



PONTIFICIO CONSIGLIO  
PER LA PROMOZIONE DELLA  
NUOVA EVANGELIZZAZIONE



# 24 hours for the Lord

MATERIAL  
FOR THE LITURGY AND REFLECTION

ROME, MARCH 28-29, 2014

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The published material is offered to parishes and Christian communities for the purpose of assisting those who wish to live fully the initiative entitled, *24 Hours for the Lord*. This suggested program can, of course, be adapted for the needs of each local community.

In Rome, Pope Francis will open this initiative by presiding at a penitential celebration in St. Peter's Basilica. The parishes and communities will work to open this initiative in a similar way during the late afternoon or early evening of March 28.

On Friday night, March 28 and all throughout the day of Saturday, March 29, it would be important to keep the parish church open and to provide people with the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Penance.

We propose the following:

- a program of *Lectio divina* which could be used during the time in which the church is open in order to assist the penitent in preparation for confession by welcoming and mediating upon the Word of God;
- a text to assist in the individual celebration of the Sacrament of Penance, helping the individual penitent to live the experience of the encounter with the priest in the moment of individual confession, in a conscious manner, overcoming any inner resistance.

## I.

# THE PROPOSAL OF *LECTIO DIVINA* FOR THE TIME OF SILENT PRAYER

The following proposal is based on the practice of *Lectio divina* and may be used to provide penitents with a time of prayer and reflection in preparation for the individual celebration of the Sacrament of Penance.

It is important that the Church be prepared in such a way so that whoever enters feels drawn to recollection in a climate of silence and prayer. In addition, it would be beneficial for the priest welcoming the penitents to wear an alb (or a cassock and surplice) and purple stole.



## Part I

### FROM THE DARKNESS OF SIN TO THE LIGHT OF FAITH

The experience of darkness is always dramatic, for it halts all action and provokes an overwhelming sense of insecurity. It is as if one is paralyzed, unable to move, to see, to speak and to relate to what is real. Darkness creates illusions, those surreal situations which have nothing to do with reality. And it is for this reason, that at the very beginning of this journey of conversion and reconciliation with God, we wish to express our desire to see, asking for Christ's light, which we so desperately need.

#### Gospel

From the Gospel according to John

9: 1-41

As Jesus went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?' 'Neither he nor his parents sinned,' Jesus answered 'he was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

'As long as the day lasts  
I must carry out the work of the one who sent me;  
the night will soon be here when no one can work.  
As long as I am in the world  
I am the light of the world.'

Having said this, he spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man, and said to him, 'Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam' (a name that means 'sent'). So the blind man went off and washed himself, and came away with his sight restored.

His neighbours and people who earlier had seen him begging said, 'Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?' Some said, 'Yes, it is the same one.' Others said, 'No, he only looks like him.' The man himself said, 'I am the man.' So they said to him, 'Then how do your eyes come to be open?' 'The man called

## I. The Proposal of *Lectio divina* for the time of silent prayer

Jesus' he answered 'made a paste, daubed my eyes with it and said to me, "Go and wash at Siloam"; so I went, and when I washed I could see.' They asked, 'Where is he?' 'I don't know' he answered.

They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees. It had been a sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man's eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he had come to see, he said, 'He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see.' Then some of the Pharisees said, 'This man cannot be from God: he does not keep the sabbath.' Others said, 'How could a sinner produce signs like this?' And there was disagreement among them. So they spoke to the blind man again, 'What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?' 'He is a prophet' replied the man. However, the Jews would not believe that the man had been blind and had gained his sight, without first sending for his parents and asking them, 'Is this man really your son who you say was born blind? If so, how is it that he is now able to see?' His parents answered, 'We know he is our son and we know he was born blind, but we do not know how it is that he can see now, or who opened his eyes. He is old enough: let him speak for himself.' His parents spoke like this out of fear of the Jews, who had already agreed to expel from the synagogue anyone who should acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. This was why his parents said, 'He is old enough; ask him.'

