

THE FORGE IN OUR DAILY LIFE

Quid Prodest

Advent

1

THE URGENT THING IS TO WAIT

The Forge in Our Daily Life

GENERAL OBJETIVE

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.

QUID PRODEST - 2011

PATRIS MEI - 2012

CARITAS CHRISTI - 2013

SPIRITUS DOMINI - 2014

OBJECTIVES OF *QUID PRODEST* STAGE

- To stir up an attitude of authenticity and of seeking God's Will in one's own life, keeping in mind one's present experience of life.
- To calmly reread one's personal history, discerning it in the light of the Word of God.
- To learn to identify one's wounds in order to experience a process of healing.
- To recapture one's happiness in being a Claretian.
- To ground the search for a new response to God's Call, in a spirit of conversion in the light of the Claretian *Quid Prodest*.

1

The urgent thing is to wait (Advent)

2

And He dwelt among us (Christmas)

3

Called to be sons (Ordinary Time I)

4

On the road to Easter (Lent)

5

The new life in Christ (Easter)

6

Followers of Christ like Claret (Ordinary Time II)

7

Witnesses in the midst of the world (Ordinary Time III)

8

Born to love (Ordinary Time IV)

9

Looking back to look forward (Ordinary Time V)



1. The journey begins

Perhaps you are opening this booklet entitled *The Forge* for the first time. As you get into its pages, perhaps you will notice within yourself a varying mixture of curiosity and expectation, or indifference, or an instinctive negative reaction, or interest. Glancing through the booklet, you will ask yourself if what you are holding in your hands will end up being just another lost opportunity. It is not uncommon for new, challenging adventures to begin like this. For the moment, and before continuing any further, it would be opportune to clarify a few things.

What you are reading forms part of a collection of booklets. In a carefully programmed sequence, you will receive support in your personal growth as a person and as a Claretian. These will be simple suggestions for your own personal formation, not a formalised course on Theology, Spirituality or Pastoral ministry. But as the word “formation” is very slippery –it has so many meanings!- it would be good to clarify its meaning first. Let’s avoid the use of certain adjectives which, in the last few years, have perverted its meaning:

- **Hydraulic:** It considers each Claretian to be like a bottle. Formation is the water with which we fill it. The only worry for those concerned would be to find the right funnel through which to channel the water of instruction.

- **Didactic:** the overriding concern is to bring to each competent Claretian the greatest capacity in terms of content, but in a soulless manner. Clinical truths without human warmth quickly turn into tedium, or become unpalatable to the person who collects them.

- **Functional:** Formation of this nature has as its target to achieve, at all costs, that each Claretian and each community should operate like a clock in their apostolic work. This is a mechanistic view of formation. Priority is given to efficient and well-organised work. What happens within people counts for little.

- **Sequential:** it tries to encapsulate the objectives in an artificially juxtaposed time sequence: first you attend to the human side; then the spiritual; followed by details of the consecrated life; then finally, what pertains to the Claretian way of life. You follow a fragmented scheme that has no bearing on reality and is unreliable. Don't all these dimensions interrelate in real life?

- **Intellectual:** the principle concern is that each Claretian has a well furnished mind – something which, otherwise, continues to be a fundamental asset anyway-. But it regrettably fails to point out that in the mind, apart from ideas, there are feelings, desires, sufferings, values, decisions, which move and stir about inside. But none of these even feature.



Exercise 1: To begin

Please, read these words:

**EDUCATION - INSTRUCTION - LEARNING - SOCIALIZATION
ACCULTURATION - TRANSFORMATION - INSPIRATION
SKILL ACQUISITION - TRAINING - TEACHING - REFRESHER TRAINING
CARE - PREVENTION - CONDITIONING - PERSONALISATION.**

If necessary, add more. Choose from this list five words which seem closest to what you think you need to continue growing. Add another of your own. Discuss it with someone in the community.

2. Prepare the way of the Lord

Something new could happen in my life

The liturgy of Advent maintains a tension of anticipation repeating the following: "Beware, the Kingdom is about to arrive. Time has been fulfilled. Something is about to happen". The parables about watchfulness which the liturgy offers us, especially the one concerning the oil lamps, warn us that the bridegroom is arriving. To maintain the tension of expectation is to keep an attitude *Quid Prodest*, awake anticipating his imminent arrival "as the sentry awaits the dawn", "like the sensible virgin", even though it seems that, as God takes so long to appear, perhaps he has forgotten and you stop watching.

Sometimes you think that nothing "of interest" is going to happen. Your days pass with wearying monotony. Your time is consumed by its mechanical, routine rhythms. Will your life always be like "yesterday's film"? Will it change anything? What were your greatest dreams and ideals? Have they been lost forever? Will you begin to dream again?

If you look at yourself in all sincerity, you will notice that somewhere inside yourself there always springs of dissatisfaction. You shouldn't be dismayed when you recognise them. They are not signs. They are the expression of life that stirs in of you. Dissatisfaction is a symptom and engine human growth:

- You finished your studies and made your final vows years ago. You never imagined how difficult it would be to deal with people who are often obstinate and unsympathetic. You wanted to serve them with great care. But they all came to you with demands and impatience. And, after some months, you began to ask yourself questions which still plague your mind.

- You have been a Claretian for 20 years. The romance disappeared a long time ago. Your life in the community and apostolic work drags along with a sense of disenchantment and loss of appetite which you never experienced before. Sometimes you doubt the reality of your vocation.

- You are the Superior of a community. After a few negative experiences, you feel isolated and distant. You frequently check the calendar to work out how long before you complete your term of office.

You begin to wonder if you will persevere to the end.

- At the very bottom of your heart there still reverberates the call to radicalism: to be amongst the poor experiencing greater poverty yourself. Life, however, took you along other paths and you think the time for idealism is now past. And no-one takes away the intermittent bitterness.

- You have devoted your life to your missionary work. You have committed to it completely. But, in spite of everything, you have lost that sense of happiness that filled your soul in former days. A "situation" prevents you from recovering the lost freshness. You can't tell anyone. It is your own personal affair.

- You have been posted to a new community. You begin a new phase. And you feel great uncertainty and insecurity. You don't know where to begin nor what to do. Before your life was more secure.

You have your own history of dissatisfaction. You have confronted it many times. It makes you feel that "something is missing". Such dissatisfaction could be the mark of a call to something new. Frequently you don't see it like that and your sense of bitterness makes you blame others. Or you join the number of those who, on their return, have become accustomed to scepticism and never talk about these things. It never occurs to them that their dissatisfaction could be the uncomfortable jab that pushes them to seek something deeper and more authentic. How do we help them to start out on a new road? How do we awaken in them a new sense of hope?

Throughout the history of mankind there has never been a great discovery that was not preceded by a great sense of hope. Even though what is sought is not always discovered. Sometimes the discovery is a disappointment, but other times it is so startling that it surprises even the discoverer himself. What did Christopher Columbus search for? Convinced that the earth was round, he set off towards the west searching for a route to India. And he found a continent as yet undiscovered by Europeans. So to have a restless heart is a good omen, even though it is bothersome initially. This is the message of Advent.

