

# THE FORGE

in our daily life

PATRIS MEI  
“**LORD**,  
teach us to ‘**PRAY**’”

8

Ordinary Time IV



### THE NATURE OF THE STAGE

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

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

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

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

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

October, in addition to being a month, in which the missionary vocation is highlighted, it is a special month for us Claretians.

During its thirty-one days, we honor a number of the best known and most beloved saints, all of whom, among other things, mastered the art of integrating ministry and contemplation: Theresa of the Child Jesus, Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Antioch, Theresa of Avila, Luke the Evangelist, and, of course, our own Fr.Claret, whose feast we celebrate this month. This month, we also remember our esteemed brothers, most of them martyrs, whose missionary ministry was sealed by their heroic sacrifice to God.



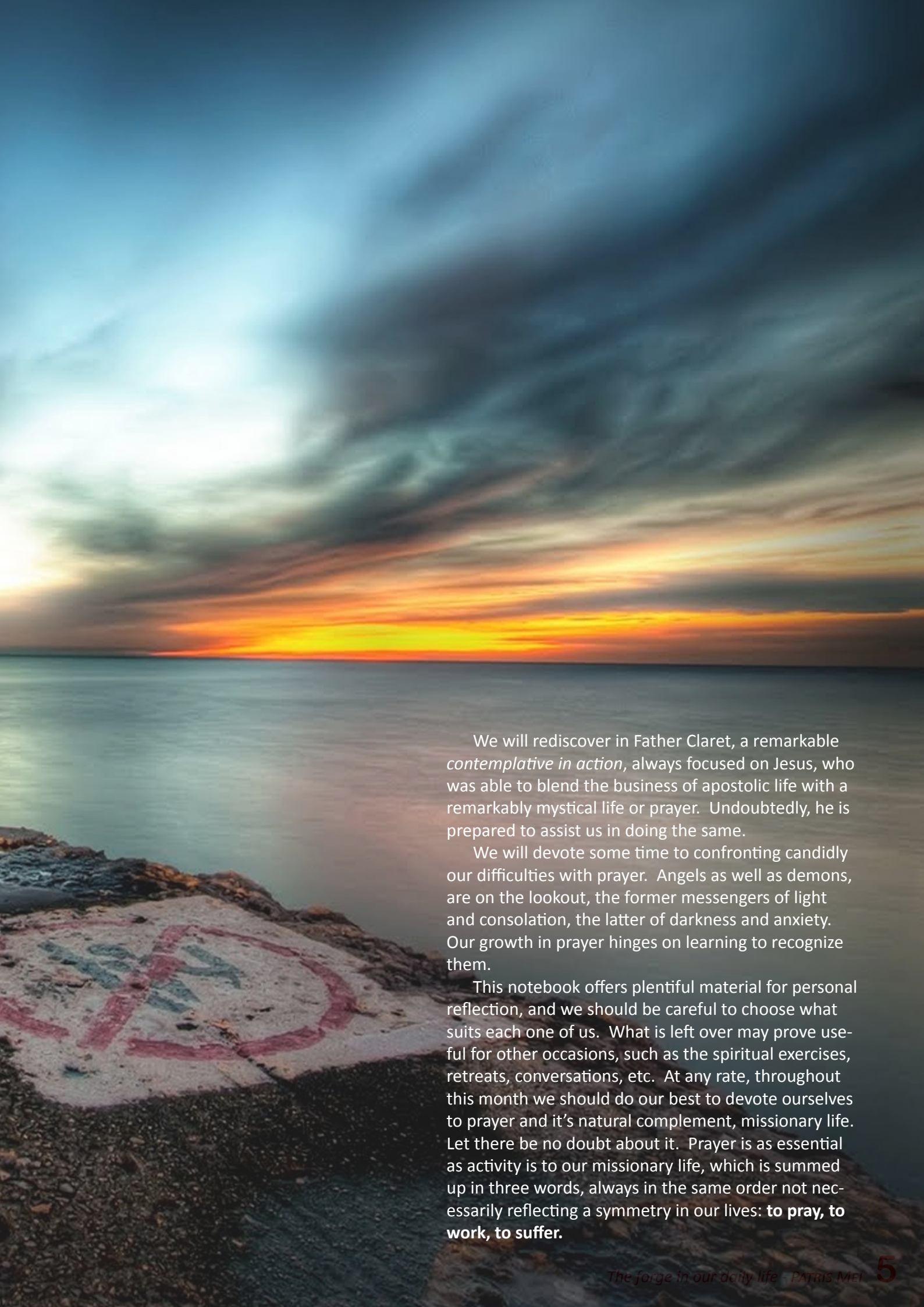


These considerations, which might be seen as providentially connected, should help us live this month from the perspective of sons of our Father. A month provides us only a small amount of time, in which to rekindle our desire to grasp the profound implications of our missionary calling. We may be helped to pray more consistently, and to dare to go into that place, where according to our individual needs and circumstances we truly encounter God.

This workbook is dedicated exclusively to prayer. We hope it offers practical suggestions about how to focus our prayer, how to evaluate it, how to promote growth in prayer, and how to discern what the Lord might be saying to us in prayer.

When it comes to prayer, Jesus is, and must be, our only teacher. No one else! No matter our temperament, our age or nationality, we must learn everything about prayer from him. Don't worry. Jesus is not a threat to our individuality, let alone our personhood. On the contrary, he enhances and fulfills these. So, we keep our eyes on him and listen closely to what he has to say to us. And, yes, Mary remains our faithful companion along the way.





We will rediscover in Father Claret, a remarkable *contemplative in action*, always focused on Jesus, who was able to blend the business of apostolic life with a remarkably mystical life or prayer. Undoubtedly, he is prepared to assist us in doing the same.

We will devote some time to confronting candidly our difficulties with prayer. Angels as well as demons, are on the lookout, the former messengers of light and consolation, the latter of darkness and anxiety. Our growth in prayer hinges on learning to recognize them.

This notebook offers plentiful material for personal reflection, and we should be careful to choose what suits each one of us. What is left over may prove useful for other occasions, such as the spiritual exercises, retreats, conversations, etc. At any rate, throughout this month we should do our best to devote ourselves to prayer and its natural complement, missionary life. Let there be no doubt about it. Prayer is as essential as activity is to our missionary life, which is summed up in three words, always in the same order not necessarily reflecting a symmetry in our lives: **to pray, to work, to suffer.**



## Exercise 1: Your personal prayer

- Choose seven adjectives to describe your personal prayer. Then, from your perspective, list them in order of importance.
- Write a brief explanation why your prayer is as it is. This may help you prepare for your next meeting with your spiritual director.

## 2. Reflection

### A basic understanding prayer

The famous screen actor Vittorio Gasmann said in an interview (*Oggi*, March 1990) that at the age of 68 he overcame the severe depression, which for two years had prevented him from dealing with the simplest matters of everyday life.

– It was an extremely difficult ordeal, but I learned a lot about the world and myself.  
– What did you learn? - the interviewer asked.  
– To pray. That doesn't sound like much to you? I never gave religion much thought. I was indifferent in that respect. Neither fish nor flesh. Neither an atheist nor a true believer. I began studying a wide range of faith-related issues. I read Dante and study the theology of his time. Now, I understand the importance of a spiritual perspective. I find light in prayer. Imagine a man like me, accustomed to being highly successful, rediscovering that masterwork of simplicity, the Our Father.

This anecdote is not meant to suggest that things are always so simple, but that such things do indeed happen, and that nothing could benefit us more than strengthening our religious convictions and renewing commitment to prayer. In spite of the countless difficulties we may encounter, prayer is absolutely essential to our relationship with God. Yet, as in every human relationship, there are certain principles, which determine how deep a relationship we may expect to have with God.

### First: Prayer, while absolutely essential, is fraught with problems.

To deny these difficulties belies the importance of prayer, which is, above all, to seek God, but far more than that, to enjoy a personal relationship with him and to be his friend. We are familiar with other ways of saying the same thing. Understanding this, however, we are likely to be more careful and realistic, when it comes to discerning our experiences of encountering and speaking to God. God knows us through and through and does reveal himself to us, but he does not cater to our tastes and desires. Sometimes, he reveals himself to us without our feeling it, and viceversa. No matter the extent to which we surrender ourselves to him, or how correct our perception of him, God remains the Greatest and the Absolute Mystery.

### Second: Never try to manipulate God.

Yes, God can, and does, speak to us. Unfortunately, if we believe this, we can fall prey to idols and fashion for ourselves a God to our own liking. Let God be God. We must not try to manipulate him. Someone, speaking of attachment to our pets, said man's best friend is precisely one who can't talk – the dog. We need to be careful and not fooled by the silence and seeming absence of God. It would be a serious mistake for us to create for ourselves a god of our own liking, with only those attributes, which appeal to us. God cannot be bought. Notwithstanding, it is also true that true prayer is an exchange between the strength of the one praying and the weakness of God.





**Third: We will never know if we have actually prayed.**

We must accept this fundamental truth humbly, and accustom ourselves to not knowing or understanding completely what transpires when we pray. It does no good to take meticulous stock of ourselves or our prayer. In fact, that might be nothing more than thinly veiled egoism. An examination of conscience, as we will see, takes an entirely different approach. It should not be surprising, then, that throughout the centuries, the Church has been wary of the enlightened, overly emotive prayer and the uncritical interpretation of what has been experienced in prayer. Such suspicions and cautions, whether expressed in no uncertain terms or more gently, challenge the egoism and the tendency to manipulate God, which bedevil those who devote themselves to prayer.

**Fourth: True prayer requires humility.**

The British Carmelite W.M. Becket defines prayers as “the only place in the world with no place to hide”. It’s true. He goes on to say that

prayer consists in being defenseless before God. What is God going to do? Will he actually speak to me? Well, that is what life is all about, and that is why authentic prayer is indispensable. In spite of the difficulties and the demons, about which he speaks further on, I am who I am, and only from the depths of myself can I pray authentically to God. I must not flee or attempt to hide.

**Fifth: The most important thing about prayer is doing it.**

To pray is to pray humbly. Time devoted to prayer, though it seems wasted – I was distracted, I felt nothing, I see no progress – is an expression of the importance we attach to our search for God. Our time is a vase of alabaster, which we are willing to squander for love of the Lord, as Mary of Bethany did (cf. *Jn* 12:1-8). Simply by taking time for prayer we tell God: “This means a great deal to me, and I want so much to encounter you and to be one with you, my God, that I count this time well spent. I may not experience what I am looking for, but my time is not wasted.”



