

# THE FORGE IN OUR DAILY LIFE

Quid Prodest

Christmas

2

AND HE DWELT AMONG US

# 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. Starting from life

**T**oday is Christmas Day. Perhaps your surroundings are filled with colorful decorative symbols and expressions of Christmas wishes, etc. Maybe the people around you began these preparations before the end of November. Mass media advertisements may have reduced the shine of this festival's atmosphere. You may remember the joy you felt when you celebrated this day with your family members, since this is the day for families to come together. You too may have enjoyed some of the material preparations for this celebration. Possibly you have shared your joy in ways such as sending greeting cards to your nearest and dearest ones, buying special gifts for important people in your life, decorating your house with special lights, crib settings, etc.

Along with these preparations, you will have begun a spiritual preparation for Christmas with the liturgical Advent celebrations. During the advent season, you prepared yourself to be awake for the Lord's coming. You have prayed with the Church, "Come, Lord". You have journeyed with St. John the Baptist to prepare the way for the Lord

and discovered that you are called to make an inward journey. You would have had time to think of your vocation when you read the calls of Mary, Joseph, Zachariah, etc. Perhaps you would have been moved to reflect, comparing your past spiritual practices with the present ones to better celebrate this feast day meaningfully. All these preparations aim at deepening our awareness of our worth by collaborating with the grace of the Lord.

This year the Advent season opened your way to enter into the forge experience in our daily life by its *Quid Prodest* invitation to examine the meaning of your life. This Christmas season is an encouragement for you to look into yourself in the light of its gospel characters and important feast days. The major events and persons of this season can lead you to better understand yourself: the Holy Family, shepherds, three wise men, New Year,

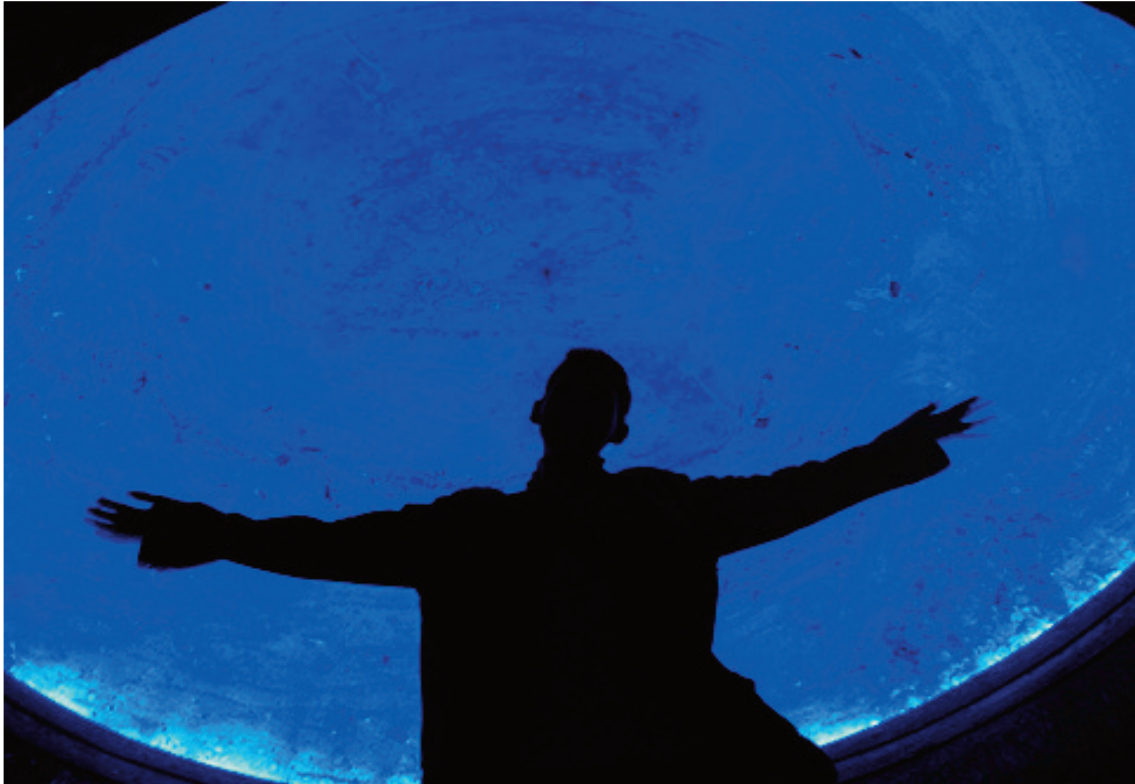
the solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God and the Baptism of the Lord will invite and encourage you to continue your search to find yourself with the Lord.

In order to begin your *Quid Prodest* journey during this Christmas season,





## 2. Reflection



### You are a very precious person

“The Word became Flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1, 14). These words of St. John remind us that God has become a human person like us. The aim of this Emmanuel God is his total participation and solidarity with our weaknesses and mortality. Through this he reminds us that he is always with us. The beauty of this God is in his generosity to put on himself our ugliness. His self-emptying to become like a sinful human being (2Cor 5, 21; Phil 2, 7) shows your importance and preciousness in his eyes.

If God is so generous in accepting you as you are, why don't you recognize your worth? When you have developed your knowledge in so many fields and if you are still not able to know your worth and dignity, “what is the use” of your intellectual caliber? When you are able to appreciate the beauty of people, places and things and yet you are not able to enjoy the beauty of your human side, what are you going to achieve in life? What are you going to profit by hiding your real self with false masks to present yourself as a loveable person? God's incarnation invites you to accept your real self as you are. This is the beginning of your reverence and recognition of his incarnation in your life.

