of Jesus!

Friday 13th January 2012

- 1 Sam 8:4-7. 10-22
- Ps 88 (89)
- Mk 2:1-12

We are not told the name of the paralytic, or of those who brought him to Jesus; they are simply referred to as "some people." But where would the world be without such people? They are the anonymous "bringers" of people to Jesus, doing good quietly, patiently and unselfishly. Thanks to all the people who bring me to Jesus. Thanks to them, we are who we are today.

Saturday 14th January 2012

- 1 Sam 9:1-4. 10. 17-12.19
- Ps 20 (21)
- Mk 2:13-17

The tax collectors were a hated group, and many were unscrupulous in lining their own pockets. That Jesus should pick one of them to be his follower shows how little his thought ran on conventional lines. Unlike him, we usually see only types and not people, for we even see ourselves as types. "Who me?" Yes, he calls us by name, not by type.

Sunday 15th January 2012. Second Sunday of Ordinary Time

- 1 Sam 3:3-10. 19
- Ps 39 (40)
- 1 Cor 6:13-15. 17-20
- Jn 1:35-42

John showed who Jesus was to the first disciples, who went with him and saw. So great was their encounter with Jesus that they had to share it with others. As Claretians, we have to show Jesus to others like John and the first disciples. Point out Jesus to the people you minister, and be bold to talk about your faith in Jesus.

Monday 16th January 2012

- 1 Sam 15:16-23
- Ps 49 (50)
- Mk 2:18-22

People capable of the deepest joy are also capable of the deepest sorrow because they respond to life as it comes. But others become forever mired in a halfway place, experiencing neither joy nor sorrow. Joy is the chief characteristic of a Claretian. How do we experience and express this joy in our vocation?

Tuesday 17th January 2012

- 1 Sam 16:1-13
- Ps 88 (89)
- Mk 2:23-28

In a Zen monastery, there is a piece of calligraphy that says, “If you break the law, you will never attain freedom.” Then, underneath is written, “If you keep the law, you will never attain freedom.” The kingdom empowers us with not just a freedom *from* but also a freedom *for*. Are we deep in the kingdom to be truly free to do God’s will?

Wednesday 18th January 2012

- 1 Sam 17:32-33.37. 40-51
- Ps 143 (144)
- Mk 3:1-6

There are always multiple layers of meaning in the Scriptures. Jesus restored the man back to his dignity as a human person. Later, Jesus himself would be nailed to the cross, becoming powerless for the powerless. Such a one will always be in trouble with the powers that be. Like Claret, we share in this mission of Jesus to liberate others. Nothing daunts us!

Thursday 19th January 2012

- 1 Sam 18:6-9; 19,1-7
- Ps 55 (56)
- Mk 3:7-12

The kingdom begins small. Jesus spoke of seeds hidden in the ground, seemingly insignificant, but holding something tremendous within. To understand even a single seed in its very essence would be to understand the universe. A true disciple’s silence is wonderful to listen to.

Friday 20th January 2012

- 1 Sam 24:3-21
- Ps 56 (57)
- Mk 3:13-19

Jesus chose those who he wanted to proclaim the coming of the kingdom and they came to him. Claret saw in this his calling to be an apostolic missionary. With him, we were also called by Jesus and we came, forming with him an apostolic community of missionaries.

Saturday 21th January 2012

- 2 Sam 1:1-4, 11.12.17.23-27
- Ps 79 (80)
- Mk 3:20-21

In the 4th century, Abba Antony, the founder of monasticism, said, “A time is coming when men will go mad, and when they see someone who is not mad, they will attack him saying, ‘You are mad, you are not like us.’” As disciples, we share our Master’s lot of persecution and privation.

Sunday 22nd January 2012. Third Sunday of Ordinary Time

- Jon 3:1-5.10
- Ps 24 (25)
- 1 Cor 7:29-31
- Mk 1:14-20

As Jesus begins proclaiming the kingdom, he calls his first disciples. They respond without delay. When we respond to the call to be disciples, we also accept to proclaim the kingdom with him. Let us ask for the grace to leave everything at once and follow him without delay.

Monday 23rd January 2012

- 2 Sam 5:1-7.10
- Ps 88 (89)
- Mk 3:22-30

It is ironic how people confuse Jesus with the anti-kingdom. Jesus' rebuttal is particularly instructive to know more about the kingdom: "No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man." Though challenged, the kingdom will never be overcome because God is much stronger than evil.

Tuesday 24th January 2012

- 2 Sam 6:12-15.17-19
- Ps 23 (24)
- Mk 3:31-35

It is doing God's will that makes us a family with Jesus. This was the passion of his life that he could say, "Not my will but yours be done," which brought him to his death on the cross. His passion to do the Father's will was stronger than death.