Exercise 2: Dreams and complaints

Take at least an hour to complete this exercise. In a discrete, quiet location, try to respond to the following questions by writing in your notebook:

1. **Write at the top of the page:** “**THE OPPOSITE OF MY DREAMS AND COMPLAINTS**” and the date on which you are doing this work.
2. **Make a list of your deepest dreams and aspirations** (burning desires, yearnings, hopes, Utopias....). And, on a separate sheet, make a new list of your most frequent complaints (those which you express and those which you suppress; those which you direct against others and those against yourself). Don't restrict yourself when writing these down. Be honest about what you say and feel when you complain.
3. **Re-read what you have written** and choose from each list what you would normally repeat most yourself. Once you have chosen the most repeated dreams and complaints, mark what seems the most frequent and intense of these, aspirations as well as complaints.
4. **Analyse both.** Try to capture, in the first instance, the feelings that come over you when you consider them. Indicate the strength of those feelings (what pains you and what stirs within you). Remember some situations when they came to the surface and recall what you really felt inside at those moments. Try to put those feelings into writing, or express them with a drawing or look for a symbol which illustrates them, even though you may struggle to find something suitable.
5. **Answer this question:** beneath this recurring complaint and beneath this burning desire, what mystery lies hidden from you? What desire is it pointing to? What personal aspiration of yours is being expressed indirectly?
6. **Draw your own personal conclusions.** You can discuss them with the person guiding you.

The Quid Prodest of Mary

The solemnity of the Immaculate Conception is at the heart of Advent. Our Mother Mary occupies a central place during this liturgical period, along with Isaiah, John the Baptist and the mysterious remnant of Israel. The relationship of each Clare-tian with the Mother of Jesus is extremely varied. Expressions about that relationship are, perhaps, dependant on one's spiritual and emotional education. But without a doubt it will be alive and well in each one of us. From your own personal standpoint and on this journey of *Quid Prodest*, you are invited to fix your gaze as a son on Mary. Try to discover how she managed to overcome the challenging predicaments of her life in a clear and firm bid to remain faithful to the will of God. Mary always trusted in God and put her hope in Him.

6 The urgent thing is to wait.

• The predicament between her matrimonial duties and God's plan.

Three facts (cf. Luke 1, 29.34.38) show Mary's inner struggle. The first episode of Mary's life mentioned in the gospel is her marriage with Joseph. Even before God, Mary had given her first consent to a man. So it's not surprising then that in verse 29 it is said: "She was troubled by these words and pondered what the greeting might mean". God was entering her life like a subversive element. "What will the power of God do with me?" It is dangerous to be touched by this power. When God comes, everything is turned upside down. This tension reappears in verse 34: "How will this be since I know not man?". Mary understands that God is going to change her chosen path; she doesn't know how that will be, but she surrenders herself into his hands because she trusts in him. She has ceased control over her own destiny, as shown in verse 38 which encapsulates the whole mystery: "Behold the hand-maid of the Lord; do it according to your word". They are

words which reflect total trust and are hard to bear. Her life is now totally surrendered to the will of God, who can now do with her what he wills. Her reaction reveals everything: "God has control over my life".

- ***The predicament between staying in Nazareth or going to Elizabeth's house.***

After the annunciation, Mary quickly embarks on a journey. The experience in Nazareth was, without a doubt, very intense. It required a period of thoughtful repose, an oasis of solitude to consider what she had experienced. Confronted with this possibility, the young girl from Nazareth decides to go urgently to help Elizabeth. She decides to set forth to serve others. The result being a blessing. In the gospel according to Luke, the first words expressed between two human beings are those exchanged between Mary and Elizabeth. Elizabeth says four things in praise of Mary: "Blessed are you..., happy are you who have believed, Mother of the Lord, who brings happiness to my house".

- ***The predicament between bemoaning evil in the world or being joyful because God is at work.***

Hearing the praise bestowed by Elizabeth, Mary responds humbly by returning the praise to where it belongs: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord". In her song, she sings to the great God in the face of her own poverty; to the God that turns around the history and destiny of human beings; to the God who feels merciful and comes to our aid. She abandons herself to the power of God, who intercedes on behalf of the poor, the humble and the hungry. Everything is encompassed by the mercy of God. Nothing is left in the margins.

- ***The predicament between occupying the centre ground or relegating yourself to the margins.***

It seems strange that Luke, in the whole of his account of the birth, does not describe a single detail about Mary's state of mind. She is simply the mother, who gives birth and lays Jesus in the manger. Whilst everything around her is in celebration, with happiness, angels and shepherds, she is confined to fulfilling the role of mother, and the only thing said of her is that "she kept all of these things to herself and pondered on them in her heart" (Luke 2,19). What was going on inside her? Mary was undergoing internal growth. As mother, she had to experience being at the centre of hap-

nings, but in reality these point out to her that the Son is greater than she is. He, not she, should be the centre of attention and interest. From the beginning, nevertheless, Mary receives a warning: He is the important one. And from that moment, she has to learn to do everything on behalf of Jesus, accepting that she should withdraw discreetly.

- ***The predicament between living with honour or living beneath a sword of pain.***

It is not easy to understand the meaning of Simeon's prophecy: "He is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected – and a sword will pierce your own soul too – so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare". (Luke 2, 34-5). What does this "sword" mean for Mary? It announces her close involvement in the life of the rejected Jesus, in seeing how her own Son will be the object of conflict and rejection; in seeing her own Son surrounded by so many ambiguities, the countless diverse reactions that encircle Him, and to feel torn by the suffering experienced by the rejected Messiah. She sees Jesus in the midst of all these people who, at first, all seemed good and kind, like shepherds, then in a moment in history they divide and oppose Him. Mary will be caught up in the hazardous life of her Son and will suffer when she finds out that he will be rejected as the Messiah by the leaders of the people, without herself being able to offer him any direct form of help.

- ***The predicament between "owning" her Son or respecting his singular freedom.***

The episode of Jesus in the temple shows Mary's special suffering in the following words: "See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you" (Luke 2,48). In reality, we are not dealing with a simple state of anxiety and anguish, but much more. It is the same term which indicates, in Luke 16, 24, the painful suffering of the rich man in hell: "These flames" says the rich man "are tormenting me". What type of pain is Mary suffering during those three days searching for Jesus? The most painful thing for Mary was to understand how her absolute trust on the word of God had brought her to an unexpected situation in her relationship with her Son, to a level of misunderstanding and isolation when she saw her Son slipping out of her hands, and he speaks to her in a way she does not understand. She had to ponder anew on all this in her heart.

• ***The predicament between being the mother of a winner or a total failure.***

Although Luke does not address it directly, we are able to contemplate what happens to Mary when, in Luke's reference in 4,29, she sees her Son expelled from Nazareth and humiliated by all His fellow countrymen. Mary sees Jesus' failure, experiences the suffering of not being able to do anything for him and understands that she has been called to passively accept such suffering as a manifestation of the Messianic strength of the love of Jesus and of his unconquerable freedom.

• ***The predicament between holding a position of privilege or remaining as a disciple.***

Mary receives another harsh blow from Jesus himself. Perhaps this turns out to be the most demanding test before his death on the cross. Luke refers to it (8, 19ff) in such a way that, when he describes this episode, he comes across as extremely sensitive, unlike Mark, who is much more incisive and confines himself to saying that his mother and brothers can't get near to Jesus because there are too many people; so they let him know indirectly that they are there and want to see him, but Jesus refuses to receive them and says: "My mother and brothers are those who hear the word of God and follow it": an undeniably harsh response. Jesus is totally free and makes his freedom hard to bear, especially for his own Mother. She understands that she must respect the freedom of her Son. This is the only way she will win her Son back, becoming his disciple and persevering in his discipleship.

• ***The predicament between barren loneliness and fruitful motherhood.***

Mary's brief appearance at the foot of the cross (John 19, 25-27) has a final and lasting value. When she accepts that her Son is dying, Mary receives other children. She receives the well-beloved disciple and opens her heart to the children of the Church. At the moment when Jesus is glorified on the cross, Mary receives the definitive blessing of her "yes" to God. Mary's initial "yes" to God gave rise to an extraordinary series of unforeseen events: she could never have imagined what it would entail being a mother and

having to separate herself from her Son and abandon Him in the hands of men so that the love of God could be made manifest through him. She would never have thought that her Son would have to die, and suffer in that fashion. Mary learned in a deeply personal way that the love of God for humanity has no limits. For that reason, we venerate her as the one who can connect us with that love, whose fire she experienced like no-one else.