So the Jews again sent for the man and said to him, 'Give glory to God! For our part, we know that this man is a sinner.' The man answered, 'I don't know if he is a sinner; I only know that I was blind and now I can see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He replied, 'I have told you once and you wouldn't listen. Why do you want to hear it all again? Do you want to become his disciples too?' At this they hurled abuse at him: 'You can be his disciple,' they said 'we are disciples of Moses: we know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' The man replied, 'Now here is an astonishing thing! He has opened my eyes, and you don't know where he comes from! We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but God does listen to men who are devout and do his will. Ever since the world began it is unheard of for anyone to open the eyes of a man who was born blind; if this man were not from God, he couldn't do a thing.' 'Are you trying to teach us,' they replied 'and you a sinner through and through, since you were born!' And they drove him away.

Jesus heard they had driven him away, and when he found him he said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' 'Sir,' the man replied 'tell me who he is so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said, 'You are looking at him; he is speaking to you.' The man said, 'Lord, I believe', and worshipped him.

Jesus said:

'It is for judgement  
that I have come into this world,  
so that those without sight may see  
and those with sight turn blind.'

Hearing this, some Pharisees who were present said to him, 'We are not blind, surely?' Jesus replied:

'Blind? If you were,  
you would not be guilty,  
but since you say, "We see,"  
your guilt remains.

### **An aid for reflection**

- "Jesus touches and illuminates the eyes of a beggar, one who represents all people. A caress of light becomes a caress of freedom. One who is unable to see must rely on others, on walls, on a cane, on parents, on the Pharisees. One who is able to see walks securely, without being dependent upon others. They are free. Like the blind man in the Gospel, who when he is healed becomes strong, no longer living in fear but able to face the wise and to be attentive to the concrete facts and not to the words. One feeds on light and dares. Free. A caress of freedom becomes a caress of joy. For to see is to delight in faces, beauty, the colors. The light is a touch of joy which rests upon things. And so it is with faith, which is a new vision of things, creating a luminous glance which brings the light to the place upon which it rests: "You are light in the Lord" (*Ephesians* 5:8)... The glory of God is a man who returns to see. And his luminous glance gives praise to God... He will speak of sin only to say that he was forgiven and his sins cancelled. Sin does not explain God. God is compassion, a future, an ardent approach, a living hand which touches the heart and opens it, a love that

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gives birth and shares life, which brings light. And it is your heart which will tell you that you were made for the light” (Ermes Ronchi).

- The darkness from blindness can lead to a return to oneself, to an understanding of who we are, and to search within ourselves for the truth of our existence, in order to entrust it to the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation. Saint Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, once stated: “*in interiore homine habitat veritas*”, inside man lives the truth; or as Guigo the Carthusian wrote: “I will return to my heart and I will see if I can understand” (*Jacob’s Ladder*, 4). The journey of conversion and of a return to God is born within the silence of those who recognize that being distant from the Creator, the creature, made in his image and likeness, no longer knows who he is nor the very meaning of his life. Such is the consequence of the darkness caused by sin. Yet, the return is facilitated by the inner silence which asks: “Who are you, O my God, and who am I?” This is also the question which the believer, conscious of being loved and forgiven, is called to promote in his life of faith and of witness. The blind man, who has already received the gift of sight, wants to believe in the fullest sense and no longer holds back his complete trust in the one who had restored his sight. “Do you believe in the Son of Man?... And who is he that I may believe in him?... It is He who is speaking to you!” We live once again in the intimacy of this moment of encounter with the Son of God who wants to heal us of the blindness of a life which is not a life, for it does not correspond to God’s plan for us. We should ask ourselves if we truly believe in Him in order that this question and its subsequent personal response provoke a reform of our life, in the light and virtue of the Grace of the sacrament in which the presence and action of Christ, in the forgiveness of sins, is realized within us.

### Let us pray

(1)

*Psalm 41 (42)*

Like the deer that yearns  
for running streams,  
so my soul is yearning  
for you, my God.

My soul is thirsting for God,  
the God of my life;  
when can I enter and see  
the face of God?

My tears have become my bread,  
by night, by day,  
as I hear it said all the day long:  
'Where is your God?'

These things will I remember  
as I pour out my soul:  
how I would lead the rejoicing crowd  
into the house of God,  
amid cries of gladness and thanksgiving,  
the throng wild with joy.

Why are you cast down, my soul,  
why groan within me?  
Hope in God; I will praise him still,  
my saviour and my God.

My soul is cast down within me  
as I think of you,  
from the country of Jordan and Mount Hermon,  
from the Hill of Mizar.

Deep is calling on deep,  
in the roar of waters;  
your torrents and all your waves  
swept over me.

