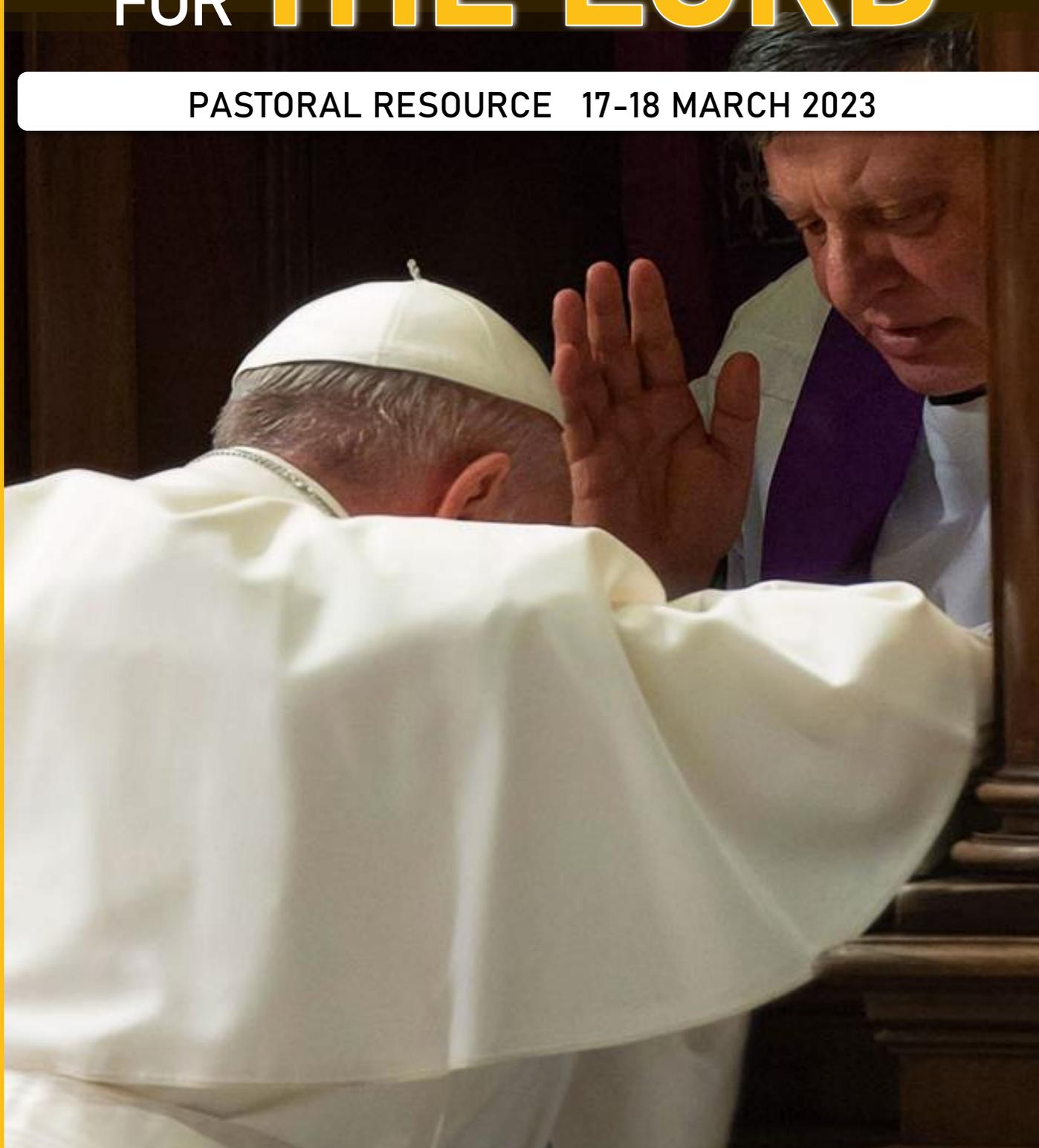


Dicastery for Evangelization  
Section for Fundamental Questions regarding Evangelization in the World

# 24 HOURS FOR THE LORD

PASTORAL RESOURCE 17-18 MARCH 2023





**DICASTERY FOR EVANGELIZATION**  
*SECTION FOR FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS  
REGARDING EVANGELIZATION IN THE WORLD*

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## Introductory remarks

**T**he aim of this resource is to offer some suggestions to parishes and Christian communities to prepare for the 24-hours for the Lord event. Obviously, these are suggestions that can be adapted according to local needs and customs.

On Friday evening March 17th and during the entire day of Saturday March 18th, it would be good to have the church open, offering the opportunity for Confessions, preferably in the context of guided Eucharistic Adoration. The event could begin on Friday evening with a Liturgy of the Word to prepare the faithful for Confession, and conclude with the celebration of Mass on Saturday afternoon.

The first part of this resource offers some thoughts to help reflect on the reason for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The texts help prepare the faithful to meet the priest at the time of individual confession in a mindful way. They may also help overcome any resistance that often blocks one from going to confession. A testimony is given that recounts a personal conversion: this may be helpful for reflecting on one's own change and on the awareness of the presence of God in one's life. A person's life is also presented, which can inspire us to do works of mercy and to continue to grow personally after having received absolution from our sins.

The second part can be used when the Church is open, so that those who go to confession can be helped in prayer and meditation through readings based on the Word of God

PART I

# CONFESSION

You know that a good confession restores us to heaven and the friendship of our God.

Saint John Vianney (the Curé of Ars)

## Reflection on the Sacrament of Reconciliation today

✠ *Vittorio Francesco Viola, O. F. M.*

The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Lk 18:9-14) compares two opposing attitudes of man before God. The first is that of those who “presume to be righteous” and, therefore, have no need to be forgiven: indeed, he claims to have a right to a prize that he deserves from God. The second is that of one who knows he is a sinner: the only thing he can do is to humble himself by beating his chest and trust in God's absolutely free gift of mercy.

To both, God has only one desire that must be faced with the freedom he has given us: the Father, rich in mercy, desires nothing more than to embrace, lift up, regenerate, restore the dignity of a son, free from every chain, bring back to life, and save every man. It was precisely to reveal the merciful face of the Father that the Word became flesh and came to dwell among us (cf. Jn 1:14). St. John Paul II wrote in *Dives in misericordia* (no. 2): «Not only does [Christ] speak of it and explain it by the use of comparisons and parables, but above all He Himself makes it incarnate and personifies it. He Himself, in a certain sense, is mercy. To the person who sees it in Him - and finds it in Him - God becomes «visibile» in a particular way as the Father who is rich in mercy» (Ef 2:4). The fatherhood of God, which we thought we had irretrievably lost since the day of our sin in the Garden of Eden, although still yearning for it in our hearts, is restored to us through the Son.

The Gospels recount how the encounter with the incarnate Word happens in various circumstances and in very different ways, traversing the often tortuous and unexpected paths of people's lives. The adulteress is dragged before Him after being caught in her sin; the paralytic is lowered to Him from the roof, due to the resourcefulness of his friends; Zacchaeus climbs a tree in his desire to see Him, and then hurries down to host Him in his house. The woman in Simon's house, known to all as a sinner, throws herself at his feet to wash them with her tears. The thief meets Him in the decisive hour on account of the same death sentence, to find himself shortly thereafter with Him in His Kingdom.