• ***The predicament between staying on the margin or belonging to a community.***

The role of Mary in the Church is very clear: from the very beginning of the Church, Mary is there along with the Twelve. Mary not only gave herself to God but she also gave him Jesus; she surrendered Jesus on the altars of his mission, freeing herself as much as she could, however little that was, from her emotional relationship with her Son. For that reason, she receives as a gift, not the life of her resurrected Son, but the primitive community. Purified of her emotional sensitivity and all kinds of privilege, she opens up to receiving a multitude of traitors and sinners. Luke, even though he doesn't tell the story of the cross which John refers to, helps us to understand how Mary, freed from everything, having given homage to her Son, surrendered to his Father and torn from her in His love for humanity, can now open again her arms and take her appropriate place in the Church on behalf of all the other children.



Perhaps you feel powerless and speechless standing before the huge inner decisions which Mary had to face up to. She experienced the power of the love of God to remain faithful to her "yes" to God. During this period of Advent, you too can experience this power of the love of God and, like her, accept the plan that God is outlining in your predicaments. Ask for the intercession of the Mother of Jesus to achieve a heart like hers, simple, humble, patient, trusting in God, capable of spreading around that filial acceptance of God's plan which transforms the world.



Exercise 3: Mary of the *Quid Prodest*

- Without a doubt, this meditation can provide you with elements for your own personal prayer, choosing different points or just one linked with lectio divina, in line with the texts suggested by way of “vita Mariae”.
- Take another moment to contemplate this singular image of the Heart of Mary of our parish in Hayes in the United Kingdom.

- Put yourself before her, seek silence, and leave aside your haste.....Try to observe all that it represents. Try to understand what the artist has wanted to communicate.

- And now look at Mary’s eyes..... “You look at me..... And I see.....”

- Afterwards, look again at Mary’s eyes:.....”I look at you..... And I discover.....”

- Finish with a spontaneous prayer to the Mother of *Quid Prodest*, she who knew how to always opt in favour of the affirmation of God.

In order “to prepare the way”

Filo of Alexandria, a Jewish philosopher and contemporary of Christ, analysed the expression: “Know yourself” - already known during that time as the beginning of wisdom-When he asked himself: What type of knowledge of oneself is the most important? He responded: It is not the anatomical knowledge of one’s own body, nor the psychological nor the moral knowledge. The most important is to know what one is capable of doing and how one can be transformed. To know oneself is to seek what is missing.

Perhaps you are already conscious of “what is missing”. But you have a strong inner resistance to seeking it out again. You tell yourself that ideals are deceitful, because they promise a lot and, in the end, they throw you into the sea of dissatisfaction and frustration. Perhaps, for that reason, you have become convinced that it is better to live with what you have and resign yourself to the impossibility of any change taking place that is worthwhile. You hear repeating inside you, like an echo, the title of that novel by the Spanish writer Fernando Fernán Gómez: “Journey to nowhere”. You can even rise to defending it with thousands of rationalizations: “That doesn’t suit me”, “What need is there for trying anything new?”, “I like myself as I am”, “I don’t need to push myself further”.

But, hopefully, it could be that you dare to accept that to feel dissatisfied is something of great value. That is precisely the greatest impetus capable of moving you, because “the human being has a greater need of meaning than bread and justice”(A. Beguin). If you want to be faithful to yourself, you have to regain what is missing in your life.

Advent is repeating it to you. It coincides, too, with the core message of *Quid Prodest*: to move from what you are comfortable with to exploration.

In order to begin the exploration, you have to prepare yourself. Just like those who want to set out on the Road to Santiago de Compostela and complete it. Good preparation is based on three fundamental catchwords:

1. Carry your finitude in your backpack, made up of your limitations and possibilities. Do not despise anything about yourself. Your reality, past and present, can take you further than your own dreams. You have no need to deny or hide anything, either about yourself or your past. You are a compound of needs and ideals. Grasp them both as something precious. If you come to terms with your past, you will be able to reconcile yourself with your future.

2. Look for a guide to the route, an expert, nearby and strong. Because you can get lost or grow weak, or tire yourself unnecessarily or give up altogether. You can’t control everything nor know beforehand the best route to take. It is more realistic to recognize that the road of exploration should always be travelled with a companion.

3. You will arrive at your destination if you trust (in yourself, in the support and in others..... in God who watches over you). Trust is born and grows strong in tenacity. It will help you to tackle positively all the threats and obstacles that get in your way. And, even though you might delay in reaching your goal, you will feel guided by a hand that protects you unconditionally and guides you towards your heart’s desire.





Exercise 4: Preparing the way

1. Imagine that a friend says to you that “things are not going well for him”, precisely when things are going better than ever and he has no real cause for complaint. He asks you to help him. What would you advise him? Why?
2. “Prepare the way” is an important message of Advent and of the *Quid Prodest*. To dig a little deeper:
 - Read **appendix 1**: “You have to try to grow, not to be perfect”
 - **With regard to a recent personal crisis.** In this account try to take your own limitations and shortcomings in your own hands. Don’t judge yourself. Recognize it forms a part of your own being. Then try to see in them what is beneficial and valid. Don’t invent anything. Not everything is negative. In one’s limitations there are always possibilities. Write them down. At the end consider how these positive facts open up possibilities about a change in perspective about yourself.
 - **Accompanied or by yourself?** Faced with your life’s journey, make one list of the advantages of relying on spiritual guidance, and in another, the disadvantages. Discuss them with someone and draw conclusions.
 - **Your collection of blessings.** Make up a “sympathetic inventory” of the blessings that you have received; search around in your life and try to find examples of kindness and talents that the Lord has blessed and graced you with. All that is good in you is a gift from God to continue the journey. And what you do not have, you do not need.
3. **Finish with a prayer to the Holy Spirit**, beseeching him that it will be he who moves you with his breath, which gets you started and keeps you on the right track, which instils a sense of excitement in you, who accompanies and guides you to strive for what you most want.

What would you like to change?

Fears and expectations

It makes sense to ask this question if you have previously dodged two beguiling reactions which usually present themselves to the person who takes their life in their hands:

- **The pretension of wanting to change suddenly.** Nothing happens automatically in life. Distrust this idea if it appears in your life. Don't indulge in wishful thinking with impossible desires. One does not change all of a sudden. Every change that has lasting value is usually preceded by a long prehistory of laborious research.

- Or **reluctance which persuades you to give up any intention to change** and envelops you in a state of resigned conformity, in the mediocrity of the status quo. Every sceptic will always find powerful reasons for not doing anything. He needs them to remain dormant, without apparent problems of conscience.

Once upon a time they asked the sculptor Michelangelo what he did to create such magnificent works of art. "It is very simple" he answered. "When I look at a block of marble, I see the sculpture inside. All I have to do is take away the super-



fluous material." Deep down, life is the art of seeing beyond appearances. The masterpiece, which you are, is often covered over by layers of fear, blame and indecisions. But if you decide to take away what is superfluous, if you have no doubt in your ability, you will be able to recognize who you are and what you can expect from life.

Supposing you are wide awake and new questions are bothering your conscience. You will say to yourself: Can I still change? Isn't it already too late? Would I really like to try it? What can really change in me? Let's clarify things.

1. Can you change the person you are? Your "temperament", the basic equipment you have for building your life, does not allow change, only acceptance. Don't waste time uselessly envying others because "you don't like yourself". When all is said and done, either it annoys you to accept yourself as you are or it frightens you. Well, even though your temperament cannot change, your relationship with him can. The key is one of self-acceptance. God, who has made you

good and unique, original and unrepeatable. He loves you as you are. You don't need to imitate others, but to be yourself. Your task is to learn how to live with your own temperament and welcome it as a route to transformation.

