

THE WORD
at the center
of our lives

journey for the time of Lent

Lent 2010

The Mennaisian Family – On-going Formation

INTRODUCTION

***Lent is the time
when the decision to resemble the Son
progressively matures***

“When God says he wants our sanctification, it is as if he said that he would like to find in us the perfection of his Son. He wants us to be, in some way, insofar as human weakness allows, clothed with Jesus Christ, in the words of the Apostle. He wants us to follow Jesus Christ in all His ways, to judge everything as He judged. He wants us to love what He loved, and despise what He despised, to hate what He hated, in a word, may all our thoughts conform with His thoughts, and may we be His living image!” (John Mary de la Mennais, SVIII, 2469ss)

Lent has always been the time of penance and fasting, of conversion and spontaneous and more or less generous yielding. And it will always be so, but only as a symbol of the participation in Christ’s paschal mystery. This is the turning point, what should actually grow during each Lent – the real desire of the believer. Only then, will Lent no longer seem a time of sadness and affliction, contributing to a depressing and sad idea of Christianity and Christians.

Still, the time of Lent prepares and trains the believer to escape from the sad and restricted circle of his goals, of his private and somewhat ambitious perfection, to walk with Christ into Jerusalem and share with Him the mystery of redemption.

*Lent is the time in which the believer acknowledges – in the words of Bonhoeffer – the “costly grace” that the Lord has paid for his salvation, and therefore **it is also the time in which the decision to resemble the Son progressively matures**, not only as a passive beneficiary of redemption, but through the grace of Christ’s Cross, called upon by love to join Him later, in the Resurrection.” (Cencini, A., Continuous Training)*

The following journey is an invitation to revise our relationships in light of the Lord’s Word and in communion with John Mary. Our identification with Jesus will be realized as long as we weave bonds with people as He himself did. We know that choosing the Resurrected One will require of us to participate in His own destiny as the crucified one. Therefore let us confirm our desire to be like Him in our daily life, weaving bonds of communion with the Father, our brothers and “the little ones.”

Fraternally,

*The Animation Team of Ongoing Training,
Brothers Jean and Guillermo*

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

INTRODUCTION

*“My son,
if you have decided to serve the Lord,
prepare for trials.” (Si 2, 1ss)*

“Once acknowledged by the Father as his ‘beloved Son’ during his Baptism in the river Jordan, ***Jesus' fidelity to God is put to the test.*** However, unlike Adam and Eve in the earthly paradise and the people of Israel in the desert, he resists temptation and triumphs over the Evil One.

The tempter's attack on Jesus which began during his stay in the wilderness will culminate in the days of his passion on Calvary, when the Crucified One will definitively triumph over evil and reconcile man with God. The Evangelist Luke closes today's account of the temptations with *a reference to Jerusalem*; he wants to emphasize from the outset that Christ's triumph on the Cross will take place in the Holy City, where the paschal mystery will be fulfilled.” (John Paul II)



READING

Luke 4, 1-13

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil. He did not eat anything during that time, and in the end he was hungry. The devil then said to him, “If you are Son of God, command this stone to turn into bread.” But Jesus answered, “Scripture says: People do not live on bread alone.” Then the devil took him up to a high place and showed him all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to Jesus, “I will give you all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me and I give them to whom I wish. All this will be yours if you worship me.” But Jesus replied, “Scripture says: You shall worship the Lord your God and serve him alone.” Then the devil took him up to Jerusalem, set him on the highest wall of the Temple, and said, “If you are son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written: God will give his angels charge of you to guard you, and again: They will hold you in their hands, lest you hurt your foot against the stones.” But Jesus replied, “It is written: You shall not challenge the Lord your God.” When the devil had exhausted every way of tempting Jesus, he left him, to return another time.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

*“At the moment we receive the sacrament of regeneration, God could have told us as to His Word, the eternal object of His complacency and His love: You are my Son, I have begotten you today; you are clothed in holiness, marked with the seal by which I recognize my children and from now on you have a right to my heritage; nothing can take that away from you, as long as you never break **the bonds of faith, hope and charity that bind your whole being to Me.**”*

(John Mary of La Mennais, S III 1005)

“The temptations described as those of Israel must be related historically to baptism.” This includes the fundamental option for Christ:

solidarity with one's brothers, in obedience to the Father. Temptations represent the cost of this option as a struggle against the contrary option. The divine choice costs all one's lifetime; therefore we are always liable to fail, and we often do.

There are two opposite ways of becoming a son ("If you are a Son..."), *two ways of living the bonds*, one diabolic and the other divine. The first one consists in wanting to possess oneself, others, and the Other, while wanting to control one's own life and the life of others; the second consists in receiving everything as a gift from our Father, doing and giving everything as a gift, just like Him, putting one's own life in the hands of others. The first one creates a system of violence and death, the other one of love and life.

The devil that tempts men has, at the beginning, just one power: taking the Word away from him (cf. Luke 8, 12) so that he does not obey God. This is what he tries to do, even with Jesus. But if one obeys, the Word grows in one's heart and produces fruits of salvation. This is why the devil tempts him with tribulation, so that he feels discouraged and falls into mistrust (cf. Luke 8, 13). If he cannot discourage him, he tries to choke the Word of God with worries about riches and pleasures, his allies to seduce man and lead him to disobedience (cf. Luke 8, 14)." (*Silvano Fausti, 93-94*)

HELP FOR PERSONAL MEDITATION



Read again the text of the Gospel taking a moment to think about the two ways of living the *bonds* that are presented in this moment of Jesus' life.

Reflect again on other situations of Jesus' life in which He experienced the temptation to forsake his fundamental option: solidarity with the brothers, in obedience to the Father. (Luke 11, 29-30; 11, 53-54; 23, 35-38,)

Remember moments in which was conveyed a feeling of discouragement or dismay of the Master. (Luke 7, 31-35; 9, 41; 13, 34-35)

LENT WITH JOHN MARY DE LA MENNAIS

(Suggestions for a community meeting)



1. Read the text during the week before the meeting. Read it knowing that these are words of our Father trying to reach out to our hearts.
2. Pause a moment at those phrases that touch you personally. Underline them.
3. Clarify in your heart the thoughts which discourage and weaken your dedication to live up to your calling and mission.
4. During the community meeting: List and illustrate with real life situations the advice given by our Founder.

SERMON : *THE FALSE IDEA ONE GETS ABOUT PERFECTION*

“Many times during the year, I have noticed some of you getting blocked in the paths of perfection by false ideas about it. That is why I think I should take this time of retreat to give you some advice on this matter.