## Exercise 1: My Christmas experience

As an exercise to help you value your life more and more in the light of the Lord's incarnation, you are invited to follow these suggestions:

During this Christmas season, whenever you go to the community chapel, **try to pay attention of the statue of the child Jesus** and become aware of your childhood days and your growth. Discover the positive and negative sides of your life in the process of your growth. Be thankful for all these experiences.

Or

If you are interested you may do **an exercise to help you discover your strengths and weaknesses**:

Write down on your Forge exercise note book, some of the **notable positive and negative sides of your life**.

Observe your internal reaction while writing them down. While doing it, try to be aware your defense mechanisms.

Sometimes we experience within us a sense that even if God accepts us, we find it difficult to accept our defects and be reconciled within us. **Try to accept your negative sides as a fact of your life.**







## Exercise 2: My crib

Why don't you **make a crib** setting in your room and observe your internal reactions while doing it?

Or

Take time **to observe the press and T. V. commercial advertisements** of this season and be in touch with your internal reactions.

Or

If you sense within yourself a resistance to doing these exercises, don't worry about it. **Just be in touch with those internal movements.** This will help you know yourself.

In the following outline of the picture of the birth of Christ, you find various biblical characters involved in the birth narrative of Jesus. **Try to notice who you identify with and your place in the story.** What do you think are the reasons for this?



### My origins: my family

The Emmanuel God has promised that he would be with his chosen ones till the end of the world (Mt. 28, 20). He accompanies us from the beginning of our existence through our parents, brothers, sisters and others. Their presence in our life has formed us in many ways. All of us have got both positive and negative experiences of our families: love, rejection, anger, poverty, comfort, etc. Because of this our actual behavior pattern has got something to do with these opening experiences. In this process, our parents and families have played a vital role in our human and Christian formation.

Your reaction to these experiences may be a sense of gratitude. If you have brothers and sisters, you may explore the blessings of similarities and





differences, likes and dislikes among you. At the same time, you may have some unforgettable negative moments in your family life. These may still disturb you even now. Carrying this pain throughout your life is not healthy. Looking at those experiences positively and mending the broken relationship will make you happy, because you are called to learn the art of being happy and content despite the problems.

The **feast of the Holy Family** is an invitation for you to be in touch with your family. To value the importance of your family in your life. Try to return to your childhood by doing the following exercise:

## Exercise 3: My home and my family

- **Take a photo of your house** and try to still be amazed at your house, remember its surroundings, the neighbors, the household animals your family had, the smell of the garden, stable, etc.
- **Take your family photo** and pay attention on each member of your family. Remember some important events of every person of your family. Be aware of your emotions while looking at them. Try to be aware of their roles in forming you. Every member has got a message for you. Try to listen to them. If you have any painful negative experiences with any of them try to be aware of them and be reconciled with them.





## Friends and know persons

The Christmas season brings to us the feast of St. John, the apostle. According to the gospels, he was the best friend of Jesus. Wherever Jesus went, he too was there. He was very close to Jesus (Jn 13, 23) even in the crucial moment of his death (Jn 19, 26). Besides, Jesus called his disciples friends on the basis of his openness with them (Jn 15, 12-17). There were some women followers who were blessed with his friendship (Lk8, 1-4). He was also seen by the Pharisees as being the friend of tax collectors and sinners (Mt. 11, 19). His friendship with them came from his deliberate option for the lowest persons of the society (Mt. 9, 12). His decision to be their friends shows his self emptying to become one among them (Phil 2, 7; Heb 2, 17).

In our lives the role of our friends also play an important part in our formation. They help us to discover ourselves. Friendship is a sacred bond without any formally signed agreements and conditions. While we are born as brothers and sisters in our families, we become friends by our choice of people. This is the result of a pure personal decision to welcome and accept others in our life. It is with these friends we open ourselves for consolation and guidance.

Perhaps you may remember certain friends who have helped you in many ways. Perhaps you don't have real friends and prefer to be superficial in order to avoid personal commitments. Perhaps you may be scared of friendships because of certain experiences like betrayals, profit making, back biting, open confrontations, challenges, etc. You





might have lost or broken friendships because of jealousy, pride, dominating characters, lack of delicacy, disrespect for personal boundaries, doubting, etc.

The feast of St. John is a call for you to check whether your friendships have really helped you to know yourself better. The principle of *Quid Prodest* questions you: while you may know and have wide contact with many people, yet if you don't have a friend of you can confide in, what is the use having so many persons around you? If you want only to be liked or pleasing to all, and are afraid of your friend pointing out your drawbacks, what is the use of being liked by people? If you want to guide people and you don't want to be truly guided by your friends, then what is use of your guidance to other people? Do your relationships with other people help you to know and be who you are?

The following exercises are offered to you to aid you in deepening your awareness of the importance of your friends and others in order to help you know yourself better:

**12** And He dwelt among us.





## Exercise 4: Christmas greetings

- **Collect the Christmas cards and gifts you have received;** look at the messages and remember the role and influence of those friends and people in your life.
- Some people become our friends and some are chosen as friends: in the list of your friends, **find out those persons whom you chose to be your friends and those persons who became your friends.**
- Try to identify those persons who were friends **since your childhood** and become aware of their role in forming you.
- In your community context, **do you have friends or you have acquaintances?** If you have friends, what defines them as friends?
- Try to review **your friendship experiences.**

## My community

Our vocational experience is an experience of God as well as a personal experience with one another. Our community is the place to discover our identity in relation with other members. The members of our communities help us to understand ourselves better. The personal project is the result of our interpersonal relationships. The principle of action and reaction, cause and effect helps us to explore in us our reactions to every movement of our community. Therefore our communities have the potential to help us to grow in maturity. In this process of our personal maturity, we are called to face the positive and negative experiences that teach us to discover our true image as people. Certainly our communities can help us to be in touch with ourselves through its positive and negative contributions.