By day the Lord will send  
his loving kindness;  
by night I will sing to him,  
praise the God of my life.

I will say to God, my rock:  
'Why have you forgotten me?  
Why do I go mourning  
oppressed by the foe?'

With cries that pierce me to the heart,  
my enemies revile me,  
saying to me all the day long:  
'Where is your God?'

Why are you cast down, my soul,  
why groan within me?  
Hope in God; I will praise him still,  
my saviour and my God.

*Psalm 42 (43)*

Defend me, O God, and plead my cause  
against a godless nation.  
From deceitful and cunning men  
rescue me, O God.

Since you, O God, are my stronghold,  
why have you rejected me?  
Why do I go mourning  
oppressed by the foe?

O send forth your light and your truth;  
let these be my guide.  
Let them bring me to your holy mountain,  
to the place where you dwell.

And I will come to the altar of God,  
the God of my joy.  
My redeemer, I will thank you on the harp,  
O God, my God.

Why are you cast down my soul,  
why groan within me?  
Hope in God; I will praise him still,  
my saviour and my God.

(2)

“O Christ, you say in your Gospel: ‘My Father is always at work and I am also at work’. What does this mean if not a new heaven and a new earth? You formed the earth from the abyss and the heavens from the earth. An abyss is the sinner, but when you shine the light out from the darkness in order to cast aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light, you reveal yourself as the creator of a new heaven and a new earth. Now O Lord, I recognize how the land of my mind is formless and chaotic. ... and it ignores the truth of its nature... It is profoundly disordered, for I do not possess within myself the ornaments of virtue nor the beauty of the divine image in which it has been made. In this way, it is enclosed in the abyss of its own blindness and its face is obscured by the darkness of deceit which it has in itself... The abyss of my mind O Lord, calls to you, the one who surpasses all intelligence... in order that that you may create, even out of me, a new heaven and a new earth... you have formed our hearts, placing within them the light, separating the light from the darkness and calling the light day and the darkness night... Enlighten, O Lord, my darkness and say to my soul ‘let there be light’ and your light will be”.

(Guigo the Cistercian)

(3)

*From the Liturgy*

It is truly right and just  
that we should always give you thanks,  
Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God.

For you do not cease to spur us on  
to possess a more abundant life  
and, being rich in mercy,  
you constantly offer pardon  
and call on sinners  
to trust in your forgiveness alone.

## I. The Proposal of *Lectio divina* for the time of silent prayer

Never did you turn away from us,  
and, though time and again we have broken your covenant,  
you have bound the human family to yourself  
through Jesus your Son, our Redeemer,  
with a new bond of love so tight  
that it can never be undone.

Even now you set before your people  
a time of grace and reconciliation,  
and, as they turn back to you in spirit,  
you grant them hope in Christ Jesus  
and a desire to be of service to all,  
while they entrust themselves  
more fully to the Holy Spirit.

(Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation I)

## Part II

### THE LOOK OF JESUS

In the great mystery that is man, created in the image and likeness of God, with a capacity for Christ and for his divine and human prerogatives, the face and its very glance, has a symbolic and real importance. The face indicates the totality and the infinity of every person. In the exchange of glances there is an intimate communication, which the following Gospel passage recounts.

Aware that it is only in the light of an encounter with Christ that I am able to know deeply and truly who I am, I abandon myself totally now to this Word in order to become a companion of Christ and his Apostle Peter for the purpose of recognizing, along with them, the power of divine mercy, which during these times the Church invokes, proposes and celebrates in the Sacrament of Penance with the confession sins.

### Gospel

From the Gospel according to Luke

22: 54-62

After arresting Jesus, him they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest; Peter was following at a distance. They lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat around it, and Peter sat down with them. When a maid saw him seated in the light, she looked intently at him and said, "This man too was with him." But he denied it saying, "Woman, I do not know him." A short while later someone else saw him and said, "You too are one of them"; but Peter answered, "My friend, I am not." About an hour later, still another insisted, "Assuredly, this man too was with him, for he also is a Galilean." But Peter said, "My friend, I do not know what you are talking about." Just as he was saying this, the cock crowed, and the Lord turned and looked at Peter; and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." He went out and began to weep bitterly.

"The Lord turned and looked at Peter..."