2. *Can my bad habits change?* Your behaviour can be changed. But not in a proactive way. We are not simply talking about gritting your teeth and clenching your fists; because that can be psychologically exhausting. Better to use an indirect approach, changing from within (attitude) and without (conduct). A change of external appearance doesn't change anything. You will have to learn, especially, to change your perception: your way of looking at life, and at other people etc. Learn from those who have their eyes open, unencumbered, and see everything – even the worst things – from a perspective that is clear, realistic and reconciliatory.

3. *What can change in me?* What is possible is to change the basic attitude you have for facing up to life and its events. More than that, this is what you can and should change. Such a change in basic attitude happens through *Quid Prodest* experiences, as we call them here. We are talking about those which, due to their existential density, get everybody active so that they can bring about change. Such experiences are not set up beforehand. They simply happen. They occur at a time of crisis, a serious illness, and failure, a disappointment, an appointment, a loss, an encounter of a true messenger of the gospel,...They can be recognized by the emotional shock which they unleash, a combination of fear, frustration and hope. Sometimes they alternate with traumatic episodes.

Fr Claret made progress on his path thanks to his experiences of *Quid Prodest*. He went through a variety of experiences, as you will learn during your meditations in Lent. At best, the most familiar of these experiences was suffered in the Barcelona church of Sts Justo and Pastor. When he recounted it, Claret uses the language of grace; but don't forget the human substratum of emotional frustration with respect to his promising life in Barcelona: "Disillusioned, disgusted and bored with the world, I considered leaving it and fleeing into solitude" (*Aut.77*).



Exercise 5: My *Quid Prodest* experiences

During a week of Advent describe some of your “*Quid Prodest* experiences”, those personal experiences which left you in turmoil and ended up creating in you a great or small change. Follow the scheme. It is easy, but it demands faithfulness. Don’t forget it’s all about describing, not judging and even less condemning. Recall it and write it down. Look at yourself through the rear-view mirror. “Life is lived heading forwards, but you understand things looking behind you” (S. Kierkegaard).

Guide for working with *QUID PRODEST* EXPERIENCES

EXPERIENCE (Put a name to it)	BRIEF ACCOUNT (What happened)	CHANGES EFFECTED IN YOU	HOW GOD BECAME PRESENT
Example 1 The day when, for the first time, I fell in love... ... Entitled: “MY FIRST LOVE”	Example 1 I describe the place, approximate date, what happened on the surface....I do it like an Ignatian “composition of place” (people, environments, details, words....). Focus on all that might be relevant.	Example 1 This is the most important point of this task. I indicate what happened inside me: I describe new feelings, my reactions, my unexpected ideas, my nervousness... all that occurred within my inner self.	Example 1 This exercise is one of faith. God will be recognized by intuition, but you should not invent Him nor mistake Him. I try to look with eyes of faith and to see what lessons He wanted to give me. For the first time, I understood what was freely given love...
Example 2 Tittle: “GOODBYE”	Example 2 I recount the day I left the family home for the first time and began a new phase of my life.	Example 2 I write of my life experiences: memories, fears, hopes, illusions, loneliness, stress....	Example 2 Looking backwards, I discover signs of the presence of God who, at that difficult time, took care of me through various means.....my personal relationship with him... ...my crises and doubts.....
Finally, finish by praying psalm 137 (cf. Appendix III)			



How am I living?

“Tell me how you are living and I will tell you what you are seeking”. To recognize the purpose of your life, what you are really seeking, it would be a good idea to look at your lifestyle. Lifestyle is an expression we use a lot but very loosely. It is so difficult to pin down its exact meaning. Without trying to determine its exact meaning, let us understand by “lifestyle” that combination of variables which make up the external manifestation of the day-to-day life of a person, drawn from his values, needs, relationships and choices. They are the visible face of what goes on inside a person. The following statement is applicable: “Tell me how you live and I will tell you what moves you”.

Perhaps you have never stopped to analyse your own lifestyle. To get in touch with it, you should carefully attend to your habits, customs and private ways of doing things. We usually reveal ourselves to others not so much by what we say, but rather the way we feel and express it, as well as through other things like the way we organize our lives, use our possessions, choose our friends, dress, suffer and the way we enjoy life..... which we pay little attention to.

When you have closely examined your own lifestyle, you will have taken a step closer to knowing your self. You will come to realise the important influence it has on the formation of your own conscience. Experience tells us that conscience is educated not so much by studying and research, but rather by the process of living. “He who does not live as he thinks, will end up thinking as he lives”. As a result, every route to personal transformation passes through an examination of lifestyle.



Exercise 6: “Take your own temperature”

This exercise helps to evaluate lifestyle in a planned way. Draw several thermometers in your notebook. Using them, you will measure the temperature of each indicator of lifestyle. The temperature determines the value – positive or negative – you give to your way of life. When you mark the temperature you think you have, give a reason to justify it. Follow these rules:

1. As an exercise of assessment **it requires sincerity and clarity without moralizing**. Be honest with the truth you perceive in yourself. Humble truth is an essential route to growth.
2. Using 0 as a median of assessment, **mark your own temperature** using approximate maximum and minimum scales:

- +20 Outstanding (ideal)**
- +10 Normal (adequate)**
- 0 Minimum (below this you feel bad))**
- 10 Below standard (you are unhappy about yourself)**
- 20 Well below standard (you can't continue like that)**

3. **Measure your own temperature** in the following visible aspects of your life:
 - your personal timetable on a normal working day in your life. (To do this it would be advisable to have a copy in front of you)
 - Your personal hygiene, your dress and footwear.
 - Money which you have available (on expenses that you do not have to account for)
 - What you eat and drink (tastes, habits, preferences...)
 - Your personal leisure time (sleep, hobbies, sport, TV, friendships....)
 - Your normal state of mind (if you have the courage, you can ask someone who lives with you).
 - Environment which you seek out and frequent (type of people and ages, their social background, your interests ...)
4. **Take the time necessary to do it.** Go over it, correct it and add to it what you see fit. Share the results of your appraisal with someone who knows you and who openly shares his opinion.
5. **Compare, for example, your personal schedule** with one of the schedules which Fr Claret observed in his life (cf. Appendix II). It is not suggested you imitate it, but simply to contrast the “lifestyle” which dominates his daily timetable and your own. Any surprises?

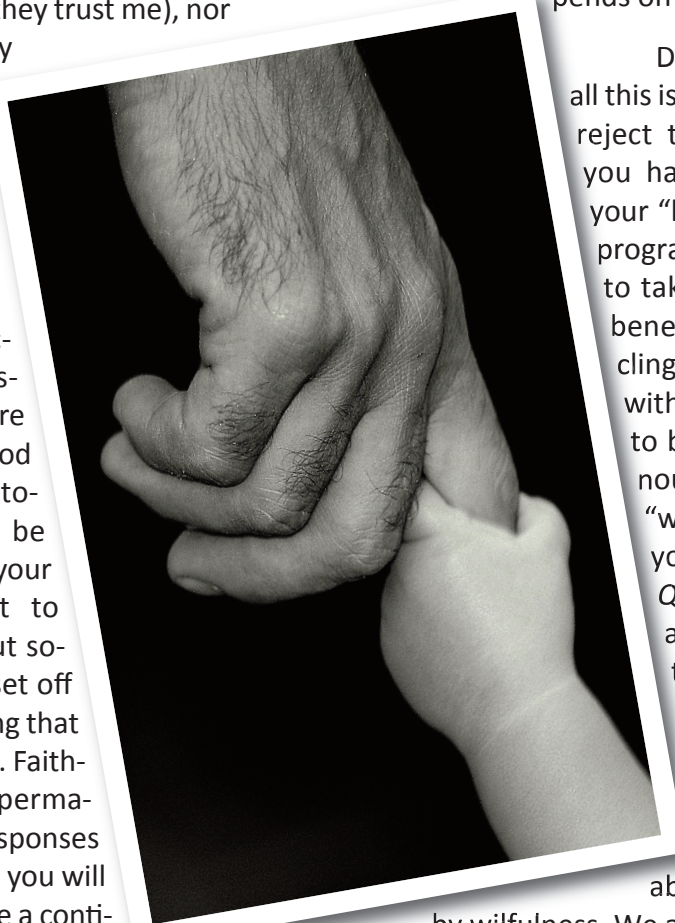
Which calls do you heed?