In this sense, are you able to accept that community members are gifts from God? Perhaps certain events in the community may make you hesitant to answer this question. At the same time, you cannot overlook the joy you have enjoyed from the same community. Despite its problematic issues, the difficult moments have brought us all together to live in solidarity. When one suffers all of us suffer, as in the case of our body (1Cor12, 26).

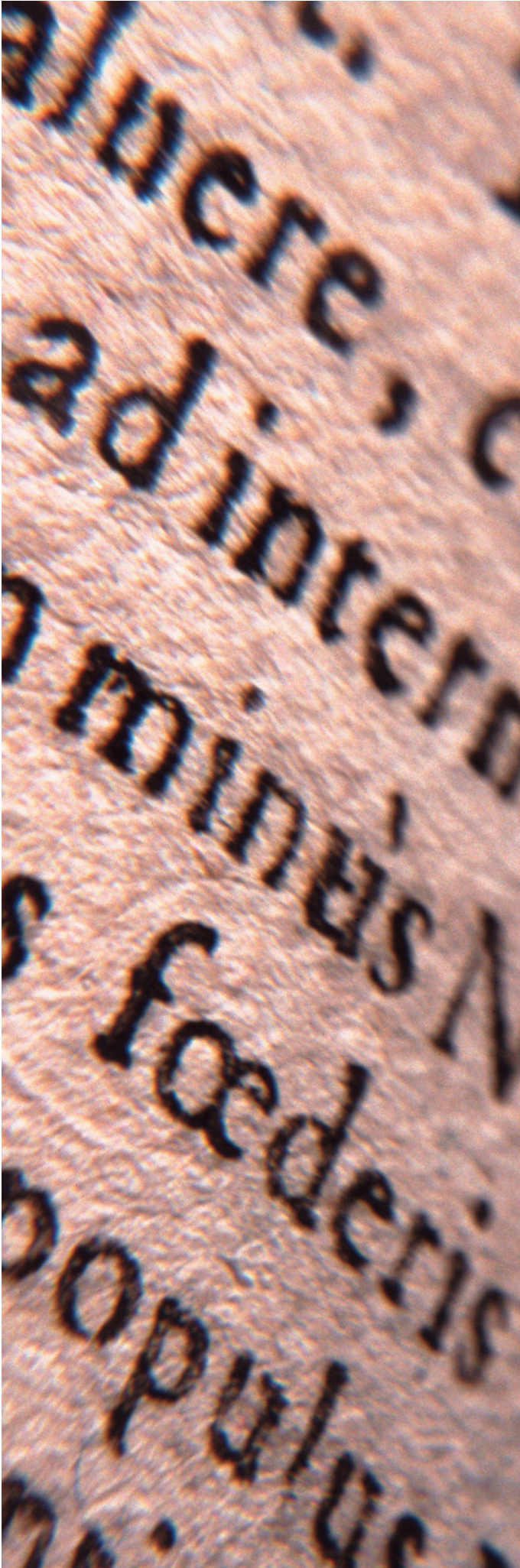




Hence, these personal inner reactions are a call for you to be in relationship with yourself and others. It is there you discover that you are a social being and realize that you are called to live in a family or a community; you are invited to build up family or community. The perseverance in this mission depends on your inner life which leads you to gain yourself by losing certain elements. Your relationship with your inner world is the life in the Spirit who will lead you to take away these unwanted elements and fill it with the one that is necessary (Lk 18, 22).

Your journey in this *Quid Prodest* process invites you to discover the role of the community for your inner life. What have you achieved by being indifferent to the community? What is the use of your negative critical attitude towards the members of your community? What is the use of your meticulous observation of spiritual practices, if you have not grown up in your inner life towards a smooth relationship with others?





The **feast of the Holy Innocents** during this Christmas season is an invitation to examine your reactions towards other people. As Herod felt threatened by the birth of the Messiah, you may experience a feeling of threat or insecurity from others. Life in the Spirit leads us to realize our brokenness which is the first step towards an integrated life. In the light of the role of the community to form your inner self, why don't do the following exercise?

## Exercise 5: The photo of my community

- **Take in your hands the photo of your present community.** Pay attention to every member of the community one by one and observe all your internal reactions.
- What have you gained in self realization through reflection on your relationships with your community?





## My surrounding

When we hear and see the sufferings of human beings, we are moved. We sense within ourselves a sort of reaction towards them. We are unable to resist our compassionate approach to the victims of the tragedies. Because, all that is genuinely human raises an echo in our hearts (GS. 1) In the face of human misery and sufferings, we are unable to turn a blind eye to them. The groaning of these our fellow brethren makes us want to experience their pain within us. We are challenged from within to look at their reality as if it is ours and take it up as our pending task. When Jesus went around the villages and towns and met with the reality of the people, he was overflowing with compassion for them (Mt 9, 36). He listened to them and they spoke to him and waited for a response. Our identification with society depends on how we form our inner self.

We can be amazed at the beauty of nature and human beings. Their mere sight makes us think of their creator, their orderly arrangement and functioning. They challenge us to learn from them and to commit ourselves to preserve them. All this is the result of our capacity for an internal journey which leads us to listen to them. Because their reality is not dumb; it speaks to us.

