

THE FORGE IN OUR DAILY LIFE

Quid Prodest

4

Lent

ON THE ROAD TO EASTER

The Forge in Our Daily Life

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

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 inspire an attitude of authenticity while 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. “I will lead her once more into the desert where I can speak to her tenderly”

We have arrived at the season of Lent. Perhaps it is the liturgical season where the message of *Quid Prodest* echoes the loudest: the urgency of assessing the value of your life and choosing the right path. You have forty days to deepen your insight and to get into shape. Throughout this period you will have the opportunity to study the current phase of your life in depth and, guided by the Word of God, you will be able to enter the desert so that God can talk to you tenderly. You will have the chance to identify your temptations and to learn how to face up to them (first week). You will also be invited to climb the mountain with Jesus to discover that you are “a beloved son” of the Father (second week). Like the Samaritan woman, you will yearn to drink “other water” and Jesus will be “the water that springs into eternal life” for you (third week). With the man born blind you will be able to identify your own blind spots and experience that Jesus is the light that will help you to see (fourth week). Finally, side by side with Lazarus, Martha and Mary,

you will discover that Jesus, the Life, saves you from all your deaths (fifth week).

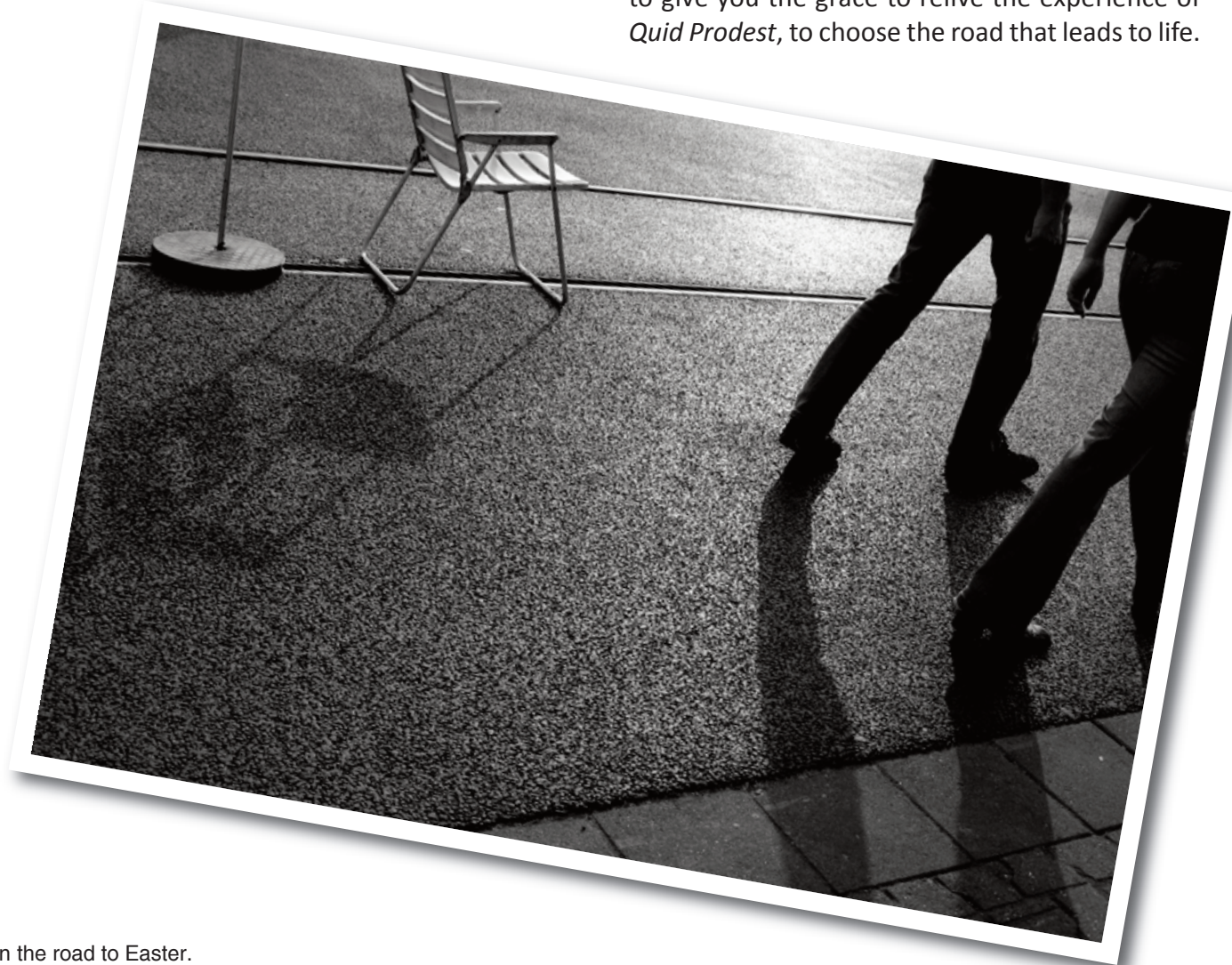
Throughout Lent, the power of *Quid Prodest* will invite you to choose the water, the light and the life that is Jesus. You will feel that other proposals and lifestyles, which you have considered, do not touch your heart and, for that reason, they don't make you happy. You will once again experience the singular magnetism of Jesus and the renewing power of your Baptism.

There is also a chance that you will notice there is considerable tension between conflicting calls and that you have to make commitments. Don't be afraid. Embrace Lent this year like a new opportunity. You can tell yourself: "This year will not pass me by". Don't forget that the person who pushes Jesus to the desert is not the devil but the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will also guide you on this crossing "so that you do not trip over a stone".

As in the previous stages, you will find in this booklet some reflections that will guide you during the coming weeks. Meditate on them quietly. Connect them with your life as a Claretian

Missionary. Also take the time to do the exercises. When all is said and done, this is not just about reading, but about taking your own life in your hands. And above all, take great care with your daily practice of the "*lectio divina*". There is nothing more enlightening and healing than the Word of God. Perhaps you have been able to corroborate this in the last few months. When we open ourselves up to the Word with childlike simplicity, it becomes a torch to carry when walking and a light for our path (cf. Ps 119,105). If you experience tiredness or boredom, if you feel tempted to change for other, more "interesting" reading, don't forget that the practice of the "*lectio*" is always a struggle, a place where all temptations come together. But also the "meeting tent" with God. In it he will speak to you "face to face, as a man speaks with his neighbour" (Ex 33,11)

It's likely that in previous years you have put emphasis on helping others to live their Lenten period. This year, without forgetting your pastoral mission, remember that you are the first to be called to conversion. As a disciple, you will learn to guide others better. Let yourself be guided along the liturgical road of the Church, and ask the Lord to give you the grace to relive the experience of *Quid Prodest*, to choose the road that leads to life.



2. “Jesus made up his mind to go to Jerusalem” (Lk 9:51)



The road begins in the desert

The desert is the place in the first week of Lent (cf. **appendix II**). In our case, we are not dealing so much with a physical place, but rather a symbolic space. Even a city can become a desert: a place for testing yourself, but also a place where you will encounter yourself, other people and God himself (cf. **appendix III**). In the desert there are no signposts that clearly point the way we should choose. Often there are several possibilities: blessing or curse (cf. Gn 11,26); the way of sinners or the way of the just (cf. Ps 11-6); the tendencies of the flesh or the impulses of the Spirit (cf. Rom 8,5-6); finally, what leads us to life or what leads us to death.

This need to have to choose a road from amongst many is the nucleus of the *Quid Prodest* experience. Our Founder lived it intensively in the desert of his own life. On the one hand, we are talking about an anthropological experience: that's to say, the need to choose between two conflicting ways of understanding and living one's life: one leads to fulfilment and the other leads to failure. It is, furthermore, a theological experience: to make God your Lord of life or focus on your own interests. Claret, deep down, lived throughout his life what Jesus lived intensively in the desert (cf. Mt 4,1-11). Seen as such, the *Quid Prodest* experience helps us to become aware of our own state and pushes us to enter into a process of transformation to reach the “way” that God dreams for us.

Crossroads on the road of life

Remember that the name of this section is taken from the gospel verse which played a decisive role in the life of Claret. “What will one gain by winning the whole world if he destroys himself?” (Mt 16,26; Aut 68). Even though it is a constant theme throughout his life, it becomes more acute at certain points and turns into the testing ground for his vocational fidelity. For Claret it has a special importance because of its meaning and the frequency with which it occurred. It presents itself in a particularly important way in the following crossroads of his life:

- **At the time-eternity crossroad**, which had a special place during his infancy and youth. From being a very small child “I used to think about eternity” (Aut 701,8)) and more specifically on the eternity of hell (Aut 11) “This idea is the mainspring of my zeal”(Aut 15,9, 14). Later on, up against the disappointments he experiences in Barcelona, he remembers the verse from the gospel “What will one gain...?” read “from being a small child” which left a deep impression on him (Aut 68) This leads him to embark on a new direction in his life (Aut 69,75). So, it may be regarded as a significant moment of conversion.