“We pray because we cannot imagine not doing it. It affects the ebb and flow of everyday life, just as physical exercise, or taking a short nap after lunch, do.”

**Sixth: Go slowly and in an orderly fashion.**

We dare not be smug. The way of prayer is paved with the subtlest of temptations, soul-shaking potholes, and disillusionment. It is no time before we wonder, “Where am I?” Prayer has its principles and laws, which over the centuries have been confirmed by the Church. “No one is judge in his own case,” is a good example. We ought not look for God only when it suits us, but without fail, and keeping it simple helps us focus our energy. Being in a hurry, expecting results, forgetting that we cannot manipulate God, and mere caprice all undermine prayer.

**Seventh: It all comes down to seeking God, then listening to him.**

It bears repeating that prayer, in the simplest of terms, is passionately seeking God, the God “who shines most brilliantly in his absence” (Simone Weil). What is the Christian life but a search

for God, “who seems to have disappeared, leaving us in mourning?” To paraphrase the Spanish poet Antonio Machado: “Your God? No, God as he truly is. Come with me to look for him. Keep yours for yourself. Come with me to look for him.”

Here are two bits of advice, which might help

us persevere in prayer.

Think of persevering in prayer as engaging in the latest preventive therapy. We are so afraid of cancer today that we don’t hesitate to undergo the latest scan. Prayer can serve as a scan of the spirit. Crises arise because we don’t see them coming, though we might have if we had been faithful to prayer. Anger, despair, emotional difficulties, or threats to our faith take their toll. It can be extremely difficult to start exercising, but if we stay at it, it becomes a need, and we do it not out of obligation but because it makes us feel good. Likewise, if we persevere in prayer, we come to need it. We pray because we cannot imagine not doing it. It affects the ebb and flow of everyday life, just as physical exercise, or taking a short nap after lunch, do. Habits begin with taking the first step, then the next, then the next.

## Exercise 2: Prayer in our Constitutions

1. Spend some time to read slowly and carefully Chapter V of the first part of the Constitutions about Prayer (CC 33-38). We suggest these steps:

- Before you do, ask the Lord to make you understand and internalize the content.
- As you read, underline or color the most striking texts. Do not do a reading too fast.
- When finished, give thanks to God and beg.

2. It may be useful for you to remember the internal logic of the constitutional text as briefly reflected here:

- No. 33: Basis: Imitation of Christ who prays and teaches us to pray
- No. 34: Spirit of missionary prayer and its contents
- No. 35: Our Church and liturgical prayer
- No. 36: Our devotion to Mary
- No. 37: Personal prayer of the Claretian missionary
- No. 38: Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation



## The prayer of Jesus

The Constitutions (#33) acknowledge an inherent connection between our prayer and the prayer of Jesus, and between prayer and missionary activity. “We who have undertaken Christ’s missionary work should also imitate his constancy in prayer (57), and take to heart his recommendations and teachings (58) on prayer without ceasing (59).”

### Jesus at prayer

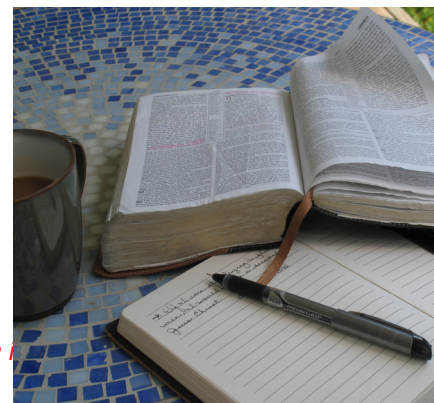
All four gospels provide glimpses of Jesus at prayer. The gospel of Luke, however, is replete with such examples.

- What defined Jesus was not his serenity, his meekness, or his kindness, but the fact that he was sent, the fact that he was a missionary. The impetus of his missionary activity was his absolute and unwavering commitment to doing the will of God, which he seemed to intuit clearly and profoundly. Under the rubric of prayer, Luke cites the first words of Jesus: “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (*Lk* 2:49), and his last: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (*Lk* 23:46). These are the last words of one who has lived a dedicated life and recognizes that the work entrusted to him is now consummated” (*Jn* 19:30). The entire life of Jesus unfolds between these two poles of response and vindication.
- Luke mentions Jesus praying at decisive moments of his life: in the temple at the age of

twelve (*Lk* 2:49); at his baptism (*Lk* 3:21-22); during his ministry, which was inspired and sustained by habitual prayer (*Lk* 5:16); before the choosing of the Twelve (*Lk* 6:12-13); before asking those men of little faith who they believed he was (*Lk* 9:18); at the Transfiguration (*Lk* 9:28-29); after the sending of the seventy-two disciples (*Lk* 10:21); before teaching his disciples how to pray (*Lk* 11:1-2); in the days before his death (*Lk* 21:36-37); at the Last Supper (*Lk* 22:17-19); warning that Simon Peter would deny him in a moment of overwhelming temptation (*Lk* 22:31); in the Garden of Olives (*Lk* 22:39-42, 45-46); and on the cross (*Lk* 23:34-46).

- Remember that, according to Luke, from the time of his adolescence Jesus took part in the prayer of his people. In the temple in Jerusalem, we sense for the first time his unique relationship with the Father. The son of Mary loved his mother as nobody else could, he devoted himself unstintingly to his apostles, but never ceded to them the place in his heart, which belonged to his Father alone. Jesus prayed to his Abbá for his apostles. Still, for as long as he was with them, we never see him sit down and deliberate with them. He never consults them about important decisions. Throughout his life he scrutinizes the will of God, as a traveller consults a map. In the case of Jesus, the journey was difficult and fraught with sorrow, which might explain why Jesus was wont to pray in solitude and in the silence of the night. His solitude can be described only as sacred.

- Luke regards prayer as “the favored place of revelation”, the communication of the Word and





the Spirit of God. In prayer Jesus' grows in his awareness of his communion with the Father. In prayer, Jesus discerns the will of God and is empowered by the Spirit to put it into action. In John 4:34, he says, "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work. Note that he does not say, "I am obliged to do the will of the one who sent me," as if it were a bothersome imposition. On the contrary, Jesus referred to the prayerful discernment and carrying out of God's will as his nourishment. It was his food. Indeed he rejoiced in the action of the spirit (Lk 10:21), and was in turn moved to pray to the Father. Mary, too, "overshadowed by the power of the Most High" (Lk 1:35) responded with her (*Magnificat*).

### *Jesus, teacher of prayer*

Jesus prays and he teaches how to pray. Jesus' teachings on prayer were profoundly rooted in his own daily. Luke assigns three stages to Jesus' teaching his disciples to pray: Jesus prays to the Father; the disciples observe him at prayer; taken by what they observe, they ask Jesus to teach them to pray. (Lk 11:1ff)

Observing Jesus in prayer, the disciples wished to pray as he did. They asked if the traditional ways of praying, including the way in which John the Baptizer and his disciples prayed, were acceptable, or was there need for a new way of praying. They asked Jesus to explain the essentials of prayer.

So, not surprisingly, Claret insists that Jesus is the only teacher of prayer – "... not simply the teacher but the model and exemplar, who models and exemplifies what he teaches. Accordingly, the eternal Father says to every one of us: 'Observe and imitate the exemplar, who reveals himself to you...Put into practice what you experience in meditation, just as one, learning to draw or write, eyes the original and copies it down on paper. Observe the original, who is Jesus Christ, and copy his virtues'" (*El Colegio*, Barcelona, 1860, 59).

Jesus did not teach his disciples a new technique. He simply taught them the Our Father, a prayer for sons and daughters, which indeed his disciples are - sons and daughters of God. The distinctive element of this prayer is that we address

God as Abbá, since it is precisely in prayer that we develop an affective relationship with the Father. To pray is to establish an affective relationship of a son or daughter to the Father, though addressing God as our Abbá is not as obvious it might seem. Only Jesus could have taught us to do so.

The Our Father asks that the name of Abbá be glorified and sanctified, that his Kingdom come and that his will be done.

To begin with, the word Father is indispensable. It inspires and informs the entire prayer. It is, however, one of those words rendered redundant by the addition of adjectives like good or loving,

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which detract from the simplicity and straightforwardness of Abbá or Father.

- **“That he be our Abbá”**, meaning that we are brothers and sisters. There is no place in the Our Father for individualism. Even when we pray alone, we pray in the plural. Whoever calls God Father implicitly acknowledges his ties to six and a half billion other human beings on the planet. When I say, “Our Father,” I affirm that everyone of them, without exception, is my brother or sister. “Our,” not “mine.” The Father of not just one tribe or a single nation. “Our.” His sons and daughters in Sierra Leone, his billions of Chinese sons and daughters, and his son, the annoying neighbor on the floor overhead.

- **“Hallowed be your name”**. We have been given the name of God, which we can either profane or sanctify. Regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves, as Christians we either sanctify or profane God's name. Once committed to carrying on the ministry, through which Jesus sanctified the name of his Father, we must sanc-



tify the Father's name by toppling all idols and ridding our hearts of all golden calves, those false images of God, which we are so often prepared to embrace.

- **"Your kingdom come".** C. Blumhardt points out that in the Our Father we do not ask that we be brought to the Father's Kingdom, but that his Kingdom come to us. The Lord's prayer keeps us tethered to the earth. The Kingdom of God is coming to us, yet, according to Jesus, it is already within us, though it is not a kingdom of this world. Indeed, the Reign of Christ comes in the person of Christ, whom we welcome into our lives each time that we pray for the coming of the Kingdom.

- **"Your will be done."** As the saying goes, we should be careful what we ask for. This petition is a perfect example. There are few things we cherish more than our personal freedom, and we resent few things as much as another's will being imposed on us. To pray as Jesus teaches us to pray is not an attempt to get God to honor our wishes but an expression of our willingness to bend to what God desires for us. After all, he desires – he cannot desire otherwise – only what is to our benefit. And since God reveals his will through everyday events, we need to learn to discern – to have a feel for – the ways of God.

We must ask the Father to meet three existential needs, which we continue to experience, until indeed the Reign of God is realized.

- **"We are hungry."** The disciples dropped everything to follow Jesus, yet daily nourishment remained essential. We who are called to proclaim the coming of the Reign of God, as Jesus did and his disciples did, still require our daily bread.

- **"We are sinners."** So we ask to be forgiven our sins, which assumes our capacity to forgive and pardon others. "We are able to forgive others precisely because we have been forgiven, and because we are able to forgive, we can ask for the definitive pardon." The disciple of Jesus must pray even for his enemies (cf. *Lk 6:28*).