At the same time, you may have come across people who remain lukewarm to the appeals of the world. They have become hard hearted and don't want to have anything to do with these realities. You may have observed how their selfishness makes them blind to looking at reality with a compassionate heart. Can you consider someone human if they are incapable of listening to the charm and harm of our society? A person can be considered as human on the basis of their capacity for self realization which is developed by their dialogue with their surroundings. Being insensitive to reality is to become blind and ignorant to oneself. We are called "to be attentive to everything that happens in various parts of our world and the Church and to be ready to respond using the missionary criteria..." (MFL 4.d). The listening and response to reality is a fruit of your listening to the Word at the depth of your inner being (Heb 4, 12-13). The presence of the Word provokes you to welcome his appeal from reality. The more you listen to him, the better you realize yourself.

Being updated and making a contemplative reading of reality are the guidelines to strengthen this aspect of listening to God in yourself. While updatedness is the result of your capacity to read the signs of the time with much respect for the reality, the contemplative reading of the reality is your capacity to listening to it with faith and love. Among the various means to mature in these aspects of life, communication media and information technology play a pivotal role.

How do you make use of them? Are they just for your information or they are means to form you into a better person? In the light of the *Quid Prodest* can you say that the internet and other communication media have helped you to listen to yourself with their information boom? Or has your expertise in these fields allowed you to deepen your commitment to gain your identity? On the contrary, what does it profit you if your wider experience in this field has not helped you to realize your worth? If your critical analysis of the reality has not allowed you to make a critical review of your own life, what have you achieved by this knowledge?

The following exercise is offered to help you increase your capacity for listening to the yourself and your surrounding reality. You are invited to share your experiences with your community.



## Exercise 6: Walking around

- **Go for a morning or evening walk** in a particular area of your town. While walking on the streets of this part of the town pay attention to everything you see, look at the various scenes – people with different approaches, shops, vehicles, animals, etc.
- While looking at them, **try to listen to the reactions within you** – emotional, social, political, spiritual, etc.
- You may also do the exercise while traveling in the bus, train, plane, ship etc.



### 3. *Lectio Divina* in this Christmas season

The practice of *Lectio Divina* helps us to remain with the Word of God. Its main objective is to listen to the God who is speaking to us constantly. The *Quid Prodest* is an invitation to learn the art of listening to Our Master's voice in the depths of our heart. During this Christmas season, you are invited to pay attention to the feast days and people appearing in the readings and to try and identify with them, especially with Mary our Mother and St. Joseph who are models of *Quid Prodest*. St. Luke's presentation of Mary pondering the events in her heart shows her docility to listen to God. St. Mathew's presentation of St. Joseph shows his attentive listening to the movements of the Spirit in his inner self.



<b>Saturday 25th December</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is 52,7–10</li> <li>• Jn 1,1–18</li> </ul>	<b>Solemnity of the Na- tivity of the Lord</b> <p>Today we celebrate the joy of God becoming a person like us. The incarnation of God reveals his generosity and recognizes the beauty of being human. His participation in the life of the human society manifests his generosity to accept us as we are. If God is ready to accept us as we are, why can't we accept ourselves and open the way for a joyful living?</p>
<b>Sunday 26th December</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ec 3.2-6.12-14</li> <li>• Mt 2.13-15.19-23</li> </ul>	<b>Feast of the Holy Family</b> <p>The Holy Family is an invitation to be aware of God's love in our families. The commitment of Mary and Joseph to bring up Jesus is a reminder to remember gratefully the generosity and sacrifice of our parents for us. The watchfulness of Mary and Joseph to protect and bring up Jesus is a call for us to examine our alertness to nurture and develop the presence of Jesus in ourselves.</p>
Monday 27th December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1Jn 1,1-4</li> <li>• Jn 20,2–8</li> </ul>	<b>Feast of St John, Apostle and Evange- list</b> ( <i>Calendario Claretiano</i> , 481-486) <p>St. John experienced the friendship of Jesus personally. This friendship helped him to be aware of his rough dealing with the people (sons of thunder). It helped to purify his motivation to be with Jesus (the right to sit on his right side). It revealed his friend's invitation to be close to him in all the moments of his life. It motivated him to be at the side of his friend in his critical moment. It is friendship that helps him know the value of self sacrifice for another.</p>
Tuesday 28th December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1Jn 1,5-2,2</li> <li>• Mt 2.13–18</li> </ul>	<p>Children are the symbols of God's tender loving care for us. Their birth reveals a message of hope and assure us of the future. Their presence demands the right to life and challenges our respect for it. Herod is the symbol of human selfishness and hard heartedness. The inability to welcome and appreciate the diversity of life and the gifts of each one, foster in us Herodian attitudes like an unhealthy competitive approach, rivalry, disrespect for life, hard heartedness before human suffering, domination, etc. Holy innocents call us to be tender in our dealings with others.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1Jn 2,3–11</li> <li>• Lc 2.22–35</li> </ul>	<p>Simeon was a man led by the Spirit. He had the capacity to listen to the Spirit who inspired him to go to the temple to meet the Lord. It is very interesting to an elderly man recognizing God's arrival in the form of a little child. People who have heart listening to God are capable of humbling themselves to recognize and adore the revelation of the divine mystery revealed in ordinary events and people.</p>



