



OFFICE OF

# FORMATION

*ongoing*

San Francisco Province, USA

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Dear Confreres and Friends,

This month's theme continues our look into liturgical season, with special emphasis on the Sacred Triduum we are about to enter. The 75th anniversary of Don Bosco's cannonization message of our Rector Major is also included. We conclude with advertisement for the Institute of Salesian Spirituality for the upcoming academic year. Blessings to you all in this Easter Season.

Gael E. Sullivan,sdb  
Office of Ongoing Formation



## THE SACRED TRIDUUM

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### A. MAUNDY THURSDAY (AD MANDATUM)

#### I. JESUS WASHES HIS DISCIPLES' FEET

##### 1. Scripture Reading: John 13:1-20 (Text of NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. <sup>2</sup> The devil had already put into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper <sup>3</sup> Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all thing into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, <sup>4</sup> got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. <sup>5</sup> Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. [Cf. Lk 22:27] <sup>6</sup> He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" <sup>7</sup> Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." <sup>8</sup> Peter said to

him, "You will never wash my feet" Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." <sup>9</sup> Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." <sup>11</sup> For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

<sup>12</sup> After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? <sup>13</sup> You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup> So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. [Cf. 1 Pt. 2:21] <sup>16</sup> Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their masters, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. [Cf. Mt 10:24; Lk 6:40] <sup>17</sup> If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. <sup>18</sup> I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfill the Scripture, 'The one who ate my bread has lifted his

heel against me.' [Ps. 41:9] <sup>19</sup> I tell you this now, before it occurs, so when it does occur, you may believe that I am he. <sup>20</sup> Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me."

#### 2. Reflection on the Washing of the Feet

##### (1) Theological Introduction

The story of the Washing of the Feet by Jesus on the occasion of the last meal he took with his disciples before he suffered opens with a solemn introduction. This preface makes two important statements about Jesus that not only throw light on the person of Jesus but also give us an understanding of the drama that is about to unfold.

The first statement reads: "*Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*" [13:1] Jesus' knowledge, freedom, and love for "his own" express Jesus' total and unconditional commitment to completing in full freedom the work of salvation that God had entrusted to him.

Now right before the Washing, and immediately connected with it, we hear a second extraordinary statement: "*During supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table ...*" [13:3] Jesus had come from the Father with all powers, and now being about to finish the work he had come to do and to return to the Father, he wished to give his disciples a sign of the mystery of his servant-abasement

by washing their feet. What an extraordinary statement! The washing of the feet, therefore, is to be the sign, or acted parable, of all that has preceded in the Gospel, as well as of all that is to follow, Jesus' passion and death.

## **(2) The Foot Washing**

After the grand introduction, the symbolical action of the washing of the feet is narrated, and it is told in two parts, the first part [13:4-11] reveals the mystery of servant-abasement; the second part [13:12-15] tells us what this service means for the disciples. In both parts, we discern two levels of meaning: service and the quality and limitlessness of this service.

### *[The Mystery of the Service Rendered by Jesus in His Life and in His Death]*

As a sign that Jesus loves his own he engages in the menial service of washing his disciples' feet. One of the duties of slaves, household servants, as also of the disciples of a rabbi, was to wash their masters' feet. Jesus is the master, the rabbi or teacher, and yet it is he who washes the disciples' feet.

By this "shocking" reversal of roles, Jesus wished to remind his disciples of what he had been doing all along, of what he had come for, of the nature of his ministry. Jesus' life had been a life of service. The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve. [Cf. Mk. 10:42-45; Mt 20:25-28; Lk 22:25-27] This he did by preaching the word of life, by exorcising evil from people's soul and bodies, by healing the sick and feeding the hungry, by receiving and forgiving sinners, and by comforting people in their pain.

At a second and higher level, by this reversal of roles Jesus wished to indicate that he was going now to engage in the highest kind of service, even unto death. He loved his own *to the end*. The phrase *to the end* is all important, because it tells us that by washing his disciples' feet like a slave Jesus meant to symbolize the service of his redeeming death, the limitless giving of himself on their behalf.

