

# THE FORGE

in our daily life

PATRIS MEI  
“I WILL SEEK  
YOUR FACE, LORD”

1

Advent

### 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

We start a new liturgical year, and with it, a new stage of the journey of *The Forge in our daily life*. Are you willing to continue the journey started last year? Although at first glance, you may have the impression that everything is repeated, in fact, each new year is different. It is true that “Christ is the same today, yesterday and forever” (*Heb 13:8*) and you are also the same. However, “to live life is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often” (**J.H Newman**). Do not let the demons of fatigue and routine prevent you from continuing to live and enjoy the journey.

This year the Advent season has four full weeks. Liturgically, we are starting **cycle B**. On the journey of the Forge, after the introductory stage of the *Quid Prodest*, we enter the stage *Patris Mei*, the stage of fire.

There is no transformation without fire. The growth in the life of the Spirit is not so much the result of a determined effort to change as the result of an attitude of docility to the action of the Spirit, which moulds us to be Christ-like. The fire, in the symbolism of the Forge, refers to the experience of the love of God, maternally mediated by the Heart of Mary, and to the Spirit which pours into us the gift of charity. **St Anthony Mary Claret** makes a clear link when speaking of the “fire of Jesus:” “God, in the soul of a righteous man does what fire achieves, which lights, warms and converts the fuel into heat, melts the minerals, and reduces stones to ashes; these same effects are caused by the fire that Jesus came to bring upon the earth “ (*The six talents of prayer*).



Who does not feel seduced by the mystery of the fire? Maybe you remember your early childhood experiences in front of a fire. The fire, as we are reminded by Claret, lights, warms, purifies, heals, softens, etc. All these verbs can have God as the subject. Maybe that's why the Bible is replete with allusions to fire, from the "burning bush" (cf. *Ex* 3:2) to the "tongues of fire" that descends on the community of disciples gathered in Jerusalem (cf. *Acts* 2:3).

We also find many references in the great spiritual teachers. Have you read, for example, the poem "Living Flame of Love" of **St. John of the Cross**, whose memory we celebrate on 14th December? In one of its stanzas he proclaims: "O lamps of fire / in whose light / the deep caverns of feeling, / that were dark and blind, / with strange beauty / colour and light shine on his beloved."

Our **Father Founder** often uses the symbol of fire to speak of love: "Love in a man who preaches the Word of God is like fire in a musket. If a man were to throw a bullet with his hands, he would hardly make a dent in anything; but if he takes the same bullet and ignites some gunpowder behind it, it can kill. It is much the same with the Word of God" (*Aut* 439). He also uses it to speak of the zeal that should characterise the missionary: "The same Holy Spirit, by appearing in the form of tongues of fire above the Apostles at Pentecost, showed us this truth quite clearly: an apostolic missionary must have both heart and tongue ablaze with charity" (*Aut* 440).

The fire of love is not achieved by introspection or by other means: it is a gift. Therefore, at the beginning of this stage, you can make your own prayer the one that Fr. Founder addressed to Mary: "Mary, my Mother, Mother of Divine Love, I can ask for nothing more pleasing to you, nor anything that you are more ready to grant, than the love of God. Grant me this, my Mother and my love. Mother, I am hungry and thirsty for love; help me satisfy my need. O Heart of Mary, furnace and instrument of love, kindle in me the love of God and neighbour" (*Aut* 447).

On page 2 of this booklet you will find the objectives for this year. Take time to read them quietly and, above all, to connect with them at this moment of your life. To do this, you can make use of the following exercise.





## Exercise 1: The objectives of the *Patris Mei* stage

It is important that at the beginning of this new stage you design your own “roadmap.” What we are proposing here is just one example. The questions may help clarify what you are experiencing. No need to answer them all. Simply choose one from each item that best fits your personal situation at this time. In your notebook you can also write down the plan of your objectives using your own words.

### 1. Moving from superficial attitudes to deeper attitudes.

- What signs of superficiality do you see in yourself?
- How do you think superficiality around you affects your search for God?
- What does it mean for you to live life “from the depths?”

### 2. Growing up in the experience of the love of God as a foundation of our missionary lives.

- What experiences of your life has given you a clearer perception of the love of God?
- Which texts of Scripture will help you to a greater understanding that God loves you?
- How does your everyday life reflect this experience of the love of God?

### 3. Study 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.

- Which image of God do you think prevails in your approach to the divine mystery?
- Do you see a negative image, even if it's vestigial, which distorts your view of God?
- Which biblical images of God are more enlightening?

### 4. Developing, theoretically and practically, the experience of prayer.

- Make a list of five words that can best express what prayer means to you.
- How much time do you spend in daily prayer? Do you think it's enough?
- What do you think you need to improve your prayer life?

### 5. Understanding more deeply the Claretian dimension of the experience of God as Father.

- What aspect of the experience of God that Claret had stands out most for you?
- Do you think your experience of God is, in practice, a source of apostolic commitment?
- What impact does the expression “being about the Father's business” have on you?

On the same page you can also see the topics that we are going to touch on during the course of the *Patris Mei* stage, linking in with the different liturgical periods. They make up our “roadmap”:

**1) The search for God:** “I will seek your face, Lord”(Advent); **2) The incarnation of God:** “The love of God was made flesh” (*Christmas*); **3) God of the Kingdom:** “The Kingdom of God is near” (*Ordinary Time I*); **4) The fatherhood of God and our role as his sons:** “You are my beloved son” (*Lent*); **5) The God of life:** “He is not a God of the dead, but of the living” (*Easter*); **6) The Word as the source of life:** “Your Word gives me life” (*Ordinary Time II*); **7) Faith as an answer to the love of God:** “I believe in you, Lord” (*Ordinary Time III*); **8) Prayer as our encounter with God:** “Lord, teach us to pray” (*Ordinary Time IV*); and **9) The Claretian experience of God:** “To be about the Father's business” (*Ordinary Time V*).

This is not a systematic course about the mystery of God or the different positions that man adopts before it. In your own language you can find recent publications on this topic. What the *Patris Mei* stage offers, rather, is a **spiritual journey based on the Word of God**, as proclaimed throughout the liturgical year, and in our charismatic sources: primarily, the Constitutions. Unlike last year, in this stage the focal point is no longer the initial situation of being the “iron rod” (*Quid Prodest*) but the action of fire on it (*Patris Mei*). The most important thing now is not to ask where we are, what paths we want to follow, and how to choose the one that leads to life, but to let ourselves be cleansed, heated, softened and enlightened by the fire of the love of God as transmitted to us through his Word. The stage is thus more contemplative than introspective, given to more worshipping than inquisitiveness.



## 2. Reflection

### He who seeks, finds

This first booklet is entitled “**I will seek our face, Lord.**” It is a phrase taken from *Psalms* 27 (26). The full context is: “My heart tells me, ‘Seek your face’. Yes, your face, Lord, is what I seek, do not hide your face from me” (vs. 8-9).

The *entire Psalter* is full of expressions referring to the search for God. You will find them daily in the recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours: “This is the generation of those who seek the Lord, of those who come to your presence, God of Jacob” (*Ps* 24:6); “Be proud of His holy name and rejoice those that seek the Lord. Look to the Lord and his power, seek his face always” (*Ps* 105:3-4), “I seek you with all my heart, do not let me stray from your commandments” (*Ps* 119:10). Psalmic images are often very evocative: “As the deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God” (*Ps* 42:2).

One of the most often recited psalms in the liturgy, *Psalms* 63 (62), reflects our search for God as a vital necessity, once again making use of the image of thirst and water: “O God, you are my God, it is you I seek; for you my body longs and my soul

thirsts, as a dry and weary land with water” (*Ps* 63:2). Throughout the four weeks of Advent, pay attention to the many references to the search for God displayed in the *Psalms*. If you feel prompted, **make notes in your notebook** that best express what you are currently experiencing at this time in relation to your own search for God. They can help clear your mind and direct your prayer.

The books of the *Prophets* also express the human search for God in a different language. Today, in line with many of our contemporaries who experience the silence of God or even doubt his existence, we may confess: “Truly you are the God who remains hidden” (*Is* 45:15). Confronted with the mystery of evil, we dare even to go beyond the hand of Job: “Why hide your face from me and consider me your enemy?” (*Job* 13:24). It is with difficulty that we will experience the joy of meeting him if we have not felt in our inner being the dark night of his absence. In this sense, the cultural times in which we live, paradoxical as it may seem at first glance, might constitute an exceptional opportunity for an experience of God that is deeper, less obvious, but more sustained and enjoyed. As missionaries, we empathise with





the distress of many people who do not find God in the midst of their painful experiences, who fail to see the alignment between faith and science, who feel outraged by some believers whose lives do not reveal God by what they do.

At the beginning of Advent this year, we experience more deeply the words of the prophet Hosea: "Let us strive to know the Lord, his coming is as certain as the dawn" (*Hos* 6:3). Isaiah says it in words that seem intended for our current situation: "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call to him while he is near" (*Is* 55:6). And so do the words Paul spoke at the Areopagus in Athens: "From one stock he created the whole human race to live throughout the earth, and he fixed the time and the boundaries of each nation. He wanted them to seek Him by themselves, even if they were only groping for Him, to succeed in finding Him" (*Acts* 17:26-27). Paul himself says: "Yet he is not far from any of us. For in him we live and move and have our being" (*Acts* 17:27-28).