Anyone who approached Jesus with the same feelings and attitudes as the tax collector, confessing his guilt, always “returned home justified” (cf. Lk 18:14). The condemnation is replaced by absolution with a full formula, not because our sin does not exist, but because it is consumed in the fire of God's love. Redemption brings to completion the original plan for which we were created and to which God has remained faithful despite our infidelities, namely, the possibility for us to partake in the communion of love of the Persons of the Holy Trinity.

There is only one crucial question: how can we, too, have the concrete experience of encountering Him today in order to receive the gift of reconciliation and live in the freedom of God's children? Without a real encounter with the Lord who saves, the awareness of our sin would end up being a prison with no way out.

We, too, "need" to be given the opportunity to humble ourselves before God with the concrete gestures of penance and the words of a sincere request for forgiveness. Above all, we need to experience God's mercy as it happened in the days of the Incarnation through Jesus' gestures and words of forgiveness. All this is truly given to us in sacramental form in the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.



The Second Vatican Council helped us rediscover the theological meaning of the Liturgy, that is, its place in the dynamics of faith. Chapter I of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* sets out general principles for the reform and promotion of the sacred Liturgy. I will recall them very succinctly: the celebratory action is the present moment, the *today* of salvation history; the Church is in the world not only to proclaim the Lord's Passover but to enact it in the celebration of the sacraments. In the celebratory action Christ is truly present in many ways, thus making an encounter with Him possible. Not a remembrance of Him, but the possibility, of encountering Him in sacramental form, like the adulteress, like the paralytic, like Zacchaeus, like the woman in Simon's house, like the thief on the cross. Through a *good understanding* of the *rites and prayers* (cf. SC No. 48), by virtue of the presence and action of the Spirit, the Church exercises the priestly role of Jesus Christ and actualizes the saving power of his Passover, offering to all the faithful, through participation in the ritual action, the possibility of being reached by the efficacy of the work of Redemption, the possibility of being saved.

Based on these general principles, the Council hoped that the rite and formulas for the sacrament of Penance would be revised so that they would more clearly express both the nature and effect of the sacrament (cf. SC No. 72). The realization of this recommendation has been long and difficult. This is not surprising when one considers the

complex development of the ritual of the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation, which in the course of the Church's journey took on very different forms before arriving at the codification of Paul V's Ritual (1614) in use until Vatican II.

In enacting the reform of the celebration of this sacrament, certain principles, taken from the conciliar documents, were observed.

*Lumen Gentium* (No. 11) deals with the common priesthood exercised in the sacraments and states: «Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from the mercy of God for the offence committed against Him and are at the same time reconciled with the Church, which they have wounded by their sins, and which by charity, example, and prayer seeks their conversion».

The same theme is taken up by the decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* in No. 5, speaking of priests as ministers of sanctification through the sacraments and the Eucharist: «By Baptism men are truly brought into the People of God; by the sacrament of Penance sinners are reconciled to God and his Church».

The decree *Christus Dominus* in No. 30.2 also reminds pastors «of how much the sacrament of Penance contributes to developing the Christian life». and, exhorts them «to always make themselves available to hear the confessions of the faithful».

The *Praenotanda* to the Rite of Penance approved by St. Paul VI on December 2, 1973 are an excellent summary of the understanding of the celebration of the sacrament in light of the principles reaffirmed by the Council.

The basic elements which needed to be referred to in the revision of the rite can be summarized as follows: salvation history as the revelation and realization of the mystery of reconciliation; sin as an offense against God and a wound to the ecclesial body; the twofold dimension of reconciliation, with God and with the Church; and the involvement of the Christian community in the process of conversion.

Their ritual implementation soon proved complex. We cannot review here, even in summary, the breadth of issues that emerged and the reasons that inspired the reform efforts. Even the choice to maintain the terminology handed down by tradition, while trying to redefine the terms in the light of conciliar theology, proved to be a difficult task. Considering the purpose of this resource book, I will limit myself to a few useful considerations to improve the quality of liturgical



participation in the celebration of the sacrament, a participation which, as the Council calls for, must be fully conscious, active (cf. SC No. 14) and fruitful (cf. SC No. 11).

First of all, it is fitting to recall that the Church celebrates the remission of sins and reconciliation in Baptism, the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance. The common purpose, namely the forgiveness of sins, underlies the intimate relationship that exists between the distinct characteristics of these sacraments (cf. *Praenotanda* No. 3).

Moreover, the Church is called to live a profound penitential dimension that pervades her whole life: in this way she expresses her being in a process of continuous conversion until the day of the Lord's return. The penitential attitude of the Christian life is not a way to earn God's mercy. Rather, it expresses our desire to belong to the Trinitarian love not only in words but in the practical concreteness of the offering of suffering united with that of the Cross of Christ, works of mercy and works of charity, until Christ is formed in us (cf. Gal. 4:19). This attitude is also expressed in the Liturgy and, in particular, in the sacrament of penance (cf. *Praenotanda* nos. 4-5).

A mistaken understanding sometimes leads us to approach the sacrament of Penance with the same inner attitude as someone who enters a courtroom knowing that he is guilty. The parable of the merciful Father (Lk 15:11-32) teaches us that the son returning home does not find a criminal court, but the feast that expresses the father's joy over the return of his son. The place of celebrating the sacrament is the wedding banquet hall, where the community celebrates Easter, Christ's victory over sin and death, in the joyful experience of his forgiving mercy. Our confession restores us to the brightness of the white robe of baptism, a garment specifically required to participate in the feast.



This is what is intended: God passes a judgment, the cross of His Son judges our sin, exposes our faults, calls them by name, and shows the inconsistency of our self-absolving justifications. This judgment is certainly the most penetrating gaze we can have into our inner world and one that no psychological introspection, however beneficial, can ever match. Psalm 139:23-24 says: «Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting». This gaze, however, is not that of a ruthless judge who enforces a law with unforgiving firmness, but is rather that of a good and merciful father who, as in the parable, is eager to embrace his son again. If we struggle to free ourselves from the idea of the courtroom, let us at least try to think about it is a very special court, in which the judge has the earnest intention of wanting to absolve us and our lawyer has the best argument of his loyalty in our defense: «But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous» (cf. 1Jn 2:1).

The ritual form that best expresses the ecclesial dimension of this sacrament is certainly the “Rite of reconciliation for several penitents with individual confession and absolution”. Nevertheless, even the most frequent “Rite for Reconciliation of Individual Penitents” - if celebrated according to the directions of the current ritual - holds the same dimension. Being members of the same body establishes such a deep bond, which in addition to co-responsibility for guilt, also enables us to mutually share in penance (cf. *Praenotanda* No. 5).

In the celebration of the sacrament each believer exercises his or her baptismal priesthood in the proper acts of the penitent: contrition, confession and satisfaction (penance) (cf. *Praenotanda* 6). This Tridentine terminology taken up by the current ritual is explored and understood in its deeper meaning. One example: after defining contrition according to the teaching of the Council of Trent (the sorrow and detestation of the sin committed, with the intention of sinning no more), the definition is expanded with a quotation from St. Paul VI's *Paenitemini*, which describes *metánoia* as “that intimate and total change and renewal of the entire man—of all his opinions, judgments and decisions—which takes place in him in the light of the sanctity and charity of God, the sanctity and charity which were manifested to us in the Son and communicated fully”.

