



RETREAT IDEAS

A Resource for Passionists

Gerard Mahony C.P.

FOREWORD

For most of his life as a Passionist, Fr Gerard Mahony has been principally engaged in the ministry of preaching missions and retreats. He has also devoted much time to studying and reflecting on the Passionist Charism – both in its spirituality and history. And so, Fr Gerard is more than qualified to offer and share his **Retreat Ideas: A Resource for Passionists**.

Fr Gerard offers us a rich resource, both as a personal retreat/reflection time, and as an aid in the preparation of retreats and days of recollection. His material is steeped in lived experience of 67 years of prayer as a Passionist religious and 62 years of preaching as a priest. Each retreat topic follows a definite pattern and is based on Scripture and the works of both classical and modern spiritual writers.

Above all, Fr Gerard has endeavoured to reflect on each topic from his standpoint as a Passionist, making use of the spiritual teachings and writings of the Founder, St Paul of the Cross and sharing the fruits of a lived Charism.

I commend this valuable resource not only to members of the Passionist Family, but also to anyone who desires to deepen their spiritual life and to those who feel drawn to experience God's unconditional love shown in the Passion of Jesus.

"May the Passion of Jesus Christ be always in our hearts"

Joachim Rego C.P.
Provincial

16th August 2009.

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PREFACE

The year 2009 and I am 67 years professed as a Passionist; this year I will be ordained 62 years. I have given about 300 retreats to school children, parish groups, Sisters, Brothers and Priests, as well as Passionists themselves. I don't know (does anyone?) I might be reaching the end of my life as a giver of retreats. The thought occurred to me that I should write a new retreat and leave behind these reflections with a Passionist flavor.

What I had in mind was:

- i) That sometimes it is difficult to make an annual retreat and this could be a help;
- ii) That there may be young priests in the future preparing to give a retreat – and this might be helpful. Of course, this cannot take the place of their own preparation. (I certainly could not and would not want to preach someone else's reflections – it would sound more like a recitation.) But these ideas might be a help.

Throughout these reflections, I have quoted a great deal – and I would NOT do that if I was giving the retreat! It all needs to come from our own prayer and our own reading and in our own style.

The format of these reflections differs one from another – sometime deliberately and sometimes because they were compiled over a period of years.

I've added dots in the text to suggest possible places for personal reflection. It's best not to go along with speed reading.

Gerard Mahony C.P.

14th August 2009

62nd Anniversary of Ordination

RETREAT TOPIC: READINESS FOR THE RETREAT

Are you ready for this retreat? ... Are you free enough? ... Or are there many distractions bothering you just now? ... Loreto Sister, Deidre Brown, a music teacher and lecturer at the seminary in Melbourne, prepared to make a retreat but with the exam papers to be marked and many other things to do, she thought she was not ready. She spoke to the retreat director about her situation. She presumed the solution would be to choose another time for retreat – a time when she was less hassled. The director responded: “Don’t you think that God always says to us: ‘Just come as you are’”. She spent the night mulling over that reply and, next morning, she had composed the words and music to the hymn ‘Come as you Are’. Let us reflect slowly on the words:

COME AS YOU ARE

Come as you are, that's how I want you.
Come as you are, feel quite at home.
Close to my heart, loved and forgiven;
Come as you are, why stand alone?

No need to fear, love sets no limits.
No need to fear, love never ends.
Don't run away shamed and dishearten'd
Rest in my love, trust me again.

I came to call sinners, not just the virtuous
I came to bring peace, not to condemn.
Each time you fail to live by my promise,
Why do you think I'd love you the less?

Come as you are, that's how I love you.
Come as you are, trust me again.
Nothing can change the love that I bear you.
All will be well, just come as you are.

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PRESENCE OF GOD

Let us begin by thinking of the God who is the main conductor of this retreat ...

Years ago on community retreats, we had the evening reflection in the dark. Fr Francis Clune, C.P., was an Irishman who had served as an Army chaplain at Gallipoli and in France, and whose voice was affected by mustard gas. I remember him delivering the Presence of God in a thin, squeaky voice, reciting Psalm 139. Slowly, let us reflect on those words:

O Lord, you search me and you know me,
You know my resting and my rising,
You discern my purpose from afar.
You mark when I walk or lie down,
All my ways lie open to you.
Before ever a word is on my tongue
You know it, O Lord, through and through.
Behind, and before you besiege me.
Too wonderful for me, this knowledge,
Too high beyond my reach.
O where can I go from your spirit,
Or where can I flee from your face?
If I take the wings of the dawn
and dwell at earth's furthest end,
even there your hand would lead me,
your right hand would hold me fast.
For it was you who created my being,
Knit me together in my mother's womb.
I thank you for the wonder of my being,
And for the wonders of all your creation ...

PRAYER

Each new turn along the way, Lord, leads towards a new birth. At all such moments I hear your words: 'You are my child; this day I am begetting you.' At such moments of new birth, give me the strength to be as obedient as any child at that moment of its birth. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

TEXT: **Luke 12: 35-40**

Jesus said to his disciples: 'See that you have your belts done up and your lamps lit. Be like people waiting for their master to return from the wedding feast, ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. In truth I tell you, he will do up his belt, sit them down at table and wait on them. It may be in the second watch that he comes, or in the third, but blessed are those servants if he finds them ready. You may be quite sure of this, that if the householder had known at what time the burglar would come, he would not have let anyone break through the wall of his house. You too must stand ready, because the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.'

Jesus tells us that we must be ready just as the Israelites in Egypt were ready to go into the unknown to improve their situation. (Exodus 12:12) This translation speaks of belts being done up. Other translations speak of 'loins being girt'. It simply means to be clothed in such a way that we are unhampered as we journey along. I guess today we would say: be ready with running shoes on, shorts and light tops. Or, if it is a matter of plunging into the pool, we might be wearing those modern slick swimmers that glide through the water.....

The second thing is 'lamps that are lit'. This was a time before torches with batteries. There was a bowl of oil with some cotton to light. Here we are reminded of the wise and foolish bridesmaids who did or didn't have extra oil for their lamps.....

These people are also waiting for their master to return from a wedding. There was no way of knowing when that would be. Traditionally, the men would gather at the groom's house and the women would gather with the bride. In the evening, when the bride was ready, the men would process to the house of the bride. Sometimes, the groom had not yet met the bride – all the arrangements had been made by the best man. So introductions were needed. Then they would form a procession and with song and joyful shouts they would return to the groom's home for the celebrations. And who could tell how long they would last??

Meanwhile, the servants would have to stay awake, awaiting the master's return. The master would be tired and sometimes hungry if the journey had been long. In the text there is a reversal: the master does up his belt and prepare a meal for his servants – as we can expect he will do for us in this retreat ...

The second parable is about robberies, which occurred even in those days!! But if the owner only knew when the robbery was to take place, he would be ready for the attack

And then we come to the final sentence – one that has been weakened by missionaries and others by associating it with the time of death. For there are many comings of the Lord. It could be now and later today or tomorrow. The text says: 'the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.' It is not necessarily to announce the end of our earthly existence, but coming just as friend and lover to speak with us

So, are we ready to begin this retreat? Are we really ready? ...

- Could it be that we are like some learner car drivers who put one foot on the accelerator and one foot on the brake with the result that there is much smoke, much noise but little movement?
- Are we only as ready as Peter the apostle thought he was? 'Lord, I would be ready to go to prison with you, and to death!' and Jesus knew what would happen in fact – and said: 'I tell you, Peter, by the time the cock crows today, you will have denied that you know me.' (Luke22: 33-34)
- Could it be possibly true that the words offered by Cardinal Newman apply: 'Fear not that your life will come to an end; fear rather that it never came to a beginning.'
- Are we ready to take hold of the 'now'? Eckhart Tolle has an entire book on the "Power of Now" (Hodder, Australia 2004). He says:

"Since ancient times, spiritual masters of all traditions have pointed to the Now as the key to the spiritual dimension. Despite this, it seems to have remained a secret. It is certainly not taught in churches and temples. If you go to a church, you may hear readings from the Gospels such as 'Take no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself,' or 'Nobody who puts his hands to the plow and *looks back* is fit for the Kingdom of God.' Or you might hear the passage about the beautiful flowers that

are not anxious about tomorrow but live with ease in the timeless Now and are provided for abundantly by God. The depth and radical nature of these teachings are not recognized. No one seems to realize that they are meant to be lived and so bring about a profound inner transformation.”

- Are we ready for some creative silence, as Thomas Merton calls it?

“Silence has many dimensions. It can be a regression and an escape, a loss of self, or it can be presence, awareness, unification, self-discovery. Negative silence blurs and confuses our identity and we lapse into daydreams or diffuse anxieties. Positive silence pulls us together and makes us realize who we are, who we might be, and the distance between these two. Hence, positive silence implies a disciplined choice and what Paul Tillich called ‘the courage to be.’ In the long run, the discipline of creative silence demands a certain kind of faith. For when we come face to face with ourselves in the lonely ground of our own being, we confront many questions about the value of our own existence, the reality of our commitments, the authenticity of our everyday lives.

When we are constantly in movement, always busy meeting the demands of our social role, passively carried along on the stream of talk in which people mill around from morning to night, we are perhaps able to escape from our deeper self and from the questions it poses. We can be more or

less content with the external identity, the social self, which is produced by our interaction with others in the wheeling and dealing of everyday life. But no matter how open and honest we may be with others, this social self does imply a necessary element of artifice. It is always to some extent a mask. It has to be.”

CONCLUSION

St Paul of the Cross wrote to a Francis Appiani who later became a Passionist:

“Accustom yourself to a holy, loving repose in God, and remain there in secret silence, resting on the bosom of the highest God. Arouse yourself spirit with loving darts, for example: ‘O Goodness, O Love! And then continue in a holy peace in God in a sacred silence.’”

WARNING! THIS RETREAT COULD MEAN CONVERSION

RETREAT TOPIC: CONVERSION

INTRODUCTION

I want to begin with a story, a good place to start. It's a story from the life of Joyce Huggett, an Anglican retreat-giver, who gives lectures and writes religious books and articles. She doesn't name the evangelist about whom she is speaking, but it sounds like the evangelist, Billy Graham:

“You can't sit on the fence forever. Unless you choose Jesus as the Lord of your life, by implication you are rejecting him... Jesus longs that we should surrender our entire lives to him and urges anyone who had never done so to ‘make a decision for Christ.’”

Huggett responds: “I had never heard anyone give that challenge before. But it made sense. If Jesus loved me enough to die for me, the least I could do was to express my thanks in an act of glad surrender. The surge of emotions that welled up inside me expressed more eloquently than any words the deepest desire of my heart and mind – for both were fully engaged in that moment to place my life once and for all in the hands of the living God.”

“When the evangelist invited those who would like to make such a commitment to Christ to come forward to the front of the church, I pushed my way past my friend who was sitting at the end of the pew, and stumbled up the aisle. I knew what I wanted to do and was determined to go through with this public abandonment of all I had and all I was to the Christ

who had revealed himself to me afresh that night. That moment was a turning point of my life: a conversion experience.”

What I want to give now is a WARNING! If you intend to make this retreat – or any retreat – there is always the possibility of God bringing about a change in your life.....

PRESENCE OF GOD

Thomas Fossi was from Elba. He met Paul of the Cross when the latter gave a mission there in 1735. Thomas was married with a family; a successful business man. But he was hot-headed and over-zealous. Paul wrote to him:

“Make yourself a good retreat in the interior of your soul, and, in that desert, treat with the highest Good one-on-one, adoring Him in spirit and in truth. Since his divine majesty is pleased to speak to you of the mysteries of the Passion, so in your interior retreat, treat with him in such colloquies, but do it as children do, who often take their repose in the bosom of their mother and express their innocent love with sweet glances to the face of their mother. So you should glance with faith and love.”

PRAYER

Teilhard de Chardin:

“My God, to encourage your action throughout everything in me, I will do more than open and offer myself to the passivities of existence. I will faithfully associate myself with your work on my body and soul. I will force myself to follow and anticipate your smallest impulses. Oh, if I could

resist you so little, Master, that you will no longer distinguish me from you!

Within the limits of my powers, because I am a priest, I want to be free from no one, the first to be aware of what the world loves, follows, and suffers – the first to seek, to sympathize and to grieve – the first to blossom and to sacrifice myself – in the broadest human way and with more earthly nobility than any other servant in the world. (XII, 325)

TEXT: Mark 1: 15

“Be converted and believe the Good News.”

Thomas Dubay writes in *“Deep Conversion: Deep Prayer”*:

“Six words, ten syllables! After twenty centuries of commentary by saints and scholars, it is still safe to say that we have not fully plumbed the depths of that short sentence. Yet, upon analysis, we find it brilliant.

Be converted, that is: be changed, refreshed, even transformed from your present condition or stance to another, perhaps an opposite other. That is rather an abrupt way to begin a conversation or a lecture. Jesus did have a habit of surprising people, of saying what no one would expect him to say. Yet, I have just remarked that these six words are brilliant. What do I mean?”

He goes on to say that he should have said:

“Accept the Gospel and it will convert you. But no! It is as if there are two things: ‘Be converted ... and ... Believe the Gospel’

- In 2002, the Congregation of Institutes produced a booklet called ‘Starting Afresh with Christ’. It stated:

“Consecrated persons are called by the Spirit to a continual conversion to give new vigor to the prophetic dimension of their vocation

- The Pope made it clear in his message to the members of the last plenary session of our Congregation:

“The Church counts on the continual dedication of this chosen host of her sons and daughters, on their yearning for holiness and upon the enthusiasm of their service to foster and sustain every Christian’s striving for perfection and to enhance the common welcoming of neighbor, especially those most in need. In this way, witness is given to the love of Christ among all people.”

- Evelyn Underhill, an Anglican spiritual writer, wrote about conversion in a book called “The Spiritual Life”. Fr Tom Ryan, SM, quotes it in his article in “*The Australasian Catholic Record*, April 2008.

“When the creative action of God as Spirit finds personal response, it entails changes in a person’s awareness, self-awareness, namely, a conversion. Whatever the form in which the incitement of the hidden God teaches a person, the human response follows much the same road even though its various stages are named in a variety of ways. (p.49)

“It is a waking up, a noticing of spiritual light, a sensitivity to a spiritual atmosphere that reveals our human world in its true reality. Thus, one’s horizons are widened, the landscape is seen differently, personal experience is enormously enriched and responsibilities enlarged.” (p.44)

“The mind is enlightened, the heart attracted, power is given to the will to persevere.” (p.46)

“It is a shift to a greater level of freedom and truth – a broadening of horizons, a recognition of what is true and good, a step in self-transcendence, and a conscious communion with the Real.” (pp. 49-50)

Now, I would like to offer the conversion experiences of St Paul of the Cross and St Therese for your reflection.

In 1713, when **Paul of the Cross** was 19 years old, he attended Mass and listened carefully to a sermon given by the parish priest. He felt what he called ‘an internal movement’ such as he had never experienced before; he felt ‘blinded’; he gained an almost ‘experiential knowledge of God as a Person who in his ineffable greatness, bent over him and loved him as a person’!

Rosa Calabrese was told by Paul a few months before he died: “From that day I began to really know my God.”

Another thing that happened – and it was linked with the above – he thought his life until then had been useless and his sins seemed suddenly magnified. He set about making a confession and decided to give himself up to mortification and penance.