“God forbid I should suggest that one can be too eager to be perfect, nor to work passionately to become so. Woe to the Christian, and more so to the priest or religious, who would not hear this word that our divine Master said to all his followers without exception: ‘Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.’ (Matt 5:48) But take care not to imagine perfection in a vague way, and not to torment yourself needlessly and indiscreetly for failing to reach a state that is not and cannot be that of men on earth. Nothing is more dangerous than illusions of this kind. They swell your head and dry up your heart; they exhaust you with endless subtleties and lure you into a maze without exit.

“Nonetheless, you may ask, since on the one hand we are committed to seek perfection, and on the other it is so easy to fool oneself trying to reach it, what rule should guide our judgment on this matter?

*“Here it is, my sons. This judgment should be founded not on reasoning, but on facts. **Be convinced that all thoughts that discourage and trouble you, that weaken you and shake your dedication, come not from God and cannot lead to Him;** that*

everything that tends to sadness, gossip, and mistrust of superiors, to unhappiness in your situation, is none other than temptation. Thus does Satan transform himself into an angel of light to seduce us. Just as he took our Lord to a high mountain, where he showed Him all the kingdoms on earth, he takes over your spirit, leading it to heights to show distant seductive chimeras; he dazzles it, to quickly plunge it into the darkness of pride. Yes, pride (...)

“Now then, these disturbing thoughts that I condemn, what effect do they produce in you? Isn't it, too often, to prefer your own judgment to that of the leaders that God has given you? Isn't it to create some kind of resistance to being guided by them? Isn't it about a sad readiness to blame everything, to feel scandalized without motive? Isn't it, finally, a secret craving not just to be perfect, but to know it, to see yourselves without stain nor wrinkle in your own eyes? This knowledge will always be rejected by God, as it would destroy your humility, the only basis of any perfection and of any virtue, since He wants us to rely not on our innocence, but on His mercy.

“Remember well: perfection is not about never experiencing any weakness of will or being free of all the miseries inescapable in our condition down here. It is not about doing something extraordinary or great; on the contrary, it is about being humble, little, supple in the hands of God; it is about being indulgent and kind towards our Brothers, considering oneself last and the least perfect of all. It consists specially for you in doing with love, simplicity and admirable peace everything that is in the line of obedience.

“You search history for examples of perfection and sanctity, but don't you have, right before your eyes, very apposite examples to move and teach you? Look at our humble Brothers, and I can tell you about them what our Lord told his apostles while showing them the children: ‘the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.’ (Matt 19:14) This poor brother, who sweeps your stairs and dusts your rooms, who serves you at the table and does all these humble chores thinking of nothing but doing the holy will of God, is way beyond him among us who strives aggressively to raise his spirit to sublime contemplation and who, falling back upon itself, becomes incapable of tasting the sweetness of the grace that strengthens the weak, not by inspiring a presumptuous confidence, but showing their weakness.

“You worry about many questions and matters. I could tell you: ‘you worry about too much,’ while they, on the contrary, keeping their

minds free from all speculative and vane thoughts, willing to be humbly led not by their own thoughts but those of their superiors as docile instruments, 'have chosen the better part.'

"In a few words, my sons, do you really want to progress towards perfection? Do not try to do it in a speculative way but lean toward it, not by anxious efforts, but calmly regularly and constantly. Open and broaden your soul, and then God will pour grace deliciously into it, along with light and peace." (John Mary of La Mennais, VII P. 2486)

5. Let us share our thirst for God

"Be convinced that all thoughts that discourage and trouble you, that weaken you and dishearten your dedication, come not from God and cannot lead to Him." (John Mary de la Mennais)

- Let us start by praying with the psalmist and apply his words to all those going through discouragement in their lives.

Psalm 88

O Lord, my God, I call for help by day;
before you I cry out by night.
May my prayer come to you;
incline your ear to my cry for help.

My soul is deeply troubled;
my life draws near to the grave.
Counted among those going down into oblivion
I am like those without strength.

I lie forsaken among the dead,
like those lying in the grave,
like those you remember no more,
cut off from your care.

You have plunged me into the bottom of the grave.
In the darkness, in the depths;
With your wrath heavy upon me,
you have battered me with all your waves.

You have taken away my closest friends;
you have made me repulsive to them.
I cannot escape from my confinement.
My eyes have grown dim with grief;
spreading out my hands to you,
I call upon you every day, O Lord.

Are your wonders meant for the dead?
Will ghosts rise to give you thanks?
Is your love and faithfulness remembered
among those gone to the netherworld?
Are your wonders known in the dark,
your salvation in the land of oblivion?

But to you, O Lord, I cry for help;
every morning I pray to you.
O Lord, why do you reject me,
why do you hide your face?

Afflicted and close to death from youth,
I have suffered terrors and helplessness.
Your wrath has swept over me;
your assaults have destroyed me.

Now they surround me like a flood;
and completely engulf me.
Bereft of loved ones and now alone,
only darkness is my companion.

- Let us discuss together in a climate of prayer, the situations and the people of our teaching and parochial community who are going through a difficult moment and/or times of discouragement.
- Let us share our pleas.

LECTIO VITAE

- When the day is done, go over what you have experienced during it. Go calmly over your feelings...
- Show to the Lord:
 - The temptations to discouragement that you experience in your personal life.
 - The temptations to discouragement related to the Congregation, the Province, your community or family life
 - The temptations of discouragement related to your mission

(Remember with gratitude all those with whom you could share your feelings of discouragement.)

- Reflect on all the events and words that you have seen today which have conveyed life to you.
- Recall some Brother or other person who may have had a good impact on your life by the way in which he lived his *bonds*: receiving everything as a gift from the Father, and doing and giving everything as a gift, just as Jesus did, putting his own life in the hands of others.

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

INTRODUCTION

Jesus went up the mountain “to pray.” (Lk 9, 28)

“The Transfiguration is not only the revelation of Christ's glory but also a preparation for facing Christ's Cross.”
(Vita consecrata, 14)

READING

Luke 9, 28-36



About eight days after Jesus had said all this, he took Peter, John and James and **went up the mountain to pray**. And while he was praying, the aspect of his face was changed and his clothing became dazzling white. Two men were talking with Jesus: Moses and Elijah. They had just appeared in heavenly glory and *were telling him about his departure that had to take place in Jerusalem*. Peter and his companions had fallen asleep, but they awoke suddenly and saw Jesus' Glory and the two men standing with him. As Moses and Elijah were about to leave, Peter said to him, 'Master, how good it is for us to be here, for we can make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' For Peter didn't know what to say. And no sooner had he spoken than a cloud appeared and covered them; and the disciples were afraid as they entered the cloud.

Then these words came from the cloud, "This is my Son, my Chosen one, listen to him." *And after the voice had spoken, Jesus was there alone*. The disciples kept this to themselves at the time, telling no one of anything they had seen.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

On the Second Sunday of Lent, the Evangelist Luke emphasizes that Jesus went up on the mountain "to pray" (9:28), together with the Apostles Peter, James and John, and it was "while he prayed" (9:29) that the luminous mystery of his Transfiguration occurred.

