

24 HOURS FOR THE LORD
20-21 March 2020
Your sins are forgiven (Lk 7:48)
Pastoral resource

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Introductory notes

*This resource is intended to offer some suggestions to parishes and Christian communities to prepare for the **24-hours for the Lord** initiative. Obviously, these are suggestions that can be adapted according to local needs and customs.*

On Friday evening March 20th and during the entire day of Saturday March 21st, it would be good to have the church open, offering the opportunity for Confessions, preferably in the context of a guided **Eucharistic Adoration**. The event could begin on Friday evening with a Liturgy of the Word to prepare the faithful for Confession, and end 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 conscious way. They may also help overcome any resistance that often blocks one from going to confession. A testimony is given that tells of a personal conversion: this helps to reflect 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.*

CONFESSION

“There are two wings with which to fly to Heaven; they are confession and communion.”

St. John Bosco, 1422

«It is called the *sacrament of forgiveness*, since by the priest's sacramental absolution God grants the penitent “pardon and peace” »

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1424

Why should I go to confession?

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a Sacrament of healing. When I go to confession, it is in order to be healed, to heal my soul, to heal my heart and to be healed of some wrongdoing. The biblical icon which best expresses them in their deep bond is the episode of the forgiving and healing of the paralytic, where the Lord Jesus is revealed at the same time as the physician of souls and of bodies (cf. Mk 2:1-12; Mt 9:1-8; Lk 5:17-26).

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

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

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

it aloud, everyone respond in his heart: when was the last time you made your confession? Everyone think about it ... Two days, two weeks, two years, twenty years, forty years? Everyone count, everyone say 'when was the last time I went to confession?'. And if much time has passed, do not lose another day. Go, the priest will be good. Jesus is there, and Jesus is more benevolent than priests, Jesus receives you, he receives you with so much love. Be courageous and go to Confession!

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

Pope Francis, *General audience*, Wednesday, February 19, 2014

Testimony of Beatrice Fazi (excerpts)

I started out really badly. I did not think I was able to become a mother and bride, I who was proud to put myself in the footsteps of Christ. I was born into a Catholic family who educated me in the sacraments. At a certain point I let myself be taken by the catechesis of the world that tore my family's tent apart. After 21 years my parents decided to separate. And among us three children a terrible worm crept in: to have been born by mistake. I began not to believe anymore what I had been taught. And so I started thinking about becoming someone because I wanted that place that had been taken away due to my parents' separation and I started making room in the world to become famous. We want to be happy and to be loved. But my search for happiness started in the wrong places.

After high school I left Salerno for Rome and at 20 I had an abortion. I was in love with a man who was twice my age. I jumped in and made this mistake. The people who were near me said: it's just a lump of cells. And so I decided to abort. The catechism of the world is very strong and will convince you. Evil comes as the best choice and common sense; he knows how to disguise himself; he knows how to cheat you. And I lived by common sense for years. But then at a certain point I was filled with emptiness.

At one point, by chance, or rather by "God effect", when, I had experienced emptiness and this lack of meaning, by chance while travelling around Rome I went into a church and sat down tired in the back row. I was there to rest a little rest when I started looking around. There were people praying and my eyes settled on the consecrated host on the altar. At that moment something strange happened: I felt accepted, loved. That bread that I had considered up to then as unleavened made me feel the love of God. I heard Jesus say to me "I love you". I started crying like a fountain before that host. Then, I left that church and tried not to listen because I thought I was not worthy of God bending over me. I didn't deserve God's love. And this is the first sin to confess. It took some time before I accepted that love.

My life resumed normally until August 2000. It was the days of World Youth Day and I was on a motorbike with the man who would later become my husband. At a traffic light on the streets of Rome we met a crowd of papa boys. And at that moment in the eyes of one of those boys I saw that light that I had seen in the host. Again I started to cry. In that boy's eyes was that light, that joy that I was looking for but hadn't found. That hidden treasure. I was envious of that joy. Then things came together. Meeting a friend of mine from the university who had invited me to a catechesis on the 10 commandments, I set foot in a church. In the meantime, I was pregnant with Maria Lucia, who is now 13 years old. So I asked my friend to make an appointment with the priest who held these catecheses, almost out of superstition. I thought that God would punish me for the abortion I had had at the age of 20 for the baby to whom I should have given birth. I went to confession for the first time after many years. I understood that I was unhappy because I had driven God out of my life. I thought I had wisdom; I was the god of my life. Finally I started to beg for that joy that I couldn't find. In that confession I found mercy. The secret to being happy is to ask God for a new heart. My life was changed. I who started from different assumptions, I who had become a Buddhist with an atheist companion, separated, an abortion on my shoulders became a Christian wife. I am a mother of four. If you give him a chance, God will make you a masterpiece. I am happy because I