- **"We encounter temptation at every turn."** We beg to be spared the temptation to cease following Jesus, to fall back into the sins of our past, to lose faith, or to leave the community. We also pray because, in these end times, we experience tribulation and nearly irresistible temptation (cf. *Lk 22:40.46*).

Jesus makes clear that God the Father heeds our prayer in our time of need and never fails to respond. There are the parables about the friend knocking on the door at midnight (*Lk 11:5-9*), the widow who drives the judge crazy (*Lk 18:1-8*), and the tax collector, whose prayer was simply: "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner" (*Lk 18:13*). It pays to pray without ceasing to such a Father, who cannot deny his sons and daughters what we ask and cannot possibly give us anything but what is good for us (*Lk 11:13*).

We must pray without ceasing, not simply in times of crisis or when in the mood to pray (*Lk 18:1*). We must pray without ceasing to be ready for the Lord's return (cf. *Lk 22:31-46*). The passion of Jesus has become ours, and we must remain alert in the face of persecution, snares and, temptation, and pray without ceasing, lest we fail. There is no room for the arrogance of the Pharisee, only the humility of the Psalmist: "A contrite and humble heart, you will not despise" (*Psalms 50*).



## Exercise 3: The Our Father

*After reflecting on the prayer of Jesus and his practice of meditation, read the second section of the fourth part of the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" (nn. 2.759 – 2.865) and its splendid, authoritative synthesis of the Our Father. This is the outline.*

### SECOND SECTION: THE LORD'S PRAYER or the OUR FATHER

- Article 1 "A SUMMARY OF THE ENTIRE GOSPEL"
- I The heart of the Sacred Scriptures
- II "The Lord's Prayer"
- III The prayer of the Church
- SUMMARY
- Article 2 "OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN"
- I Approach him in total confidence
- II "Father!"
- III "Our Father"
- IV "Who art in heaven"
- SUMMARY
- Article 3 THE SEVEN PETITIONS
- I Hallowed be your name.
- II Your Kingdom come.
- III Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
- IV Give us today our daily bread.
- V Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
- VI Lead us not into temptation.
- VII Y But deliver us from evil.
- THE CLOSING DOXOLOGY







### Mary's prayer. Mary of the *Patris Mei*

Our reflection on *Patris Mei* would be incomplete without reflecting on Mary's relationship with God. It must be noted that the fifth chapter of our Constitutions, devoted to prayer, not only does not present Mary as a model of prayer, but avoids any mention of praying to Mary. Christian prayer is always directed to the Father in the name of the Son through in the Spirit. Yet while it is clear that we do not pray to Mary, it is fitting that the Constitutions remind us that she is "associated with all her heart in the saving work of her Son" (CC 36). Thus, it is entirely appropriate to invoke her intercession in our missionary undertakings (cf. *Aut* 270).

– So, it behooves us to dwell on Mary's prayer, expressed in the Magnificat, which reflects the depth of her prayer. Claret says: "Later, out of devotion to Mary Most Holy, I added the sweet name of Mary, my mother, my patroness, my directress and my all, after Jesus" (*Aut* 1.5). Mary forms us as well (*GPF* 99). In the gospels, she says little, although the little that she says is indeed precious. Likewise, precious little is said about her. Still, it is abundantly clear how she saw herself in relationship to God.

– "Be it done to me according to your word" (*Lk* 1:38)

– "Blessed the one who hears the Word of God and puts it into practice" (*Lk* 11:28)

– "Mary guarded all these things and meditated on them in her heart" (*Lk* 2:19)

In our filial and apostolic commitment to Mary, mother, teacher and formator we imitate her interiority and sensitivity to people in need (cf. *GPF* 100). Her path is our path as well.

In the depths of her heart, Mary listened to the Word, safeguarded and meditated on it, and put it into practice the Word. These four elements, in this order, sum up Mary's life of prayer. However, to understand them properly, we must grasp the primacy of "be it done unto me according to your Word." Mary was the hearer, the guardian, the contemplative and servant of the Word precisely because she desired nothing else but to conform her life to the will of God.



### Mary listened... (Lk 11:26-38)

«Mary is the “listening Virgin”, who welcomes the Word of God in faith” (*Marialis Cultus* 17). The episode in Luke 11:27-28 confirms this. An anonymous woman cries out, “Blessed the womb, which bore you and the breasts which nursed you.” Mary is praised for being the mother of Jesus. Jesus, however, corrects the woman in a way, which undoubtedly took his audience by surprise. His mother was indeed blessed, but not because she was his mother, but, above all, because she listened to the Word and fulfilled it. This correction could come only from the lips of Jesus, and he could not have praised her more highly.

### “Mary kept all these things...” (Lk 2:19)

Listening is followed by safeguarded all these things. Precisely what did Mary safeguard in her heart? Everything about Jesus: the events of his life, his words, his reactions, and in remembering them she made them her own. To keep is to remember, to welcome interiorly what has been perceived, even what challenges our way of thinking, what we don’t understand, or even what causes us pain. Still, we allow the Word of God, or at least a part of it, to penetrate our hearts, where it can be understood more deeply, where we can make it our own, where we can identify with what we remember. We metabolize the Word and convert it into energy, capable of vivifying our entire being.







**“She meditated on these things in her heart...” (Lk 2:19)**

Meditation is not to be confused with deductive reasoning or drawing logical conclusions. It is not a process of the mind or brain. Rather, meditation takes place in the heart: “She meditated on these things in her heart”. Meditation is taste and see interiorly the goodness of the Lord and his ways. At times, its results seem to defy logic. Mary meditated in awe on what she learned.

**She put it into practice: “ (Lk 11:28)**

Authentic prayer is the warp and woof of everyday life. Having said, “Be it done to me according to your Word”, Mary remained faithful and obedient to the end. Not only did she listen, safeguard and meditate on the Word, she put it into practice. What is faith but daring to welcome the Word of God and saying yes, even when we do not grasp the implications? As *Mt* 18ff and *Lk* 2.4ff make clear, the Word stirs conflict and insecurity, yet produces in the believer the fullness of life.



## Exercise 4: The Annunciation in the “Redemptoris Mater” chapel

In the *Annunciation* we see an angel unrolling an image of Mary, her eyes closed in recollection, as she listens. Kneeling and silent, she accepts the will of God. The unrolled parchment represents the fulfillment in her of the hopes and promises of the messianic prophets.

In her lap she holds a skein of wool, which symbolizes the flesh of the Word, to be knit in her and from her. Pointing to Mary's ear, the archangel Gabriel indicates that Mary welcomes his message with faith and love.

Ephraim the Syrian, alluding to an ancient tradition from northern Africa, which has its origins in Egyptian hieroglyphics, says that the action of the Spirit worked upon Mary through her hearing. St Paul will insist, “Faith comes from hearing.” In the mosaic, while unrolling the Word, the angel keeps his right hand near Mary's ear, indicating that he announces the Word to Mary, who listens to it. Her hands continue to finger the skein of red wool. Ancient tradition frequently portrayed Mary weaving. Here she weaves the flesh of the Word.



**Take a good bit of time to reflect on this image, dwelling on the meaning of the various symbols. Allow yourself to take in the beauty of this icon of the prayer of Mary.**

### The Church's liturgical prayer

After speaking of “...the spirit of adoptive sonship,” which ought to animate our prayer (CC 34), the Constitutions address various forms of prayer, emphasizing the primacy of the daily Eucharist... “During the sacred seasons and on feasts days, our prayer should be attuned to the spirit of the Church, which in the liturgy, portrays to the faithful the total mystery of Christ (CC 35).” Whether

personal or communal, private or liturgical, all expressions of prayer are enhanced by the observance of the liturgical year, which celebrates the mystery of Christ from his incarnation and birth to his ascension and Pentecost, while we await in joyful hope Christ's return. (SC 102). The celebration of the liturgical year, with its rich symbols and rites, introduces us to the mystery of salvation, and



as as “mother and teacher”, the Church imparts wisdom and provides us spiritual nourishment.

### *Eucharist*

The Constitutions place the Eucharist within the broader context of the prayer of Christ and the Church - in which we participate. The Eucharist is not simply the pre-eminent school of prayer; but the foundation and the summit of prayer. It is the mystery, the presence and oblation of Christ, “in which he offers himself for his brothers, honors his Father and fosters the unity of the Church” (CC 35). Partaking of his sacrificial Body and drinking of the cup of the Lord, we are transformed into Christ Jesus. God raised Jesus up and gave him to the Church (cf. *Eph* 1:19-22), filling the world with his presence (cf. *Eph* 4:9ff). Jesus remains with us, his community, until the end of time. The Eucharist is also the mystery of the spousal union of Christ with his Church. Next year, in the *Caritas Christi* stage, an entire notebook will be dedicated to the Eucharist.

### *Liturgy of the Hours*

The Church is called to follow and imitate Jesus in prayer. The Liturgy of the Hours teaches us the style and rhythm of the Church’s daily prayer and how to pray without ceasing. Rather than a burden, the Hours should be regarded as a gift, which we welcome graciously. The Hours enable us to make our own prayer the prayer of the Church, the the Spouse who listens to her Spouse and responds, in accord with the inspiration of the Spirit to the Word of God. The rythm of the Hours allows us to hear God speaking to us, and moves us to meditate upon God teachings and actions throughout history. The Hours invite us to remember – as the Scriptures understand remembering -the wonders of God.

Lauds, Vespers, the daytime hours, and Compline, and Office of Readings, sanctify time precisely because we are sanctified in observing them: making us docile to the action of the Spirit, removing obstacles, inspiring proper dispositions, and strengthening us in our struggles along the difficult path to sanctity.

“  
What is faith but daring to welcome the Word of God and saying yes, even when we do not grasp the implications?”

### *The Prayer of Fr. Claret*

Pope Pius XII, on the occasion of the canonization of our Founder, masterfully described St. Anthony Mary Claret as a man of contrasts. The most striking contrast, no doubt, was that Claret always remained aware of the presence of God, even in the midst of his prodigious and relentless activity. Our Founder was, above all, a man of God who, in his Autobiography and other autobiographical documents, described his experience of prayer and what he taught. We sum them up here.

### *His growth in prayer*

Anthony was, indeed, a missionary, long before he began to reflect on his apostolic vocation.

- At just five years of age, he spent a good part of the night in prayer, comparing the world and eternity, dwelling on human infidelity and the danger of eternal damnation. These are the early stirrings of his apostolic vocation. He begins to pray the rosary daily and to contemplate the mysteries of the life of Jesus Christ (cf. *Aut* 44-49).