In spite of your dissatisfaction, you acknowledge that you are made to be happy. Every human being essentially seeks happiness. Everybody wants to feel good. If there is one thing that interests all of us, is to find an outlet for those irrepressible yearnings for life that fills our being. But, how do we attain happiness? Where is its secret? Who will tell us how to achieve it?

With so many who avidly search for personal fulfilment and following many trails, ask yourself if you are, or are not, on the trail seeking something. Do you hear that call deep inside you yet? Could you achieve that happiness without God? Could you sing the words of Psalm 63: "You love is worth more than life itself"?

The *Quid Prodest* is an uncomfortable message which invites you to pinpoint where happiness is. And it advises you not to locate it in a job (schools, government, preaching), nor in a place (I have my doctor here, my friends), nor in other people (they understand me, they trust me), nor in an object (my computer, my clothes) nor in an idea (experience proves that to me) nor in any type of faithfulness (what really matters is loyalty) nor even in an image of yourself or of God.

All these dissatisfactions (negatives), all your desires (positives) are nothing more than the repeated call that God makes to you, drawing you towards something deeper: to be happy being yourself. To live your own vocation. If you want to achieve it, you will have to cut something out of your life and set off along the road. Without making that break, there can be no growth. Faithfulness in the Spirit is not a permanent anchor, but consistent responses to something new. That's how you will live your life like a vocation, like a continued response to the continuous calls that he is making to you. Answering faithfully, you will be true to yourself without remaining the same.



Perhaps your most radical relinquishment will be stripping yourself of the "computer programme" which conditions your understanding of happiness. We receive warnings against the crude orders (wealth, pleasure, power) but not against other, more subtle, orders but equally damaging. It is precisely these that make us less happy which, even though we gain the whole world, make us lose our own lives. Orders which frequently occur to us, like the following:

- **"Happiness is a thing of the future"**. False. It is either a thing of the present or it doesn't exist at all. The yearning for, and the journey towards, a non-existent future, prolongs our unhappiness.

- **"Happiness will come with a change of situation and people"**. False. Happiness is never an extraneous matter (dependant on powers outside my control) but one of purpose (it depends on me).

- **"Happiness will come when it can fulfil my desires"**. False. Happiness never depends on success or failure.

Deep down you know that all this is false, but it's a struggle to reject this programme because you have invested so much of your "life" in it. If you erase this programme, it's as if they were to take away the ground from beneath your feet. And you cling on to it, bobbing around with fanciful dreams. In order to be happy, you have to renounce this programme, this "world". If not, you will ruin your life. This is the radical *Quid Prodest* seen from an anthropological perspective. What happens is, when you dig deeper into humanity, you then stand with God.

We are not talking about giving up by force or by wilfulness. We are talking about "seeing", about "coming to realise" the huge lie we are living, which is the cause of our anxieties, our dependencies, our unhappiness. This is the liberating message of *Quid Prodest*.

Exercise 7: Heeding calls

This new exercise will help you to recognize certain calls which come to you. Sometimes they are so subtle that they may pass you by. Sharpen your attention. Be sincere. Have patience if, at the beginning, you take a while to see them. As always, answer in writing in your notebook.

- Can you distinguish inside yourself **orders that paralyze and disorient you** on the road to discovering happiness? Could you name and describe them?
- Do you see in your life **symptoms of “complacency”** (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual)? Which symptoms?
- Do you experience **a call to “get out of” the situation in which you find yourself**? Do you resist it or take steps to respond to it?



3. Suggestions for personal guidance



PERSONAL GUIDANCE IN THE FORGE

1. Why?

- To personalize the process: observant of God in me today.
- To avoid deceit which confuses and disorients me.
- To feel encouragement on your personal journey.

2. The interview: how is it done?

- Brief without themes or distractions. About an hour.
- Narrative focused on recounting your experiences: what I do and what I feel.
- Transparent, this is how it is, sincere, clear and direct.
- Prepared: it usually helps to take in written notes to keep focused.

To prepare a guidance session

1. To begin with, it is recommended to reveal to the counsellor the personal circumstances of your life.

- Is there any matter that needs airing before dealing with the topics suggested here?

- To indicate how your personal work in the notebook is developing and the feelings it instils in you.

2. Share with him the results of your analysis of your most prominent dissatisfaction and discontent.

- What are the origins of this dissatisfaction and discontent?
- What overriding feeling do they create inside you?
- What do they say about yourself?
- What do they say about God?

3. Speak to him about your personal quests, your deepest desires, your targets at this moment of your life.

4. How is your experience of Advent following the pattern of the “Forge project in our daily life”? And your personal relationship with Mary?

4. Guidance notes for the *lectio divina*

1. I become silent (inside and outside)

I am in the presence of the Lord. I look around me, at my circumstances, at what happens near me. I pinpoint what is most affecting me. I contemplate God who loves me, welcomes me, listens to me and speaks to me.

Invocation of the Holy Spirit

Humbly, I ask you, Divine Spirit

Who is the true light

And the very fount of all light,

That, meditating faithfully on the Word

I can keep it in my heart

And bring it to life, as did Mary. Amen.

2. Word of God

I quietly and carefully read the text twice.

The first time, to appreciate its overall meaning

The second time, studying carefully all the details.

3. In the presence of the Word

- What does this text say?
(close reading)
- What does it say to me personally?
(Meditation)
- What do I say to you now, Lord?
(Prayer)
- I want to identify myself with you! What are you asking me to do?
(Contemplation and commitment)

4. Thanks

Thank you, Lord, for your presence

And for being near during this moment of prayer;

And for the light and strength you have given me

Help me to live according to your will,

Discarding what ties me down and holds me back

In order to seek you out, Lord Almighty

And serve you through others .

Through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.

5. Two questions for each day

- What do I achieve gaining everything, if I lose my life?
- What do you want of me, Lord?

Advent is a suitable time for looking at yourself in the mirror of judgement and finding out if your life is moving on and in which direction it is going. Advent helps you to find the reason for travelling and not stopping (cf. **Appendix IV**). There are motives for travelling because you can still have desires. The word of God activates the forces within you to achieve the only true desire capable of fil-

ling your heart: the desire for God. The benefit of Advent is that the words that Mary pronounced and which were her life's project, can now become your own. "Here is your servant Lord: do with me according to your word". Behind these words lie the secret of her heart, the key which kept her on the road as a woman and believer.