Thursday 30th December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1Jn 2.3–11</li> <li>• Lk 2.22–35</li> </ul>	<p>The growth of Jesus in body, strength and wisdom invites us to be aware of our physical, mental and emotional health. Our growth in all these fields is a blessing. Though they may be signs of our weakness, they are also calls to be thankful to God. When we are suffering from sicknesses it reminds us that we are not alone, but accompanied and consoled by various people. When we are healthy, we have to appreciate the beauty of our life; when we are sick we are led to recognize our fragility.</p>
Friday 31st December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1Jn 2.18– 1</li> <li>• Jn 1.1–18</li> </ul>	<p>Today is the last day of the year which offers us an invitation to take time to review our life experience throughout this year. God has shown his accompanying presence through various persons and events. Therefore we are called to be grateful for all his blessings and ask pardon for our ingratitude. Jesus has come closer to us. Did we welcome him to guide us?</p>
Saturday 1st January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nm 6. 22-27</li> <li>• Gal 4. 4-7</li> <li>• Lk 2. 16-21</li> </ul>	<p><b>Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God</b></p> <p>We have received this New Year from the hands of God. Today we remember the past and look to the future with hope. We begin this year of 2011 with the solemnity of our Blessed Mother. St. Luke presents the quality of her heart in his gospel. Her heart pondered all the actions of God in her life. It means that she never forgot the Lord's grace. This shows her life is in touch with her deepest self where she was always hearing the call of God.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is 60.1-6</li> <li>• Ef 3. 2-3a, 5-6</li> <li>• Mt 2.1-12</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 Jn 3. 22 - 4. 6</li> <li>• Mt 4.12-1, 23-25</li> </ul>	<p><b>Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord</b></p> <p>The journey of the wise men in search of the child Jesus is a symbol and invitation for our inner search to encounter God. As they had to face darkness and seek guidance in their journey, we too experience obscure moments and the need for guidance to find that hidden divine presence in us. Our strength in this search is the voice of faith that moves us to go ahead. If only we know how to discern the movements of the Holy Spirit within us, how rich will be our self awareness to lead a life in Him!</p> <p>Mary and Joseph gave the name Jesus to the child as instructed by the angel. This is a holy name because at this name all the world will bow (Phil 1, 10). His name is a powerful one that cast away evil. His name inspired the people for salvation. The name of each person is the embodiment of a personal identity. The holy name of Jesus invites us to examine our commitment to protect the good name of others and to preserve the holiness of our identity.</p>

Tuesday 4th January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 Jn 4. 7-10</li> <li>• Mk 6. 34-44</li> </ul>	<p>Whenever Jesus saw the painful reality of people's lives, he was moved to free them from their pains. Personal experience of his love is the threshold of a life of solidarity. St. Paul was urged by the love of Jesus (2Cor 5, 14). Father Claret tells that he was forced by this love to go from town to town for the sake of the gospel. The experience of God's love will make us realize our unworthiness and lead us to a life of gratitude.</p>
Wednesday 5th January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 Jn 4.11-18</li> <li>• Mk 6.45-52</li> </ul>	<p>The disciples were unable to value the providential care of Jesus for them. Because of this inability they were seeking remedies from outside rather than finding what they were seeking in Jesus himself. Personal experiences with Jesus alone will increase our trust in his providential accompaniment. If we don't recognize the love of Jesus in our personal lives, all our effort to seek him outside will be in vain.</p>
Thursday 6th January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 Jn 4.19-5.4</li> <li>• Lk 4.14-22a</li> </ul>	<p>Jesus expresses the missionary effects of his anointing of the Spirit. These effects reveal his identity as the messenger of good news, the liberator and a healer. The one who is filled by the Holy Spirit has a commitment to live the latter's gifts and fruits in him. Life in the Spirit will lead one to constantly review one's life and to strengthen one's identity.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 Jn 5. 5-13</li> <li>• Lk 5. 12-16</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 Jn 5. 14-21</li> <li>• Jn 3. 22-30</li> </ul>	<p>The healing of a leper by Jesus is an invitation to recognize our own need for our healing. We are physically as well as emotionally sick. Our brokenness is affecting us to the extent of losing the joy of living. Physically we may look healthy, but we may suffer internal wounds. Accepting the compassionate love of Jesus means allowing him to touch us. Love is the only remedy for the internal wounds needing to be healed.</p> <p>The mission statement of John the Baptist was, "he must increase and I must decrease". His vocation was to prepare the way for the Lord. He was very conscious of his mission of bearing witness, to the lamb of God, to the world. Even when the people considered him to be the Messiah, he openly said that he was not. He was faithful to his call of being a forerunner to Christ. So he was bold enough to be what he was. A great temptation for us is to be what we are not and longing to be somebody else. A life of joy consists in the satisfaction with what we have and not longing for what don't have.</p>

**Sunday  
9th January**

- Is 42. 1-4, 6-7
- Acts 10. 34-38
- Mt 3. 13-17

**Feast of  
the  
Baptism  
of the  
Lord**

Baptism is for the forgiveness of sins. Though Jesus was sinless, he identified himself with our sinful condition. In this participation the Father confirms his identity as his Son. We are born as sons of God, through our baptism where we are washed from our sinful condition and become a new creature. This baptism is not a mere ritual but it is a commitment to shed away our sinful ways and begin a new life. Our identity as children of God is preserved through our constant turning away from our sins.





## 4. To go deeper

### Appendix I: A DRY CHRISTMAS (HENRI NOUWEN)

Everything was there to make a splendid Christmas. But I wasn't really there. I felt like a sympathetic observer. I couldn't force myself to feel differently. It just seemed that I wasn't part of it. At times I even caught myself looking at all like an unbeliever who wonders what everybody is so busy and excited about. Spiritually, this is a dangerous attitude. It creates a certain sarcasm, cynicism, and depression. But I didn't want or choose it. I just found myself in a mental state that I could not move out of by my own force.