## An aid for reflection

- For a moment, Jesus diverts his attention away from the Jewish court which is questioning and judging him in order to focus fully upon Peter, who was unable to stand firmly in the faith. Even though, the Master was a part of his life for three years.
- “I no longer call you servants but friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you... It is not you who has chosen me, but I who have chosen you!” This friendship, which Jesus proposed to his disciples as the foundation of his intimate and existential relationship, is the light that makes it possible to live the sacraments as the presence and action of Christ in the life of the believer. It is a deep intimate friendship which is able to change a life which is sometimes filled with suspicions, uncertainties, delusions and a fear of tomorrow. It is a friendship which is like a covenant, in which Christ commits Himself to me and with me in order that I may come to realize the way which is oriented by the Gospel and towards the Gospel, with all of the demands which this includes and with all of the freedom which comes from this relationship to the truth. Christ commits Himself to me in the sense that he gives his life for us and for our salvation, and he commits Himself to me because in the mystery of the Incarnation is expressed this complete intimacy towards the lives of all the faithful. The freedom of a life in Christ is expressed in a wonderful way by the vocation which he reveals to each of us. “I have chosen you”: this choice belongs to the immeasurable love of Jesus. Even Peter asked himself: Why me Lord? “It is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.”
- The inability of Peter to remain faithful to Christ changes when their two glances meet, the glance of Jesus which reaches Peter at the moment of the denial and the glance of Peter which sees the eyes of Christ penetrating his life and making present the gift of mercy. In reality, it is sin which destroys the relationship between Christ and the believer. But, as St. Ambrose states: “To fall is common to all, contrition belongs to faith” (*Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, 10, 72). Peter feels the forgiveness for his denial, a forgiveness given in virtue of his faith. “The essential gift is the gift of the path that is to be followed which leads to the feast” (A. de Saint Exupéry), and the true feast is that wherein the experience of forgiveness

is not only psychological but effective, for the heart of stone becomes the heart of flesh, thanks to the free action of God working within us through forgiveness. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux describes the action of God which transforms in the following words: “He is life and power, and as soon as he enters in, he awakens my slumbering soul; he stirs and soothes and pierces my heart, for before it was hard as stone, and diseased.... So when the Bridegroom, the Word, came to me, he never made known his coming by any signs, not by sight, not by sound, not by touch. It was not by any movement of his that I recognized his coming; it was not by any of my senses that I perceived he had penetrated to the depths of my being. Only by the movement of my heart, as I have told you, did I perceive his presence; and I knew the power of his might because my faults were put to flight and my human yearnings brought into subjection. I have marvelled at the depth of his wisdom when my secret faults have been revealed and made visible; at the very slightest amendment of my way of life I have experienced his goodness and mercy; in the renewal and remaking of the spirit of my mind, that is of my inmost being, I have perceived the excellence of his glorious beauty, and when I contemplate all these things I am filled with awe and wonder at his manifold greatness” (Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Songs of Songs*, 74, 5-6).

### Let us pray

(1)

*Psalm 138 (139)*

O Lord, you search me and you know me,  
you know my resting and my rising,  
you discern my purpose from afar.  
You mark when I walk or lie down,  
all my ways lie open to you.

Before ever a word is on my tongue  
you know it, O Lord, through and through.  
Behind and before you besiege me,  
your hand ever laid upon me.  
Too wonderful for me this knowledge,  
too high, beyond my reach.

O where can I go from your spirit,  
or where can I flee from your face?  
If I climb the heavens, you are there.  
If I lie in the grave, you are there.

If I take the wings of the dawn  
and dwell at the sea's furthest end,  
even there your hand would lead me,  
your right hand would hold me fast.

If I say: 'Let the darkness hide me  
and the light around me be night,'  
even darkness is not dark for you  
and the night is as clear as the day.

For it was you who created my being,  
knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I thank you for the wonder of my being,  
for the wonders of all your creation.

Already you knew my soul,  
my body held no secret from you  
when I was being fashioned in secret  
and moulded in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw all my actions,  
they were all of them written in your book;  
every one of my days was decreed  
before one of them came into being.

To me, how mysterious your thoughts,  
the sum of them not to be numbered!  
If I count them, they are more than the sand;  
to finish, I must be eternal, like you.

O search me, God, and know my heart.  
O test me and know my thoughts.  
See that I follow not the wrong path  
and lead me in the path of life eternal.