This is why to be washed by Jesus is presented as a matter of vital importance for the disciples. It is a prerequisite to having a share with Jesus, that is, to passing, like him, from death to life. To Peter, who objected to having his feet washed because he did not understand, Jesus said: "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." [13:8]

### **[The Disciples Bidden to Imitate the Master in Service]**

In the second part of the story of the washing, Jesus calls on his disciples to imitate him in self-giving service: "I have set you an example that you also should do as I have done to you." At one level, the disciples are exhorted to imitate him by *mutual* love and service. This is what Jesus, at one level, certainly wished to teach by the menial action of washing the feet. He wanted his disciples, whom he was about to leave behind "in the world," to form a community

made one in mutual love and service. But at a second and higher level, he challenged his disciples to imitate him all the way in self-giving sacrifice, and to be ready even to lay down their life for their brothers or sisters. For by the abasement of the Washing, he, the Master and Teacher, symbolized that he "loved them to the end." At a third level, in the final sentences of the story, Jesus goes one step further and calls on his disciples, the Church, all of us "who remain in the world," to continue his ministry in our own lifetime. It is a commission to continue his redeeming service not only for one another in the community of the Church, but for the world, to be other Christs. Jesus says, "Servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. Whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me." [13:16ff] Thus Jesus calls us both to build up the community in love, and to become his messengers and representatives in the world—and like him to give of ourselves even to death.

## **(3) Relevance for Here and Now**

As we reflect on what Jesus did, and on what he meant to signify by it, we recall that the washing took place "during supper." This was Jesus' last supper, the meal that he took with his disciples on the night before he died. It was the same supper during which, according to the other gospels, Jesus shared the bread and the cup of the Eucharist with his disciples, and told them to do the same as a memorial of his passion and death.

We are his disciples, "his own" as Jesus called us. On Holy Thursday night, we have table fellowship with Jesus; we share the bread and the cup by which Jesus offers us, with the forgiveness of sins, the blessings of his redeeming sacrifice. The Washing of the Feet represents symbolically Jesus' same self-giving service. He loved us *to the end*. He invites us to come to him and let ourselves be washed, and so share the blessings of his Eucharistic sacrifice.

Sinners though we are, because of our faith and Christian commitment, we already belong to Jesus. We are "his own." We gladly submit to the washing, even though, like Peter, we may stand in awe before the abasement of the Son of God. But, like Peter, we surrender and say, "Lord, not my feet only, but my hands and my head!" [13:9]

## **B. GOOD FRIDAY: JESUS ON THE CROSS**

### **I. WHAT JESUS SUFFERED: ARCHAEOLOGY OF CRUCIFIXION**

#### **1. Introduction: Jesus sentenced to death**

When Jesus appeared in Pilate's court for trial, the charge was a criminal one, for the Roman procurator did not concern himself with religious matters. The charge was subversion or insurrection, with a claim of kingship.

The Roman authorities were skittish about any individual (especially if Galilean) who drew a following. That would worry Pilate. The gospels, however, (Matthew and John are especially heavy-handed) are unanimous in the claim that it was the Jewish authorities who plotted to put Jesus to death, and who pressured Pilate into passing and executing the sentence. They were glad to encourage the procurator and to let him solve their own problem with Jesus.

The sentence decreed against Jesus was death by crucifixion according to Roman law and custom. This was one of the cruelest methods of execution ever devised. It was so horrible and dishonorable that it was applied only to slaves and non-Roman criminals, men only, and only for the most serious crimes: murder, temple theft, high treason, insurrection or revolution. This last was the charge brought against Jesus.

## 2. The Scourging

According to Roman custom, a scourging preceded every crucifixion. It was the first stage of the execution, and it was designed to weaken the criminal, so that he wouldn't be hanging on the cross forever. This punishment was so gruesome that it could by itself cause death. An ancient historian relates instances of scourging in which the person's entrails were ripped out, and the bones on the back and shoulders were laid bare. The scourging before a crucifixion was so punishing because the executioners had discretionary power and no limits were set the number of blows. The thongs of the flail or whip were fitted with pieces of bone or metal.

Until the time of execution the victim was totally in the power of the executioners. The soldiers continued to abuse the victim, and played brutal games with him just to pass the time of day. This, as the gospels tell us, is what they did with Jesus.