- **At the crossroad between family security and the priesthood.** In 1820, out of love, he offers himself as a candidate for the priesthood. “Humanly speaking, I see no hope, but you have the power to make it happen, if you will” (Aut 40).

- **At the crossroad between prestige and world security and the anonymity and guarantee of salvation at the Carthusian monastery:** “He told me (my father) of all the fond hopes he had for me...and when I mentioned that I wanted to become a Carthusian, his sorrow reached its peak” (Aut 77). They were desires which “God had used to uproot me from worldliness”(Aut 113).

- **At the crossroad between the security of parish life and the attraction of foreign missions:** “I felt a deep desire to leave it (the curacy) and go to the missions ... even if it meant undergoing death” (Aut 112). Through the Word and prayer, the Lord called me to preach (Aut 120): “I told him of my voyage and the reasons...the good father ... encouraged me in my intentions. I listened to him as if he were an oracle and presently resumed my travels” (Aut 121).

- **At the crossroad between the security of parish life and the popular missions:** “I left...so as to be permanently free to preach wherever the bishop might send me, without any fixed residence”(Aut 193) “In acting thus I was assured of doing God’s will and of being sent by him, not by any whim” (Aut 194).

- **At the crossroad between a vocation lived out as an apostolic missionary and/or the role as Archbishop of Cuba:** When I was nominated Archbishop of Cuba “I was struck dead by the news” (Aut 491). “Overwhelmed by the nomination, I had no desire to accept” (Aut 495). After giving it careful thought, he finally accepts despite his own reluctance (Aut 496, cf 491,495,498; EC 305, 306).

- **At the crossroad between resignation when confronted by obstacles and continuation in Cuba:** In 1853 he proffers his own resignation, but he remains undecided even though, with the opportunity of making a choice, he chooses “the poorest, the most oppressive and painful” (EA 538). A year later he doesn’t even think about his resignation (EA 540, 543).

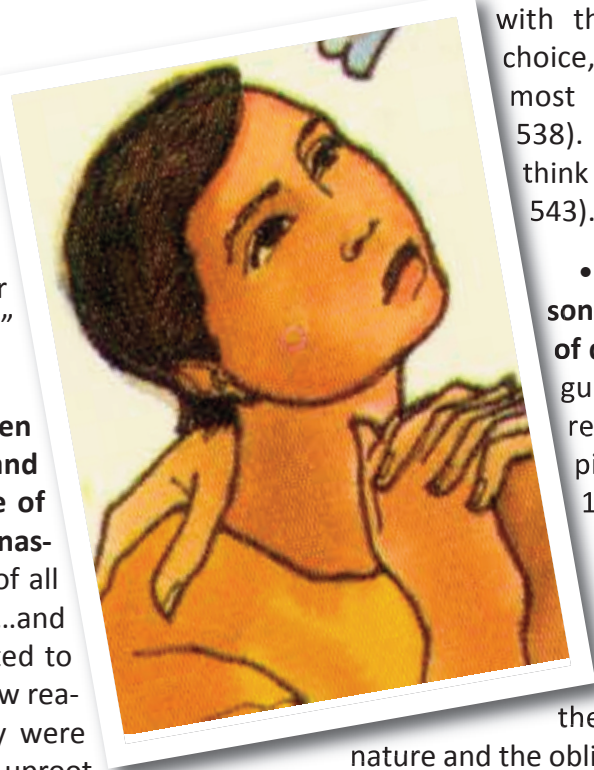
- **At the crossroad between personal security and the acceptance of death:** After the assault in Holguin, he writes to the Pope who replies that he should stay despite the danger (Propósitos 1856, EA 546, 547).

- **At the crossroad between being confessor to the Queen and an uncertain future:** At this juncture he experiences the stress between his outgoing nature and the obligation to remain at Court; between being faithful to his apostolic mission and his withdrawal from political life; between his apostolate and his inner life (Aut 614: note 120).

- **At the crossroad between faithfulness to the Queen and faithfulness to the Pope:** Claret listens to the words of Jesus: “Anthony, leave” (Aut 832) and through prayer, reflection and advice, he comes to a carefully considered decision (Aut 833, 952; especially EA 447, 449).

- **At the last crossroad of death:** “The earth will be a place of exile for me. My thoughts, my feelings and sighs will be sent up to Heaven”(Propósitos 1870: EA 588) The skill of recognizing a good death (EA 624, 628).

- **At the crossroad between the insecurity of Fontfroide and the security of Rome:** Once settled in Fontfroide, he feels “like a deserter” and he decides to set off for Rome for everybody’s good (EC iip.1484, 1485).



The experience lived by St Anthony Mary Claret is personal and specific to him, but it contains guidelines that help us to face up to the crossroads for those of us who have received the same gift of grace as him.

- Claret's life had many changes of direction. Everyone of them meant a significant change for him personally, but always with continuity in mind: **faithfulness to the will of God**.

- From this sprang Claretian itinerancy, which has nothing to do with fickleness and improvisation, but everything to do with perseverance and discernment. This state of mind makes him live in a **constant process of self-examination and renewal**.

- To discover the will of God for himself, Claret resorts to **prayer**, turns to the **life of the saints** for enlightenment (Aut 241, 259) and, at moments of special significance, he lends great weight to **consultation and spiritual direction** (Aut 81, 488, 496).

- At the same time he becomes aware that **everything is the work of grace**: God gives him desires to help him take difficult decisions (Aut 113, 112) or makes him feel repugnance so that he is not affected by grandeur (Aut 622) or frees him from evil so that he concentrates on his greater glory and the salvation of souls (Aut 751).

- His response to grace uncovers new challenges for him, and leads him to make ever more **radical choices**: detachment from material things (Aut 359,360) acceptance of trials and tribulations.

It is likely that, when you consider the road of your own life, you will come to realise that you have encountered a few crossroads; that is, moments when you were confronted with several roads and you have had to choose one. The following exercise will help you to explore some of them and, ultimately, to know yourself better.



Exercise 1: My crossroads

Note: This is an exercise that could take quite a long time. It requires a period of calm. It's not vital that you do it all at once. It might best be left for the community day of retreat. What is important is that you give it the attention it deserves, making it a useful tool in the process of self-discovery.

1. I open my notebook. I begin a new page. I write **CROSSROADS** as the title. I also note the date on which I begin this exercise.
2. In this exercise **I consider my life as a journey** along a road that began when I was born and has brought me to this point. There were moments when I could have chosen different routes to the ones I chose (for example, I could have been a lawyer or farmer instead of a Claretian, I could have been Indian or Spanish instead of German, Nigerian or Argentinian, married instead of celibate etc). In other words, at certain points of my life I freely chose, or was forced by circumstances to choose, a certain route which could have caused by life to turn out differently. I now call those moments of choice in my life "crossroads".
3. The routes I could have followed, but I didn't, are **the unexplored possibilities in my life**, some of which I would like to examine in this exercise. For example, at a given moment in my life I decided to abandon my professional and sentimental plans so as to become a Claretian. Over the years, the possibility of reconnecting with my former ambitions could still be a reality. We all have hidden within us an array of possibilities that are awaiting the opportunity to emerge, just like the seed left in the Pharaoh's tomb 3000 years ago which, when planted, began to grow.
4. In a state of silence and inner calm, **I mentally review my life's journey** trying to pinpoint crossroads, both big and small; I make a list of them.
5. I carefully study this list and **choose what most attracts me** at this moment of time.
6. **I describe the beginning and first steps of the journey that I actually followed.** I allow my writing about them to flow freely. I avoid making judgements. I confine myself to simply writing down what comes into my head.
7. **I go back to the fork in the road** and imagine the direction I didn't take, and see where it takes me. I write down in detail what flows into my imagination, without leaving anything out, without trying to analyse myself.
8. When I finish this exercise, **I will pause awhile and carefully read all that I have written down**, and make a note of my reactions to this reading.