am Pierpaolo's wife and the mother of Maria Lucia, Fabio, Giovanni and Maddalena. I am happy because I pray lauds with my husband, say the rosary with my children. The family is the place where I feel fulfilled as an artist. God makes us superheroes. I have seen my husband do incredible things. The sanctifying grace of marriage is a very powerful means. The family is a place of hope, a support. The Christian family is fantastic stuff. I can tell you about these 15 years of union with Pierpaolo as an extraordinary thing. Pray together, say a rosary together, if you are tired: pray. If you pray, stay united, and the miracle will come true.

N.B. On several occasions Beatrice Fazi has given the testimony of her conversion. That reported above (and considered the most appropriate for the purposes of this pastoral resource) is a transcription taken from a meeting with young people at the Sanctuary of San Gabriele on August 20, 2015. The complete testimony can be found in the following book: Beatrice Fazi, *A new heart. From the evil of living to the joy of faith.*

How can I prepare for confession?

Each believer knows in his heart the obstacles that can arise in approaching the sacrament of penance. Due to the evil one, human feelings such as pride and shame come into play. Often, we must not forget it, even distrust both towards the sacrament itself and towards one's ability to say in the traditional words, "to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin".

For centuries the Church has had useful schemes for an examination of conscience that have highlighted the various types of sin, often related to the Ten Commandments or with the paradigms of virtue that have been handed down by the Church's moral tradition. Before even dealing with the individual sins that bother the conscience, it would be helpful for the penitent to meditate on the nature of sin and why it must be promptly remedied.

Nothing can shed more light on the nature of sin than to put it before its exact opposite: the love of God. The Word of God manifests this love in many expressions, but reveals its highest manifestation in the cross of Christ. Here the Son of God offers himself, in full obedience to the mission he received from the Father, as a victim of expiation for our sins. It is the passion of Christ in fact, with the individual elements that make up its dynamic - betrayal for money or for sheer advantage, lies, mockery, senseless and continuous violence - which paradoxically reveal the nature of sin that destroys.

The blood of Christ shed on the cross out of love is not simply the real price of our ransom, but also the most precise and most personalized measure of our sin. This is why, before approaching the sacrament, we would do well to meditate above all on the passion of Jesus as recounted in the Gospels. It is not enough, however, to read the story of the Passion; we must put ourselves in the story with the problems of our personal lives to see how we measure ourselves with the others and, above all, with the Lord Jesus who offers himself for us. In this way, our hearts will be opened and we will realize that the last word on us belongs neither to sin nor to the evil one, but to the mercy of the Father revealed in Jesus Christ, who gave himself totally for us.

How do I go to confession?

When you enter the confessional, the priest warmly welcomes you, addressing you with words of encouragement. He makes the merciful Lord present.

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

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

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

**The Lord Jesus who came to call and save sinners
welcomes you with kindness.**

Trust in him.

The priest, as is appropriate, reads or says from memory some text from Sacred Scripture, which speaks of God's mercy and His invitation to man to repent.

Mk 1:14-15

**Now after John was arrested,
Jesus came into Galilee,
preaching the gospel of God, and saying,
“The time is fulfilled,
and the kingdom of God is at hand;
repent, and believe in the gospel.”**

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

**Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me. (Ps 51:2-3)**

The priest extends his hands (or at least his right hand) over the penitent's 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.**

The penitent answers: Amen.

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

Response: His mercy endures forever.

Then the priest dismisses the penitent who has been reconciled, saying:

The Lord has freed you from your sins. Go in peace.

Prayer of the Penitent

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended You. I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of Heaven and the pains of hell. But most of all because they offend You, my God, Who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Your grace to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin. Amen.

Or

I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend with your help to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Saviour Jesus Christ suffered and died for us, in his name, my God, have mercy.

What do I do after confession?

« The ingredients for a happy life are called the *beatitudes*: blessed are the simple, the humble who make room for God, who are able to weep for others and for their own mistakes, who remain meek, fight for justice, are merciful to all, safeguard purity of heart, always work for peace and abide in joy, do not hate and, even when suffering, respond to evil with good. These are the Beatitudes. They do not require conspicuous gestures; they are not for supermen, but for those who live the trials and toils of every day, for us.»