The tension between seeking and finding appears accentuated in the Song of Songs, especially in the second and fourth poems. The

second poem stresses the search for a loved one by the beloved: "On my bed at night/I looked for the one I love/I sought him without finding him/I called him and he did not answer/I will arise and go about the city/Through the streets and the squares/I will seek the love of my heart/I sought him without finding him" (*Song* 3:1-3). The theme reappears in the fourth poem, "I myself opened to my beloved. / My soul went after him! / I looked and could not find him / I called him and he did not answer me" (cf. *Song* 5:6, 5:7 to 8, 6:1 to 3).

God's Word assures us that the search does not go unrewarded: "Seek that you may live" (*Amos* 5:4); "You will seek me and find me when you search for me with your heart. For Yahweh says, 'I will let myself be found by you'". (*Jer* 29: 13-14); "I love those who love me, and go to meet those who seek me" (*Prov* 8:17). In fact, the golden rule of Jesus himself is summed up in the Sermon on the Mount: "Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened. For everyone who asks, receives; whoever seeks, finds; and the door will be opened to him who knocks" (*Mt* 7:7-8).

Despite whatever situational and personal difficulties we have, we know that God never closes his doors to those who seek with a sincere heart. Jesus did say that the pure in heart “will see God” (Mt 5:8).

### Life is a constant search

Probably one of the fruits of the *Quid Prodest* stage was finding out that you live an unsatisfied existence, that you haven’t yet found fulfilment in what you do, that no human relationship, religious or apostolic work fulfils the longings of your heart. **St. Augustine** masterfully expressed this concern in the human heart with a consecrated formula: “You made us, Lord, for you and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” It is taking us time to realize this, but this is the most profound truth about man: **we were made for God**. All that is not him will always leave us dissatisfied.

In fact, everything that humans do (science, technology, art, politics, religion, etc.) is, in essence, a search for the meaning of life, for personal fulfilment and, though we do not always interpret it as such, a “search for God.” From the moment we came to the use of reason, we do nothing but wonder about the *what* of reality in case that *what* were a *who* and the *who* had *something to do with us* and we with it. You may be able to remember the questions you had as children and adolescents, your study of philosophy, what you have read throughout your life on these fundamental issues. But above all, you can recall those experiences where you placed all your hopes and then they left you feeling empty.

We experience a gap between the infinity of our searching and what we manage to find. This is our tragedy: living at the behest of two opposing forces, both alluring, urgent and different. On the one hand, the many desires that urge us along the way, offering the tantalizing “fruit of paradise” (cf. *Gen 3:1-7*), with the promise of satisfying our desire for happiness in its fullness; and, secondly, the desire for the infinite that God has engraved on the human soul, “a brightly shining wound” that makes the feeling of his absence more painful and intense, and which becomes an internal gravitational force that draws us to Him and that He alone can satisfy and quieten.

Perhaps no one has been able to express more deeply than **St. John of the Cross** this experience of “absence-search-find”: “Where have you hidden yourself, / beloved, and left me groaning? /

“Human beings experience a gap between the infinity of our searching and what we manage to find.”

Like the deer you ran away, / having wounded me; / I went after you, crying, and you were gone”. The entire *Spiritual Canticle* is a poem describing the agonizing journey of seeking God: “Seeking my love, / I will go over these mountains and along these river banks; / I will neither pluck the flowers, / nor will I fear wild beasts, / and I will pass by strongholds and frontiers”. During this Advent you might find time to slowly read the meditation in the *Spiritual Canticle*. You can download the text from the website of the Forge. If you can, try one of the versions accompanied by music, for example, by the Spanish singer **Amancio Prada**. You can find some on the Internet.

**Our Founder** also experienced firsthand the desire to know God, but was aware that this is a gift: “First of all we should ask God what St. Augustine asked, *Noverim te, noverim me*: Help me, Lord, to know Who you are and who I am. Though infinitely inferior to God, man is made like Him, is his image. God, and God alone, can be and is the focus of man efforts; God, and God alone can be and is the centre of man, and only in him, therefore, can the heart find true rest” (*The Railroad*).

The Forge, and especially, the daily exercise of “lectio divina”, can help you experience that search with intensity, which will never really come to an end. Every little discovery is the beginning of a new search. As you have observed throughout the *Quid Prodest* stage, it is nothing spectacular. The “lectio divina” is not a flashy speech. It is the “gentle whisper” of God within the fabric of everyday life. Do you remember the experience of Elijah? “Then Yahweh said: Go up and stand on the mount, waiting for Yahweh. And Yahweh passed by. There was first a windstorm, wild wind which rent the mountains and broke the rocks into pieces before Yahweh, but Yahweh was not in the wind. After the storm, an earthquake, but Yahweh was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake, a fire, but Yahweh was not in the fire. After the fire, the murmur of a gentle breeze. When Elijah perceived it, he covered his face with his cloak” (1 K 19:11-13). Noisy communities want God



to manifest himself in a showy manner, like the wind, earthquake or fire. But He prefers to reveal himself as a “gentle whisper.” Can you hear this whisper without a quiet environment? When all is quiet around us, “all things, even the small things, Claret says, will herald God’s power, wisdom, goodness and his other attributes. Looking at all these wonders and works of God, you cannot help but say along with St. Augustine: “Lord, heaven, earth and all things tell me to love you, my God !...»” (*Ascetic Letter*).

### We are seekers who have been “found”

Is it correct to speak about “seeking God”? Should we not recognize, rather, that it is He who seeks and finds us? Is not this precisely the great difference about Christianity in relation to other religions? Indeed, both activities (searching and finding) go together. Jesus speaks of God as a father who, when his son was still far away, “was so deeply moved with compassion that he ran out to meet him, threw his arms around his neck and kissed him” (*Lk 15:20*). It is God who makes the first move, who awakens in us the desire to search. The tension between the searching and the finding are beautifully summed up by the poet **Antonio Machado**: “Everywhere I look for you / without ever finding you, / and everywhere I can find you / just by going out to look for you.” In fact, as Jesus tells us, we would not seek if we were not pushed and pulled by God himself: “No one knows the Father except the Son and he to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (*Lk 10:22*).

**St. Anthony Mary Claret** was also a searcher who experienced, in the midst of his trials, that God came to meet him. At the end of the *Patris Mei* stage in booklet 9, entitled “Being about the Father’s business”, you will have the opportunity to deepen your experience of God. But now, at the beginning it is good to remember the passion with which he searched for the hidden treasure, “Thoroughly convinced that to be a good missionary it is both useful and essential to have love, I have searched for this hidden treasure and

would sell everything in order to find it.” (*Aut 442*). Moved by the experience of *Quid Prodest*, he abandoned his desire to be the prime-mover, and his search had only one goal: “Lord, I want to know nothing but your holy will, that I may do it, and do it, Lord, as perfectly as possible. I want nothing but you yourself, Lord, and in you – and only through and for you – all other things. For you are all I need”. (*Aut 445*).



To always do the will of God, to love him with all his heart, he needed to be put into the Forge, burning with the fire of love. So his search for God becomes prayer: “My Jesus, there is one thing I ask that I know you will grant. Yes, my Jesus, I ask you for love, for great flames of that fire you brought down from heaven to earth. May that sacred fire enkindle, burn, melt, and pour me into the mould of God’s will”. (*Aut 446*).

### Advent as a journey of seeking and finding

Below there are some new prompts for your reflection, in tune with the liturgy of each of the four weeks of Advent, which offer us a **journey of seeking in four stages**:

First Week	Second Week	Third Week	Fourth Week
Vigilance	The Way	Witnesses	Signs

You cannot find anything if you are asleep or busy with preoccupations. The search for God begins with an attitude of *watchfulness and vigilance* (1) that allows us to prepare *the way* (2), hear *the witnesses* (3) and recognize *the signs* of God in our own history and world history (4). Bombarded by stimuli, again we need to stop and open our eyes and hearts.

### Vigilance (first week)

It is striking that at the beginning of the *Patris Mei* stage, the first reading of the first Sunday of Advent (cf. *Is* 63:16 b-17, 64,1.2 b-7) opens with this invocation: “O Lord, thou art our *father*.” The name of God appears as “father”, which Jesus later revealed in all its originality and depth. If you want to go deeper into this subject, you can read on the web page of the Forge the document “Fatherhood of God in the Old Testament.” The end of that same reading could describe what we are now experiencing in some cultural contexts: “There is no one who calls upon your name, no one who rouses himself to lay hold of you ... And yet, Yahweh, you are our Father; we are the clay and you are the potter; we are the work of your hand” (*Is* 64:6-7).

Except on **30<sup>th</sup> November** (feast of the **Apostle Andrew**), the first readings of all the other days of the first week of Advent are taken from the prophet Isaiah. It is as if the liturgy would like to put before our eyes, at the beginning of Advent, the dream of God, so that we do not collapse under the weight of our frustration and exhaustion. Amid the bad news we receive daily, the prophet tells us that “In the last days, the mountain of Yahweh’s house shall be set” (*Is* 2:2), and “From the stump of Jesse a shoot will come forth...the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him” (*Is* 11:1-2). We can always rely on the Lord “for Yahweh is an everlasting Rock” (*Is* 26:4), and finally, the people will no longer have to mourn, for the Lord has mercy on us and shows us his compassion (cf. *Is* 30:19-21).