Thus, for the three Apostles, going up the mountain meant being involved in the prayer of Jesus, who frequently withdrew in prayer especially at dawn and after sunset, and sometimes all night. However, this was the only time, on the mountain, that he chose to reveal to his friends the inner light that filled him when he prayed: his face, we read in the Gospel, shone and his clothes were radiant with the splendor of the divine Person of the Incarnate Word (cf. Lk 9:29).

There is another detail proper to St Luke's narrative which deserves emphasis: the mention of the topic of Jesus' conversation with Moses and Elijah, who appeared beside him when he was transfigured. As the Evangelist tells us, they "talked with him... and spoke of his departure" (in Greek, *éxodos*), "which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem" (9: 31).

Therefore, Jesus listens to the Law and the Prophets who spoke to him about his death and Resurrection. In his intimate dialogue with the Father, he did not escape from history, he did not flee the mission for which he came into the world, although he knew that to attain glory he would have to pass through the Cross. Christ enters even more deeply into this mission, adhering with all his being to the Father's will; he shows us that true prayer consists precisely in uniting our will with that of God.

For a Christian, therefore, to pray is not to evade reality and the responsibilities it brings but rather, to fully assume them, trusting in the faithful and inexhaustible love of the Lord. For this reason, the verification of the Transfiguration is, paradoxically, the Agony in Gethsemane (cf. Lk 22: 39-46). With his impending Passion, Jesus was to feel mortal anguish and entrust himself to the divine will; his prayer would become a pledge of salvation for

us all. Indeed, Christ was to implore the Heavenly Father "to free him from death" and, as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews wrote: "he was heard for his godly fear" (5: 7). The Resurrection is proof that he was heard.

"Prayer is not subsidiary or optional, but a question of life or death. In fact, only those who pray, who entrust themselves to God with filial love, can enter eternal life, which is God himself. During this Season of Lent, let us ask Mary, Mother of the Incarnate Word and Teacher of the spiritual life, to teach us to pray as her Son did, so that our life may be transformed by the light of his presence." (Benedict XVI)

HELP FOR PERSONAL PRAYER



- Read the gospel text again. Contemplate Jesus in the intimacy of his prayer. Feel his BONDS with the Father, with his followers and with the people:

- With the Father:

- + He climbed the mountain to pray;
- + The appearance of his face changed;
- + They talked about Jesus' departure (death – resurrection);

+ From the cloud a voice was heard: *"This is my Son, my chosen one, listen to him."*

- With the disciples:

- + He took Peter, John and James with him;
- + Peter and his companions saw the glory of Jesus.

- With the people:

+ "The next day, when they came down the mountain, a crowd met them." (LK 9:37)

- You are invited to come down from the mountain to live with Him the demands of God's plan and undertake with courage the path to the cross. Take into yourself the mystery of Transfiguration and the prayer at Gethsemane, and repeat in your heart: *"This is my Son, my chosen one: listen to him."*

LENT WITH JOHN MARY DE LA MENNAIS

(Suggestions for a community meeting)



Let us make a personal review of our life of prayer in light of the thoughts of our Founding Father:

- In our life, we have to choose whatever intensifies in us communion with God. This is not a "spiritual" communion; it is a communion with what He wishes, with His plan of salvation.

“Human wisdom says: What you are asking is not reasonable. A higher wisdom, faith, answers: Amen, alleluia! After all, what do I care about success? It is not success that God asks of me but sacrifice, and He will surely reward it. Let us seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and the rest will be added to us.” S VIII 2459-60.

Go over your life of prayer.

Ask yourself:

“What am I really seeking in my prayer?”

“In what ways do my bonds with the little ones (children, youth) figure in my personal prayer?”

- *“This is my Son, my Chosen one, listen to him.”*
God is my Father; he loves me and wants the best for me. Abba.

“What is certain is that the best remedy is to calmly submit our will to the will of God, whose thoughts for us are those of peace, and whose designs for our miserable hearts are those of love. ... Never tire of worshipping and blessing this Providence so merciful, who wills to enrich our hearts with all the treasures of the cross!”

(To Bruté, A I, 65-67)

Is this a profound conviction that affects me deeply in my being?
Is this a living certainty for me?
Do I keep this belief in moments of the cross?
With our community let us share our feelings, our personal situation and our life of prayer.

We can also present our suggestions to improve our moments of community prayer:

It would help me during our prayer if...

+ *I feel that praying in community...*

+ *What helps my prayer in community is...*

+ *To avoid staying "on the mountain top" in our life of prayer, it would be good to ...*

+ *Once in a while, we could...*

Let us share our thirst for God

"Now, my Brothers, if prayer was so powerful in the Old Testament, how much more so must it be in the New, since Jesus Christ has consecrated it in a special manner. Our prayers are so intimately united to His that we make but one voice with Him." (JM de la Mennais, On prayer, S IV, 1469-71)

The psalms always inspired the dialog of Jesus with his Father. By praying through them, we lend our voice to the Lord, to our Brothers, and we make the psalmist's experience our own.

In this prayer, the believer expresses his admiration towards God's fathomless wisdom, which penetrates all things and sounds the deepest reaches of the human heart.

Let us recite it slowly, and after a moment of silence, share our prayer with our Brothers.

Psalm 139

O Lord, you know me:
you have scrutinized me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
beforehand you discern my thoughts.
You observe my activities and times of rest;
you are familiar with all my ways.

Before a word is formed in my mouth,
you know what it is all about, O Lord.
From front to back you hedge me round,
shielding me with your protecting hand.
Your knowledge leaves me astounded,
it is too high for me to reach.

Where else could I go from your Spirit?
Where could I flee from your presence?
You are there if I ascend the heavens;
you are there if I descend to the depths.

If I ride on the wings of the dawn
and settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand shall guide me
and your right hand shall hold me safely.

Shall I say, "Let darkness hide me,
I prefer the night as my light?"
But darkness for you is not dark
and night for you shines as the day.

It was you who formed my inmost parts
and knit me together in my mother's womb.
I thank you for these wonders you have done,
and my heart praises you for your marvelous deeds.

Even my bones were known to you
when I was being formed in secret,
fashioned in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw the course of my days;
they were all recorded in your book
before any of them came to be.

How difficult it is to grasp your thoughts, O God!
Their number cannot be counted.
If I tried to do so,
they would outnumber the sands;
I am never finished with you.

LECTIO VITAE

“In his intimate dialogue with the Father, he did not escape history; he did not flee the mission for which he came into the world. True prayer consists precisely in uniting our will with God’s.” (Benedict XVI)

Jesus experiences the presence of the Father in His life through the simple meetings He had with others.

