



PONTIFICAL COUNCIL  
FOR THE PROMOTION OF  
THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

# 24 HOURS FOR THE LORD

## 25 MARCH 2022

IN HIM, WE HAVE FORGIVENESS  
(REF. COL.1: 13-14)

**MARCH 25 AT 5:00 PM**  
**ST. PETER'S BASILICA**  
**Penitential celebration with**  
**Pope Francis**

**#24hoursfortheLord**

24 HOURS FOR THE LORD  
*25-26 March 2022*  
In Him we have forgiveness (cf. Col 1:13-14)  
Pastoral Resource

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### ***Introductory remarks***

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

***On Friday evening March 25<sup>th</sup> and during the entire day of Saturday March 26<sup>th</sup>, it would be good to have the church open, offering the opportunity for Confessions, preferably in the context of guided Eucharistic Adoration. The event could begin on Friday evening with a Liturgy of the Word to prepare the faithful for Confession, and conclude with the celebration of Mass on Saturday afternoon.***

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

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

## PART I. CONFESSION.

Such is the effectiveness of three syllables [words]. *I have sinned* is just three syllables [words]; and yet in these three syllables [words] the flames of the heart's sacrifice rose up to heaven. So [too for] those who have done genuine penance, and have been absolved from the constraints by which they were bound and cut off from the body of Christ.

Saint Augustine, *From Sermon 393*.

## Reflection on the Sacrament of Reconciliation today

✠ *Rino Fisichella*

Paul's invitation to ensure that we live intensely the opportunity for forgiveness offered by Christ is set within a broader context in which the apostle seeks to share the great mystery of Jesus with the Colossian community. We know that one of the core themes of the letter is to highlight the mystery of Christ which surpasses all knowledge. He is the very icon of the Father, the firstborn and the very end of creation as well as the beginning of the new life brought about by his resurrection. In him dwells the fullness of all things, so that “through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20). The continuous exhortation that dominates the entire letter strives to strengthen the recipients in their initial faith. What Christians have received deserves to be treasured not as theoretical knowledge, but rather as consistent personal behaviour and community action capable of expressing the credibility of their faith.

Today's Christian who reads the letter to the Colossians is noticeably struck by the apostle's insistence on the mystery of Christ. In some ways, it seems that in this brief letter Paul wanted to capture a true synthesis of his Christology. It is easy to uncover the themes dear to the apostle, such as the all-encompassing mystery of Christ, his conception of the Church, the principles of morality, redemption and eschatology... all centred in Christ. The Son of God contains within himself such a uniqueness that he is the beginning, the end and the synthesis of all the Father's action. The theme of forgiveness also belongs to this vision and takes on its own particular relevance because it is taken up several times in the body of the same letter and with decisive references to the revelation which is the great chapter on reconciliation.

The prayer of thanksgiving at the beginning of the letter clearly shows how Christians' actions should be. The apostle describes it very clearly as “lead a life worthy of the Lord” (v.10) if you want to remain faithful to the original text, while the Bible of the Italian Bishops' Conference translates it as “behave”. The believer's “journey” is marked by four conditions: “bearing fruit in every good work”, “growing in the knowledge of God”, “to be persevering”, and “giving joyful thanks to the Father”. It is no small task that is being proposed; yet, Paul does not hesitate to present it to the early believers so that they may learn to be consistent and credible in witnessing to the faith. The reference to joy stands out immediately. We cannot forget that the apostle was writing this letter while he was in prison, probably in Rome; nevertheless, he is convinced that the strength of the Christian consists precisely in expressing joy. The truth about one's life and the goodness to which we should bear witness are grounded in the joy of gratitude to God. Paradoxical, yet decisive: the life of every disciple of the Lord is not only destined to bear fruit above all with the progressive and growing knowledge of God, but in a special way with perseverance in times of difficulty that are always transformed into the joy of thanksgiving to God for the salvation offered by Christ.

The Apostle's words are not foreign to daily life. Faith is not a theory, but the fruit of a personal encounter with the Lord that marks and determines one's entire life because it brings meaning to the events that one experiences. We should also think realistically about Paul's demands. As is known, in about the years 60-62, the Colossians experienced a major earthquake that completely destroyed the city. Paul writes his letter probably around the year 60. Of course, there is no mention of the earthquake in the letter and we cannot set exact dates, but is it so unlikely that those Christians would



have remembered Paul's writing that invited them to rejoice and give thanks in any circumstances while they were experiencing the drama of destruction?

All this leads to the strong and compelling call for deliverance from the "power of darkness" and the "forgiveness of sins". The experience of reconciliation should help one to live these two moments with an intensity that allows one to perceive the immensity of the gift received. The Christian is a "child of light" because by his death on the cross Jesus gave his life in order to destroy the "power of Satan" and thus free people from the dominion of sin and death. The most tangible sign of this freedom, which is evident in the history of each person, is the act of love with which God reconciles every sinner by offering his forgiveness. This, the apostle states, is the inheritance we have received because we share his very life that makes us holy: "And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him" (Col 1:21-22).

Forgiveness carries with it a host of questions that pertain to daily life and that are summed up in what is probably the most pressing question today: why should I forgive? Often, we find ourselves in the position of expecting to be forgiven, but we become resistant when we are called to forgive others. "For-give" bears the reality in the semantics itself. It is a given and cannot be demanded. It is "give-for," something that is given, able to become contagious, so it can be offered as well. By closing ourselves up in the selfishness of resentment and revenge, we cannot let the death of the innocent man on the cross who offers his forgiveness to everyone be in vain. It is not easy to forgive if we have not first had the experience of being forgiven. Today, those who forgive seem to have become heroes, so much so that it has become uncommon to do so. People opt for the anger that brings forth death rather than offer forgiveness that lengthens life. The source of freedom is confused with falling into slavery. This is a dramatic situation in recent times where forgiveness seems to have become a stranger to family life and society.