In 2002, celebrating Mass with the relics of **St Therese Lisieux**, Bishop Michael Malone of Newcastle-Maitland diocese, said in the homily:

“Therese Martin was the youngest of nine children; four of her siblings, two sisters and two brothers, had died before she was born. Her father was a successful watchmaker, her mother a skilled craftswoman. Therese herself was a sickly child. As a baby she had to be cared for by a wet nurse for the first twelve months. When her mother died four years

later, Therese was plunged into a state of sadness and sensitivity that lasted eight years. She was a somewhat temperamental, shy child, inclined to be withdrawn from other children. Consequently, she found school life rather unpleasant.

When she was about 13 years of age, she experienced a deep conversion. Whilst she had always had a strong relationship with God and was conscientious about prayer, the conversion experience caused a marked change in her. Her sister, Celine, commented that Therese now seemed more self-assured and more compassionate towards others.

It was then that Therese developed an interest in the mission of the Church. At the same time, she expressed a desire to suffer for God.”

CONCLUSION

These last two conversions did not happen in a retreat nor did many others that I could quote. But it is possible that God could touch us and bless our retreat with a life-changing conversion.

RETREAT TOPIC: PRISONS WE CHOOSE TO LIVE IN

INTRODUCTION

Several things inspired this reflection. One was this: I watched a film called *The Crossing Guard*. It starred Jack Nicholson, playing one of his 'one flew over the cuckoo nest' roles of a father whose daughter was killed years ago by David Morse. Nicholson is waiting for him to get out of prison so he can kill him. Both men are in prison – Morse in a physical prison of tortured grief; Nicholson is in a prison of revenge. There is no happiness in either life. The story works out well in the end – after years of agony.

Secondly, Doris Lessing gave five lectures on "Prisons we Choose to Live Inside". I don't know what she spoke about... but the title challenged me.

Thirdly, John O'Donahue in his book, *"Eternal Echoes"*, has a chapter *"Prisons we Choose to live In."* I will use some of his headings.

PRESENCE OF GOD

M. Scott Peck, the Connecticut psychiatrist and author, tells in "The Road Less Travelled and Beyond" (Rider, 1997) about his first retreat. He went to the retreat exercises in the hope of some 'revelation' about how he should proceed if his writing was to become popular. He experienced a dream one night and this is his description of it:

"I was an onlooker in a distinctly middle-class home. In this two-car family, there was a seventeen year old boy who was the kind of son any father would love to have. He was president of the senior class in high school; he was going to be valedictorian at graduation time; he was

captain of the high school football team; he was good looking; he worked hard after school, and if all that wasn't enough, he had a girlfriend who was sweet and demure. Moreover, the boy had his driver's licence and was an unusually responsible, mature driver for his age. Only his father wouldn't let him drive! Instead, the father insisted on driving this boy wherever he had to go – football practice, jobs, dates, proms. And to add insult to injury, the father insisted that the boy pay him five dollars a week out of his hard-earned after-school earnings for the privilege of being driven around, which he was quite capable of doing himself. “

Dr Peck awoke from his sleep in a fury at this autocratic father and his fury continued for some time. When he cooled down, he used his skill to look at the dream. Could God be the father and himself the son? Finally, he realized that God was saying to him: “Hey, Scotty, you just pay your dues and leave the driving to me. LEAVE THE DRIVING TO ME!”

.....

PRAYER

God, you are a great deliverer. You are the one who helped Paul and Silas and brought them out of their prison. Play this same role with all who are incarcerated, whether physically or psychologically. We sincerely ask this through your Son, Christ our Lord.

TEXT: Acts 16: 23-34

“After inflicting many blows on them, they threw them into prison and instructed the jailer to guard them securely. When he received these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and secured their feet to a stake. About

midnight, while Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God as the prisoners listened, there was suddenly such a severe earthquake that the foundations of the jail shook; all the doors flew open, and the chains of all were pulled loose. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, thinking that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted out in a loud voice, "Do no harm to yourself; we are all here." He asked for a light and rushed in and, trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas.

Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you and your household will be saved." So they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to everyone in his house. He took them in at that hour of the night and bathed their wounds; then he and all his family were baptized at once. He brought them up into his house and provided a meal and with his household rejoiced at having come to faith in God." (*New American Bible*)

How dreadful it would be for any one of us, living a reasonably decent life, but, at this moment standing before a judge in court. We hear the judge saying: "You are guilty and I am sentencing you to so many months in jail." What desolation would creep into our souls!

Handcuffed, we would be led away to the prison. For a while, we would be busy: fingerprints, photos, etc. and, after that, led away to our cell. How crushing to hear the clang of the iron door close us into the empty cell that is going to be our home for so many months that will seem like years because of the loneliness and isolation.

What a bleak future! Now, life continues in a cold area 8 x 8 feet, except for meals and an occasional walk for exercise – not when you feel like it but only

when you are told. All freedom has disappeared, confined for the weeks ahead.

We do not have to be physically imprisoned to be prisoners. Let's consider the following:

1. **Frightened Identity:** We all have the responsibility to discover who we really are. Sometimes, we put on masks to hide the reality and sometimes we try to create a whole new – but unreal – image of ourselves. Who are we really?
2. **Old Time Religion:** Sometimes we emphasize sin and selfishness so much that we despair of ever being worthwhile. The message fails its purpose and leaves some of us imprisoned. God becomes the judge who condemns rather than the God who loves us unconditionally.....
3. **Being Hurt:** Real or imagined hurt can eat into us and the iron gate of prison clangs again. O'Donohue writes: "A mental prison can be as bad as a physical one." A mental prison can be devastatingly lonely. Sometimes, it is difficult for anyone to reach us. We are so hurt that it is difficult at times to distinguish our life from our hurt.....
4. **Fears:** People have many different types of fear. Some cannot leave their home; some worry about diseases; some are afraid of insects and animals. Caroline Myss, American mystic and author, challenges us to ponder these questions:
 - What fears have the most authority over me? List three.
 - What happens when a fear overtakes me?

- Does it make me silent?
- Do I allow people to speak for me?
- Do I agree to some things out of fear that I otherwise would not agree to?
- Have I let creative opportunities pass me by?
- How conscious am I in the moment that I am sabotaging myself?
- Am I able to recognize the Saboteur in others?
- Would I be able to offer others advice about how to challenge one's Saboteur? If so, what would it be?

Source: http://www.myss.com/library/contracts/four_archs.asp

5. **Inability to Forgive:** “Of all the many challenges for the reasonable mind, few are more difficult than forgiveness. For a culture that believes in law and order, it is difficult to accept the spiritual imperative to forgive. Forgiveness is, in fact, the most irrational spiritual task you will be given because it stands in direct opposition to all you have been taught about fairness and justice. And of all the many injuries that are difficult to forgive, among the most difficult is being humiliated. But forgiveness is a mystical necessity.” (Myss, p. 223)

And, after all, our inability to forgive usually only affects ourselves. We choose a prison to live in

.....

6. **Loneliness:** Fr Tony Cleary was a member of our Province. He was a New Zealander who died at the young age of 44 at St Ives. After his death, it was found that, amongst other gifts, he was also a poet. I quote this poem written on 21st October 1972:

There is a prison building
Whose walls are moulded strong
With hurt and shame its mortar
Binding giant blocks of fear
Yes, darn it, it is a dungeon
A stifled, damply darkened pit
Some little window here, now there,
Permits a straying sunbeam float in upon
the air.

7. **Possessions:** Sometimes we hold on to possessions. We cannot think what life would be like without them, or we pretend that some day, we may need them. So, in our prison, they clutter up our cell and they give us a false sense of security.

8. **Spiritual Anorexia:** Thomas Moore, an Irish writer, adds another prison in his book, "The Soul's Religion" (Harper Collins, 2002, p. 229). He tells us that *anorexia* means *no appetite*. Physical anorexia is found in people who look in the mirror – an ordinary mirror – but they see themselves as in a trick mirror. They see themselves as obese. I guess spiritual anorexia would occur when people have done little spiritually but think that they are doing too much and ease up. What a prison that leads to!

.....

CONCLUSION

So we have reflected on some of the many prisons we may choose to live in. we might be lucky people and may not have been touched by them in any way.

If they ring a bell for us, know that there is an escape. We can pass through the steel doors and

return to real freedom. If we cannot do it alone, there is always professional help. But, before there is any hope of healing, we must be convinced that we are held in this prison and we need help to experience freedom once more.

RETREAT TOPIC: FOLLOWING JESUS

INTRODUCTION

In this reflection, we will be thinking about the cost of following Jesus. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church, nn. 520-521*, says:

“In all his life, Jesus presents himself as our model. He is the ‘perfect man’ who invites us to become his disciples and follow him. In humbling himself, he has given us an example to imitate; through prayer he draws us to pray and by his poverty, he calls us to accept freely the privations that may come our way.”

.....

PRESENCE OF GOD

“Where is your house then?” (*Eyes on the Cross: Michael Kennedy, Crossroad, 2001*)

Where do you dwell?
But in this lost moment
passing through this door
I experienced
a feeling of belonging
I had never felt
In my life.
I knew
what was happening within.
I could never forget that place
where I felt deep presence –
Wasn't sure what to say
But Jesus began to talk
about his time apart –
how he saw everything different
He would like to see
How conditions could be changed
for the excluded of society
This gave me confidence.”

PRAYER: *(Brother Roger of Taize)*

“Agreeing to lose everything for you, O Christ,
in order to take hold of you,
as you have already taken hold of us –
means abandoning ourselves to the living God
and praying with God: Father, not what I want
but what you want!
Losing everything in order to live from you, O Christ,
means daring to choose;
leaving ourselves behind, so as no longer to walk
on two roads at the same time...
Saying ‘no’ to all that keeps us from
following in your footsteps;
And ‘yes’ to all that brings us closer to you,
and, through you, to those whom you confide to us.

TEXT: Matt. 9: 9 - 13

As Jesus was walking on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he got up and followed him.

Now while he was at table in the house, it happened that a number of tax collectors and sinners came to sit at the table with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to the disciples, ‘why does your Master eat with tax collectors and sinners. When he heard this he replied, ‘It is not the healthy who need the doctor but the sick. Go and learn the meaning of the words: *Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice.* And indeed, I came to call not the upright but sinners.’

The first point about this text comes from the words, “he got up and followed him”. Someone who knows these Eastern languages tells me that they have a continuous verb in their language. In other words, he got up, and he got up, and he got up. The agreement

to follow is not made once and for all and, then, forgotten about. It has to be repeated every day of our lives, every moment ...

The second point is what this step cost the apostle, Matthew. Let us consider:

- His whole belief system changed. As a Jew, what he had believed had been turned upside down.
- As a former tax collector, he had been ostracized by the Jews as a traitor. He collected taxes for the Romans and got as much extra for himself as he could. So he was rated with sinners
- From being hated – and, perhaps, hating others – he received compassion from the man Jesus.
- He was a rich man. He was called to surrender all and follow Someone who, at times, had nowhere to lay his head
- From having a rather sedentary life, he now had to travel up and down the country
- Following the leader nearly cost him his life when they travelled across the lake and experienced the storm at sea
- From being in a rather comfortable position, he would follow Someone who would be criticized and hounded to death
- He had to take up his own cross if he was to follow

- He had to believe in the resurrection of Jesus
.....
- From being a Jew attached to his own country,
he had to take the message to the Far East
.....

What does our call demand of us?

- It means that we know Christ and have faith in him. This can be more difficult than the few words seem to entail. (*cf. Jn. 20:29*) It is not just an intellectual assent but it is making him, and him alone, the ground on which we stand
- It means that we trust him – even when we have unsuccessfully labored hard and he tells us to keep going. (*cf. Lk. 5:1-11*) He wants us never to be afraid (*cf. Mtt. 14:22*)
.....
- It means loving him, to feel the fire burning within us (*cf. Lk. 24:13*) Avoiding all coarsening of these same hearts (*cf. Lk. 21:25-28*)
- It means that we are people of prayer (*cf. Lk. 11: 1-13*)
- It means that we answer the call to go out to all the world at Jesus' request (*cf. Mk 6: 7-13*)
- It means that we wash others' feet (*cf. Jn. 13: 1-15*)
- It means that we carry our cross with Jesus (*cf. Mtt. 10: 37-42*)

CONCLUSION

I want to quote now from Thomas Merton and Paul of the Cross. Thomas Merton wrote about his conversion to Catholicism:

“It was there I first saw him.
Whom I serve as my God and my King
and who owns and rules my life.
It is the Christ of the Apocalypse
the Christ of the martyrs
it is the Christ of St Paul and St John
and of St Augustine and St Jerome
and all the Fathers – and the desert Fathers.
It is the Christ God, Christ King.”

Later on, when he entered the monastery, he wrote:

“He is the whole meaning of our life
The whole substance of our religious life.
Nothing in religion makes sense
if we forget this great central truth.
Christ said: ‘I am the Truth’.
We come seeking life
We come seeking light.
He is ‘the Light of the world.’
We come seeking God
In him dwells the fullness of God. (Col. 2:9)

And finally, St Paul of the Cross, when he thought he was alone, exclaimed:

“What, a God made man! A God crucified! A God dying! A God present in the Eucharist!”
(Cajetan, CP, *Spirit and Virtues*, p. 53)

Paul was very familiar with the Scriptures and often quoted them:

“I must tell you to draw greater fruit from the Lord’s teaching. You must listen to the Word of God, either vocal or written, as if Jesus Himself were speaking to you. (*Letter to Marchessa Marianna del Pozzo, 11-11-1728*)

RETREAT TOPIC: THE CONTEMPORARY PASSION

INTRODUCTION

The Passion of Jesus, so dear to all of us, is not just an historical event – over and done with. Jesus unites himself so closely to the people of this time and age that the Passion continues. Blood is still flowing; bodies are being beaten; minds are confused and afraid; humanity is being tortured to this day. And Jesus is involved. The Passion, in fact, is forever

PRESENCE OF GOD

St Paul the Apostle wrote to the Philippians (4:4):

“Rejoice in the Lord always! Again, I say, rejoice! For the Lord is near.”

Let our minds and hearts take in the thought of God’s presence. Let our minds ponder the nearness of his presence. Let our hearts rejoice in the presence of him whom we love. “For the Lord is near.” He is near by the presence of his majesty. He is immersed in our history. He is involved in our struggles. Let us adore him, love him, and thank him for his great love.....

PRAYER

Let us pray that the death of Christ on the cross will bring us to the glory of the resurrection

“God, our Father, in obedience to you, your only Son accepted death on the cross for the salvation of mankind. We acknowledge the mystery of the cross on earth. May we receive the gift of redemption in heaven?” (*Prayer from the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross*)

TEXT: 2 Cor. 4: 7- 12

We carry this treasure in vessels of clay so that this all surpassing power may not be seen as ours but as God's. Trials of every sort come to us, but we are not discouraged. We are left without answer, but do not despair; persecuted but not abandoned; knocked down but not crushed. We carry everywhere in our person the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us. For we, the living, are given up continually to death for the sake of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may appear in our mortal existence. And as death is at work in us, life comes to you." (*Christian Community Bible*)

It is worthwhile considering some features of the portrait of an apostle that Paul sketches:

- We do not lose heart.
- We do not proceed with trickery nor do we falsify God's message.
- We are no more than his servants.
- Let people discover in us the glory of God which shines in Christ's face.
- We carry the death of Jesus so that life may be revealed in us.
- We believe and that is why we speak

I suppose we are all familiar with the *Quo Vadis* legend and what happened to St Peter. According to the legend, Peter is already the Pope, Vicar of Christ on earth. He is in Rome, in the thick of a violent persecution. We can

understand his thinking that the newborn Church needed him and why he planned a quick exit from the Eternal City. He escapes through one of the gates of the city and sets out along the Appian Way. Suddenly he sees a vision of Jesus and Peter asks him: “Quo Vadis – Where are you going?” and the Lord replies: “I am going to Rome to be crucified again.”

