

# 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 also the action of the Holy Spirit pouring into us the gift of love.

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

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

- 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 methodoloy 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** 



Each of the synoptic gospels presents the baptism of Jesus being followed by the temptations in the desert. During the Quid Prodest period last year the experience of Jesus was used to invite you to look towards Easter and consider the journey you have made in your life. This year you are invited to use these texts to orientate your reflections during this period. Reflections which will invite you to make time to withdraw from the noise and distractions of your busy life and to make the inner space necessary for exploring the significance of being, like Jesus in the desert, a Son of the Father. This is an identity which during this period of the Forge in daily life, you are being asked to bring to conscious awareness.

Each week there will be a reflection for you to consider along with some suggestions of exercises that you can do to engage more deeply with the material. Before we look at Jesus' temptations you will be invited to make time to consciously place yourself before the Father who loves you,

to continue to enter into the focus of this year's theme: the Patris Mei experience. Having explored some ideas about the vows as an expression of our being Sons there will be some material offered to provoke reflection on our vocational identity as Claretians and the final week of Lent, Holy Week, will look at Jesus as our model: the suffering servant. As you use these materials you are invited to pay attention to what is invoked in you. Which points resonate with your experience? Which aspects do you find yourself disagreeing with? How do your reactions compare to the other members of your community?

In essence you are being encouraged to use this season of Lent to live the consequences of your relationship with your Father, to your fullest potential without being tempted to give it only a half - hearted expression that runs the risk of being second rate.









# 2. Reflection

During the first few days of Lent you are invited to make some time to look over the materials being offered for this season and to create a programme on how you intend to use the materials.

"As soon as he was baptized, Jesus came up from the water. At once, the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God come down like a dove and rest upon him. At the same time a voice from heaven was heard, "This is my Son, the Beloved; he is my Chosen One." Then the Spirit led Jesus into the desert that he be put to the test by the devil."

(Mt 3:16 - 4:1).

# Week One: You have not chosen me, I have chosen you

A sense of being called and chosen is a significant element of our vocational identity. Routine and busy lives, if not balanced with moments of prayer and reflection, can leave us feeling that everything is dependent on us who must remain in control rather than us humbly recognising that we are collaborating in the agenda of God. If our lives are devoid of the deeper experience of being intimately loved by the Father, our apostolic endeavours, rather than being expressions of loving service, can instead be transformed into an insatiable workaholism that seeks to earn what the gospel reveals as freely given: the Father's love.

During this first full week of Lent you are invited to make time to get in touch with your own personal history of feeling loved by God. You may find it helpful to look over any notes and writings that you have gathered during the previous months of the Forge experience. There is also a suggested exercise for the week that offers an alternative means of entering into a sense of your sonship. Having taken time to recognise patterns that exist in your own life, you are encouraged

to share, with at least one person, what emerges for you when you look back over your life, identifying those moments and situations where you have experienced being loved by God the Father in particular. You might find it helpful to identify particular scripture passages that speak of the Father you have come to know.

# Exercise 1: A Father's letter to his son

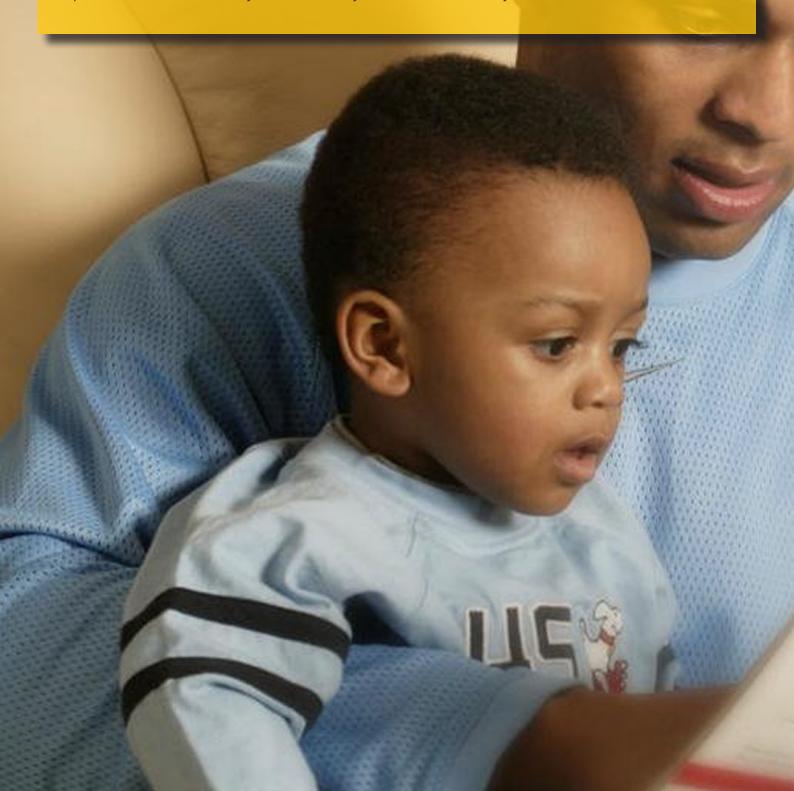
1. You are invited to take some time to read or listen to (download from the Forge webpage) the following letter which is based on a *father*'s *love letter*.

Take some time just to sit and reread the letter becoming aware of what it invokes in you with respect to your own relationship with the Father. Try not to judge your reactions; just become aware of them, accepting them as gift.

## 2. A Son's response...

Then, having taken some time just sitting and contemplating this message, take some paper and a pen and write a letter giving your response to the Father's question.

For this exercise it is suggested that you keep writing your response without stopping to review or correct what you are writing. Then a couple of days after writing your letter you are invited to make some space to prayerfully review your response to the Father and identify what it means to you to have been chosen by the Father.