Who should be first when it comes to forgiveness? The one who is wronged and then forgives, or the one who did the wrong and asks to be forgiven? These questions point to our humanity that resides within us and that still needs to be freed in order to pass from darkness to light. The Son of God did not wait for the sinner to ask for forgiveness; he offered it himself as the ultimate sign of his love. Forgiveness is not separated from love, but is one of its distinguishing features. Where there is no forgiveness, it cannot be said that there is true love either. Where there is true love, there must also be a willingness to forgive. This is not an automatic act, but calls for the strength that comes from above. At times, it may take time, and for this reason the apostle's plea for patience can be helpful and encouraging. In any case, the patient expectation to receive and offer forgiveness demands in turn that it be accompanied by the perseverance to abide in the Lord's teaching that asks us to forgive not "seven times, but seventy times seven" (Mt 18:22). On the other hand, love is a pure gift that is offered and only when one loves with such a love is one able to love first in order to awaken love in the other person. It is the same for forgiveness. It is a courageous act that can be attributed to the power of love that overcomes all resistance. It is not cowardly to forgive; on the contrary, it is typical of the strong one who knows the true value of life and the power of love that generates a sense of serenity and deep peace. It is no coincidence, on the other hand, that in the very essence of forgiveness there is a need to forget the wrong received in order to begin a new interpersonal relationship. Forgiveness and forgetting: a difficult but necessary combination.

The Apostle's letter to the Colossians gives us further insight into the universal connotation of forgiveness. The redemption wrought by Christ is not limited to forgiveness in relation to man, but extends to an act of salvation that also encompasses the whole of creation. In fact, he will have

to receive it anew in order to place it into the hands of the Father at the end of time and thus reconcile definitively everyone and everything. This is not without its own particular significance. It is often understood that forgiveness is meant only for people. This is not the case. There are certain actions that go against creation and demand a change such as those who ask for forgiveness. This entails the need to change one's life. There is no true forgiveness, in fact, if it does not lead to a change in one's lifestyle. To the extent that we reclaim the sense of belonging to creation and not of dominating over it, will an awareness of respect and responsibility also open up. Perhaps, at this point in history, forgiveness needs to be combined precisely with respect, which indicates an awareness of someone and something close to me, and with responsibility, which calls for a true and coherent response from our very self.

### **Testimony of conversion**

Conversion is a particular moment in the life of every person. There are those who convert gradually, in small steps, discovering every day, every week something new about their faith, their weaknesses, their talents. Gradually, as time goes on, they recognize their own wrong decisions, correct themselves in small increments, deepen their faith and grow spiritually.

On the other hand, there are those who experience a sudden conversion, a dramatic experience that brings about a radical change of life. The instantaneous discovery of God, which opens their eyes of faith to the spiritual world, is always accompanied by the awareness of their own failings and, at the same time, of the unconditional love of God who forgives the repentant sinner of everything.

We hope that the personal conversion testimony recounted below will be helpful in reflecting on God's presence in one's life and where one is in their faith.

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Leonardo was born to a middle-class family in Milan at the end of September 1946. Unfortunately, there was growing misunderstanding between his parents, and when he was just two years old, Laura Mondadori and Giorgio Forneron got divorced. Leonardo stayed with his mother, while his father no longer sought any contact with his son. Laura returned with Leonardo to her parents' home in Piazza Duse in Milan. In 1951, Leonardo was legally recognized by his famous grandfather, Arnaldo Mondadori, who gave his grandson his surname and included him in his important publishing business.

The boy grew up in a highly cultured environment. Due to the extensive acquaintances of his grandfather, Arnaldo, the family home was visited by people such as Thomas Mann and Giuseppe Ungaretti. As a child of his time, for the young Mondadori, religion was an abstract concept of life that had become outdated and was not given too much weight. Leonardo, constantly surrounded by the most famous personalities of literature and philosophy, dedicated himself to humanistic studies. First in the famous classical high school Giovanni Berchet in Milan and then he enrolled in philosophy at the State University in Milan. Don Luigi Giussani taught religion in the high school from 1954 to 1964. During those years he founded the first community of Student Youth, which would later give rise to the "Communion and Liberation" movement. Leonardo, however, was not aware of the existence of a group of his fellow high school classmates in search of a deep religious sense.

After turning eighteen, during a vacation in Cortina d'Ampezzo, the young student met Paola Zanussi. They fell in love and four years later, in 1968, they got married. In 1970 Leonardo graduated in philosophy. Their daughter, Martina, was born, but Paola and Leonardo no longer lived together. After seven years their marriage broke down and they got divorced.

Soon after Leonardo met another woman, Katherine Price, married her, and they had two children: Francesco and Filippo. Unfortunately, the second marriage also ended in divorce at the beginning of the 1990s. It is exactly at this time in his life that God touched him with his grace.

"I remember a breakfast at Savini with Pippo Corigliano, the public relations manager of Opus Dei. It was 1992 and at that time I had no interest whatsoever in religion, let alone the Church. But I felt that my life was, how should I put it, full of mistakes. I already had two divorces behind me and three children from two different women. Corigliano made a big impression on me. I decided to meet him again. I began to ask him for advice. He was very considerate. He said, "If you're open to these things, I could arrange for you to meet with a priest."

It was the sincere conversations with the priest, Don Umberto de Martino, that gradually opened Leonardo's heart.

"An outstanding priest. He had great respect for me. I began to trust him, to follow his suggestions. And slowly, following what he told me, I realized I was finding the answers I was looking for. I became very enthusiastic, I wanted to change my whole life all at once. And he, as priest, very realistically, held me back: don't be in a hurry, he said, God doesn't ask the impossible of you, just go ahead slowly. I have never left that priest, and he is still my spiritual director".