Crises and temptations

Time in the desert is also a time of crisis (cf. **appendix IV**) a time of being tested and a time of temptation. Even though we are dealing with somewhat different experiences, they all have in common the fact that we are subjected to their conflicting forces which push us in opposite directions (cf. **appendix VIII**). Generally, we associate temptation with something which seduces us, which pushes us to do something evil. In the Bible, however, even though the modern notion of incitement to evil is not entirely absent, temptation is understood more specifically as a test or a trial. In this sense, to acknowledge that someone is tempted means that they are put to the test, to prove their steadfastness. In Luke's gospel, for instance, Jesus addresses Peter in the following words: "Simon, Simon, Satan has demanded that you be sifted like grain, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have recovered you shall strengthen your brothers" (Lk 22,31-32). From these words we can guess that Jesus speaks from his own personal experience. It is likely that the synoptic account of the temptations of Jesus (which this year we will read in Matthew's version

on the first Sunday of Lent) will metaphorically be described as a deep, personal experience of temptation which touches the very messianic heart of Jesus, who was "tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sinning" (Heb 4:15). He is subjected to the actual physical temptation of using his status as the Son to conquer all resistance to a mission leading to him being stripped and killed. The accounts of the temptations are a powerful synthesis, like parables, of the way that Jesus lived and described his experience of *Quid Prodest* to his disciples. He also had to choose between the seduction of the messianic message based on power or the faithful and trusted response to the Father, whose Word (expressed in the Scriptural texts cited in the accounts) points in another direction.

Looking at Jesus, who is put through a test, you too can investigate your own temptations that you suffer in your life as a missionary. These probably vary according to your age, but they all have something in common: they prevent you from freely and happily living out your missionary vocation. The following exercise will help you "to put names to them".



Exercise 2: My temptations

Temptations	Word of God	What am I learning?
Briefly describe the 3 temptations which, in your judgement, have stood out the most since you started the journey of the <i>Forge project in your daily life</i> .	Write down some Scriptural quotations which are enlightening for you and which might help you face up to your temptations.	Write down what you are learning from these tests: What do they reveal about yourself? What are your weak points? What support do you have?
1. (For example: despair because my pastoral work hardly bears any fruit)		
2.		
3.		

The Constitutions remind us that “as Christ our Lord was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil, so must we, his disciples, undergo many temptations” (CC 53). How do we tackle these tests? The very same Constitutions give us the key: “During our temptations we must stand loyally by Christ who is still being put to the test in us”. For this cause “Let us all put on the armour of God, not presuming on our own strength, but trusting with unwavering hope in the Lord who will show himself faithful to us in the midst of temptation itself. Let us be on our guard, then, as the Lord tells us and pray to our heavenly Father not to put us to the test”.

Don’t forget that wherever you are confronted by your temptations, your crises and wounds, it is there that, if you live united with Christ, a path to personal growth will always open up. Temptation can also take the form of a learning opportunity in your life as a missionary, and a “place of encounter” with Jesus.

Called to the transfiguration: you are my beloved son

One of the most serious temptations that can beset us relates to our own identity. How often have you asked yourself who you really are? Every time you go through a bad patch in your life, the same questions emerge: Who am I? Is it worth continuing to be poor, chaste and obedient in a world that seems not to appreciate these values? What do I “gain” and what do I “lose” by the fact that I am a Claretian? Am I really developing into a free person? During the previous stage, when you tackled the problem of self-image, you had occasion to reflect on all this. As believers, we know that our deepest identity is to be children of God: “The name CMF emphasizes our condition as sons and brothers. It shows that we are human beings loved by God the Father and by Mary, our mother, in the Spirit; called to participate in the life of God (Gen 1:26) graced by the Spirit with filial and brotherly characteristics: dignity, liberty, confidence, joy, tenderness, compassion and solidarity” (MFL 35). But often, far from seeing and feeling what we really are, far from a sense of enjoyment and living our lives accordingly, we simply do not believe in our own greatness. It’s likely that, on occasions, you don’t feel happy and that your feelings, attitudes and behaviour do not really reflect your true self but what you think you are. In other words, it’s possible that you have become aware of some

“false identities” which prove to be obstacles to feeling the happiness of being a son of God and, as a result, to dealing confidently with your life. If that is the case, don’t you think you need to change the way you see yourself? Owing to some failure in your education and formation, and to some negative experiences that have beset you throughout your life, perhaps you have learned not to value yourself as the person you really are.

Perhaps you need to “climb the mountain” with Jesus, carrying your burden of worries and frailties. If you open up your heart, if you are not afraid to tackle your own demons (feelings of inferiority or guilt, hurt, emptiness etc) you will hear the Father pronouncing the same words over you that he pronounced over Jesus: “This is my Son, the Beloved”(cf Mt 17:5). You will feel that this is the true word that will help you along because it restores your sense of identity. Many other words will simply “ruin your life” because they promise you false identities (do better than the rest etc). In booklet no. 3 you had the opportunity to dig a little deeper into the meaning of self-esteem and especially of being and feeling like a son of God. Perhaps you could re-read a few paragraphs or go over the exercises again. In the stage *Patris Mei* we will explore this crucial experience a little further.



Exercise 3: My statements

Carefully read the statements in the left-hand column. Spend a few minutes in silence. Allow pictures, memories and echoes of the past to enter your mind. Then write a few words about what you have discovered in the right-hand column.

<p>“Unless a person’s essential being is fundamentally accepted, loved and respected by others and, above all, by him/herself, mental health will not be achieved”</p> <p><i>(A. Maslow)</i></p>	
<p>“After having travelled the world over in search of happiness, you come to realise that it is on your own doorstep”</p> <p><i>(African proverb)</i></p>	
<p>“Whatever a man’s worth, his value is no greater than the value of being a man”</p> <p><i>(A. Machado)</i></p>	
<p>“There is so much good in the worst situation, and so much bad in the best situation, that it is absurd to condemn anyone”</p> <p><i>(Hindu proverb)</i></p>	
<p>“I have undergone many misfortunes.....that never actually took place”</p> <p><i>(Mark Twain)</i></p>	
<p>“Have ambition to do things well, not to perfection. Never give up the right to make mistakes because, if you do, you will lose the ability to learn new things and to advance in life”</p> <p><i>(D. Burns)</i></p>	

Transforming encounter with Jesus

The gospel readings of the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent recount three encounters with Jesus which radically changed the lives of the people involved: with the Samaritan woman (*third Sunday*) with the man born blind (*fourth Sunday*) with the dead Lazarus (*fifth Sunday*). Through these encounters, Jesus appears as? like water ("I am the living water") like light ("I am the light of the world") and like life ("I am the resurrection and the life"). The Gospel of St John presents all these saving encounters as "signs", but they can also be interpreted from the perspective of *Quid Prodest*. In fact, what is the benefit of drawing real water from the well if your heart continues to thirst for the water of truth and love? What is the benefit of recovering your eyesight if you don't see the signs offered by Jesus and believe in him? What is the benefit of regaining your biological life if the end is to die again for good? Jesus does not confine himself to simply solving an unpredictable situation, but he brings the people he meets (the Samaritan woman, the blind man and his friend Lazarus) into his own mystery. He gives them living water, the light of faith and eternal life.

Throughout the three weeks, you will also have the chance to meet up with Jesus and to share with him your experiences of thirst, blindness and death. Through your daily practice of the "Lectio Divina", let the Word of God reveal to you the Jesus who, for you, is the water, light and life. Dare to take the leap of faith. You will see that the whole of your life will take on a new meaning, even though superficially nothing changes. Don't simply lay your needs before Jesus, what you consider to be urgent in your own life. Let him surprise you and take you beyond your own desires and expectations.

Live the "Easter Triduum" with Christ

The Lenten journey finishes at the gates of the Easter Triduum. This year, how would you like to celebrate the passion, death and resurrection of Christ? Holy Week, begun with Palm Sunday or the Passion of Our Lord, leads up to the "Holy Triduum" or the "Easter Triduum" (one day in three) in which we commemorate the essence of the Christian faith. We confess that Jesus Christ **died** (Good Friday) **was buried** (Holy Saturday) and **rose on the third day** (Easter Sunday). We do not commemorate these events like someone dusting off

an album of family photos, but through the liturgy and by the power of the Spirit, we experience their reality and their power to save.