Sunday November 28th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 2.1-5 • Rom 13.11-14 • Mt 24.37-44 	First Sunday of Advent	Take note of the beginning of Advent. Its sobriety (lack of flowers, purple vestments, omission of the Gloria) prepares you to meet an important Somebody. The <i>Quid Prodest</i> will remind you that, contrary to all appearances, your story is not a product of mere chance. Someone is coming to visit you. For that reason, the liturgy today will awaken in you two reactions: hope and vigilance.
Monday November 29th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 4.2-6 • Mt 8.5-11 		Jesus admired the faith of the centurion. He believed in his word, which is a remedy, strength and medicine for health. When expressed, it reveals its powerful creative, healing and reconciliatory energy, like nothing else in the world. God said.....and it was done. Jesus said.....and he was cured. And Jesus will admire you if you believe, like the centurion.
Tuesday November 30th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rom 10.9-18 • Mt 4.18-22 	St Andrew, apostle and co-patron (<i>Calendario</i> , pp. 455-459)	The secret of happiness is simple: heed the call of Jesus and respond affirmatively. That call will enter your life. Are you listening? Responding? Are you capable of leaving everything? These are good questions.....To achieve happiness of life, you have to free yourself up.
Wednesday December 1st	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 25.6-10 • Mt 15.29-37 		There's no need to hide your own shadows, your limitations, your sin.....but put them all at the feet of Jesus, under his gaze. The cure. The Quid Prodest helps us to stop hiding ourselves, disguising ourselves with make-up, and to recognize that change itself begins with a simple expression of sincerity.
Thursday December 2nd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 26.1-6 • Mt 7.21.24-27 		The gospel is not a theory to be learned, but it is to put into practice the Word, which has been heeded and welcomed. You are not on the right track if you listen and do not act. Still worse is not to listen. And no-one can take your place. When the storm blows, what will keep you on your feet?
Friday December 3rd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 29.17-24 • Mt 9.27-3 	Memorial of St. Francis Xavier, priest	Do you believe that Jesus can return your sight? Do you believe that he will make you see? It is not a rhetorical or absurd question. It is a test of faith. You now know through experience of your inability to change yourself on your own. Repeat with passionate faith: "Have pity on me, Son of David!"



Saturday December 4th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 30,19-21.23-26 • Mt 9,35-10,1.6-8 	Jesus felt compassion for people because they were distressed and destitute. And to help them he asked his Father to be sent co-workers. His compassion reaches you. Not his reproach. Don't be afraid of Him. His co-workers are not far from you. Give them a chance.
Sunday December 5th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 11,1-10 • Rom 15,4-9 • Mt 3,1-12 	Second Sunday of Advent John the Baptist proclaims: "Be converted... ..Show by your actions that you have returned to God". Your life is peppered with warnings of this kind. Sometimes they spring from tenderness, other times from pain. Pain is usually the loudspeaker of his warnings.
Monday December 6th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 35,1-10 • Lk 5,17-26 	To get closer to Jesus, source of life, sometimes you have to attract attention, to shock someone, break with the norm ... Do not forget that one of the most potent disincentives that stops you from facing up to life is the influence others have over you. If you do not dare to overcome it, you will be paralyzed forever. para siempre.
Tuesday December 7th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 40,1-11 • Mt 18,12-14 	Memorial of St. Ambrose, bishop and doctor You are more important than you think. Even though you neither believe it nor understand it, there is Someone who is looking to give you what you crave. Do not run any more. Allow yourself to be caught by him. Nothing will happen to you. To him you are irreplaceable. He cannot be there without you.
Wednesday December 8th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gén 3,9-15.20 • Lk 1,26-38 	Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (<i>Calendario</i> , pp. 463-468) Mary always said "yes". Before saying it, she was afraid and asked questions. She had her Quid prodest in Nazareth. The invitation of the angel was loaded with promises and risks. She had a struggle within her heart. In the end, she surrendered to the Lord. To live is to trust in him "Let it be done."
Thursday December 9th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 41,13-20 • Mt 11,11-15 	It is a very strong temptation to replace the kingdom of God by the violence of the strong. There is much violence in our world. You have it within you and use it to say "no" to the humble precursors of Jesus. Therefore, "unless you become like children"
Friday December 10th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 48,17-19 • Mt 11,16-19 	Given the possibilities of life which are opening up during Advent do not adopt an attitude of "opposition." Do not entrench yourself under the principle of contradiction and rejection. Jesus gives us a lesson today. Don't play around with him any more, nor immunize yourself against His grace. Don't be a child!

Saturday December 11th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Si 48.1-4.9-11 • Mt 17,10-13 		"But they did not recognize him." Advent is a time of careful training for eyes of faith. It's about looking and getting to see him, to recognize him near to and alive in everything. Never say that he "is not there"; tell Him you don't see him, that he opens your eyes with his hands and places in them two drops of faith.
Sunday December 12th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 35.1-6a. 10 • James 5.7-10 • Mt 11.2-11 	Third Sunday of Advent	Do you have doubts about the coming of Jesus? Do you still doubt that He can transfigure your existence? Look up and carefully identify that crowd of people who have found him and have undergone the metamorphosis of love. Let them tell you about it ...
Monday December 13th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Num 24.2-7.15-17a • Mt 21.23-27 	Memorial of St. Lucy, virgin and martyr	He who does not believe in God will not believe that He intervened in the world. Nobody can convince those who do not believe. Whoever believes in God does not need miracles and he who does not believe in God, no miracle will help him believe. Where do you stand?
Tuesday December 14th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So 3.1-2.9-13 • Mt 21.28-32 	Memorial of St. John of the Cross, priest and doctor	One thing is the will and the other is the desire. They often do not coincide. When God asks you something, it will be more beneficial to say: "I want, although I have no desire" than "I have a great desire but I have no will." Sometimes you have to say with humility: "I want, but I can not."
Wednesday December 15th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 45.6b-8.18.21b-25 • Lk 7.19-23 		No need to wait for anyone other than Jesus. Do not be confused about your hopes. His arrival will be recognized by clear signs: the transition from blindness to vision, from laziness to diligent service, from falsehood to truth, from selfishness to self-surrender. And blessed are you if you keep your trust in Him!
Thursday December 16th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 54.1-10 • Lk 7.24-30 		How to recognize the messenger who prepares the way for the Lord? The true messenger will guide us to the critical, inevitably risky point, of conversion. Make contact with him and you will never be the same the same! He will plunge you into a painful but healthy crisis. There is usually no conversion during quiet times.
Friday December 17th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gen 49.1-2.8-10 • Mt 1.1-17 		Jesus' genealogy seeks to emphasize that Jesus is human, He is Emmanuel, and that history has meaning. If you interpret this correctly, you will understand this: He is close to you and your story has a direction. Your deeper identity will be uncovered by Him, shining His light into your darkness and brightness.

Saturday December 18th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jer 23.5-8 • Mt 1.18-24 	Joseph does not use his right to bring down the weight of the law on Mary but shows mercy. Consequently he is admitted into the Kingdom. Against all human logic, compassion is the key that opens the doors of the Kingdom. An angel in a dream recommends this.
Sunday December 19th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 7.10-14 • Rom 1.1-7 • Mt 1.18-24 	Fourth Sunday of Advent In times of darkness and turmoil, of disorientation, of discouragement, shadows of temptation, that's when angels appear! Not devils! They open windows to the future ... In Joseph's <i>Quid Prodest</i> there was a voice that explained how God acts. Briefly. In detail.
Monday December 20th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 7.10-14 • Lk 1.26-38 	"The Lord is with you," he said to Mary. He also says it to you. It wasn't you who sought the Lord, it was him who sought you and has placed himself at your side. Occasionally you may have felt abandoned, but, like Mary, ask God and ponder on his answers in your heart.
Tuesday December 21st	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Song 2.8-14 • So 3, 14-18a) • Lk 1.39-45 	When they met, Mary and Elizabeth understood each other before saying anything. They were both on the same wavelength immediately. How could they understand each other without speaking? Such is the miracle of the communion: The other person lets you cross the threshold of his secrets only if you look with eyes that give up competing or seducing, or if you've shaken off your pride and offer tenderness.
Wednesday December 22nd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Sam 1.24-28 • Lk 1.46-56 	It is very useful not only to recite the Psalms, but to memorize them in order to bring them to mind at all times. They give shape to your feelings and help you understand how God is accomplishing his mission amidst the ever changing events of History. Just like Mary.
Thursday December 23rd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mal 3.1-4.23-24 • Lk 1.57-66 	Birth of St. Anthony M. Claret (<i>Calendario</i> , pp. 469-474) To give a name to a child was a means of expressing the identity of that child and his place amongst the offspring of the parents. God is renamed the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. From that time, as happened with the prophets, they were dedicated to the mission he entrusted them. You have a name and a mission assigned by God. You will be unhappy if you're not true to your deeper identity.
Friday December 24th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Sam 7.1-5.8b-12.14a.16 • Lk 1.67-79 	If someone has saved us from some danger, we will be grateful to them forever. Today may be a good day for reconciling yourself with your past (He has saved you from many dangers) and also with your future (He will accompany you in your future difficulties). You can live with confidence.