All these promises of God are fulfilled in the history of the world and in our own history, but, as Jesus himself warns us in the gospel from the first Sunday, we do not know when the time is right. Moreover, when we look at the surface, through the media, of the reality that surrounds us, we get the impression that the opposite is true. Natural disasters grab the headlines (fires, droughts, floods, earthquakes), so do human dramas (war, famine, pandemics, corruption, injustice), and church scandals, etc. Therefore,



the attitude required to recognize the presence of God in the complex web of life is one of vigilance: “Stay awake, for you don’t know when the Lord of the house will come” (*Mk* 13:35). It is beautiful to see God as the “owner of the house”, whose coming, though presented to us with a measure of unpredictability, is always as a saviour. Jesus reveals that, despite the apparent failures, God does not ignore the history of the hands and we walk towards the fullness of everything in him. This is the foundation of Christian hope, which goes well beyond a simple mood of optimism or some partial successes.

In the Gospel readings that the liturgy includes this week, there are other references to God the Father. The one on **Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> November** is perhaps the most significant for illuminating our journey of searching: “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and made them known to the little ones” (*Lk* 10:21). The contrast between “wise” and “little ones” and between “have hidden” and “made them known” runs through the gospel from beginning to end. It is perhaps a more important key to understanding why the educated and “wise” (i.e., self-reliant, sure of their conquests) fail to recognize the signs



of God which, nevertheless, seem obvious to the “little ones”(i.e., the needy, those requiring help.)

The Gospel passage of **December 1<sup>st</sup>** reminds us that true religiosity is not the mere invocation of God but, above all, the fulfilling of “the will of my Father in heaven” (*Mt* 7:21). God is the rock upon which we build our house. So, even though we are threatened by rain, floods and winds, our house can withstand them.

Finally, on **Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> December**, the Gospel reading presents Jesus speaking about God as “Lord of the harvest” (*Mt* 9:38), who has to be begged to send labourers into this immense harvest which is the world, so that, moved by the very compassion of Jesus, they can accompany all those who are “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (*Mt* 9:36).

Some of the meditations of the **Office of Readings** for this first week will also help deepen our experience of God. If you are not an ordained minister and therefore do not usually pray the Office of Readings, you can dispense with these references, although you may find them enlightening.

- On Monday, **St. Charles Borromeo** invites us to feel gratitude: “We must continue to celebrate it fittingly, giving praise and thanks to the eter-

nal Father for the mercy he has shown us in this mystery.”

- On Tuesday, **St. Gregory Nazianzen** emphasises the salvific work of God through His Son: “It was necessary that holiness be conferred on man through the humanity God took to himself. In this way, conquering the tyrant by force, he freed us and led us back to himself through his Son, the mediator. The Son brought this about to the honour of the Father to whom, in all things, he is seen to defer”.

- On Wednesday, **St. Bernard** exhorts us to welcome the Word of God through which he comes to visit us: “If you keep the word of God in this way without a doubt you will be kept by it. The Son with the Father will come to you. The great prophet who will renew Jerusalem will come and he will make everything new”.

- Perhaps the best text in tune with the theme of this phase is found on Friday. It’s a beautiful piece from the *Proslogion* of **St. Anselm**: “Enter into the inner chamber of your soul, shut out everything save God and what can be of help in your quest for him and having locked the door seek him out. Speak now, my whole heart, speak now to God: “I seek your countenance, O Lord, your countenance I seek.” The following exercise focuses on Anselm’s text.



## Exercise 2: I seek you, Lord

1. Carefully read St. Anselm's prayer which you will find in Appendix 1. Underline the words or expressions which catch your attention. Allow them to sink in.
2. Afterwards, write your own prayer of searching. You could give it the title: "I seek you, Lord". You could write it first as a rough draft. Change the expressions. When it is finished, copy it into your Forge notebook.

### The way (second week)

The **second week of Advent** is an invitation to prepare the way along which the Lord comes to us and we approach Him. In the first reading of the Eucharist we basically continue reading the prophet Isaiah. His words of consolation have a special resonance: "Be comforted, my people, says your God" (*Is* 40:1) and a message of encouragement: "Have courage, do not fear, See, your God comes, demanding justice. He is the God who rewards, the God who comes to save you" (*Is* 35:4). In the Gospel the figure of our Father in heaven appears, "they don't want even one of these little ones to be lost" (*Mt* 18:14), especially those who have strayed from the path of life. It is likely that you yourself, in moments of fatigue or disorientation, recognise yourself in the words of the **Apostle Thomas**: "Lord, we don't know where you are going; how can we know the way?" (*Jn* 14:5). The second week of Advent gives you the opportunity to reflect and pray using the symbol of **the way**, understood as the "place" where God comes to you and where you move towards Him.

The way is a universal symbol. It takes on great importance in the work of the evangelist Luke. He frequently uses the verb "to walk" (*poreúomai*). This verb is very rare in Mark, more common in Matthew, and it appears about forty times not only in Luke's gospel but also in Acts, particularly in the section of the "path of Jesus to Jerusalem." Something similar could be said of the noun "way." Luke not only often uses expressions like "the way of salvation" (*Heb* 16:17), "the way of the Lord" (*Acts* 18:25), "the way of God" (*Acts* 18:27), but in a series of texts which are quite exceptional and difficult to explain, he defines the Christian life as "the way" (cf. *Acts* 9:2, 18:25.26, 19:9.23; 22:4; 24:14.22).

Against this New Testament background, texts of the **Constitutions** become more meaningful and they invite us to "daily renew our resolution to advance in the way of the Lord" (CC 52) and also to welcome the repentant brother with sincere love, so as to "follow more surely in the way of the Lord" (CC 55). In fact, the Constitutions as a whole provide an aid to progress on the journey of seeking God, which the season of Advent so strongly emphasises. Therefore, "we the members of the Congregation, are obliged by the prescriptions of these Constitutions so that we may grow in the way of the Lord and in the service of the Kingdom of God". (CC 158).

On 8<sup>th</sup>, the **Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception**, the liturgy sings to "Blessed be God, the Father of Christ Jesus our Lord, who in Christ has blessed us from heaven with every spiritual blessing" (*Eph* 1:3). He has chosen us out of pure grace for us to be his sons and his heirs. This blessing is manifest in a special way in Mary, "full of grace" (*Lk* 1:28). All God's promises will come true because "with God nothing is impossible" (*Lk* 1:37). In the Advent journey, and precisely in the week which focuses on the symbol of the way, we look on Mary as "a pilgrim of faith" as the woman who was found by God in her daily life and, despite not clearly understanding his purpose, responded with a positive 'yes' and got herself going.

The **Office of Readings** this week also offers us some guidelines:

- **Eusebius of Caesarea** echoes the invitation that the Word prepares the way for us: "These things were said because God was about to come to the wilderness which had been impenetrable and inaccessible for a whole age. For all the nations were empty of the knowledge of God:





access had been prohibited to all men of God and the prophets. That was why that voice ordered a way to be prepared for the Word of God, and the pathless and rugged wastelands levelled, so that at his coming, our God might find the road clear for his advance.”

- Confronted with the desire for new revelations, **St. John of the Cross** reminds us that God the Father has given us everything in the Word made flesh, which is His Son: “But now that the faith is founded in Christ and the Law of the Gospel made known in this age of grace, there is no longer any reason to question him in that way. Nor need he speak and answer as he did then. When he gave us, as he did, his Son, who is his one Word, he spoke everything to us, once and for all in that one Word. There is nothing further for him to say.”

- **St. Augustine** sums up what God will grant us: “God promised to men the divine nature; to mortals, immortality; to sinners, justification; to castaways, a state of glory.”

- Finally, **St. Peter Chrysologus** talks about the desire to see God: “Love cannot bear not to have sight of what it loves. That is why holy people thought all that they had merited was nothing if they could not see the Lord. That is why Moses dares to say, ‘If I have found favour in your sight, show me your face.’”

In the light of so many messages, you may feel a bit overwhelmed. Where should you fix your attention? Often the first reaction may be compared with the famous phrase of **St. John of the Cross**: “Today, do not send me any more messengers because they cannot tell me what I want to know” Do not feel compelled to seek impossible syntheses. Let the Word fall on you like gentle rain. You will see that among all the messages proclaimed, there’s always one that connects with what you need. Listen to it and follow it. Don’t worry about it too much. It will offer much more water than you need to irrigate and fertilize the pasture of your life. Take what you need, the rest, let it go.

## Exercise 3: May God be blessed along the way

1. During this second week you can carry out an exercise based on the canticle from Eph 1, 3-14 which the liturgy presents as the second reading during the Mass of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception.
2. Make a list of all the verbs which describe the action of God the Father on each one of us.
3. Afterwards, write your own canticle of blessing based on those experiences in which you have felt most strongly God's action on the way during your life.