Wednesday 25th January 2012. Conversion of St. Paul

- Acts 22:3-16
- Ps 116 (117)
- Mk 16:15-18

We are sent to proclaim the good news to all of creation. We renew this commissioning today as missionary evangelizers. We recall the day we received this vocation, the day of our profession, ordination or assignments. We remember the times we received the call to conversion and are constantly challenged to be converted.

Thursday 26th January 2012

- 2 Sam 7:18-19.24-29
- Ps 131 (132)
- Mk 4:21-25

Timothy and Titus did not know Jesus in person but accepted his challenge to "hear the word, take it to heart and produce." May we be like Timothy and Titus as true servants of the Word and use all possible means to proclaim the Good News of the kingdom.

Friday 27th January 2012

- 2 Sam 11:1-4.5-10.13-17
- Ps 50 (51)
- Mk 4:26-34

Seeds sown in the ground sprout, grow, and bear fruit. The kingdom Jesus proclaimed grows and is built up in our midst without our being aware of it until it matures. We cannot fully imagine how its fullness will be, but we know it will be most wonderful.

Saturday 28th January 2012

- 2 Sam 12:1-7.10-17
- Ps 50 (51)
- Mk 4:35-41

We have faith but at times it's not enough to weather the storms of our life. We find ourselves severely tested sometimes, especially in times and with people we least expect. But Jesus says, "Quiet now! Be still!" Don't panic! He is in control.

Sunday 29th January 2012. Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time

- Dt 18:15-20
- Ps 94 (95)
- 1 Cor 7:32-35
- Mk 1: 21-28

Jesus has power over all evil and unclean spirits. But if Jesus has power over all evil, why is there still so much suffering in the world? What is our hand in it? What can we do to help relieve others of their suffering?

Monday 30th January 2012

- 2 Sam 15:13-14.30; 16,5-13
 - Ps 3 (4)
 - Mk 5:1-20
- The pigs or the man? We also have the same dilemma in our life and ministry. What should we do when faced with economic constraints in our ministry? It is good to remember that a human person is of more worth than the whole world.

Tuesday 31st January 2012

- 2 Sam 18:9-10.14.24-25.30
 - Ps 85 (86)
 - Mk 5:21-43
- Mark's gospel leaves an impression of breathless haste. Many sentences begin with "and"; he often uses phrases like "straight away," "and immediately"; he uses the 'historic present' (Jesus "says" to them, not "said"), which gives a feeling of urgency. There is the urgency about the whole gospel that makes it quite clear that it is not just for reading but for doing.

Wednesday 1st February 2012

- 2 Sam 24:2.9-17
 - Ps 31 (32)
 - Mk 6:1-6
- We have to go through many things to become adult Christians. Many people, even in the Church, will try to keep us in a pre-adult state, thinking that this is what Jesus wants. But he said that we must be adults who are like children, not children who are like adults.

Thursday 2nd February 2012. Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

- Mal 3,1-4
 - Ps 23 (24)
 - Heb 2,14-18
 - Lk 2:22-40
- As we grow old, most of us dwell on the past or worry about the future, and lose sight of the present. But Simeon and Anna had eyes to recognize the coming of what they had been waiting for "today." They had the freshness of mind and spirit – such people become old only on the outside and are truly younger than any of us!

Friday 3rd February 2012

- Sir 47:2-11
 - Ps 17 (18)
 - Mk 6:14-29
- In the work of those who bring about the kingdom, the forces of the anti-kingdom will do all they can to extinguish even a spark of light, or silence a solitary voice that speaks of truth and justice. But no matter what they do, that tiny spark will set the world on fire with the flames of the Spirit, that voice will still shout the Good News of God's saving power.

Saturday 4th February 2012 . Venerable Fr. Jaime Clotet

- 1 Kings 3:4-13
 - Ps 118 (119)
 - Mk 6:30-34
- Jesus told the apostles to rest when they returned from their mission. Rest is not some kind of reward after doing one's work, but an integral part of work. We all need to rest and pause for a while. Rest, the art that animals, and even the whole of creation, practice to perfection, is one "work" we have to learn.

Sunday 5th February 2012. Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time

- Job 7:1-4.6-7
 - Ps 146 (147)
 - 1 Cor 9:16-19.22-23
 - Mk 1:29-39
- Jesus continues his ministry of healing and preaching, but he always has time to pray. Prayer is not only for sustenance but an integral part of the mission. Contemplation complements action. Prayer is the fire that keeps one's zeal burning. Many get burned out because they let the flames of their missionary life be smothered.