## 3. The Cross and the Death-Walk

The cross was made of two poles: the upright beam and the crossbeam. The upright pole, or "tree," consisted of a fairly stout trunk, either tall or short, which was set firmly in the ground at the place of execution, and a transversal or cross beam.

On the way to the place of execution, the death-walk, the victim carried only the crossbeam, as the upright pole was set in the ground, some times permanently, at the place of execution. The gospels tell us that at one point during the death-walk the soldiers forced a man named Simon, who happened to be on his way home from the fields, to carry this beam for Jesus. The fact that Jesus lacked the strength to carry this wooden stave shows that the scourging and the abusive treatment had been extremely severe.

## 4. The Inscription or Title

Hanging from the cross beam carried by the criminal

on route to the place of execution was a placard that bore an inscription stating the charge or reason for the death sentence. This inscription was called "the title." In Jesus' case, the title, inscribed in Aramaic, Greek and Latin: read, "The king of the Jews." For Jews such a designation carried the heavy religious connotation of messiah (king), and that is why they objected. For Pilate it was a statement charging revolutionary activity. But the very wording ("king") was his way of showing his callous contempt both for Jesus and for the Jews.

## 5. Calvary

The little hill on which Jesus was executed was called Golgotha (*Gogoltha*, in Aramaic), a word that means "skull." The place was so named not because skulls were strewn about the site (unthinkable in a Jewish city) but because of a rocky outcrop shaped like a skull.

The church of the Holy Sepulcher stands on this traditional site of Jesus' death and burial. Excavations have revealed that in Jesus' times the place might have been an abandoned stone quarry. There were tombs at the farther end; and John tells us that there was a garden there and a new tomb hewn in the rock that may have belonged to Joseph of Arimathea or to Nicodemus.

The place was located right outside the city's west wall, separated from it only by a shallow and narrow depression. Notwithstanding other rival claims (such as "Gordon's Calvary" farther out), this traditional site is the most likely place of the crucifixion.

## 6. Preliminaries to Crucifixion

Immediately before execution, the victim was given wine mixed with myrrh. This was a humane gesture required by custom. It acted as a narcotic and made the torments of crucifixion a little less painful. Jesus, however (according to Mk. and Mt) refused to drink it. This drink is to be distinguished from the drink of cheap wine (or vinegar) that (according to all the gospels) was offered to Jesus with a sponge fixed to a reed, as he was dying on the cross. The use of a reed to reach Jesus' lips shows that he was hanged on a "high cross," not on a "low cross."

The execution squad by an unwritten right could take whatever the victim wore. Thus the soldiers divided Jesus' clothing among themselves: girdle or belt, sandals, perhaps a headband and tunic. Obviously, this outer garment was the most desirable piece of clothing. In Jesus' case (as John tells us) it was of high quality, woven in one piece. The soldiers cast lots for it.

## 7. Crucifixion

At the place of execution, after being given the drugged drink and being stripped naked, the criminal was made to lie flat, supine on the ground, with arms outstretched. His hands were then nailed to the crossbeam with spikes driven

through the wrists, so they could support the weight of the body. Some times the man's arms were also secured to the crossbar with ropes. Next, the crossbeam with the body dangling from it by the wrists was hoisted into position and fastened on top of the upright pole to form a T. Only then were the victim's feet nailed together to the pole with one large spike, some times with an additional supporting peg under the feet.

In some forms of crucifixion, when a long drawn-out exposure was desired, a second peg was used as a kind of seat—hence the expression, "*sedere in cruce*" (to sit on the cross).

## 8. Death on the Cross

The inhumanity of execution by crucifixion lay in the fact that death was repeatedly postponed as the victim struggled on the cross, and the pain was prolonged. The moment that strength gave way and the body sagged, the lungs collapsed cutting off oxygen and circulation. By reflex, the victim would struggle to draw himself up by pushing and shifting the weight on to the feet. Since they were firmly nailed or pegged, the pressure on the chest was relieved, and he would experience a reprieve. After a while he would tire again, and again collapse, and so on—prolonging the agony some times for several days, until he could no longer react. In most cases the victim died of circulatory failure brought about by the collapse of the lungs and the chest cavity.