On **Holy Thursday** afternoon (the beginning of the first day) you can ask yourself: what was the essence of the last message given by Jesus to his friends and, through them, to the whole of humanity, including myself? All this is encapsulated in these words: "Love one another". The verb 'to love' is present in every language. We use it continuously but we are never sure exactly what it means. Jesus doesn't waste time trying to explain it. He takes off his cloak, he girds himself with a towel and he begins to wash his disciples' feet (cf Jn 13: 1-20). Note how John's gospel introduces the scene: "...as he had loved those who were his own in the world, he would love them with perfect love" (v.1). So 'to love' means "to wash someone's feet", to lower yourself to the level of someone's feet, which is the lowest level possible. Don't you think that this is the perfect lesson for you and that, without it, you would not understand the true meaning of the Eucharist? In fact, as you know, the fourth gospel does not have a Eucharistic narrative like the synoptic gospels. Instead, it includes this account, which is exactly what we read in the mass "in Coena Domini". Washing someone's feet would be impossible for the person who relies entirely on his own feelings of good will or his own altruistic inclinations. Jesus knows this. He therefore wants to enlist us into his own manner of total commitment. The Eucharist is celebrated and we are given bread and wine. Sharing communion with him via the bread and wine, we take part in his vocation as a "washer of feet" and a "life of commitment". Without the Eucharist there is no lasting commitment. So that there might be a Eucharist, servants are needed who take on the duty of distributing it "in the name of Jesus" in memory of him. Contemplate the close relationship between the testament of love, the sacrament of the Eucharist and the sense of ecclesial ministry. If you are a priest, today is the day to express gratitude for your vocation, to better understand its sacrificial nature (you are not only a qualified servant but your entire life has been devoted to the sacrifice of Christ) and to pray for all the priests of the world.

In John's gospel, whose version of the passion is read out on **Good Friday** (first day of the Triduum), the death of Jesus is triumphant. The cross is both a throne and a scaffold. From the

cross he communicates his Spirit to the whole of humanity (cf. Jn19: 30). Next to Jesus' cross are Mary and the disciple whom Jesus loves (cf. Jn 19: 25-27).

As you silently meditate on the cross of Jesus, you will find it easier to see clearly how you yourself are living your life, and if what really moves you is "gaining the whole world" or "living out the gospels". You will better understand the significance of your tests and temptations. You feel a great sense of solidarity with all the other sufferers in the world, especially with those who can't share their suffering with anyone else. You will descend into the abyss of your sin and you will feel, as never before, your own ingratitude. Finally, you will be blessed with the grace to see the meaning behind death, both your own and that of your loved ones (cf. **appendices V and VI**). And you will feel that, with every cross of suffering, you will find Mary standing there ("stabat mater juxta crucem"). She will help you to stay close to Jesus, to share in his suffering and also to be able to share in his glory (cf. Phil 3: 10).



Holy Saturday (the second day of the Triduum) is a "non-day", a night that lasts twenty four hours, a "non liturgical" day. The Church keeps watch by the buried body of Jesus. Today Christ has disappeared: we do not know "where they have put him" (Jn 20:13). Today is the day for all those who, for some time, have not been able to respond when asked about their faith in Jesus. It is the day of those communities who have had Christ at their centre and today they do not know where he is hiding. It is the day for those of us who sometimes live "as if he did not exist". Finally, it is the day of those who no longer search for their faith but simply settle into a state of indifference. But it is also a day of great hope, a surprisingly Marian day. Alongside Mary "we know" that something incredible is about to happen. The night of doubt is going to be defeated by the dawn of faith. We await God's great work at a time when there is nothing we can do.

The Easter Vigil heralds **Easter Sunday** (the third day). Promises are fulfilled. Our belief in him has been worthwhile. If we share in his death, we not only do not lose our lives, but we gain it forever. Our *Quid Prodest* finishes in victory.

Exercise 4: My own characters in the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus

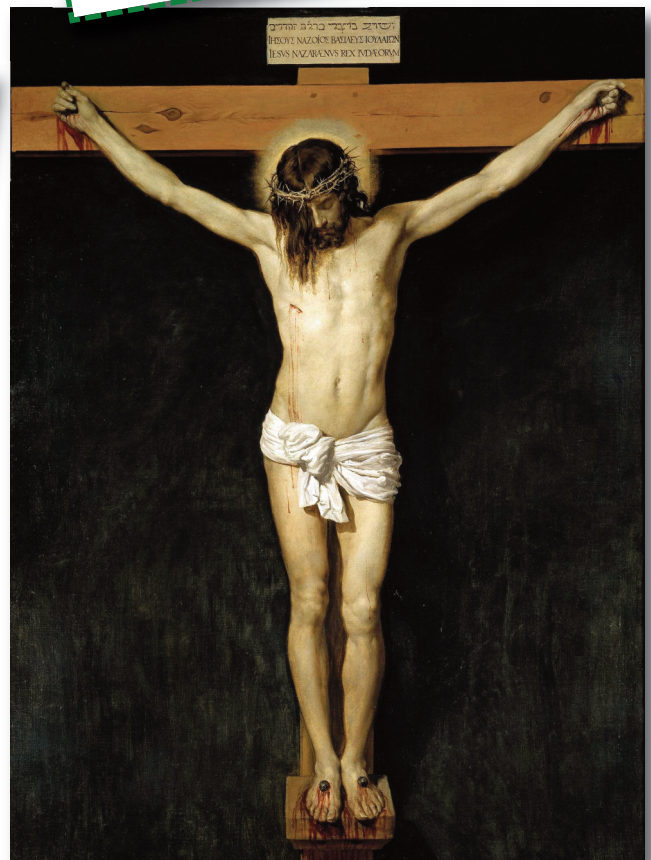
In the left column are seven significant characters that appear in the narrative of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John. Start reading the biblical texts listed below. Let each person get inside you and talk to you. Then in the right column, write down the characteristics you share with each of them, and in what sense they reflect your own feelings and attitudes in relation to Jesus. Although you may have a bit of each, with which character do you most identify? Why?

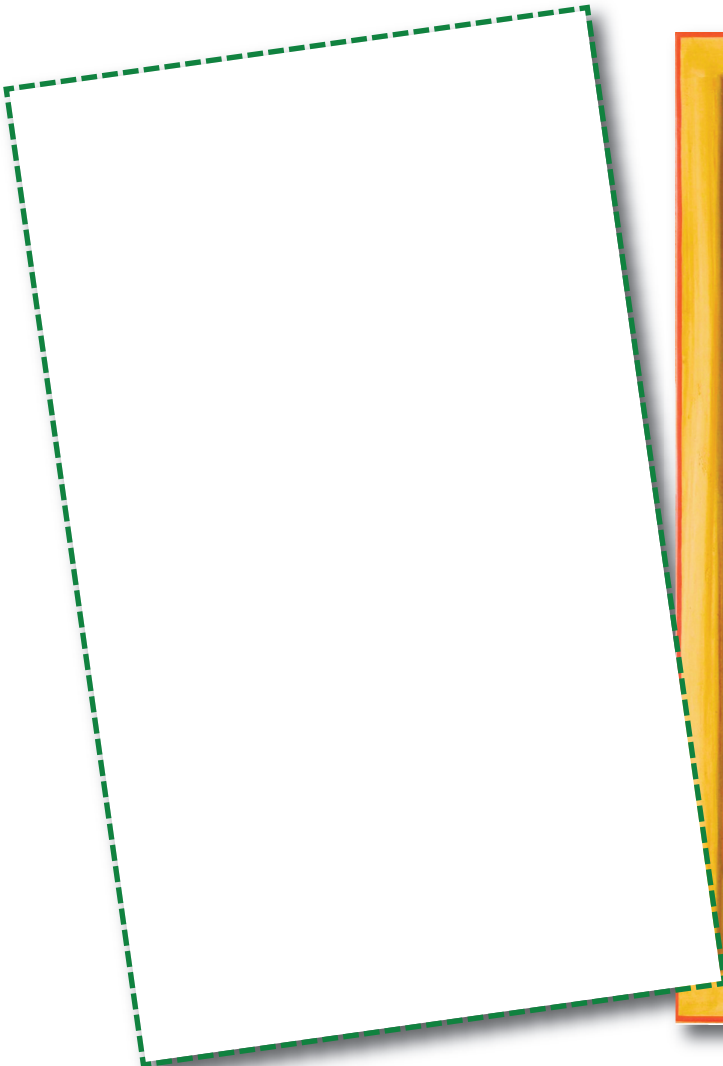
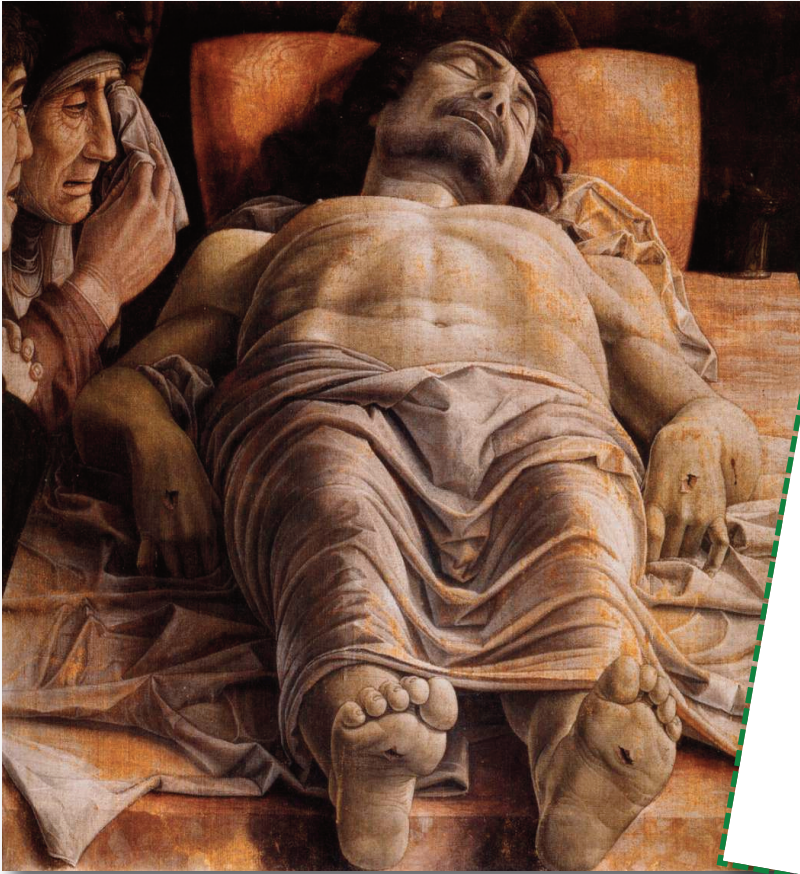
JUDAS (cf. Jn 18:3-9)	
PETER (cf. Jn 18,10-11; 15-18; 25-27; 20,1-9)	
PILATE (cf. Jn 18:28-40; 19:1-16)	
MARY, THE MOTHER (cf. Jn 19:25-27)	
THE BELOVED DISCIPLE (cf. Jn 19:25-27; 20:1-9)	
JOSEPH OF ARIMETHEA (cf. Jn 19:38-42)	
THOMAS (cf. Jn 20:24-29)	