St Teresa of Avila is said to have found particular comfort in this story and she wrote about it towards the end of her book, “The Interior Castle”:

“How did St Peter feel after receiving this favour from the Lord? And what did he do? He went straight to his death.”

And St Teresa says in her inimitable style:

“And the Lord showed him no small mercy in providing someone to kill him.”

There was another story that I want to bring to your attention, one that happened perhaps a quarter of a century earlier. It concerns a Pharisee named Saul, a persecutor of Christians. He was on his way to Damascus to put followers of Christ in prison – and perhaps put them to death. He was stopped, blinded. And the Lord spoke to him, not about the persecution of Christians, but he said: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

Now these two stories set the theme for our reflection.

The passion, death and resurrection of Jesus hold the central place in Christ’s life. He had come to this earth especially for this purpose. He saw these things as the greatest manifestation of love for humanity. “No greater love can a man have than to lay down his life for his friends.” (*Jn. 15:13*) He knew these things as the greatest act of glorification. Then, these same events meant so much to him that he wanted to continue them through the

ages of history and, so, having himself a body that could no longer suffer, he looked for others to continue this glorification and this love.

By Baptism we have been chosen for this. We were incorporated into Christ so that he lives and dies in each one of us. So the Passion continues today. Our Passionist Constitution expresses it in n.3:

“We are aware that the Passion of Christ continues in this world until he comes in glory; therefore, we share in the joys and sorrows of our contemporaries as we journey though life towards the Father. We wish to share in the distress of all, especially those who are poor and neglected. We seek to offer them comfort and to relieve the burden of their sorrow.

The power of the Cross which is the wisdom of God, gives us strength to discern and remove the causes of human suffering.

For this reason, our mission aims at evangelizing others by means of the Word of the Cross. In this way, all may come to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, may share in his sufferings and, becoming like him in his death, may be united with him in glory.”

In our life and ministry, we see this continuing Passion – some who are troubled by mental anguish, temptations, in prayer and loss of memory, allow Jesus to agonize afresh in the garden of Gethsemane. Some, suffering disappointment and injustice, have Jesus suffering humiliations afresh in his trials. Some, bearing voluntary or involuntary penance, have Jesus bent over the pillar of scourging afresh. Some, finding religious life a difficult, weary road, have Jesus staggering along the way to Calvary. Some, nearing the end of their lives, allow Jesus to cry out: ‘It is finished’ and he dies afresh.

But, the complete picture is not all suffering and sadness. The Lord went from death to life, from passion to resurrection, from suffering to glory. We, too, cannot stop at the death of Jesus. The resurrection is the result of all that happened on Calvary. So, with Jesus, our new life begins!

CONCLUSION

St Paul of the Cross, after he had received the habit, went to make a long retreat. The Bishop had asked him to record his thoughts and feelings. On the first day he wrote: "I know that I do not desire to know anything else or to taste any consolation. I desire only to be crucified with Jesus."

RETREAT TOPIC: DEATH

INTRODUCTION

Fr Fulgentius, novice master, wrote to St Paul of the Cross to tell him that he had set aside a day for the novices to reflect on death. Paul wrote back thanking him for his initiative and remarking it would be a good thing if this were established in all the retreats.

PRESENCE OF GOD

“Lord, still my soul
As a mother quiets the little ones on her lap
Centred in you alone,
Let the splendor of your presence
Light up my every dayness
Make me a smooth channel for the overflow
Of your divine Will in the world.
Let me move gently
In this omnipresence of the Divine
(Adrian Van Kamm, *“Spirituality and Gentle Life”* page 30)

PRAYER

Fr O’Shea, S.J. a great worker amongst the poor of New York City was found dead at his desk. These are the last words he wrote.

“Rabboni, when I am dying
How glad I shall be
That the lamp of my life
Has burned out for thee;
That sorrow has darkened
The path that I stood
thorns, and not roses
Were strewn o’er the sod;
That anguish of spirit
So often mine
Since anguish of spirit

So often was Thine!
My cherished Rabboni
How glad I shall be
To die with a hope
Of a welcome from Thee!"

John 17.1-5

"After this, Jesus raised his eyes to heaven.
'Father, the hour has come glorify your son
So that just as you have given him power over
All humanity he may give eternal life to all
Those you have entrusted to him and
Eternal life is this!
To know you the only true God and Jesus Christ
Whom you have sent
I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work
That you gave me to do. Now, glorify me
With the glory I had with you before the world ever began.

I have just read some 60 or 70 letters of condolences
that Paul of the Cross wrote to grieving people. I
would like to present just three of these.

- 1) To an unmarried man named Angelo Chiatlic
who had just lost his father.

"Dear Signore Angelo, now is the time to allow the
power of Jesus Christ to shine forth, first by taking as
your loving father this same Saviour of ours and as
he was always obedient even unto death, so let the
same virtue shine forth in exact obedience to your
pious mother. Keep her happily consoled in her
widowhood. (Dec 19, 1759).

- 2) A religious superior wrote to Paul about a priest
who was ill for six years and had a great fear of
death. Paul replied (Sept 28, 1764).

"If he showed repugnance to dying, that is something
natural, for to receive death with joy and happiness is
the way of great saints.

3) On the 12th of September, Paul wrote to John Sancez about the death of Paul's own brother, Fr John Baptist:

“From the onset of his illness I began to humbly kiss the hand that was about to deliver the stroke and have continued to do so up until now. Nevertheless, I could not help feeling the pain although I had great reason to console myself over the precious death he died, equal to his most exemplary life.

“In the course of his long illness, he protested always that he wanted nothing to ease the pain and that he was dying willingly and without fear. In his last days he had such a peaceful countenance that those who came agreed in marveling at seeing his serenity. So he continued to the end, always allowing visitors and suggesting to them motives of faith and piety.”

THE DEATH OF THOSE CLOSE TO US

Of course, the first of these is Jesus himself. His death – crucifixion, beyond all doubt, was a brutal, horrifying form of execution. Nailing his wrists and feet to the wood of the Cross and lifting it on high was the definitive act of rejection.

We could think that people wouldn't want to be reminded of this savagery. But no! The Cross is special to all Churches and we, especially, have the Cross as part of our badge – a cross buried on a heart. After all, he did say: “when I am lifted up, I will draw all to myself.”

The death of others too can teach us so much. St Paul the Apostle wrote to the Romans: “The life and death of each of us has a profound influence on others.”

Sr. Joan Chittister OSB wrote:

“Death is a call to look again at life – this time with a wiser eye. It alerts the rest of us to life – just when we have grown tired of it ourselves, perhaps, or worse yet, simply unaware of it ourselves.”

When someone in our community dies we meet in the chapel and we prayerfully reflect on his life and the example he has given us.

OUR DEATH: Robert Veatch, PHD in “*Death and Dying*” writes:

“In modern times, death is pornographic as the British sociologist, Geoffrey Gorer, put it. “We are fascinated with the subject and, yet, compulsively repress any discussion of it. At one and the same time, we approach it with curiosity and lack of comfort. We want to know more about it but don’t quite know how to get more information.

The late John La Farge, S.J. in “*Reflections on Growing Old*” commented that because death affects us all and because we know so little about it, we should be all the more eager to discuss the little knowledge we do possess!! But, he added: “The most fearful, the really most interesting topic in the world is banned in polite conversation. Our slice of life periodicals, our communications media of all sorts, will feature every kind of death-dealing violence: corpses, funerals and tombs, but they are very reluctant to discuss the simple fact of life’s termination.” (pg. 4).

In the Introduction to this talk, I spoke of a day set aside to reflect on death.

- ✓ We Passionists are reminded of death all through life. In Baptism we died with Christ, we were buried with him and we rose to new life.
- ✓ At our Profession, we read the story of Christ's death from St John's Gospel with the tower bell tolling our death and we lay prostrate covered with a mantle. It was our death to all our former living.
- ✓ In our daily prayer some might reach the stage of mystical death – another dying to this life.
- ✓ And, then, there is lots of little (near) deaths that punctuate our journey through life.
- ✓ And there is our daily Mass where we offer ourselves as victims with Christ to the glory of the Father.
- ✓ And, finally, there are the many occasions in our ministry when we are reminded as one of our Passionists used to preach on missions: "At the end of each one's life, there is an open grave."

Henri J Nouwen wrote in "*Life of the Beloved*", 1992.

"I am afraid (of death) every time I let myself be seduced by the many voices of the world telling me that my "little life" is all I have and advising me to cling to it with all my might. But when I let these voices move to the background of my life and listen to the small soft voice calling on the

Beloved, I know there is nothing to fear and that dying is the greatest act of love, the act that leads me into the eternal embrace of my God whose love is everlasting.”

Death should not come as a surprise to us. We believe we all have a body that will not last forever.

CONCLUSION

Now, I would like to conclude with two quotes.

The first is from Sr. Joan Chittister, O.S.B. in her 2008 book *“The Gift of Years”* pg. 222:

“It’s time now for surrender to acceptance. Perhaps for the first time in our adult lives we will go into a period of total dependence. We will be asked to accept rather than to resist, to welcome instead of question, to believe instead of doubt.

“There will be conversations yet to have. This is our last time to be honest, to be loving, to be open, to be grateful, to be patient, to be lovable and loving and loved.

This is the time for melting into God. The words that come now will be the honest ones, the hopeful ones. The veil between us and eternity will begin to tear. And we will begin the slow walk through it, ready, open, thrown upon the heart of God.

“We know now that this life is whole. The first part was good, so good. Why should we doubt for a moment that this half will be anything less?

“Now the mystery is about to reveal itself. Now the time is complete. Now it is finished. Now it is only beginning.”

The last quote comes from a dying lady at Eversleigh, Marrickville. (This used to be a hospital in Addison Road, opposite the Metropolitan Re-hab Centre. Fr Bonaventure and Bro Gabriel died there and my own mother peacefully died there.) This lady was called Alice Fitzgerald and her words were recorded in Caroline Jones' *"Search for Meaning"*, p. 224.

"This so-called death sentence has been the most liberating experience I can think of: it's wonderful. In a way, what I see is the door, the door that is just standing there, just waiting for me to go through it. I said to somebody who was terribly worried about my happiness (laughs) and the thought that I should want to fight against death – and I said: "When you have your boarding pass in your hands (laughs) you don't want to stop the trip. You want to go on."

RETREAT TOPIC: PASSIONISTS AND EVANGELISATION

INTRODUCTION

The Passionist Constitution reads (n.62):

“To our own Congregation the Church has entrusted a special share of her apostolic life. She urges us to keep constantly alive in the hearts of the faithful the memory of the Passion is which the love of the Saviour is eminently expressed. She looks to us by our apostolic labours to render more and more fruitful that redemptive love.”

PRESENCE OF GOD *Ps. 94.1-2, 6-9*

“Come, ring out your joy to the Lord:
Hail the rock who saves us.
Let us come before him, giving thanks
With songs, let us hail the Lord.

Come in, let us bow and bend low;
Let us kneel before the God who made us;
For he is our God and we
The people who belong to his pasture,
The flock that is led by his hand.

O that today you would listen to his voice!
Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,
As on that day at Massah in the desert
When your fathers put me to the test;
When they tried me, though they saw my work!”

PRAYER

God, you have called us all to be evangelizers. We want to do this but, at times, it seems hard and unrewarding. Help us to see that it is for you that we work, and not ourselves. Help us to have the courage to go on with this your ministry.

LUKE 4.16-22

“Jesus came to Nazara where he had been brought up and went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found a place where it is written:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me
For he has anointed me
To bring the good news to the afflicted.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives,
Sight to the blind
To let the oppressed go free
To proclaim a year of favour for the Lord.*

He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down and all eyes were on him. Then he began to speak to them:

“This text is being fulfilled today even while you are listening and he won the approval of all, and they were astounded by the gracious words that came from his lips.”

In 1975 Pope Paul VI wrote an Encyclical that was called *Evangelii Nuntiandi* “Preaching the Gospel.” He hoped to introduce a “new period of Evangelisation.” Now, 34 years later we might wonder about this. In the West, at least, we see:

- a growing shortage of priests.
- ageing religious

- the young, and not so young, growing tired not of Christianity but Churchianity!!!

But we, as individuals and as a Congregation, can't allow ourselves to be despondent. Rather we have to steady our wavering knees, gird our loins, and courageously face the future. The word of Jesus and the work of the Church must continue on.

In this reflection, I would like to draw from our Constitutions, which will be noted as V1, or V2 or V3 and the Encyclical quoted (with just 1, 2 or 3).

- **Everyone is an evangelizer**

Our baptism means that we have put on Christ and that means not only his personality but also his mission is evangelisation, as we saw in the TEXT. The Constitution doesn't expect us all to be capable of the same works but all are called according to their age and ability.

- **Evangelisation is as much about witness as preaching.**

"The Gospel must be proclaimed as 'witness (21) "As we said recently to a group of lay people: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (41). "Either tacitly or aloud – but always forcefully – we are being asked" "Do you really believe what you are proclaiming? Do you live what you believe? Do you really preach what you live? The witness of life has become more than ever an essential condition for really effectiveness in preaching. (V.76)

- **We have a specific role in the church's mission**

This was clear in our introduction. But, we are told that we must be open to all requests that might be made on us that we have to be strong in retaining our character. (V.73).

“The ministry of the Word we hold in highest esteem. What we have to live and preach in all fidelity, is the Good News of Salvation. (V.63).

- **We have a special role of preaching**

“Each field of our apostolate whether pastoral, ecumenical, or missionary, should be marked not only by the witness of our lives but also by professional competence, experience and adaptation to the changing needs of time and place.” (v.76).

- **Our evangelisation is closely linked with community**

Fr Paolo Alonso, CP provides the following points:

- The choice of the apostolate is to be made on a community basis (V. 28)
- Our apostolic activity is an expression of community (v.67).
- Our apostolic commitments must, therefore, allow us to belong to a community and to be involved in its external ministry (v.59).
- All religious should be given suitable opportunities to make use of their various gifts in the many different apostolic works that the Congregation does (v. 68).

- In the awareness that we share in the entire human community, we feel the need and the responsibility to co-operate with others of good will in the search for all that is true, noble and just (p.4.8) bearing in mind the present in the needs of the Church and the world, our special mission in the Church. (v.69).
- Preaching the Passion: “We make our own the words of St Paul “we preach Christ crucified! (1 COR. 1.23) of whom we proclaim: “He has risen!” (MT28.6) “We Passionists make the Paschal mystery the centre of our lives” (V.65).
- Teaching Meditation: “Our Founder urged us to be tireless in teaching others how to meditate in the best and easiest way upon the Passion of Christ. We, therefore, have to be sensitive to the values inherit in the religious devotion of the people today; we should also use initiatives to find new and creative ways of deepening the prayer life of others as well as our own. (V. 66).