5. Notes for the community encounter

1. INTRODUCTION AND MOTIVATION

After a short prayer, the person who leads the community meeting should activate the community encounter, advising how it should proceed:

- It is recommended that everyone should take their own copy of booklet 1 of the Forge and his own personal notes.
- The purpose of the encounter is to share. We are not talking about reaching agreement on anything, but to listen to the others and to be involved yourself.
- The person who leads the meeting should monitor carefully the use of time so that everybody can have their say.

2. DIALOGUE

- You should begin **by inviting members to describe to the others their own personal work** on the Forge booklet. Two questions could help open the discussion:

- How has your work progressed? Difficulties, surprises.....
- Your opinion on the results of your work.

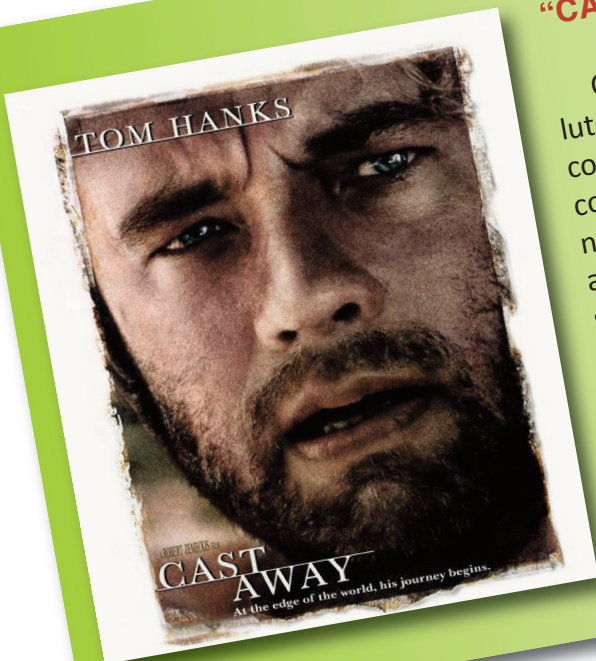
- Afterwards, **everybody should comment on these points:**

- What outward differences do we see between an entrenched Claretian and one who is searching?
- What are the motives for an established Claretian to remain so, without any strong desire for growth? Are any of the causes evident amongst us?
- What else can help us to make the shift from entrenchment to productive activity?

The final balance

Throughout Advent you have tried to "**become aware**" of the moment of time where you are. Summarize and evaluate the process experienced, considering the period as a whole. Write answers in your notebook to these issues:

1. **How did you feel during this first phase?** What impression of the work do you have?
2. In short, **what does the expression *Quid Prodest* mean for you?** How would you translate it?
3. **What callings (lights, motions) have you experienced** that seem to take you in the direction of the Spirit? Describe them.
4. What would you have to consider **to make better use of your ordinary everyday life?**



“CAST AWAY”

Chuck Noland, an engineer with FedEx, whose life is absolutely governed by the clock, suffered a plane crash and becomes the only survivor on a remote island. Stripped of the conveniences of everyday life, he must first meet the basic needs for survival, including water, food and shelter. He, who always found a solution to the problems, must find a way to sustain physically. What next? Here starts the real Chuck's personal journey, his *Quid Prodest* more crude. His ability to persevere and to hope are a product of their experiences. While the conclusion of history can not be a conventional ending for Hollywood, is, like life, full of truth, pain and promise.



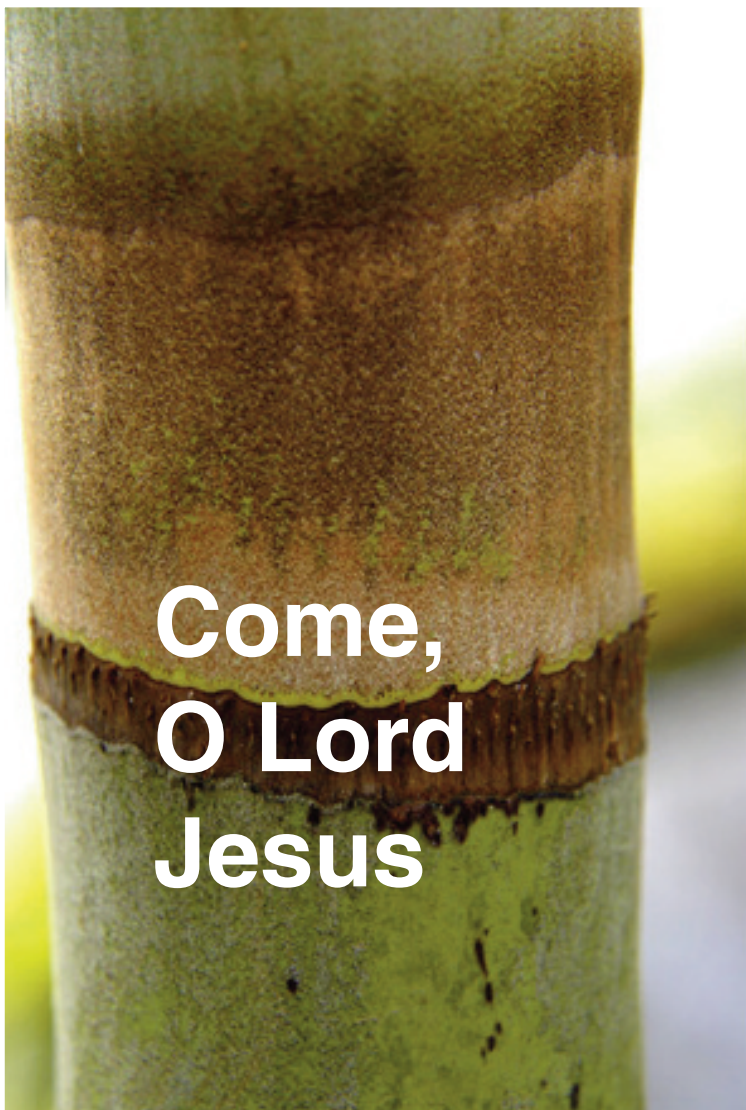
“REGARDING HENRY”

Henry is a very busy man both in his working life and in his social and family life, which makes him an impulsive person with a high professional ambition. In his family life he goes along a parallel path, perhaps not devoting to it the time it deserves. Her daughter "Linda" perceived distance with her father and subsequently she will pen another different path. After the beginning of the film, everything changes when Henry suffered a stroke which makes him to lose his memory. Very slowly he regains his mental and physical functions by acquiring other emotional and moral values. Then he realizes that he has committed many injustices both in his professional and in his family life. Now he will try to remedy them. The slow process of transformation is a wonderful parable of *Quid Prodest*. We do not disclose the outcome of the story, where even the dog seems to "talk."