(2)

*From the Liturgy*

It is truly right and just  
that we should give you thanks and praise,  
O God, almighty Father,  
for all you do in this world,  
through our Lord Jesus Christ.

For though the human race  
is divided by dissension and discord,  
yet we know that by testing us  
you change our hearts  
to prepare them for reconciliation.

Even more, by your Spirit you move human hearts  
that enemies may speak to each other again,  
adversaries join hands,  
and peoples seek to meet together.

By the working of your power  
it comes about, O Lord,  
that hatred is overcome by love,  
revenge gives way to forgiveness,  
and discord is changed to mutual respect.

(Preface of Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II)

## Part III

# THE GIFT OF THE RESURRECTED ONE

## Gospel

From the Gospel according to John

20: 19-23

In the evening of the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you', and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you.'

'As the Father sent me,  
so am I sending you.'

After saying this he breathed on them and said:

'Receive the Holy Spirit.  
For those whose sins you forgive,  
they are forgiven;  
for those whose sins you retain,  
they are retained.'

## An aid for reflection

*From the Catechesis of Pope Francis*

1. The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation flows directly from the Paschal Mystery. In fact, on the evening of Easter the Lord appeared to the disciples, who were locked in the Upper Room, and after addressing them with the greeting, "Peace be with you!", he breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven" (*Jn* 20:21-23). This passage reveals to us the most profound dynamic contained in this Sacrament.

## I. The Proposal of *Lectio divina* for the time of silent prayer

First, the fact that the forgiveness of our sins is not something we can give ourselves. I cannot say: I forgive my sins. Forgiveness is asked for, is asked of another, and in Confession we ask for forgiveness from Jesus. Forgiveness is not the fruit of our own efforts but rather a gift, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit who fills us with the the wellspring of mercy and of grace that flows unceasingly from the open heart of the Crucified and Risen Christ. Secondly, it reminds us that we can truly be at peace only if we allow ourselves to be reconciled, in the Lord Jesus, with the Father and with the brethren. And we have all felt this in our hearts, when we have gone to confession with a soul weighed down and with a little sadness; and when we receive Jesus' forgiveness we feel at peace, with that peace of soul which is so beautiful, and which only Jesus can give, only Him.

2. Over time, the celebration of this Sacrament has passed from a public form – because at first it was made publicly – to a personal one, to the confidential form of Confession. This however does not entail losing the ecclesial matrix that constitutes its vital context. In fact, the Christian community is the place where the Spirit is made present, who renews hearts in the love of God and makes all of the brethren one thing in Christ Jesus. That is why it is not enough to ask the Lord for forgiveness in one's own mind and heart, but why instead it is necessary humbly and trustingly to confess one's sins to a minister of the Church. In the celebration of this Sacrament, the priest represents not only God but also the whole community, who sees itself in the weakness of each of its members, who listens and is moved by his repentance, and who is reconciled with him, which cheers him up and accompanies him on the path of conversion and human and Christian growth. One might say: I confess only to God. Yes, you can say to God "forgive me" and say your sins, but our sins are also committed against the brethren, and against the Church. That is why it is necessary to ask pardon of the Church, and of the brethren in the person of the priest. "But Father, I am ashamed..." Shame is also good, it is healthy to feel a little shame, because being ashamed is salutary. In my country when a person feels no shame, we say that he is "shameless"; a "sin verguenza". But shame too does good, because it makes us more humble, and the priest receives this confession with love and tenderness and forgives us on God's behalf. Also from a human point of view, in order to unburden oneself, it is good to talk with a brother and tell the priest these things which are weighing so much on my heart. And one feels that one is unburdening

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oneself before God, with the Church, with his brother. Do not be afraid of Confession! When one is in line to go to Confession, one feels all these things, even shame, but then when one finishes Confession one leaves free, grand, beautiful, forgiven, candid, happy. This is the beauty of Confession! I would like to ask you — but don't say it aloud, everyone respond in his heart: when was the last time you made your confession? Everyone think about it... Two days, two weeks, two years, twenty years, forty years? Everyone count, everyone say 'when was the last time I went to confession?'. And if much time has passed, do not lose another day. Go, the priest will be good. Jesus is there, and Jesus is more benevolent than priests, Jesus receives you, he receives you with so much love. Be courageous and go to Confession!