St Paul of the Cross preferred to send out missionaries who were prayerful over those who were learned.

- **Evangelisation is the response of the Prophet**

There is a prophetic power included in the teaching of the Constitutions. We know the definition of a prophet: one who speaks in the name of another, presenting a project for the future.

The Passionist is one who speaks in the name of Christ crucified and presents a project which Christ proclaimed on the Cross.

RETREAT TOPIC – THOUGHTS ON MEDITATION

INTRODUCTION

When I gave retreats, I discovered that many religious had abandoned meditation and settled for vocal prayers. Some were badly instructed. Some didn't have the patience to persevere in this very difficult exercise. So, I thought it might help to give some thoughts about how ordinary people prayed and what they said about prayer.

After all, Passionists have a founder who was declared (not by Passionists) as one of the greatest mystics of the 18th century.

Karl Rahner said: "The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he will not exist at all."

PRESENCE OF GOD

St Paul of the Cross wrote to Signora Maria Johanna Venturi Grazi. She was married to Agnes' twin brother, Vincent. When Paul first wrote to her, Agnes was already dead, buried on Monte Argentario.

"I ask you to be sure to be alone – God and you. Detach yourself from everything and follow your exercises even more than at first. Keep your room free for yourself so you can be there at the right times to treat with God in holy prayer. I recommend interior recollection to you as I have said so many times."

PRAYER

Lord, frequently in Scripture you tell us to listen to your voice. It strikes me as strange that you have to tell us so often. But you do!! Sure, I can understand, we don't hear you, sometimes because we cannot believe you want to talk to us, personally. After all, who are we?

We don't hear sometime because of the busyness of the world, enjoying this life, making a dollar, trying to turn down the radio or TV that keeps getting louder and louder! I know these are excuses, often weak excuses. Sometimes, I have never learnt to tune into your voice. I am deaf, Lord. Sorry, Lord. Amen.

TEXT: PS.39 (40)

"I waited patiently for the Lord, he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and he set my foot upon a rock making my steps secure."

REFLECTION: Sr. Teresa of Avila defined prayer as a conversation with God; St John of the Cross speaks of the purpose of prayer. (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 11.2)

"The state of union is a total transformation of the will into the Will of God, in such a way that every movement of the will shall always be the Will of God." So, he is saying that the conversation is about discovering what God wants us to do.

Henri Nouwen (*Clowning in Rome*, DLT, 2001) wrote:

“Prayer is not introspection. It is not a scrupulous, inward-looking analysis of one’s own thoughts and feelings, but is attentiveness to the presence of love personified, inviting us to an encounter. Prayer is a presentation of our thoughts, reflective as well as daydreams and night dreams – to the one who receives them, sees them in the light of unconditional love and responds to them with divine compassion. The movement from thinking random thoughts to living in communion with love is a radical conversion of our mental processes. Gradually, we move away from ourselves – our worries, pre-occupations and self-gratifications and we direct all that is ours to the one who loves us, trusting that, through love, all will be made new.”

There is no doubt that Paul of the Cross was in a better environment for meditation than we are, with our newspapers, wireless, computers, e-mails, mobile phones etc. I’m sure Paul had his distractions from reading of his 30 day retreat but, for us, distractions are quite normal and plentiful. Someone has described them as being like a tree full of chattering monkeys. Paul, as a spiritual director, suggested we ignore them and quickly return to prayer but if they can’t be dismissed make them part of our prayer.

It is most important to persevere, as writes St Teresa of Avila, whether they reach the goal, or die on the road or the earth itself goes to pieces beneath them. (*Life*, XV 5,7, 9) or as Paul of the Cross said that we should stay at prayer “even if it costs us the pains of hell to stay there.” No-one learns meditation, in a day, month or even a year.

Paul tells us to linger on a particular sentiment and to slowly move on. In fact, he described it like someone holding some cotton wool in his hand and dropping a drop of perfume on it. It slowly spreads on the wool. Don't add another drop until the last one has finished its course.

Dryness in meditation is part and parcel of its life and not knowing this can make some give up. Paul saw dryness as an excellent sign and such people should not be disturbed by it. He told some of his directees: "Remain in the presence of God, like a statue in its niche, detached from all consolation." (*Agnes Grazi, 16.12.1733*) The saints tell us that the great work of meditation, apparently so useless, hopeless, unprofitable though it seems, if we persevere, there will be a purification of faith and love.

Sheila Cassidy (*The Tablet*, 20 Oct. 2001) put it this way:

"These days, after many years of prayer little or not at all, I get up shortly after 6.15 in the morning. I make a mug of tea and clasping it to me like a comforter, sit cross legged on the floor in my living room in front of the Icon of the Trinity, and a candle. I have a big hour glass and I tip it upside down and abandon the hour to God.

"This is a waste of time prayer, holocaust time. I often feel really lousy, tired, nauseated, dreadful and long to creep back to bed, but I do not because this is God's time, not mine, and I know that its quality lies not in what I feel but in the totality of the gift. This is a time of

abandonment to God, a time in which I try to still my mind and just be open, respective to Him. My prayer is totally without image and largely without words.

“After 20 years, this emptying of the mind comes relatively easy to me, or perhaps, it is more accurate to say that I am more relaxed about it then I used to be. If, as usually happens, my mind is invaded by a kaleidoscope of thoughts and ideas I simply ignored them. Some thoughts, of course, are too insistent to be ignored, so I gather them up and include them in my prayer.”

This is a very interesting quote from Tony Campolo (*“Sermon at Greenbelt Festival, Cheltenham, Tablet, 1 September 2001*):

“You need to pray in stillness and quietude. Jesus said: “Go into the closet, shut the door. In stillness and in quiet I focus on the Lord. I don’t say anything. Mother Teresa was once asked:

“When your pray what do you say to God?”

I don’t say anything; I listen.

Interviewer: “Alright, what does God say to you?”

“God doesn’t say anything, God listens! And then she said: “If you can’t understand that, I can’t explain it to you.

Tony continues “I have to say the name Jesus over and over again to drive away the 101 things that are waiting to be done, that absorbs

my consciousness and in the stillness I allow Jesus to invade me, to possess me, the same Jesus who died on the Cross, the same Jesus who was resurrected.”

St Paul of the Cross believed that in our prayer journey, we need a guide. He was convinced that the principle guide was the Holy Spirit but, sometimes, to avoid mistakes, we need a human guide who is a knowledgeable person.

As Passionists our meditation is directed to the Passion. Paul believed that, however advanced in prayer we become, we have to begin with the Passion. Tessa Shief, (*“How to Pray, D.L.T. 1993, Tablet, 20 October 2001”*), writes:

“I gasp breathlessly as I meet in prayer God in anguish. In the Garden of Gethsemane, I fall in love with a God who so painfully knows his own humanity. This God who knows his need for friends and suffers the agony of loneliness, rejection, and fear is one I can identify with, for I know he is a real God, and the only one I can adore. I meet him in Gethsemane as the one who refused to short circuit his human suffering as the lover who embraces his beloved. It is when I look at the people around me – often fellow divorcees, who have also wept, sweated blood, and, somehow, crawled out of their prisons that I realize the life of each one of us is ‘holy ground’ where God is mysteriously wiping our tears and leading us from darkness to light. It is then that I want to sing like Mary: “my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices to God my savior, for, I know, he doesn’t abandon us.”

CONCLUSION

I read this story in John Powell's *"Reason to Live: Reason to Die"* (*Argus*, 1972 page 101):

A man is falling over the side of a cliff. He grabs the root of a shrub and he can feel the roots breaking. He begs God to help him. God says to him: "Do you believe in me?" The man impatiently cries out: "I do, I do?" God says: "Do you trust me?" The man quickly gasps "Yes, yes!" God comes back to him: "Then I will see to it that you are saved. Now do what I tell you. LET GO!!"

RETREAT TOPIC: THE SPIRITUALITY OF CREATION

I want to preface this reflection with the fact that there are many quotes here because it seems important that experts in the field should have their say.

The quotes I have gathered are basically about spirituality – and thus, about our own life.

1. Albert Nolan, *Jesus Today*, p. 175:

“Spirituality is a following of Jesus, having his outlook in everything. He had been involved in creation for billions of years – long before humans came to be. So, creation is God’s primary revelation to us. We have to believe that our spirituality is nothing if it doesn’t recognize our oneness with God, with ourselves and others and with the whole universe – all these are ‘a seamless whole.’”

2. Diarmud O’Murchu, *Reclaiming Spirituality*, p.94:

Without mutual interdependence nothing attains its full potential. It is in the context of Communion, and not through competition, robust, individualism, that all life forms discover their true identity and the realization of their full potential.”

3. Thomas Berry, C.P., *The Dream of the Earth*, p. 195.

“We cannot discover ourselves without first discovering the Universe, the Earth, and the imperative of our own being ... Nor should we think of these as isolated from our own

individual being or from the human community.
We have no existence without the Earth and
without the Universe.”

PRESENCE OF GOD

When God created our universe, God did not let it just spin away. It is held in creation with the help of the Creator. God has to hold it in being with his presence or it would all fall into nothingness.

TEXT

- In him, all things hold together.” (Col. 1: 16-17)
- Jesus spoke of vines, lilies in the field, sowing seed, a fig tree, weeds, a mustard tree, about sparrows and other birds of the air, and he broke bread and drank wine.
- John’s Gospel begins with Jesus being the Word, and “through him all things came into being.”
- “Then I heard all the living things in creation – everything that lives in heaven and on earth, and in the sea, crying: ‘To the one seated on the throne, and to the Lamb, be all praise, honour, glory and power forever and ever.’” (Revelation 5:13)

PRAYER

The whole world is full of glory:

Here is the glory of created things,
The earth and the sky,
The sun and the moon,
The stars and the vast expanses:
Here is fellowship
With all that was created,

The air and the wind,
Cloud and rain,
Sunshine and snow:

All life like the bubbling of a flowing river
And the dark currents of the depths of the sea
Is full of glory.

The white waves of the breath of peace
On the mountains,
And the light striding
In the distances of the sea:

The explosion of the dawn wood-pigeons
And the fire of the sunset doves,
Sheep and cattle at their grazing,
'the joy of countless creeping things
As they blossom,
Spider and ant
Of nimble disposition
Proclaim the riches of goodness. *Euros Bowen*

From *"Lost in Wonder"*, Esther De Waal, John Garratt Publishing, 2003 – p. 134.

Before listening to the experts, we might reflect on the Saints. I remember reading about Paul of the Cross when he was old but could still walk out into the garden with the aid of a stick. He would stop before a plant and strike it gently with his stick. He would say: "Be silent. Give me a chance to give glory to God."

He suggests the same idea to a young man, Francis Appiani. (16.07.1738)

There was a story about Blessed Dominic Barberi who, as a novice, on the way to becoming an apostle in England and converting many people, was sent

out by his Master to preach to the birds. He climbed a tree and spoke to them. Afterwards, he told the Novice Master that he did what he was told to do but he didn't make any converts!

St Gregory of Nyssa (330-395) wrote:

“For when he considers the universe, can anyone be so simple-minded as not to believe that the Divine is present in everything, pervading, embracing and penetrating it? For all things depend upon him who is and nothing can exist which does not have its being in him who is.”

St Bonaventure said -

“Therefore, open your eyes, alert the ears of your spirit, open your lips and apply your heart, that, in all creatures, you may see, hear, praise and worship, glory and honour your God.”

David Tacey, *“Re-Enchantment: the New Australian Spirituality, 2000:*

“Nature is not only outside, but also within, and ultimately what we do to nature, we also do to ourselves. In killing off the spiritual essence of the earth, we end up by killing ourselves, for this essence nourishes our own biological and spiritual life. The inner ecology of the soul and the outer ecology of the world are inextricably linked.”

Thomas Berry, C.P. with T. Clarke, *Befriending the Earth*, 1990:

“We are literally born as a community: the trees, the birds and all living creatures are bonded together in a single community of life.”

They write of human beings ‘as autistic, listening only to ourselves and unable to relate meaningfully with nature.’ They encourage us ‘to hear what the earth, the crops, the water – all created things – have to say to us. If we did this, they assert, we would know that they think of us ‘as destructive, hurtful, selfish.’

Carl Segar, astronomer and author, wrote:

“What has evolved on our planet is not just life – not just grass, or mice, or beetles, or microbes, but beings with a great intelligence, with a capacity to anticipate the future consequences of present actions, with the ability to even leave their home world and seek out life elsewhere. What a waste it would be if after four billion years of tortuous biological evolution, the dominant organism of the planet contrived its own annihilation. No species is guaranteed its tenure on this planet. And we are here only about a million years; we, the first species that has devised the means of its self-destruction.”

Anita Gordon and David Suzuki, *“It’s a Matter of Survival”, 1990*

“There has never been a greater crisis than the one we now face. And we are the last generation that can pull us out of it. We must act because this is the only home we have. It is a matter of survival.”

Where does all this lead us in our spirituality? Mary Tinney in the *“EarthSong Journal”* of Spring 08, the third of her articles concludes with these words:

“Earth link spirituality is based on a renewed appreciation of life, of nature, of earth and cosmos as embodying the sacred. This spirituality is also based on a new understanding of the sacred, of the divine, of mystery, of God, present within but also beyond

cosmos and earth; and a new understanding of humans as interconnected, inter-dependent, a species among species, a planetary power with ethical and moral responsibilities.

“We can know that we are interconnected, cultivate an open attentive and receptive attitude, and be aware of what our bodies and our place are saying. We can develop a state of readiness to recognize the sacred, present in our time and place. Moments of profound insight, revelation and conviction are indeed graced, faith-filled moments. These can be times of pain, suffering, joy, wonderful awe. Only when we enter fully into them, can we really say that ‘the world is charged with the grandeur of God’ (page 27).

RETREAT TOPIC: COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION

From earliest times in church history, men, and later women, left the world and went into a quiet place to form a community. They were not running away from the world so much as hoping to get to their God – a God who, with Christian tradition – is a God of relationships. We cannot fully understand it but we believe that there is a community in God – three persons, quite distinct, yet only one God. So, these frail beings sometimes went into solitude to be alone with God but soon realised that they were not meant to be alone anymore than God was. They were social animals and so welcomed companions.

It seems that they had a double motive. They wanted to live like God and as he wanted them to live and they wanted to share their inspiration and the guidance given them – an inspiration we now refer to as Charism.

So, then and now, Religious Community has to be God – centred. He must be the first and most important member of the community. Community calls also for a relationship between its members. It also calls for a relationship with those outside the community especially the crucified today – and, as we saw, in the reflection on the Spirituality of Creation – a relationship with the whole of the Universe.

For our reflection now we will be using the Constitutions. I happened to be privileged to be at the General Chapter 1968 – 1970. (There were two sessions to this Chapter corresponding to the two years mentioned). The agenda was to prepare for a new edition of the Constitutions. Of course, the

Capitulars were not expected to pull a draft out of the air. Provinces were asked to offer suggestions. On the subject of community there were over 200 interventions with all sorts of suggestions. What the Capitulars gleaned from all these was that the idea of Community was a so vague or misunderstood that there was need for a completely new approach.

The 1968-70 Chapter produced a “Chapter Document.” After fourteen more years of consultation the new Constitutions were printed in 1984.