Pope Francis, *Angelus*, November 1, 2017

«If I did something in my life, it is because I was never ashamed to talk about God»

Dorothy Day

At the dawn of the new century, Dorothy was born on November 8, 1897 in Brooklyn. Her father, John Day, was of Irish origin, while her mother, Grace Satterlee, was the descendent of English emigrants. Dorothy's parents were married in the Episcopal Church, but rarely participated. John was a journalist and from 1904 the entire family lived in San Francisco where he worked as a sports correspondent. An earthquake devastated San Francisco in 1906. The headquarters of the journal where John worked were destroyed and the Day family moved to Chicago, in search of a better future.

As a young girl, Dorothy read many books, often also the Bible. When the rector of the nearby Protestant community managed to convince her mother to enrol her brothers in the choir, she herself began to attend catechism and willingly participated in the liturgical life of the community. Hence her inspirations for the future began there:

“As a child, I was thrilled with anything I read about the saints. I could see the greatness of giving life to the sick, the maimed, to lepers. Priests and nuns from around the world could work for the little ones of Christ, and my heart was touched because of their work. But there was another question in my mind. Why has so much been done to remediate evil, instead of avoiding it earlier when it is still possible? ... Where were the saints who were trying to change the social fabric? Where were those who were not only willing to serve the slaves but to eliminate slavery?”

In 1914 Dorothy finished high school and thanks to a scholarship she began to study at the University of Illinois-Urbain-Champaign. World War I was raging in the world; various social and economic ideas were spreading throughout the industrial society. After two years Dorothy left the university and moved to New York, where she rushed into various activities against the war and in favour of the poor.

“I wanted to go with the protestors, go to prison, write, influence others and leave my dreams to the world. How much ambition and how much searching for myself in all this! But her thoughts were still unclear. “I was only eighteen years old and I could not decide between my loyalty to socialism, to trade unionism (the Industrial Workers of the World = I.W.W.) or to anarchism. When I was reading Tolstoy I was an anarchist. My loyalty to The Call [then the only socialist newspaper in New York] kept me a socialist, ... and my Americanism led me to the I.W.W. movement”.

The February revolution of 1917 in Russia was seen worldwide as the wake-up call for the working class. A few months later Dorothy was arrested for a silent protest at the White House, organized by a group of women suffragists belonging to the National Women’s Party. Day was beaten when the police officers intervened, and was sentenced to 30 days in prison. After 15 days she was released (10 of which she was on a hunger strike).

Since her youth, Day led a rather bohemian life. She became a colleague and friend of several social activists and prominent communists. She fell in love with Lionel Moise, but when she became pregnant, she decided to have an abortion. This decision will mark her for life. In February 1921, she civilly married Berkeley Tobey, mischievous and convivial, with whom she travelled in Europe. After returning from the trip she moved to Staten Island, where she began living with Forster Batterham, a social activist and biologist. Dorothy felt loved, happy and accepted by Forster. One day, to her surprise, because she thought she was sterile after her abortion, she discovered she was pregnant.

Nine months later, in the first weeks of 1926 her daughter Tamar Theresa was born. Her birth was the turning point in her faith. “No human being can receive or contain a flood so strong with love and joy as the one I have often experienced since the birth of my daughter; the need to praise, to worship came from there”. That desire led her to search for a deeper meaning: “I didn't want my daughter to struggle and stumble through life like I had often struggled and stumbled. I wanted to believe and I wanted my daughter to believe and belong to a Church that could offer her such an inestimable grace as faith in God and the loving company of the saints; so, the thing to do was to baptize her as a Catholic.

In March of 1926, Day met Sister Aloysia who helped her prepare for the first sacrament of her daughter. Tamar Theresa was baptized in 1927, before her mother was baptized. Dorothy, instead, waited until December 28, 1927 to be baptized. In the meantime, she paid the price for her decision. “Becoming a Catholic meant saying goodbye to a partner I loved very much. I clarified my ideas by asking myself the simplest question: choose God or a man? I chose God and lost Forster. I was baptized on the feast day of the Holy Innocents, December 28, 1927. It was something I had to do. I was tired of following the turmoil and the desires of my heart, of always doing what I wanted or what my desires led me to do, with the constant impression of ending up astray. The cost of all this was the loss of the man I loved, but I gained my salvation and that of my daughter.”

A period of life began in which Dorothy was looking for how to respond to her deepest vocation. She worked in Los Angeles in the field of cinema, wrote articles, protested in defence of the poorest. At the end of 1932, following a demonstration of unemployed people in Washington, she went into the nearby Church of the Immaculate Conception. She prayed spontaneously that “a path would open for me, to use the talents I possess for my fellow workers and for the poor”. And

then she added: “I want to make a synthesis that reconciles the body and the soul, this world and the next one [that is to come]”.