In the ritual structure of the sacrament of penance, a key element--unfortunately still not widely put into into practice--is the proclamation of the Word. One of the merits of the reform sought by the Council is certainly “That the intimate connection between words and rites may be apparent in the liturgy (SC n. 35). God's word allows us to peer into our hearts and know our sin, calls us to conversion, and proclaims God's mercy that is brought about in sacramental forgiveness (cf. *Praenotanda* No. 12).

A final point. No. 10 of the *Praenotanda* gives us a description of the confessor's ministry that shows all the richness of the celebration of this sacrament. He is called as a physician to “know how to discern the diseases of the soul in order to bring suitable remedies” and as a judge to evaluate everything wisely; he must be a man of God skilled in discerning the spirits, which is “the intimate knowing of God's work in the hearts of men”; he must reveal, in words and deeds, the merciful heart of the Father and the care of the Good Shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep to bring it back to the fold.

In *Misericordiae vultus* (n. 2) Pope Francis wrote: «Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness».

It is in the Sacrament of Reconciliation that we are given the opportunity to have a living experience of God's mercy for us.



## Testimony of conversion Phan Thi Kim Phúc

*Nothing gives such pleasure to God as the conversion and salvation of men.*  
Saint Gregory of Nazianzus

Conversion refers to the situation of a person who, realizing he or she is going in the wrong direction, changes course and takes the right one. It is an inner transformation in which one moves from a situation of estrangement or indifference toward God to a life of oneness and friendship with him. Conversion implicitly entails a call from God, and at the same time the person's willingness and commitment to embrace the God-given call. So, conversion is both a gift of God's Grace and a person's free response.

The process of conversion can take place gradually, taking several days, weeks, months and even years -- or it can happen all of a sudden when one realizes God's presence, one's own inadequacy and the fact that the path to eternal happiness exists, freely choosing it as one's own.

We hope that the personal conversion story recounted below will help you reflect on where you are with your faith and God's presence in your life.



Phan Thị Kim Phúc was born April 2, 1963 in Trang Bang, a rural village about 40 kilometers from the capital city of Saigon, South Vietnam. For several years, the country had been engulfed in a bloody war. Often Vietcong warriors or government forces came to the area. The war, however, did not affect Trang Bang, and Kim, together with her parents, grandparents and eight brothers and sisters, led a rather carefree life, helping her parents with simple household chores.

In the early 1970s war activities were increasing around Trang Bang. Then came the unforgettable day of June 8, 1972 when Vietcong forces occupied the village and South Vietnamese troops decided to attack them. Thirty or so civilians, including the Phúc family, gathered in the local temple with the hope that none of the military and guerrillas would lash out at the religious place. Around noon, however, one of the South Vietnamese soldiers mistakenly took the civilians gathered in the temple for Vietcong members. Suddenly "a smoke grenade exploded, covering the scene in bright purple and gold. It was a signal to the South Vietnamese pilot following the battle: drop the bombs on this very spot."

One of the soldiers near the temple realized the seriousness of the mistake and started shouting, "Get out! Run! You must leave this place! It is not safe here! They will destroy this whole place! Go! Children, run first!"

Kim, along with the other children, rushed from the temple into the small square near by, and then everyone spilled out onto the village's main road. Out of the corner of her eye she saw the plane abruptly drop in altitude: from below its belly four bombs dropped. Seconds later the whole area was flooded with napalm. The air was burning, reaching a temperature of 1,000 degrees Celsius. Kim was burning. Her clothes, her shoulders, her legs - everything was on fire. The pain was tremendous, but she didn't stop. She ran ahead.

Along the same road, together with the military, was a very young reporter: Nick Ut, who filmed the plane attack with his camera.

The group of children caught up with the military - a few years later Kim will remember that at that moment she shouted, "Nóng quá, nóng quá - too hot, too hot."

One of the reporters, Christopher Wain, stretched out his hand and gave the little girl water. He then poured water over her head and burned body, but he made things worse because the oxygen from the water reacted with the napalm residue on her body and she started on fire again. Nick Ut also came to her rescue. Setting his camera aside, he took her to the hospital in Saigon. Doctors, however, ascertained that the little girl would not survive-about 30 percent of her body was burned. Nick insisted and eventually convinced the doctors to try. Kim spent the next fourteen months in the hospital and underwent seventeen medical procedures.

Meanwhile, one of Nick's photos, showing Kim naked, burned and terrified, running on the road with the other children, was awarded a Pulitzer Prize. The photo is called "The terror of war"



The healing process was extremely painful, but along the way another thing happened - much more serious: Kim's heart was filled with anger and hatred. She had negative and very deep feelings toward all the people who caused her pain, toward all the people who turned their backs, at seeing her scarred and deformed skin. She no longer felt loved, accepted, beautiful, worthy of living.

Years and years later, during an interview, Kim will say, I wanted to die that day, together with my family ... it was hard for me to bear all that hatred, that anger”.

All these physical and emotional experiences led her to choose medicine as her subject of study. Simultaneously, she also sought a deeper meaning in her life and studied different religions. One day in 1982, in her second year of college, she found the New Testament in the university library in Saigon. She picked it up, sat down and began leafing through the pages. Her gaze fell on the phrase spoken by Jesus in the Gospel of St. John: “I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me” (14:6). At first Kim thinks Jesus is very presumptuous - “there are thousands of ways to get to God; everyone knows that”. She closed the book but continued thinking - she realized that if the sentence Jesus said is true, then all her life she has been worshipping the wrong gods.

Then another thought came to her: “That Jesus, He suffered in defense of His claim. He was mocked, and tortured, and murdered. Why would He do all these things, if He were not, truly, God? Her pain had to have a purpose, otherwise she could not have endured the fight so faithfully. I never thought about Jesus in this way - the wounded way, the way that bears the scars.”

The whole reflection led Kim to conclude: “If Jesus really is who he says he is, and he has endured all that he says he has endured, then maybe he could help me make sense of my pain and finally come to terms with my scars”.

Over the next few weeks Kim deepened her knowledge about the Christian religion, talked with other people, gradually discovered that faith comes from listening and that God has a plan for her. She compared her painful experiences with God who had suffered. One

day she realized that she is loved and wanted by God. In early 1983 she announced to her family that she had changed her religion - she had given her life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christian conversion gave her the strength to forgive. Today Kim Phúc lives in Canada with her husband and two children. She has dedicated her life to promoting peace by providing medical and psychological support to war victims.

*"Forgiveness has freed me from hatred. I still have many scars on my body and severe pain almost every day, but my heart is purified. Napalm is very powerful, but faith, forgiveness and love are much stronger. We will no longer have war if everyone learns to live with true love, hope, and forgiveness. If that little girl in the picture could do it, ask yourself, can I do it too?"*



## How to prepare for confession? Reflection on the examination of conscience

*Pope Francis, August 6, 2014, General Audience*

**B**esides the New Law, Jesus also gives us the “protocol” by which we will be judged. At the end of the world we will be judged. And what questions will we be asked there? What will these questions be? What is the protocol by which the judge will evaluate us? We find it in Chapter 25 of the Gospel of Matthew. Today the assignment is to read the fifth Chapter of the Gospel of Matthew where the Beatitudes are; and read the 25th Chapter, where the protocol is, the questions that we will be asked on Judgement Day. We will not have titles, credit or privileges on which to stake our claims. The Lord will recognize us if, in our turn, we recognized him in the poor, in the hungry, in the indigent and the outcast, in those who suffer and are alone.... This is one of the fundamental criteria for evaluating our Christian life, which Jesus calls us to measure up to every day. I read the Beatitudes and I think of how my Christian life should be, and then I examine my conscience with this Chapter 25 of Matthew. Every day: I did this, I did this, I did this.... It will do us good! They are simple but concrete things.