My Son, I know all about you. I know when you sit down and when you stand up. I know all your ways. (Ps 139:1-3) Even the number of hairs on your head are known to me. (Matt 10:29-31) It was in my image that you were made, (Gen. 1:27) and it is in me that you live and move and have your being, for you are my Son. (Acts 17:28) Even before you were conceived, I knew you. (Jer. 1:4-5) I chose you when I planned creation. (Eph. 1:11-12) You were not a mistake, for all your days are written in my book. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. I formed you in your mother's womb (Ps. 139:13 -16) And brought you forth on the day you were born. (Ps 71:6) I have been misrepresented by those who do not know me; (Jn 8:41-44) I am not distant or angry, No, I am the complete expression of love, (1 Jn 4:16) And all I want to do, is to lavish my love upon you, because you are my child and I am your Father. (1 Jn 3:1) I offer you more than any earthly father ever could, (Matt. 7:11) For I am the perfect father. (Matt. 5:48) I provide for you and I meet all your needs. (Matt. 6:31-33) The plan I have for your future has always been filled with hope, (Jer. 29:11) because I love you with a love that is everlasting. (Jer. 31:3) My thoughts about you are as countless as the sand on the seashore. (Ps. 139:17-18) And I will never stop doing good to you, (Jer. 32:40) for you are my treasured possession, (Ex. 19:5) I want to show you great and marvellous things. (Jer. 33:3) Seek me with all your heart, And you will find me. (Deut 4:29) I can do more for you than you could ever possibly imagine. (Eph. 3:20) For I am your greatest encourager, (2 Thess 2:16-17) the Father who comforts you in all your troubles. (2 Cor. 1:3-4) When you are broken hearted, I am always close to you. (Ps. 34:18) As a shepherd carries a lamb, I have carried you close to my heart. (Is 40:11) One day I will wipe away every tear from your eyes. And I'll take away all the pain you have suffered on this earth. (Rev 21:3-4) I am your Father, and I love you even as I love my son, Jesus. (Jn 17:23) For in Jesus, I have shown my love for you. (Jn 17:26) To see him is to see me, He came to demonstrate that I am for you, not against you, (Rom 8:31) that I am not counting your sins. (2 Cor 5:18-19) Jesus died so that you and I could be reconciled, (2 Cor 5:18-19) the ultimate expression of my love for you. (1 Jn 4:10) Everything I loved I gave up, in order to gain your love. (Rom 8:31-32) If you receive the gift of my son Jesus, you receive me, (1 Jn 2:23) and nothing can ever separate you from my love again. (Rom 8:38-39) Come home and I'll throw the biggest party heaven has ever seen. (Lk 15:7) I have always been Father, and will always be Father. (Eph. 3:14-15) My question is... Will you be my Son? (Jn 1:12-13)

# Week Two: The Lord hears the cry of the poor

Throughout the scripture, God the Father is presented as having a special affinity for the poor. Their simplicity of life allows them to be sufficiently free to recognize and respond to the presence of God in their lives. All human beings have to make choices about their relationship with the world around them and how they use the resources that the Father in his generosity gifts us with. In the first temptation Jesus is tempted by the devil to prove that he is the Son of God by transforming the stones into bread. Despite his hunger Jesus did not choose to give in to this temptation. The way we choose to use not only the material possessions but also our own personal gifts and talents reveals something about who we are and our understanding of our heavenly Father. Pubto be creative in our use of goods or secretive in the choices we make about our time and resources. Like the younger son in the Parable of the Prodigal Son our greed for what we feel entitled to can tempt us to selfishly take and use things; resulting not only in our resources being wasted, but ourselves feeling dissatisfied, frustrated and potentially drawn into cycles of addiction as we seek more of what has failed to satisfy. Like the Prodigal Son, it is only when we view our life through relationship with the Father that new opportunities can emerge. But as the Prodigal Son returns home expecting to have to beg for forgiveness, his Father is presented as looking out for him awaiting his return. To be men on fire with love, to love unconditionally as our Father loves us requires a certain detachment from things that limit us, in order to be free to look out for others.

"He did not eat anything during that time, and in the end he was hungry. The devil then said to him, 'If you are son of God, tell this stone to turn into bread.' But Jesus answered, 'Scripture says: People cannot live on bread alone."

(Mt 4:2-4)

licly each of us has professed that we will live in accordance with the Constitutions of our Congregation. Chapter III of the Constitutions clearly outlines the attitudes and behaviors that we have committed ourselves to cultivating in our lives:

- A lack of attachments to places and possessions in order to be freely available for whatever the gospel and Congregation requires of us.
- A dependency on God and our fraternal community in which we share all in common.
- An apostolic poverty expressed in a simplicity of life which identifies with the poor making available what we have for the needs of the Congregation and the people of God.
- The rejection of our right to dispose of our temporal goods and of using them without the permission of our superiors.

In our lives and ministry how often do we find ourselves tempted to ignore these attitudes and behaviors which we have committed ourselves to because they make life uncomfortable for us? Instead of seeking to live the ideals we can choose

In essence the vow of poverty is an expression of a desire for freedom not just from the trappings of wealth but all that can restrict us, in order that we can be free for God. I was always struck in my work as a missionary, seeing how those who have wealth, in building walls and fences to protect their homes and families, at the same time trap themselves within what they have constructed. In a world in which we are constantly bombarded with messages about what we need to have, to be accepted and valued by others, we too are susceptible to the messages of our consumerist society and we collect goods and resources that we feel we cannot do without. Then, as time passes, the thought of moving and uprooting our lives becomes too big to contemplate. In more serious situations our choices about the use of our resources and time can be the expression of an addiction which is in need of being constantly fed with no hope of satisfaction. Whereas a few decades ago it seemed to be relatively few things such as alkohol that were considered addictive, the list just seems to keep on growing: Gambling,

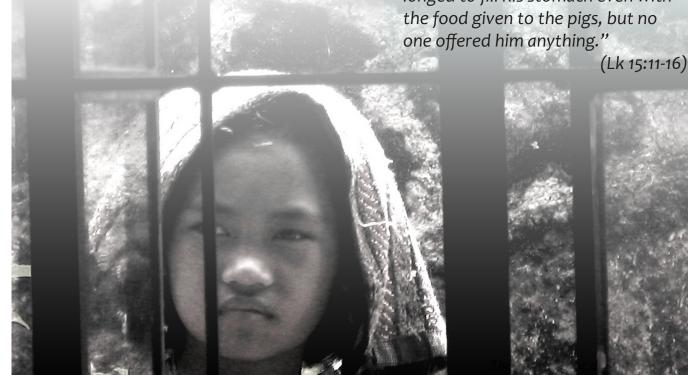
sex, food, dysfunctional relationships, internet, TV, drugs etc. While some of these are not necessarily bad in themselves, yet unless uncontrolled they have the capacity to limit a person's capacity to freely live a healthy life either because of constant adjustments having to be made to accommodate the addiction or a web of denial being created to maintain secrecy about how one is spending one's time.

As religious, our recognition that the Father has a special affinity for the poor, has implications both for the lifestyle choices we make and the people we choose to work with. Questions of social justice and protection of the environment are not optional extras or fads for us to pick and choose from; they are an expression of fundamental characteristics or values that we as sons have learnt from the Father who has chosen us.

During this second week of Lent you are encouraged to become more consciously aware of your attitudes towards the resources you use; the relationship you have with them, and to what extent you feel your choices being compatible with your knowledge of God the Father.