A short time later she met Peter Maurin: a French emigrant, a man without formal education, but a deep thinker with a sense of social justice. Peter was fascinated by St. Francis of Assisi, read the Church Fathers and the writings of Pope Leo XIII. His theological scholarship offered a great contribution to Dorothy's religious progress. Thus was born their first work: the monthly magazine *The Catholic Worker*. The first issue came out exactly on May 1, 1933, addressing social issues in the light of the Gospel. A group of friends and collaborators gathered around the magazine, and together they founded *The Catholic Worker Movement*.

The couple did not stop with only propagating ideas, but immediately went on to carrying out works of mercy. They founded the “hospitality houses” that welcome the most needy, living with them. It was a concrete response to the Great Depression in which the United States was immersed at that time. Dorothy was aware that it was not enough to only distribute bread to the poor – it was necessary to rethink the present society, too middle-class and focused only on itself.

Day also knew how to combine activism with healthy progress in religious life. It approaches the spirituality of St. Benedict. She became an oblate in the Abbey of St. Procopius in Lisle - Illinois, in 1955, describing the activity of the monks and nuns as follows: “they certainly follow Christ in poverty, in hard work. Even the nuns make us ashamed. I especially love those foreign sisters who work in kitchens and laundries, who devote their youth and beauty to Christ, their Spouse, thus becoming completely happy”.

She spent her life against war and social injustice, but was always motivated by a much deeper call. “We are all called to be saints ... and we could also overcome our bourgeois fear of this name. We might even get used to recognizing the fact that there is something holy in each of us. To the extent that we are growing up, sending back the old man and putting on Christ, there is something holy, divine, right there”.

On November 28, 1980 Dorothy suffered a heart attack and left this world. At the request of Cardinal John J. O’Connor, in March 2000 Pope John Paul II gave permission to the Archdiocese of New York to open the proceedings for canonization, granting Dorothy May Day the title “Servant of God”.

VIGIL

«Before any activity, before the world can change there must be worship. Worship alone sets us truly free; worship alone gives us the criteria for our action. Precisely in a world in which guiding criteria are absent and the threat exists that each person will be a law unto himself, it is fundamentally necessary to stress worship. »

Benedict XVI, Address to the Roman Curia, December 22, 2005

Introduction

The Vigil that will take place during the “**24 hours for the Lord**” initiative plays a key role because it characterizes the entire event. It is desirable that the Vigil be carried out with the Blessed Sacrament exposed, while one or more priests be available to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

This Vigil is inspired by the words that Jesus spoke to a sinful woman: “Your sins are forgiven”, highlighting the inseparable link between love and forgiveness. The entire passage, where the evangelist Luke describes the encounter of Jesus in the house of a Pharisee, can be interpreted spiritually in various ways. We will focus on three aspects: the first emphasizes the love and dedication that a man gives to those who forgive him; the second demonstrates a certain logic: the more one forgives, the more one loves, and by loving more, one is able to forgive more and more; the third shows us that sins are not always told in words, but sometimes only a few gestures are needed - tears, kneeling.

The “24 hours for the Lord” event is closely linked to the liturgical season: namely, the Fourth Sunday of Lent. The joy celebrated during this Sunday formerly called “Laetare”, stems from personal conversion, reconciliation with God and the grace received in the Sacrament of Forgiveness. The Sunday readings (1 Sam 16: 1-4, 6-7, 10-13; Ps 22; Eph 5: 8-14; Jn 9: 1-41) show, among other things, how God chooses and how he heals. We note that recognizing and healing, according to Divine criteria, is a process that lasts over time, and it is not always easy to discern its stages, as is also the thought of God who acts in human history. The initiative was precisely planned in the days preceding the fourth Sunday of Lent, to give the faithful the opportunity to free themselves from sins, thus preparing them for Easter, so close at hand.

In carrying out the *24 hours for the Lord*, it would be good to emphasize the topics indicated above. However, the carrying out of the vigil and the choice of biblical themes and passages is always left to the discretion of the pastors and the organizers of the event who, in the various parts of the world, know the needs of the faithful entrusted to their pastoral care.

From what has been done in previous years, the initiative usually takes place in three ways:

1. In small communities such as hospitals or parishes/rectories with relatively few numbers of faithful.

In this case the whole initiative often takes place on Friday evening. The event could begin with the penitential service, then exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, and Eucharistic adoration in silence or animated by a prayer group (according to the possibilities and needs of the community), inviting everyone to sacramental reconciliation with God.