Still in the midst of it all I saw—even though I did not feel — that this day may prove to be a grace after all. Somehow I realized that songs, music, good feelings, beautiful liturgies, nice presents, big dinners, and many sweet words do not make Christmas. Christmas is saying “yes” to something beyond all emotions and fee-

lings. Christmas is saying “yes” to a hope based on God's initiative, which has nothing to do with what I think or feel. Christmas is believing that the salvation of the world is God's work and not mine. Things will never look just right or feel just right. If they did, someone would be lying. The world is not whole, and today I experienced this fact in my own unhappiness. But it is into this broken world that a child is born who is called Son of the Most High, Prince of Peace, Saviour.

I look at him and pray, “Thank you, Lord, that you came, independent of my feelings and thoughts. Your heart is greater than mine.” Maybe a “Dry” Christmas, a Christmas without much to feel or think, will bring me closer to the true mystery of God-with-us. What it asks is pure, naked faith.

### Appendix II: MEDITATION ON CHRISTMAS (CATHY MOLLOY - KARL RAHNER)

Amidst the hustle and bustle of Christmas many people find themselves drawing breath now and again and wondering what it is all about. On the one hand, there is the exhilaration of the 'season of goodwill', the decorations and seasonal music to brighten all our lives, the getting together with friends or colleagues or family, the special food and present-giving that lifts us right out of the ordinary humdrum existence of short days and long winter nights. Where would we be without it? On the other hand, there are constant reminders that Christmas is not a joyous time for everyone. Loneliness and poverty, homelessness, isolation, hunger and sickness can be exacerbated at Christmastime and we are fairly bombarded with requests to include others at home and far away in our celebration of the great Christian feast. And so we should be.

But what is it all about? What is the meaning of Christmas? What does the Christian feast celebrate? In an essay entitled 'Understanding Christmas', German theologian and Jesuit priest, Karl Rahner, invites readers to an understanding of the meaning of this important Christian celebration. In celebrating the birth of Christ we celebrate the birth of the one in whose death and resurrection Christians have discovered hope and God's 'irrevocable promise of salvation'. The meaning of Christmas is that the emptiness of death is filled with the 'nameless incomprehensibility of God'. (Karl Rahner, 'Understanding Christmas', in *Theological Investigations*, Volume XXIII, New York: The Cross Road Publishing Company, 1992 pp 140-148)

The following extract, the conclusion of Rahner's essay, is offered as a meditative piece, a Christmas 'gift'

to you who are busier than ever because it is Christmas, to you who are exhausted and wondering how it has come to this, to you who are delighted or disaffected, enchanted or alienated, by the excitement and the drama of Christmas.

*Those who in the quiet of peaceful recollection, of docile resignation, in the silent Christmas of their own heart, let the press of things, of people, of desires fall back, which would otherwise obstruct their view of infinity, those who for a while at least extinguish the earthly lights that prevent them from seeing the stars in the sky, only those who, in a silent night of their heart, allow themselves to be called by the ineffable, wordless nearness of God speaking through its own silence, if we have the right ears for it, only they celebrate Christmas as it should be celebrated, if it is not to degenerate into a mere worldly holiday. We should feel as we do on a clear winter night, when we walk under the starry sky: far away the lights of human nearness and the security of home are still calling us. But above us stretches the sky, and we feel the silent night, which may at times impress us as uncanny and frightening, like the quiet nearness of the infinite mystery of our existence that is at once sheltering love and wide expanse.*

*The eternal future has entered our time. Its brightness is still dazzling, so that we believe it to be night. But it is a blessed night, a night that is already warmed and illuminated, a beautiful night, cosy and sheltering, because of the eternal day that it carries in its dark womb. It is silent night, holy night. But it is so for us only if we allow the stillness of that night to enter our inner*

*person, then in our heart too 'all is calm.' And that is not difficult. For such a loneliness and stillness are not heavy. Its only heaviness is that which belongs to all sublime things that are both simple and great.*

*Yes, we are lonely. There exists in our heart an inner land, where we are alone, to which nobody finds the way except God. This innermost unreachable chamber in our heart exists. The question is whether we, in a foolishly guilty way, avoid it, because nobody else and nothing of what is familiar to us on earth can enter into it with us. Let us enter there ever so quietly! Let us shut the door behind us! Let us listen to the ineffable melody that fills the silence of that night. Here the silent and lonely soul sings for the God of her heart her finest and most personal song. And she may be sure that God hears it. For this song no longer has to seek the beloved God beyond the stars in that inaccessible light where he dwells and where no one can see him. Because it is Christmas, because the Word was made flesh, God is near, and the faintest word in the quiet chamber of our heart, the word of love, reaches his ear and his heart.*

*We must be quiet and not fear the night, else we will hear nothing. For the ultimate message is uttered only in the night's stillness ever since, through the gracious arrival of the Word into the night of our life, Christmas' silent night, holy night came down among us.*

## Appendix III: CHRISTMAS CAROLS

### Silent night

Silent night, holy night  
All is calm, all is bright  
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child  
Holy Infant so tender and mild  
Sleep in heavenly peace  
Sleep in heavenly peace

Silent night, holy night!  
Shepherds quake at the sight  
Glories stream from heaven afar  
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!  
Christ, the Saviour is born  
Christ, the Saviour is born

Silent night, holy night  
Son of God, love's pure light  
Radiant beams from Thy holy face  
With the dawn of redeeming grace  
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth  
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth

## O Come All Ye Faithful

O Come All Ye Faithful  
Joyful and triumphant,  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.  
Come and behold Him,  
Born the King of Angels;  
O Come All Ye Faithful  
Joyful and triumphant,  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.  
Come and behold Him,  
Born the King of Angels;  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
Christ the Lord.