"The younger said to his father: 'Give me my share of the estate.' So the father divided his property between them.

Some days later, the younger son gathered all his belongings and started off for a distant land where he squandered his wealth in loose living. Having spent everything, he was hard pressed when a severe famine broke out in that land. So he hired himself out to a well-to-do citizen of that place and was sent to work on a pig farm. So famished was he that he longed to fill his stomach even with the food given to the pigs, but no one offered him anything."



# Exercise 2: The use of my resources

- 1. Take a few minutes at the end of each day this week to recall your experiences throughout the day without judging them.
  - What resources, money, materials, tools, food etc have you used during the day?
  - What was your attitude towards them?
- 2. You are invited to repeat this exercise over a few days and then try to look back over the experience to see if you become aware of any patterns in your life.
  - To what extent do the patterns you notice resonate with your understanding of the vow of poverty?
- What do the choices you make about using money, time, talents etc reveal about your understanding of what God the Father is like?
  - How free are you to respond to new and unexpected invitations from God?

#### Week Three: Unconditional Love

In the second temptation Jesus is challenged to prove who he is by demonstrating the relationship with God's angels. Like Jesus, all of us exist within a network of relationships in which we have to make choices. As male religious we have made a public vow of celibate chastity. For many this has been presented in terms of self denial and the rejection of our human sexuality, reducing the vow to meaning no sex.

requires us to engage in both an ongoing relationship with God and the members of our community.

While it is easy to focus on the task of being faithful to living this vow in terms of sexual continence, the Constitutions, presenting the vow as freeing us to love God and all people, present us with a much wider challenge than just refraining

"Then the devil took him up to Jerusalem and set him on the highest wall of the Temple; and he said, 'If you are son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written: God will order his angels to take care of you and again: They will hold you in their hands, lest you hurt your foot on the stones.' But Jesus replied, 'It is written: You shall not challenge the Lord your God.'" (Mt 4:5-7)

**Chapter II of the Constitutions** invites us through imitating Christ to embrace the gift of chastity in order to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to the concerns of the Father, building together a community not founded on carnal desire or blood but on the will of God. Chastity is presented as freeing us to love God and all people. It is recognized that celibate living is not easy and

from sexual activity. In essence the Constitutions present us with the challenge of living in right relationship with God, our neighbour, and when it invites us to look after our health, and ourselves: the primary commandments to love God, neighbour and self. In a world in which people can be treated as objects to be used and thrown away, we are challenged by the Gospel to recognise each individual's value as a child of God. Our public profession of Celibate Chastity makes us

accountable for living in non-exploitative relationships. Our commitment to be free to respond to the needs of the gospel which is part of the missionary call we have experienced prevents us from being able to faithfully make the commitment that non exploitative Christian relationships should be founded upon.

While we may hear comments to the effect that someone has broken his vow by engaging in sexual activity, how often do we talk about individuals breaking their vow because of the way they treat others with disrespect and rudeness? The horror of the sexual scandals that have rocked the church around the world in recent years is not just because of the failure of the clergy to abstain from sexual activity. The scandal is in the lack of respect that has been shown to the victims of abuse, and exploitative relationships not only by the clergy involved in the cases but also by the institutional church. Our public claims to be an institution which aims to live in right relationship have been brought into question because of the appalling way so many people have been treated. As the scandals expand to include not just sexual but also the physical and psychological abuse, the outrage expressed in society challenges us as individuals and communities to take stock of the quality of the relationships we are engaged in, in our communities and our ministry.

As men inspired to be on fire with love, spreading those flames to others, we need to be especially sensitive to the consequences of our behaviour on others. Given the complexity of human nature and the variety of personalities which exist, a constant vigilance and sensitivity needs to be cultivated so that in our community and pastoral relationships we are sufficiently self aware to recognise the impact of our actions on others. We need to be aware when we may have acted in ways that wound and hurt others, creating difficulties and obstacles that prevent others from experiencing the Good News of Jesus Christ, which we need to present in word and deed in all our interactions.

The parable of the Prodigal Son offers much for reflecting on relationships.

• The younger son's request for his half of his inheritance was tantamount to telling his Father he wished he was dead already so he could have his money.

- The *older son* who remained loyal and stayed at home yet resented seeing his brother welcomed home and experiencing a celebration which he was not entitled to.
- The father who respects his younger son's wishes giving him his freedom to leave and make mistakes and then is ready to welcome him back, and in the midst of the celebration notices his older son's absence and goes to speak with him.

In this reflection in referring to the vow of Celibacy we have used the phrase 'living in right relationship'. What does this phrase suggest to you about the quality you should be aiming for in you relationships: with God, the members of your community, those you work with, and even yourself?

Community life is not easy; it can be easier to just live together keeping communication at a superficial level so as to avoid conflict. While it would not necessarily be appropriate to share

"Meanwhile, the elder son had been working in the fields. As he returned and was near the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what it was all about. The servant answered: 'Your brother has come home safe and sound, and your father is so happy about it that he has ordered this celebration and killed the fattened calf.'

The elder son became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and pleaded with him. The indignant son said: 'Look, I have slaved for you all these years. Never have I disobeyed your orders. Yet you have never given me even a young goat to celebrate with my friends. Then when this son of yours returns after squandering your property with loose women, you kill the fattened calf for him."

(Lk 15:25-30)

our deepest feelings and secrets with everyone in community all the time, there is a way in which living in right relationship involves a commitment to transparency and honesty in our lives together, so as to build trust and express our mutual concern for one another. If there are areas of our life which we struggle to keep hidden and secret, personal issues or feelings about things going on in the community or Congregation, something is probably in need of attention.

None of us in community should act or feel as if we are islands whose choices lack consequences for those around us. The challenge for each of us is to aim to live a balanced life in which we pay attention to our relationship with God, neighbour and self.





# Exercise 3: My relationships with other people

- 1. Take a few minutes at the end of each day this week to recall your experiences throughout the day without judging them.
  - Who are the people that you have come into contact with (telephone, meetings etc.) during the day?
  - What was your attitude towards them?
- 2. As you repeat this exercise over a few days do you begin to become aware of any patterns in your life?
- To what extent do the patterns you notice resonate with your understanding of the vow of celibacy and living in right relationship with others?

#### Week Four: The Father's will

The devil offered Jesus the opportunity to have power over all that he could see. But Jesus in his life chose to exercise power as service for others. From our earliest days each of us has been involved in struggles for power and control

to participate in a community which attempts to discern and hear God's will.