- At ten years of age, he discovers in prayer his personal friendship with the Lord, who is present and alive in the Eucharist. This inspires his commitment to serve his Friend and Master (cf. *Aut* 40).

- As a youth, in Barcelona, in the midst of the delirium of the factory, he continues to recite the rosary faithfully and attend Sunday Mass (cf. *Aut* 66). Vocational trials teach him wisdom. He discovers the vanity of the world, and worldly success, if one loses one’s soul (cf. *Aut* 68-40).

- As a seminarian in Vich, he begins to read Scripture and to take the Word of God to heart:





“

In the heart of Claret, holiness and the apostolate were one and the same as the work of the Father in Jesus Christ, unifying tendencies and resolving contradictions.”

“...what moved and stimulated me most was reading the Holy Bible, to which I had always been strongly attracted. Some passages had such an effect on me that I seemed to hear a voice telling exactly what I was reading” (*Aut* 113-114). His devotion as a son of Mary, in service to the Word, is rooted in his reading the Scriptures. A mere boy, he assisted at parish Vespers on feast days. Now, a cleric, he is formally initiated into the liturgical prayer of the Church (cf. *Aut* 90).

- As a Jesuit novice in Rome, Anthony’s prayer reaches its full missionary expression. “I offered my all to God without reserve. I was continually thinking and planning what I could do for my neighbor, and since the time had not yet come for me to set out on my work, I busied myself with prayer” (*Aut* 153).

In prayer he shares with the Virgin Mary his vision of the needs of the world, the zeal with which he was inflamed, his intercession, and his generous and docile dedication to the apostolic mission. (cf. *Aut* 153-164).

- As an apostolic missionary, he imitates Jesus, preaching and healing by day, and praying to the Father at night. No matter how much work there is, he never avoids prayer, because it provides the spiritual nourishment, the crucible, in which



the dross is purified, the mold in which his will is conformed to the will of God, the forge in which the fire of Pentecost is enkindled to announce to all the Gospel. Characteristic of this time is his “apostolic prayer”:

- As a missionary bishop in Cuba, he is impelled by the fire of the Spirit to discern the most urgent needs of his archdiocese, and to undertake pastoral visits and preach missions. In prayer he finds the strength to face up to his opponents and to prepare himself for martyrdom (cf. *Aut* 577-581. *Propósitos* 1850-1857).

- In Madrid he enjoys a more organized life, allowing him to spend more time in prayer: three hours, the entire night (cf. *EA*, pg. 516). He receives illuminations and extraordinary graces related to his evangelical mission and his service to the Church (cf. *EA*, pg. 641-662).

- As an exile, –old and infirm – he does not let up on prayer, in spite of his desolation and his experience of being configured to Christ Crucified (cf. *EA*, pg. 606).

### *Claret, contemplative in mission*

Our Founder saw no conflict between contemplation and action. In fact, he regards both as the heart and soul of his mission. The apostolate does not detract or distract from prayer, nor contemplation from the apostolate. Claret never felt as alone as he did in the hubbub of a crowd, and never so overwhelmed by those in need – sinners, the just and the self-righteous – as when he sought to be alone in conversation with God. His famous metaphor of the compass speaks volumes: Claret imagined himself to be the two arms of a compass, one fixed on the center in love and the other planning the mission, according to the impulse, coming from the center. (cf. *Aut* 706. 710. 713).

The secret of this harmony lay in his missionary vocation: Claret experienced one and the same voice calling him to sanctity and to the apostolate. His vocation thrived on the bond between sonship and mission, which he regarded as his participation in the Sonship-Mission of the

Son. As a seminarian, he felt driven to imitate the decision of Jesus: “I must be in my Father’s house”. In the heart of Claret, holiness and the apostolate were one and the same as the work of the Father in Jesus Christ, unifying tendencies and resolving contradictions. The Autobiography is replete with expressions, referring to the apostolate as an expression of filial love. Claret believed he was sent by the heavenly Father, just as Jesus the Son was sent. He prays as the Son prayed and, just as the Son did, he carries out his mission.

The other unifying element is the love of Christ, moving him to cry Abbá, and unable to contain himself, he is impelled to dart from one place to another. That love was fed especially through the Eucharist.



Around it rotates Claret’s mysticism, which he assumed as a spring of holiness and apostolic fecundity (cf. *Aut* 767). The greater number of the mystical graces, which Fr. Claret received are either purely Eucharistic – as the conservation of the species (26 August, 1861) – or are related to his celebration of Mass or his prolonged times of adoration (cf. *Aut* 681. 684. 698).



## Exercise 5: Claret's prayer and our own

1. Reflect at length on the texts cited above with respect to Claret's prayer. Write down what speaks to you most strongly.

2. In your notebook, describe your own journey in prayer, your relationship with the Lord and its development over the years. The following might help:

- Describe the most significant stages in the the course of your life of prayer, including times of dryness or times when you abandoned prayer. Describe precisely when, where, and if you can, why things went this way.
- Ask yourself why these moments were particularly important. Note the chronological order.
- Try to capture in a few words the significance of each stage, as well as the significance of what seem to have been the defining experiences during each stage.
- Finally, try to tie all this together. What draws you to prayer, and when you begin to pray, what speaks to you most immediately? Where does your practice of prayer seem to be headed? What do you need, in order to move ahead? What has helped you to clarify this?

### How to pray in everyday life

One of the questions, asked by masters of the spiritual life, is about the relationship between prayer and conversion of life. Prayer and life, life and prayer are the warp and woof of our existence. St Teresa of Jesus said: "Put little trust in the prayer of anyone, who is not disposed to let it make a difference in everyday life." A Claretian must attend to the sacred as well as the mundane, even when they appear irreconcilable.

**A danger.** A missionary runs the risk of driving a wedge between prayer and what is thought of as everyday life. One imagines that the sacred can be experienced only at certain times and in certain places, and that the mundane and ordinary only threaten to undermine one's relationship with God. God becomes God of the temple, rather than God of the mission, which is precisely what governs a missionary's everyday life. It is not enough to seek God at certain times and in certain places. We must recognize him in the circumstances of everyday life.

- **What is the everyday?** Very simply, the everyday consists of everything that occurs in our everyday lives: all and sundry actions and activities, interaction with other people, situations and

experiences. It is the ordinary or not particularly remarkable, the profane or not particularly religious, and the morally ambiguous, those situations in which what is good or bad is not all that obvious.

- **What does the everyday have to do with prayer?** Essentially, everything. We discover and interact with God in every aspect of our lives. Prayer is not a strictly interior or private activity, peripheral to our work and mission. At the deepest levels, prayer and everyday life flow from a single source. Our reality - all that surrounds us, all that we do and all that happens to us, is where we should expect to hear God's and recognize his face.

- Notwithstanding, all creation "has been made subject to futility" (*Rm* 8:20). As a result, as free and responsible creatures, we do not always abide by God's will or allow ourselves to discover him in our lives. In turn, in prayer we are easily misled and exposed to every sort of pitfall.

- **Thus, the importance of discernment.** Discernment is the effort to bring the light of the Word of God and the faith of the Church to bare upon how God is at work in our lives. Both the



Word of God and the faith of the Church enable us to discern how the Lord indeed responds to our petition, “Lord, show me your path” at this moment in our lives. This discernment requires three dispositions:

– *Do not underestimate the importance of the first moments of the day.* Those first moments are significant from both a psychological and spiritual perspective. Be as alert to them as possible, since they set the tone for the rest of the day, affecting how we are likely to deal with others during the day. They also affect the pace of our day.

– *Live in the present, focused on what you are doing.* Realistically, there is no better way to get through the day. The present moment is all that actually exists. The past is past and the future is not yet. Should the future arrive, it will then be the present. We should try to deal with whatever comes our way as an event, in which God mani-

festes himself to us. The circumstances of our lives provide truly sacramental moments, in which to recognize and welcome the Lord and to do his will.

– *Keep our hearts always set on God.* Our Constitutions (#52) admonish us “...to strive to walk in newness of life, setting our hearts on God, doing everything with an upright intention and true fervor of heart, bearing adversities for his sake.

To foster this spirit of prayer, our Constitutions prescribe a number of practices, aimed at maintaining the contemplative dimension of our individual lives as missionaries and as Claretians in community.

Rhythm	Prayer of the Claretian Missionary		
	Personal	Liturgical	Marian
Daily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Meditation (CC 37; Dir 89)</li> <li>– Reading (CC 37)</li> <li>– Exam (CC 37; Dir 90)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Eucharist (CC 35; Dir 85)</li> <li>– Liturgy of the Hours (CC 35; Dir 85)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Spiritual exercises: Rosary and other exercises (CC 37; Dir 87-88)</li> </ul>
Weekly		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Sunday and feast days (Cf. 1 VR 114.128)</li> </ul>	
Frequently	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– “Visits” and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (CC 35)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Sacrament of Reconciliation (CC 38)</li> <li>– (Review of community prayer) (Dir 93)</li> </ul>	
Monthly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Day of recollection (CC 52; Dir 91)</li> </ul>		
Yearly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Spiritual Exercises (retreat) (CC 52; Dir 92)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Celebration of the sacred seasons (CC 35)</li> <li>– Veneration of the saints: St. Joseph, St. Michael and All the Angels; the Apostles; the four co-patrons (CC 35)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Honoring Mary in liturgy and other devotions (CC 36)</li> </ul>



## Exercise 6: The rhythm of your prayer

1. Take some time to reflect on how your everyday life affects your prayer (personal, liturgical and devotional) and how your prayer affects your everyday life. Reflect on how your personal, liturgical and devotional prayer affect one another. Look for connections as well as disconnections. Discuss these with your spiritual director.
2. List your practices of daily prayer, in chronological order. Whatever you are doing, is it sufficient to motivate you and enhance the quality of your life?
3. How does your community help you to remain faithful to prayer? Could it do more?

### Angels of prayer

It makes no difference whether we are well advanced in prayer, let alone masters of it. We all need another person to motivate us and accompany us. The way of prayer is too difficult for us to go it alone. Exercise 5 may remind us of a few rough spots we have encountered along the way. Yet it may also have caused us to realize that for some reason or another we have persevered in prayer in good times as well as bad, even without knowing why. Suppose we call this impulse an angel. After all, Fr. Claret “experienced the visible protection of the Blessed Virgin and of the angels and saints” (cf. Aut 464), and, from the beginning of the Congregation, invoked the patronage of the angels as the models and protectors of the missionaries. The nature and form of such enigmatic beings aside, they are at our side whenever we pray. Thanks be to God, we are never alone in prayer.