Thus Dr. Mondadori discovered not only spiritual direction, but also the Sacraments of Confession and Communion.

"It would be more correct to say the 'discovery' of confession. Yes, it was an immense joy. I remembered things I had repressed. And then I felt at peace with God. Happy. Just as I felt happy at my real 'first communion,' in New York, on Christmas Eve of 1993".

The change in Leonardo's soul was noticeable to everyone. "I live a vibrant Christian life and it is this vision of faith that, despite everything, makes my life glow".

One day, upon meeting his first wife, she was heard to ask, "What happened to you? Did you get plastic surgery on your face?" he replied, "No, I got plastic surgery on my soul".

Leonardo Mondadori did not keep this experience of faith just for himself, but sought to pass on the grace he had received.

"Among the things I really like to do, actually, that I most enjoy, is to give a little witness in certain social or professional circles that seem opposed to my outlook. There is an uninformed secularism - I encounter it all the time - that gives Christianity a caricatured image".

His family members also felt the testimony of his faith.

"We talk to each other a lot, nothing drops from above ... when I was their age no one in the family was able to help me deal with a truly human life, the one that I discovered late in life, after ending up in so many dead ends".



A couple of years after his conversion, in 1998, he was diagnosed with thyroid cancer and then pancreatic and liver cancer. While the thyroid cancer was successfully removed, the pancreatic cancer proved to be increasingly invasive and resistant to treatment. When asked if he fears death, Leonardo replied:

"I'm afraid of "physical" death, that is, it scares me to think about the moment when I will die. But I say to myself: why on earth did Jesus allow himself to be crucified? Either Christianity is a deception, or our salvation is in the crucifixion". And then he adds: "I had the proof that Jesus is there. And if he is there now, he will be there also after our death. I do not know what this 'after' will be like. But I am certain that for those who are at peace with God it will be very beautiful".

On December 13, 2002, Leonardo Mondadori left to meet Jesus, to whom he had entrusted his life.

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

*Pope Francis, September 4, 2018, Santa Marta*

Every evening, make an “examination of conscience”, like a prayer, to determine if it was “the Spirit of God or the spirit of the world” that prompted us throughout the day. This is a decisive action in our “spiritual battle” which leads us to “understand His heart” and the meaning of Christ. This is the suggestion that Pope Francis made during Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday, 4 September, recalling that a person’s heart is like a “battlefield” where, throughout the day, “the Spirit of God, which leads us to good works, to charity, to fraternity” encounters “the spirit of the world, which leads us to vanity, pride, sufficiency, gossip”.

In the first reading, referring to the passage from the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians (2:10-16), the Pope pointed out that “the Apostle Paul teaches the Corinthians the way to think like Christ, Christ’s sentiments” and to have the attitude that Christ had. It is the path that allows the Holy Spirit to work in us. Indeed, Saint Paul reminds us that we all received the Spirit of God.

Pope Francis explained that it is the Holy Spirit that enables us to carry on in life, that brings us to know Jesus, to have the same sentiments as Jesus. He reiterated that we can study a great deal, study the Bible, study history, study theology, but these are not the paths that lead us to have the same sentiments as Jesus. They certainly help, but the true way is to let oneself be drawn forward by the Spirit, by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that leads us to the heart of Jesus, to understand who Jesus is, how Jesus acts, what Jesus wants, what Jesus’ will is--to understand the heart of Jesus.

The question is, how can we get there? Saint Paul affirms that the “unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God” and therefore, as Pope Francis explained, we need the Holy Spirit for this journey, this Christian walk. Similarly, the Apostle Paul explains, “we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit of God”.

Essentially, reiterated the Pope, "There are two spirits, two ways of thinking, of feeling, of acting: that which leads me to the Spirit of God, and that which leads me to the spirit of the world". And "this happens in our life: We all have these two 'spirits,' we might say". There is the "Spirit of God, which leads us to good works, to charity, to fraternity, to adore God, to know Jesus, to do many good works of charity, to pray", but there is also "the other spirit, of the world, which leads us to vanity, pride, sufficiency, gossip – a completely different path".

“Our heart, a saint once said, is like a ‘battlefield, a field of war where these two spirits struggle’ and he called this a ‘spiritual battle’”, the Pope explained. “In the Christian life, one must fight to find space for the Spirit of God, and to cast away--like Jesus expelled the demon--the spirit of the world”, he added, referring to the day’s Gospel passage (4:31-37).

Reflecting further on this, the Pope suggested “a beautiful prayer that each of us can recite every day, before going to bed, looking back on the day” and asking ourselves “which spirit did I follow today? The spirit of God or the spirit of the world?”. He pointed out that this is what is meant by an examination of conscience--” feeling within our hearts what took place in this interior battle, and asking how I defended myself against the spirit of the world that leads to vanity, ugliness, vice, to pride”. In other words, “how did I defend myself from real temptations”. We must identify the temptations, Pope Francis stressed, and “this is to be done as a prayer, before going to bed, today, asking ourselves what kinds of feelings we had, identifying which spirit prompted us to which sentiments: the spirit of the world or the Spirit of God?”.

By making an examination of conscience with this evening prayer, the Holy Father continued, “if we are honest, we will often find that ‘today I was envious, I was greedy’”. This is “the spirit of the world”. Identifying these feelings is important because “we all face this interior battle, but if we do not understand how these two spirits work, how they act, we will be unable to move forward with the Spirit of God which helps us to understand Christ’s thoughts, the meaning of Christ”.