**Mt 5:3-10**

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

**Mt 25:31-46**

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left.

Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'

Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.'

And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

## How to go to confession? Individual celebration of the Sacrament

*When you meet the priest for confession, he welcomes you warmly, offering words of encouragement. He makes the merciful Lord present.*

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

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

*The priest helps you to place your trust in God, with these words or something similar:*

The Lord be in your heart,  
that you may repent  
And humbly confess your sins.

*Depending on the situation, the priest, reads or says from memory a text from Sacred Scripture, which speaks of God's mercy and His invitation to repent.*

### Rom 5: 8-9

But God shows his love for us  
in that while we were yet sinners  
Christ died for us. Since, therefore,  
we are now justified by his blood,  
much more shall we be saved  
by him from the wrath of God.

*Then, you can confess your sins. If need be, the priest will help you, asking pertinent questions and giving suitable advice. The priest will invite you to express repentance, reciting an act of contrition or some other similar prayer, for example:*

Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;  
I am no longer worthy to be called your son.  
God, be merciful to me a sinner! (Lk 15: 18-19; 18,13)

*The priest extends his hands (or at least his right hand) over your head and says:*

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

*Response:*

Amen.

*After absolution the priest continues:*

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good.

*Response:*

His mercy endures forever.

*Then the priest dismisses you saying:*

The Lord has forgiven you. Go in peace.

*Prayer of the Penitent:*

Against you, you alone, have I sinned,  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you are justified in your sentence  
and blameless when you pass judgment.  
Indeed, I was born guilty,  
a sinner when my mother conceived me.. (Ps 51 4-5)

*Or*

O Jesus, fire of love,  
I have never offended you!  
O dear and good Jesus, with Your Holy Grace  
I do not want to offend you again,  
nor ever again hurt you,  
because I love you above all things.  
Merciful Jesus forgive me!

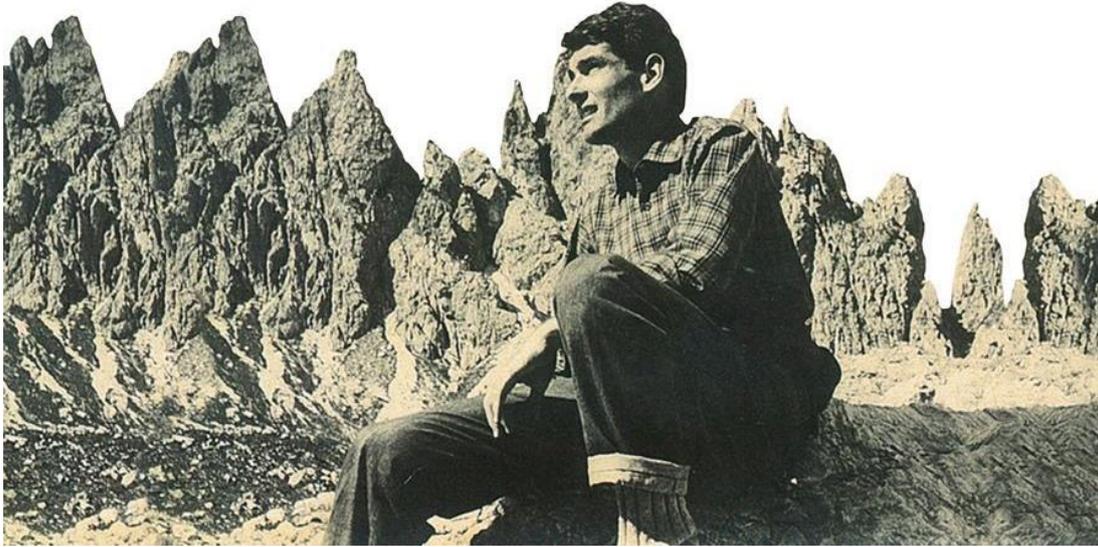
## What to do after confession?

In hope we were saved, says Saint Paul to the Romans, and likewise to us (Rom 8:24). According to the Christian faith, “redemption” — salvation — is not simply a given. Redemption is offered to us in the sense that we have been given hope, trustworthy hope, by virtue of which we can face our present: the present, even if it is arduous, can be lived and accepted if it leads towards a goal, if we can be sure of this goal, and if this goal is great enough to justify the effort of the journey.

Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, No. 1.



## Servant of God Giancarlo Rastelli



Giancarlo Rastelli was born in Pescara on June 25, 1933. His father, Vito Rastelli, was a journalist, while his mother, Luisa Bianchi, taught in an elementary school. At the end of the war, in 1945, Giancarlo moved with his family to Parma, his parents' hometown, where he graduated from high school in 1951. He enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Parma, where he graduated cum laude in 1957, and his thesis was awarded the Lepetit Prize. But it was not only his intellectual gifts that amazed his fellow university students. Even today they tell of the time when Gian, before working on anatomy, would surprise everyone with a question like, "Do you remember St. Paul's Hymn to Charity?"

His medical career was striking. He worked at the Institute of Human Anatomy, the Institute of General Pathology and the Institute of Clinical Surgery. Upon graduation, he became a volunteer assistant first and then extraordinary assistant at the Surgical Clinic at the Chair of Special Surgical Pathology of the University of Parma. After five years, he received a NATO scholarship and moved to the United States, to the Mayo Clinic - a leading medical research center - where he specialized in cardiac surgery. To his colleagues and friends Gian said, "I've always thought that the first gift that the sick person must have from the doctor is the gift of science, the gift of being treated as it goes."

Another characteristic must be added to his excellent medical education and practice: that of religion. Dr. Rastelli's motivation to save lives was not just in the Hippocratic Oath, but he discovered and deepened it in his Christian faith. Even as a 13-year-old boy he entered the Marian Congregation in Parma, at the Oratory of San Rocco, where Father Molin Pradel directed his attention to the poor, the marginalized, the excluded and the sick. This Christian spirit of openness and absolute dedication to those most in need shone through in his mission as a doctor, surgeon and researcher. Giancarlo always saw the face of Christ in the faces of the sick. Hence, his work as a researcher at the Mayo Clinic was always combined with his care for the sick, faithfully executing the clinic's motto: "The patient comes first". One of his patients described his special relationship with his attending physician, Dr. Rastelli, as follows, "He got sick with the sick and healed with them".

In 1964 Giancarlo returned to Italy to marry Anna Anghileri of Sondrio. Twenty days later, upon returning to Mayo, he learned from routine tests, required for researchers, that he had malignant lymphogranuloma (Hodgkin's disease). Dr. Rastelli was told that he most likely had five years to live. Despite the shocking news, he was strong and told his wife Anna, "I am happy. I have been given so much in life, and now with you I have everything". And after a few days, "I have been given more time, thank God. We will not talk about it anymore. We will live a normal life", and she agreed with just as much spiritual strength.

The next five years were spectacular: Dr. Rastelli developed new classifications and procedures for cardiac surgeries, which, in medical manuals around the world, are still known as Rastelli Procedures 1 and 2. At the same time, his human and spiritual growth, which few people knew about, revealed increasing supernatural signs.