- **The angel of loneliness.** In spite of our discouragement, we do our best to pray. Still it seems as if we are in a sound proof room and our words go anywhere. The angel of patience helps us to persevere.

- **The angel of consolation.** The classical writers call it desolation. Its source is often unknown, and it often comes out of nowhere. Yet, in spite of our discouragement, dryness and lack of desire, we persevere. A comforting angel sustains you. A consoling angel is at our side.

- **The angel of words.** At times, our prayer is purely vocal, with or without formulas. And, though we know that words are no guarantee of God’s hearing us, we persevere, if only because we ourselves are determined to remain attentive to God, and so we repeat them over and over again very slowly. Have no doubt, a watchful angel keeps us alert.

- **The angel of silence.** When we feel reduced to just being there, and it feels like stepping into a pool and the water lapping against us, God reveals himself in the silence. The silence is not empty, but neither does it elicit words from us. In moments such as these, a knowing angel guides us.

- **The angel of few words.** Sometimes, we pray in short phrases, punctuated with brief silences or rhythmic breathing, restraining the imagination and allowing us to be silent. A gentle angel lights the way.

- **The angel of wisdom.** Academic types tend to be inclined to discursive prayer. With some, however, prayer becomes an article worthy of publication. When we simply converse with God friend to friend, putting aside the metaphysics, a wise angel is at our side.

- **The angel of distraction.** We are frequently distracted with one distraction leading to another. It is not unusual to find ourselves thinking about all kinds of things during prayer. All of a sudden, an alarm goes off, and we say crazy things to God,



like, “Forgive me, Lord. I was distracted.” There’s a clever angel watching over us.

- **The angel of gratitude.** It happens sometimes. We enter into prayer and do nothing more than ask for God’s Spirit. Though incapable of accomplishing anything on our own, we feel impelled to dance and to give thanks, and to bring our loved ones before God, who desires for them more than we can ask or imagine (Ephesians 3.20). The angel of thanksgiving accompanies us.

- **The angel of patience.** Many, if not all of us, are familiar with the Serenity Prayer. When lack of self-esteem or anxiety go untreated, they may go underground, from where they vent in unhealthy ways, such as aggression, acting out sexually, and frittering away our time out of aimlessness or despair. Without help from others, we easily make excuses to ourselves, lash out at those who have hurt us, and end up hostile and bitter. In the meantime, God is not a spectator from afar, and if we turn to him in time of personal disarray, he will assist us in recovering our wholeness, and even help us to turn such experiences of brokenness into seeds of growth. We are accompanied by an angel of patience.

There are countless other angels, but that is not germane to the matter at hand. What is important is the ability to integrate all our experiences. Indeed, that might include accepting the fact that we simply cannot be certain of the quality of our prayer. Feeling we have prayed is no guarantee that we have, nor is feeling we have wasted our time reason enough to believe we have not prayed. Unbeknownst to ourselves we have been in immediate touch with God. The fact is that all contact with God, real as it is, is always mediated, so that what appears quite obvious to us may not be as it seems to be.

Remember that God is light. We do not see light, yet light enables us to see other things. In turn, what is illuminated is not itself light, yet it makes us aware of light. The primordial experience of prayer consists not in seeing God, but only in seeing the world through the eyes of God. A missionary is able to see as God sees, thanks to yet another angel – an angel of *mirada aguda*) who accompanies us in prayer.

## Exercise 7: The role of angels and demons in our prayer

In the appendix there is a **list of angels and demons who affect our prayer**. Write down from the list the reactions you most often experience in prayer and what they indicate. Read the list slowly. Ask yourself which indicators describe your prayer life. Based on your own experience, what else would you add?

### The examen (cf. CC 37)

#### The importance of the daily examen

Fr. Claret considered the daily examen the most effective way to discern the Lord’s presence in one’s daily life. His own examen, which he always did a quarter of an hour before the mid-day meal, focused on the virtues of *meekness* (cf. *Aut* 742), *love of God* (cf. *Aut* 801), and for fifteen years without interruption *humility* (cf. *Aut* 351). The importance Fr. Claret attached to the exa-

men is reflected in his Resolutions for 1869 and Resolutions for 1870. In Resolutions for 1869 he resolves to teach people in season and out of season how to do the examen well.

The Constitutions mandate the use of the daily examen as a means of evaluating our fidelity to the Gospel and as a stimulus to grow in that regard (cf. CC 37). Beyond a doubt, examining our daily life in the presence of God is worth the time and effort and the practice should be revived. By focusing our attention on the missionary calling of



Jesus Christ and the fact that we are living temples of the Holy Spirit, the examen enables us to live united to Jesus as beloved sons of the Father and brothers to all human beings.

Prayer and daily life are not parallel universes competing for our attention. They go hand in hand. The examen, for example, is a spiritual exercise, which heightens our awareness of God at work in everyday life and provides material for dialogue and discernment with the spiritual director.

### *How to make the examen*

At the end of his autobiography, the Colombian Gabriel García Márquez says, “What matters in life is not what happens to you but what you remember and how you remember it.” We should consider what we remember of our day and how we remember it. Our Directory states: “The examen, according to the mind and practice of our Holy Founder, is carried out concretely at two basic times: toward midday, when it mainly has the character of mental prayer, and at night, when it has the character of a general review of the day, and can be joined to the recitation of Compline” (Dir 90). These practical suggestions will help us to do that.

**1. Composition of place:** We silently place ourselves in the presence of Jesus, fully expecting him to speak to us in some way. We ask the Holy Spirit to help us examine our lives without a trace of self-deception.

**2. We thank God for the gift of this day and the many gifts we have received:** good health, relationships, energy and the ability to go on working, etc. This is the upside of our day, which we conclude with thanksgiving and praise.

**3. Next, we examine the downside of our day,** reflecting on one or two weak points, which show our laziness or inappropriate reactions to others in various situations. It is important that we do this in conversation with Jesus.

**4. We ask the Father and Jesus to pardon our infidelities and our failures** to love them and our brothers.

**5. We seek the light of the Holy Spirit,** in order to live tomorrow more in accord with God’s love.

## Exercise 8: Examining our lives in the presence of God

- We should make the examen during the recitation of Compline, going slowly, placing ourselves in the presence of Jesus, giving thanks, reviewing the day, asking forgiveness, and asking for light and strength.
- We should observe the same procedure in preparing for sacramental reconciliation, not focusing solely on our sins, but recognizing and giving thanks for God’s presence in our lives, and asking for the strength to soldier on.

### **Fr. Claret’s apostolic prayer**

Our Founder regarded prayer as the soul of the apostolate. “The first means I have always employed and still do is prayer. In my opinión, this is the greatest means that can be used for the conversion of sinners (*Aut* 264)...I not only prayed myself but asked others to pray” (*Aut* 265)...

We share in the spirit of Claret and participate as well in his spiritual experience, with its various charismatic features. “Among the characteristic

elements inherited from our Father Founder the following stand out: Christocentrism, his Eucharistic piety, his love for the Word of God, his way of living Cordimarian sonship in close relationship with his missionary vocation, and his devotion to the Apostles and to saints, who were especially distinguished for their apostolic zeal” (*Dir* 84).

Apostolic prayer is inspired by the persons and situations we encounter in carrying out our



mission. It sees God's salvific action in those situations, and holds them up to the light of the Word of God. It integrates our personal lives, community life and the exercise of the apostolate. It reinforces our missionary commitment, particularly from the perspective of shared mission.

The fundamental charismatic features of Claret's apostolic prayer have been combined by various commentators in rich syntheses, which merit our study and our effort to make those features our own.

## Exercise 9: Reading the Commentary on the Constitutions

1. Read the commentary on number 34 of the Constitutions (the Spirit of missionary prayer and its contents), which is found in the book *Our Project of Missionary Life*. (Commentary on the Constitutions II. Rome, 1992, pp. 466-493. To enhance your understanding of these, you might summarize the text in your own words in outline form or write in our notebook the phrases, which strike us as the most significant and helpful.

2. We might set aside a day – our day of retreat if no other day is available - for unhampered personal apostolic prayer. The document *Prophetic Claretian Formation*, edited in 2003 by the General Prefecture for Formation, and available online, might be of help.

3. You might find it rewarding to pen a personal prayer, expressing what it means to you to be a Claretian. Keep it in your breviary, so you will be reminded to recite it often. The Forge Online allows you to share your prayer with other Claretians.

### Various kinds of prayer in our missionary life

In the practice of prayer, it is best to keep things simple, adopting practices suitable to the common person. Such practices do not deserve the elevated name method, yet, if done properly, they do produce results.

It is not unusual for beginners at prayer to latch onto more difficult and complex methods, doubting that what sounds so easy can be all that effective. Unable to take simpler practices seriously, they reject them out of hand and, forfeit any opportunity to experience the proven effectiveness of such practices. God forbid, we make that mistake.

Unfortunately, it is possible that a beginner's attraction to the difficult and complex masks an unconscious excuse not to follow through on them. After all, they are complex and difficult.

The Benedictine Anselm Grun says that "prayer does not have to be devout, just sincere." What matters is placing ourselves in the presence of God. It is with that in mind that we proceed to consider certain Claretian types of prayer. How-

ever, when all is said and done, we remain obliged to develop our own style of prayer.

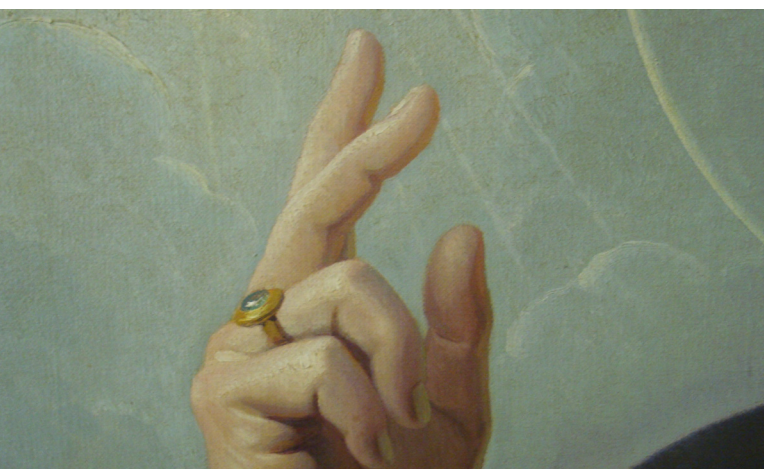
• **First and foremost, we must realize that prayer is a serious undertaking, and that to pray well demands preparation.** Fr. Claret believed that prayer had to take place in the context of the entire day. In the Constitutions he instructs the Missionaries to prepare the material for prayer the night before and to recall it upon rising, proof he did that himself (cf. *Constitutions* 1865, II, number 29-34. *Colegial* I, p. 288). Such preparation helps us remain aware of the seriousness of what we are about to do. Were we invited to meet the president of the government – or, for that matter, even Fr. General, would we take the invitation lightly? So we ought to accustom ourselves, before beginning to pray, to place ourselves in the presence of God.