When exploring the Vow of Obedience in chapter IV of the Congregation's Constitutions it does not say that we have committed ourselves to

"Then the devil took him up to a high place and showed him in a flash all the nations of the world. And he said to Jesus, "I can give you power over all the nations and their wealth will be yours, for power and wealth have been delivered to me and I give them to whom I wish. All this will be yours provided you worship me.' But Jesus replied, 'Scripture says: You shall worship the Lord your God and serve him alone.'"

(Mt 4:8-10)

of our lives. The tantrums that we probably threw as young children, our demands for attention, adolescent rebellion and the jealousy we feel when others are getting things that we want or deserve, are all testament to our experience of coping with this dimension of life. Do we get our way? This is the area of our life that the vow of obedience touches. Obedience has as its root in the verb to listen, and so our public vow of obedience commits us to consciously avoid placing ourselves and what we want as our rule of life choosing instead

blindly do what we are told. We are encouraged to imitate Christ who came to do the Father's will, by offering up the free ability to arrange the course of our lives, and to attain the mission of our Institute, through observing the vows and the Constitutions. Desire to do God's will out of love, for the missionary in our Congregation, is understood as expressed in in the availability to be sent anywhere in the world and to have a readiness to accept whatever ministry one is assigned. In exploring this dimension of our lives the role of the

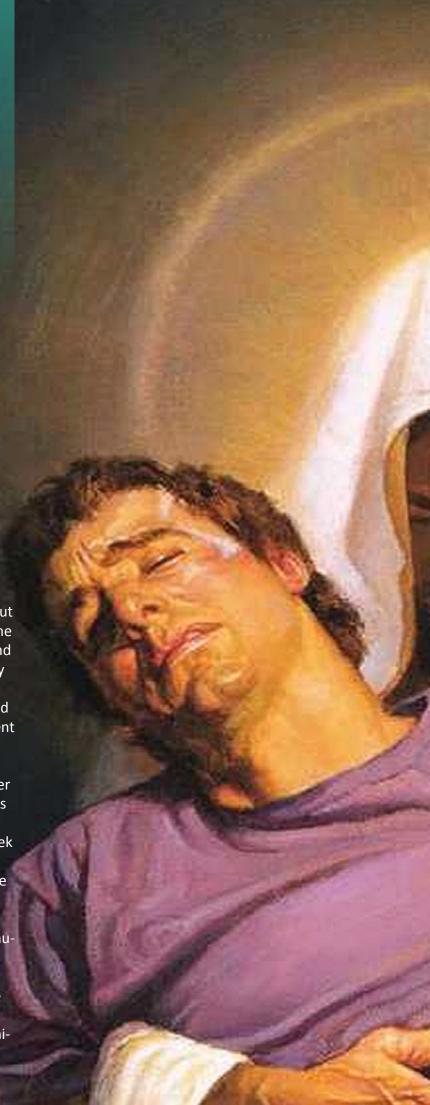
"But the father turned to his servants: 'Quick! Bring out the finest robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and kill it. We shall celebrate and have a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has come back to life. He was lost and is found.' And the celebration began.".

(Lk 15:22-24)

superior in discerning God's will is highlighted, but with this role the Constitutions clearly identify the responsibility of the Superior to listen; to God and to their members in order to discern and identify what is to be done. They have an authority that should be exercised in a spirit of service exercised for the sake of their brothers and the achievement of the Congregation's mission.

All of this challenges us to reflect on a number of dimensions, not only of our own personal lives but also of the quality of our community life:

- Our commitment to prayer, in which we seek to hear God's desire for us.
- The way we go about planning our lives, the commitments we make with our time.
- The quality of the time and space we make available to really listen to our brothers in community.
- Our participation in the preparation processes for chapters, assemblies and the life of the Congregation.
- The way we exercise power in our communities and ministries.



Each of these dimensions needs to be explored not just from an examination of our personal behaviour but also from a congregational perspective. As a community what is it we actually do that allows us to legitimately claim that we fulfil our commitment to seeking the Father's will? How much space do we create in communities for a sharing that allows God to speak to us through our Brothers? Do we experience our communities as places where power is exercised in service of one another? Or do the roles and responsibilities individuals receive find expression as opportunities for having power over others? In the parable of the Prodigal Son the Father had the opportunity to treat his younger son as a servant, but instead welcomed back a beloved son. The older brother felt hurt and angry over what he perceived as an injustice and initially refused to obey the Father's will by entering the celebration for his brother's return. How he responded after his conversation with the Father we do not know. We are presented with a conflict between these two characters. The loving Father who wants to celebrate his son's return despite the pain and suffering he might have experienced when his younger son requested his inheritance and left, and the older son whose hurt and pain prevent him from being able to celebrate. This might challenge us to reflect on how our experience of pain and woundedness impacts on our commitment to doing what our heavenly Father would want. Are we able to put the hurts and pains of the past behind us and celebrate what we have today, or do we choose to hold on to memories that we use an excuse to give up on trying to listen for the presence of the Father's voice oming to us through the lives of our brothers in ommunity. "The father said: 'My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But this brother of yours was dead, and has come back to life. He was lost and is found. And for that we had to rejoice and be glad."" (Lk 15:31)

# Exercise 4: Reflection on seeking the Father's will through living the vow of Obedience

Take some time during the week to reflect upon the following points:

- In your family, how did you learn to live obedience? In what ways does your family experience resonate with how you live it now?
- Think about a time when you "were obedient"
  - Was there joy or was it a duty or a strain?
  - Was there a sense of invitation or obligation?
- Did it stretch you to being more loving, moving you to bigger horizons? Or did it leave you feeling diminished, humiliated?
- What meaning does religious obedience have for you at this stage of your life?
  - Let images, feelings, words, symbols, persons emerge as you think about this.
- As you reflect on your experience as the person you are today, are you aware of the things which help or hinder you to actively seek to follow the Father's will.
- What has been your experience within the Claretian Congregation of seeking the Father's will?

#### Week Five:

# Recognising what it means to be a Son

It is interesting that each of the synoptic gospels links the Baptism of Jesus, to his being immediately led into the desert to be tested by the Devil. The devil, Satan, the prince of lies. Down through the centuries our cultures have contributed different images and ideas that have become incorporated into the identity of this entity designated by the term Satan. It can be interesting to shed the cultural accretions that have been added down through the centuries and look at the biblical texts in which the devil appears.