### Witnesses (third week)

The **third week of Advent** focuses closely on the figure of **John the Baptist** as the forerunner of the Lord. He is the voice that bears witness to the Word. Following the gospel extracts that are read throughout the week, we can say that the witnesses of the Messiah are those who recognise his authority and the signs which he makes (Monday-Wednesday), who know how to respond to them and act accordingly (Tuesday) who belong to the children of the kingdom (Thursday) and who acknowledge the Father as the one who sends Jesus (Friday). On **Saturday the 17th** the important feast days begin, which follow their own sequence (cf Guidelines in the lectio divina).

We should allow ourselves be guided by a few meditations from the **Office of Readings**:

- **St. Augustine** talks to us clearly in the meditation proposed for Sunday, "John was a voice, but the Lord in the beginning was the Word. John was a voice for a time, Christ the eternal Word in the beginning." With these key thoughts you can interpret all other messages.

- Pay attention to the maxims of the "Imitation of Christ" by **Thomas A Kempis**: "Make no great account of what man is for you or against you, but mind and take care of this, that God be with you in everything you do."

- **St. Irenaeus** tells us that "man does not see God by his own powers; but God of his own will appears to men, to whom he wills and when he wills."

**John the Baptist**, "the greatest man born of woman" symbolizes all those who by their example and their words, help us prepare the way of the Lord. Throughout history, innumerable people have sought the Lord and prepared his ways: from **Augustine of Hippo** to **Teresa of Calcutta**, including **Francis of Assisi**, **Clare of Assisi**, **Teresa of Avila** and many others.

Among the witnesses there are many men and women who have not been canonized. How can we not recall, for example, the famous Memorial of **Blaise Pascal** in 1654: "God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, not of philosophers or wise men. Certainty, certainty. Feeling. Joy. Peace. God of Jesus Christ ... it is only to be found in the ways taught by the Gospel?"

The history of the last two centuries, marked by the emergence of atheism as a culture, is peppered with genuine seekers of God, who become for us "Fireflies in the middle of the night": **John Henry Newman** ("I decided to put my trust in God at all times and in every place. He will never reject me"), **Leon Bloy** ("When you're alone, before God, at the entry into a dark avenue, you know yourself,





“  
If you go to the end  
of the world, you will find  
God’s footprints; if you go  
into you own inner self,  
you will find God.”

and you do not over-estimate yourself”), **Charles de Foucauld** (“When I believed there was a God, I realised I could not do anything other than live for him”), **Paul Claudel** (“It’s true! God exists, he is there. He is someone, he is a being as real as me! He loves me, he calls me”), **Gilbert Chesterton** (“When men no longer believe in God, it’s not that they don’t believe in anything. Rather they believe in everything”), **Giovanni Papini** (“Now that God has conquered me, I rediscover signs of fire, which didn’t burn me because I would not stop”), **Raïsa Maritain** (“You are always looking for what needs to be done. The only thing to do is to love and serve God with all your heart”).

The list goes on with men and women who have moved from atheism to faith, or who simply have discovered a deeper way of believing: **León Felipe** (“I see you, Lord, like a red hot iron, burning my flesh to the bone”), **Robert Schuman** (“There is only one way to identify with the thinking of God: daily meditation on the Bible”), **Edith Stein** (“God is truth. Those who seek truth, seek God, whether or not they are aware of it”), **C. S. Lewis** (“I admitted that God was God and on my knees I prayed”), **Antoine de Saint-Exupéry** (“There is only one problem, only one in all the world: give a spiritual purpose back to man”), **Madeleine Dêlbrel** (“If you go to the end of the world, you will find God’s footprints; if you go into you own inner self, you will find God”), **Jacques Loew** (“We need a few pinpricks to deflate our sense of vanity, our ego, so that when we reduce ourselves, we find God”), **Simone Weil** (“Attitude of prayer: I have to look to something other than myself, so that I can free myself from me”), **Carlo Carretto** (“Do not try to reach God through intelligence: you will never succeed. Reach out to Him with love; then it becomes possible”), **Julián Marías** (“The problem of the divinity is not invented, developed or fabricated, but is discovered”), **André Frossard** (“God exists, I have found Him”), **Thomas Merton** (“The only hope that is infallibly achieved is the desire of being loved by God”), **Roger Schutz** (“You who seeks God, you must know that the vital thing is the acceptance of Christ”), **Oscar Romero** (“All my hope is in God”), **Alberto Hurtado** (“Truly God has been my loving Father, the best of all Fathers”), **Jean Vanier** (“The experience of the love of God changes everything and, at the same time, changes nothing”), **Martin Luther King** (“I’ve had in my hands a lot of things, and I have lost everything, but I put everything in God’s hands, I will continue to keep it”), **Dorothy Day** (“We can not love God unless

we love one another, and to love we must know each other”), **Julius Nyerere** (“I cannot believe that God is so careless that has made the use of one of his gifts depend on the abuse of another”), **Léopold Senghor** (“Just hearing the trombones of God, your heart beats to the rhythm of blood, your own blood”), **Joséphine Bakhita** (“If only you knew what a great grace it is to know God!”) ... and many others.

The search for God crosses cultures and religions. How can we forget the figures of **Rabindranath Tagore** (“Every child, at birth, brings the

message that God has not yet lost hope in men”) and **Mahatma Gandhi** (“The highest of human enterprises is trying to find God. No one can have an experience of God if he is not pure in heart”)?

For us **St. Anthony Mary Claret’s** witness takes on a special importance (the 204<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth is on the 23<sup>rd</sup>), of the **Blessed Claretian Martyrs of Barbastro** and many other “**Claretians of yesterday and today**” that have helped us to find, to believe and to grow in our faith along the way.



## Exercise 4: Witnesses of the Mystery

*"The seekers" of God mentioned in the preceding paragraphs are just a small sample of the millions of men and women who have sought and continue seeking God in all religions and cultures. It is also likely that these names have no connection with those who, in fact, have been more likely to illuminate your life and helped you in your journey of faith. This exercise is intended to recall some of those people. You would not have got where you are without their testimony and help.*

1. Make a list of the names of people (living or deceased, famous or unknown) who have exerted a positive influence on your search for God through their words, their writings and, above all, by their example.
2. Select a person from the list you have written. Call that person to mind and hold them in your heart. Remember what impressed you most about them. Then, quietly, begin to write an imaginary dialogue with that person. Tell him or her what you're worried about right now regarding your search for God, what you are experiencing in this adventure: desires, discoveries, silences, questions, crises ... Listen to what this person says to you. Let yourself be touched by their words and their silences. Write down what you say to him or her. Do not worry about your writing being consistent. The important thing is to be honest, and bring out from your inner self what it is you are going through.
3. When you have finished, re-read the whole dialogue and record your own reactions.

### Signs (fourth week)

The **fourth week of Advent** is marked by characters such as **Zechariah, Elizabeth**, the young **John** and, above all, **Joseph and Mary of Nazareth**. Through their stories, the liturgy is nearing the climax of the narrative: **the Word was made flesh and came to dwell among us**. Everything that happens are "signs" that help guide our search to the cave of Bethlehem, in the company of the *shepherds* (symbol of the poor) and the *Magi* (symbol of the pagans). Also today, the Lord places along your way some signs that will assist you in your search for the Mystery. It is very likely that, beyond the books that you read or any outstanding events, the most illuminating people will be the ordinary folk with whom you share your life mission. Give thanks to God for them.

The week opens with **the vocation of Mary** (cf. *Lk 1:26-38*), a text which the liturgy presents to us no fewer than three times during this Advent (8<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> December); it then continues with **the story Zechariah** (cf. *Lk 1:5-25*), **Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth** (cf. *Lk 1:39-45*), **the canticle of the Magnificat** (cf. *Lk 1:46-56*), **the birth of John** (cf. *Lk 1:57-66*) and then closes with **the singing of the Benedictus** (cf. *Lk 1:67-69*) announcing that "through the tender mercy of our God, the sun will visit us from on high, to enlight-



en those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our steps along the path of peace”.

Throughout the week we celebrate the major feast days (begun on the previous Saturday), with the antiphons which incorporate seven messianic titles: **Wisdom** (17), **Adonai** (Ruler) (18), **Renewal** (19), **Key** (20), **Sun** (21), **King** (22) and **Emmanuel** (23). Each constitutes an integrated response to our search for God:

- **Jesus-Wisdom** offers you his Spirit so you can acquire a simple heart and, thus, willingly receive God’s revelation.

- **Jesus-Adonai**, whom you may recognise as such with the help of the Spirit (cf. *1 Cor* 12:3), frees you from false masters that enslave your heart and block your search for God.

- **Jesus-Renewal** helps the ‘withering stump’ of your daily routine to push forth green shoots of the joy of life and hope.

- **Jesus-Key** opens the secrets of the heart of God so that you know that the Father is searching for you, as if you were a younger son, as if you were the eldest son..

- **Jesus-Sun** illuminates your nights, guides your questions, dispels your doubts, helps you not to reduce God to a problem but to look for Him as if he were a Mystery.

- **Jesus-King** makes your search for God inseparable from your struggle to attain the values of the Kingdom of God.

- **Jesus-Emmanuel** helps you to recognise the majesty and love of God in the realities of human poverty.