3. Dear friends, celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation means being enfolded in a warm embrace: it is the embrace of the Father's infinite mercy. Let us recall that beautiful, beautiful parable of the son who left his home with the money of his inheritance. He wasted all the money and then, when he had nothing left, he decided to return home, not as a son but as a servant. His heart was filled with so much guilt and shame. The surprise came when he began to speak, to ask for forgiveness, his father did not let him speak, he embraced him, he kissed him, and he began to make merry. But I am telling you: each time we go to confession, God embraces us. God rejoices! Let us go forward on this road. May God bless you!

(February 19, 2014)

### Let us pray

*From the Liturgy*

For he [Christ] is the true Lamb  
who has taken away the sins of the world;  
by dying he has destroyed our death,  
and by rising, restored our life.

(Preface I of Easter)

## I. The Proposal of *Lectio divina* for the time of silent prayer

The following Gospel passage is suggested for reflection following the celebration of the individual confession of sins.

# FORGIVEN, WE FORGIVE

## Gospel

From the Gospel according to Matthew

5: 38-48

Jesus said to his disciples: ‘You have learnt how it was said: *Eye for eye and tooth for tooth*. But I say this to you: offer the wicked man no resistance. On the contrary, if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well; if a man takes you to law and would have your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone orders you to go one mile, go two miles with him. Give to anyone who asks, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away.

‘You have learnt how it was said: You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike. For if you love those who love you, what right have you to claim any credit? Even the tax collectors do as much, do they not? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Even the pagans do as much, do they not? You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect.’

## Let us pray

*From the Liturgy*

We should give you thanks and praise,  
O God, almighty Father,  
for all you do in this world,  
through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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For though the human race  
is divided by dissension and discord,  
yet we know that by testing us  
you change our hearts  
to prepare them for reconciliation.

Even more, by your Spirit you move human hearts  
that enemies may speak to each other again,  
adversaries may join hands,  
and peoples seek to meet together.

By the working of your power  
it comes about, O Lord,  
that hatred is overcome by love,  
revenge gives way to forgiveness,  
and discord is changed to mutual respect.

(Preface of Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II)

II.  
PREPARATION  
FOR THE INDIVIDUAL CELEBRATION  
OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE



## Gospel

From the Gospel of Mark

10: 17-22

Jesus was setting out on a journey when a man ran up, knelt before him and put this question to him, ‘Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: You must not kill; You must not commit adultery; You must not steal; You must not bring false witness; You must not defraud; Honour your father and mother.’ And he said to him, ‘Master, I have kept all these from my earliest days.’ Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him, and he said, ‘There is one thing you lack. Go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ But his face fell at these words and he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth.

### An aid for reflection

The passage about the rich young man is all about you too. The desire for happiness and the way this episode ends force you to examine yourself before Jesus. Today, he wants to meet you. He loves you (cf. *Lk* 24:19). You are not in the presence of a stranger, since you were willed, created and loved in him and through him (cf. *Eph* 1:3-14). Whatever your situation, Jesus gazes upon you and tells you that he loves you. You did not seek him first, rather he chose you (cf. *1 Jn* 4:10; *Jn* 15:16-17).

This episode opens up many ways of thinking about yourself and better understanding the way your life is going.

In which of these situations do you see yourself at present?

1. “*Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*”

Jesus shows me your Face, O God (*Jn* 14:9), he shows me that you are my friend, you are my Father. His word, sometimes strong and sharp (cf. *Jn* 6:60; *Heb* 4:12), is meant to restore fully the dignity that I have lost. It does no

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good to say that “I am only human”, that “I am not perfect”, that “everyone is doing it”.

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Sometimes I think of these questions, especially when I am depressed. There are even times when I would like to die, but only to escape from the hard things. Perhaps I have been tempted to think and do senseless things, to go after old and new idols, to find easy and convenient excuses, but I know well what the consequences have been. I have not found greater certainty; perhaps only greater fears. I have looked, but I see no easy solutions. I am afraid of surrendering myself to you. I realize that my heart will be restless until it rests in you. No thing or person can completely fill it. And I cannot love anyone truly and freely (cf. *Rom 12:9*) if my heart does not know that it is loved.

You are greater than my heart, you are also infinitely greater than my weakness. My sin does not prevent me from recognizing you, indeed it becomes an opportunity to experience your greatness especially in the joy of forgiveness; I do not deserve it, and for this reason I bind myself to you in true gratitude.