Monday 6th February 2012

- 1 Kings 8:1-7.9-13
- Ps 131 (132)
- Mk 6:53-56

The kingdom brings healing and liberation, so those who suffer gather around the bringers of this message of salvation from the anti-kingdom. It is like honey that attracts bees, as Father Claret said. Does our community offer honey to the people around us? Or do we give them vinegar instead?

Tuesday 7th February 2012

- 1 Kings 8:22-23.27-30
- Ps 83 (84)
- Mk 7:1-13

Those experts in the Word of God know very well even where to put the commas and the periods, and are too preoccupied in carrying out the words of the Bible to the letter that they disregard the spirit of the law. God has a mother's heart, so to understand his will, we have to read his words as the words of a loving parent.

Wednesday 8th February 2012

- 1 Kings 10:1-10
- Ps 36 (37)
- Mk 7:14-23

Religion is not about appearances or observances, but about you! It is about the kind of response you make to the world, to others, and to God. It is about whether that wonderful "chemistry" of the Gospel is happening to you: the kind of "chemistry" that can turn bad stuff into good, curses into blessings, suffering into strength.

Thursday 9th February 2012

- 1 Kings 11:4-13
- Ps 105 (106)
- Mk 7:24-30

What does all this mean? Don't we always expect Jesus to do the noblest, most loving thing? Don't we expect him always to match our idea of him? But Jesus is always challenging our mindsets and pre-conceptions. Let us ponder over this event to know him better.

Friday 10th February 2012

- 1 Kings 11:29-32; 12,19
- Ps 80 (81)
- Mk 7,31-37

Even after the long years of formation, we still need Jesus to lay his hand on us and say, "Ephphata," that we may truly hear and understand. May our tongue be loosened that we may begin to speak the message of salvation we bring in plain language.

Saturday 11th February 2012

- 1 Kings 12:26-32
- Ps 105 (106)
- Mk 8:1-10 (o Jn 2,1-11: Our Lady of Lourdes)

As sons of Mary's heart, we have to learn from our Mother how to trust and have confidence in Jesus, even to anticipate God's goodness in times of dire need. We pray that in her heart, our faith will be forged to that of hers – unwavering and trusting.

Sunday 12th February 2012. Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time

- Lv 13:1-2.45-46
- Ps 31 (32)
- 1 Cor 10:31 – 11,1
- Mk 1:40-45

This was a man asked by Jesus not to tell anyone the good thing that happened to him, but how could he keep himself from proclaiming a most wonderful thing! So he did. We professed as proclaimers of the Good News and have been sent to do so, yet there are times that we lack the enthusiasm and the fervor to speak what that man was told not to.

Monday 13th February 2012

- Jas 1:1-11
- Ps 118 (119)
- Mk 8:11-13

People have a great fascination for signs, thinking that the more spectacular the sign, the greater its effect to bring about faith. But what sign would suffice someone who does not have eyes even for the little miracles of daily life? The marvelous signs of God's presence are all around us, happening right before our eyes, but most of us do not see.

Tuesday 14th February 2012

- Jas 1:12-18
- Ps 93 (94)
- Mk 8:14-21

Jesus asks us today: "Do you still not understand?" What a timely question on Valentine's Day. We have answered the call to be his disciples and left everything for the sake of the kingdom. On this day, let us ask ourselves how we really understand the call we have embraced? Where is our heart?

Wednesday 15th February 2012

- Jas 1:19-27
- Ps 14 (15)
- Mk 8:22-26

Let us not get discouraged with ourselves and lose heart. Profession or ordination is not synonymous to perfection, but more of a signpost in our formation journey with Jesus. God gradually forges our heart until it conforms to his will, but it takes time.

Thursday 16th February 2012

- Jas 2:1-9
- Ps 33 (34)
- Mk 8:27-33

Peter, whom we consider the first pope, was called Satan by Jesus when he set God's will aside for his human concerns. Even if something seems good, it is not truly good if it does not advance the will of God. So in our work for the kingdom, we have to learn to discern which among the possible means before us are in accord with the mind of God.

Friday 17th February 2012

- Jas 2:14-24.26
- Ps 111 (112)
- Mk 8:34 – 9,1

The values of the kingdom are opposed to those of the anti-kingdom. Paradoxically, the idolatrous lust for life of the anti-kingdom brings about death, while losing one's life for the Gospel leads to finding true life. Let us reflect on how we see and regard life.

Saturday 18th February 2012

- Jas 3:1-10
- Ps 11 (12)
- Mk 9:2-13

We consider change as external, like molding a lump of clay into some object, which still remains the same lump of clay. And so after years of formation, we come to think that change is near to impossible, for we are still the very same person when we first entered the congregation. But formation is not about molding; rather, it is letting yourself be transformed, transfigured by the Spirit, our first Formator.