• **Of all the methods there is one, which incorporate all of them.** It is *lectio divina*, the ordered and methodical exercise of personally listening to the Word of God. In the practice of



*lectio divina*, we read the Word, meditate on it, ponder it, in order to be nourished by it, steeped in it, and transformed by it - at a pace which best suits our needs. Simply opening the Book, we allow it to speak to us, attentive to what its stories have to say to us, or at other times, immersing ourselves in a particular passage, we become a contemporary of Jesus, and in the intimacy of his company, we meditate on what we see, hear, and touch. We might dwell on a single verse or even a single word, letting ourselves be led into the bottomless abyss, as it opens itself to us. All of these are ways of praying with the Word of God. *Lectio divina* enjoyed primacy of place with Fr. Claret, who wrote: "But what moved and stimulated me most was reading the Holy Bible, to which I have always been strongly attracted" (*Aut* 113).

We are accustomed to associating Claretian prayer with meditation. Fr. Claret recommended it repeatedly. In *Pastoral al Clero* he said: "Not to recite much but to meditate." In similar words he instructed seminarians in *El Colegial*: "Every kind of prayer done well is good, but mental prayer is the most suited to the Seminarian, since if he



is experienced in making mental prayer, he will recite the Divine Office well, he will celebrate the Holy Mass well, when he is a priest. And he will be a good priest, but if he is not a priest of mental prayer, he will not have the spirit of Jesus Christ" (*Colegial* I, p. 54). Is meditation simply the ordering of ideas. No, it is not a game of solitaire, using ideas instead of cards. Meditation is reflecting or slowly pondering. As Wittgenstein said: "To reflect on the meaning of life is to pray." Meditation involves thinking but is more open to surprises than analytical reasoning. According to Fr. Claret, the ordinary subject for meditation should be the life of Christ (cf. *Colegial* I, p. 136 ss), employing

the gospels or a commentary. Claret nourished himself with these: "And so I constantly thought on Jesus - in the crib, in the carpenter's shop, on Calvary. I meditated on his words, his sermons, his actions; on the way he ate, dressed, and travelled from town to town" (*Aut* 356). "To encourage myself, I would recall Christ's teaching on the matter and meditate on it constantly" (*Aut* 362).

• **Fr. Claret also recommended vocal prayer.**

In his Autobiography he says that it was his preferred form of prayer. "Vocal prayer suits me better than strictly mental prayer, thank God" (*Aut* 766). Vocal prayer is the slow repetition of prayers of aspiration, similar to Eastern mantras, which are gradually interiorized by the one praying them. This ongoing colloquy with God, or affective prayer, ought to be the goal of all our prayer, and countless phrases from the Psalms - "I thirst for you like a parched land" (*Psalms* 143:6) or "Better one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere" (*Psalms* 84:11) - are tailor made for this kind of prayer. Still, "Abba, your kingdom come," or "Father, send forth your Spirit," would seem to be the perfect Christian mantras. Fr. Claret was fond of writing personal prayers, to refresh his spirit and that of his missionaries. Those he wrote during his novitiate stand out (cf. *Aut* 153-164)

• **Twice, the Constitutions (cf. CC 33 & 66)**

**urge constancy in prayer, also called prayer of the heart or the Jesus prayer.** Constantly invoking Jesus has a powerful mystagogical effect, which slowly penetrates our interior until it reaches the unifying core of our being, the heart. In the words of St. John Chrysostom, through the gift of constancy in prayer, "the heart absorbs God, and God absorbs the heart, and the two become one." Every capacity and all one's energies coalesce at one's center, so that the missionary who is constantly in prayer is able to work tirelessly, because he is immersed in the creative movement of God, sacrificing completely his own will. This is how contemplation and work coalesce. One's life becomes a sea in a bottomless ocean, which is God, in whom we move and live and have our being (cf. *Heb* 17:28). The rosary is meant to accomplish precisely the same purpose.

• **Fr. Claret's resolutions indicate it was not unusual for him to pray for what would cost him or what was not his own will:** for example, that he experience poverty, contempt and humiliation (*Resolutions* for 1843, 7). Obviously, Claret knew better than to think that God derives satisfaction



from human suffering or misfortune. What he sought was complete detachment and freedom of heart. It is one thing to say to the Lord, "I harbor absolutely no desire for riches." Plenty of room for self-deceit there. However, one might think long and hard before saying, "If it serves your greater glory, take everything." At any rate, the only reason one should pray for what costs or runs against the grain is to keep one's ego in check. Left unchecked, the ego seizes every opportunity to acquire material wealth, worldly power and public distinction, which often result in emotional and relational disorders and addiction.

• **At the end of the day, Fr. Claret believed that a missionary, who has completed his formation, should be accorded considerable liberty with respect to the time, place, style and posture during prayer.** He recognized legitimate differences among individuals in different situations. Too rigid a posture, for instance, is uncomfortable and impedes prayer. (Not that we have the final word,

when it comes to prayer.) On the other hand, while appealing, peaceful places often encourage prayer and we feel calm and refreshed when we have finished, environment and prayer do not always go hand in hand. Someone dropped out of a course on prayer because, he said, "I can pray in that setting without courses or workshops. What I need is to learn to pray on the bus or in the midst of the busyness of the parish." St. Anthony Mary Claret, *contemplative in mission*, no?

## Exercise 10: How do I pray?

In your next visit with your spiritual director discuss together in detail how you pray. Not the nature of theology of prayer, but how you pray. Examine the form and method of your personal prayer from day to day. You are sure to discover some ways in which you might improve.

## 3. Guidelines for the community meeting

During the October community meeting, members should discuss the following suggestions for fostering and improving community prayer, then agree to pursue one of them together.

1. **Do *lectio divina* together around the biblical texts for the Eucharist of the Solemnity of St. Anthony Mary Claret.** Conclude with the examen, using the format in the workbook.

2. **Review the community's prayer life** as outlined in the community project and as it is actually practiced. Employ these three steps:

• **Observe:** Discuss your community's day to day practice of prayer, as if reviewing it on videotape. What does this tell you about the quality of your community prayer?

• **Judge:** Evaluate the time and quality of community prayer. The chart, in which the recommended practices of prayer for the Claretian community are presented, can be useful. That chart is found in this workbook.

• **Act:** As a community, agree on one step you will take to improve community prayer, and write that into your community project.

3. **The community might profit from visiting a monastery or convent of contemplative men or women** to share their lives of prayer. Hosts, as well as visitors, should recite verspers or a minor hour together.



## 4. Suggestions for doing the “lectio divina”

### Monday, October 1, 2012. Memorial of St. Teresa of the Child Jesus

Job 1.6-22  
Psalm 16  
Luke 9.46-50

#### *The least is the most important*

Jesus had to be patient with his enemies as well as his followers, who came along slowly. We, too, may harbor a secret desire to be appear exceptional and to occupy first place. We really miss the point. The one who welcomes and serves others in the name of Jesus, treating them as God treats them and welcoming them in his name as the greatest. To serve is to reign.

### Tuesday, October 2, 2012. Memorial of the Holy Guardian Angels

Job 3.1-3,11-17,20-23  
Psalm 87  
Luke 9.51-56

#### *Anger towards one's enemies*

The disciples of Jesus were ready to call down the wrath of God on the inhospitable Samaritans. Some people become so overwhelmed with anger they are obsessed with getting even and even feel justified in invoking God's help in avenging themselves. Others are not as volatile. Nonetheless, the concluding words of this passage apply to all of us. “They went to another town.” Put behind us what we cannot change and focus on something else. It is a big world and God gets even by forgiving.

### Wednesday, October 3, 2012

Job 9.1-12,14-16  
Psalm 87  
Luke 9.57-62

#### *Those who would follow Jesus*

Apart from being different, these three would-be followers of Jesus are greeted with similar responses. To the first, Jesus points out that he has nowhere to lay his head, while the birds have nests and the foxes lairs. To the second, Jesus makes it clear that even caring for his father is no excuse to delay. To the third, who asks to be allowed to say farewell to his family, Jesus says that one who sets his hand to plow, then looks back, is not worthy of him. There can be no doubt as to the radical nature of Jesus' call and its urgency. He does not allow for comfortable transitions or delay. It is a matter of priorities and one's first must be Jesus and his Kingdom.

### Thursday, October 4, 2012. Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi

Job 19.21-17  
Psalm 26  
Luke 10.1-12

#### *Laborers for the harvest*

All who follow Jesus are, in turn, sent as apostles, although the apostolic mandate given to those called to the consecrated or missionary life, and the priesthood, has its own character. Complaints abound regarding the scarcity of vocations. Jesus' response is right to the point: “Ask the master of the harvest!” There is no better strategy for vocational ministry. Prayer is first and foremost, precisely because laborers for the harvest are called and guided by God. Only God bestows a vocation. Such hopeful and unconditional prayer expresses hope in a vocational springtime. Though we find it hard to admit, the harvest is not to be confused with the number of members in one's own institute.

### Friday, October 5, 2012

Job 38.1,12-21;40,3-5  
Psalm 138  
Luke 10.13-16

#### *Curse of the cities*

A curse calls upon someone more powerful to take it out on the petitioner's enemy. Some go so far as to ask God to take their side – and in a way not to be mistaken or forgotten. Jesus' curse, however, is of a different kind. It is prophetic. He hopes the inhabitants of Corozain, Betsaida and Capharnaum will wake up and realize that their own evil doing can only result in greater evil befalling them. He pleads with them not to resist God's grace, lest the cycle of evil continue. Their own obstinance invokes judgment. There is no excuse for refusing God's grace: not the fact that Christians are also sinful, nor that their behavior is inconsistent with their beliefs, nor lack of time, nor “nobody told me,” difficult circumstances, fear. etc.