### 2. “Do you know the commandments?”

It is true that today many people no longer know what is truly necessary. There are so many approaches, so many opinions, so many orders. In the Church too I sometimes hear different opinions which confuse me. Or perhaps I am only excusing myself. Perhaps I do not sufficiently know what the Commandments demand of me. I know that there is something amiss in me, but I have not yet made the effort to find out what. What I learned as a child was fine then, but today it is no longer sufficient. In the Law of God I can find unsuspected riches of wisdom in order to live a fully human life (cf. *Ps 1*), but I sense that there is an even greater treasure contained in it, which opens my weakness to an eternal and mysterious horizon: the horizon of divine life. Why did Jesus refer to the Ten Commandments of Moses? Are they still valid for us (cf. *Mt 15:17-19*)? I know that the Old Covenant was fulfilled in the new and eternal friendship (cf. *Jn 15:25*) which the Father established with us in the Son. And in the same way that God prepared humanity he is preparing me for a full encounter with Jesus.

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If I wish to know him my heart must be respectful and chaste, honest and sincere, straight and thankful to the one who has done me good (cf. *Mk* 10:19), and these attitudes must be expressed in concrete words and deeds (cf. *Jas* 2:4-16). Certainly, for this I need commitment and courage, but without an effort on my part I will never learn to love and perhaps it will always be more difficult for others to love me. Only if someone accepts me for what I am will I too become capable of loving. For this reason I absolutely need you, God, my Father.

3. *“All of these I have observed from my youth. What am I still lacking?”*

It is true! I am not happy with mere external and formal practice. To live only from day to day means being prey to changing moods and feelings, and nothing seems important enough to commit myself fully to it. Perhaps it is harder to struggle for a small senseless thing than to give all for what is worth a lot. I experienced this when I fell in love with someone: nothing could make me afraid anymore. My heart becomes free and light, happy and serene, and able to leave behind the things to which I am often attached (cf. *Ps* 62:11). By giving us your Son, you have truly redeemed every situation.

It is easy not to fear when all is going well, but when things go against me I lose my peace and motivation. But difficulties can also make my trust strong and sure (cf. *2 Cor* 1:3-7), and you, Father, know what I need. The Beatitudes (cf. *Mt* 5:3-11) frighten me, but in times of difficulty they are a great consolation.

Blessed are the poor in spirit in a world which desperately looks for well-being; blessed are the meek and humble of heart who do not proudly seek the first places (cf. *Mt* 23:6); blessed are the misunderstood and those who are persecuted because of their commitment to justice; blessed are the pure of heart in the face of so much malice and superficiality, which poison even the strongest ties between people; blessed are the peace-makers who are not discouraged by the difficulties of a huge undertaking. This is the Gospel law lived and preached by Jesus.

Being with friends is something easy and pleasant. It is nice to be close to those who are good and strong in heart. For this reason, perhaps, I find it

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hard to accept myself, and I don't like myself when I am capricious and fearful, when my heart is closed in cold and selfish calculation.

4. *“Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven.”*

This is the most difficult phrase. How can you ask me for everything? Have you given me something only to take it away from me? Are you perhaps envious if I am happy? The alternative to suspicion is trust. Peter too, Jesus's generous and impulsive, most faithful and weak friend, put his trust in Jesus's words and threw out the nets after labouring in vain for an entire night (cf. *Lk* 5:5), and he drew it in, full of fish. Having things is not the answer to inner emptiness.

What good does it do to gain the whole world if I lose my soul (cf. *Mk* 8:36), if I lose my heart, which is the real reason why all things have been given to me? What I have is not so important; rather, what counts is how I use the things I have. My gifts, which are my possessions, can gain me many friends (cf. *Lk* 16:9). To have true friends is a priceless treasure, a true security. Perhaps the only certain way of not lacking anything comes from giving it away. And doing so joyfully. I know that you love the person who gives joyfully (cf. *2 Cor* 9:7).

5. *“Come, follow me.”*

Life is not an eternal round-about. You come looking for a definitive and confident response. You have a plan of love for me. I do not impose my decisions on you and you do not impose yours on me. But when you pass by, you call me to respond. Just as you did with Mary. She abandoned her plans for yours, and in her you did wonders (cf. *Lk* 1:48-49).