“It is very simple” said the Pope, “we have this great gift, which is the Spirit of God, but we are weak, we are sinners, and we also have the temptation of the spirit of the world”. And “in this spiritual battle, in this war of the spirit, we must be victors like Jesus, but we must know the path to take”. This is why, he continued “an examination of conscience is so useful, to look back on the day in the evening and say, ‘Yes, I was tempted in this way today, I was victorious here, the Holy Spirit inspired me’”. Essentially, it is about “knowing what is going on in the heart”.

The Pope then cautioned, “If we do not do this, if we do not know what happens in our heart--and I don’t say this, the Bible does--we are like ‘animals that understand nothing’, that move along through instinct”. But “we are not animals, we are children of God, baptized with the gift of the Holy Spirit”. “This is why it is important to understand what happened in my heart today. May the Lord teach us to make an examination of conscience every day”.

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

*When you meet the priest for confession, he welcomes you warmly, offering words of encouragement.*

*He makes the merciful Lord present.*

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

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

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

**Trust in God the Father:**

**He does not want the death of the sinner,  
but that he be converted and live.**

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

**Ez 11: 19-20**

**I will give them a new heart,  
and put a new spirit within them;  
I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh  
and give them a heart of flesh,  
so that they may follow my statutes  
and keep my ordinances and obey them.  
Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God.**

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

**Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;  
God, be merciful to me, a sinner! (Lk 15:18; 18:13)**

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

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

*Response: Amen.*

*After absolution the priest continues: Give thanks to the Lord for he is good.*

*Response: His mercy endures forever.*

*Then the priest dismisses you saying: The Lord has forgiven you. Go in peace.*

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*Prayer of the Penitent*

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

*Or*

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

**What to do after confession?**

When we look at the lives of those who have faithfully followed Christ, we are inspired with a new reason for seeking the City that is to come (cf. Heb 13:14 and 11:10); and at the same time, we are shown a most safe path by which among the vicissitudes of this world, in keeping with the state in life and condition proper to each of us, we will be able to arrive at perfect union with Christ, that is, perfect holiness.

*Lumen Gentium, 50*

**Servant of God, Sister Thea Bowman**

Bertha Bowman was born on December 29, 1937 in Yazoo City, Mississippi. Her family belonged to the Methodist community and joyfully professed their faith. Her father, Theon Bowman, was a doctor and her mother, Mary Esther Bowman, a teacher. They lived in Canton, Mississippi - a state marked by a long battle for civil rights, which would also deeply mark Bertha's life. Just two generations before her birth, her grandfather had been an African-American slave.

As a young girl Bertha spent lots of time with the elders, learning from their wisdom. She was very curious and was told about the customs and traditions of her people and learned about African-American songs and culture. The adults immediately realized that the little girl was very gifted and learned easily. Little Bertha was enrolled at *Holy Child Jesus School* in Canton, where she met the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. The goodness and professionalism of the sisters impressed the young student. She felt greatly attracted to their example of life, especially their dedication to serving poor and needy children. Despite her very young age - she was only 8 years old - Bertha asked her parents for permission to become a Catholic. Her father and mother, knowing the extraordinary maturity of their daughter's thinking, did not object. Thus, at the age of 9, Bertha entered the Catholic Church.

In 1952, when she was only 15 years old, she told her friends and parents that she wanted to move to La Crosse, Wisconsin to enter the Order of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, as a novice. Her loved ones also understood and supported her decision. When she arrived at the convent in 1953, she was the only black girl in the entire order. The sisters immediately recognized Bertha's extraordinary intelligence, her charism, and her desire to help people. Her ability to speak and converse made her an excellent speaker, so much so that the sisters decided from the beginning that she should study to become a teacher.

At her religious profession she took the name Mary Thea, which is the name she was known as throughout her life. In 1969 she graduated and in 1972 completed her doctorate. She taught students of all age groups, first in La Crosse, Wisconsin and then in Canton, Mississippi. Charismatic and joyful, she did not just pass on scientific concepts, but educated and evangelized, and became a strong reference point for generations of students.

The Second Vatican Council in the late 1960s profoundly marked her life's journey. Sister Mary Thea Bowman dedicated herself to studies of African American culture and the Church's liturgy. "When we understand our history and culture, then we can develop the ritual, music and devotional expression that satisfies us in the Church". She began teaching at the Catholic University of America. Her vision of a multicultural society, however, was far from the prevailing views. One of her students noted: "And she knew that we were all not a melting pot. She was never very interested in that particular metaphor. She was a whole lot more interested in saying that we are more like a salad. So when you are a salad, you don't lose your characteristics, you remain individuals. And the whole point is to love one another. And that's what she did".

She travelled throughout the United States, breaking down racial biases with her speeches and engagements. She created the environment to foster interpersonal communication in order to understand the differences between different cultures and ethnicities. She encouraged cultural exchanges between white and non-white Catholics, especially in the southern United States, where local churches are particularly wounded by segregation.

In 1978, with the approval of her superiors, she returned to Mississippi to care for her aging parents. By this time, Sister Thea enjoyed quite a reputation as a scholar, but above all as a religious believer who knew how to speak and put the Gospel into practice even in very difficult situations. The Bishop of Jacksonville, knowing of her arrival, offered her the Office of Consultant for Intercultural Affairs in his Diocese. Sister Mary Thea accepted and committed



herself to skilfully promoting the unity that comes from the Gospel and is embodied in the Church shaped by cultural and multi-ethnic diversity.

In 1984 her parents passed away, one after another, and she was diagnosed with breast cancer. To her students she says somewhat jokingly, "I will live until I die". She continued tirelessly and with a smile to maintain the high pace of her activities, even when cancer invaded her bones and forced her into a wheelchair. In 1987, Sister Bowman published the collection of Catholic hymns and songs, *"Lead Me, Guide Me: The African American Catholic Hymnal"*. It was the first work of its kind to emanate from the African American community and at the same time the fruit of years of study, work and listening to African American communities: "When we understand our history and culture, then we can develop the ritual, the music and the devotional expression that satisfy us in the Church".