- I recall today's moments. To what extent have my actions, words, feelings and reactions been consonant with these words: *“This is my Son, my chosen one, listen to him”*?
- I stop and consider some difficult moment of the day. I recall the face of a Brother, child, youth, father, teacher, family member, with whom I had a misunderstanding or who has pained me, repeating sincerely: *“This is my Son, my chosen one; listen to him.”*

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

INTRODUCTION

*“Unless you change your ways, you will all perish as they did.”
“Master, let it stand one more year.”*

“Let us pray to Mary most holy, who accompanies and sustains us on our Lenten journey, to help every Christian to rediscover the grandeur, I daresay *the beauty of conversion*. May she help us understand that mending one’s ways is not simply a duty, but the most effective way to better oneself and society. A felicitous adage expresses it well: It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.” (Benedict XVI)



READING

Luke 13, 1-9

One day some people told Jesus what had happened in the Temple: Pilate had Galileans killed and their blood mingled with the blood of their sacrifices. Jesus replied, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this? I tell you: No. But unless you change your ways, you will all perish as they did.

And those eighteen people in Siloam who were crushed when the tower fell, do you think they were guiltier than all the others in Jerusalem? I tell you: No. But unless you change your ways, you will all perish as they did.”

And Jesus continued with this parable: “A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard and he came looking for fruit on it, but found none. Then he said to the gardener: ‘Look here, for three years now I have been looking for figs on this tree and I have found none. Cut it down, why should it use up the ground?’ The gardener replied: ‘Master let it stand one more year, so that I may dig around it and add some fertilizer; and perhaps it will bear fruit. But if it doesn’t, you can cut it down.’”

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

The passage of Luke's Gospel that is proclaimed on this third Sunday of Lent relates Jesus' comments on two events of his time. The first: the uprising of some Galileans, which Pilate repressed with bloodshed. The second: the fall of the tower of Jerusalem, which claimed 18 victims. Two very distinct, tragic events: one caused by man, the other accidental.

According to the mentality of the time, people tended to think that the disaster which struck the victims was due to some grave fault of theirs. Jesus instead says: "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans... Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem?" (Lk 13: 2, 4). And in both cases he concludes: "I tell you, No: but unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (13: 3, 5).

This, then, is the point to which Jesus wants to bring his listeners: the need for conversion. He does not propose it in legalistic terms but rather in realistic ones, as the only adequate response to the events that place human certainties in crisis.

Before certain misfortunes, he states, it does no good to blame the victims. Rather, true wisdom consists in yielding to the insecurity of life and adopting an attitude of responsibility: doing penance and to improving our own lives. This is wisdom; this is the most effective response to misfortunes on every level: interpersonal, social, international. Christ invites us to respond to evil first, with a serious examination of conscience and commitment to purify our lives. Otherwise, he says, we shall perish; we shall all perish in the same way.

In fact, "people and societies who live without ever examining themselves are destined to final ruin." (Benedict XVI) Conversion, on the other hand, though it does not shield us from problems and misfortunes, allows us to face them differently. It facilitates first the prevention of further harm, defusing some of its threats. And in any case, it overcomes evil with good, if not always on a factual level rather independent of our will, certainly on a spiritual level. In other words: conversion overcomes the root of evil which is sin, even if it cannot always avoid its consequences.

HELP FOR PERSONNAL PRAYER



This Sunday's Gospel invites us to become more heedful of the kind of bonds that bind us to God:

- In His presence I discover my truth. I need to convert. *"Unless you change your ways, you will all likewise perish."*
- In the path to my conversion, Jesus intercedes for me and commits to help me. *"Let it stand one more year; I shall dig around it and add fertilizer."*

Here is the answer according to mercy; we are all forgiven in the Son, because we too are sons, God's children. I discover the means through which the Lord is helping me in my Christian and/or religious life.

LENT WITH JOHN MARY DE LA MENNAIS

(Tips for a moment of community prayer)

"Unless you change your ways, you will all likewise perish." Luke 13, 3
"People and societies who live without ever examining themselves are destined to final ruin."
(Benedict XVI)

- Let us choose a hymn related to the need of forgiveness and reconciliation. (If possible, decorate the place of prayer with branches of the fig tree and/or of vines.)
- A reader announces the psalm inserting the antiphon:

Psalm15

Ant.: 1 Lord, who will dwell in your tent
and reside on your holy mount?

Lord, who will dwell in your tent
and reside on your holy mount?

Those who walk blamelessly
and do what is right,
who speak truth from their heart
and control their words,

Who do no harm to their neighbors
and cast no discredit on their companions,
who look down on evildoers
but highly esteem God's servants;

Who at all cost stand by a pledged word,
who do not lend money at interest
and refuse a bribe against the innocent.
and you will never be shaken.

Do this,

- Let us read some of the following sentences of the Founder, with a pause between them for a silent prayer.

+ "My God! Often the deepest wounds are those who are felt least, and the most dangerous sores are those we do not seek to heal. I say this for many of you who probably imagine themselves as faultless because their outer conduct is apparently regular, but who actually lose imperceptibly the spirit of their state, losing one after another all the virtues proper to it.

(Silence)

+ "Thus their language will be edifying; they shall avoid gross and scandalous faults, they will notice and condemn quite rightly in others the least failings to the rule; but they will grant themselves a crowd of things that they condemn; for example they will not scruple to fail habitually in charity, that is, to violate the first and greatest of the precepts, not of a human law but of the divine law, and of the holy gospel of Jesus Christ." (S VII p. 2262-2263)

(Silence)

+ "One imagines that it is enough to avoid flamboyant disorders and vulgar vices, and one stops struggling, even though there are inclinations to correct, passions to tame. Thus, one is content with a mere beginning of virtue, as though God did not demand more. May this instruction clarify this so important matter, and finally persuade you to produce worthy fruits of penance and to complete the work of your conversion!" (Sermon V.p.1654)

(Silence)

+ Doesn't experience show us daily that, in the words of the pious author of *The Spiritual Combat*, it is easier to convert a confessed sinner than one who conceals from himself his state and tries to hide under the shroud of virtue? For, how can our sermons be of service to you if, content with what you think you have accomplished, you imagine having nothing more to do; if blinded by presumption, say because you have had your Jubilee, you think there is nothing further to do; if you are not convinced that the Lord is asking you for more? Which one of you will be willing to renew his life with a true and sincere conversion? So I tell you, everyone needs conversion. Yes, to all does the Apostle address, and I likewise do so, the words of my text: "*Paenitemini et convertimini ut deleantur peccata vestra – Do penance and be converted.*" (Sermon V, p. 1656)

(Silence)

+ "Actually, my Brothers, understand well: conversion is not merely showing some external signs of repenting, beating one's breast, tearing one's clothing, approaching the sacred tribunal of penance after long delays; it is not just having a weak desire of salvation and renouncing to the greatest disorders; conversion is correcting all one's defects whatsoever, and striving seriously to become a perfect Christian."