Giancarlo extended his generosity to patients and friends, even personally paying for the very expensive Mayo surgeries of children who came to him from Italy. He even hosted them in his home if they could not afford to stay in the USA. He once wrote this on the subject: "Knowing, without knowing how to love, is nothing. It is less than nothing." In 1966 Giancarlo and Anna's daughter Antonella was born.



Anna, his wife, describes their relationship this way, "In Gian I discovered my reason for being. Gian is the proof of God's existence and eternity. But, in my happiness, there are tears of what you know but which cannot be said. I thought I was going crazy, but I was overcome with great and unexpected strength. Every day is a gift from heaven. Our journey is as light as breath and as important as life. And I'm not talking about the life of this earth that we consider time stolen from eternity, but of everlasting life".

Giancarlo's illness became increasingly serious. He was prone to relapses, and rounds of x-rays and chemotherapy treatments. In January 1970, a debilitating fever overtook him, almost completely impeding his professional research. Later that month he had planned to present to his team the so-called third Rastelli procedure, but he could not attend the meeting that day. He was hospitalized and intubated. He died on February 2 without having been able to unveil his third method.

The beatification process for Giancarlo Rastelli was opened in 2005.

## PART II

# VIGIL

... he is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you;  
he is the beauty to which you are so attracted;  
it is he who provokes you with that thirst for fullness that will not  
let you settle for compromise;  
it is he who urges you to shed the masks of a false life;  
it is he who reads in your hearts your most genuine choices, the  
choices that others try to stifle.  
It is Jesus who stirs in you the desire to do something great with  
your lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow  
yourselves to be grounded down by mediocrity, the courage to  
commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves  
and society, making the world more human and more fraternal.

Saint John Paul II,  
*Prayer vigil, XV World Youth Day, 2000*

## Introduction to the Celebration

The Vigil that takes place during the “24 hours for the Lord” plays a key role, because it is the main part of the entire event; so, it would be good if it could be celebrated with the Blessed Sacrament exposed, while one or more priests would be available to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

This Vigil is inspired by the words from the Gospel of Luke “God, be merciful to me, a sinner” (cf. Lk 18:13), emphasizing man's own effort to turn to God in search of forgiveness. The Evangelist Luke relates Jesus' account of two men going to the temple to pray (cf. Lk 18:9-14). In the story, the attitude of the Pharisee is contrasted with that of the tax collector. While the former, standing during prayer, boasts of his actions before the Lord, the latter, keeping his distance and with his eyes downcast, acknowledges his guilt. The realization that he is guilty leads the tax collector to utter one of the simplest prayers for forgiveness: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner”. The prayer is answered and the tax collector goes home justified by God, unlike the Pharisee, who justifies himself. The text can be understood in several ways. We will focus on two of them: the first highlights the action of the man who recognizes himself as a sinner before God and humbly asks for forgiveness. The second, however, warns against a human attitude that seeks self-justification by comparing oneself with others. During this process, one finds fault with others and perceives oneself to be better than them. The sense of superiority does not allow them to ask God for forgiveness.

The “24 hours for the Lord” event is closely linked with the liturgical season of Lent, and in particular with the Fourth Sunday of Lent, formerly known as “Laetare”. The joy celebrated during this Sunday flows from personal conversion, reconciliation with God and the grace received in the Sacrament of Forgiveness. Among other things, the Sunday readings (1 Sam 16:1b, 6-7,10-13a; Ps 23; Eph 5:8-14; Jn 9:1-41) portray how man is chosen by God and touched by his grace, abandoning the life of darkness and becoming a child of light. That passage from darkness to light, from death to life, from sin to forgiveness, is illustrated through the healing process of the man born blind.

The event will take place in the days just before the Fourth Sunday of Lent to give all the faithful the opportunity to cleanse their souls of sins, and in this way, be prepared for Easter, which is now close at hand.

During the 24-hours for the Lord, the topics indicated above should be emphasized. However, the planning and choice of themes and scriptural passages is always up to the discretion of the pastors and organizers who, in various parts of the world, know the needs of the faithful entrusted to their pastoral care.

N.B. Reconciliation with God and man restores man to peace. Wars and peace are not merely a result of political dealings, but above all of the disposition of human hearts.

In this sense every person, and moreover every Christian, is responsible for war and peace in societies and among nations. We all have the mission to cultivate merciful hearts and to spread the culture of forgiveness and peace. During the “24 Hours for the Lord” initiative, prayer for peace and reconciliation among warring nations and social groups that are still in conflict cannot be overlooked.

As in previous years, the event usually takes place in three settings:

1. In small communities such as hospitals or parishes/rectories with a relatively small number of worshippers.  
In this case the entire event often takes place on Friday evening. It could begin with the penitential liturgy, followed by exposition of the Blessed Sacrament with Eucharistic Adoration either silently or animated by a prayer group (according to the possibilities and needs of the community) followed by inviting everyone to sacramental reconciliation with God.
2. In larger parishes (especially in urban areas), at the vicariate or deanery levels where the event will be held in several parishes/communities.  
It would be good to begin on Friday evening with Holy Mass or the Liturgy of the Word. Then the Blessed Sacrament is exposed and Eucharistic Adoration begins, animated by various parish groups or by various parishes.  
The organizers are responsible for planning the programme for Adoration and its duration, ensuring that there is ample time and priests available for the faithful to go to confession.
3. In cathedral churches, basilicas, sanctuaries, or in parishes and places of worship that are most significant for the local Church, carefully chosen by the bishop or those responsible.  
The event should be organised in a more solemn manner, emphasising the universality of the Church that is celebrating it simultaneously throughout the world. The church should also remain open throughout the night, with Eucharistic Adoration animated in shifts by various prayer groups and communities. It would be good to have the Ordinary and the Bishops present at least at the beginning and end of the event, and if possible, also for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. One or more priests should always be present and available to hear confessions.

If possible, a group of specially trained and prepared lay people could invite people passing by the church to come in and take part in the event (especially in churches located in city centres, historical and tourist areas, places with a large number of people, etc.). A simple invitation, a word of welcome or an explanation of the event often provide an opportunity to enter into much more serious conversation, thus becoming a real moment of evangelisation. Often, the lay faithful, especially those who have systematically received formation in various communities and prayer groups, can be excellent in helping the people

prepare for confession, by talking with them especially those who have not attended church for some time and might feel uncomfortable about facing the priest directly.

Songs can be chosen to adapt the Vigil to the particular needs of a specific community (parish, hospital chapel, monastery, rectory, shrine, etc.). To develop the recurring themes of the biblical texts proposed, a meditation could be prepared or testimonies could be chosen, according to the needs and resources of the community itself.

## Beginning of the Vigil

### Penitential Liturgy

The assembly sings a hymn or a suitable song while the priest and ministers process into the sanctuary.

#### GREETING

C: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

R: Amen.

C: Mercy and peace be with all of you.

R: And with your spirit.

C: "Jesus told this parable again for some who had the self-presumption that they were righteous and despised others". With these words the Evangelist Luke invites us on a journey into the intimacy of our hearts. Spontaneously the questions arise: how do I relate to others? What do I think of them? What do I think of God himself? Brothers and sisters, the questions help us to review and pull together the fabric of our daily lives, of relationships made up of thoughts, words and unfinished actions - often wrong, painful and damaging. God does not condemn us, but waits patiently until we understand our mistake and raise our cry: "God be merciful to me a sinner". Tonight, in the intimacy of our hearts, let us ask God for mercy for ourselves and for those among our brothers and sisters who have not yet found the strength and courage to be here with us and to ask the Father for mercy.