Her work in African-American cultural, ritual and folk piety was recognized by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. In June 1989, the bishops invited her to speak at the annual meeting of the Conference. Sister Thea Bowman spoke to the Bishops about the Church as a Home: the Family of Families. A rather spontaneous speech that the bishops themselves would later perceive and describe as a heart speaking to other hearts. Sister Bowman presented African American spirituality, its place in the Church and its contribution. She reiterated the need not only for education and instruction but especially for the evangelization of black children and the urgency of including them in Catholic communities. "Your job is to enable me, to enable God's people, black people, white people, proud people, all the people, to do the work of the Church in the modern world".

Sister Thea Bowman died on March 30, 1990. In 2018, the Diocese of Jackson opened her cause for beatification.

## PART II. VIGIL

«All interior life needs silence and intimacy with Christ in order to develop. »

St. John Paul II, *Letter to the Bishop of Liège, “Corpus Domini”*, 1996

## Introduction to the Celebration

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

This Vigil is inspired by the words from the Letter to the Colossians: "In Him we have forgiveness" (cf. 1:13-14), emphasizing the source of forgiveness found in Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul exhorts the Colossians to give joyful thanks to the Father, who has enabled them to share in the lot of the saints. Thus, the Apostle emphasizes God's action aimed at saving man and making him a sharer in eternal life. All this is possible through his Son sent to redeem the lost. The text lends itself to various spiritual interpretations. We will focus on two aspects: the first highlights the mediation of forgiveness through the Son of God (*in Him*). Therefore, man is not saved by himself, but through the merciful love of God who forgives him through his Son who died and rose again. The second aspect shows God's forgiveness as a reality that man possesses: it is a gift freely received, because it is paid for with the Blood of Jesus Christ.

The "24 hours for the Lord" event is closely linked with the liturgical season of Lent, and in particular with the Fourth Sunday of Lent, formerly known as "Laetare". The joy celebrated during this Sunday flows from personal conversion, reconciliation with God and the grace received in the Sacrament of Forgiveness. Among other things, the Sunday readings (Jos 5:9, 10-12; Ps 33; 2 Cor 5:17-21; Lk 15:1-3; 11-32) portray, how man becomes a new creature through the grace received from God. The old man is transformed by the grace of God, received through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which redeems humanity from its sin.

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

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

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

1. In small communities such as hospitals or parishes/rectories with a relatively small number of worshippers.

In this case the entire event often takes place on Friday evening. It could begin with the penitential liturgy, followed by exposition of the Blessed Sacrament with Eucharistic Adoration either silently or animated by a prayer group (according to the possibilities and needs of the community) followed by inviting everyone to sacramental reconciliation with God.

2. In larger parishes (especially in urban areas), at the vicariate or deanery levels where the event will be held in several parishes/communities.

It would be good to begin on Friday evening with Holy Mass or the Liturgy of the Word. Then the Blessed Sacrament is exposed and Eucharistic Adoration begins, animated by various parish groups or by various parishes.

The organizers are responsible for planning the programme for Adoration and its duration, ensuring that there is ample time and priests available for the faithful to go to confession.

3. In cathedral churches, basilicas, sanctuaries, or in parishes and places of worship that are most significant for the local Church, carefully chosen by the bishop or those responsible. The event should be organised in a more solemn manner, emphasising the universality of the Church that is celebrating it simultaneously throughout the world. The church should also remain open throughout the night, with Eucharistic Adoration animated in shifts by various prayer groups and communities. It would be good to have the Ordinary and the Bishops present at least at the beginning and end of the event, and if possible, also for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. One or more priests should always be present and available to hear confessions.

If possible, a group of specially trained and prepared lay people could invite people passing by the church to come in and take part in the event (especially in churches located in city centres, historical and tourist areas, places with a large number of people, etc.). A simple invitation, a word of welcome or an explanation of the event often provide an opportunity to enter into much more serious conversation, thus becoming a real moment of evangelisation. Often, the lay faithful, especially those who have systematically received formation in various communities and prayer groups, can be excellent in helping the people prepare for confession, by talking with them especially those who have not attended church for some time and might feel uncomfortable about facing the priest directly.

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

## **“24 hours for the Lord” during the pandemic**

While this pastoral resource is being prepared, the pandemic caused by the sars-cov-2 virus is still present in various parts of the world. We are fully aware that the health restrictions imposed by the authorities have a major impact on the entire event, as well as on the individual celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In this section, therefore, we would like to share some ideas on how to conduct the Vigil and the related Confessions.

### **1. In the case of a total ban on liturgical celebrations**

Wherever the sacraments cannot be celebrated because of the pandemic, it is important to spread the Gospel message of the Lord's mercy among the faithful. The present initiative could provide an opportunity to bring comfort to the Christian community.

The role of chaplains in hospitals, clinics, nursing homes and many other public and private health care facilities is crucial in bringing forgiveness and peace to those most at risk from the pandemic.

The faithful should be reminded that the Church gives us a special way to receive absolution for sins in cases where it is impossible to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Pope himself explained it to us: “I know that many of you go to confession before Easter... Many will say to me: ‘But Father...I can't leave the house and I want to make my peace with the Lord. I want Him to embrace me... How can I do that unless I find a priest?’. Do what the catechism says. It's very clear. If you don't find a priest to go to confession, speak to God. He's your Father. Tell Him the truth: ‘Lord. I did this and this and this. Pardon me.’ Ask His forgiveness with all your heart with an act of contrition, and promise Him, ‘afterward I will go to confession.’ You will return to God's grace immediately”. (Pope Francis, *Homily at Santa Marta*, March 20, 2020).