PRESENCE OF GOD

When Paul first wrote to Maria Johanna Grazi, Agnes was already dead. Paul wrote this to Maria:

“Keep yourself in the recollection that has been recommended to you and lose yourself always more in God with faith and holy love and with the despoilment of everything created so that you may be reborn every moment in the Divine Word, Christ Jesus, to a new life of Love”).

TEXT: ACTS 2.44-47:

“Each day with one heart, they regularly went to the Temple but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously; the praised God and looked up to everyone. Day by day, the Lord added to their community those destined to be saved.”

PRAYER

Lord, you called us into community when you called us to Religious Life. You promised to continue that call daily – all our life, even as we make faulty

attempts to build community. Stay with us Lord. Amen.

In the first document of Vatican II called “The Church” we read:

“It has pleased God to make people holy and save them not merely as individuals, without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people which acknowledges the truth and serves Him in holiness (n.9).

Spirituality is basically about relationships. Katherine Zaffore wrote:

“The pivotal shift in spirituality’s meaning for the 20th century resides in the birth of a worldview of interdependence and relationality. In its broadest sense, spirituality centres in our awareness of relationality. It is the relational component of lived experience”

(*“The Hope of Wholeness”*, Columba Press, Dublin, 1911, (p. 12).)

Naturally, the first relationship is with God. He is the centre of our lives and the centre of community. Religious must be ‘experts’ in community life and so witness to God’s plan of unity but, of course they have not a monopoly on it, nor do they have all the answers.

Diamuid O’Murchu writes: “Many religious today are struggling for a meaningful experience of community, conflicting expectations, unresolved personal tensions, excessive work are some of the blockages.”

Let us look at the present Constitutions and reflect on some of the building – blocks they offer us:

- ❖ “Our Passionist vocation is a call to live the fullness of Christian love in an evangelical community.” (v.25).
- ❖ We are better Passionists because we work all day long. (v.25).
- ❖ We shun the idea of being better than others. Each makes his own contribution according to his ability (v.26).
- ❖ Community means relationships and sharing (v.27).
- ❖ Community means mutual esteem (v.28).
- ❖ Community means concern for the sick and ageing. (V.29-31).
- ❖ We all belong to the local church and the people who live in it (v. 34-35).
- ❖ Our parents are our greatest benefactors (v.36).
- ❖ Community is about unity not uniformity (v.127).
- ❖ Co-responsibility is accepted by everyone (v.113).
- ❖ And now, just a few concluding thoughts:
 - I am often reminded of the superior/leader saying to his community: “You go off and recreate and I’ll do something useful!” We all need of course to re-create ourselves, including superiors/leaders. I’m fascinated by what he thought was more useful.
 - We all need to contribute to the slow but satisfying building of community.
 - More than anything else, perhaps, we need to be forgiving – for, sometimes there are hurts, known and unknown, offered by a member.
 - It seems that community is more about BEING than DOING.
 - So, we need to offer the community our REAL selves.

A last quote from M. Scott Peck: “*The Road Less Travelled and Beyond*” (1997, Rider). He writes about pseudocommunity:

“In order to avoid the pain of unlearning and changing when groups assemble to form community, they first attempt to pretend that they are already a community. The basic pretense is that all the members are the same, a pretense that is sustained by the practice of an unwritten set of rules that everyone knows. In this stage, the members are acquisitively polite to each other in order to avoid any disagreement in their desire to deny their individual differences. But the realist is that people, with their unique souls as well as egos, are all different which is why we call this pretense – pseudocommunity” (pp. 273-4).

RETREAT TOPIC : CHALLENGES OF VOWED POVERTY

INTRODUCTION

This reflection was inspired by the Social Justice Statement of September 21, 2008 but even more so by these words of Sr. Joan Chillister OSB in *“The Fire in These Ashes”* (Sheed & Ward USA, 1995, pp. 106-107).

“What religious life needs now, if vows are to be worth anything at all, is a fresh and challenging call to a new understanding of poverty, one that engages this entire generation of religious in the process of living poverty for the sake of the poor. The old formation manuals, the dusty documents from another age, the constitutions and customs books that made poverty a thing of ownership rituals and the theological air-fairy must be rooted out of spiritual language, removed from our bookshelves and re-written by our lives.”

PRESENCE OF GOD

Paul of the Cross wrote to Agnes Grazi (August 17, 1739):

“Let the devil roar as much as he wants. You know where to hide, the impregnable fortress is ready, you understand me. I mean the side of Jesus, where is found every strength, sweetness, comfort, and in one word, every good. Do not be surprised that after the fiercest storms of temptation your soul usually finds itself more united, more peaceful, and more in love with God.....”

TEXT:

Mark 10:17-22

“Jesus was setting out on a journey when a man ran up, knelt before him and put this question to him: ‘Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus said to him: ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone, you know the commandments’ and he said to him: ‘Master, I have kept all these since my earliest days. Jesus looked steadily at him and was filled with love for him and he said: ‘You need to do one thing more. Go, sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, then come, follow me. But his face fell at these words, and he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth.’”

“The Word of God calls us to conversion, alerting us for the need to change and challenging us to see and act differently. The rich man had a tight grip on his possessions. They had become the symbol of his identity and any act of charity on his part seemed to reinforce for him how he had been blessed by riches. He could afford to buy a reputation for being generous. In the long run, the invitation to let go, to leave behind what was holding him back from discipleship and from journeying with Jesus, was asking too much of him.” (*Social Justice Statement 2008*, p. 3).

PRAYER

Lord, you have called us as you called the young man. We answered and took the vow of poverty. But what does it mean for me. Help me to put aside my ideas and listen to what you ask of me. Amen.

Certainly, St Paul of the Cross lived in a different time than us. Here is how Fabiano Georgini, C.P. described his times:

“The economic structure of the 18th century was based on the possession of land and houses, revenues gained from the working of the land and the ownership of cattle, sheep, etc. There were also many craftsmen, some of them even organized. However, hardly any industry existed. Economic security was assured by the use of natural resources; money counted for little. The economy is general, on both the national and family levels, tended to be a self sufficient one. Social security as we know it today was non-existent; though a weak attempt was made to help farmers and craftsmen who were the victims of some calamity of nature. The sick were cared for at home and rarely in a hospital, for these were very primitive. One ordinarily traveled on foot, those financially well off depended on horses or horse and carriage for their transportation.” (Studies, *Passionist History and Spirituality*, no. 24).

When Paul went to Rome to get the rule approved he just went down and asked the captain of a ship to take him for Genoa to Rome for free. Try that today!

So we cannot live the poverty Paul himself lived but we can heed his teaching about poverty.

It is extremely significant that Paul’s first idea was that we should be called: “The Poor of Jesus” Tauler wrote about this title back in his time but Paul didn’t study Tauler till much later (1748). But, then, Paul was advised in his early discernment of his vocation by Franciscans and Capuchins, some of whom were well read in Tauler.

Paul also had a motto: Poverty is the standard under which the whole Congregation fights” (Const. n14) and he wrote to brother, Joseph and said: “Believe me, you are the most fortunate people in the world, poor in this life, you will be rich in eternity.” (30/09/1746).

Now, for some statements:

- Our poverty is not the same as destitution. Joan Chittister writes: “A vow of poverty has nothing to do with institutional destitution. To talk in those terms is to fly in the face of other concerns, equally just, equally important – the care of the elderly, the education of the young, the obligation to creditors, the needs of ministry. A community that itself is destitute is in no condition to help anyone else.” (The Fire – page 107).
- We are not owners but stewards. Pope Benedict XVI in his 2008 message for Lent:

According to the teaching of the Gospel, we are not owners but rather administrators of the goods we possess: these, then are not to be considered as our exclusive possession, but means through which the Lord calls each one of us to act as a steward of his providence for our neighbor.”

- We have to avoid attachments: “We make too many concessions to the world, as a result, we condemn ourselves to mediocrity.” (*Attachment to things*”, Nicolas Schwizer, 2008, *Cath News*). He says “The saints compare this to a cobweb which traps men and women and never lets them go.”

- We have to act differently from our brothers and sisters in the world. Continuing the article of Nicolas Schwizer: “The first Christians had the audacity to be different and, therefore, they created a new world, a world filled with Christian values. To be different often means to appear crazy as the first Christians did. It also means to do battle against sin in all its forms, beginning with oneself, but also battling the many situations of sin in the world which surrounds us.”
- As with all people, Religious have to watch being caught in the trap of consumerism and aggressive marketing. There are people who study how to get men and women to spend money. Whether it is new machinery, or new cosmetics, or new cars, these people try to convince you that you can’t survive without this product.

“Consumerism is the new religion. It is **practiced by increasing numbers of people in the western world. Quantity is the new divinity**, more and more products are offered. The more you have the greater your status. The power of this divinity is its ability to reach you anywhere. Advertising is the liturgy. Within a few years this virus can penetrate the very heart of an intricate way of life that has taken hundreds of years of history to construct. Before long a distinctive new way of life is rifled and the inhabitant exiled and drawn into the net of consumerist culture.” (John O’Donohue, *“Eternal Echoes”* (pp 83-84).

- The vow of poverty is a call to personal conversion.

Joan Chittister writes: “Personal conversion, once the primary object of the religious vow of poverty, becomes in this new spirituality the seedbed religious poverty, the point at which we see it break out in the individual life and become possible to the Christian community that is the congregation. Without personal conversion to the meaning of religious poverty in a world now desperately, obscenely poor, poverty remains nameless, depersonalized, pure religious myth.” (*The Fire in the Ashes*”, page 111).

- It calls for responsible stewardship. We can no longer put the responsibility on a superior’s permission. We took a personal vow, we have the responsibility.

“Many religious are coming to see the vow of poverty as a public commitment to responsible stewardship of the Goods of the Earth and to struggle for just economic order in which an equitable sharing of limited resources will hasten the end of the oppression of the poor by the rich. The implications of such an understanding of poverty reach from voluntary simplification of personal and corporate participation in the politics of social justice.” (*New Wineskins*”, Sandra Schneiders, LHM).

It means the poor serving the poor.

“We aim to share what we have with other communities of the Congregation and of the Church and with the poor.” (*Const. v.11*).

“The religious congregation that forgets its mission to poverty becomes really poor of soul. Turned in upon itself it dies because it has no reason to live other than to preserve its privacy,

safeguard its institutions, ensure its comfort and secure its pension fund. This kind of religious life ceases to be religious at all. Then all the symbolic gestures of the world became more theatre than sign.” (*Joan Chittister, page 111*)

- This could lead to insecurity.

“We recognize that this may lead to insecurity, and at times, even the lack of necessities. Nevertheless, we place our full confidence in God and his supporting grace.” (*Const. 10*)

- Poverty does not mean – we can sit back and wait for our needs to come through the chapel window.

“Each of us willingly accepts that he is subject to the Common Law of Labour and contributes to the daily life of all according to his capacity”. (*Const. 11*)

RETREAT TOPIC: RESILIENCE AND ST PAUL OF THE CROSS

Preamble

The inspiration for this reflection came from reading a book by a former radio presenter, Anne Deveson. The book was called "*Resilience*." It impacted on me and I thought now that is the quality that our Founder demonstrated.

Since then I have read an article by a Frances O'Keefe, called *Fostering Resilience*. That was a good read also.

A story goes with these writings about Victor Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist and survivor of Auschwitz. His book: "*Man's Search for Meaning*" tells us about his life in the concentration camp. He was on his way one day to work, worrying whether he should trade his last cigarette for a bowl of soup. Suddenly, he was disgusted by just how trivial and meaningless his life had become. He saw that, to survive, he had to find some purpose. Frankl imagined himself giving a lecture when and if he survived the war. To do so, he created goals for himself. He succeeded in rising above the suffering of the moment. As he said in his book:

"We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be charged."

PRESENCE OF GOD

For nearly 3,000 years this psalm has called God's people to worship the one true God. It is a call to sing God's praise and listen to his word:

“Come, ring out our joy to the world
Hail the God who saves us
Let us come before Him, giving thanks
With songs let us hail the Lord.”

There is no doubt God is here in our midst. Greet him and thank him.

“Come in; let us bow and bend low
Let us kneel before the God who made us;
For he is our God and we
The people who belong to His pasture.”

Everything we touch and see and hear is all God's. He is a wonderful Shepherd who guides us, protects us, and loves us.

We bend low in his presence!!!

RESILIENCE

St Paul: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not drive to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed; always carrying on the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.” (2 Cor. 4.8).

St Paul the Apostle was also an example of resilience. After his conversion to Christianity he was bombarded from every side but he survived all these until martyrdom.

Before we begin our reflection proper let us see what resilience means. Anne Devison: “Resilience is the ability to confront adversity and still find hope and meaning in life.”

O’Keeffe: “In psychology and counseling literature we use the term ‘resilience’ to explain people’s ability to rebound from hardship and successfully adapt to stress.”

In other words, as the word says, it is a “bouncing back.”

Now, we look at St Paul of the Cross.

1. His vocation developed over a period of 25 years, when Paul sought to discover what God wanted him to do with his life. When he was clear on this, he had to leave his family – his parents (and he believed if he got to heaven it would be due to his mother) and brothers and sisters. This was not an easy step. He described it to Francis Appiani, March 28th, 1737:

“Oh, if you knew the conflicts that I encountered before embracing this life of mine! There was the great fear aroused in my mind by the devil, compassion for my parents, who I was leaving in great need, as their only worldly hopes were entirely dependent on me, interior desolation, depression and fears. I was afraid I would not persevere. The devil made me think I was deceived in thinking I would serve God in this way that was not the life for me and so on.”

But, he made the break and it was years before he saw his family again and that was on the death of his father.

2. **40 Day Retreat**

After being clothed in the habit he began this retreat – a retreat that was full of inspiration but was also dotted with trials as he recorded in the diary he wrote for the bishop: He suffered from melancholy (Nov. 23); hidden temptations (Nov. 23); he was without sensible feeling (Nov. 25); dryness (Nov. 26 & Dec 30); no spiritual consolation (Nov. 26); disquieting thoughts (Nov. 27); naked sufferings (Nov. 27); distracted (Nov. 28 & 29); the cold; the chills; priests coming at all hours to say Mass (Dec 21); headaches (Dec. 28).

But, he persevered. Later, he was to say: “One must proceed when and how God wishes.” (15.5.1741).

3. **Founding the Congregation**

From the retreat, Paul went to Rome to get approval of the Rule he had written. He was booked on as a beggar and sent away. Instead, he went to the Basilica of Mary Major and took a vow to promote the memory of the Passion.

4. **Founding Retreats**

Because Italy was divided at this time into many countries, Paul had difficulty at times with governments as well as bishops and other religious orders and lay people e.g. when he was building the retreat in Monte Argenterio, they had to take stone blocks up the hill and at night,

some people would climb up and roll the stones down again. Paul got the retreats built that he wanted but still said: “Our affairs are always in turmoil” (22.08.48).

5. **Arrivals and Departures**

Paul founded a very strict Congregation and although there was a steady flow of candidates, there were also some departures that stressed Paul; included in these was his brother, Anthony. Paul wrote to his Novice Master: “Regarding the young man from Montieri, if he is already a cleric, he would be accepted. But, as a lay brother how can we do that since there are too many.” (18.05.1748).

6. **Grief**

Besides his parents, Paul had to face the death of his brother, John Baptist who played a big role in the foundation of the Congregation. There was also the death of Agnes Grazi.