For its part, the **Office of Readings** now places us firmly in the context of Christmas:

- The **letter to Diognetus** emphasises the generosity of God that comes to men: “So long as he maintained his secrecy, and kept his own counsel, it seemed as though he had no care for us and had put us out of his mind. But as soon as he disclosed it through his beloved Son, and revealed what had been planned since the beginning, then straightway he poured out all the fullness of his bounty upon us, permitting us to share his benefactions and to see and know such blessings as none of us could ever have looked for.”

- **St. Irenaeus** uses expressions that have passed into our theological and spiritual heritage to characterize the relationship between God and man and vice versa: “God is man’s glory, but it is man who receives the effect of God’s activity, who is the recipient of all God’s wisdom and power. Without pride or boastfulness, man should have a true evaluation of created things and of their creator, that is, of God, the supremely powerful, who gave existence to all things. He should abide in the love of God, in submission, in thanksgiving. If he does he will receive a greater glory from God who will go on until he becomes like the one who dies for him.”

- **St. Bernard**, turning to Mary, the central figure of the fourth week, writes: “To you the price of our salvation is offered. If you consent straightway shall we be freed. In the eternal Word of God were we all made and lo! We die; by one little word of yours in answer shall we all be made alive.”



“

God is man's glory;  
but it is man who receives  
the effect of God's activity,  
who is the recipient of all  
God's wisdom and power.”

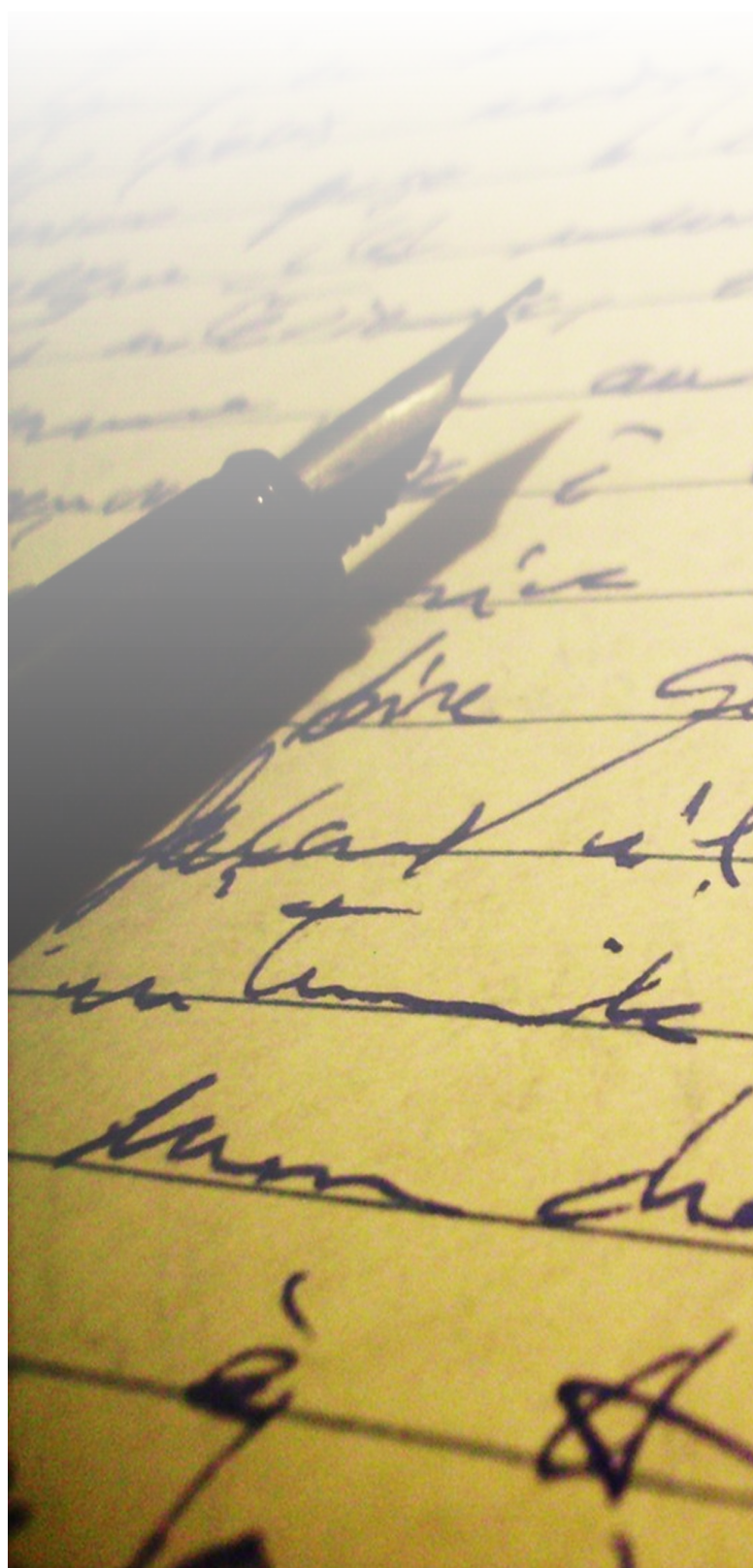
- **St. Ambrose**, commenting on the *Magnificat*, explains what the greatness of God means: “The Lord is magnified, as you have also read elsewhere, ‘Magnify the Lord with me’, not that human words can add anything to the Lord, but because he is magnified in us. Christ is the image of God, hence, and good or religious deed a soul has performed, magnifies the image of God in whose likeness the soul was made. And, as it magnifies his image it has some share in his greatness, and is thereby ennobled.”

- **St. Hippolytus** once again links our searching for, and our finding of, God to our proximity to Scripture: “There is one God, and we can come to know him only through sacred scripture. So then, let us look at what scripture proclaims, let us discover what its teaching is. As the Father wants to be believed, so let us believe; as he wants the Son to be glorified, so let us glorify him; as he wants the Holy Spirit to be given, so let us receive him. We must not act in accordance with our own mind or our own will; we must not do violence to what God has given. We must look at things rather as God has chosen to make them known through scripture.”

- Finally, **St. Augustine** foretells the essence of the mystery of Christmas: God became man so that man can become a child of God: “Let us, then, rejoice in this grace, that our glory may be the testimony of our conscience, and we may glory, not in ourselves, but in the Lord. Obviously, it was because of this that it was said, ‘my glory, who lifts up my head’. For what greater grace could have dawned upon us from God, that that

he, who had only one Son, made him the son of man, and so in turn made the son of man a son of God. Ask yourself whether this involved any merit, any motivation, any right on your part; and see whether you find anything but grace!”

Guided by the liturgy of the Church, you can experience that it is possible to heat the “iron rod” of your personal life. In the light of the Word it will be easier to make sense of what you experience every day. Moreover, you can be the Advent for the people God puts in your path.



## Exercise 5: Signs along the way

Our search would be fruitless if we did not find, along the way, signs that indicate or confirm exactly where we are going. This exercise can help you explore some of those.

1. You can start by choosing one of the two canticles in the liturgy of the fourth week of Advent: the *Magnificat* (on the lips of Mary) or the *Benedictus* (on the lips of Zechariah). Write up the full text in your Forge notebook, using the liturgical version you recite daily in vespers or lauds.
2. Then you can compose your own Magnificat or Benedictus, inspired by those recent events which you consider as “signs” of God’s presence in your life.

## 3. Guidelines for the community encounter

Sometimes, preparations for Christmas don’t leave much space for a quiet community meeting. However, if scheduled well in advance, you may be able to put aside a time before the end of Advent. **The meeting could be divided into 5 sections.** If it’s not possible to do all of them, you should, at least, choose section 2.

### 1. Preparing supper

Members of the community could prepare supper together on this day, sharing out the tasks. The important thing is to spend time doing manual work together which serves the community. The action of working together engenders a different kind of contact amongst community members.

### 2. Dialogue

At an appropriate moment, you could talk about the journey that every member of the community has followed during the season of Advent. The following questions could serve as prompts:

- In what state of mind did you begin the *Patris Mei* stage?
- Which of the four weeks of Advent has been more relevant to your personal situation? Why?
- Which witnesses have helped you more along your way as you search for God? Why?

### 3. Prayer

The evening prayer could be prepared as an integration of the four stages experienced during Advent: vigilance, the way, witnesses and signs. You could use symbols to help the community to recall the journey travelled.

### 4. Supper

The supper on this day is the result of the efforts of all members of the community. Its festive character should, therefore, be emphasised. The community gathers together in a different way around the table.

### 5. Film

If given the right circumstances, the community can finish the day with a film that connects with the theme of this phase, for example: *Babette’s Feast*, *Like God*, *Of gods and men*, etc.



## 4. Guidelines to the “lectio divina”

### Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2011. First Sunday of Advent

- Is 63:16b-17; 64,1.2b-8
- Ps 79:2-3,15-16,18-19
- 1 Cor 1:3-9
- Mk 13:33-37

This year Advent begins with an invitation to stay awake to receive the “master of the house”. He comes unexpectedly, but not as a thief, but as the Father who has called us to participate in the life of his Son. Meanwhile, without any pressure, we continue with the entrusted task.