In looking at Scripture texts from Genesis and the Gospels more closely, the work of the devil is not so much to lie or do evil, but rather to distract people from doing what is best by presenting alternative options that appear to be fundamentally good and which even reflect the expectations of the wider society. If we look closely at the interchange between Satan and Eve, Satan doesn't lie to Eve, he just doesn't tell her the whole truth. In the temptation narratives and Mark in particular it appears that it is the desire of the Spirit present in the baptism who leads Jesus to the desert in order to be tested. So often in life it is not that we are faced with having to make a choice between good and evil, rather it is having to choose between what is the best thing to do and what will be good enough.

Each member of our Congregation, in making vows, have made a public expression of our desire to live in right relationship with others, to use possessions wisely and to discern and live by the Father's will. Our Constitutions make it clear that our missionary identity calls us to live a life free

"When the devil had exhausted every way of tempting Jesus he left him, to return another time."

(Lk 4:13)

from attachments and worldly interests that can prevent us from being available to serve wherever we are needed. The importance of the local community as the place in which our vows are supported and lived out is also clear. It does not take much reflection on the Constitutions to recognise the ideals and values that should underpin our life and behaviour as Claretian Missionaries. But how often are we tempted to take the easy way out and not live these ideals? Not necessarily in order to do wrong but more often than not, to just remain comfortable, to not upset anyone. Do we recognise the voice of the devil in our lives inviting us not to worry about giving half hearted responses, of merely being satisfied with doing the minimum rather than passionately responding to the challenges that come our way? It's not that we're being tempted to do evil, it's just that we're tempted not to worry about doing what is best!

In many parts of today's world the needs of the individual are assumed to be more important

than the greater good of the wider community. In the Church too these attitudes can be observed, for example, in individuals who join congregations quite happily making use of the resources on offer: for their education, growth and development. Apparently all is OK until a point of conflict is experienced and the needs of the congregation conflict with the individual's personal agenda or life project. Often at this point the individual chooses to go on his way with little concern for the impact or consequences of his choice on others. It is a reality that as religious we will fall in love and desire wealth and power, all these desires are part of the human condition.

The challenge is that we respond to these experiences from a deep sense of understanding what it means to be a son of the Father.

# **Exercise 5: A practical activity**

Calling to mind moments when you have felt passionate about having been called by God to be a Claretian, identify a particular action or activity that you will undertake this week that for you will be a symbolic expression of what being a Claretian means to you.

# Holy Week: Jesus, the suffering servant, our model for Sonship

On leaving the desert Jesus' public ministry began with him announcing the closeness of the kingdom, inviting people to live out a conscious awareness of the closeness of the loving Father. For himself his discernment was that his messiahship was to be that of the suffering servant.

During this final week before Easter, we are presented with the events of the final days of Jesus' life in which we witness the consequences of his faithfulness to the Father's will: his suffering and death on the Cross. An acceptance of suffering is a constituent part of Claret's image of a son

"The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. He or she is sharply different from the person who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. For such it will be a later choice to serve – after leadership is established. The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and

of the Immaculate Heart of Mary; who is not only deeply aware of the presence of God's love in this life but also manifests a willingness to suffer; for as Claret wrote: nothing daunts him: he delights in privations, weLkomes 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.

And yet there is another challenge to our sense of comfort when we look at the example of Jesus. In following his path he is led to the point on the cross of exclaiming: 'My God my God, why have you forsaken me?' Are these the opening words of a psalm of consolation or the cry of one who is experiencing the anguish of the absence of the Father's presence? How does this exclamation of Jesus on the cross resonate with our own experience of the Father's presence in our own life during moments of difficulty and suffering? Throughout the gospels the need for the openness to death as the way to life is taught but it is in these last days that we see that Jesus 'walked the talk'. How much do we have to die in order that new life begins?

During this last week of lent each us of is invited to enter into the mystery of Jesus' suffering and death:

- his struggle to fulfil the Father's will despite the cost to himself;
- his apparent rejection by the people he came to serve;
- his betrayal and denial by those closest to him;
- the physical pain and discomfort he had to endure,
- his acceptance of the decisions of authorities that he didn't agree with.

In what ways is Jesus' story, these days, our story? Do we remain steadfast in our commitment to living the Father's will when the going gets tough or when preaching the Gospel means we may not feel as popular as we would like? How much discomfort, physical or psychological are we prepared to experience before we say enough

blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.

The difference manifest itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, will they not be further deprived?"

(Robert Greenleaf)

is enough? How do we work with authorities we don't agree with?

The Gospel message is clear; it is those who live in accordance with the Father's will who are blessed despite how it might appear from a worldly perspective. As we come to this final week of Lent throughout which you have been invited to explore your own relationship with the Father, what does your participation in the events of this Holy Week reveal to you about your level of passion and dedication to fulfilling the Father's will?

# **Exercise 6: Preparing the Holy Week**

Enter into the Holy Week celebrations trying to be more consciously aware of where your personal story meets the story of Christ.

# 3. Guidelines for the community meeting

In your community meeting you are invited to explore together how the living out of our identity as religious is a reflection of our experience and understanding of God as Father. In what ways does the practical living of our vows reflect the gospel values that arise from the Father's revelation of himself to us?

The suggested structure for the community meeting would be to invite each person to take some time for prayerfully reflecting on the following quotes from different writers on religious life.

- "Religious life is fundamentally a God quest, a passionate, restless, endless search for God. Intimacy with God is not one of the elements which allows us to give meaning to religious life. It is the only way. " (Sandra Schneider).
- "At depth there is only one model of religious life, that which is rooted in the experienceat-base, the founding experience: a profound spiritual experience, an affective relationship with God." (Joao B. Libanio).
- "One thing and one thing only can sustain religious life, can nourish religious life, can justify religious life: The religious must be the person who first and foremost, always and forever, in whatever circumstances, seeks God and God alone, sees God and God alone in all of this confusion, in all of this uncertainty and, whatever the situation speaks God –and God alone." (Joan Chittister).
- "Radical Generosity: to give in a single moment a life which is to be lived successively through time." (Summa Theologiae).
- "To make a vow is to commit to an act of radical generosity in the present moment, be-



ing unaware of the unfolding future." (Timothy Radcliffe).

- "To live your life in such a way that it wouldn't make sense if God didn't exist."
- "Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than falling in a love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the mornings, what you will do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, who you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything." (Pedro Arrupe).
- "Religious life must be about seeing what others do not see or saying what others may not say, for whatever reason or whatever price. Religious must be about the great questions of life." (Joan Chittister).

# 4. Guidelines for the "lectio divina"

The readings of the season offer a complementary way of exploring the themes that have been introduced in this booklet: our identity as sons and the responsibilities and consequences of that relationship with the Father.