(Silence)

- Let us all sing together a hymn of forgiveness.

- "*Let it stand more year, so that I may dig around it and add fertilizer.*" It is the Son who knows the love of the Father for all his children. Justice and mercy, holiness and love are always linked in a mysterious dialog in God.

(Let the mercy of God re-echo in our hearts as we listen to his Word).

- "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost." (Lk 19,10)
- "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Lk 5.32)
- "For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." (Jn 3, 17)

- Shared prayer. Those who wish may share their personal prayer.

- Last hymn.

LECTIO VITAE

“Master, Let it stand one more year,
so that I may dig around it and add fertilizer.
Perhaps afterwards it will bear fruit.
Otherwise, you can cut it down.”

- I ask myself: What fruits has the Lord found in me today?
- I discover how far the Lord has been at my side, how he dug the soil around me, how much he has strengthened my path to conversion.
- I am grateful for the fruits of the Spirit which I have sensed through the words and deeds of my brothers (laypersons, children, youths, family, Brothers of the community...)

FORTH SUNDAY IN LENT

INTRODUCTION

*“God is a friend always ready
to give us new proofs of His tenderness.”*
John Mary de la Mennais (Sermon V 1673)

“It is the Father who initiates reconciliation, who perfectly recognizes the effort you make to be converted in your innermost soul. He runs out to meet you. And while you are still far, he sees you and hurries to you. He sees into your heart and comes to meet you, so that no one may get in his way, and once He reaches you, He enfolds you in his arms. Coming to your encounter, He manifests His presence; embracing you, He shows his clemency and paternal love. He falls on your neck to pick you up, for you have fallen, and to lead you into Heaven so that there, loaded with sins and bent towards everything earthly, you may seek your Creator. Christ falls on your neck to free it from the yoke of slavery and replace it with his sweet yoke.” (Ambrose, Exposition on Luke’s Gospel, 7, 229-230)

READING

Luke 15, 1-3; 11-32



Meanwhile tax collectors and sinners were seeking the company of Jesus, all of them eager to hear what he had to say. But the Pharisees and the scribes frowned at this, muttering, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” So Jesus told them this parable: “There was a man with two sons. The younger said to his father: ‘Give me my share of the estate.’ So the father divided his property between them.

“Some days later, the younger son gathered all his belongings and started off for a distant land where he squandered his wealth in loose living. Having spent everything, he was hard pressed when a severe famine broke out in that land. So he hired himself out to a well-to-do citizen of that place and was sent to work on a pig farm. So famished was he that he longed to fill his stomach even with the food given to the pigs, but no one offered him anything.

“Finally coming to his senses, he said: ‘How many of my father’s hired workers have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will get up and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against God and before you. I no longer deserve to be called your son. Treat me then as one of your hired servants.’

“With that thought in mind he set off for his father’s house. He was still a long way off when his father caught sight of him. His father was so deeply moved with compassion that he ran out to meet him, threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. The son said: ‘Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you. I no longer deserve to be called your son...’ But the father turned to his servants: ‘Quick! Bring out the finest robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and kill it. We shall celebrate and have a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has come back to life. He was lost and is found.’ And the celebration began.

“Meanwhile, the elder son had been working in the fields. As he returned and was near the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what it was all about. The servant answered: ‘Your brother has come home safe and sound, and your father is so happy about it that he has ordered this celebration and killed the fattened calf.’ The elder son became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and pleaded with him. The indignant son said: ‘Look, I have slaved for you all these years. Never have I disobeyed your orders. Yet you have never given me even a kid goat to celebrate with my friends. Then when this son of yours returns after squandering your property with loose women, you kill the fattened calf for him.’ The father said: ‘My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But this brother of yours was dead, and has come back to life. He was lost and is found. And for that we had to rejoice and be glad.’”

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

In this Gospel three persons appear: the father and two sons. But these people represent two rather different life projects. Both sons lived peacefully, they were fairly well-off farmers so they had enough to live on, selling their produce profitably, and life seemed good.

Yet little by little the younger son came to find this life boring and unsatisfying: "All of life can't be like this," he thought: rising every day, say at six o'clock, then according to Israel's traditions, there must have been a prayer and a reading from the Holy Bible; then they went to work and at the end of the day another prayer.

Thus, day after day he thought, "But no, life is something more. I must find another life where I am truly free, where I can do what I like; a life free from this discipline, from these norms of God's commandments, from my father's orders; I would like to be on my own and have life with all its beauties totally for myself. Now, instead, it is nothing but work..."

And so he decided to claim his whole share of inheritance and leave. His father was very respectful and generous and respected the son's freedom: it was he who had to find his own life project. And he left, as the Gospel says, for a far-away country. It was probably geographically distant because he wanted a change, but also inwardly distant because he wanted a completely different life.

So his idea was freedom, doing what I want to do, not recognizing these laws of a God who is remote, not being in the prison of this domestic discipline, but rather doing what is beautiful, what I like, possessing life with all its beauty and fullness. And at first - we might imagine, perhaps for a few months - everything went smoothly: he found it beautiful to have attained life at last, he felt happy.

Then, however, little by little, he felt bored here, too; here too everything was always the same. And in the end, he was left with an emptiness that was even more disturbing: the feeling that this was still not life became ever more acute; indeed, going ahead with all these things, life drifted further and further away. Everything became empty: the slavery of doing the same things then also re-emerged. And in the end, his money ran out and the young man found that his standard of living was lower than that of swine.

It was then that he began to reflect and wondered if that really was the path to life: a freedom interpreted as doing what I want, living, having

life only for me; or if instead it might be more of a life to live for others, to contribute to building the world, to the growth of the human community.

So it was that he set out on a new journey, an inner journey. The boy pondered and considered all these new aspects of the problem and began to see that he had been far more free at home, since he had also been a landowner contributing to building his home and society in communion with the Creator, knowing the purpose of his life and guessing the project that God had in store for him.

During this interior journey, during this development of a new life project and at the same time living the exterior journey, the younger son was motivated to return, to start his life anew because he now understood that he had taken the wrong track. I must start out afresh with a different concept, he said to himself; I must begin again.

And he arrived at the home of the father who had left him his freedom to give him the chance to understand inwardly what life is and what life is not. The father embraced him with all his love, he offered him a feast and life could start again beginning from this celebration.

The son realized that it is precisely work, humility and daily discipline that create the true feast and true freedom. So he returned home, inwardly matured and purified: he had understood what living is. Of course, in the future his life would not be easy either, temptations would return, but he was henceforth fully aware that life without God does not work; it lacks the essential, it lacks light, it lacks purpose, it lacks the great sense of being human. He understood that we can only know God on the basis of his Word.

We Christians can add that we know who God is from Jesus, in whom the face of God has been truly shown to us. The young man understood that God's Commandments are not obstacles to freedom and to a beautiful life, but signposts on the road on which to travel to find life.