“SCENT OF A WOMAN”

Charlie is a scholarship in one of the best schools in the U.S. During winter break, he decides to work and save money, instead of going home like most of their peers. The work we get is caring for Frank Slade, a retired military officer, blind and maniacal as he prepares for the final weekend of his life, making a trip to New York. Charlie Simms, a correct student who is almost forty years younger than him, does not know that Slade is planning to enjoy as much as possible before putting an end to his horrible life. The young boy who must accompany an irascible captain, drinker and womanizer, will receive a series of lessons that he will never forget.



6. To go deeper

Appendix I: YOU HAVE TO TRY TO GROW, NOT BE PERFECT (John Powell)

It seemed that everything was so noble, so generous and even-I said in my own heart- so holy ... "It reaches the maximum. Surrender yourself completely. Do not settle for less. "The grandiloquence of my enthusiasm to do everything possible, to be the best possible, made fire circulate in my veins. But the grandiloquence also betrayed the reality, because it was not realistic. Nothing is ever perfect. My "best possible" was always flawed. The results of my passion for perfection left a bitter taste in my mouth. In the depths of my being there always sounded a weak and prolonged wail: "But ... if I've worked so hard, if I have given everything I had, if I have put all my efforts ... " Afterwards, I punched the ground in frustration and then raised my fists to the sky, but it didn't give me any relief. I had no choice but to admit that I am imperfect, that I make mistakes. I share in the human condition, which is typified by trial and error. I tried to hide it or deny it in every way possible; I tried to pretend that I had everything under control. But despite the concealment and deception, I knew from the beginning that my performance would never live up to my dreams, would never be perfect.

Appendix II: FR CLARET'S TIMETABLE

For P. Claret this year -1863- was quieter than previous ones, which does not mean that he was more rested. In the absence of important trips, he says, "I had more time to devote to preaching, the confessional and writing books and pamphlets." The objectives are almost equal to those of 1862. He puts demands on meekness, because it was the goal that he found hardest to achieve given the impertinence of the people. In Lights and graces you notice a spiritual movement that does not yet form part of his overall plan: it is to live fully in the filial love of the Father: to love God as Jesus did, being a lover as the Son was. These exercises were completed at El Escorial.



The overall plan of the Exercises (made in 1863) From October 23rd to November 1st inclusive

1. Each year I will do the holy exercises.
2. Each month, a focused day of retreat.
3. Each week I will go to confession.
4. Each week I will fast three days, which will be Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, and on the same days in the evening I will abstain from the dessert.
5. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday I will take the discipline or something equivalent. On Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday I'll wear the cilice.
6. During prayer I will think of the Mysteries. I will avoid rushing; I will remember the rebuke suffered by St Catherine of Sienna (p.69). St Luis spent at least an hour in prayer just to say Matins (p. 191).
7. I will pay particular attention to meekness. I will remember the meekness of Jesus, model and teacher, who says, Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.
I will remember the meekness of the Most Holy Mary, who never even once was moved to anger, nor ever lost the most perfect meekness with immutable and inimitable equanimity, both interior and exterior, without ever seeing signs of it on her face, in her voice; nor even her movements revealed any internal vibrations of anger (t.2p.276).
I will consider its usefulness, because humility is pleasing to God, and meekness to others. It is better to do less with patience, meekness and kindness, than to do more in haste, anger, annoyance and grumpiness, which will be offensive to people.
8. I will never get annoyed, I'll remain quiet and offer everything to God that gives me grief.
9. I will never complain, I will be resigned to the will of God who has ordained it so for my own good. Poverty, humiliation, pain and contempt.
10. I will always be kind to everyone, particularly to those who most annoy me.

Appendix III: PSALM 137 – MAKE SURE YOU FINISH THE WORK OF YOUR HANDS

The Lord will carry out his plans for me. Lord, your mercy is everlasting; do not leave incomplete the work of your hands. "

Comforting words, if any. "The Lord will carry out his plans for me." I know you have plans for me, Lord, you have begun your work and want to bring to fruition what has begun. That's enough. With that I can rest. I'm in good hands. The work has begun. It will not be interrupted mid-way. You promised that you will finish it. Thank you, Lord.

You yourself spoke reproachfully of the man who begins and doesn't finish a job: the farmer who looks behind him halfway along the furrow, the surveyor who leaves the tower half-finished. That means that you, Lord, are not like that. You plough the furrow to the end, you finish the tower, you make sure the job is completed. I am your work. Your hands have made me, and your grace has brought me to where I am. Do not shirk your responsibility, Lord. Do not leave me high and dry. Don't give up on your work. It is your reputation, Lord. Let no person see me and say: "He started to build and could not finish." It will bring a happy ending to what you have begun in me, Lord.

You have given me the desires; give me now the means to fulfil those desires. You invited me to take my vows; give

me strength now to fulfil them; you called me to put me on the road towards you; give me now the determination to get there. Why did you call me, if you were not going to continue calling me? Why did you make me leave, if you had no intention of making sure I arrive? Why did you give me your hand, if then you were going to let go halfway? That is not the way to do it, Lord ...

I am constantly on the move, and I am experiencing difficulty, fatigue, doubt. So I console myself thinking about the seriousness of your words and the strength of your promise. "The Lord will carry out his plans for me." That statement gives me hope when I lack the strength, and gives me encouragement when my faith falters. I can fail, but you do not. You've committed to my cause. And you fulfil your promise to the end.

Let me express my faith in a prayer, my own conviction in a humble prayer, with words that you have given me and I delight in pronouncing: "Lord, make sure you complete the work of your hands!"

Appendix IV: THE TRAIN (Leonard Boff)

A train moving, beautiful and fast, to its destination. It cuts across the fields like an arrow. It penetrates the mountains. It crosses rivers. It crosses cities. It slides like a mechanical snake, without hindrance. It's shape, it's heat, it's speed: everything balanced perfectly.

Inside the train there develops a drama: the drama of humanity. People of every race: people who talk and people who are silent. People working and people resting. People enjoying the scenery. Preoccupied people doing business. People who are born and people who die. People who love and people who secretly hate. People who even argue about the direction of the train: the train took a wrong turn! People who believe they are on the wrong train. People who protest, even against the train itself: they should never have built trains because ...! People who design faster trains. People who gratefully accept the train, enjoying and celebrating their benefits. People who do not make a fuss: they know that it will get safely to their destination. Why worry? People who feverishly run towards the carriages at the head of the train because they want to arrive quicker! Contradictory people, who go in the opposite direction to the train, stupidly walking towards the guards-van at the end: they would like to flee the train!

And the train keeps running, impassive, to its predetermined destination. It transports everyone patiently, without distinguishing between the embittered and committed person. Neither does it refuse to courteously transport its detractors. No one is denied. And to everyone is offered the opportunity to have a wonderful and happy trip, and the guarantee of reaching the city of the sun and relaxation.

The trip is free for everyone. No one can leave or break out. We live inside the train. And that's where freedom is exercised: you can go forwards or backwards; it is possible to change the carriages or leave them as they are; you can enjoy the scenery or be bored along with your neighbours; it is possible to gratefully accept or bitterly reject the train. But that does not stop the train from proceeding towards its destination nor courteously admitting everyone on board.

And there are people who welcome the train, are glad of its existence, and take delight in its speed, who enjoy watching the scenery and making friends with fellow travellers. It strives to make everyone feel at ease, it rails against those who damage the furnishings or annoy their fellow travellers. Don't miss the purpose of the journey, neither because of the travails nor the gratification of freedom. It is wonderful that there is a train and can take us so quickly towards the fatherland, where everyone is eagerly anticipated, where there will be warm embraces and where love will never end!

And you, reader, in what direction will you travel?

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The Forge in our daily life

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