O Sing, choirs of angels,  
Sing in exultation,  
Sing all that hear in heaven God's holy word.  
Give to our Father glory in the Highest;  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
Christ the Lord.

All Hail! Lord, we greet Thee,  
Born this happy morning,  
O Jesus! for evermore be Thy name adored.  
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
Christ the Lord.

## Appendix IV: A TOUCH OF HUMOR

*Here are some actual announcements taken from Church Bulletins.*

- Don't let worry kill you -- Let the church help.
- Thursday night -- potluck supper. Prayer and medication to follow.
- Remember in prayer the many who are sick of our church and the community.
- For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.
- The rosebud on the altar this morning is to announce the birth of David Alan Belzer, the son of Rev. and Mrs. Julius Belzer.
- This afternoon there will be a meeting in the south and north ends of the church. Children will be baptized at both ends.
- Tuesday at 4:-00 p.m. there will be an ice cream social. All ladies giving milk will please come early.



- Wednesday, the Ladies Liturgy Society will meet. Mrs. Jones will sing "Put Me In My Little Bed" accompanied by the pastor.

- Thursday at 5:00 p.m. there will be a meeting of the Little Mothers Club. All wishing to become little mothers, please see the minister in his study.

- This being Easter Sunday, we will ask Mrs. Lewis to come forward and lay an egg on the altar.

- The service will close with "Little Drops Of Water," One of the ladies will start quietly, and the rest of the congregation will join in.

- Next Sunday, a special collection will be taken to defray the cost of the new carpet. All those wishing to do something on the new carpet will come forward and get a piece of paper.

- The ladies of the church have cast off clothing of every kind and they may be seen in the church basement Friday.

- A bean supper will be held on Tuesday evening in the church hall. Music will follow.

- At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be "What Is Hell?" -- come early and listen to our choir practice.



## Appendix V: CHRISTMAS SERMON ON PEACE, 1967 (MARTIN LUTHER KING)

It really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. We are made to live together because of the interrelated structure of reality. Did you ever stop to think that you can't leave for your job in the morning without being dependent on most of the world? You get up in the morning and go to the bathroom and reach over for the sponge, and that's handed to you by a Pacific Islander. You reach for a bar of soap, and that's given to you at the hands of a Frenchman. And then you go into the kitchen to drink your coffee for the morning, and that's poured into your cup by a South American. And maybe you want tea: that's poured into your cup by a Chinese. Or maybe you're desirous of having cocoa for breakfast, and that's poured into your cup by a West African. And then you reach over for your toast, and that's given to you at the hands of an English-speaking farmer, not to mention the baker. And before you finish eating breakfast in the morning, you've depended on more than half the world. This is the way our universe is structured; this is its interrelated quality. We aren't going to have peace on Earth until we recognize this basic fact of the interrelated structure of all reality.





## Appendix VI: CHRISTMAS HOMILY, 2009 (BENEDICT XVI)

For most people, the things of God are not given priority, they do not impose themselves on us directly, and so the great majority of us tend to postpone them. First we do what seems urgent here and now. In the list of priorities God is often more or less at the end. We can always deal with that later, we tend to think. The Gospel tells us: God is the highest priority. If anything in our life deserves haste without delay, then, it is God's work alone. The Rule of Saint Benedict contains this teaching: "Place nothing at all before the work of God (i.e. the divine office)". For monks, the Liturgy is the first priority. Everything else comes later. In its essence, though, this saying applies to everyone. God is important, by far the most important thing in our lives. The shepherds teach us this priority. From them we should learn not to be crushed by all the pressing matters in our daily lives. From them we should learn the inner freedom to put other tasks in second place -- however important they may be -- so as to make our way towards God, to allow him into our lives and into our time. Time given to God and, in his name, to our neighbour is never time lost. It is the time when we are most truly alive, when we live our humanity to the full.

Some commentators point out that the shepherds, the simple souls, were the first to come to Jesus in the manger and to encounter the Redeemer of the world. The wise men from the East, representing those with social standing and fame, arrived much later. The commentators go on to say: this is quite natural. The shepherds lived nearby. They only needed to "come over" (cf. Lk 2:15), as we do when we go to visit our neighbours. The wise men, however, lived far away. They had to undertake a long and arduous journey in order to arrive in Bethlehem. And they needed guidance and direction. Today too there are simple and lowly souls who live very close to the Lord. They are, so to speak, his neighbours and they can easily go to see him. But most of us in the world today live far from Jesus Christ, the incarnate God who came to dwell amongst us.

We live our lives by philosophies, amid worldly affairs and occupations that totally absorb us and are a great distance from the manger. In all kinds of ways, God has to prod us and reach out to us again and again, so that we can manage to escape from the muddle of our thoughts and activities and discover the way that leads to him. But a path exists for all of us. The Lord provides everyone with tailor-made signals. He calls each one of us, so that we too can say: "Come on, 'let us go over' to Bethlehem -- to the God who has come to meet us. Yes indeed, God has set out towards us. Left to ourselves we could not reach him. The path is too much for our strength. But God has come down. He comes

towards us. He has travelled the longer part of the journey. Now he invites us: come and see how much I love you. Come and see that I am here. *Transeamus usque Bethlehem*, the Latin Bible says. Let us go there! Let us surpass ourselves! Let us journey towards God in all sorts of ways: along our interior path towards him, but also along very concrete paths -- the Liturgy of the Church, the service of our neighbour, in whom Christ awaits us.