2. In larger parishes (primarily in urban areas), in prefectures (and/or vicariates/deaneries) or in places where it is decided to organize the event in multiple parishes/communities.

It would be appropriate to start on Friday evening with Holy Mass or with the Liturgy of the Word. Subsequently the Blessed Sacrament is exposed and Eucharistic Adoration begins animated by different parish groups or by various parishes.

Those responsible for organizing the program of the entire adoration and its duration, should also ensure shifts so that all the faithful can go to confession.

3. In cathedrals, basilicas, sanctuaries, or in parishes and places of worship most significant for the local Church and carefully chosen by the Ordinary or by those responsible.

The event should be organized in a more solemn way, emphasizing the universality of the Church which celebrates this simultaneously throughout the world.

The church should remain open even at night, with Eucharistic Adoration animated in shifts by various prayer groups and different communities.

It is desirable that the Ordinary and Bishops be present at least at the beginning and end of the event, and also be available for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The consistent presence of one or more priests ready to hear confessions should be assured.

Also if possible, a group of specially trained and prepared faithful could invite people passing by the church to come in and take part in the event (especially churches in the city centre, in the historical and touristic centres, in places of large flows of people, etc.). A simple invitation, a welcoming word, an explanation of the event are often enough to open a much more serious conversation, becoming a real moment of evangelization. Not infrequently the lay faithful, especially among those who systematically receive formation in various communities and prayer groups, can carry out a very valuable service in preparation for confession, talking with people who have not come to church for a long time and may find themselves uncomfortable in the direct and immediate presence of the priest.

In planning the Vigil, songs could be chosen for the particular needs of a specific community (parish, hospital chapel, monastery, rectory, sanctuary, etc.). To deepen the recurring themes in the proposed biblical texts, it is suggested that a meditation be prepared or to choose some testimonies, according to the needs and possibilities of the community itself.

BEGINNING OF THE VIGIL
SUGGESTION FOR THE PENITENTIAL SERVICE

While the priest and the ministers go to the sanctuary, the congregation sings a hymn or another suitable song.

GREETING AND ADMONITION

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

R: Amen.

C: Mercy and peace be with all of you.

R: And with your spirit.

C: Brothers and sisters, this evening our merciful God wants to say to each one of us: “Your sins are forgiven”. It depends totally on us, if we are able to bow down before him, to wash his feet with our tears, which arise from a contrite heart that seeks true love. In our hearts we want to bring to God those who are far from him, so that in the coming hours, dedicated to reconciliation in a particular way, throughout the whole Church, they can find courage and present themselves to the throne of Mercy.

All gather for some time in silent prayer.

C: O God, who never tires of being merciful, give us a penitent and faithful heart that knows how to return your Fatherly love, so that we can spread the Gospel message of reconciliation and peace along the roads of the world. Through our Lord Jesus Christ ...

LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading 1 Tm 1:1,6-11

From the second letter of Saint Paul the apostle to Timothy

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control. Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but take your share of suffering for the gospel in the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy

calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago, and now has manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher.

L: The Word of God

R: Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm (from Psalm 32)

R: *Lord, take away my guilt and my sin*

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

I acknowledged my sin to thee,
and I did not hide my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord";
then thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin.

Thou art a hiding place for me,
thou preservest me from trouble;
thou dost encompass me with deliverance.
Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

Gospel acclamation (cfr. [Jn 4:10](#))

Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

God loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins.

Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

Gospel

C: The Lord be with you.

R: And with your spirit.

C: From the Gospel according to Luke

(7:36-50)

R: Glory to you O Lord.

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat at table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was sitting at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "What is it, Teacher?" "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace!"

C: The Word of the Lord

R: Praise be to you, O Christ

Homily

GENERAL CONFESSION OF SINS

After a brief pause for reflection following the homily, the celebrant says:

C: On the day we celebrate Christ's victory over sin and death, we too are called to die to sin in order to rise to new life. Let us recognize ourselves in need of the Father's mercy.

C: I confess to almighty God

R: and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly 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 blessed Mary, ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

C: God Almighty have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and lead us to life everlasting.

R: Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Everyone stands

C: Now, in obedience to Christ himself, let us join in prayer to the Father, asking him to forgive us as we forgive others.

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 evil.

SIGN OF PEACE

C: Dear friends, confident in the words of Jesus, with a heart willing to receive the grace of forgiveness, let us exchange a sign of peace.

Everyone exchanges a sign of peace.

EXPOSITION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament follows, as usual and with animated Eucharistic Adoration which will last until the end of the "24 hours for the Lord" initiative.

Individual confessions and absolution follow.