In fact, in number 1452 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church we read: "When it comes from the love of God loved above all else, contrition is called 'perfect' (contrition of charity). Such contrition forgives venial sins; it also obtains the forgiveness of mortal sins,



if it involves the firm resolution to have recourse, as soon as possible, to sacramental confession."

In some regions, despite the prohibition of public celebrations, the priest could, on his own, go around his parish, blessing people in their homes at a suitable distance. Such a blessing, with the Blessed Sacrament or the relics of patron saints, could be carried out with the prior consent of the local bishop and the competent civil authorities.

Where possible, modern means of communication can be used to broadcast the Vigil, thus preparing the faithful for perfect contrition, in view of sacramental confession, once the health-related restrictions are lifted.

The pandemic can never become an excuse to close the church.

## 2. In case of partial restriction of liturgical celebrations

In most parts of the world, the pandemic-related regulations allow the faithful to gather and celebrate the sacraments, albeit with time limits and restrictions on the number of participants.

In accordance with the decisions made by the local bishop and the health regulations in force, the faithful could be invited to come to church at different times. In order to facilitate managing the people to maintain proper spacing in church, several groups of the faithful could be invited by age or according to neighbourhood, village, etc. The whole initiative could take place over several days in order to allow people to experience a quiet moment of adoration and have access to a priest available to hear confessions.

A place for hearing confessions should also be prepared, in compliance with health regulations. In the past, priests have resorted to various solutions in this regard. We would like to point out two: the first is to prepare a place (a room, the sacristy, etc.) where, in privacy, a priest can hear the penitent's confession, but at the same time maintain the distance indicated by the competent health authorities. The second solution is to use the confessional, sealing it with plastic film, Plexiglas, or other similar materials suitable for this purpose.

### **Penitential celebration**

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

### **GREETING**

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

R: Amen.

C: Mercy and peace be with all of you.

R: And with your spirit.

C: At the beginning of his Letter to the Colossians, St. Paul thanks God for having given us his own Son "in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins". Brothers and sisters, this evening we too wish to give thanks to God for the mercy he has shown us. He does not condemn us; on the contrary, in Christ his Son, he opens the door of forgiveness to us and invites us to enter it. It depends only on us, if we want to turn to Him and ask for mercy for our transgressions. In our prayer this evening, we would also like to present to the Lord those of our brothers and sisters who do not have the courage to come and ask for forgiveness, or who do not feel the need to do so and have turned away from the faith and from God himself. May they also find forgiveness and peace.

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

C: Let us pray.

Extending his hands and says:

O Father, who has freed us from sin  
and has given us the dignity of adopted children,  
look with favour upon your family,  
that all believers in Christ  
may be given true freedom and eternal inheritance.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who is God,  
and lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
for ever and ever.

All respond:

Amen.

## LITURGY OF THE WORD

### First Reading

Col 1: 9-14

From the letter of Saint Paul the Apostle to the Colossians

For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to

share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

L: The Word of the Lord

R: Thanks be to God

### Responsorial Psalm

From Psalm 97(98)

R: The Lord has made known his salvation.

The Lord has made known his victory;  
he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.  
He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness  
to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen  
the victory of our God.  
Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;  
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,  
with the lyre and the sound of melody.  
With trumpets and the sound of the horn  
make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.

### Gospel Acclamation

Mt 4:23

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

Jesus proclaimed the good news of the Kingdom  
and cured every disease and every sickness among the people.

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

### Gospel

C: The Lord be with you.

R: And with your spirit.

C: From the Gospel according to Mark

(7:31-37)

R: Gloria to you, O Lord.

Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak”.

C: The Word of the Lord.

R: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

## Homily

### GENERAL CONFESSION OF SINS

After a brief time for reflection, the celebrant says:

C: This evening the Lord Jesus has called us to conversion. Let us acknowledge that we are sinners and with confidence let us ask the Lord for His mercy.

C: I confess to Almighty God

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

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

R: Amen

### THE LORD’S PRAYER

All stand

C: Enlightened by the *Word of the Lord* who invites us to cleanse our hearts and straighten our ways, let us turn to Him with our whole hearts and say:

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

### SIGN OF PEACE

If permitted by the health regulations, the Celebrant says:

C: Dear brothers and sisters, confident in the forgiveness offered to each of us through Jesus Christ,  
Let us share with one another a sign of peace.

All exchange a sign of peace.

### EXPOSITION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

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

This is followed by time for confessions and individual absolution.

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

### Scheme of Eucharistic Adoration

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

During the Vigil, all the health-related regulations should be followed, observing the decisions made  
by the local Bishop.



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

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

### EXAMPLE OF A SHIFT

After exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, there is a moment of silence, followed by the musical group leading a song.

This is followed by a reading from scripture:

Let us listen to the Words of the Lord from the Gospel of Matthew

At that time Peter approached Jesus and said to him:

"Lord, if my brother commits sins against me, how many times shall I forgive him? Up to seven times?" And Jesus answered him, "I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. He had begun to settle his account when he was presented with a man who owed him ten thousand talents. When he was not able to repay, his master ordered him to be sold, together with his wife, children and all his possessions, and thus to pay off the debt. Then the servant lay prostrate on the ground and begged him, saying, "Be patient with me and I will pay you back everything. The master took pity on the servant, let him go, and forgave him his debt.

As soon as the servant left, he found one of his companions who owed him a hundred dinars. He took him by the neck and choked him, saying, "Pay back what you owe!" His companion, prostrate on the ground, begged him, saying, "Be patient with me and I will pay you back." But he would not, and went and had him thrown into prison until he had paid his debt.