He realized too that work and the discipline of being committed, not to oneself but to others, extends life. And precisely this effort of dedicating oneself through work gives depth to life, because one experiences the pleasure of having at last made a contribution to the growth of this world that becomes freer and more beautiful.

I do not wish at this point to speak of the other son who stayed at home, but in his reaction of envy we see that inwardly he too was dreaming that perhaps it would be far better to take all the freedoms for himself. He too in his heart was "returning home" and understanding

once again what life is, understanding that it is truly possible to live only with God, with his Word, in the communion of one's own family, of work; in the communion of the great Family of God.

I do not wish to enter into these details now: let each one of us apply this Gospel to himself in his own way. Our situations are different and each one has his own world. Nonetheless, the fact remains that we are all moved and that we can all enter with our inner journey into the depths of the Gospel.

Only a few more remarks: the Gospel helps us understand who God truly is. He is the Merciful Father who in Jesus loves us beyond all measure. The errors we commit, even if they are serious, do not corrode the fidelity of his love. In the sacrament of Confession we can always start out afresh in life. He welcomes us; he restores to us our dignity as his children. Let us therefore rediscover this sacrament of forgiveness that makes joy well up in a heart reborn to true life.

Furthermore, this parable helps us to understand who the human being is: he is not a "monad", an isolated being that lives only for himself and must have life for himself alone. On the contrary, we live with others, we were created together with others and only in being with others, in giving ourselves to others, do we find life.

The human is a creature in whom God has impressed his own image, a creature who is attracted to the horizon of his Grace, but he is as well a frail creature exposed to evil but also capable of good. And lastly, the human being is a free person. We must understand what freedom is and what is only the appearance of freedom. Freedom, we can say, is a springboard from which to dive into the infinite sea of divine goodness, but it can also become a tilted plane on which to slide towards the abyss of sin and evil and thus also to lose freedom and our dignity.

Dear friends, we are in the Season of Lent, the 40 days before Easter. In this Season of Lent, the Church helps us to make this interior journey and invites us to conversion, which always, even before being an important effort to change our behavior, is an opportunity to decide to get up and set out again, to abandon sin and to choose to return to God.

Let us - this is the imperative of Lent - make this journey of inner liberation together.

Every time, such as today, that we participate in the Eucharist, the source and school of love, we become capable of living this love, of proclaiming it and witnessing to it with our life. Nevertheless, we need to

decide to walk towards Jesus as the Prodigal Son did, returning inwardly and outwardly to his father. At the same time, we must abandon the selfish attitude of the older son who was sure of himself, quick to condemn others and closed in his heart to understanding, acceptance and forgiveness of his brother, and who forgot that he too was in need of forgiveness. (Benedict XVI)

HELP FOR PERSONAL MEDITATION

Let us contemplate the Father in the parable. Let us pray for the grace to make a personal experience out of these bonds of love towards each other, to be his image among the children and youths that are entrusted to us.



- “He was still a long way off when his father caught sight of him.”
- “His father was so deeply moved with compassion ...”
- “He ran out to meet him...”
- “He threw his arms around his neck ...”
- “and kissed him.”
- “The father turned to his servants: ‘Quick!’”
- “Bring out the finest robe...”
- “Put it on him.”
- “Put a ring on his finger ...”
- “and sandals on his feet.”
- “Take the fattened calf and kill it.”
- “We shall celebrate and have a feast...”
- “The father said: ‘My son, you are always with me...’”
- “Everything I have is yours.”

LENT WITH JOHN MARY DE LA MENNAIS

(Suggestions for a community meeting)



The following phrases will allow us to describe the answers that our Founding Father gave to the two questions that this text of the Gospel presents us on this Sunday. “Who is really God?” and “What is man?” The parable is understood not when it is interpreted, no matter how accurately this is done, but when it is LIVED.

- Let the thoughts of John Mary resonate personally inside us.
- Let us answer the two previous questions according to the thinking of our Founder.
- Let us discuss in community the consequences derived from his answers:
 - + for our life of personal relationship with God (bonds with God),
 - + for our community life (bonds with others), and
 - + for our apostolic life (bonds with children and youths)

“What is man before God? I do not have enough words to express our misery, our lowliness, our nothingness; and without any doubt, I do not need to prove to you that we are nothing before God, who shows Himself so great in His doings; before the Holy of the Holies, the Highest, the Almighty, the Boundless. Nevertheless, our extreme littleness has not stopped Him from casting the eyes of His Providence on us. Although we are immeasurably below him, he has wished us to communicate with Him; his love has become present in a certain way, before us, to calm our fears and our own weaknesses, and to make us see, in this God that we have dared to approach with more than trembling, a father, our protector, our support and our shelter; a friend who is always willing to give us new proofs of his tenderness; a Savior ever ready to pour his graces and favors upon us, and who wants us to consider the good the He does to us more as the pledge of an infinitely greater bliss that he is preparing for us.” (Sermon V 1673)

“Even if your disorders were many, even if your failings have been serious, do not fear. Come, prodigal son in disgrace: the Church which is moved by your disgrace opens up its treasures to pay all your debts. Enter then trustfully into your father’s home. Yes, He himself assures you

through my mouth that even if your clothing of iniquity is scarlet red, it will become white as snow; He will forget your wanderings; forgive all your failures. He will think only of rejoicing at your return. You will live happily in his arms, in his bosom, until you pass into the heavenly booths, in God's abode, amidst shouts of praise and joy that will resound eternally at the festive celebration of the righteous." (Sermon V 1683)

"No doubt, we must feel our misery with great pain, but we should feel even more strongly that letting it overwhelm us will not help, and that God unveils it so that we may rush and throw ourselves into the arms of our Redeemer, who calls us saying: 'Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.' So, children, do not forget that the goal of the examen is not only to make us own that we are unfair, ungrateful and unfaithful, but to have us resort to the One whose merciful and sweet hand can heal our wounds and the sores of our poor torn heart. All the time that you might spend consumed by sadness, tormented with despair, is time lost. The fastest and safest is to seek refuge right away within the wounds of J.C., and to imitate the prodigal son who, although very guilty, hurried to leave those miserable places where he suffered hunger and weakness, full of confidence in the goodness and indulgence of his father." (Sermons 1 – Registry III, p. 944)

We share our thirst for God

"Just like the prodigal son, I will go to him. Yes, I will go to meet my father; I will tell him I have sinned and he will receive me with joy, he will hold me in his arms. I used to be his enemy but now he will call me his son. I will receive a new proof of his love, a new proof of his tenderness. I will sit at his table and eat the white bread of the chosen ones. Oh Heaven! He himself will be my living nourishment!" (John Mary de la Mennais, Registre I, p. 350)

Psalm 50

Have mercy on me, O God, in your love.
In your great compassion blot out my sin.
Wash me thoroughly of my guilt;
cleansing me of evil.