### Monday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2011

- Is 2:1-5
- Ps 121:1-9
- Mt 8:5-11

Believing is trusting. Therefore faith amongst people and communities, who have lost their basic trust in reality and in life, is so very difficult. It is noteworthy that the “great master of trust” is a Roman centurion. Yesterday as today, the true believers will come “from east and west”. With their trust in Jesus they will force us to question the authenticity of our own faith.

### Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2011

- Is 11:1-10
- Ps 71:2,7-8,12-13,17
- Lk 10:21-24

Only the Son, and those to whom the Father reveals his mystery, know the Father. These “privileged few” are a heterogeneous group described as “ordinary folk”: people who do not see themselves the be-all for everything and open themselves to God. Learning to be ordinary requires a lifetime of effort.

### Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> November 2011. Feast of St Andrew, Apostle

- Rm 10:9-18
- Ps 18:2-5
- Mt 4:18-22

Jesus calls some people who already have their lives organised. A vocation to the apostolate does not fill in the gaps: it simply gives a new direction to one’s existence. You can only leave your family and your job when you hear the voice of Jesus (“Come and follow me”) and have received a new mission: “I will make you fishers of men.”

### Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> December 2011

- Is 26:1-6
- Ps 117:1,8-9,19-27
- Mt 7:21,24-27

What really matters is not being pious or committed. Both attitudes can be just a reflection of one’s ego. What counts is fulfilling the will of the Father. This was Claret’s obsession throughout his life. That is why the storms of persecution and slander did not destroy it. We too are called to build our lives upon the rock of the Word of God.

### Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2011

- Is 29:17-24
- Ps 26:1,4,13-14
- Mt 9:27-31

It is not enough to be blind. You should have the humility to recognise it and seek help: “Have mercy on us, Lord”. Faith begins with a realistic recognition of our poverty and reaches an absolute trust in the power of Jesus: “Yes, Lord, we believe you can do it”. It is a difficult journey during times of self-sufficiency and distrust. But it is always possible.



### Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2011. Memorial of St Francis Xavier, priest

- Is 30:19-21, 23-26
- Ps 146:1-6
- Mt 9:35-10, 1.6-8

The great harvest of the world needs workers sharing the same feelings about Jesus: compassion for the people who walk “like sheep without a shepherd” and availability: “What you have received for free, freely give.” Jesus asks the Father for compassionate and willing shepherds, not mercenaries. The task (to preach, heal, exorcise) takes on another meaning.

### Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2011. Second Sunday of Advent

- Is 40:1-5, 9-11
- Ps 84:9-14
- 2 Pe 3:8-14
- Mk 1:1-8

John reads the signs of what’s happening, perceives the imminence of the Messiah, and is preparing to welcome his arrival, with a change in his lifestyle, and he invites others to prepare the way of the Lord. It is dangerous for the evangelizers to begin at the end. We run the risk of altering the message and, above all, to forget that we are just messengers.

### Monday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2011

- Is 35:1-10
- Ps 84:9-14
- Lk 5:17-26

Jesus is “more than a prophet” because he gets to the root of all the problems both in human beings and in the cosmos: sin. Only forgiveness will heal us completely, and bring back a sense of harmony with others and with nature. Healing is, above all else, forgiving. The evangelizer, who is always a forgiven sinner, should always be an expert at getting to the root.

### Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2011

- Is 40:1-11
- Ps 95:1-3, 10-14
- Mt 18:12-14

The Father, in whom we have faith, does not know how to “optimise” the use of resources using criteria of productivity. He is a poor reckoner. He is likely to mobilise all resources to retrieve an ordinary “lost sheep”. An excess of love is the only effective alternative to a society based on the “measuring of performance”. But someone has to implement it. God works through his sons and daughters.

### Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2011. Memorial of St. Ambrose, Bishop and Doctor

- Is 40:25-31
- Ps 102:1-4, 8, 10
- Mt 11:28-30

Tired, exhausted, burnt out. These are words that describe many evangelizers. The disproportionate difference between the effort put in and the meagre fruits harvested, is clearly obvious. Only the “Journey towards Jesus” can rehabilitate us, because he alone gives us the wherewithal of winning and losing.

### Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2011. Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

- Gn 3:9-15, 20
- Ps 97:1-4
- Eph 1:3-6, 11-12
- Lk 1:26-38

In Mary we discover what can be achieved by the love of God in a human being who allows oneself to be transformed by it. Mary is the incandescent woman, “full of grace,” who believed that, despite all the uncertainties, “nothing for God is impossible”. The fruit of faith is God-with-us.



### Friday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2011

- Is 48:17-19
- Ps 1:1-6
- Mt 11:16-19

What should we do? Play the flute or sing lamentations? We are followers of a Christ who had the reputation of being a glutton and a friend of publicans and prostitutes. The effectiveness of the mission is not measured by popularity ratings but by the ability to reach out to the very heart of people, to laugh with those who laugh, and mourn with those who cry.

### Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> December 2011

- Si 48:1-4.9-11
- Ps 79:2-3.15.19
- Mt 17:10-13

He is already amongst us, but we do not recognise him. We convert him into a church official or have him face up to the Church. We dress him up as a pious man or as a revolutionary. We make him a healer, a fringe Jew, a guru, a hippy, a peasant ... But he is a permanent rebel. He is always out there somewhere. For that reason, he can save us.

### Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2011. Third Sunday of Advent

- Is 61:1-2a.10-11
- Ps (Lk 1:46-50.53-54)
- 1 Thes 5:16-24
- Jn 1:6-8.19-28

John has a clear idea of his own identity. So he understands the scope of his mission. He is not the light nor the Messiah or even a prophet. He is simply the voice that proclaims the Word, the water prepared by the fire of the Spirit. Evangelization is always a "reference to", "a way for"... The evangelizer clearly distinguishes the Word from the voices.

### Monday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2011

- Nm 24:2-7.15.17a
- Ps 24:4-9
- 1 Cor 1:3-9
- Mt 21:23-27

The key word is authority. It is obvious that Jesus has it, but its origin is not so clear. Who is it that can call others to follow him? Who can order the wind and the sea to be silenced? Who can forgive sins? Who dares to interpret the law and heal on the Sabbath? ... It goes without saying. The facts speak for themselves for those who want to hear.

### Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2011. Memorial of St Lucy, virgin

- So 3:1-2.9-13
- Ps 33:2-3.6-7.17-19.23
- Mt 21:28-32

The story of two sons is another way of illustrating the message: "Let your word be yes or no". Often, education is just a process that trains us to mask reality. In the end, we do not know what is truth and what is a lie. Advertising plays with this ambiguity, but not faith. For the love of God in Jesus is a firm and definite yes.

### Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2011. Memorial of St John of the Cross, Doctor

- Is 45:6b-8.18.21b-25
- Ps 84:9-14
- Lk 7:19-23

The question still remains: Is it you or do we have to wait for someone else? The answer is the same: "Go and tell what you have seen and heard". Jesus continues multiplying the signs of his saving love. But they do not always coincide with what we want or expect. So we feel offended and secretly seek "other" alternatives.



## Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> December 2011

- Is 54:1-10
- Ps 29:2-6.11-13
- Lk 7:24-30

John is neither a reed shaken by the wind, nor a man dressed in finery or even a simple prophet. He is “the greatest man born of woman”. But any small inhabitant of the Kingdom can beat him. This gives confidence to the small people of this world and makes the big people angry, who have “thwarted the will of God for them”.

## Friday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2011

- Is 56:1-3a.6-8
- Ps 66:2-3.5.7-8
- Jn 5:33-36

Jesus does not assume any power: he is an “envoy”. The good works he does demonstrate the sovereignty of the Father. So, he who actually vouches for Jesus’ identity and mission is not John the Baptist, but God himself.

## Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> December 2011

- Gn 49:2.8-10
- Ps 71:1-8.17
- Mt 1:1-17

Genealogy is always at the service of some interest. Matthew’s too. This construction of 14 x 14 x 14 (which draws a line from Abraham to Jesus) has a clear motive: to show that “Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ”. The genealogy is, in fact, a letter of identity: God rooted in human history.

## Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> December 2011. Fourth Sunday of Advent

- 2 Sam 7:1-5.8-12.14.16
- Ps 88:2-5.27.29
- Rm 16:25-27
- Lk 1:26-38

Mary’s calling, besides being a unique experience provides a model for all her children. In Luke’s account we find everything we need to understand our calling. There is a constant interplay between God (called, promise, sign) and the child (confusion, wonder, acceptance). It is these stories about being called that make Christmas a meaningful event.

## Monday 19<sup>th</sup> December 2011

- Jc 13:2-7.24-25a
- Ps 70:3-6.16-17
- Lk 1:5-25

Zechariah is not Mary. She is a village woman. He belongs to the priestly class. His story has almost the same script, but deviates in one essential point: “You will remain silent because you have no faith in my words”. Perhaps that is closer to our own experience. But despite his old age and lack of faith, God’s promise was fulfilled.

## Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> December 2011

- Is 7:10-14
- Ps 23:1-6
- Lk 1:26-38

The third time that the story of Mary’s calling is referred to in the season of Advent. Today you can study her response: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, do unto me according to your word”. It’s the same Hinnení of Samuel, of Jesus ... Is it also yours?

## Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> December 2011

- Song 2:8-14
- Ps 32:2-3.11-12.20-21
- Lk 1:39-45

Just a small insignificant detail on this journey of Mary from Nazareth to a village in the mountains of Judah: her “promptness”, her “readiness”. There is a mysterious relationship between the adventure of faith (“Blessed are you who has believed”) and the attitude of “set off promptly”. Faith is always a gift, but we must prepare to welcome it.



## Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2011

- 1 Sam 1:24-28
- Ps (1 Sam 2:1-7)
- Lk 1:46-56

The hymn of the *Magnificat*, read in light of *Patris Mei*, could be entitled: “Mary: the God in whom I believe”. The God of Mary is puzzling. It changes the order of things. It gives a whole new identity to people. But more than anything, he is “my saviour”. This is what Mary has experienced. Therefore, she bursts into a song of praise that expresses all the hope of his people.

## Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2011

- Mal 3:1-4.23-24
- Ps 24:4-5.8-10.14
- Lk 1:57-66

Today and tomorrow are days dedicated to John. What happens to him and through him is in tentative anticipation of what will happen to Jesus and through Jesus. The name John is a summary of his calling: “God is mercy”, His life will be a path along which God’s mercy will reach human beings.

## Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> December 2011

- 2 Sam 7:1-5.8b-12.14.16
- Ps 88:2-5.27.29
- Lk 1:67-79

The *Benedictus* is the summary of Advent and the overture for Christmas. What we hope for and celebrate is the fact that God “has visited and redeemed his people”. Jesus will be the “dawn from on high, to enlighten those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our steps along the path of peace”.



## 5. Texts for further study

### Appendix 1: From St. Anselm's "Proslogion"

Come you little creature! Leave your worries for a little while; hide yourself, for a time, from your disturbing thoughts. Cast aside, now, your burdensome cares, and put away your toilsome business. Make room for God for a little while; and rest in him for a moment. Enter the inner chamber of your mind; shut out all thoughts save that of God, and such as can aid you in seeking him; close your door and seek him. Speak now, you precious child, speak now to God, saying, "I seek your face; your face, Lord, will I desire." And come you now, O Lord my God, teach my heart where and how it may seek you, where and how it may find you.

Lord, if you are not here, where shall I seek you, being absent? But if you are everywhere, why do I not see you present? Truly you dwell in unapproachable light. But where is that unapproachable light, or how shall I get to it? Or who shall lead me to that light, that I may see you in it? Again, by what signs, under what form, shall I seek you? I have never seen you, O Lord, my God; I do not know your face.

What, O most high Lord, shall this man do, an exile so far away from you? What shall your servant do, anxious in his love of you, and cast out afar from your face? He yearns to see you, and your face is too far from him. He longs to come to you, and your dwelling-place is inaccessible. He is

eager to find you, and knows not your place. He desires only you, and does not know your face.

Lord, you are my God, and you are my Lord, and never have I seen you. It is you that has made me and renewed me, and has bestowed upon me all the blessing I enjoy; and yet I do not know you. Finally, I was created to see you, and I haven't yet done anything for which I was created.

Then, O Lord, how long? How long, O Lord, will you forget us; how long will you turn your face from us? When will you look upon us, and hear us? When will you enlighten our eyes, and show us your face? When will you restore yourself to us?

Look upon us, Lord; listen to us, enlighten us, reveal yourself to us. Restore yourself to us, that all may be well with us; without you all is not well with us. Pity our toilings and strivings to get to you since we can do nothing without you.

Teach me to seek you, and reveal myself to you, when I seek you, for I cannot seek you, unless you teach me how, nor find you, unless you reveal yourself. With great longing I will seek you, and seeking you will increase my longing; let me find you in love, and in finding you, love you.

### Appendix 2: Instruction "Faciem Tuam, Domine" (2008)

1. "*Faciem tuam, Domine, requiram*": your face, O Lord, I seek (Ps 27:8). A pilgrim seeking the meaning of life, enwrapped in the great mystery that surrounds him, the human person, even if unconsciously, does, in fact, seek the face of the Lord. "Your ways, O Lord, make known to me, teach me your paths" (Ps 25:4): no one can ever take away from the heart of the human person the search for him of whom the Bible says "He is all" (Sir 43:27) and for the ways of reaching him.

Consecrated life, called to make the characteristic traits of the virginal, poor and obedient Jesus visible, flourishes in the ambience of this search for the face of the Lord and the ways that lead to him (cf. Jn 14:4-6). A search that leads to the experience of peace — "in his will is our peace" — and which underlies each day's struggle, because God is God, and His ways and thoughts are not always our ways and thoughts (cf. Is 55:8). The consecrated person, therefore, gives witness to the task, at once joyful and laborious, of the diligent search for the divine will, and for this chooses to use every means available that helps one to know it and sustain it while bringing it to fulfilment.

Here, too, the religious community, a communion of consecrated persons who profess to seek together and carry out God's will: a community of sisters or brothers with a variety of roles but with the same goal and the same passion, finds its meaning. For this reason, while all in the community are called to seek what is pleasing to the Lord and to obey Him, some are called, usually temporarily, to

exercise the particular task of being the sign of unity and the guide in the common search both of carrying out the will of God both personally and as a community. This is the service of authority.

#### *A path of liberation*

2. The culture of Western Society, strongly centred on the subject, has contributed to the spread of the value of respect for the dignity of the human person, positively fostering the person's free development and autonomy.

Such recognition constitutes one of the most significant traits of modernity and is a providential given which requires new ways of conceiving authority and relating to it. One must also keep in mind that when freedom tends to become arbitrariness and the autonomy of the person, independence from the Creator and from relationships with others, then one finds oneself before forms of idolatry that do not increase freedom but rather enslave.

In such cases, believers in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the God of Jesus Christ, must embark upon a path of personal liberation from every idolatrous cult. It is a path which can find its motivation in the Exodus experience: a path of liberation which leads from the acceptance of the common scattered way of thinking to the freedom of adhering to the Lord and from the monotony of one way of looking at things to itineraries that bring one to communion with the living and true God.



The Exodus journey is guided by the cloud, both bright and obscure, of the Spirit of God, and, even if, at times, it seems to lose itself down paths which do not make sense, its destiny is the beatifying intimacy of the heart of God: "I bore you up on eagle wings and brought you here to myself" (Ex 19:4). A group of slaves is freed to become a holy people who know the joy of free service to God. The Exodus events are a paradigm which accompanies the entire biblical reality and is seen as a prophetic anticipation of the same earthly life of Jesus, who, in turn frees from slavery through obedience to the providential will of the Father.

### Appendix 3: Looking for God (St Augustine)

Don't pray to God looking up to heaven  
Look inside yourself!  
Don't look for God far away from you,  
but inside yourself ...  
Do not ask God what you need:  
look for it yourself!, and God will look with you,  
because he gave it to you as a promise and a goal  
for you to reach ...  
Do not blame God for your misfortune  
Endure it with Him! And He will suffer with you  
and if there are two in pain, the suffering is less ...  
Never ask God for guidance,  
by a show of miracles, from the outside;  
Guide yourself!  
with responsible freedom, in love,  
and God will guide you  
from within, and without you knowing how!

Do not ask God to answer you when you talk to him;  
you answer him!, because He first spoke to you;  
and if you still want to hear what is lacking  
listen to what He has already told you.  
Do not ask God to give you freedom,  
you fail to recognise the freedom he has already given you.  
Dare to live your freedom!  
and will know that it was only possible  
because your God wants you to be free.  
Do not ask God to love you,  
while you are afraid to love  
and knowing yourself to be loved.  
It is you who should love Him!  
and you will know that if there is heat, it is because there  
was a fire  
and if you can love it is because He first loved you.



## Appendix 4: Prayer of Etty Hillesun (12<sup>th</sup> July 1942)

Dear God, these are anxious times. Tonight for the first time I lay in the dark with burning eyes as scene after scene of human suffering passed before me. I shall promise you one thing, God, just one very small thing: I shall never burden my today with cares about my tomorrow, although that takes some practice. Each day is sufficient unto itself. I shall try to help you, God, to stop my strength ebbing away, though I cannot vouch for it in advance. But one thing is becoming increasingly clear to me; that You cannot help us, that we must help You to help ourselves. And that is all we can manage these days and also all that really matters: that we safeguard that little piece of You, God, in ourselves. And perhaps in others as well. Alas, there doesn't seem to be much You Yourself can do about our circumstances, about our lives. Neither do I hold You responsible. You cannot help

us but we must help You and defend Your dwelling place inside us to the last. There are, it is true, some who, even at this late stage, are putting their vacuum cleaners and silver forks and spoons in safe keeping instead of guarding You, dear God. And there are those who want to put their bodies in safe keeping but who are nothing more now than a shelter for a thousand fears and bitter feelings. And they say, "I shan't let them get me into their clutches." But they forget that no one is in their clutches who is in Your arms. I am beginning to feel a little more peaceful, God, thanks to this conversation with You. I shall have many more conversations with you. You are sure to go through lean times with me now and then, when my faith weakens a little, but believe me, I shall always labour for You and remain faithful to You and I shall never drive You from my presence.