At the end of the Vigil the solemn blessing is given with the Blessed Sacrament. In some places, especially where the "24 hours for the Lord" is carried out with solemnity, the initiative can be

concluded on Saturday evening with the celebration of the evening Mass for the IV Sunday of Lent or with First Vespers.

CARRYING OUT OF THE VIGIL

The present text is a proposal that can be concretised and adapted according to local traditions.

In view of the duration of the vigil, the number of participants, the organizational possibilities and other factors, animation of Eucharistic Adoration could take place in shifts, with a change of theme every hour.

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

OUTLINE OF A SHIFT

After exposing the Blessed Sacrament, a brief period of silence follows, after which, the musical group sings. This is followed by reading the biblical passage:

Listen to the words of the Gospel of John (9:1-41)

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him. We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” As he said this, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man’s eyes with the clay, saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing. The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar, said, “Is not this the man who used to sit and beg?” 9 Some said, “It is he”; others said, “No, but he is like him.” He said, “I am the man.” They said to him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” He answered, “The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash’; so I went and washed and received my sight.” They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. The Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, “He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” There was a division among them. So they again said to

the blind man, “What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.”

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

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, “Give God the praise; we know that this man is a sinner.” He answered, “Whether he is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see.” They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you too want to become his disciples?” And they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” The man answered, “Why, this is a marvel! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if any one is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” They answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of man?” He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you.” He said, “Lord, I believe”; and he worshiped him. Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.” Some of the Pharisees near him heard this, and they said to him, “Are we also blind?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains”.

Time of silence

TESTIMONY/MEDITATION

A testimony of conversion is then suggested. This testimony could be given by a person eager to share how the Lord touched his/her heart with the grace of forgiveness, or a testimony could be read (for example: in the present resource the testimony of Beatrice Fazi). If a testimony is not possible, a meditative text could be used, such as:

From Homily 44 (1-2) “Healing of a man born blind” by Saint Augustine

Healing of the blind man is very significant. The man born blind represents mankind, who was stricken by blindness in the first man when he sinned. Just as blindness originated from infidelity, so enlightenment arises from faith.

We have just read the long lesson of the man born blind, whom the Lord Jesus restored to the light; but were we to attempt handling the whole of it, and considering, according to our ability, each passage in a way proportionate to its worth, the day would be insufficient. Wherefore I ask and warn your Charity not to require any words of ours on those passages whose meaning is manifest; for it would be too protracted to linger at each. I proceed, therefore, to set forth briefly the mystery of this blind man’s enlightenment. All, certainly, that was done by our Lord Jesus Christ, both works and words, are worthy of our astonishment and admiration: His works, because they are facts; His words, because they are signs. If we reflect, then, on what is signified by the deed here done, that blind man is the human race; for this blindness had place in the first man, through sin, from whom we all draw our origin, not only in respect of death, but also of unrighteousness. For if unbelief is blindness, and faith enlightenment, whom did Christ find a believer at His coming? Seeing that the apostle, belonging himself to the family of the prophets, says: And we also in times past were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. Ephesians 2:3 If children of wrath, then children of vengeance, children of punishment, children of hell. For how is it by nature, save that through the first man sinning moral evil rooted itself in us as a nature? If evil has so taken root within us, every man is born mentally blind. For if he sees, he has no need of a guide. If he does need one to guide and enlighten him, then is he blind from his birth.

The Lord came: what did He do? He set forth a great mystery. He spat on the ground, He made clay of His spittle; for the Word was made flesh. And He anointed the eyes of the blind man. The anointing had taken place, and yet he saw not. He sent him to the pool which is called Siloam. But it was the evangelist’s concern to call our attention to the name of this pool; and he adds, which is interpreted, Sent. You understand now who it is that was sent; for had He not been sent, none of us

would have been set free from iniquity. Accordingly he washed his eyes in that pool which is interpreted, Sent—he was baptized in Christ.

After the testimony/meditation a song is sung followed by silent prayer.

Intercessory prayers by the whole assembly follow.

PRAYER FOR THE INTERCESSION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Holy Mary,
Virgin of silence and mysterious peace:
sorrowful strong faithful,
waiting at the sepulchre,
where the Word is silent and the Holy One of God lies.
Vigilantly waiting
for darkness to give way to light,
for life to sprout from the earth.
Waiting for the dawn of day where the sun never sets,
the hour of birth of a new humanity.
Waiting to see in the risen Son
the new face of redeemed man,
to hear the new greeting of peace,
to sing the new song of glory.
Virgin of the Spirit, icon of the Church,
we implore your faith in the Word for us,
your hope in the Kingdom,
your love for God and for man.
To you, glorious Mother of God,
blessed by faith,
woman of immense compassion,
our perennial and grateful praise. Amen.