Everyone is in silence for a few moments. Then the celebrant continues:

C: Let us pray.

**Extending his hands and says:**

C: O God, you show no partiality and give us the assurance  
that the prayer of the humble pierces the clouds;  
Look also on us as on the repentant tax collector,  
and open us to trust in your mercy  
To be forgiven in your name.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who is God,  
and lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
for ever and ever.

**All respond:** Amen.

**LITURGY OF THE WORD****First Reading****Sir 35:15b-17.20-22a***From the book of Sirach*

For the Lord is the judge,  
and with him there is no partiality.  
He will not show partiality to the poor;  
but he will listen to the prayer of one who is wronged.  
He will not ignore the supplication of the orphan,  
or the widow when she pours out her complaint.  
The one whose service is pleasing to the Lord will be accepted,  
and his prayer will reach to the clouds.  
The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds,  
and it will not rest until it reaches its goal;  
it will not desist until the Most High responds  
and does justice for the righteous, and executes judgment.

L: The Word of the Lord

R: Thanks be to God

**Responsorial Psalm****From Psalm 34**

**R.** The poor cry out, and the Lord hears them.

I will bless the Lord at all times;  
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.  
My soul makes its boast in the Lord;  
let the humble hear and be glad.

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted,  
and saves the crushed in spirit.  
The Lord redeems the life of his servants;  
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

### Gospel Acclamation

Mt 4:23

*Praise and honour to you, Lord Jesus Christ!*

God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ,  
entrusting to us the word of reconciliation.

*Praise and honour to you, Lord Jesus Christ!*

### Gospel

C: The Lord be with you.

R: And with your spirit.

C: From the Gospel according to Luke

(18:9-14)

R: Gloria to you, O Lord.

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: «Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, “God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income”. But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner”! I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted».

C: The Word of the Lord.

R: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

### Homily.

All stand.

### GENERAL CONFESSION OF SINS

After a brief time for reflection, the celebrant says:

C: Inspired by the humility of the tax collector, let us ask God for forgiveness of our sins.

C: I confess to Almighty God

R: and to you my brothers and sisters that I have sinned in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault. Therefore, I ask the Blessed Mary ever Virgin, all the angels and the saints, and you my brothers and sisters to pray for me to the Lord our God.

C: May Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you your sins and bring you to life everlasting.

R. Amen.

### THE LORD'S PRAYER

C: Inspired by the Word of the Lord that invites us to ask God for the forgiveness of our sins, let us address our wholehearted prayer to Him:

R: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from all evil.

### SIGN OF PEACE

If permitted by the health regulations, the Celebrant says:

C: Dear brothers and sisters, reconciled by God's grace received through Jesus Christ, let us exchange a sign of peace.

All exchange a sign of peace.

### EXPOSITION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

The Blessed Sacrament is exposed as usual and is followed by animated Eucharistic Adoration which continues until the end of the "24 hours for the Lord".

This is followed by time for individual confessions and absolution.

At the end of the Vigil, a solemn blessing with the Blessed Sacrament is given. In some places, especially where the event is solemnly celebrated, the "24 Hours for the Lord" can conclude on Saturday evening with the celebration of Mass for the Fourth Sunday of Lent or First Vespers.

## Carrying out of the Vigil

This text is a proposal that should be subsequently implemented and adapted according to local traditions.

The animation of Eucharistic Adoration could be done by various groups, taking turns, with different themes, changing hourly, depending on the duration of the vigil, the number of participants, the organizational possibilities and other factors.

During the celebration of the vigil, ample time should be allowed for silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

### EXAMPLE OF A TURN

After exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, there is a moment of silence, followed by the musical group leading a song. This is followed by a reading from scripture:

Let us listen to the Words from the letter of Saint Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians

(5,8-14)

For once you were darkness,  
but now in the Lord you are light.  
Live as children of light -  
for the fruit of the light is found  
in all that is good and right and true.  
Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord.  
Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness,  
but instead expose them.  
For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly;  
but everything exposed by the light becomes visible,  
for everything that becomes visible is light.  
Therefore, it says,  
«Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you».

Time of silence.

**TESTIMONY/MEDITATION**

At this time a testimony of conversion could be given by a person willing to share how the Lord touched his/her heart with the grace of forgiveness. An alternative could be to read Giancarlo Rastelli's conversion testimony found in this resource. In case a testimony is not possible, a meditative text could be read, such as:

**Exposition on Psalm 63 Saint Augustine**

There is a sleep of the soul; there is a sleep of the body. Sleep of body we all ought to have: because if sleep of body is not taken, a man faints, the body itself faints. For our frail body cannot long sustain a soul watching and on the stretch on active works; if for a long time the soul shall have been intent on active pursuits, the body being frail and earthly holds her not, sustains her not for ever in activity, and faints and falls. Therefore God has granted sleep to the body, whereby are recruited the members of the body, in order that they may be able to sustain the soul watching. But of this let us take heed, namely, that our soul herself sleep not: for evil is the sleep of the soul. Good is the sleep of the body, whereby is recruited the health of the body. But the sleep of the soul is to forget her God. Whatsoever soul shall have forgotten her God, sleeps. Therefore the Apostle says to certain person that forgot their God, and being as it were in sleep, did act the follies of the worship of idols— the Apostle, I say, says to certain persons, Rise, you that sleepest, and rise up from the dead, and Christ shall enlighten you. Was the Apostle waking up one sleeping in body? Nay, but he was waking a soul sleeping, inasmuch as he was waking her, in order that she might be lightened by Christ. Therefore as to these same watchings says this man, God, my God, unto You from the light I watch. For you would not watch of yourself, unless there should arise your Light, to wake you from sleep. For Christ lightens souls, and makes them to watch: but if His light He takes away, they slumber. For this cause to Him there is said in another psalm, Lighten my eyes, that I may never slumber in death.. .. Even if certain souls, looking away from him, have fallen asleep, the light is equally present to them; only they cannot see it because they are asleep. It is like when one sleeps during the day. The sun has already risen, the day is warm, but for that person it is as if it were night: not being awake, he cannot see that the day has already dawned. So it is [spiritually] for some. Christ is already present; the truth has been preached; but their souls still sleep. Well, to such you, if you are awake, say daily, Arise, thou that sleepest, and arise from among the dead; and Christ shall enlighten thee. For your conduct, your customs must in Christ be a living thing awakened, so that others may notice them, the heathen who sleep, and at the sound of your alacrity wake up and, shaking off their sleep, begin to say together with you in Christ, God, my God, with you I have been watching since Dawn.

The testimony/meditation is followed by a song and then a time of silent prayer.

An intercessory prayer can now be said by the whole assembly.

### PRAYER TO THE BLESSED MOTHER

Hail, O Star of the ocean,  
God's own Mother blest,  
ever sinless Virgin,  
gate of heav'nly rest.

Virgin all excelling,  
mildest of the mild,  
free from guilt  
preserve us meek and undefiled.

Taking that sweet Ave,  
which from Gabriel came,  
peace confirm within us,  
changing Eve's name.

Keep our life all spotless,  
make our way secure  
till we find in Jesus,  
joy for evermore.

Break the sinners' fetters,  
make our blindness day,  
Chase all evils from us,  
for all blessings pray.