Sunday 19th February 2012. Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time

- Is 43:18-19.21-22.24-25
- Ps 40 (41)
- 2 Cor 1:18-22
- Mk 2:1-12

We oftentimes see ourselves as among those who brought the paralytic to Jesus, thinking that we go into so much trouble to help others. Yet, we can also reflect on ourselves as the paralytic, whom others go into a lot of trouble to help. Open your eyes to see those around you who care for you, and be aware of how they love you.

Monday 20th February 2012

- Jas 3:13-18
- Ps 18-19
- Mk 9:14-29

We have become “professional” believers that faith, which for many remains incomprehensible, has become ordinary to us. But what do we truly believe? Let us say to Jesus with the man in today’s Gospel to help us in our unbelief, that we may see the liberating power of the coming of the kingdom.

Tuesday 21st February 2012

- Jas 4:1-10
- Ps 54 (55)
- Mk 9:30-37

from today’s image of children as precious and innocent human persons, children were without any status in society in Jesus’ time. It is their being “nothing” that should speak to us of the message of Jesus, to us who want to become “something” in the world.



5. Texts for further study

Appendix I: A Prayer of Archbishop Oscar Romero

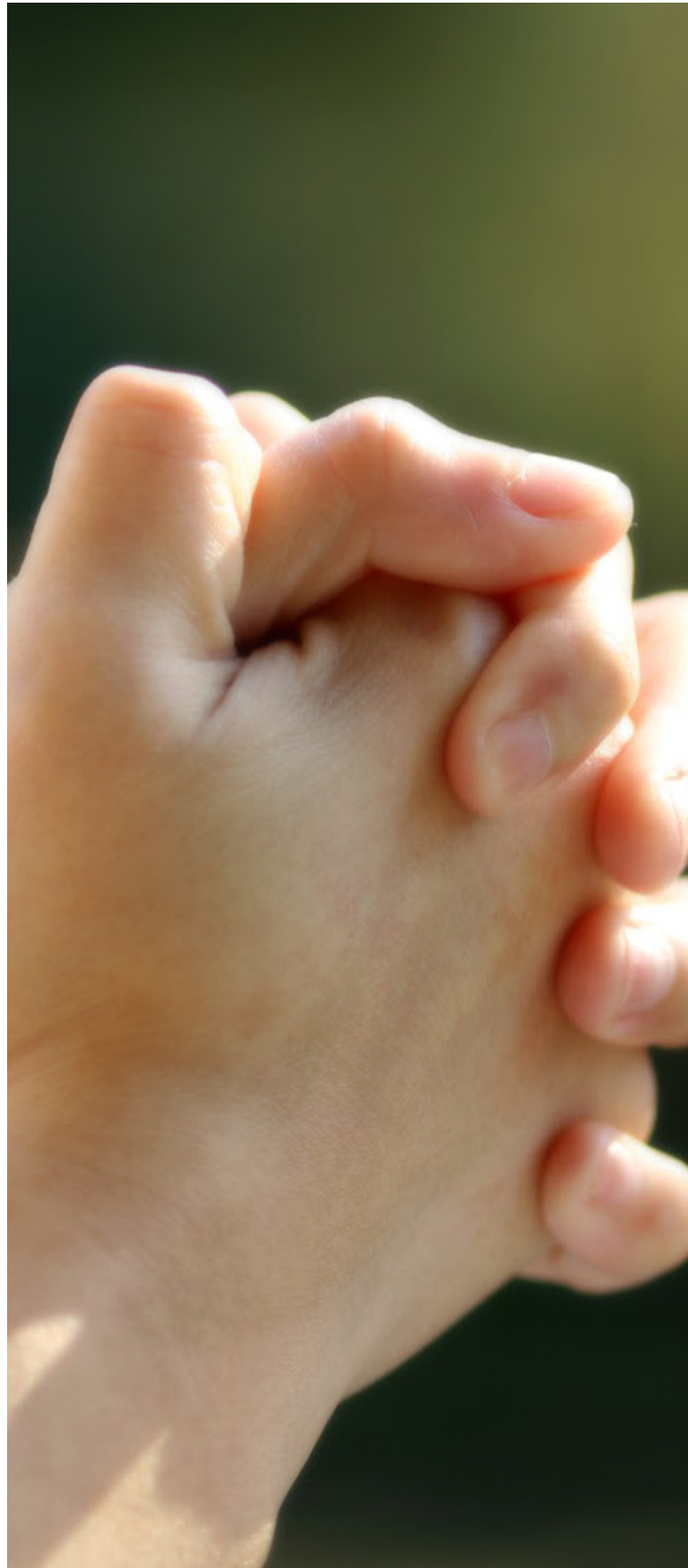
It helps now and then to step back
and take the long view.
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime
only a fraction of the magnificent enterprise
of God's work.
Nothing we do is complete,
which is another way of saying
that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the Church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.
This is what we are about:
we plant the seeds that one day will grow;
we water the seeds already planted,
knowing that they hold future promise;
we lay foundations that will need further development;
we provide yeast that produces effects,
far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is
a sense of liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something and do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning,
a step along the way,
an opportunity for the Lord's grace
to enter and do the rest.
We may never see the end results,
but there is a difference between
the master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders,
ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.