RETREAT TOPIC: HOPE

INTRODUCTION

Carlo Corretto in *Summoned By Love* wrote: “The post-Conciliar Church runs the risk of going down in history as the Church of Fear.”

That seems wrong. Just when:

- ✓ We have re-discovered the power of the Holy Spirit;
- ✓ Such a widespread hunger for spirituality and prayer;
- ✓ People are involved in justice and peace;
- ✓ The liturgy has become more interesting

Just when these things are happening:

- ✓ People are searching for novelty;
- ✓ Vocations have almost disappeared in the western world;
- ✓ Security collapses – socially, politically, culturally;
- ✓ Mass attendance decreases

PRESENCE OF GOD: Psalm 56(55)

When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.
In God, whose word I praise,
In God, I put my trust and have no fear
What can man do to me?

I am bound by the vows I have made, O God
I will pay you the debt of thanks
For you have saved my life from death
To walk in the presence of God
In the light of the living.

PRAYER

Powerful Saviour, we often reflect on the valley of tears. There are so many sorrows in our lives. So many disappointments, so much pain. Remind us that you are still with us and you can master all things. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

TEXT: Isaiah 43:1-5

Do not be afraid for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine. Should you pass through raging water, I will be with you; or through rivers, they shall not swallow you up. Should you walk through fire, you will not suffer and the flame will not burn you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your savior. Since I regard you as precious, since you are honoured and I love you, do not be afraid for I am with you.

Fr Frank Andersen, MSC, has composed a hymn based on these words from Scripture, *Do Not Be Afraid*. How often we find these words in the Scriptures!

DEFINITION

The Catechism of the Catholic Church gives this definition of hope: “Hope is a theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength but on

the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit.” It also promises us all the helps to get there.

SCRIPTURE

Let us look at some of the texts about hope:

- ✓ “Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.” (Heb. 10:23) ...
- ✓ “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. I am going to prepare a place for you. I shall return and take you to myself, so that you may be with me.” (Jn. 14:1-3) ...
- ✓ The Holy Spirit is poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3: 6-7) ...
- ✓ “I mean that the point of all our toiling and battling is that we have put our trust in the living God and he is the Saviour of the whole human race, but particularly of all believers.” (1 Tim. 4:10) ...

PAUL OF THE CROSS’ DIRECTION ON HOPE

Now I wish to quote from Paul of the Cross and his letters of spiritual direction:

The last letter before he died was written to Sr. Maria Magdalene of the Cross. She was a contemplative and Paul wrote some strong words to her:

“I wrote in my last letter to you that you should take courage and trust your Divine Spouse, and that, after the battle, the Lord would give you peace and victory and that, after the storm, your mind would rest peacefully. But, from what you wrote to me, I see you are cowardly and much lacking in confidence that you ought to have in God, since you see that your temptations are growing, as well as your internal agitation. If the devil gives nothing more, he has gained much.” (8.8.1775)

Paul likes to refer to God’s role in this life and especially in our disappointments, sufferings and struggles as the Divine Pilot.

When he was in the process of founding the Congregation and meeting much opposition, he wrote to Fr Erasmus Tuccidini in 1730:

“The ship (the Congregation) is at sea without sails and without oars, but is steered by the Great Pilot who will absolutely bring it to the port safely. The ship is battered by storm and winds, but this only makes the power and wisdom of the Great Pilot, Jesus Christ, shine forth. May Jesus Christ live forever, for he gives the strength to suffer every hardship for love of him.” ...

“The works of God are always under attack so that the Divine Magnificence may shine forth. When everything crashes to the earth, that is when they can be seen to rise to the heights.” ...

Eleven years later, on the 16th June, 1741, he wrote to Sr. Maria Breschani:

“Paul is in a storm and the Great Pilot steers him.” ...

Paul didn’t only speak of the Pilot. He wrote to Dominic Constantini, brother of the future founder of

the Passionist nuns, when he was planning to build the monastery at Corneto:

“Arm yourself with confidence in God and do not let the difficulties frighten you. God can make us see prodigies. So with great heart, give yourself to the task with a humble heart and pure intention for the glory of God.” (04.04.1757)..

To John Baptist Pettirossi, he wrote:

“When things seem desperate, then the Divine Majesty makes you see what a wonderful Father he is and in his decree all things are arranged. Be content in God and trust in him, for he is a Father, a most loving Father, who would let heaven and earth perish before one who confides in him.” (07.09.1751)

...

To Mrs. Ippolita Piccarilli (Pettirossi), he wrote:

“Leave the care of everything to his Divine Majesty.” (04.08.1752)

To Fr Vincent Bertolotti, a Passionist since 1748, one who was a Superior in all ranks up to General Consultor:

“The evils that God permits united with the sufferings and agonies of Spirit, joined to the assaults of the internal enemy are proofs which the Divine Providence uses to purify your soul as gold in a furnace. Dear Fr Vincent often says: ‘Even if it kills me, I will hope in him.’” (04.02.1755)

COMMUNAL DIMENSION OF HOPE

Monsignor Stephen J. Rossetti, Ph D, D Min, a priest from New York, spoke to the PASPAC Group in 2009. He said he learned about hope from 16 years

of ministry in St Luke institute, where struggling priests and religious would stay for six months to find hope again.

He began his talk with these words:

“It is important for the Church today and for the future of your religious community in particular to look at the virtue of hope. What happens in our increasingly hopeless society is not irrelevant to your pursuit. In fact, such societal trends can and do inform and, at times, infect you and your community for good or for ill.”

He went on to say that society thinks bigger and more is better. Religious are meant to be counter-cultural and that means hope. He says:

“The journey for us all is to be part of a healing community that walks together towards the fullness of life. We are all damaged by sin. We are all called to grow in holiness and wholeness. And we do this, not as individuals but necessarily as a Christian community.”

He quotes Pope Benedict’s *Spe Salvi* which says that hope ultimately must be rooted in community and he quotes words from that letter: “The real life, towards which we try to reach out again and again, is linked to a lived union with ‘a people’, and for which each individual it can only be attained within the ‘we’.
(#14)

HOPE IN MINISTRY

Now I would like to turn to Fr Henri Nouwen, a Dutch priest, who came to America and taught in universities and colleges. He was also a great benefactor of the members of the *L’Arche* community.

Towards the end of his life, he became interested in the circus. He befriended the great circus family and especially the trapeze artists called the Flying Rodleighs. Their work fascinated him. I believe he saw in their feat the reality of God and us. He watched again and again as one tumbled through the air and was caught by the other with great timing. This was God catching us – without fail!

Henri Nouwen wrote several books, including *The Wounded Healer*, which dealt with contemporary ministry. In the third chapter of this book, headed “Ministry to a Hopeless Man” he writes:

“Hope makes it possible to look beyond the fulfillment of urgent wishes and pressing desires and offers a vision beyond human suffering and even death. A Christian leader is a person of hope whose strength, in the final analysis, is based neither on self-confidence derived from his personality, nor on specific expectations, but on a promise given to him.”

“This promise not only made Abraham travel to unknown territory; it not only inspired Moses to lead his people out of slavery; it is also the guiding motive for any Christian who keeps pointing to new life even in the face of corruption and death ...

“Without this hope we will now be able to see value and meaning in the encounter with a decaying human being and become personally concerned. This hope stretches far beyond the limit of one’s own psychological strength, for it is anchored not just in the soul of the individual but in God’s self-disclosure in history. Leadership, therefore, is not called Christian because it is permeated with optimism with optimism against all the odds of life but because it is grounded in the historic Christ event, which is

understood as a definitive breach in the deterministic chain of human trial and error and as a dramatic affirmation that there is light on the other side of darkness.” ...

“Hope prevents us from clinging to what we have and faces us to move away from the safe place and enter unknown, fearful territory. This might seem romantic, but when a person enters, with his fellow man into the fear of death and is able to wait for him right there, ‘leaving the safe place’ might turn out to be the very difficult act of leadership. It is an act of discipleship in which we follow the hard road of Christ, who entered death with nothing but bare hope.” (pp. 76-77) ...

THE OPPOSITE OF HOPE IS DESPAIR

Imagine someone in a situation when ‘all is lost’ and life does not seem worth the effort. I heard of a suicide just recently. It was of a young man at university who had passed all his exams – except one. We cannot understand the depth of hopelessness that must torture people like this.

William Lynch, from Notre Dame University, USA, wrote about this in 1995:

In summary he said:

1. The person who has lost hope cannot imagine being helped by anyone in any way. They are alone in their experience of negativity.
2. The one who despairs sees the situation as one of total failure. Nothing positive remains.

3. Despair breeds on unreality. If I expect perfection in everything and everyone, I am headed for despair.
4. Despair brings with it an inability to act or even desire something better.

CONCLUSION

We might not be able to fully understand those who are without hope, but let us, at least, try to help, to make some effort at being a minister of hope.

RETREAT TOPIC: SUFFERING

INTRODUCTION

Joseph Heller, in his novel *Catch 22* has his main character, Yossarian, give a fierce serve to the Lord:

“And don’t tell me God works in mysterious ways ... There’s nothing so mysterious about it. He’s not working at all. He’s playing, or else has forgotten all about us. That’s the kind of God you people talk about – a country bumpkin, a crazy, bumbling, brainless, conceited, uncouth hayseed. Good God, how much reverence can you have for a Supreme Being who finds it necessary to include such phenomena as phlegm and tooth decay in his system of creation? What in the world was running through that warped, evil, scatological mind of his when he robbed the people of the power to control their bowel movements? Why in the world did he ever create pain? ... When you consider the opportunity and power he had to really do a job, and then look at the stupid, ugly little mess he made of it instead. It’s obvious he never met a payroll. Why! No self-respecting businessman would ever have a burglar like him as even a shipping clerk!!”

Suffering is a mystery but we will try to see some sense in it.

PRESENCE OF GOD

To Teresa Palozzi, Paul wrote:

“Remind yourself that it is truth of faith that God is closer to us than we are to ourselves, closer than our very flesh. So lose yourself completely in God, repose on his divine breast, adore him, love him and,

if you cannot say a word, that is not important ...”
(31.08.1758)

PRAYER

“O God, who in your mercy looks upon us in our suffering and pain, who lifts us rejoicing where we have fallen, to put us in a new place. Let your gift of love be with us as we depart from one another, knowing that we are leaving as friends, but taking them with us in our hearts and in our minds. Give us greater understanding and sensitivity, O Lord, to respond to those around us, who hold their hands out to us, asking for ministry to them; let it be wise and discerning; let it be full of hope and meaning and let us show in our own lives the gift of your love for us.

You who constrain us, who reconciles us, and who sets our feet upon a new way, guide us day by day, that whatever we do or say, will be to your glory. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” (Dr Colston quoted in *The Meaning of Human Suffering* by Catherine de Hueck Doherty, ch. 9)

TEXT: 2 Cor. 1:3-7

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the merciful Father and the God who gives every possible encouragement. He supports us in every hardship, so that we are able to come to the support of others in every hardship of theirs, because of the encouragement we received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow into our lives, so too does the encouragement we too receive from Christ. So, if we have hardships to undergo, this will contribute to your encouragement and your salvation; if we receive encouragement, this is to gain for you the encouragement which enables you

to bear with perseverance the same sufferings as we do. So our hope for you is secure in the knowledge that you share the encouragement we receive no less than the sufferings we bear.”

Corinth is a bustling sea port, with a large population and the largest Christian community in the region. Paul and Timothy were the bringers of faith to this area. Now Paul is telling them that there have been difficulties and sufferings for him, but they were the sufferings of Christ because borne in imitation of Christ but more so because he sees himself in Christ. He also speaks about the encouragement he and they will receive.

Now, I would like to express the principal points about suffering:

1. The Old Testament writers, particularly, seem to be convinced that suffering is explained as a punishment for sin. Because so many saints suffered in excruciating ways, I don't see this as true.
2. I have no doubt about God's fierce, blazing, heart-throbbing love for each of us and I cannot see how he could be happy about our suffering.
3. The Passion shows us suffering up close. In the film, *The Passion of the Christ*, there may have been some exaggeration in the portrayal of the suffering Jesus, but nevertheless, he did suffer immensely. He took on a body that was set to suffer.

In the Passion, we see clearly:

- i) He fully submits to suffering, the flogging, the mockery

- ii) He does not try to escape as he had done earlier “because his time had not yet come.” Now, he is fulfilling the will of his Father
- iii) There does not seem to be any hope in his sufferings. Yet, there is no doubt that he died, abandoned but hopeful

Pope John Paul II wrote on *The Christian Meaning of Suffering* (1984):

“Suffering contains a special call to this virtue every person must exercise on their own part: the virtue of perseverance in bearing whatever disturbs and causes them harm. In doing this, the individual unleashes the hope which will maintain in him/her the conviction that suffering will not get the better of him/her. That it will not deprive him/her of dignity as a human being linked to awareness of the meaning of life.

In suffering there is a concealed power which draws a person close to Christ. When the body is gravely ill, totally incapacitated, and the person is almost incapable of living and acting, all the more do interior maturity and spiritual greatness become evident ...

It is suffering, more than anything else, which clears the way for the grace which transforms human souls. In suffering, a person discovers himself – his own humanity, his own dignity, his own mission.”

In his letters of spiritual direction, Paul of the Cross saw in his suffering seven signs that God offers to us:

1. **The sign of discipleship.**

He wrote this to Canon Coccia, which would have been based on the words of Jesus: "If you wish to be a follower of mine, go sell all you have and give to the poor, and follow me." (10.01.1768) He wrote to Canon Raffi: "Christ suffered for us that we might follow in his footsteps." (27.07.1773)

2. **The sign that God wants to strengthen us.**

He wrote to Agnes Grazi: "Suffering is a sign that God wants to strengthen you. Crosses will not be wanting and the more one advances in the service of God, the more sufferings there will be." (17.04.1734)

3. **The sign of something precious.**

He told his own mother: "All sufferings are more fortunate than the rich of the world." (15.12.1734)

4. **The sign of a call to higher perfection.**

Paul wrote to Maria Johanna Grazi: "I sympathize with you in your precious sufferings. Oh, Maria Joanna, if you knew the path along which God is leading you, oh, how joyful you would be! For it is a path that leads to high perfection."

5. **The sign that God loves you so much.**

Paul wrote to a married woman: “Your sickness and hardship are signs that God loves you very much.” (28.12.1769)

6. **The sign of God calling us to great peace.**

Paul wrote to Marianna Girelli: “We need to act like a vine-dresser; when the storms come, he retires to his cabin and remains in peace. So we, in the midst of so many storms, let us stay in the golden cabin of the Divine Will.” (24.05.1768)

7. **The sign that God wants to draw close to us.**

He wrote to Agnes Grazi: “Suffering helps us to unite more closely with God.” (07.03.1739)

CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude with some words of Stephen A Schmidt, the author of *Staurus* and a short poem from the same magazine:

“Suffering can be shared so that there is a community of people those who suffer, those that heal, those who love, those who care – all participate in the meaning and healing of the one who suffers ...The wisdom of illness is surely between being forsaken by God and resting firmly in God’s hands. Those words are more than a metaphor. They are about the reality of the wisdom of suffering and illness. The Christian rests one’s life on such wisdom and it is enough.”