### Saturday, October 6, 2012

Job 42.1-3,5-6,12-16  
Psalm 118  
Luke 10.17-24

#### *Your names are inscribed in heaven*

As often as not, cities name their streets and squares in honor of local personages. A name is important because it represents the person and is the social expression of one's identity. At our baptism, we were given a name, which is recorded in the church of our baptism as a kind of official recognition of our citizenship in the Church. Undoubtedly, public records are important, but the acid test of our identity and our bond with Jesus is our participation with him in bringing about the Kingdom, actively collaborating with him in overcoming the forces of evil. Therein lies the true source of our happiness.



## Sunday, October 7, 2012. Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Genesis 2.18-24  
Psalm 127  
Hebrews 2.9-11  
Mark 10.2-16

### *What God has joined together*

Many good people differ with the Catholic Church's insistence on the indissolubility of marriage. They acknowledge the Church's teaching as the ideal but an ideal beyond the ability of most to meet. Given human weakness, they would prefer the Church presented this teaching of Jesus as a 'counsel' – no, not merely a suggestion – rather than a mandate binding on all. They argue correctly that no one is held to the impossible and that no one should commit to what is beyond his or her ability. The point is that without God human beings can accomplish little or nothing. To remain a disciple of Jesus and to reap the benefits of the Kingdom of God, one must allow God to change one's heart of stone into a heart of flesh.

## Monday, October 8, 2012

Galatians 1.6-22  
Psalm 110  
Luke 10.25-37

### *Who is my neighbor?*

To the question "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus responds with the parable of the Good Samaritan. The parable reflects the fact that help in time of need frequently comes from where it is least expected, rather than from relatives and friends, who may even ignore or neglect us. The Good Samaritan challenges us to tear down the walls of prejudice, fear and resistance, which keep us from reaching out to those in need. Jesus does not present the priest and levite in a favorable light, but highlights the contrast between them and the Good Samaritan. Only charity, the love of God, can make an enemy a friend.

## Tuesday, October 9, 2012

Galatians 1.6-22  
Psalm 110  
Luke 10.25-37

### *Mary listened... Martha was very busy*

Martha was right. Service is of the essence. On the other hand, she was mistaken to understand service as the sum of actions intended to meet the immediate demands of extending hospitality. Mary, on the other hand, appears to be of no help. She understands what service really is really about. The comparison of the two sisters tends to favor Mary. "Only one thing is necessary," is fundamental to the teaching of Jesus. The "one thing" is, undoubtedly, to listen to him and to enter into communion with him. That requires prioritizing our activities and being hearers of the Word - in service to the Reign without forgetting the King.

## Wednesday, October 10, 2012

Galatians 2.1-2,7-14  
Psalm 116  
Luke 11.1-4

### *Our Father*

Luke's form of the Our Father is abbreviated in comparison with Matthew's, which we are accustomed to use (Mt 6.9-13). It is striking that the Lord's Prayer is missing from the gospels of Mark and John. The essence of the prayer is the word Father. We believe not only in God, but in God the Father. The seven petitions can be divided into two groups, the first characterized by repetition of the word your (your name, your reign, your will) and the second by the repetition of the pronoun us (give us, forgive us, deliver us). This does not mean that one part of the Our Father is about God's interests and the other about ours. Obviously, as a result of the Incarnation, God's interests are ours and our interests his.

## Thursday, October 11, 2012

Galatians 3.1-5  
Psalm:  
Luke 11.5-13

### *Ask, seek, call*

Continuing to speak of prayer, today Jesus gives two brief examples: the persistent friend and the father who responds to the request of his son. Both stories assure us that God listens to our prayer. If we heed a friend in need, and a father heeds his son in need, how much more does God attend to us, when we are in need. Luke's version is telling: "Your heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit..." He will give what is best, not necessarily what we ask, which often falls far short of what we truly need. Furthermore, Jesus instructs us to persevere in prayer, assuring us that God always listens. We do not know how God will respond to our petitions. We do know that he listens to us as a Father listens to his son. Jesus assures us.



## Friday, October 12, 2012

Galatians 3.7-14  
Psalm 110  
Luke 11.15-26

*The one who is not with me is against me.*

Every kingdom divided against itself will fall. Not only does history confirm this, this is the testimony of the human spirit. As St. Paul acknowledged, the human spirit is divided. "...I do not do what I wish but the evil I do not wish to do..." (cf. Romans 7.18-23). Can this division be overcome? Yes. Not only can we overcome existential and spiritual conflict within, we can be converted to the cause of healing divisions in the world. How? Being very careful of what fills one's own heart. Living focused. Or, which is the same, "Being with him." Many people before death confess with deep sadness that they have spent most of their lives on useless things...because they were not with Jesus, but far from him.

## Saturday, October 13, 2012

Galatians 3.22-29  
Psalm 104  
Luke 11.27-28

*Blessed are those who hear the Word and keep it.*

Above all, let us emphasize the dignity of a woman. She is more than a womb and breasts, more than sexual. She cannot be reduced to biology. Above all, she is a person, and therefore her bliss, like a man's, consists in living the gift of the grace of God the Father and translating it into action. Luke portrays Mary, the Mother of Jesus, as a model of faith, because she, like no one else, listened to the Word, accepted it, and begot it in her womb. The cause of her bliss are her awareness and freedom as a person of faith. The praise Jesus bestows on this daring woman belongs to her as to no other. Moreover, it is not limited to her external beauty but includes her entire person. And she served him as daughter.

## Sunday, October 14, 2012. Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wisdom 7.7-11  
Psalm 89  
Hebrews 4.12-23  
Mark 10.17-30

*Sell what you have and follow me*

The Gospel presents the case of the rich young man, to whom Jesus said: "Go, sell what you have, give the money to the poor and follow me." He was told to give up everything and, trusting completely in God and no one else, to follow Jesus. All of us have received this call. It seems difficult, but Jesus assures us that God can do everything. We are no better than others because of our calling, since only God is good. Nor should we count on our own will power, because God alone is the way and strength for the journey. Still, we must respond, each one of us as best we can. We must be decisive, since trying to stride two paths at once, only guarantees our unhappiness. "At that statement, his face fell and he went away sad, for he had many possessions" (Mark 10.22)

## Monday, October 15, 2012. Memorial of St. Teresa of Jesus

Galatians 4.22-24,26-27,31-5.1  
Psalm 112  
Luke 11.29-32

*The sign of Jonah*

Daily life is full of signs: a flyer or poster, a traffic light, applause, an ambulance siren. We communicate with signs. The Bible tells us that God the Father has revealed himself through signs. What was wrong with the Jews seeking a sign from Jesus? It was not their asking for a sign, but demanding proof and refusing to accept that God has his own ways. We understand that, when we look back and are happily surprised to discover that every step of the way, especially in hard times, there has been Someone who has held us in the palm of his hand. That is the great sign. The sign God gives us through Jesus.

## Tuesday, October 16, 2012

Galatians 5.1-6  
Psalm 118  
Luke 11.37-41

*Giving alms from what is within*

Hygiene has never received the attention it receives today. Yet, if we make it a point to wash our hands before meals, to kill harmful germs, we ought to be even more careful about what our senses take in. Not everything we think or see is good for us. We need to be careful about what comes through those open windows, through which we communicate with the world. The sacraments are also hygienic. A good child of God practices interior hygiene, and when necessary, takes advantage of the care the Church is able to offer. In this way, 'one can give alms from what is within': devoting his time to his own interests; but giving from the heart, and not simply with a show of generosity.



## Wednesday, October 17, 2012. Memorial of St. Ignatius of Antioch

Galatian 5.18-25  
Psalm 1  
Luke 11.37-41

### *Seats of honor*

There are situations, in which people generally do not seek the first place. In church, they prefer the back pews and out of the way corners. That is strange, since we should never be ashamed to profess our faith. On the contrary, we should express it publicly, even if that entails petty risks and humiliations. But Christ tells us to pray to the Father in secret, right? Certainly, but Christian life does not rule out the communal profession of faith in liturgy. A contradiction? No. Christian life includes the communal profession of faith in the liturgy as well as the personal encounter with God in private prayer. We need to foster both, because they affect one another for better or worse.

## Thursday, October 18, 2012. Feast of St. Luke, Evangelist

2 Timothy 4.9-17<sup>a</sup>  
Psalm 97  
Luke 10.1-9

### *The harvest is plentiful*

The harvest is plentiful. Many good people have never heard the Good News. Will they be saved? Indeed, "God wills all to be saved and to come to the glory of God" (2 Timothy 2.4), and in his mysterious ways will reach all. Then, why the need for missionaries? Why ask for laborers if God works in his own ways? Look at Jesus. He does nothing without inviting others to share in his mission, and he does today as he always has always. Running through the veins of every baptized person is the blood of an apostle and missionary, which only prayer can channel to all human beings.

## Friday, October 19, 2012

Ephesians 1.11-14  
Psalm 32  
Luke 12.1-7

### *Good leaven*

All of us are either good or bad leaven. For better or worse, our lives affect the lives of others around us. We can be the "leaven – that is the hypocrisy - of the Pharisees," producing vanity, sensuality, superficiality, materialism, hatred, etc. We are called to be the opposite: leaven, contributing to robust values, hope, peace, generosity, good humor. It is difficult to be good leaven in the midst of our world. Jesus calls to be that and encourages us not to lose heart: May God not forget us. Indeed, if he cares for the birds and flowers, and "has counted the hairs of our head," we need not fear even those who can kill the body...since he forgets not one of his children.

## Saturday, October 20, 2012

Ephesians 1.15-23  
Psalm 8  
Luke 12.8-12

### *Counsel for times of persecution*

Three sayings of Jesus constitute the warp and woof of today's Gospel. He says how the believer must behave in the face of persecution: "I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God. But whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God." The most telling verse is: "Everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. What is that sin? It is the conscious and definitive rejection of Christ, as the definitive Word of the Father. Although there is no obligation to expose ourselves unnecessarily to danger, we must not renounce our faith. The best way of bearing witness to our faith continues to be good example. Virtue is the best witness.

## Sunday, October 21, 2012. Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 53.10-11  
Psalm 32  
Hebrews 4.14-16  
Mark 10.35-45

### *Whoever wishes to be great among you*

Jesus contrasts what he expects of his disciples with the attitude of the world, which when all is said and done was their attitude. James and John thought following the Master was a privilege. Of course, it required sacrifice, but they would still put themselves above the rest. Jesus burst that bubble, making it clear they should desire nothing but to serve, not looking for recognition or prestige but simply the opportunity to love and serve. And because of this complete commitment, we are assailed by the power of evil. Nonetheless, united to him and pursuing the path he lays out for us, we attain the fulness of life.