Praise to God the Father,  
honor to the Son,  
in the Holy Spirit,  
be the glory one.  
Amen.

Show thyself a Mother,  
may the Word divine  
born for us thine Infant  
hear our prayers through thine.

A hymn is sung and everyone prays silently until the end of the prayer time.

Depending on the length of the entire Vigil, this sequence can be repeated, changing the scriptural passages and songs, and alternating testimonies, meditations, and prayers.

In view of the liturgical season of Lent, the Stations of the Cross, praying the Holy Rosary and/or the Chaplet to the Divine Mercy could also be included.

Other scriptural passages that could also be used during the vigil: Psalm 51 (psalm of repentance); Jn 8:1-11 (the adulterous woman); Col 1:9-14 (from darkness to the light of Christ).

As an alternative, *Lectio Divina* could be celebrated either individually or as a community. The following is suggested or Pope Francis' reflection on the Prayer of the Heart (found after the *Lectio*).

*Lectio Divina* Jn 9:1-41 (IV Sunday of Lent)

*Sr. Ana Felício, asm*

*O Holy Spirit,  
Soul of my soul,  
I adore You.  
Enlighten, guide,  
strengthen and console me.  
Tell me what I ought to do  
and command me to do it.  
I promise to be submissive  
in everything that  
You permit to happen to me,  
only show me  
what is Your will.  
Amen*

The Holy Spirit, who inspired Scripture, who guided the prophets, who acted in Jesus and led him to act always in accordance with the Father's will, is the same Spirit who speaks to us today through the Word, who enlightens us, guides us, strengthens us and consoles us.

What Pope Francis said at the General Audience of January 27, 2021 may help us. In reflecting on prayer with the Sacred Scriptures, he said: «That Bible verse was written for me too, centuries and centuries ago, to bring me a word of God. It was written for each of us. This experience happens to all believers: a passage from Scripture, heard many times already, unexpectedly speaks to me one day, and enlightens a situation that I am living... Thus, we read the Scriptures so that they may “read us”».

1. Read with obedience

At the same audience, the Holy Father invited people to begin «reading the biblical passage attentively [...] with “obedience” to the text, to understand what it means in and of itself».

With this confidence, let us open the Bible to chapter 9 of John's gospel.

**A**s he [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that

God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore, his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.

Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

## 2. Enter into dialogue

Let us listen further to the words of Pope Francis: «One then enters into dialogue with Scripture, so that those words become a cause for meditation and prayer: while remaining faithful to the text, I begin to ask myself what it "says to me"».

St. Teresa of Jesus maintained that prayer is nothing else «than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us» (*Life* 8,5). This is the time to enter into dialogue between friends.

Let's begin by imagining the scene...The text tells us that «As he [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth». Envisaging the scene, it seems that one day by chance Jesus met a man blind from birth... It seems like an accident, but later Jesus says: «you have to»...you had to! Jesus had to meet *that* blind man, or more precisely, Jesus *wanted* to meet him, wanted to enter his life, just as he wants to enter each of our lives.

Jesus saw a man blind from birth. His disciples also saw him, but they did not see the same thing as Jesus. The disciples saw the logic of sin-sickness, the logic of retribution: if you do good, you are blessed by God; if you do wrong, you are cursed. The disciples ask Jesus -«Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?»- corresponds to the mentality of the time that illness was a consequence of sins.

Jesus comes to destroy this rationale of seeing God as a judge, who punishes when we do wrong. Jesus comes to reveal the face of the Father, which is a face of light, because this Father in heaven «makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good» (Mt 5:45), makes his light shine on all his children.

The disciples seem to be looking back, stopping to figure out the past, searching for causes to justify the situation. But in doing so, they turn their backs on the blind man. Jesus acts differently. He looks forward, not dwelling on the past, but looking at the one in front of him and seeing him. Jesus sees this man. He sees someone in front of him, a person living «in darkness and in the shadow of death» (Lk 1:79) and that is what draws him. While the disciples seem to be looking for the guilty, Jesus is only concerned with healing and giving life. He did not come to condemn the world, but to save it (cf. Jn 3:17).

Let us go back to the scene...The blind man stands still, waiting for someone to help him. Jesus passes by and takes the initiative. He does not ask anything of the blind man, and neither does the blind man ask anything of Jesus. He already knows. For our Heavenly Father knows what we need long before we ask Him (Mt 6:8). He knows what is hidden in the darkness, even though it covers us, it does not hide us from Him (cf. Ps. 139:11): He, in fact, is the light of the world.

At this moment, Jesus acts: he takes some clay mixes it with his saliva and anoints the blind man's eyes. He then commands him to wash in the pool of Siloam. The blind man obeys and returns healed.

It was part of ancient traditions to cure with saliva. Because saliva came from the mouth, it was thought to transmit the breath of life, and thus it had healing properties. When the evangelist John describes Jesus mixing mud, he is alluding to the dust of the ground with which God created man (cf. Gen. 2:7). Thus, Job prays in his pain: «Remember that you fashioned me like clay;

and will you turn me to dust again?» (Job 10:9). God hears our plea. The mute cry of this blind man reaches Jesus who, using this clay/mud, forms him anew. He gives him birth again. There is a new creation!

Jesus uses two substances: a pre-existing substance, the earth, and a personal substance, saliva. This is always how Jesus heals us: he uses what we are, he uses our earth, and he gives us his Spirit. In this way he heals us, transforms us, gives us life, and he does it with the same Spirit he gave us at Easter, with the same Spirit «who is Lord and gives life». Just as the creation of the world came through the Word and the breath of life, so, now, the communication of God's Grace comes through the mouth of the Word: the healing of this man blind from birth represents the creation of the New Man. It is a foretaste of Easter: the Risen One illuminates the world with new fire.

He is such a new creation that others around him no longer know him: «Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?» Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.”» ... There is really a profound transformation. When Jesus touches us, something changes us, and we don't even know how to explain what happened. Even the blind man, when asked questions, can only say «He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see»: He cannot say more. When Jesus touches us, it is an experience we cannot explain, we just know that we see things differently!

Jesus is the light of the world, and light does not impose itself, it lets us see what exists, it does not impose its presence. Darkness, on the contrary, imposes itself. When there is darkness, we see only this: darkness. When there is light, we see so much more! Jesus does this with us! He wants us to see more! In fact, by healing the blind man, Jesus enables us to understand something of the mystery of the suffering that affects us. It helps us understand that suffering is never God's punishment! This God is not the *Abbà* of Jesus. The mystery of suffering is an unfathomable mystery to which we have no answer. When we are affected by suffering, the same doubt arises in us as the disciples, that doubt that was put into us by the ancient serpent: "Is God really a good father, who only wants good for us? Then why does this happen to us? Why do I suffer like this? Why do those I love suffer?"

Faced with these questions we cannot give hasty answers, like those of the disciples. There is a certain sacred silence that comes upon us. God does not want our suffering, but it comes to us – inevitably – for reasons we often do not understand. And God can use it so that in us «God's works are manifested». How? If in times of suffering we know how to live “with the same mind” with which Jesus experienced his Cross (Phil 2:5). Living in total

surrender to the Father, saying with Jesus: "Father, not my will but yours be done (cf. Lk 22:42). I don't see, I don't know why this is happening to me, but I trust in you. I know that you love me and that in you all things work together for good (cf. Rom 8:28) by mysterious ways that I neither know nor understand". When we have the courage and grace to live this way, suffering is a kind of highway to Heaven. It conforms us to Christ, makes us more like him.