For I acknowledge my wrongdoings
and have my sins ever in mind.
Against you alone have I sinned;
what is evil in your sight I have done.

You are right when you pass sentence
and blameless in your judgment.
For I have been guilt-ridden from birth,
a sinner from my mother's womb.

I know you desire truth in the heart,
teach me wisdom in my inmost being.
Cleanse me with hyssop and I shall be clean,
wash me, I shall be whiter than snow.

Fill me with joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
Turn your face away from my sins
and blot out all my offenses.

Create in me, O God, a pure heart;
give me a new and steadfast spirit.
Do not cast me out of your presence
nor take your holy spirit from me.

Give me again the joy of your salvation
and sustain me with a willing spirit.
Then I will show wrongdoers your ways
and sinners will return to you.

Deliver me, O God, from the guilt of blood,
and of your justice I shall sing aloud.
O Lord, open my lips,
and I will declare your praise.

You take no pleasure in sacrifice;
were I to give a burnt offering,
you would not delight in it.

O God, my sacrifice is a broken spirit;
a contrite heart you will not despise.
Shower Zion with your favor:
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Then you will delight in fitting sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and bulls
offered on your altar.

- **John Mary speaks on our behalf.**

“What is man's word? Dear God, speak to them yourself with that strong and penetrating voice that moves and converts hearts; make them start repenting and loving you even now. My God, have pity on their weakness; do not let any of them perish; do not let that even one resident in this house be obstinate or get lost, despite of all that we do or rather of all that You do to save them.

“My God, let me ask you; go to their encounter as the father of the prodigal son went to meet his unhappy son. Lord, all these are all your children; reach out then your hand of mercy, that powerful and gentle hand that pulled Saint Peter from the waves and that blessed the poor sinner woman repentant at your feet.” (Sermon V p.1870 bis)

LECTIO VITAE

“God is a friend always ready
to give us new proofs of His tenderness”
John Mary de la Mennais

It is only when we become parable that we understand what the parable teaches us.

- Review of this day. In which actions do you recognize yourself as the younger son, the elder, or the merciful father?
- Who made you feel at home?
- For whom have you been a bearer of God's tenderness today?

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

INTRODUCTION

“Neither do I condemn you; go away and don’t sin again.”

“What is serious and strong about Jesus’ approach is that He befriended and was communal not only with ‘the marginal’ and ‘the weak’ of that society, but also ‘the bad,’ those ‘morally’ despised in that society: sinners, publicans, prostitutes, Samaritans and the like. This is difficult to understand, although clear in the Gospels, because befriending and being communal with the marginal and the weak was valued then and still is, but befriending and being communal with the bad, the perverted, and those that all are ashamed of we are unready for, since that would be tantamount to losing our dignity, our good reputation.” (JM Castillo)



READING

John 8, 1-11

As for Jesus, he went to the Mount of Olives. At daybreak Jesus appeared in the Temple again. All the people came to him, and he sat down and began to teach them. Then the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees brought in a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They made her stand in front of everyone. “Master,” they said, “this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now the Law of Moses orders that such women be stoned to death; but you, what do you say?” They said this to test Jesus, in order to have some charge against him. Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. And as they continued to ask him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who has no sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” And he

bent down again, writing on the ground. As a result of these words, they went away, one by one, starting with the elders, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Then Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She replied, “No one.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go away and don’t sin again.”

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

“As for Jesus, he went to the Mount of Olives. At daybreak Jesus appeared in the Temple again. All the people came to him, and he sat down and began to teach them.” Jesus was spending the night outside the city, close to the Mount of Olives, and returned in the morning to teach at the temple, where the people gathered to listen to Him. There is no reference to the contents of His teaching. What he taught was in his very person, in his being and acting; since He is the “Word,” the new sanctuary, the presence of God, of the One who now reveals completely in forgiveness.

“Then the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees brought in a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery.” According to the law, this woman was to be executed, and what was actually in question was how, for at that time the opinions were divided between stoning and strangling.

“They made her stand in front of everyone.” The law with its prohibitions and mandates risks putting evil, through denunciation and punishment, at the center of attention. Actually, God had put the tree of life at the center of Paradise, not the one that would occasion transgression and death. It was the enemy, the accuser, who put it at the center. The cross would return the tree of life in its place, always fruitful in every season and capable of healing every wound.

“The Law of Moses orders that such women be stoned to death.” Stoning is a form of collective killing so that no one feels responsible. It requires unanimity: everyone participates and gives free rein to his aggression against the offender or presumed offender, who personifies what torments everyone and must be eliminated. His riddance confirms our presumed innocence.

“They said this to test Jesus, in order to have some charge against him.” They seek his opinion so as to set him up. The stones of the Scribes and Pharisees are directed against Him who is the center of the Law and the Prophets, to whom Scripture testifies, rather than against the woman placed in the middle.

Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. This action surely has a direct and clear intention: Jesus does not confront or provoke them; that would sharpen their furor. He rather adopts a noncommittal posture, turns to himself in a thoughtful pause, to avoid being snared into the collective violence. This is what He will invite the others to do, offering them another example to follow, different than the leaders’ violence into which they wanted to drag him.

“He straightened up.” Jesus stands up before the woman, but now facing her accusers. They persist in their questions, heeding what is written but not the Writer. This is why he stands up, to show them himself: He is the Writer.

“Let anyone among you who has no sin be the first to cast a stone at her.” With these words, Jesus calls on everyone to face his responsibility and personal conscience, in order to remove evil from the root. He requires each one to seek his inner self and apply to himself the judgment he wants to inflict on the woman. Only then will each be able to see the evil in his heart and his own blindness, and discover his own need for mercy and forgiveness. One abstains from judging others when one begins to judge oneself.

“And he bent down again, writing on the ground.” The purpose of Jesus is not to cast stones at the sinners, whether the adulteress or the pharisees and scribes. He just wants each one to become aware of himself and his sin, to discover own heart of stone, to become receptive of the gift of a heart of flesh, full of the Lord’s Spirit, capable of living by his Word.

“They went away, one by one, starting with the elders.” We have all sinned and are deprived of the glory of God. Awareness of one’s own evil is the first gift of God. The scene is not without irony: those called to judge (the most powerful section of the Sanhedrin) are the first brought to perceive their fault.

“He was left alone with the woman standing before him.” The woman had been placed in the middle by the watchful guardians of the law that condemns. Now she is alone with Jesus, surrounded by the boundless mercy of God. In the end, what is left to each man is the encounter of his own misery with God’s mercy. In each of us there lives uneasily the adulteress together with those who would stone her. Instead of doing that, we must recognize her in oneself: that is where we encounter the Lord.