Amen.



Appendix II: *Your kingdom come*

Your kingdom come;
may it come soon
to the hungry,
to the weeping,
to those thirsting for your justice,
to those waiting for centuries for a truly human life.
Grant us the patience to smooth the way
on which your kingdom comes to us.
Grant us hope that we may not weary
in proclaiming and working for it,
despite so many conflicts,
threats and shortcomings.
Grant us a clear vision
that in this hour of our history
we may see the horizon
and know the way on which
your kingdom comes to us.

(From a Nicaraguan meditation)

Appendix III: *Beatitudes of Reconciliation (Sisters of St. Joseph)*

Blessed are those who are willing to enter into the process of being healed,
for they will become healers.
Blessed are they who recognize their own inner violence,
for they will come to know non-violence.
Blessed are they who can forgive self,
for they will become forgivers.
Blessed are those who are willing to let go of selfishness and self-centeredness,
for they will become a healing presence.
Blessed are those who listen with compassion,
for they will become compassionate.
Blessed are those who are willing to enter into conflict,
for they will find transformation.
Blessed are those who know their interdependence with all of creation,
for they will become unifiers.
Blessed are those who live a contemplative life stance,
for they will find God in all things.
Blessed are those who strive to live these beatitudes,
for they will be reconcilers.

Appendix IV: *On experiencing God (Karl Rahner)*

- Have you ever kept silent, despite the urge to defend yourself, when you were unfairly treated?
- Have you ever forgiven another although you gained nothing by it and your forgiveness was accepted as quite natural?
- Have you ever made a sacrifice without receiving any thanks or acknowledgment, without even feeling any inward satisfaction?
- Have you ever decided to do a thing simply for the sake of conscience, knowing that you must bear sole responsibility for your decision without being able to explain it to anyone?

- Have you ever tried to act purely for love of God when no warmth sustained you, when your act seemed a leap in the dark, simply nonsensical?
- Have you ever been good to someone without expecting a trace of gratitude and without the comfortable feeling of having been “unselfish”?

The first thing that strikes one in beginning to analyze the reality of Jesus of Nazareth is that he did not make himself the focus of his preaching and mission. Jesus knew himself, lived and worked from something and for something distinct from himself. This fact, which can be deduced from faith if one accepts that Jesus was truly a human being and behaved in a manner appropriate to a creature, emerges incontrovertibly from the Gospels. Jesus' life was an outward-directed one, directed to something very different from himself.

In the Gospels this something central in Jesus' life is expressed by two terms: "kingdom of God" and "Father." Of both, the first thing to say is that they are authentic words of Jesus. The second is that they are all-embracing, since by "kingdom of God" Jesus expresses the whole of reality and of what is to be done, and by "Father" Jesus expresses the personal reality that gives final meaning to his life, that in which he rests and what in turn does not allow him to rest. Finally, "kingdom of God" and "Father" are systematically important realities for theology, giving it a basis on which better to organize and grade Jesus' multiple external activities, to conjecture his inner being and, undoubtedly, to explain his historical fate of dying on the cross.

Both realities, kingdom and Father, though distinct and not simply inter-changeable, complement one another, and so "the kingdom explains God's being abba and the Fatherhood of God provides a basis for and explanation of the Kingdom." In making an analysis, however, one has to choose to begin with one or the other, and here I begin with Jesus' relationship to the kingdom, because this is how the Gospels begin, because they give a lot of information on it, and because, I think, one can approach Jesus' overall reality better by starting from his external activities on behalf of the kingdom and moving from there to his inner relationship with God, than one can by working the other way round.

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The Forge in Our Daily Life

PATRIS MEI - 2012

“

I knew that I would have
to preach again and again and
the same time pray that the Lord
would turn his kind and merciful eyes on
worldly people that they might tremble,
shudder and be converted” *(Claret)*