The poem is called “*Jesus Healing*” by Jill Peldez Baumgaertner:

His lumpy spine, the bent elbows,
stiffened arms close to his chest
at angles his clenched fists
gripping nothing but themselves
he is bowed and unmoving on his pallet
until his friends' sudden horst
of the burden light as spindles
faith driving them to the one
who heals atrophied limbs
and withered spirits. Muscles
loosened, warmed, he stops
out of the frigid shadow
of his day-to-day into a three
dimensional walk home.

RETREAT TOPIC: MATURE FAITH

INTRODUCTION

Faith is the foundation stone of Christian and religious faith. St Paul of the Cross had an extraordinary faith. When he was leaving the chapel one he said to this brother, Anthony: "Ah! Fr Anthony, if the Lord increases my faith ever so little, I don't know what will become of me." And yet, it is a fact that later on, he was severely tempted about his faith! I guess that is only a means of increasing faith.

PRESENCE OF GOD: Isaiah 52:3-6

The Lord says this:

You were sold for nothing:

You will be redeemed for nothing.

For the Lord says this:

Long ago, my people went to Egypt and settled as aliens.

Finally Assyria oppressed them for no reason.

So, now, what is to be done?*

declares the Lord.

And my name is held in contempt all day, every day.

Because of this, my people will know my name;

Because of this, they will know when the day comes.

That it is I saying: Here I am.” ...

“What is to be done?” could also be translated as

“who is on my side”

PRAYER

God, my Father, give me the energy and curiosity to look before I leap. Help me to find the courage not to be afraid to leap without the absolute guarantee of success. Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief. Amen.

TEXT: Mark 9:14-28

When they came to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and scribes arguing with them.

Immediately on seeing him, the whole crowd was utterly amazed. They ran up to him and greeted him.

He asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I have brought to you my son possessed by a mute spirit.

Wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive it out, but they were unable to do so."

He said to them in reply, "O faithless generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I endure you? Bring him to me."

They brought the boy to him. And when he saw him, the spirit immediately threw the boy into convulsions. As he

fell to the ground, he began to roll around and foam at the mouth.

Then he questioned his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" He replied, "Since childhood.

It has often thrown him into fire and into water to kill him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

Jesus said to him, "'If you can!' Everything is possible to one who has faith."

Then the boy's father cried out, "I do believe, help my unbelief!"

Jesus, on seeing a crowd rapidly gathering, rebuked the unclean spirit and said to it, "Mute and deaf spirit, I command you: come out of him and never enter him again!"

Shouting and throwing the boy into convulsions, it came out. He became like a corpse, which caused many to say, "He is dead!"

But Jesus took him by the hand, raised him, and he stood up. "

So often, we are like these people. We draw close to Jesus to witness perhaps a miracle but we fail to give him an 'all-out' trusting faith. We believe in him; we pray to him; we go to Mass yet we hardly know what it means to allow Christ into the centre of our being. We listen to him, hear his Word read at Mass; we receive Holy Communion and yet we are filled with doubt and perhaps think that he is asking too much. Sometimes we want to wrestle with God rather than embrace him.

When we were baptised, we received an influx of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity – but only in

seminal form, a seed planted in us. Sometimes it remains a seed and we go through life with a childish faith. It was meant to grow – and grow to maturity. There is a mighty difference between the faith we held as children and the faith expected of us now.

I remember reading the Queensland *Catholic Leader*, back in 1994, where Fr Kevin Ryan wrote about people who had a solid faith and others who had a thin veneer. You see, we only have mature faith when we have made that blind leap of faith. Are we tottering on the edge and not quite ready to jump? ...

Let us look at some aspects of faith.

FAITH – THE WHOLE MEANING OF LIFE

Faith is more than being able to put a tick on every line of the Creed. It is not a mental thing – it is the whole meaning of life. It is surrendering our life into the hands of Jesus and accepting his offer of friendship.

We read in the *Seven Day Journey with Thomas Merton* written by Esther de Waal (Guildford, Surrey, UK, 1992, pp. 63-66):

“He is present in the depths of our being as a Friend
And is our other self.

Without Christ -

There would be no salvation

No happiness

No joy ...

Because we would be irrevocably cut off from God –

Without Christ

We cannot save ourselves

no matter how heroic may be our sacrifices.”

FAITH IS A GIFT OF THE SPIRIT.

In John 14:17, Jesus is at the Last Supper and he spoke of the Spirit:

“I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete to be with you forever, the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot accept since it neither sees him nor knows him; but you will know him because he will be with you; he is in you.”

He is the giver of gifts and that certainly includes our faith. But it is a gift which the Spirit hides, as in the gospel story of the treasure hidden in the field. It is not easily possessed. The one who will have it must work to find it – must dig deep or it will be hidden forever. This is where the leap of faith comes in. here I am reminded again of Nouwen and the Rodleighs – the trapeze artists who used a kind of blind faith , knowing that the catcher will be ready and the ‘caught’ will not pull the catcher from his hold on the swing. ...

MATURE FAITH LEADS TO WITNESS

Mature faith can be recognised by the fact that one is a witness. In John 15: 26-27, we read:

"When the Paraclete comes whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, he will be my witness. And you, too, will be

my witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.”

So the fact that we believe makes us want to share our belief with others. Hence, we become witnesses for Christ

...

FAITH CAN BE CHALLENGING

There is a story about Graham Greene, the 20th century novelist whose characters often had crises of faith. He was in Italy and heard about a holy priest, Padre Pio. The Capuchin had a gift for knowing people’s innermost secrets. Greene made an appointment to see him for fifteen minutes. He went to a Mass that Padre Pio was presiding at and he would have seen the blood-soaked bandages on his hands – he often had the stigmata during Mass. But Greene didn’t keep his appointment. When he returned to England some friends asked him why he had backed out. Greene allegedly declared that he wasn’t prepared for the way that man could change his life.

FAITH IS PASSION-CENTRED

One of the great conversions in the Scripture is that of Saul who was to become Paul the Apostle. Saul was a Pharisee, an upstanding member of that elite body. For him, one who had died on the cross was revolting, a scandal. He hated him and he hated his followers. Then, suddenly, he met the risen Jesus. He certainly was changed. The Cross became the centre of his existence, the subject of his preaching. He accepted the fact that there was no righteousness except in the Cross; he died to himself and accepted a new life in Jesus. In Baptism he went down into the watery grave and rose again to life with his Master. ...

CONCLUSION

In 1985, Fr Edward Downes wrote a book called *Parish – Alive, Alive O*. How wonderful if our faith was fanned into flame and all round us was alive with a sparkling mature faith!!! ...

RETREAT TOPIC : KNOWING OURSELVES

INTRODUCTION

I'll let St Teresa of Avila give this introduction.

"I don't know if this has been explained well. Knowing ourselves is something so important, that I wouldn't want any relaxation ever in this regard, however high you might have climbed into the heavens, while we are on this earth nothing is more important to me than humility. So, I repeat that it is good, indeed very good, to try to enter first into the room where self knowledge is dealt with rather than fly off to other rooms. This is the right road and if you can journey along a safe and level path, why should we want wings to fly?" (*Interior Castle 1:2, 8-9 Collected Works, 1980*).

She says this is a life time work and it never ceases. There are no short cuts. There is just the quiet turning up for life, and listening and waiting.

The Reflection will be in two parts – Through the Eyes of God and Through Our Own Eyes.

PRESENCE OF GOD

Your presence
Welds all things together
You are the caring love

That carries me
Like mother earth
Does forest, flower, tree
Outside you
The world is a wilderness

The universe indifferent
The earth a barren planet
And I a speck of dust.
Your presence alone
Is lasting home,
You are the Beyond
In the midst of daily life.
(*Adrian Van Kaam*)
"Gentle Life, pg 46).

PRAYER

Lord, you know that it is hard for us to know ourselves as we really are. Peel the film from our eyes so that we can see ourselves clearly. Help us shun pride and conceit for these are not pleasing to you. Amen.

Text: Philippians 2.5-11

Make your own the mind of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in the form of God,
did not count equality with God
something to be grasped.

But he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
becoming as human beings are;
and being in every way like a human being,
he was humbler yet,
even to accepting death, death on a cross.

and for this God raised him high,
and gave him the name
which is above all other names;

so that all beings
in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld,
should bend the knee at the name of Jesus

and that every tongue should acknowledge,
Jesus Christ as Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.”

St Paul wrote this letter from prison in Rome. His ministry is held up. So, he gives himself time for reflection. He begins this letter with some praise for the Philippians and he prays for them. He then tells

them he is not worried about this imprisonment or even death. To him *“to live is Christ, to die is gain”*.

He begins Chapter 2 with some questions. We could reflect on these:

- Does your life in Christ make you strong?
- Does his love comfort you?
- Do you really have fellowship with the Spirit?
- Do you feel kindness and compassion for one another?

Now, in our text he writes about Christ, how he was one with God but emptied himself and became like us and even humbler, accepting death on a cross. But he rose from death and given again his original position – God. We should praise him as such.

Yeats wrote: “Man needs reckless courage to descent into the abyss of himself.” (*Anam Cara, John O’Donohue, Bantam Books 1997 page 131*).

Humility is truth. Caroline Myss, (*The Castle, p, 111*) writes:

“Humility does not mean that you hold yourself in low esteem, or deny yourself respect, recognition, power, status or accomplishments.”

THROUGH THE EYES OF GOD

One of the most difficult things we have to try to understand is how God sees us. The psalmist says, “What is man that you care for him?” Since he is only a breath, a shadow, considering the size of the

universe, he would appear smaller than an ant and yet God finds his delight is to be with the children of human beings.

We can look at the Word of God and see what it says:

“God created man in the image of himself; in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.” (Gen 1.27).

“God is both refuge and strength for us – a help always ready in trouble” (ps. 46).

“God you are my God, I pine for you, my heart thirsts for you; my body longs for you as a land parched and dreary and waterless.” (Ps. 63).

“I have loved you with an everlasting love and so I shall maintain my faithful love for you.” (Jn. 31.3).

“This is my commandment: Love one another, as I have loved you.” (Jn. 15.12).

“I call you friends” (Jn. 15.15).

“Remain in me, as I remain in you” (Jer. 15.4).

“Since you have been raised up to be with Christ, you must look for the things that are above, where Christ is, sitting at God’s right hand. Let your thoughts be on things above, not on the things that are on the earth, because you have died, and now the life you have is hidden with Christ in God. But when Christ is revealed – and he is your life – you too will be revealed with him in glory.” (Col 3.1-4)

“I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive, yet it is no longer I, but Christ is living in me. The life

that I am now living, subject to the limitations of human nature, I am living in faith, faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2.20).

“You have stripped off your old behavior with your old self and you have put on the new self which will progress towards true knowledge the more it is renewed in the image of the Creator and in that image there is no room for distinction.” (Col 3.10-11).

Those are many, many quotes all through the scriptures.

THROUGH OUR EYES

“There may be many things I might know about myself – some of which I might be pleased with, some of which I might find horrifying or alarming. But, whatever I might think about this thing called myself, it certainly seems that there are numerous things I can know about it.” (Ken Wilbel in Foreword to *“Entering the Castle”* Caroline Myss, Free Press 2007).

But, the special area we will look at is the ‘ego’.

John O’Donohue (*Anam Cara*) calls this the “false self” and Eckhart Tolle calls the “illusory self”. He also refers to it as a “pathological problem.” (p. 109) “Ego is a conglomeration of recurring thought forms.” (p. 54)

“Some egos know what they want and pursue their aim with grim and ruthless determination e.g. Genghis Khan, Stalin, Hitler. Most egos have conflicting wants. They want different things at different times or they may not know what they want,

except they don't want what is: the present moment, unease, restlessness, anxiety, dissatisfaction.” (p. 47).

“A large part of people's lives is consumed by an obsessive pre-occupation with things – ‘my things’ (p. 37). If you renounce something, that doesn't always bring freedom because the ego will search for something else (p. 43). The ego tends to equate ‘having’ with ‘being’. I ‘have’, therefore I ‘am’ and the more important I am. (p. 45).

Besides objects, another basic form of identification is with ‘my’ body. So, I might be prepared to spend a fortune to appear healthy, strong, and beautiful. “Once the ego has found an identity, it does not want to let go.” (p. 51).

“Ego brings with it the need to stand out, to be special, to be in control, to have power, to be given attention and more.”(p. 79). It loves to complain about others (p.62), to triumph over them, (p. 61) seeing their faults. (p. 62).

Its survival depends on your mistaking it for reality. If you see it as an illusion, it disappears.” (p. 28)

CONCLUSION

In spite of all the pitfalls presented by the ego, the real self must be something special. Otherwise God could not love us as he does.

RETREAT TOPIC : MARY, MOTHER OF SORROWS

INTRODUCTION

The Passionist Constitution reads:

“The Blessed Virgin, Mother of the Lord, is present in a special way in our life of prayer. Like her, we too ponder God’s word in our hearts.

“We revere Mary as our Mother, and seek to imitate her trustful, persevering prayer. In our love for her, we endeavour compassionately to share her sorrows in the mystery of the Cross, chiefly by contemplating the mysteries of the Holy Rosary. Invoking her help, we are confident that her motherly intercession will win us the graces we need as sons making our way to the Father.” (v. 53).

PRESENCE OF GOD

Everlasting God, I believe that you are really and truly present. I cannot see you, but neither can I see the all - present air that sustains my life. But, how clearly you see me. My inmost thoughts, my secret feelings. Nothing is hidden from you. I thank you for having given me your sorrowful Mother to watch over me and assist me.

PRAYER

Teach me, Lord, how Mary must fit into my spiritual life. Help me to make a profitable reflection. This prayer we make through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

TEXT – JOHN 19.25-27

“Near the Cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother ‘Woman, this is your Son.’ Then to the disciple he said: ‘This is your Mother’, and from that hour the disciple took her into his home.”

We can say that Mary was the first Passionist Companion. The Vatican Council, in the document on the Church, has this statement:

“The union of the Mother with the Son in the work of salvation was manifested from the time of Christ’s original conception to his death. The Blessed Virgin loyally persevered in her union with her Son unto the Cross. There she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, suffering grievously with her only begotten Son. There, she united herself, with a maternal heart to his sacrifice, and lovingly consented to the immolation of this Victim which she herself had brought forth.” (n. 57-58).

Devotion to this courageous woman, who mirrored all the sufferings of her Son, is an integral part of the Passionist spirituality. This statement is based on the devotion of the Founder, the words of the Constitutions and the lives of Passionist Saints. I quote here from the office of St Gabriel Possenti, CP.:

“The Sorrowful Virgin was as it were, the whole meaning of his life. She was the mistress of the sanctity which he attained; so that among his brethren the opinion was unanimous that the servant of God was directly inspired, so that the cult of Mary,

the Sorrowful Mother, might receive a great increase from his example.”

Besides this, we can list the ways in which Mary was involved in setting up the Congregation.

- She it was who gently invited the Founder to a solitary life.
- She it was, appearing clothed in mourning dress with the Sign of the Passion on her heart, suggested that we should be in mourning in memory of the Passion.
- She it was who showed him the very spot where the first retreat should be built on Monte Argentario.
- She it was who inspired him to go to her Basilica of Mary Mayor to first vow the remembrance of the Passion.
- She it was, who wonderfully protected him from the opponents to his and God’s plan.

No wonder, Pope Benedict XV could write to our Father General in 1920:

“The Blessed Mother of Jesus has nothing so much at heart than that people should love his Son, crucified for our sake; she lovingly appeared to St Paul of the Cross and showed him that she looked upon himself and his sons and daughters as her special clients.” (*AAS12 (1920), 156*).