“Then Jesus stood up...” First He stood up to show Himself to the accusers as the Writer of the law, but now to show Himself to the accused as the Lord who forgives. The enemies disappear, and there remains only the One who cares for her with eternal love, in whom she recognizes her Lord, because He forgives her. A new alliance is born between them, written not in stone but in the heart. He forgives this woman without her prior repentance, for that follows forgiveness and does not consist in locking oneself inside the prison of one’s own guilt, but opening up to the joy of a greater love. Forgiveness that precedes any repentance is a creative act: it opens up a new future, in the freedom from sin and for greater love.

HELP FOR PERSONAL MEDITATION



“None of us will enter the bosom of the Father unless he is conformed to the image of his Son. It is in his Son, as he tells us himself, that he is well pleased; and to raise to Him his miserable creatures, He must find in them the traits, and I daresay the figure, the living imprint of the One he has begotten before all ages.” (JM de la Mennais, S VII 2172.)

After the words of our Founder, let us contemplate the Son: his deeds, his words, the bonds of welcome and tenderness that He has woven with the sinner woman, the firm and calm way he confronted the Pharisees and Scribes with his own truth.

LENT WITH JOHN MARY DE LA MENNAIS

(Suggestions for a community meeting)



- Let us take a moment to meditate on the following words of our founding Father. Then let us share our feelings and reflections with our community.
- Can it be said that our community is an ambassador of the mercy of God, a message of kindness and charity? How do our bonds with

the “weak”, the “marginal” and the “bad” appear in our personal and community life? (Let us share specific situations.)

“And anyway, will not God be with us? Yes, He will come to us as the father of the prodigal went to his unhappy son. Jesus Christ our Master will tend us his hand of mercy, that strong and gentle hand that pulled Saint Peter out of the waves, and blessed the poor sinner repentant at his feet. While on Earth, He wept tears of compassion over unfaithful Jerusalem. ‘Ah! If you only knew’, He said, ‘in the time still left to you, if you only knew what could give you peace!’ Well, that is the peace we plead for. He will not refuse it to our pleas. In the laborious efforts of our penance even, we will enjoy the indescribable sweetness, the chaste delights, and our present happiness will be a pledge for our future bliss.”
(Sermon V 1693)

“We are the ministers of his charity, ambassadors of his mercy, that he wants to shine over our sinful souls...” (Registre I, p.50)

“Your ministry must always be one of gentleness and charity...” (Letter to Brother Arthur, 11-23-1846)

“My sons, God has heard your prayer, and here is what he entrusts me to tell you in his name: No doubt we are unworthy that the King of kings, the Lord God of all virtues, He whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, should come and live in our sinful souls; and the angels, witnesses of this prodigious mystery of love, are amazed and frightened. But no matter our lowliness, however many our faults, if we are truly sorry for them, they will not deprive us forever of the fruit of divine communion.

“True, Jesus Christ wishes us to place on the altar a contrite and humbled heart, but he does not let us tell him to depart from us; and why should he? Because we are sinners? Ecce Agnus Dei. But it is not the righteous that he has come for, it is sinners. Or because we are ill? But He is the sovereign physician of souls, and on earth He chose to surround himself with the poor and the infirm; and this King of eternal glory, having become himself poor and weak, formed as it were his court of such. Or because we are languishing, exhausted, burdened with work, sorrows and hardship? But it is for this very reason that He calls us, to relieve us: Venite ad me qui laboratis et onerati estis, et ego reficiam vos – Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Registry II, pp 591-592)

“A school is like a hospital - all of the children are ill. The more they challenge your patience and love, the greater will be your merit and reward in Heaven. Do not lose heart but rather renew your spirit. Oh dear son! Think often of the indulgence you need from God, and following the word of the Gospel, be merciful so as to obtain mercy.” (1.35)

We share our thirst for God

- You may start by projecting an icon of Jesus with background music. Or give each one an image of Jesus to contemplate in silence.
- After some minutes, one or three readers read the text “Resemble the Son.” Continue contemplating the image of Jesus Christ silently.
- A reader proclaims the thoughts of our Founder. After a moment of silence, the same reader repeats the following phrases allowing a moment of silence between them.
“You have not brought here any feeling of humanity, and you will find none.”
“You have sowed harshness, inhumanity, now harvest the results.”
“You have fled from mercy, so it will walk away from you.”
“You have despised the poor; you will be despised by Him who became poor for love of you.”
- The hymn of the Philippians is proclaimed together.
- After a moment of silence, all are invited to share freely their personal prayer to the Lord, moved by some text or the thoughts of this day.
- End by praying Our Father on our knees, remembering the sinner before Jesus.

To resemble the Son

*Be like the Son, reaching his stature
This is the peak of desire.
To follow his PATH,
in the trail of his resolute journey,
to stop in to the places He frequented:
with the poor, the children, the ignored...
and to remake one's inner way,
marked with the signs of Abba,
towards the irresistible wind
of the Spirit who propelled Him,
ushering in the dawn of the Kingdom
that appeared with Him.*

*To cling to his TRUTH:
his mind, his desires,
his dreams, his projects,
all that mobilized his energies,
the program that raised his expectations,
his struggles, his hopes,
his friendship and his love...*

*To living his LIFE,
to be able to say:
"For me, to live is Christ."*

"On the last day, it will be said to those who have been unmerciful to their brothers: You have not brought here any compassion and you will find none; you have sown harshness, inhumanity: you will harvest its fruit. You have fled from mercy: it will leave you. You have despised the poor so you will be despised by Him who became poor for love of you." (S. IX p. 2586)

Hymn

(Philippians 2, 5-11)

Your attitude should be
the same as Jesus Christ had:

Though he was in the form of God,
he did not regard equality with God
as something to be grasped,
but emptied himself,
taking on the nature of a servant,
made in human likeness,
and in his appearance found as a man.
He humbled himself
by being obedient to death,
death on the cross.
That is why God exalted him
and gave him the Name
which outshines all names,
so that at the Name of Jesus
all knees should bend
in heaven, on earth and among the dead,

(All)

***and all tongues proclaim
that Christ Jesus is the Lord
to the glory of God the Father.***

LECTIO VITAE

Today's lectio can be complemented by adopting the bodily postures indicated in the text of today's Gospel:

- Standing, like the Pharisees and the Scribes, reconsider and beg forgiveness for those moments when you felt you were judging the words, actions or person of some of your Brothers, children, youths, mission partners...
- Lying prone on the floor, remember in your heart all the fallen, vanquished, victims of violence, of abuse, the misunderstood, the forgotten... Begin with faraway situations, and gradually approach those known to you, whose story you know ...
- Standing arms outstretched, as if inviting the sinner woman to straighten up, think in your heart of the children, youths, Brothers, mission partners, ... for whom you have been today an ambassador of the mercy of God, a message of the Lord's kindness and love.