Exercise 5: My photos

Carefully **study the following photos**. Let the pictures “speak to you”.

Then **write a prayer** in the adjacent box.





3. Guidelines for the *Lectio Divina* and personal prayer

Lent is a time for growing in ones faith (cf. **appendix I**) but it is not always easy to align our own personal and community timetable with the liturgical timetable laid down by the Church. You can begin by calling to mind the essence of this year's Lenten journey of 2011. Then you can turn to the guidelines for the daily practice of the "Lectio Divina".

As you already know, Lent calls to mind Jesus' forty days in the desert, but also Moses' forty days in the Sinai, the peoples' forty years in the desert, the forty days when Elias was fleeing from Jezabel etc. It is, therefore, a time for journeying. In our case, the destination is Easter.

There are fundamentally three means the Church proposes for advancing along our journey:

- Concerning ourselves, **FASTING** (to free ourselves from addictions).
- Concerning other people, **ALMSGIVING** (to be on hand).
- Concerning God, **PRAYER** (to open ourselves up to his grace).

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday. The words which go with the service of blessing with the ashes sum up the essence of this important period: "Repent and believe in the gospel". *Quid Prodest* takes on a strong hue because it invites us to question our own lives and set off on a journey of faith.

This year we are in **Cycle A**. This means that in the first two weeks the gospel according to St Matthew takes on a special importance. In the three following weeks, it is the gospel of St John. After the "overture" of the preparatory days, the five weeks that precede Holy Week can be seen as a journey divided into stages, whose milestones are clearly highlighted by the gospels of each of the five Sundays:

Sunday I	Sunday II	Sunday III	Sunday IV	Sunday V
<i>Mt 4:1-11</i>	<i>Mt 17:1-19</i>	<i>Jn 4:5-42</i>	<i>Jn 9:1-41</i>	<i>Jn 11:1-45</i>
• Desert	• Mountain	• Jacob's well	• Pool of Siloam	• Bethany
• Temptation	• Ascent	• Thirst	• Blindness	• Death
• Messiah	• Beloved son	• Living water	• Light of the world	• Eternal life

Suggestions for the daily practice of *Lectio Divina*

Wednesday 9th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 55.10-11 • Mt 6.7-15 	Ash Wednesday	The Lenten journey begins. Jesus reminds you how to pray, fast and give alms. He always goes “further” than what you can reasonably think or imagine. It is not about appearing to be, but actually being.
Thursday 10th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dt 30.15-20 • Lk 9.22-25 		Pay close attention to the words that have guided you since the beginning of this Lenten period. “What will one gain by winning the whole world if he destroys himself?” They are like a goad that makes you choose between what is beneficial and what is a mere distraction, between what is necessary and what is superfluous.
Friday 11th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 58.1-9a • Mt 9.14-15 		This quotation from Isaiah describes the fast that will bring us closer to God. It is like a road map that guides us when our faith falters: “More solidarity and fewer meaningless rituals”. The light we seek begins to shine when we break bread with the hungry, when we give shelter to the homeless and clothes to the naked.
Saturday 12th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 58.9b-14 • Lk 5.27-32 		Today we readily acknowledge that we are weak, fragile, we make mistakes, that life is tough. Rarely do we truly admit that we are sinners. We never allow Jesus near to bring us healing. We are completely consumed by our tendency to make excuses.
Sunday 13th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gen 2.7-9, 3.1-7 • Rm 5.12-19 • Mt 4.1-11 	First Sunday of Lent	All temptation to evil tries to thwart us from our missionary work. We have to face up to it, as Jesus faced up to his temptations: taking us out into the desert, showing us the truth that comes from the Word of God and abstaining from a way of life that always finds reasons for blaming others.
Monday 14th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lv 19.1-2. 11-18 • Mt 25.31-46 		Jesus does not mince his words: they who feed the hungry (or give drink to the thirsty) have done all that is required of them. To love others is to fulfil the law. Too many explanations distance us from what really matters.
Tuesday 15th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 55.10-11 • Mt 6.7-15 		Jesus’ prayer cures our anxiety, it connects us with the fount of all change (the Father), it purifies our intentions, it asks for only what is essential, and it fortifies us morally for a simple and sustained commitment. It is the prayer of real, and gentle change.

Wednesday 16th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jonah 3.1-10 • Lk 11.29-32 	Beginning of the Triduum to St Joseph, patron saint of the congregation (<i>Calendario</i> , pp 85-89)	The “sign” that always upsets us is Jesus himself. He is more than Jonah and Solomon. The tendency to simply see Jesus as “one more” in the huge pantheon of of leaders, religious guides and “symbols of salvation”, will prevent us from hearing his loud call to live our lives differently. Lent gradually reveals to us the mystery that “one more” eventually becomes “one fewer”.
Thursday 17th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Es 4.1-17 • Mt 7.7-12 		Ask only for the person who is in need. Look only for the person who knows they haven’t reached the end. Call only the person who trusts in someone beyond themselves. Faith can be lived like an enlightening personal experience but, often, we live it like a plea: “Lord, let me see”, “Lord, make my faith stronger”.
Friday 18th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ezk 18.21-28 • Mt 5.20-26 		The real triumph over all injustice is not only making amends for evil done but also “the new life” that comes to the person who has committed it. This disproportionate difference between the evil committed and the benefit received, has a greater “prophetic message” than any human injustice could ever understand and still less guarantee.
Saturday 19th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 S 7.4-16 • Rm 4.13-22 • Mt 1.16-24 	Solemnity of St Joseph, the Virgin Mary’s husband and patron saint of the Congregation.	Joseph of Nazareth should inspire the way we live our life of faith. Amongst the many facets of his character, this year, taking the lead from the gospel, we can highlight one: Joseph is a man who “anxiously searches for” Jesus. Along with Mary, he searches for him, having previously lost him, or at least he hasn’t realised that Jesus has stayed behind in Jerusalem.
Sunday 20th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gen 12.1-4 • 2 Tim 1.8b-10 • Mt 17.1-9 	Second Sunday of Lent	We climb the mountain with Jesus, carrying the burdens of our fragility, our hurts, our worries and fears. Meditating on his transfigured face we learn that all real change comes from the knowledge that God loves us. It’s only then can we climb down to the valley of our daily lives and confront his trials with hope in our hearts.
Monday 21st March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dn 9.4b-10 • Lk 6.36-38 		To forgive means to believe in the ability of human beings to start all over again. Forgiveness is not simply a truce to make life bearable, but is a new creation which God channels through us.
Tuesday 22nd March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 1.10.16-20 • Mt 23.1-12 		Jesus can understand every human weakness because he himself has descended into the depths of weakness. What he does not tolerate is hypocrisy. What do you gain by looking good if in the end you deny your real self.