The Sunday readings in particular offer a variety of ways of exploring the consequences of being in relationship with the Father. Beginning with the baptism, temptations and the beginning of Jesus' ministry the second week invites us to reflect on the Transfiguration: the revelation of Jesus' divine identity and also the divine plan which the disciples found a little harder to understand and accept. Week three presents us with Jesus driving the money changers and people selling in his Father's house, challenging the 'negotiating mentality' that can so easily find expression in our spiritual lives as we seek Gods favour. Later weeks see us challenged to reflect on the implications of Jesus as the light in a world where some people's reaction is to prefer the darkness. The fifth week challenges us to be sensitive to the struggle between protecting our Ego and personal agendas rather than putting others, needs first with Jesus' teaching that unless a grain of wheat dies it bears no fruit. The reading of the Passion according to St Mark can be read as an expression of differing assumptions on how God is present in our lives; a God who protects his own or one who accompanies us even in our suffering.

The Lectionary offers us much for nourishment during this season and the following points are offered to stimulate your reflection and meditation on the Word of God throughout Lent.

# Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2012. Ash Wednesday

- Joel 2:12-18
- Ps 51: 3-4,5-6b,12-14,17
- 2 Cor 5:20—6:2
- Mt 6:1-6, 16-18

As Lent begins we are reminded that God seeks a conversion of heart and not just showy external acts. What is going on at the depth of your being and what response do you wish to give?

## Thursday 23rd February 2012

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

Today's readings focus our attention on the life of the soul. Do we listen to the deepest yearnings of our heart that draw us towards life in God? Or are there times we ignore those yearnings so that we can fit in with others and feel popular or powerful?

#### Friday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2012

- Is 58:1-9a
- Ps 51
- Mt 9:14-15

Isaiah tells us today that true fasting is not just an external giving up of food but rather an internal act that seeks to liberate us. What are the things you may need to fast from in order to be free for God? Food? Alcohol? TV? Internet? A particular friendship? Something else?

# Saturday 25th February 2012

- Is 58:9b-14
- Ps 86
- Lk 5:27-32

In what way are you being called to experience a change of heart? How might you be being called by God to a more faithful living out of your identity as a Claretian, in your relationships with your brothers in community or with the people you serve in your ministry?

# Sunday 26th February 2012. 1st Sunday of Lent

- Gn 9:8-17
- Ps 25
- 1 Pe 3:18-22
- Mk 1:9-15

Why do people find it so difficult to repent and believe that we are loved by God? It is because we believe in so many other things that do not fit into this Good News. Its money and power that make me important! My countries welfare is more important than yours! What beliefs get in the way of you experiencing the Good News that you are a beloved son of God?

# Monday 27th February 2012

- Lv 19:1-2, 11-18
- Ps 19
- Mt 25:31-46

Who are the people who have been Christ for you in recent months? The people you have served or the people who have helped you? How do you react to those who cross your path and are in need? What have you gone without in order that others might have?

# Tuesday 28th February 2012

- Is 55:10-11
- Ps 34
- Mt 6:7-15

It is the Word that comes from heaven that nourishes us and reveals to us the Father's will. How sincere are you in trying to live so that the Father's will would be done? How easy is it for you to let go of what you want and follow the will of God revealed through your brothers in community?

# Wednesday 29th February 2012

- Jon 3:1-10
- Ps 51
- Lk 11:29-32

How often like Jonah do you try and take the easy way out, before facing the challenge that God puts before you? How open are you to recognise your own need for repentance and conversion? What part does the sacrament of reconciliation play in your own spiritual life?

# Thursday 1st March 2012

- Est 12:14-16, 23-25
- Ps 138
- Mt 7:7-12

How would you describe your own prayer life? What are the prayers that lie at the depth of your heart? Take some time to articulate those thoughts and prayers through writing your own prayer to God.

# Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2012

- Ez 18:21-28
- Ps 130
- Mt 5:20-26

Help to renew us! This is the Congregation's prayer to God throughout this Forge experience. How deep is your desire to experience renewal? What are the fears and desires that may prevent you being whole hearted in your openness to experience.

# Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2012

- Dt 26:16-19
- Ps 119
- Mt 5:43-48

Jesus calls us to do more than we may be comfortable doing. As a man who has publically said yes to God, how prepared are you to go the extra mile? In what ways do the choices you make limit your own availability to our Claretian Missionary lifestyle?

# Sunday 4th March 2012. 2nd Sunday of Lent

- Gn 17:1-7,15-16
- Ps 22
- Rom 4:13-25
- Mk 9:2-10

While the experience of the transfigured Jesus reinforces for the disciples that Jesus is God's beloved, it does not increase their understanding of God's divine plan. The disciples were told to be silent until they could understand both the identity of Jesus and the divine plan. What does the message of our lives reveal about our understanding of the Jesus identity and the divine plan?

# Monday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2012

- Dn 9:4b-10
- Ps 79:8, 9, 11-13
- Lk 6:36-38

How aware are you of your own sin? What do you understand by sin? How do you deal with sin in your own life? Do you find it easier to forgive others than to forgive yourself?

#### Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2012

- Is 1:10, 16-20
- Ps 50
- Mt 23:1-12

Religious hypocrisy or humble service; to what extent do these expressions describe your own ministerial life? Are there times you encourage others to accept and believe things that you yourself are not so sure about? Which aspects of your life as a minister feel burdensome and weigh you down?

# Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2012

Jer 18:18-20

• Ps 31

• Mt 20:17-28

Have there been times in your life where your desire to work for God has met with anger and rejection? Do you experience suffering as something to be avoided at all costs? or something to be embraced and delighted in with its potential to purify and strengthen?

# Thursday 8th March 2012

• Jer 17:5-10

• Ps 1

• Lk 16:19-31

Where have your priorities lain in the past? Have you sought popularity and prestige or a life of humble prayer? When taking a measure of your inner life do you identify most with the withered or healthy tree? Who are you prepared to listen to in order to find life?

# Friday 9th March 2012

• Gn 37:3-4 ...

• Ps 40

• Mt 21:33-43, 45-46

Rejection, suffering and even the possibility of death, for the true follower have the potential for transformation and transcendence. How much suffering are you prepared to experience in order to have life?

# Saturday 10th March 2012

• Mic 7:14-15, 18-20

• Ps 103

• Lk 15:1-3, 11-32

What prevents you from acknowledging your need to return to the Father for healing? Are you aware that you are truly loved and valued, that no matter what you have done to screw it all up, there is always an unconditional love that awaits you, that seeks you.