(Saint John Paul II, *Way of the Cross*, Good Friday, 1991)

A song is then sung followed by silent prayer until the end of the prayer shift.

Depending on the duration of the entire vigil, this sequence can be repeated, changing biblical passages and songs, and alternating testimonies, meditations and prayers.

Being in the liturgical season of Lent, it would be desirable to also include the Way of the Cross. Praying of the Holy Rosary and/or the Chaplet of Divine Mercy could also be done.

Some biblical passages that could be used in other shifts of the vigil: Psalm 32 (Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.); Mt 18:23-35 (Parable of the unforgiving servant); Col 3, 12-17 (forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you).

As an alternative, both for individual study as well as for community celebration, *Lectio divina* could be planned. A suggestion follows.

Lectio Divina

The Word of God ...

... is listened to

Let us listen to the Word according to the Second Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians (5:8-14)

For once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret; but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it is said,

«Awake, O sleeper,

and arise from the dead,

and Christ shall give you light.»

... is meditated on

The *Letter to the Ephesians*, as well as that *to the Colossians*, is made up of two parts. The first chapters announce salvation, that God has made us believers his gift. The second part seeks to show how you should cherish this life, what values to pursue and what choices to make so that the gift of God does not fail and is not lost. The first part concerns the *indicative of grace* (what the Lord has done for us and with us), the second part the *imperative of responsibility* (how to protect the gift through your daily choices). The passage we are commenting on (Eph 5: 8-14) belongs to the second part. To understand it better, we will start from the last verse (“Awake, O sleeper, and

arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light” - v.14), which offers a little bit of the key to understanding the whole piece. A passage from Saint Augustine will help us.

«Arouse yourself, O man; for you God has become man. “Awake, sleeper, and arise from among the dead, and Christ will enlighten thee” (Eph 5:14). For you, I repeat, God has become man. If He had not thus been born in time, you would have been dead for all eternity. Never would you have been freed from sinful flesh, if He had not taken upon Himself the likeness of sinful flesh. Everlasting misery would have engulfed you, if He had not taken this merciful form. You would not have been restored to life, had He not submitted to your death; you would have fallen, had He not come to rescue you; you would have perished, had He not come» (St. Augustine, Sermon 185: PL 38.997).

It is precisely in Christ, who became man, died and rose in his Passover for all of us, that each of us is offered the opportunity of adhering to what St. Paul has just told us, which is the verse with which our biblical passage ends: “Awake, sleeper, and arise from among the dead, and Christ will enlighten thee”.

Saint Paul probably took this verse (Eph 5:14) from an ancient Christian baptismal hymn. There we find a summary of the themes of Easter and baptism: sleep and darkness are the symbol of death, the result of sin, the terrible inheritance that Adam left to all his descendants, humanity. Christ entered into this reality of death, he truly died and in this way brought life to death, because He is “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14: 6). In Jesus Christ, who died for love of us, now the death of each of us *has become life*, the passage (Passover) to the real life which is the encounter with the Father, to discover oneself completely beloved children in Jesus the only Son.

Now, this fullness of life was given to us already by Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit in the grace of baptism, which in ancient times was called *illumination*. “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light”. In fact, in baptism we become sharers, purely by gift, without any merit on our part, of what God holds as most dear and precious: the relationship of life and love of the Father and the Son, for eternity, has been poured out in love which is the Holy Spirit. The Fathers of the Church imagined the death of Christ as his entry into the realm of the dead: and upon entering, Christ brought life, he emptied the tombs: because what God loves cannot disappear into thin air: live in his love. However, the victory of Christ does not happen in a magical way, eliminating death, but as *emptying it* of its poison and filling it with love and life. In Christ, death is not the end of everything, but the awakening and enlightenment to what is most beautiful, lasting and precious: the gaze of the Father who loves us with everlasting love.

At this point it is clearer what Saint Paul means at the beginning of our passage: “For once you were darkness, now you are light in the Lord” (v. 8).