It is only by becoming «one» with Him that we can live the new life that Jesus gives us.

### 3. Contemplate with love

Pope Francis continues: «Through prayer, the Word of God comes to abide in us and we abide in it. ... On "bad" and confusing days, it ensures to the heart a core of confidence and of love that protects it from the attacks of the evil one.... Words and thoughts here give way to love, as between lovers for whom sometimes it is enough to just look at each other in silence. The biblical text remains, but like a mirror, like an icon to be contemplated».

We so need this dialogue that becomes silence; looking at God and letting God look at us; looking at the love with which He is looking at us...

Let us imagine Him passing in front of us. Many times we happen to miss Him, blinded by so many things, distracted and lost. He passes by, sees us but we do not see Him. Instead, He sees us and touches us. He does not pass by, he does not look the other way. He looks at us carefully, knows what we need and touches us. He does not leave us the same. Something in us changes when the Lord passes by and touches us. Let us imagine Him. Let us imagine Him stretching out His arm and touching us with His hand.

But touch is always con-tact, and contact is never one-way; it is always mutual. When your skin touches something, it is in turn touched by what it touches. Jesus' hand touched the blind man's eye, and it returned the touch. Jesus' hand thus feels touched. If Jesus touches us, something in us also touches Him.

The relationship begins here. Jesus takes the initiative, but we also respond in this relationship. Let us keep him company, let our hearts speak, not with already preconstructed prayers, but with words that flow from our hearts.

*We yearn for your light*

*Enlighten us*

*Teach us the way to the dwelling place of light*

*Where you dwell*

*Tell us what you see*

*Tell us how you see*

*Only your face will show the way*

#### 4. The Word is made flesh

Pope Francis concludes: «Through prayer a new incarnation of the Word takes place. And we are the “tabernacles” where the words of God seek to be welcomed and preserved, so that they may visit the world... And when the Word of God, infused with the Holy Spirit, is received with an open heart, it does not leave things as they were before... In this way the Word of God is made flesh in those who receive it in prayer»...

In the gospel, Jesus questions the blind man: «Do you believe in the Son of Man?» This is the question that each of us must answer, with our lives! Jesus wants to heal our inner gaze and strengthen our faith. That man, blind from birth, had to accept the light and freely choose it. It was necessary for him to comply, it was necessary for him to go to the pool to wash as Jesus had commanded, and in this way he immediately regained his sight. But the light of faith is gradual: it comes through «I do not know», «he is a prophet», «he comes from God», «I believe, Lord». Let us also move ahead little by little in this journey of faith, receiving the sacraments, meditating on the Word and in fraternal love.

That man, considered cursed, punished by God, a sinner, the son of sinful parents, will become a tabernacle of God's glory! A tabernacle which shines with God's love for us, and which silences the false answers to the mystery of suffering that we often encounter. When Jesus touches us, our lives marked by the drama of suffering are transformed into a life that reveals God's action.

Let us recall the prologue of John's gospel: «The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God» (Jn 1:9-12).

The invitation that this Word leaves us is also to become *a light which God lit to illumine humanity in its dark and anxious hours*, according to the expression of St. John Paul II. This is the invitation addressed to us: to welcome the Light that has come into the world and that already touches us! For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light (cf. Eph. 5:8)!

## Prayer of the heart

Pope Francis

*Wednesday, June 9, 2021*

*Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!*

In this penultimate catechesis on prayer we are going to speak about perseverance in praying. It is an invitation, indeed, a command that comes to us from Sacred Scripture. The spiritual journey of the Russian Pilgrim begins when he comes across a phrase of Saint Paul in the First Letter to the Thessalonians: «Pray constantly, always and for everything give thanks» (cf. 5:17-18). The Apostle's words strike the man and he wonders how it is possible to pray without interruption, given that our lives are fragmented into so many different moments, which do not always make concentration possible. From this question he begins his search, which will lead him to discover what is called the prayer of the heart. It consists in repeating with faith: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!". "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!". A simple prayer, but very beautiful. A prayer that, little by little, adapts itself to the rhythm of breath and extends throughout the day. Indeed, breath never stops, not even while we sleep; and prayer is the breath of life.

How, then, is it possible to always preserve a state of prayer? The Catechism offers us beautiful quotations from the history of spirituality, which insist on the need for continuous prayer, that it may be the fulcrum of Christian existence. I will look at some of them.

The monk Evagrius Ponticus states: «We have not been commanded to work, to keep watch and to fast continually» — no, this is not demanded — "but it has been laid down that we are to pray without ceasing» (CCC 2742). The heart in prayer. There is therefore an ardour in the Christian life, which must never fail. It is a little like that sacred fire that was kept in the ancient temples, that burned without interruption and that the priests had the task of keeping alive. So too must there be a sacred fire in us, which burns continuously and which nothing can extinguish. And it is not easy, but it must be so.

Saint John Chrysostom, another pastor who was attentive to real life, preached: "Even while walking in public or strolling alone, or seated in your shop, while buying or selling, or even while cooking" (CCC 2743). Little prayers: "Lord, have mercy on us", "Lord, help me". So, prayer is a kind of musical staff, where we arrange the melody of our lives. It is not in contrast with daily work; it does not contradict the many small obligations and appointments; if anything, it is the place where every action finds its meaning, its reason and its peace.

Certainly, putting these principles into practice is not easy. A father and a mother, caught up in a thousand tasks, may feel nostalgia for a time in their life in which it was easy to find regular times and spaces for prayer. Then come children, work, family life,

ageing parents.... One has the impression that it will never be possible to get through it all. It is good then for us to think that God, our Father, who must take care of the entire universe, always remembers each one of us. Therefore, we too must always remember Him!

We can also remember that in Christian monasticism, work has always been held in great esteem, not only because of the moral duty to provide for oneself and others, but also for a sort of balance, an inner balance: it is risky for man to cultivate an interest so abstract that he loses contact with reality. Work helps us to stay in touch with reality. The monk's folded hands bear the calluses of one who holds shovels and hoes. When, in the Gospel of Luke (cf. 10:38-42), Jesus tells Saint Martha that the only thing that is truly necessary is to listen to God, in no way does he mean to disparage the many services that she was performing with such dedication.

Everything in the human being is "binary": our body is symmetrical, we have two arms, two eyes, two hands... And so, work and prayer are also complementary. Prayer — which is the "breath" of everything — remains as the vital backdrop of work, even in moments in which this is not explicit. It is inhuman to be so absorbed by work that you can no longer find the time for prayer.

At the same time, a prayer that alienates itself from life is not healthy. A prayer that alienates us from the concreteness of life becomes spiritualism, or worse, ritualism. Let us remember that Jesus, after revealing his glory to the disciples on Mount Tabor, did not want to prolong that moment of ecstasy, but instead came down from the mountain with them and resumed the daily journey. Because that experience had to remain in their hearts as the light and strength of their faith; also a light and strength for the days that were soon to come: those of the Passion. In this way, the time dedicated to being with God revives faith, which helps us in the practicalities of living, and faith, in turn, nurtures prayer, without interruption. In this circularity between faith, life and prayer, one keeps alight that flame of Christian love that God expects of us.

And let us repeat the simple prayer that it is so good to repeat during the day. All together: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!".

**«God,  
be merciful to me,  
a sinner!»**

**(Lk 18:13)**