# Sunday 11th March 2012. 3rd Sunday of Lent

• Ex 20:1-17

• Ps 19

• 2 Cor 1:22-25

• Jn 2:13-25

Jesus attacks our human tendency to try and make deals with God, in order gain favours for the sacrifices that are offered. For Jesus, the Father offers a free flow of spiritual life and love that cannot be gained through the human interactions that make up so much of our lives: buying, bartering, bargaining or bribing. God's love is freely given; all that is demanded is our gratitude and a commitment to serve life. Do you accept this truth or do you still try and strike up deals with God?

# Monday 12th March de 2012

• 2 Kings 5:1-15a

• Ps 42

• Lk 4:24-30

'No prophet is accepted in his own land.' We can probably all resonate with this expression of Jesus. Yet how often are we the ones that fail to accept the challenging messages our brothers in the province or delegation share with us?

#### Tuesday 13th March de 2012

Dn 3:25, 34-43

• Ps 25

• Mt 18:21-35

For Jesus there is no limit to forgiveness. To believe in God is to see the potential for good in all human beings. Are there wounds that you have experienced in life that still blind you to see the potential for goodness in the lives of others?

# Wednesday 14th March 2012

• Dt 4:1, 5-9

• Ps 147

• Mt 5:17-19

The Law and the Prophets, the scriptures point towards Jesus as the fulfilment of God's plan of Salvation. What place do we really give to scripture in our own journey?

# Thursday 15th March 2012

Jer 7:23-28

• Ps 95

• Lk 11:14-23

What signs do you seek to assuage your doubts? What is it about being a Claretian Missionary that gives your life meaning? What can you do to create a greater unity of purpose in your community so our mission might be fulfilled?

# Friday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2012

• Hos 14:2-10

Ps 81

• Mk 12:28b-34

Love of God, Neighbour and Self: a lifelong balancing act fundamental to the Christian life. In looking at your relationships with God, your community and yourself what needs attention so that your life might be healthier?

# Saturday 17th March 2012

• Hos 6:1-6

Ps 51

• Lk 18:9-14

Pharisee or tax collector: entitled status or humble sinner? Which of these characteristics more closely describes you and the way you relate to others? As a religious have you come to expect special treatment from others?

# Sunday 18th March 2012. 4th Sunday of Lent

• Nm 21:4-9

Ps 107

Eph 2:4-10

• Jn 3:14-21

The Son was not sent to condemn but to save the world. Jesus, the light offers us an alternative way of knowing that challenges an outlook that sees everything as normal or just the ways things are; darkness' perspective. The light challenges us to make a choice, to live the ideals and not just go along with the norm.

# Monday 19th March 2012. St. Joseph, Husband of Mary

• 2 Sm 7:4-5, 12-14

• Ps 89

• Rom 4:13,16-18, 22

Mt 1:16, 18-21,24

Joseph: an example of faithfulness and righteousness; a man open to listening to God's word. A man open to following through on the mission he had received even though it didn't make sense and the consequences of saying yes were not clear. How do you manage the consequences of having said yes to God?

# Tuesday 20th March 2012

• Ez 47:1-9, 12

• Ps 46

• Jn 5:1-3a, 5-16

Life will abound; things can be different, better. Yet if we keep doing what we have always done nothing will change. What is this Forge project inviting you to do differently so that you experience life in abundance?

# Wednesday 21st March 2012

• Is 49:8-15

• Ps 145

• Jn 5:17-30

When we judge is it to manifest our own limited will and expectations or is it because we seek the will of the one who has called us? Do we perceive our ministerial efforts as the marks of a lone saviour or as a contribution to the fulfilment of the Congregation's mission?

#### Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2012

• Ex 32:7-14

• Ps 106

• Jn 5:31-47

Christian relationships with authority are complex. Today Moses answers God back – and God relents! Jesus recognises that his authority is not accepted because those he was talking with 'do not have the love of God in their hearts'. What is in your heart when you deal with authority?

# Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2012

• Ws 2:1a, 12-22

• Ps 34

• Jn 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

Wicked people reject spiritual values and are unjust to good people. Before we feel victimised let us check our own lives. How committed are you to embracing spiritual values? Do you ever treat good people unjustly?

# Saturday 24th March 2012

• Jer 11:18-20

• Ps 7

• Jn 7:40-53

Mob rule appears to be winning in the plots against Jeremiah and Jesus not leaving much space for seeking the will of the Father. How often do I just go along with the crowd rather than take time to sincerely seek what God may want?

# Sunday 25th March 2012. 5th Sunday of Lent

- Jer 31:31-34
- Ps 119
- Heb 5:7-9
- Jn 12:20-33

Jesus reveals to us a universal spiritual process which we have a choice of cooperating with. The bringing about of the death of our scheming, manipulative self that seeks to control the world, in order to nurture the deeper self that relies on being a channel of God's love in the world. Do we allow fear, control and a sense of entitlement to create our lives? Have we experienced the transformation that dying to self brings so others see Christ in us?

# Monday 26<sup>th</sup> marzo de 2012. The Annunciation of the Lord

- Is 7:10-14; 8,10
- Ps 40
- Lk 1:26-38

'Let it be done to me according to your will.' How easy it is to say these words but so much harder to actually live them. What has been your experience of trying to be faithful in your commitment to following the will of God? Mary reminds us that it is possible to succeed; to never give up trying.

# Tuesday 27th March 2012

- Nm 21:4-9
- Ps 102
- Jn 8:21-30

It is because of his relationship with the Father that Jesus knows who he is. What do you point to as the source of your identity? Do you remain true to this identity when the world around you appears hostile or are you a chameleon that seeks to fit in?

# Wednesday 28th March 2012

- Dn 3:14-20, 91-92, 95
- Ps (Dn 3:52-56)
- Jn 8:31-42

The reading from the book of the prophet Daniel shows us God's authority and power is able to win out despite the apparently hopeless odds. Does this truth underpin the choices you make in your life?

## Thursday 29th March 2012

- Gn 17:3-9
- Ps 105
- Jn 8:51-59

The gospel reveals the growing hardness of heart towards Jesus. The first reading and psalm together remind us of God's faithfulness in remembering his covenant. How open is your heart to receiving new insights about God and your identity as a Claretian?

## Friday 30th March 2012

- Jer 20:10-13
- Ps 18
- Jn 10:31-42

For Jesus, his identity and relationship to the Father are revealed in his actions. What do our actions reveal about who we are? As evangelisers how successful are we in being an instrument for bringing others to faith in God?

#### Saturday 31st March 2012

- Ez 37:21-28
- Ps (Jer 31:10-13)
- Jn 11:45-57

Ezekiel provides an image of what it means to be in right relationship with God and the world. The Gospel reveals a situation where things are far from right. Yet the events of the Gospel are moving the situation towards the fulfilment of God's plan.