For this reason I ask forgiveness if I have not always acted this way. I ask forgiveness if I gave and then took back, for unkept resolutions and promises, for statements which were not followed through with decisions, for service done only out of duty, for flashes of generosity followed by mediocre commitment. You ask much, you ask for everything and, although you are patient, you do not tolerate hypocrisy (cf. *Rev* 3:15-16; *Mt* 22:18; *Mt* 24:51).

## Examination of conscience

When I compare myself with the young man in the Gospel, I ask:

- Whom do I seek? What do I seek? Do I really seek?

As Jesus lovingly gazes upon me, I ask:

- Am I allowing his love to transform my life?
- What is God's place in my life?
- Do I thank the Lord for what he has given me?
- Am I ready to follow Christ?
- Do I make time to meet him, to pray and to listen to him?
- For me, is the Eucharist really the meeting with Christ that he wants it to be?
- Do I really have the courage to respond when God calls?
- Is there something to which he is calling me?

When I hear Jesus's invitation to follow him, I ask:

- Do I try to imitate Christ's sentiments of love in my relations with others?
- Why am I sometimes closed and intolerant, and why do I judge from prejudice?
- Do I see others as strangers or as brother and sisters?
- Am I committed to a more just, human and responsible world?
- Does what others think about me worry me?
- Am I concerned with winning the approval of others in the daily choices I make?
- Am I open and transparent in all my actions, am I respectful of higher values such as the dignity of every human being?
- Do I seek only to satisfy emotional and sexual needs, or am I free from dependence on them?
- Do I see falling in love as a question of a pure love, based on faith and lived in faith, leading to a communion of life to be accepted as a grace and gift of the Spirit?

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And now, it is your turn: “Looking at him, he loved him...”

At this point I have two choices: I can surrender myself to your fatherly love and be embraced by you (cf. *Lk* 15:20) or I can go away sad and more alone than ever (cf. *Mk* 10:22). Lord, give me the joy of being reconciled with you (cf. *Jn* 15:11). I want to entrust to Mary my efforts to walk in humility and simplicity of heart. It was on account of these qualities that she pleased you so much during her life. My meeting with God’s mercy is important not only to God but also to those around me, since the newness of life given to me is a reason for joy for them too. The Father calls us all to rejoice for every son and daughter who returns to him. The Church too rejoices for me and with me. She thanks God and she thanks me too for this happy encounter.

What practical commitment, which I can then check and evaluate, do I wish to undertake?

After the Sacrament of Reconciliation I will try to write down my commitment, so that it may be recorded forever.

## Celebration of the Sacrament

*When you go to confession, the priest will welcome you warmly and encourage you. He makes the merciful Lord present.*

*Together with the priest make the sign of the cross saying:*

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.**

*The priest helps you to put your trust in God, using these or similar words:*

May the Lord enlighten your heart with faith,  
and give you a true knowledge of your sins and trust in his mercy.

*Response:*

**Amen.**

*At this stage, you may confess your sins. If necessary, the priest will help you by asking questions and giving suitable advice.*

*The priest, after imposing a penance, asks you to say an Act of contrition to show that you are sorry for your sins and that you are resolved to set out on the path of conversion:*

**God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you,  
and I detest all my sins because I dread  
the loss of heaven and the pains of hell;  
but most of all because they offend you, my God,  
who are all good and deserving of all my love.  
I firmly resolve with the help of your grace  
to confess my sins, do penance, and to amend my life.  
Amen.**

*Or*

**Good Father,  
I need You, I rely on you to exist and to live.**

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**Through Your Son Jesus You looked at me and loved me.  
I did not have the courage to leave everything and follow You,  
and my heart is filled with sadness,  
but You are stronger than my sin.  
I believe in Your power over my life,  
I believe that you can save me just as I am now.  
Remember me.  
Forgive me.**

*The priest then gives absolution saying:*

God the Father of mercies,  
through the death and resurrection of his Son,  
has reconciled the world to himself,  
and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins;  
through the ministry of the Church  
may God give you pardon and peace,  
and I absolve you from you sins  
in the name of the Father, and of the Son, ✠ and of the Holy Spirit.

*Response:*

**Amen.**

*After absolving you, the priest continues:*

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

*Response:*

**His mercy endures forever.**

*The priest then dismisses you saying:*

The Lord has forgiven you, go in peace.