Seeing this, his companions were very sorry and went and told their master all that had happened. Then the master summoned the man and said to him, "Wicked servant, I have forgiven you all that debt because you begged me. Shouldn't you have pitied your companion, as I have pitied you?" Disdainful, the master gave him into the hands of his tormentors until he had repaid all that he owed.

And so my heavenly Father will do the same to you if you do not forgive from the heart, each one to his brother."

**Time of silence.**

## TESTIMONY/MEDITATION

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

### **Sermon 83, St. Augustine**

So he put forward this parable for our instruction, and by warning us he wanted to save us from destruction. So also, he said, will your heavenly Father do to you, if you do not each one of you forgive your brother from your hearts. There you are brothers and sisters, the matter's plain, the warning is timely and useful; and it is a very salutary obedience we are obliged to, in order to carry out what we have been commanded. We are all, I mean to say, God's debtors, and we all have brothers and sisters in debt to us. Who, I ask you, could there be who is not in debt to God, except the one in whom no sin can be found? And on the other hand who could there be who doesn't have a brother in his debt, but someone whom nobody has sinned against? Do you really imagine anyone could be found in the whole human race who is not under obligation to a brother for sinning against him?

So then, everyone is a debtor, and yet also has someone else in debt to him. That's why the just God has set up a rule for you in dealing with your debtor, which he too will follow in dealing with his. You see, there are two works of mercy which set us free, which the Lord himself set before us briefly in the gospel: Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give and it will be given you. Forgive, and you will be forgiven refers to granting pardon; give, and it will be given you refers to doing a good turn. What he says about pardoning: you want your sinning to be pardoned, and you have someone you can pardon yourself. Again, as regards doing a good turn: a beggar asks you for one, and you are God's beggar. I mean, we are all God's beggars when we pray. We stand in front of the great householder's gate, in fact we go so far as to prostrate ourselves, we whine and implore, wanting to receive something; and that something is God himself. What does the beggar ask you for? Bread. And you, what do you ask God for, if not Christ, who says, I am the living bread who came down from heaven? Do you want to be pardoned? Pardon. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Do you want to receive something? Give, and it will be given you.

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

An intercessory prayer can now be said by the whole assembly

## PRAYER TO THE BLESSED MOTHER

To you, Mary, source of life,  
my thirsty soul draws near.  
To you, treasure of mercy,  
my misery turns with confidence.  
How close, indeed intimate, you are to the Lord!  
He dwells in you and you in him.  
In your light, I can contemplate  
the light of Jesus, the sun of justice.  
Holy Mother of God, I trust  
in your most tender and purest affection.  
Be for me the mediatrix of grace  
with Jesus, our Saviour.  
He loved you above all creatures,  
and has clothed you with glory and beauty.  
Come to the aid of me, who am poor  
and let me draw from your amphora  
overflowing with grace.

St. Bernard of Chiaravalle

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

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

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

*Other scriptural passages that could also be used:* Lk 24:13-34 (two disciples on the road to Emmaus); Psalm 51 (psalm of repentance); Mt 5:43-48 (love towards enemies).

*As an alternative, Lectio Divina could be celebrated either individually or as a community. The following is suggested:*

**Lectio Divina 2 Cor 5:17-21 (Second Reading of the IV Sunday of Lent)**

Rev. Omar Lopez Garcia

## 1. Lectio (What does the text say?)

Pope Benedict XVI, in a Catechesis dedicated to *Origen of Alexandria*, invited us to follow the method proposed by this eminent *Church Father* in his "Letter to Gregory" to approach and understand *Sacred Scripture*: «Devote yourself to '*lectio*' of the divine Scriptures; apply yourself to this with perseverance. Engage in *lectio* with the intention of believing and pleasing God. If during *lectio* you find yourself in front of a closed door, knock and the door will be opened by the guardian of whom Jesus said, 'The guardian will open it for you. Applying yourself in this way to '*lectio divina*', seek with loyalty and unshakable trust in God *the meaning* of the divine Scriptures, which is hidden in them with great breadth (*Letter to Gregory*, 4)». (*General Audience*, St Peter's Square, 2 May 2007).

### Statio: Preparing to listen

God always speaks to mankind, but in order to listen to him we must not only have our ears open, but above all our hearts. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to open our whole being to welcome the *divine word*:

Shining light, You, who illuminate the darkness of my heart in an incomprehensible way, touch the innermost part of my being and bring me to new life through the fire of your love.

I abandon myself completely to you, who created everything from nothing, lead me in total freedom and wrap me in the fire of your love.

River of life, You, who flow from the heart of the Son, at the end of this life, awaken me from the sleep of death to experience eternally the fire of your love.

Heavenly Advocate, You, who know my innermost soul, grant me wisdom from on high to recognise my sins and purify me from them with the fire of your love.

Gentle Master, You, who shape our will, teach me to be docile to divine inspiration so that, meditating on the divine word, the fire of love may be enkindled in me. Amen.

### Proclamatio: 2 Cor 5:17-21

«So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God».

### Prayerful reading

It would be good to *reread* the text slowly, paying attention to certain details in order to approach the *first dimension* of Scripture: the "literal" one so as to "know exactly what is written" (Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, St Peter's Square, 25 April 2007).

This text is part of the Pauline writings written between 54 and 57 A.D., probably in Macedonia, addressed to the Church of Corinth, which at that time was facing the threat of "division", which caused great suffering to the Apostle, who wrote to the members of this community on at least two occasions, "so that you may know the love I have for you" (2 Cor 2:4), inviting them to preserve "communion". How? Through "reconciliation".

Now, in the text, in different ways, he emphasizes what can be considered a consequence of "belonging to Christ", then what refers to "reconciliation with God through Christ", then what refers to the Christians' commitment to "reconciliation" and, finally, the Apostle's "command" to the community.