So, we need to listen to the Founder. In the Rule that he wrote in 1775 before he died are these words:

“They should honour with due devotion the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, ever Virgin, have her for chief Patroness, constantly commemorate the most bitter sorrows which she suffered in the Passion and Death of her Son. Let them by word and example promote her devotion in the hearts of others.”

In a letter to his brothers and sister, Paul of the Cross wrote on 21st February 1722:

“I leave you in the wounds of Jesus, under the protection of Mary, Mother of Sorrows, yes, you and the whole family. You will thus have a continual remembrance of the bitter Passion of Jesus Christ and of her sorrows. May he bestow upon you perseverance in God’s love with fortitude and resignation in suffering. Take Mary, Mother of Sorrows, as your patroness.”

We hear, finally, from Blessed Dominic Barberi, CP. He left an Italian manuscript in *AGCP (B.1 V111, V1.16)*.

“Mary comes to the hill of Calvary ... as she arrives there, she hears the raging shouts and frenzied cries of Jesus’ enemies. They gloat because they have at last attained the long-desired goal. She sees them proceed immediately to strip Jesus of his clothes. She sees them throw him down on to the crudely finished Cross, roughly place the nails in his palms and drive them in with heavy hammers. Thus, while nailing the hands and feet of her beloved Son, they also drive nails into the heart of his loving mother. The crucifixion of Jesus is finished, but the transfixion of the heart of Mary is not yet complete.

Jesus is raised on the cross before her eyes, for the entire world to see. She stands at his feet in brave sorrow, like a rock battered by heavy seas but unbroken. The soul of Jesus was no longer in his body, but hers could not be torn away.”

CONCLUSION

The Pope, the Founder and Passionist holy men have spoken. Our charism embraces Mary as a patroness, especially, as Mother of Sorrows.

RETREAT TOPIC: HOW WELL DO WE HEAR?

INTRODUCTION

When we grow older, often we lose some of our hearing. We are not good listeners. Sometimes, even in earlier life we don't hear, especially the word that God speaks to us.

PRAYER

“Lord, my soul is thirsting for you. When shall I go and behold your face? My thirst will be quenched, my hopes fulfilled, if only I hear you, my good shepherd, pronouncing my name. Then I will be in your holy place and you will be the God of my gladness and joy.”

(The American Passionist Carroll Stuhlmueller wrote this prayer and has left this life now so, hopefully, all he prayed about has come true.)

THE GOOD SHEPHERD (John 10.1-5)

“In all truth I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold through the gate, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a bandit. He who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the flock; the gatekeeper lets him in, the sheep hear his voice, one by one “he calls his own sheep and leads them out. When he has brought out all those that are his, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow because they know his voice. They will never follow a stranger, but will run away from him because they do not recognize the voice of strangers.”

The text is John 10.1-5. The emphasis is on the fourth line “the sheep hear my voice.” It is interesting

for Australians who see thousands of sheep in an extensive property to think that in Jesus' time a shepherd could only afford a few sheep, and whereas our shepherds do all that is needed to raise healthy animals, the shepherds of old, with their fewer sheep, lived all day with the sheep, leading them to fresh water and good pasture and defending them from wild animals. As evening fell, they used to put them into a common fold with other shepherds' sheep. They were under the care, then, of the gate keeper. The next morning, the shepherd would appear, call the sheep by name, and the sheep, recognizing the voice, followed. They were good listeners.

I would like to begin this reflection with a story about listening:

“Fr Boyle was sick and unable to say Mass one Sunday morning. He called Pat, the old sacristan, and told him to inform the people that, owing to his illness, there would not be a Mass that day and that would not be a sin on their part.

As Pat was about to leave, Fr Boyle said: “Oh Pat, you may as well make the announcements for the week.

1. Next Thursday confession will be heard for the first Friday.
2. Tuesday, the feast of Saints Peter and Paul.
3. Collections for the Holy Father next Sunday.
4. A package has been found in the Church. The owner may claim same at the presbytery.
5. Wednesday Mary McCool and John Clancy will be married. Anyone knowing why these

persons should not be married make it known to the proper authorities.

Poor old Pat was a little bewildered, but he said:

1. Fr Boyle is sick and that is no sin.
2. Thursday is the first Friday of the month.
3. Tuesday will be the feast of Mary McCool and John Clancy.
4. The Pope will take up the collection next Sunday.
5. Wednesday Saints Peter and Paul will be married in this Church and who says they shouldn't be married will find their reasons in a package in the presbytery.

Maybe, Pat listened but couldn't absorb all the points!

Ask God for the grace to be a good listener. You might like to use this prayer:

A PRAYER FOR LISTENING

Teach me to listen, Lord

To those nearest me:

My family, my friends, my co-workers.

Help me to be aware that

No matter what words I hear,

The message is:

“Accept the person I am. Listen to me.
Teach me to listen, Lord,
To those far from me
The whispers of the hopeless,
The plea of the forgotten,
The cry of the anguished.
Teach me to listen, Lord,
To myself
Help me to be less afraid,
To trust the voice inside
In the deepest part of me.
Teach me to listen, Lord,
For your voice
In busyness and in boredom,
In certainty and in doubt,
In noise and in silence.
Teach me, Lord, to listen.

Author unknown Sent by N Brims, Narooma NSW

- Experience God’s love ... listen with a lover’s ear.
- Be ready to do what needs to be done.
- Be happy and content in God’s presence
- Do not hurry
- Relax in prayer

WHY DO WE FIND IT HARD TO LISTEN EFFECTIVELY?

The noise of the world distracts us. Jesus said to one of his saints: “I would like to talk with so many people but the noise the world makes in their hearts makes it impossible for me to be heard.”

Bonheoffer wrote about the service of listening in “*Life Together*”: “The first service that one owes to

others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them.”

It is God’s love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear. So it is His work that we do for our brother when we learn to listen to him.

Christians, especially ministers, so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others, that this is the one service they have to render. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking.

Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been committed to them by Him who is Himself the great listener and whose work they should share. We should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the Word of God.

HOW TO PROCEED WITH LISTENING

- Spend sometime in peaceful relaxing.
- Make a short prayer as did Samuel (*1 Sam 2.10*) “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.” Or *Jn. 6.68* “Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.” Or, again, *Luke 1.38* “Be it done unto me according to your word.”
- Try to tune out all distractions.
- Be conscious of your feelings, thinking, hoping, etc.
- Do not be afraid of the consequences. Sister Joan Chittister, OSB, says: “The poor know that the rich cannot hear them because success has deafened them.” (*Wisdom Distilled from the Daily*” Harper and Collins, 1990).

Hugh Mackay (DAN AUST. 1994) speaks of the difficulties in a different way. He says listening takes courage and calls it one of the most psychologically courageous things that we do, because listening involves seriously entertaining the ideas of another person. The risk here is that we might have to change our whole way of thinking.

He quotes the American psychotherapist, Carl Rogers: 'If you really understand another person, if you are willing to enter his private world, you run the risk of being changed yourself. You might see it his way; you might find yourself influenced in your attitudes. This risk of being changed is one of the most frightening prospects most of us have to face.'

Hugh Mackay continues: "When we listen, we are being remarkably generous; we are offering the other person the gift of understanding, the gift of acceptance (even if not agreement); the gift of taking the other person seriously. But the generosity of listening runs even deeper than that. To listen to someone with a genuine willingness to entertain their ideas means that you join with the other person in the task of concentrating on (and, perhaps clarifying) their point of view, their opinions, their attitudes."

PATIENCE TO LISTEN

Sometimes, people answer questions before they are fully formulated, respond to statements before fully made, leap into a conversation without respecting the person who is talking. We need patience if we are going to really listen to the other. Then, and only then, can we properly respond.

Now, we need to talk about God. God wants to converse with us and wants us to listen.

HOW DOES GOD SPEAK TO US

- He speaks to us in Scripture. Here, Jesus words are 'like a double edged sword' (*Rev. 2.12*). Jesus, in St Mark's Gospel, gives us a story about a person sowing seed on a farm and he means the seed to refer to his word. When he explains what happens to the seed, we understand what he is saying about listening. (*Mk. 4.1-20*).

Some seed fell on the path and because the roots go nowhere, there is no result. He said this refers to people who are hard of hearing and the word is lost for them.

Some seed fell on rocky soil. It started off well but again got nowhere. Perhaps these people are the ones who are too fearful to take any notice. Some seed fell among thorns. Again, it started off well but then was destroyed by the thorns. This is where the Word is destroyed by what others think or by others' rejection of the Word.

Some seed fell on good soil and had a varied harvest according to the quality of the soil. So it is with the Word and our faith and our generosity and our readiness to listen.

- God speaks to us in Prayer. We don't actually hear his voice, but he contacts us through the antennae we possess – intellect, emotion, imagination, memory. We might believe it's all our own work but God knows.
- God speaks to us in Events. Again, we can think those things happening around us can

seem like accidents but God **is** creator, right here, right now. He is still working in our world.

- God speaks to us in others. Once again, they can seem to be talking out of their wisdom or stupidity. But God can use high ideas or, seemingly lesser ones through which to speak with us.

CONCLUSION

Thomas Gordon (P.E.T. Parent Effectiveness Training, Plume, 1975) writes:

“Something happens to a person when they practise active listening. To understand accurately how another person thinks or feels from his point of view, to put yourself momentarily into his shoes, to see the world as he is seeing it – you as a listener run the risk of having your own opinions and attitudes changed. To be ‘open to the experience’ of another invites the possibility of having to re-interpret our own experiences. This can be scary. A flexible (listening) person, however, is not afraid of being changed.”

RETREAT TOPIC: THE EUCHARIST

INTRODUCTION

At the very centre of our faith is the Eucharist where the people of God gather to offer sacrifice, to receive Communion, and together offer praise and glory to God. So the Eucharist educates in the fullest meaning of the word, our imagination, our mind, our heart – to embrace in all its fullness our oneness with Christ.

In 1775, when St Paul of the Cross was broken in health and could no longer go to the chapel, he wrote to the Vice Gerent of Rome for permission to say Mass and have Mass celebrated in the room next to his bedroom. Permission was granted. Today, that room with its altar is still there. I was privileged to celebrate Mass there.

PRESENCE OF GOD:

St Ambrose wrote:

“You are near, Lord,
The Lord is near to all of us
Because he is everywhere.
We cannot escape him ...
Nor lose him
God watches everything,
He sees everything.
He is close to us
And he says:
‘I am a God who is close at hand.’

PRAYER:

St John of the Cross wrote:

“O God, I comment to you this time
And ask you to bless
And to strengthen me
In my heartfelt search
For that silence and stillness

In which I pray
I shall find you
Amen.

TEXT: 1 Cor. 11: 23-27

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

REFLECTION

There are many titles given to the Eucharist. We will mention only some.

THE EUCHARIST AS A MEMORIAL

At the Last Supper Jesus, as a Jew, first celebrated the Passover – a feast which recalled the deliverance of the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt. God asked that this deliverance should be a memorial feast.

But then Jesus changed this memorial to deliverance – something that included all people – the deliverance that came from his own death on the cross. So the text speaks of 'remembrance' and 'memorial'. And, in St John's Gospel, we read: "Jesus is the Paschal Lamb whose bones remained unbroken." (Jn. 19:36)

THE EUCHARIST AS A NEW AND ETERNAL COVENANT

When God established a covenant whereby the Jews and God entered into a contract of special friendship, the agreement was sealed with a sacrifice. Jesus established a new and eternal covenant with the Eucharist. This is also sealed by us not once, but all through our lives because we can so easily change our minds.

THE EUCHARIST AS A PASCHAL MEAL

The sealing of the Covenant was not complete without eating the sacrificial victim. This meal is repeated with Holy Communion.

THE EUCHARIST AS UNIFYING

The Eucharist is nothing if it is not a sacrifice and sacrament that unites us into one community, makes us one people. Our Constitutions say: "The Eucharist is central to the life of the community." (n.43)

This is signified especially in Communion. We believe that each person receives the whole, living Jesus. This is impossible since they all go their own separate ways – unless, unless somehow, we are all made one!!!

So Communion should banish all lack of charity, all jealousy, all pride, all self-centeredness in order that we may be united. As St Paul says: "Because the bread is one we, though many, are one body, all of us, who partake of the one bread." (1 Cor. 10:17)

THE EUCHARIST AS THANKSGIVING

Lately, I have taken the time at the beginning of Mass to invite the gathering to think about the things that need to thank God for. Several writers on prayer tell us that the most important prayer is saying thanks to God. I guess that sometimes we forget that everything we have – our health, our hearing, our sight, our ability to walk and to sleep, our friends – all these are wonderful and they come from God!

St Irenaeus wrote:

“God has no need of those things which belong to us but we, on the other hand, have need to offer sacrifice to God ... and God, who has need of nothing, takes our good works to himself in order to give us a reward from the treasury of his own ‘gifts’.... So, although he does need sacrifice from us, he wishes us to offer sacrifice lest our lives be without fruit.” (*Adversus Haereses*, 18)

THE EUCHARIST AS OUR LIFE

In the documents of Vatican II, we read: “The Mass is the culmination of the whole life of the Christian community.” (p.1418)

At the conclusion of Mass, the celebrant sometimes said: “Go, the Mass is ended” – but is inaccurate. The Mass was not ended; it was just beginning. We have to leave the church aware that we have renewed our contract to ‘put on Christ’ and now we have to live that out. Every part of our day is now stamped with the agreement we made at Mass.

Thomas Merton wrote: “The mystery of the Eucharist, the source of all life in God, the source of all charity, can only be penetrated by being lived and loved.” (*The Living Bread*, p.13)

St John's Gospel has some strong words of Jesus: "I tell you most solemnly, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you." (*Jn. 6:52*)

And, "Whoever eats me will draw life from me." (*Jn. 6:58*)

THE EUCHARIST AS A SIGN OF RESURRECTION

In the first Eucharistic prayer, we say after the Consecration: "We, your people and your ministers, recall his Passion, his Resurrection and his Ascension into glory." In the second Eucharistic Prayer: "In memory of his death and resurrection ..."; in the third, "Father, calling to mind the death your Son endured for our salvation, his glorious Resurrection and Ascension into heaven ..." and in the fourth, "We recall Christ's death, his descent among the dead, his Resurrection and Ascension to your right hand ..."

Our Resurrection is also assured by Holy Communion: "Anyone who eats this bread will live forever." (*Jn. 6:59*) When some found these words hard to accept, Jesus said to the Apostles: "Will you also go away?" and Peter, the spokesman, said: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life.'" (*Jn. 6:69*)

CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude with two quotes from the second Vatican Council:

"Taking part in the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life, they offer the Divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with it. Thus both by reason of the offering and

through Holy Communion all take part in this liturgical service, not indeed, all in the same way but each in that way which is proper to himself. Strengthened in Holy Communion by the Body of Christ, they then manifest in a concrete way that unity of the people of God which is suitably signified and wondrously brought about by this most august sacrament.”
(*Lumen Gentium*, n.11)

The second quote is from the *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*:

“No Christian community, however, is built up unless it has its basis and center in the celebration of the most Holy Eucharist; from this, therefore, all education to the spirit of community must take its origin. This celebration, if it is to be genuine and complete, should lead to various works of charity and mutual help, as well as to missionary activity and to different forms of Christian witness.” (n.6)