## Appendix 5: Story: "Looking for God from where He is"

The hermit, while praying, clearly heard God's voice, inviting him to attend a special meeting with Him. The appointment was for the following evening, on top of a distant mountain. He set off early; he needed the whole day to reach the mountain and climb it. More than anything, he wanted to be on time for the important interview.

Crossing a valley, he came across a number of peasants busy trying to control and extinguish a fire in the nearby forest, which endangered their crops and their homes. They called for his help because they were in few. He felt the anguish of the situation and of not being able to stop and help them. "I should not be late for the appointment, let alone

miss it", he thought So with a prayer that the Lord might take pity on them, he quickened his pace, as he had to make a detour because of the fire. After an arduous climb, he reached the top of the mountain, panting with fatigue and excitement. The sun began to set; but he was there on time, so he gave thanks to heaven in his heart. He waited with great longing in his heart, looking in all directions. The Lord does not appear anywhere. Finally he discovered, visible on a rock, something written. It read: "Forgive me, I'm busy helping to put out the fire." That's when he realised where to find God.





## Appendix 6: Hindu story: “Desiring God”

Here is a Hindu story about a villager who came to a holy man, who was meditating in the shade of a tree, and said: “I want to see God. Tell me how I can do that. “

The saint, as is typical of saints, did not say a word, he just kept doing his meditation.

The villager went back again with the same request the next day, then the next, and the next, and the next ... but with no reply, until, at last, seeing his perseverance, the holy man said, “You look like a true seeker of God. This afternoon I’ll go down to the river to bathe. Meet me there. “

When, that afternoon, they were both in the river, the holy man seized the villager by the head, plunged him into the water and kept him there for a while, and the poor man

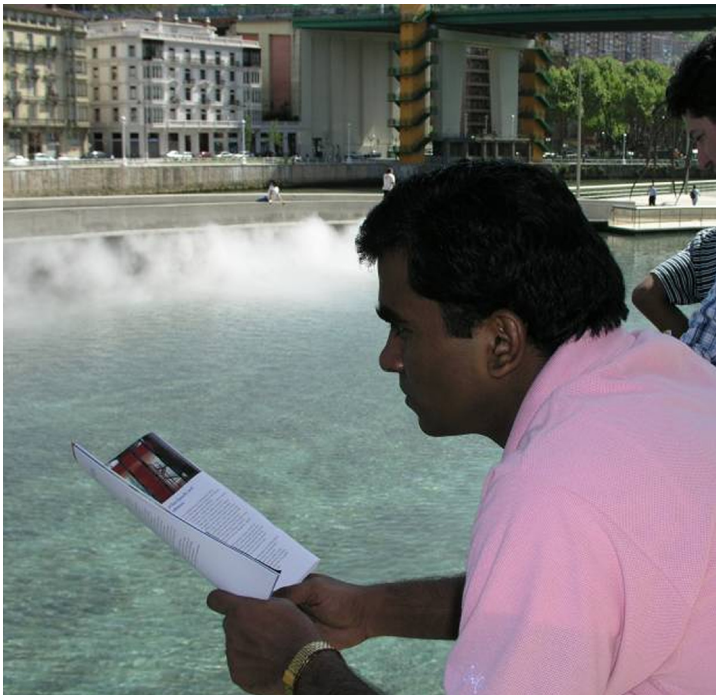
struggled to get to the surface. After a couple of minutes, the holy man released him and said, “Come to see me tomorrow by the tree”.

When, the next day, the villager went to the appointed place, the holy man was the first to speak:

“Tell me, why were you struggling like that when I was holding your head under water?”

“Because I wanted to breathe, otherwise I would have died”. said the villager.

The saint smiled and said: “The day you want God as much as you wanted to breathe, that day you will find him, for certain”.



## Appendix 7: The search for God. (Higumeno Simeon, Monastery of St Silouane, Saint-Mars-de-Locquenay)

We really like one of the Russian saints from the last century, St. Seraphim of Sarov, a very humble man. One day he told someone who came to see how to live the *hesiquia*, how to live the stillness in God. And he said the following: “If you have peace in your heart, that is if you are *hesicasta*, then you will save thousands of souls around you”. What does this expression mean? It’s vital to understand it. If St. Seraphim says: “If you have peace in your heart, you will save thousands of souls”, it is because he has been followed a path that is for us an example. He has shown us through his own life we must be humble, accept that we are small, that we know nothing about, nor personally know God, and especially we do not own him, which would be a fundamental error. You have to go through humility and abandonment, and St. Seraphim has been there. What is humility, if not the objective discovery of what we are: poor, little, helpless, not lovers?

This can lead to despair, which is not the right way. It is vital that this discovery in humility leads us to peace. And the only way forward is the abandonment of ourselves in the hands of God. If I discover that I am poor, I should not despair, nor rebel. It is not the best solution. When I despair and rebel, who am I acting against? Against me, not my Creator! But if I can humbly see my own weakness, if I did not rebel, if I really turn to God, confidently, saying: “I am small and poor, but You, You can do everything, take me in the palm of your hand and lead me!”, then this self-abandonment, which is the second stage, (humility then self-abandonment) will lead me to quiet, peace of heart, because I will, at last, be in the hands of the One who can give me this peace, the One who is Love, our God. Here, then, by the example of St. Seraphim of Sarov, is how the *hesicasta* tradition can be lived.

## Appendix 8: To the God who stays silent (R. Tagore)

If thou speakest not I will fill my heart with thy silence and endure it. I will keep still and wait like the night with starry vigil and its head bent low with patience.

The Morning will surely come, the darkness will vanish, and thy voice pour down in golden streams breaking through the sky.

Then thy words will take wing in songs from every one of my birds' nests, and thy melodies will break forth in flowers in all my forest groves.

## Appendix 9: The search for God (Benedict XVI)

Their motivation [that of the monks] was much more basic. Their goal was: *quaerere Deum*. Amid the confusion of the times, in which nothing seemed permanent, they wanted to do the essential – to make an effort to find what was perennially valid and lasting, life itself. They were searching for God. They wanted to go from the non-essential to the essential, to the only truly important and reliable thing there is. It is sometimes said that they were “eschatologically” oriented. But this is not to be understood in a temporal sense, as if they were looking ahead to the end of the world or to their own death, but in an existential sense: they were seeking the definitive behind the provisional. *Quaerere Deum*: because they were Christians, this was not an expedition into a trackless wilderness, a search leading them into total darkness. God himself had provided signposts, indeed he had marked out a path which was theirs to find and to follow. This path was his word, which had been disclosed to men in the books of the sacred Scriptures. Thus, by inner necessity, the search for God demands a culture of the word or – as Jean Leclercq put it: eschatology and grammar are intimately connected with one another in Western monasticism (cf. *L'amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu*).

The longing for God, the *désir de Dieu*, includes *amour des lettres*, love of the word, exploration of all its dimensions. Because in the biblical word God comes towards us and we towards him, we must learn to penetrate the secret of language, to understand it in its construction and in the manner of its expression. Thus it is through the search for God that the secular sciences take on their importance, sciences which show us the path towards language. Because the search for God required the culture of the word, it was appropriate that the monastery should have a library, pointing out pathways to the word. It was also appropriate to have a school, in which these pathways could be opened up. Benedict calls the monastery a *dominici servitii schola*. The monastery serves *eruditio*, the formation and education of man – a formation whose ultimate aim is that man should learn how to serve God. But it also includes the formation of reason – education – through which man learns to perceive, in the midst of words, the Word itself.

Yet in order to have a full vision of the culture of the word, which essentially pertains to the search for God, we must take a further step. The Word which opens the path of that search, and is to be identified with this path, is a shared word. True, it pierces every individual to the heart (cf. Acts 2:37). Gregory the Great describes this a sharp stabbing

pain, which tears open our sleeping soul and awakens us, making us attentive to the essential reality, to God (cf. Leclercq, p. 35). But in the process, it also makes us attentive to one another. The word does not lead to a purely individual path of mystical immersion, but to the pilgrim fellowship of faith. And so this word must not only be pondered, but also correctly read. As in the rabbinic schools, so too with the monks, reading by the individual is at the same time a corporate activity. “But if *legere* and *lectio* are used without an explanatory note, then they designate for the most part an activity which, like singing and writing, engages the whole body and the whole spirit”, says Jean Leclercq on the subject (*ibid.*, 21). [You can follow the rest of the text on the Forge webpage].



# contents



## 1. Introduction

2



## 2. Reflection

5

- He who seeks, finds
- Life is a constant search
- We are seekers who have been “found”
- Advent as a journey of seeking and finding
- Vigilance (first week)
- The way (second week)
- Witnesses (third week)
- Signs (fourth week)



## 3. Guidelines for the community encounter

14



## 4. Guidelines for the “lectio divina”

15



## 5. Texts for further study

20

- From St. Anselm's Proslogion
- “Faciem Tuam, Domine”
- Looking for God (St. Augustine)
- Prayer of Etty Hillesun
- Looking for God from where He is
- Desiring God
- To the God who stays silent R. Tagore)
- The search for God (Benedict XVI)

# The Forge in Our Daily Life

**PATRIS MEI** - 2012

“

All things, even the small things, will herald God's power, wisdom, goodness and his other attributes”  
(Claret)