Wednesday 23rd March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jer 18.18-20 • Mt 20.17-28 		Gaining the whole world means being like “the leader of nations”: searching for power, prestige and wealth. We didn’t become missionaries for that. For us, living is serving.
Thursday 24th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jer 17.5-10 • Lk 16.19-31 		There is no reason to look for something out of the ordinary to change direction in our lives. We have already received all that we need: the Word, the Eucharist, community...
Friday 25th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 7.10-14 • Heb 10.4-10 • Lk 1.26-38 	Solemnity of the Anunciation	Our vocation, like Mary’s, is formed between a promise (“The Holy Spirit will come down on you”) and an answer (“Behold the handmaid of the Lord”). Many other answers could be given (“Let’s wait and see”, “I’ll think about it”, “It’s not for me”) but they don’t help us to gain true life.
Saturday 26th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mic 7.14-20 • Lk 15.1-3.11-32 		After reading this story from Jesus, are we still able to accept a God who specialises in making our lives difficult? Many who see themselves as non-believers, aren’t they longing to believe in a God? Wouldn’t they tremble before a God who, far from being reproachful, runs up to them, hugs them and smothers them in kisses?
Sunday 27th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ex 17.3-7 • Rm 5.1-8 • Jn 4.5-42 	Third Sunday of Lent	We make the Samaritan woman’s words our own: “Give me some of that water so that I may never thirst again”. The person who is with Jesus will have life. You don’t have to “gain the whole world” to be happy.
Monday 28th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Kgs 5.1-15 • Lk 4.24-30 		The salvation that Jesus brings from God is available to anyone who trusts in him. It is not vital to be his fellow countryman (like the inhabitants of Nazareth) but to show an attitude of faith (like the foreign widow of Sarepta or the Syrian Naaman).
Tuesday 29th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dn 3.25-43 • Mt 18.21-35 		Only a deep sense of forgiveness can heal our wounds and prepare us to forgive others. But forgiveness is not something you can force on others: it is something you request and receive in humility.



Wednesday 30th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dt 4.1-9 • Mt 5.17-19 	<p>The “ten commandments” are road signs through life. To love God above all things, to glorify his name, to keep holy his feast days, to honour ones parents, to protect life, to keep noble the use of our sexuality, to respect things, to be truthful etc. are not barriers to freedom, but are the best way of safeguarding it completely.</p>
Thursday 31st March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jer 7.23-28 • Lk 11.14-23 	<p>Why does the verb “to listen” have such importance in the Bible? How often is the phrase “Shema Israel” (listen Israel) repeated? To listen means paying attention to the word of God, allowing it to enter inside us and placing it at the centre of our lives. Isn’t Lent a time to move from simply hearing to actually listening? Today’s responsorial psalm is like an echo of Jeremiah’s prophecy: “Listen to the voice of the Lord: harden not your hearts”.</p>
Friday 1st April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hos 14.2-10 • Mk 12.28b-34 	<p>Jesus establishes a link between the first commandment (referring to our love for God) and the second (referring to our love for our neighbour: There are no greater commandments that “these”. What God has joined together let no man separate.</p>
Saturday 2nd April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hos 6.1-6 • Lk 18.9-14 	<p>The parable of the Pharisee and the publican, told only by Luke, describes two ways of standing before God: with an air of smugness (like the Pharisee) or with an air of humility (like the publican). Jesus’ teaching is very clear on this point: Everyone who exalts themselves will be humbled, and they who humble themselves will be exalted. Wanting to “gain the whole world” is typical of a bad Pharisee.</p>
Sunday 3rd April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Sam 16.1-13 • Eph 5.8-14 • Jn 9.1-41 	<p>Fourth Sunday of Lent</p> <p>The healing of the man born blind is a “sign” for us to believe in the Son of Man, who always confronts us with the truth about ourselves. Do we believe we can see when, in reality, we can’t?</p>
Monday 4th April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 66.17-21 • Jn 4.43-54 	<p>You don’t need to know much about Jesus to be able to believe in him. It’s enough to have trust. The civil servant, whose son Jesus healed, “believed in Jesus and he set off on the road”. He appreciated Jesus’ worth.</p>
Tuesday 5th April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ezk 47.1-9.12 • Jn 5.1-3a-5-16 	<p>Jesus also invited the healed paralytic to walk. To set off along the road is a sign of the new life that Jesus unveils. But first, we have to feel that Jesus’ question is directed towards us: do you really want to be healed?</p>

Wednesday 6th April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 49.8-15 • Jn 5.17-30 	Memorial of St John the Baptist de La Salle, priest.	We can wreck our own lives if we allow ourselves to be carried along by the negative values of the “world”. But we can regain our lives when we turn to the word of Jesus: “They who listen to my word and believe in him who sent me, will have eternal life”.
Thursday 7th April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ex 32.7-14 • Jn 5.31-47 		Through our daily practice of the “Lectio” we can study Scripture to find life there. But it could remain a dead letter if we disconnect it from Jesus himself, who is Life.
Friday 8th April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wis 2.1a. 12-22 • Jn 7.1-2.10.25-30 		Jesus does not value his own life to the extent that he fears death. It’s of no concern to him to seek his own security. He takes risks right up to the end.
Saturday 9th April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jer 11.18-20 • Jn 7.40-53 		No-one speaks like Jesus. No-one can give life like him. When we have lived through the experience of finding him, the seductions of the world lose their shine. Living an authentic life destroys all temptation.
Sunday 10th April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ezk 37.12-14 • Rom 8.8-11 • Jn 11.1-45 	Fifth Sunday of Lent	The final frontier is the one between life and death. The resurrection of Lazarus is a “sign” that Jesus transcends the frontier because he is Lord of life and death: “The person who believes in me, even though they have died, will live”.
Monday 11th April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dn 13.14-62 • Jn 8.1-11 	Memorial of St Stanislaus, bishop and martyr.	What gives us the strength to resume the journey and “not to sin anymore” is the experience that, despite our weaknesses, we are not condemned by Jesus. It helps us also to look with pity on others.
Tuesday 12th April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Num 21.4-9 • Jn 8.21-30 		When will we understand what Jesus really means to us? When will we believe in the meaning of his own surrender, even to death? In the theology that underpins the fourth gospel, there is no doubt: “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he.”



Wednesday 13th April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dn 3.14-95 • Jn 8.31-42 		What frees us is not the truth, understood as an abstract value, but the truth that is Jesus: If the Son makes you free, you will be really free. The <i>Quid Prodest</i> is an experience that opens the doors to a free existence, not hemmed in by a slavish mentality.
Thursday 14th April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gn 17.3-9 • Jn 8.51-59 		Who is Jesus in reality? The reference to Abraham is a way of highlighting the promise/reality contrast. Abraham represents the promise. Jesus is now the reality. Through him, the alliance has reached its fulfilment: a nation teeming with people is born, which inhabits the earth as its own.
Friday 15th April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jer 20.10-13 • Jn 10.31-42 		Jesus is out of our reach. He is a free gift, but not someone we can manipulate to our own desire. Jesus draws us to him. What doesn't excite enthusiasm in us is the uncomfortable you make yourself God because, if this statement is true, Jesus can no longer be just any leader, but someone who has a connection with me, and I with him. Someone who confronts me with the truth about myself and with the answer I am giving to the purpose of my life.
Saturday 16th April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ezk 37.21-28 • Jn 11.45-57 		Jesus' death will fulfil the dream that he himself had presented to the Father: "That all will be one." Isn't it also an integral part of our missionary vocation, to fight, like Jesus, "to bring together the scattered children of God?"
Sunday 17th April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 50.4-7 • Phil 2.6-11 • Mt 26.14 – 27.66 	Palm Sunday	In his passion Jesus lives out the most radical form of <i>Quid Prodest</i> : he turns his back on security in the World, to live out the extreme consequences of the surrender of his own life. For that reason he wins the final battle.
Monday 18th April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 42.1-7 • Jn 12.1-11 	Monday of Holy Week	The gospel reading of Monday of Holy Week presents us with a supper, which almost heralds the last supper. It is a get-together of friends (Martha, Mary, Lazarus) and traitors (Judas Iscariot). It is a supper in which are highlighted two fundamental attitudes to Jesus, which will be present in the drama of his passion and death: the proximity of love and the distance of resentment.
Tuesday 19th April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 49.1-6 • Jn 13.21-23 	Tuesday of Holy Week [Fr Stephen Sala, co-founder and first Superior General (<i>Calendar</i> pp93-100)]	What really strikes about this gospel story is to learn that betrayal is forged amidst a circle of friends, amidst those who have had access to the Master's heart: Truly I say to you, one of you will betray me. The word "betrayal" is very hard. We have looked for euphemisms like weakness, error, distance etc. To talk of betrayal suggests making a connection between love and frustrated fidelity. You can only betray what you love. Will we betray Jesus whom we want to love? And if that is the case, what do we gain from that? What is the value of "thirty pieces of silver"?