# Sunday 1st April 2012. Passion Sunday – Palm Sunday

- Is 50:4-7
- Ps 22
- Phil 2:6-11
- Mk 14:1-15,47

Mark's account of the Passion challenges us to reflect on our ideas about God. Are we like the scribes or chief priest who believed that God intervenes to prevent his favourites from suffering? Or, like the bystanders, do we wait for God to perform a dramatic rescue? or Do we see God as present in the suffering; taking on the suffering and revealing to us that nothing can separate us from the power of God's love?

#### Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2012

- Is 42:1-7
- Ps 27
- Jn 12:1-11

The one who suffers and gives his life for the people is the one in whom God is well pleased. As it became clearer that he had to suffer, Jesus remained resolute to his mission. How does the possibility of suffering affect the way you live out your Claretian identity?

# Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2012

- Is 49:1-6
- Ps 71
- Jn 13:21-33, 36-38

Betrayal and rejection are elements of Jesus' story that may resonate with our own life story. Before we get caught up in calling to mind our own sense of having been wounded, who are the people we've known who may have experienced the wounds of betrayal and rejection because of our actions?

# Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2012

- Is 50:4-9a
- Ps 69
- Mt 26:14-25

The Lord God is my help. These words from Isaiah reveal the source of the Suffering Servant's confidence: his relationship with God. With this as the foundation of one's identity the reactions and expectations of others fail to deter us from achieving what we are called to be. Are there times that your desire for acceptance distracts you from your mission?

# Maundy Thursday 5th April 2012

- Ex 12:1-8, 11-14
- Ps 116
- 1 Cor:23-26
- Jn 13:1-15

The Tridium begins; one celebration in three parts. Today we remember saving meals that are celebrated and the preparation for difficult journeys that are about to begin. In this Jesus provides a pattern of sacrifice and service for us to follow: The Servant leader.

# Good Friday 6th April 2012

- Is 52:13-53,12
- Ps 31
- Heb 4:14-16-5,7-9
- Jn 18:1–19,42

Jesus' passion is an expression of the Son's free choice to accept the suffering, a complete communion with the Father to undergo an extreme form of alienation. Our experience of alienation arising from our experience of sin was something Jesus, the sinless one, was exempt from. Here he freely joins us taking upon himself our sense of alienation, his presence powerful enough to bring us through destruction into new life.

# Holy Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> April 2012

- Gn 1:12,2
- Ex 14:15-15,1
- Is 54:5-14
- Is 55:1-11
- Bar 3:1-15, 32-4,4
- Ez 36:16-17a, 18-26
- Rom 6:3-11
- Mk 16:1-8

A dead day: an empty day. In times of grief we remember, we look back. We make sense. As we make the transition to Easter, what sense do you make of your experience this Lent? In the Vigil liturgy, as a community, we remember as the history of salvation is retold from creation through to re-creation. We are shown that Emmanuel, God-is-with-us in all the events, present guiding and walking with us. It is a preparation for the gospel's revelation that the tomb is empty. As the men fled from the cross on the Friday the women now flee from the tomb. What does it mean?

# 5. Texts for further study

# Appendix 1: There was a man with two sons

There was a man with two sons. The younger said to his father: 'Give me my share of the estate.' So the father divided his property between them.

Some days later, the younger son gathered all his belongings and started off for a distant land where he squandered his wealth in loose living. Having spent everything, he was hard pressed when a severe famine broke out in that land. So he hired himself out to a well-to-do citizen of that place and was sent to work on a pig farm. So famished was he that he longed to fill his stomach even with the food given to the pigs, but no one offered him anything.

Finally coming to his senses, he said: 'How many of my father's hired workers have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will get up and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against God and before you. I no longer deserve to be called your son. Treat me then as one of your hired servants.' With that thought in mind he set off for his father's house.

He was still a long way off when his father caught sight of him. His father was so deeply moved with compassion that he ran out to meet him, threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. The son said: 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.'

But the father turned to his servants: 'Quick! Bring out the finest robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and kill it. We shall celebrate and have a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has come back to life. He was lost and is found.' And the celebration began.

Meanwhile, the elder son had been working in the fields. As he returned and was near the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what it was all about. The servant answered: 'Your brother has come home safe and sound, and your father is so happy about it that he has ordered this celebration and killed the fattened calf.'

The elder son became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and pleaded with him. The indignant son said: 'Look, I have slaved for you all these years. Never have I disobeyed your orders. Yet you have never given me even a young goat to celebrate with my friends. Then when this son of yours returns after squandering your property with loose women, you kill the fattened calf for him.'

The father said: 'My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But this brother of yours was dead, and has come back to life. He was lost and is found. And for that we had to rejoice and be glad.'

*In examining your own life in what ways do you* identify with:

- The Prodigal Son
- The Older Brother
- The Loving Father

# Appendix II: Instruction "Faciem tuam, Domine" (2008)

While all in the community are called to seek what is pleasing to the Lord and to obey Him, some are called, usually temporarily, to exercise the particular task of being the sign of unity and the guide in the common search, both personal and communitarian, of carrying out the will of God. This is the service of authority ...

... one must add the realization that in recent years the way of listening to and living authority and obedience has changed both in the Church and in society. This is due to, among other things: the coming to awareness of the value of the individual person, with his or her vocation, and intellectual, affective and spiritual gifts, with his or her freedom and rational abilities; the centrality of the spirituality of communion with the valuing of the instruments that help one to live it; a different and less individualistic way of understanding mission, in the sharing of all members of the People of God, with the resulting forms of concrete collaboration.

Nevertheless, considering some elements of the present cultural influence one must recall that the desire for self realization can at times enter

into conflict with community projects; the search for personal well-being, be it spiritual or material, can render total dedication to the service of the common mission difficult; visions of the charism and of apostolic service which are too subjective can weaken fraternal sharing and collaboration.

Also not to be excluded is the recognition that in some settings the opposite problems are prevalent, determined by an unbalanced vision on the side of collectivity and of excessive uniformity, with the risk of stifling the growth and responsibility of the individuals. The balance between the individual and community is not an easy one, nor the balance between authority and obedience.

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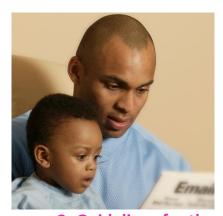


- Week One: This is my beloved son

- Week Two: The Lord hears the cry of the poor
- Week Three: Unconditional Love
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# The Forge in Our Daily Life PATRIS MEI - 2012 66 In the Church we have to manifest Christ's virginity, poverty and obedience in proclaiming the Good News." (Constitutions 5)

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