Subsequently, for a better understanding of the concept of "reconciliation" it is worth referring to related texts in St. Paul's Epistles themselves, looking at the "type of reconciliation" alluded to in the passage, who is involved, who takes the initiative, what are the consequences, for example: Rom 5:1-11; Eph 2:13-18; Col 1:18-23.

## 2. Meditatio (What does the text say to me?)

Now, we are invited to approach the second dimension of Scripture, the "moral" one, with the aim of discovering «what we must do to live the word» (Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, St Peter's Square, 25 April 2007).

At the heart of this text is the *kerygma*, that *proclamation* that is worth listening to repeatedly because it fills the human heart with joy and gives new meaning to our lives: God has loved us in Christ without deserving it and, consequently, we are called to respond to that love that always goes before us and sustains us (cf. Francis, *Message for Lent 2020*, 7 October 2019, no. 2).

However, we do not always respond to this love. Unfortunately, countless acts that engender *division and confrontation*, both within society and within the Church, manifest this. They are the consequence of an abuse in the exercise of freedom or an excessive pursuit of one's own interests to the detriment of the common good (cf. Gen 3:1-13; 4:3-10; Ex 32:1-10; 2 Kgs 11:2-17; Dan 5:1-30).

Despite our lack of faithfulness and love for God and a disproportionate reliance on our own abilities and resources, He never ceases to be merciful and ready to forgive because «He knows well of what we are made, He remembers that we are dust» (Ps 103:14), that we are fragile. It is enough to recall the way he dealt with Cain, David, Solomon or with the people of Israel themselves, whom he absolved of their sins, moved only by the greatness of His love, because «he does not treat us according to our sins or repay us according to our faults» (Ps 103:10).

Jesus expresses this truth in an extraordinary way in the parable of the merciful Father (Lk 15: 1-3; 11-32). In it he reveals to us that God is that «Father» who awaits the return of the «younger son», and when this happens, in his compassion, «he threw himself on his neck and kissed him» (Lk 15: 20). There is no reproach, only understanding, because just as «a father is tender toward his children, so the Lord is tender toward those who fear him» (Ps 103:13). In spite of the father's attitude, the «elder son» takes on the role of judge and holds the father in contempt for his behaviour in the face of the faults of his «younger brother».

As St. Paul states in 2 Cor 5:17, Christ to whom we belong through baptism, has transformed us by the action of the Holy Spirit into «new creatures», that is, into «his brothers» and «sons of God» his father. This has generated a «new relationship» of believers with God (with each of the divine persons) and with each other. And unlike the rebukes of the «eldest son» in the parable, Jesus



intervenes favourably: «he died for all» (2 Cor 5:15) for the sake of all (2 Cor 5:15) to reconcile the whole of humanity with God - his father and our father - «not counting their trespasses against them» (2 Cor 5:19).

This act has a twofold consequence. On the one hand, the Church has been entrusted with the «ministry of reconciliation» (2 Cor 5:18), which it exercises through its priests, who have «received the gift of the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins» and are called to «welcome the faithful like the father in the parable of the prodigal son», without asking «impertinent questions», being «always, everywhere, in every situation and despite everything, the sign of the primacy of mercy» (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 17). On the other hand, the Christian community has the mission of proclaiming «the message of reconciliation» (2 Cor 5:19) because «forgiveness of offences becomes the most obvious expression of merciful love and for us Christians it is an imperative that we cannot ignore. How difficult it often seems to forgive! And yet, forgiveness is the instrument placed in our fragile hands to achieve serenity of heart. Dropping resentment, anger, violence and revenge are necessary conditions for living happily» (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 9).

Therefore, let us allow ourselves to be challenged by the Apostle this Lent and «in the name of Christ, let us be reconciled to God» (cf. 2 Cor 5:20).

### 3. Oratio et contemplatio (What does the text suggest that I say to the Lord?)

At this time, we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us into the *third dimension* of Scripture: the «spiritual» one, which «enables us to understand the Christological content» of the *divine word*, as well as «the *meaning* of the mysteries, on which the souls of the saints are nourished in the present and future life" (Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, St Peter's Square, 25 April 2007).

God's way of acting is disconcerting and dramatic at the same time, as the Apostle perceives it: «For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God». (2 Cor 5:21). He does not follow human logic, but «in Jesus Christ, God himself pursues suffering and lost humanity. When Jesus speaks of the Father going out to meet the prodigal son and embracing him, these are not just words, but constitute the explanation of his very being and activity. His death on the Cross is the fulfilment of God's turning against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him - this is love in its most radical form» (Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 12).

How do we respond to this love? By acknowledging our frailties but, above all, by recognizing God's merciful love, manifested in Jesus Christ, his Son, who died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. From the depths of our hearts, we turn to Him with the words of *Psalms* 51:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.

You desire truth in the inward being; therefore, teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

In silence let the psalmist's expressions continue to resonate within us so that our lips rejoice in endless praise to God our Saviour.

#### **4. Deliberatio et actio (What does the text commit me to do?)**

The **24 Hours for the Lord** event is a *time of grace* that the Church offers us to experience anew God's merciful love through the *Sacrament of Reconciliation*, especially when we are aware that our *communion has been broken* with God and with our brothers and sisters because of sin.

Echoing the Apostle's exhortation, «we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God» (2 Cor 5:20), take the opportunity to confess. Follow Pope Francis' advice, «Keep your eyes fixed on the outstretched arms of Christ crucified, let yourself be saved over and over again. And when you go to confess your sins, believe firmly in his mercy which frees you of your guilt. Contemplate his blood poured out with such great love, and let yourself be cleansed by it. In this way, you can be reborn ever anew» (*Christus vivit*, 123).