Actually he is talking about the human condition in general, which affects all men: if Christ does not enlighten us - because He is light and life - we are nothing but darkness. In baptism the Father gave us new life and light: what a great gift! Yet, it is a gift entrusted to our responsibility, it is a gift that - like all precious gifts - can be wasted, neglected, trivialized or lost. In fact, even though we are already children of the Father, ensured of his love that overcomes every sin, every failure, even death, it is possible to live as though this were not true and therefore not enjoy much mercy. It is as though a person had a bank account of several million Euros which would allow him to lead a comfortable life, but he forgets about it and finds himself penniless. The bank account is there, but is of no benefit to the owner. Participation in the resurrection of Jesus - which is given to

us in baptism - can also be neglected: It is therefore possible, even though we are children of the Father, to live as if we do not know Him, as though His love was not faithful, as if He was not enough («Nothing disturbs you [...], God alone is enough», Saint Teresa D 'Avila, Poems). Darkness - we said - is a symbol of sin and of sins, which basically - in their variety - are nothing more than repeating the choice made by Adam and Eve, to not really trust the Lord.

Thus for this reason Paul continues his discourse saying: “Walk as children of light” (v.8). **The *therefore* is the link to what was said before:** the gift of God to us is immense, the risk of neglecting it is very real, *therefore* live well in order to take care of it. And this attitude of taking care is very concrete: “for the fruit of light is found in all that is good, right and true” (v.9).

Being children of God - who is love - and living as his children, means taking on the criteria, the lifestyle of Christ, who is the Son of the Father and at the same time true man. This is certainly not possible on our own, but only with the gift of the Spirit: since we are children, we can live as children: we can say to the Father *Abbà* and we can turn to every other person and recognize him or her as our brother or sister. To live as children of the Father means to love.

It's true, Paul seems to say - there are people - who live another rationale, that of convenience and self interest (the *but why am I bothering to do this* or rather *it is important that I think about myself, others if they see it ..., etc.*). Precisely for this reason Paul adds: “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret” vv.11-12). This behaviour, this rationale on the one hand may hurt us, but if we are honest it may also seduce us at times, - some more than less – but we convince ourselves that it is better to do it on our own, rather than try “to understand what is pleasing to the Lord” (v.10). Because the Lord - who is our Father – is constantly teaching us - through everyday life - to get out of ourselves, to go out to meet others, to make room within us for an encounter, even if this involves giving up our own projects, dreams, which reveal their own animosity, because they do not open one up to others, they do not know how to be mindful of others and are only individual. The rationale of love is sometimes painful, while that of personal gain is often pleasant!

An encounter with the Lord, listening to his word, which is light, on the one hand reveals the grace and love of God towards us, while on the other it shows the different degrees of our darkness. In fact, “when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light” (v.13). As we know, the light of the Lord - a bit like the light of the sun - while giving light also warms and clothes us. So for all of us, saints by vocation, yet still sinners – we are seduced by the lure of our varying degrees of selfishness, in our life of affections, as well as in the professional one, in the handling of our affairs as well as those of our *common home*, in relationships with friends and with strangers and foreigners - we need to take the step of asking for forgiveness of the Father and our brothers and sisters. And sacramental reconciliation, as the *sister of baptism*¹, renews the grace of sonship, because it renews the pentecost of the Spirit's love that makes all things new.

Renewed in the grace of the *indicative of God* upon us, as individuals and as a community, we will be strengthened in the responsibility of the *imperative* to guard and protect this gift in love and sincere service to every brother and sister, especially to those most in need.

1 Cfr Gianmarco Busca, *La riconciliazione “sorella del battesimo”*. Roma 2011.

“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light” (v.14).

... is prayed about

Lord Jesus Christ, help me; let me not sin against you, because I am lost.
Don't let me follow my own will, don't let me fall into ruination with my sins.

Have compassion on your creature, do not despise me because I am weak, do not forsake me because I take refuge in you, heal my soul because I have sinned against you.

Before you are all those who oppress me and I have no means of escape except for you.

Lord, by your mercy save me.

May all those who rise up against me and those who seek my soul to destroy it be shamed, because you, Lord, are powerful in all things and to you glory, to God the Father and to the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever.

Amen

Isaiah of Scete

* * *

O sweet Lady,
Woman clothed with the sun!
Help us to penetrate your mystery:
the mystery of Virgin Mother,
the mystery of Queen Servant,
the mystery
of the Almighty who pleads.
Help us to discover
ever more deeply,
in this mystery,
Christ, Redeemer of the world,
Redeemer of man.
You are clothed with the sun,
the sun of inscrutable Divinity,
the sun of the impenetrable Trinity.
“Full of grace” ...
And in the meantime,
for us who live on this earth,
poor banished children of Eve,
you are clothed
with the sun of Christ
of Bethlehem and Nazareth,
of Jerusalem and Calvary.
You are clothed
with the sun of Redemption
of man and the world
with the cross

and the Resurrection of your Son.

May this sun
always shine for us
on this earth!

May this sun
never darken
in the souls of men!

St. John Paul II