## Monday, October 22, 2012

Ephesians 2.1-10  
Psalm 99  
Luke 12.13-21

### *The foolishness of being greedy*

Thrift is a virtue. Greed is not. Still, even thrift offers no assurance of absolute security. All human securities have limits: money in the bank, harvest in the fields, physical health, a retirement fund. Everything can be lost in an economic or political crisis. Or by natural decline. The only security is the providence of God. Whoever abandons himself to providence, knows how to balance his today, in which he must be concerned about his subsistence, and his after, knowing that no one takes his belongings with him. The only coin of eternal value is love. It is fatal to be tricked into accumulating treasure for oneself and not living charitably. Without delay, one must exchange the seeming security of this world for the coin of the realm beyond.

## Tuesday, October 23, 2012

Ephesians 2.12-22  
Psalm 84  
Luke 12.35-38

### *Gird your loins and light your lamps*

The connecting thread of the three parables of today's and tomorrow's liturgies is the night, dominated by hope for dawn and the arrival of liberation. Today's parable recalls the Exodus and urges us to stay alert. Indifference or distraction are out of the question, let alone negativity or dissipation. Firefighters can nap when there is no emergency, but fully clothes and their trucks ready to roll. The Gospel calls for a similar state of readiness. The ability to react immediately to the unexpected is a virtue. Many events are foreseeable, but not the hour of death. When the Lord does come, may we celebrate with him the feast of life.

## Wednesday, October 24, 2012. Solemnity of Saint Anthony Mary Claret

Isaiah 61.1-6  
Psalm: Isaiah 12.2-3,  
4bcd-6  
2 Corinthians 5.14-20  
Mark 16.15-20  
or Luke 10.1-9

### *Go out to the whole world and preach the Gospel*

Jesus entrusted a mission to the Church: to proclaim the Gospel to the entire world. Because the Holy Spirit never ceases to inspire and enable evangelizers, even today the Church is able to fulfill its mission. On this feast of St. Anthony Mary Claret, the liturgy recounts the final sending of the apostles by Jesus. Claret was always, and above all, an apostle. Ultimately, to be a missionary was his reason for living. As were the Apostles, he was sent, and life taught him to appreciate what God can do through anyone, who puts himself in God's hands as his instrument. The Lord who sent Claret, sends us. We trust in him to assist us with his strength, which touches and transforms human hearts.

## Thursday, October 25, 2012

Ephesians 3.14-21  
Psalm 32  
Luke 12.49-53

### *Fire on the earth*

Today, Jesus speaks about fire, one of the four elements. Fire is dangerous. We approach it with caution. Fire is a sign of the inaccessibility of God, who is called in the Bible a "devouring fire" (Dt. 4.24). Jesus never presented himself as inoffensive or neutral. He brought in his wake struggle and division. He passed through a baptism of death and resurrection, which his disciples must also do. He desires to enkindle a purifying fire, which must transform his followers as well. That fire is a cause of division and scandal, affecting even his friends. The fire which Jesus brings is his Spirit of love, enlightening the mind, warming and purifying the heart. To follow him wherever he goes, one must be enflamed by that same fire.

## Friday, October 26, 2012

Ephesians 4.1-6  
Psalm 23  
Luke 12.54-59

### *Interpreting the signs of the times*

For rural people the weather forecast is extremely important. Life entails other kinds of forecasts more important and decisive than weather forecasting. Satellite or radar are of no help in these cases. What is needed is firm grasp on history and the ability to adapt to change. Searching history, we will find signs to help us interpret the profound changes in our own time. The greatest sign is Jesus, Word of the Father, who helps us to observe, judge and act, then to choose the better path of the Kingdom which he brings us. The short parable at the end of the gospel reading emphasizes the importance of fraternal charity. The love Christ brings is the definitive criterion for interpreting events suitably and to adopt the appropriate attitudes.



## Saturday, October 27, 2012

Ephesians 4.7-16  
Psalm 121  
Luke 13.1-9

### *Unless you repent...*

In today's gospel Luke employs chronicle and parable. Two tragic episodes: a brutal police action and a fatal accident as the result of a tower collapsing. Jesus refuses to side with those who see these as punishments from God. Normally, in every misfortune, natural or caused, a culprit is sought. But there are deeper causes of evil and they are in sin, rooted in the human heart. So, Jesus calls for conversion. Many complain that evil results from human evil. But few dare to pray: "Lord, I am a sinner; but don't punish the world for my sin."

## Sunday, October 28, 2012..Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jeremiah 31.7-9  
Psalm 125  
Hebrews 5.1-6  
Mark 10.46-52

### *What would have me do for you?*

The story of the cure of the blind man sums up the work of Jesus and the attitude of the disciple toward him. The shouts of the blind man contrast with the mystery, with which the Gospel veils the figure of the Master: only the demons were accustomed to call him by messianic titles! Here, however, the blind man recognizes him without ambiguity and begs for his compassion. In front of his companions, who command him to be quiet, Jesus asks: "What would you have me do for you?" The cure is described summarily. There are not the usual admiring reactions of the onlookers. More than the healing, the evangelist seems to present the attitude of man, who was healed, as paradigm of the believer. The believer sees, thanks to the word of Jesus Christ, and "follows him" (which means the Christian life.)

## Monday, October 29, 2012

Ephesians 2.19-22  
Psalm 1  
Luke 14.1-6

### *Respect for the Sabbath*

It is not unusual that the gospels join healing with controversy. In today's episode, Jesus cures a woman on the Sabbath, which draws harsh criticism from the head of the synagogue. But Jesus defends his conduct, resorting to an ad hominem argument: If it is permitted to (abrevar) the (buey) or (asno) without violate the law of rest, is it not more permissible to free an infirm woman? The story has a prophetic resonance. The true celebration of the Sabbath cannot be reduced to sacred cult, but requires doing what is pleasing to God. And above all, he is pleased by mercy rather than sacrifice.

## Tuesday, October 30, 2012

Ephesians 5.21-33  
Psalm 127  
Luke 13.18-21

### *The mustard seed and the yeast*

This famous pair of parables, which Luke presents today, aim at presenting the Reign, an indispensable theme of Jesus' preaching. The seed expresses above all the interior power of the Reign. A tree is not strong because of the many birds, which nest in its branches, but because its deep roots and robust trunk can resist winds and storms. The leaven shows its capacity to transform the world and its values. The Gospel does not change a people's culture, substituting another, but values it and brings it to fulfillment. We do not have to depend on power or impose it. Let us devote ourselves to nourishing in our hearts the seed of the Reign. Only he transforms it, as the sun, which gives it its warm color.

## Wednesday, October 31, 2012

Ephesian 6.1-9  
Psalm 144  
Luke 13.22-30

### *The narrow gate*

The question about how many will finally be saved receives a precise response by a short parable about the narrow gate. In the search for the Reign personal effort is indispensable. Mere desire is not enough. To be recognized as one of those, who aspire to be true friends of Christ, one must pass through customs at the narrow gate. Passing through is like learning a foreign language. It is neither easy nor quick, and entails not simply learning a new vocabulary but taking on an entirely different worldview. Life in Christ is like a street on a steep hill. The difficulties involved in climbing it allow us to qualify for passage through that gate to the Kingdom.

## 5. Texts for further study

### Appendix I: “Demons” and “Angels”

In our discernment of prayer, these criteria may be helpful. They are indicators, not norms. You can read them and mark four or five, with which you identify. Above all, speak with your spiritual director. This might be an opportune occasion to review how you are doing “lectio divina”, and to discern if some demon has slipped and discouraged or got you off track.

“Demons”	“Angels”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– I pray because I am told to, because it is an obligation, and the rules direct me to pray.</li><li>– My prayer is little more than routine. I don’t get much from it. I don’t expect much because I know how it goes.</li><li>– I either don’t prepare at all, or I just look over the material.</li><li>– I don’t bring my everyday life to prayer. I don’t know how to do that.</li><li>– For the most part, my prayer consists of ideas. I like new ideas.</li><li>– I look for new and different materials. Repetition tires me out.</li><li>– You use several books.</li><li>– I need words, spoken or written.</li><li>– For the most part, I meditate and reason during prayer.</li><li>– I see myself as the main character and the one in charge.</li><li>– I look for results.</li><li>– My prayer tends to be occupied with planning or making decisions.</li><li>– My prayer makes me feel satisfied with myself.</li><li>– I consider resolutions: “I will do; I commit myself to...” are the principle purpose of prayer..</li><li>– I am rigid in following methods and find myself dependent on them.</li><li>– What I want most is to rest content with work well done.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– I pray because I enjoy prayer and want to pray. Something within me moves me to pray.</li><li>– I expect surprises, when God is ready. He never fails to bring something old and something new.</li><li>– I prepare for prayer. I keep tabs on my interior climate and approach prayer with a vigilant attitude.</li><li>– I always begin with my everyday life. I keep coming back to it. Everyday experiences teach me to pray.</li><li>– I am not interested in ideas, which I prefer to be few and simple. I want to sense and savor interiorly.</li><li>– I try to go deeper and to confirm. Repetition is a help to me.</li><li>– I read the Bible sparingly.</li><li>– I can be silent.</li><li>– I try to feel, to experience, to live.</li><li>– I experience myself as recipient. My prayer is active passivity.</li><li>– I am motivated by hope.</li><li>– I want my prayer to be fruitful.</li><li>– After praying, I experience only gratitude.</li><li>– Experience has shown me that I can only dare to give myself permission to change: “Be it done...”</li><li>– I am flexible in how I pray and You are flexible in forms and faithful deep down.</li><li>– I experience joy because “it was the Lord...”</li></ul>



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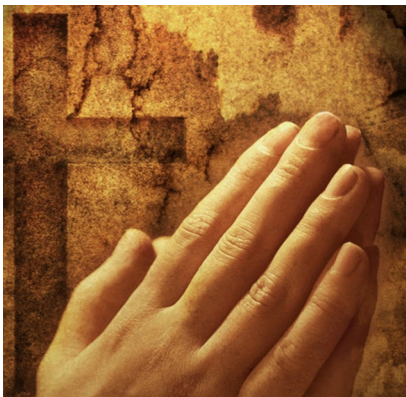
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# The Forge in Our Daily Life

**PATRIS MEI** - 2012

“

The first means I have always employed and still do is prayer. I not only prayed myself but asked others to pray”  
(Claret)