Let us once again listen directly to the Gospel. The shepherds tell one another the reason why they are setting off: "Let us see this thing that has happened." Literally the Greek text says: "Let us see this Word that has occurred there." Yes indeed, such is the radical newness of this night: the Word can be seen. For it has become flesh. The God of whom no image may be made -- because any image would only diminish, or rather distort him -- this God has himself become visible in the One who is his true image, as Saint Paul puts it (cf. 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15). In the figure of Jesus Christ, in the whole of his life and ministry, in his dying and rising, we can see the Word of God and hence the mystery of the living God himself. This is what God is like.

The Angel had said to the shepherds: "This will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger" (Lk 2:12; cf. 2:16). God's sign, the sign given to the shepherds and to us, is not an astonishing miracle. God's sign is his humility. God's sign is that he makes himself small; he becomes a child; he lets us touch him and he asks for our love. How we would prefer a different sign, an imposing, irresistible sign of God's power and greatness! But his sign summons us to faith and love, and thus it gives us hope: this is what God is like. He has power, he is Goodness itself. He invites us to become like him. Yes indeed, we become like God if we allow ourselves to be shaped by this sign; if we ourselves learn humility and hence true greatness; if we renounce violence and use only the weapons of truth and love.

Yes indeed, that is what we should pray for on this Holy Night. Lord Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem, come to us! Enter within me, within my soul. Transform me. Renew me. Change me, change us all from stone and wood into living people, in whom your love is made present and the world is transformed. Amen.

## Appendix VII: SERMON ON CHRISTMAS MORNING (T. OF CANTERBURY - T. S. ELIOT)

*"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace,  
good will toward men."*

The fourteenth verse of the second chapter of the  
Gospel according to Saint Luke.  
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of  
the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Dear children of God, my sermon this morning will be a very short one. I wish only that you should ponder and meditate on the deep meaning and mystery of our masses of Christmas Day. For whenever Mass is said, we re-enact the Passion and Death of Our Lord; and on this Christmas Day we do this in celebration of His Birth. So that at the same moment we rejoice in His coming for the salvation of men, and offer again to God His Body and Blood in sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. It was in this same night that has just passed, that a multitude of the heavenly host appeared before the shepherds at Bethlehem, saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men"; at this same time of all the year that we celebrate at once the Birth of Our Lord and His Passion and Death upon the Cross. Beloved, as the World sees, this is to behave in a strange fashion. For who in the World will both mourn and rejoice at once and for the same reason? For either joy will be overcome by mourning or mourning will be cast out by joy; so that it is only in these our Christian mysteries that we can rejoice and mourn at once for the same reason. But think for a while on the meaning of this word "peace." Does it seem strange to you that the angels should have announced Peace, when ceaselessly the world has been stricken with War and the fear of War? Does it seem to you that the angelic voices were mistaken, and that the promise was a disappointment and a cheat?

Reflect now, how Our Lord Himself spoke of Peace. He said to His disciples: "My peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." Did He mean peace as we think of it: the kingdom of England at peace with its neighbors, the barons at peace with the King, the household counting over his peaceful gains, the swept hearth, his best wine for a friend at the table, his wife singing to the children? Those men His disciples knew no such things: they went forth to journey afar, to suffer by land and sea, to know torture, imprisonment, disappointment, to suffer death by martyrdom. What then did He mean? If you ask that, remember that He said also, "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you." So then, He gave to his disciples peace, but not peace as the world gives.

Consider also one thing of which you have probably never thought. Not only do we at the feast of Christmas celebrate at once Our Lord's Birth and His Death: but on the next day we celebrate the martyrdom of his first martyr, the blessed Stephen. Is it an accident, do you think, that the day of the first martyr follows immediately the day of the Birth of Christ? By no means. Just as we rejoice and mourn at once, in the Birth and Passion of Our Lord; so also, in a smaller figure, we both rejoice and mourn in the death of martyrs. We mourn, for the sins of the world that has martyred them; we rejoice, that another soul is numbered among the Saints in Heaven, for the glory of God and for the salvation of men.

Beloved, we do not think of a martyr simply as a good Christian who has been killed because he is a Christian: for that would be solely to mourn. We do not think of him simply as a good Christian who has been elevated to the company of the Saints: for that would be simply to rejoice: and neither our mourning nor our rejoicing is as the world's is. A Christian martyrdom is no accident. Saints are not made by accident. Still less is a Christian martyrdom the effect of a man's will to become a Saint, as a man by willing and contriving may become a ruler of men. Ambition fortifies the will of man to become ruler over other men: it operates with deception, cajolery, and violence, it is the action of impurity upon impurity. Not so in Heaven. A martyr, a saint, is always made by the design of God, for His love of men, to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to His ways. A martyrdom is never the design of man; for the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, not lost it but found it, for he has found freedom in submission to God. The martyr no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of martyrdom. So thus as on earth the Church mourns and rejoices at once, in a fashion that the world cannot understand; so in Heaven the Saints are most high, having made themselves most low, seeing themselves not as we see them, but in the light of the Godhead from which they draw their being.

I have spoken to you today, dear children of God, of the martyrs of the past, asking you to remember especially our martyr of Canterbury, the blessed Archbishop Elphege; because it is fitting, on Christ's birthday, to remember what is that peace which he brought; and because, dear children, I do not think that I shall ever preach to you again; and because it is possible that in a short time you may have yet another martyr, and that one perhaps not the last. I would have you keep in your hearts these words that I say, and think of them at another time. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.





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# La Fragua en la Vida Cotidiana

*Quid Prodest - 2011*

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misioneros claretianos