Wednesday 20th April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 50.4-9 • Mt 26.14-25 	Wednesday of Holy Week	Our faces are the windows through which we reveal ourselves. If our faces are an expression of our identity, the words of the prophet Isaiah take on added meaning: "Neither did I shield my face from blows, spittle and disgrace." Or those of Psalm 68: "Shame covered my face." During the next few days we are going to take a close look at the face of Jesus. It is like a map on which are marked the joys and sufferings of all people: "I seek your face O Lord, do not hide your face from me."
Thursday 21st April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ex 12.1-8.11-14 • 1 Cor 11.23-26 • Jn 13.1-15) 	Maundy Thursday	Sharing bread and drinking from the same cup were, at the time of Jesus, very meaningful gestures. They were a means of establishing close links with other people and with nature. Bread and wine, fruits of the earth and work of human hands, became food after a process of transformation. The grains of wheat and the grapes from the vine have to die so that white bread and red wine can be born. When Jesus hands over these gifts to his disciples, he is forewarning them of his own end and, at the same time, he is offering them a new way of life: "You too can be the food of nourishment for others if you allow yourself to be milled (like the grain) or crushed (like the ears of wheat).
Friday 22nd April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 52.13-53 • Jn 18.1-19.42 	Good Friday	In the presence of the dead Jesus, all discussion ceases. The eyes look on and the heart opens up. On the cross Jesus has finally been defeated by the "world", but he sows the seed of "life" that will never be lost. By losing his life he gains it forever.
Saturday 23rd April		Holy Saturday	Today we say nothing. We don't celebrate anything. We are immersed in silence. One side of us contemplates the night of death. The other side of us slowly senses the coming dawn. Our whole life is a Holy Saturday. Our minds are filled with all the deaths that herald our own. Every spring that proclaims our resurrection calls out to us.
Sunday 24th April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gn 1.1.26-31 • Ex 14.15-15,1 • Is 55.1-11 • Rom 6.3-11 • Mt 28.1-10 	Easter Vigil	Light, water and life (bread and wine of the Eucharist) that have accompanied us as symbols of the mystery of Jesus in the second stage of Lent acquire all their expressive power tonight. Definitely light overcomes darkness, water washes every stain and quenches every thirst and the Eucharistic bread nourishes us for eternal life.

4. Guidelines for community exploration in this stage



Walt Kowalski (Clint Eastwood), a retired car worker, fills his time doing domestic jobs, drinking beer and a monthly visit to his hairdresser. Although his wife's dying wish was for him to confess, for Walt, a bitter veteran of the Korean War who keeps his M-1 rifle clean and at the ready, there is nothing to confess. Those whom he considered his neighbourhood friends have moved away or died, and have been replaced by hmong immigrants, from south east Asia, whom he despises. He is offended by practically everything he sees: fallen gutters, unkempt lawns and the strange faces that surround him; the aimless gangs of hmong, latin and afroamerican youths who think the neighbourhood belongs to them; the immature strangers that his children have become; Walt simply waits for his final hour. Until the night that someone tries to steal his 1972 *Gran Torino*.

- To enrich the work of this stage with new perspectives, at a convenient moment **the community should watch together the film *Gran Torino*** and, afterwards, hold a discussion trying to connect the film with the principal tenets of this booklet. Even though it is open to various interpretations, in our case the film could be seen as a Christian parable about the surrender of one's own life so that others might live with freedom and dignity (just like Christ in the "Easter Triduum"). The demise of the main character is preceded by a progressive journey towards conversion and reconciliation (like the daily progress of Lent). There are other topics that can be explored: co-existence amongst diverse ethnic groups, the world of urban discrimination, the pastoral theme of "difficult people" etc.

- **Other possible films are:** *The legend of the holy drinker*, *Dead man walking*, *Katyn*. It is an appropriate phase for watching and commenting on the latest films that have touched on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus: *Jesus* (Roger Young 1999), *The gospel of John* (Philip Saville, 2003), *The passion of Christ* (Mel Gibson, 2004) *L'inchiesta* (Giulio Base, 2006), *The Passion* (Michael Offer, 2007). In any case, it would be appropriate to prepare the discussion so that it doesn't descend into a mere film commentary, but connects with what each individual is experiencing in this stage.

COMMUNITY MEETING

1. If the meeting takes place on the day before, or even during, Holy Week, you could begin by reciting Psalm 87 together. A decorated cross could be placed where the meeting gathers.

2. As in previous stages, each member of the community can share some important aspects of their own experience during this stage. What really matters is to listen carefully to each other's testimony, and believe in the power of attentive listening. You can begin with Exercise 4.

3. Given that the community as such is on a journey, the following question could be apt: During these months of shared activity, what are we really experiencing as a community?

4. No special liturgical rite is suggested to enhance the liturgical celebration of the "Easter Triduum". However, during this period it would be fitting to schedule a penitential service, preferably with the people of God.

During this period of Lent, the community might also think about the possibility of **paying a visit to people who are going through a difficult patch** (the sick, prisoners etc.) or to hold a meeting with adults who are preparing to be baptized during the Easter Vigil. It is important to allow yourself to be "touched" by other people who are living through intense human experiences.

5. Stage assessment

(These questions might also be useful to prepare for the interview with your personal director).

1. Concerning yourself:

- What have I discovered about myself during the fourth stage of this journey? Have I clearly identified my most recent temptations? How am I facing up to them?
- How have I lived out my relationship with Jesus, water, light and life? Has any reading from Scripture during this period stood out for me in a special way? Which one? And why?
- How would I like to live the experience of Holy Week this year?
- Do I detect signs of tiredness in myself or do I faithfully follow my daily programme of prayer and exercises? What do I need to keep myself more awake and active?

2. Concerning the community:

- Since we started the *Forge project in our daily life*, have I detected any positive change in the life of the community?
- Could I do anything else to help the community live through this journey with greater focus? What?

6. To go deeper

Appendix I: CATECHESIS ON LENT (Benedict XVI)

The "Repent, and believe in the Gospel" is not only at the beginning of Christian life but accompanies it throughout, endures, is renewed and spreads, branching out into all its expressions. Every day is a favourable moment of grace because every day presses us to give ourselves to Jesus, to trust in him, to abide in him, to share his lifestyle, to learn true love from him, to follow him in the daily fulfilment of the Father's will, the one great law of life. Every day, even when it is fraught with difficulties and toil, weariness and setbacks, even when we are tempted to leave the path of the following of Christ and withdraw into ourselves, into our selfishness, without realizing our need to open ourselves to the love of God in Christ, to live the same logic of justice and love.

(.....) The favourable moment of grace in Lent also reveals its spiritual significance to us in the ancient formula: "Remember, man, you are dust and to dust you

will return" which the priest says as he places a little ash on our foreheads. Thus we are referred back to the dawn of human history when the Lord told Adam, after the original sin: "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3: 19). Here, the word of God reminds us of our frailty, indeed of our death, which is the extreme form. Before the innate fear of the end and even sooner in the context of a culture which in so many ways tends to censure the reality and the human experience of death, the Lenten Liturgy, on the one hand, reminds us of death, inviting us to realism and wisdom; but, on the other, it impels us above all to understand and live the unexpected newness that the Christian faith releases from the reality of death itself.

Appendix II: THE DESERT, A PLACE FOR ENCOUNTERING GOD (María José Torres)

The desert is the symbolic, geographical place of solitude, of being tested, of experiencing the reality of God stripped down to its bare essentials. To head out to the desert speaks to us of the contemplative way of life, where we briefly leave behind our own settled existence and experience the deep reality of life and our own inner self. A way of living from within, in solitude and genuine self-exploration, which takes us through a humanizing process, leading our entire being to polarize towards the God of the World.

All this presupposes an inner journey that lets our fears fall away, as well as the rationalizations and desires that paralyse us, to then open us up to the experience of God from our own nakedness. A

contemplative journey that opens us to reality, that drills through the surface and allows us to sense the very mystery of reality itself: the humanizing heartbeat of God detected in the deep anxieties of humanity and in the cries of nature.

Our departure towards the desert is an experience that slowly unifies and fortifies our existence, giving us a sense of freedom and boldness to obey and disobey, to say 'yes' and to say 'no' when God's cause requires it of us. It finely tunes our sensitivity so we can reach out and accompany the deserts of inhumanity and suffering, and switch on the "antennae" of our being to see and strengthen the hope that the other world is possible.

Appendix III: DESERT IN THE CITY (Pierre-Marie Delfieux)

God is in the city and there you can find him. The city holds a little of the fascination of Babel and the thousand temptations that fill it, which can constantly distract us from the Lord. But in the desert, we can be tempted too. Amidst all the solitude, we can still be very talkative, and in the shadow of the cloisters we can be very worldly. God is in the city and it's vital to seek him out. He will reveal himself to the person who hears his call. He will give to the person who asks. He will find the person who seeks him.

Having heard so many testimonies on this topic over so many years, I tell myself frequently that the church at large is to be found on the metro. If only we knew about all the prayers said each day by hundreds of thousands of people, from before dawn to the late eve-

ning! When we get to heaven we will be surprised to find all those who travel by metro, bus, taxi or in their own cars, have prayed with their rosary beads, or simply prayed for those around them.

Sometimes I like to imagine myself in the city, seeing it from my cell like the poet Verlaine, "from the rooftop". There, beneath our eyes, around the cathedral, all those churches, basilicas, chapels, oratories, convents and monasteries, those thousand and one votive lights that burn and shine invisibly throughout the day and half the night... they are so many more visible signs of the Presence of God.

From women giving birth to funerals, from hospital beds to prisoners' cells, in the apartments of the rich and in insanitary attics, in office blocks in crystal to-

wers, in the semi-darkness of underground workshops, in businesses and shops, everywhere lips whisper prayers, hands reach to the heavens, souls are lifted up to God. Hearts which shout out, whisper, sigh and sing to God. How do we not see it in the city if, opening up our eyes, we come across it on the corner of every street? It appears in the middle of squares. It runs the length of streets. It lives behind every house front and it bathes the whole city in the light of his Word, and fills it with the mystery of a thousand Eucharists.

We need to learn to pray in the city, to raise the volume of our murmuring, to lift up our sighs and cries to heaven. We even need to invent a new spirituality, as the Cistercians did in country areas, as St Teresa of Jesus did in the convent, as Bruno did in his solitude and Benedict did in his work, the liturgy and the Lectio.

But don't let us say that this can't be done. The gospel says it can (Lk 24:49). "Dear friends in faith" exclaimed brother Carlos Caretto, addressing those who had chosen the desert in the city "you are witnesses of the Invisible one, believers in a single God, worshippers of the Spirit, supporters of the Kingdom of Heaven. You are the ones who await the return of Christ in the city desert, saying as the first Christians did: Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus. These Christians keep watch and pray and their homes are the new monasteries". Yes, God is at the heart of the cities, we can find him there constantly, there is no doubt.

Appendix IV: THE "CRISES" OF THE APOSTLES IN THE MARK'S GOSPEL

In Mark's gospel you can clearly see the journey being taken by the Twelve in the company of Jesus. After a first wave of enthusiasm (3:7) the euphoria diminishes. Many continue to expect meaningful signs from Jesus and begin to draw back when the message, rather, aims to reach the very core of their lives. The apostles, too, acknowledge this disappointment and almost feel they have been let down: Jesus appears to dash their expectations. Their inability to understand elicits certain reactions from Jesus (8:17-21). Peter embodies the discontent of the group, its disagreement with the way things are unfolding. But before that, in chapter 4, we are given an idea of the three crises of the disciples, which Jesus responds to with three parables. For that reason, chapter 4 is known as "the chapter of the crises".

- **Crisis of effectiveness.** The word of God is effective, but it doesn't automatically produce fruit (4: 1-9). The seed will not flower if it is eaten by the birds (desire to triumph and to be more), if it does not put down

roots (purely external, aesthetic and snobbish acceptance) or if it is smothered (by the worries of your present life, by the attraction of money or power).

- **Crisis of responsibility.** Even though the seed adapts to different soil conditions, it is also true (an important contradiction) that it can grow on its own (4: 26-29). In this way Jesus wants to teach his own people that the word will bear fruit in its own time, that they shouldn't be discouraged, that they should sow the word with confidence, which on its own will bear fruit.

- **Crisis of relevance.** The parable of the mustard seed (4: 30-32) aims to be the answer to another situation in the group. The apostles can see that the group of followers is gradually getting smaller, that many don't take the Master's word seriously. Jesus bolsters up their self confidence and asks them for their unquestioned support. From something very small, the Kingdom of God will grow and grow. This is his strange reasoning about the process of growth.

Appendix V: HOMILY ON THE BEATIFICATION OF THE MARTYRS OF BARBASTRO (J.P. II)

It is a whole seminary that generously and courageously face their offering of martyrdom to the Lord. We are made aware of the moral and spiritual integrity of these young people through eyewitness accounts and through their own writings. With regard to the latter, the personal accounts passed down to us by the young seminarians speak for themselves. One of them, writing to his family, says: "When you receive this letter, praise the Lord for the most precious gift of martyrdom which the Lord deigns to confer on me". Another also wrote: "Blessed be the Immaculate Heart of Mary! They shoot us simply because we are members of a religious order" and he adds in his own language: "Don't cry for me. I am a martyr for Jesus Christ".

These martyrs expressed their firm desire to be priestly ministers, in the following way: Now that we can no longer exercise our sacred ministry here on earth, working for the conversion of sinners, we will do what St Teresa did: we will achieve our heaven doing good here on earth"

All the testimonies received allow us to assert that these Claretians died because they were Christ's disciples, because they would not deny their faith or religious vows. Therefore, with the blood they shed, they inspire us all to live and die for the word of God we have been called to proclaim. The martyrs of Barbastro, following their founder, St. Anthony Mary Claret, who had also suffered an attempt against his life, experien-

ced the same desire to shed their blood for the love of Jesus and Mary, expressed in this frequently sung exclamation: 'For you, my Queen, to give my blood.' The same saint drew up a plan of life for his religious: 'A son of the

Immaculate Heart of Mary is a man on fire with love, who spreads its flames wherever he goes. He desires mightily and strives by all means possible to set everyone on fire with God's love'.

Appendix VI: HAND TO HAND WITH DEATH (Francisco Contreras, CMF)

Cancer confronts you with the grim reality of death. For the majority of people, cancer continues to mean a death sentence. A huge wall rises up in front of you, preventing you from moving forward, imposing its inevitable conditions on your life: you are soon going to die. Once sentenced to death, exhausted by the determination to continue living, you exclaim: "It is all over, there's no escape".

Someone might come to me and quieten my spirit with this flattering observation: "You are a priest, so you have no need to be afraid of death"

Any Christian believer could be challenged with: "You have faith, and Christian faith should remove the fear of death"

I will respond now for myself. It is true that I am a priest. I believe in the resurrection and the life. Our Lord has risen from the dead, and I hope, through his mercy, I will rise up again with him. I have often preached about death, I have conducted many funerals and endeavoured to bring the Lord's consolation to those in pain. I have never said a Mass for the dead in a routine or habitual fashion. I have put my heart and soul into the service because the deceased person, when all is said and done, is a child of God, and they deserve it; also because the family members present hope to go away with a warm memory of their loved one that will draw them closer to Jesus Christ, Lord of the living and the dead.

A little while ago I read a French book. It was called: The longest distance. It turns out that the longest distance is between the head and the heart. Paradoxically, this distance is nothing more than a tiny gap.

We know a lot of things by heart. We know about the existence of death. But how different it is to realise that, sooner or later, you will meet up with it, you will see it approaching. It will touch you and you will bump into it head on. How difficult it is to welcome its imminent arrival with open arms. How far must we travel and what uphill challenge will make this a reality for us, we who are inexorably destined for death from the moment we are born.

I once administered the last sacrament to someone, suffering from a serious heart attack. His closest family told him he was going to die and that he should put himself at peace with the Lord. What he then told me surprised me: "I never thought I was going to die. I have attended several Masses for the dead" he told me in a simple and remorseful way. "But I've always thought that the person who dies is the deceased, the person in the box, not me, never me. So now you see, this is the first time I am taking death seriously and, it would seem, it will be the last time".

This is what happens to the immense majority of people. We put on a thick blindfold. We go through life blind. We are all vaguely aware that we are going to die. But who really believes the reality? Who lives their lives in the full knowledge that it will end in death?

On Ash Wednesday we attend special services that are still enjoyed by many of God's people. I have led this liturgy, which officially starts the Lenten period, as a faithful Christian and as a priest.

The presiding priest puts some ash on the forehead and pronounces the following words: "Remember you are dust, and to dust you will return".

But nobody remembers this "love dust", eminently portrayed in Quevedo's immortal sonnet. We vegetate in the amnesia of death. We refuse to face up to it. We deny it. We forget about it. The anxieties of each day, the inevitable outcome of problems and happenings, just like a strong wind, it blows and empties our heads of the ashes of the memory of death.

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The Forge in our daily life

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