When a quick death was desired, the legs (that is, the shinbones) of the man were broken by blows delivered with a pole or truncheon. As a result, when the man slumped he could no longer draw himself up by putting weight on his feet, and death ensued quickly.

John again tells us that due to the on-coming feast of Passover the legs of the two criminals who were crucified with Jesus were broken to hasten their death. But Jesus' legs were not broken, because he was already dead. However, as if to make sure, one of the soldiers stabbed him in the chest with his lance, and the fluid which had collected in and around the lungs gushed out as "blood and water."

Jesus died very quickly—according to Mark, within a mere 6 hours, from 9 in the morning to 3 in the afternoon. This again may indicate that in Jesus' case the scourging and the abuse were so severe that he never quite recovered, so that a few hours on the cross were enough to cause his death.

## 9. Redeeming Love

As believers, we reverently recall Jesus' gruesome physical sufferings in his passion and death. But we know that on the cross our redemption was won *not* through the pain, excruciating through it was, *but* through Jesus self-offering in freedom and perfect love. *It was the freedom with which Jesus embraced the cross out of love for God and*

*for us that brought about our reconciliation with God in his blood.*

It will likewise be the freedom and love with which we embrace the gospel of Jesus with its radical demands, and the pain this entails, that will enable us to be the signs and bearers of God's love to others.

## II. WITNESSES OF THE PASSION: TYPES OF RESPONSE

The witnesses of the Passion—that is, the people who appear in the dramatic story of the Passion and who have to do with Jesus, by design are made to portray various postures with respect to Jesus, and various aspects of faith or lack thereof. This is especially true in the Johannine narrative. Here they represent the attitudes and decisions of people at large, ours included, when confronted by Jesus. The response, as portrayed in the actions and words of these "secondary" actors is typical and instructive.

### 1. Jesus, Victorious in His Defeat, at Center Stage.

I said "secondary" because in the Passion story, as throughout the gospels, the figure of Jesus commands our attention at every step and in the most impressive manners. This is true not only because Jesus holds center stage as the victim who is tried and executed but also, especially in the Gospel of John, because of the transcendent portrayal of Jesus as the Incarnate Word and Son of God.

For example, the death of Jesus is presented as a supremely free act of self-donation, and as the ultimate revelation of God's redemptive love for the world.

It is presented as the victorious culmination of Jesus' mission, as his "hour of glory" triumphantly leading him back to God. The death of Jesus is the moment of his return to the Father in resurrection.

Again, from the cross Jesus is presented as judging and defeating all the powers of darkness, thereby making the cross the norm by which all other expressions of power must be judged.

Implicit in all the transcendent glory with which John endows the figure of Jesus on the cross, is the conviction, shared with the other Gospels, that the death of Jesus has redemptive power and brings about human salvation. It is from the crucified Jesus that new life streams into the world.

Obviously, these and other points in the Passion narrative are all part of our Christian belief about Jesus and about the meaning of his death and resurrection, but this story brings them into higher relief and sharper focus. This is especially true, if one may single out one point, of John's presentation of Jesus as transcendentally free, powerful and victorious in his very humiliation.

With good reason, therefore, we pray, "We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world."



## 2. The Witnesses of the Passion as Portraying the Life of Faith

The Passion narrative in John's Gospel also throws light on a number of other characters and on their varying responses to Jesus and his mission, minor roles by comparison with Christ's, to be sure. But their roles and their attitudes illuminate our experience of the life of faith and of the cost of discipleship, as we struggle in our own Christian life. We look at these

### (1) *The Opponents of Jesus*

The opponents of Jesus, the Jewish religious authorities in Jerusalem, illustrate the tragedy of unbelief. The problem they have with Jesus leads them to ally themselves with the Roman ruler, and thus to betray their own religious and civil commitments.

Judas, the apostate disciple, is presented as an even more tragic instance of betrayal. Unlike Matthew and Luke-Acts [Mt 27:3-5; Acts 1:15-19] John spares us the details of the man's horrible death, remembered with horror in the early Christian community. But the reader understands that this disciple, this "lost soul" (as John refers to him, 17:12) will come to a bad end.

Likewise, the fate of Pilate, the brutally insensitive ruler who is responsible for the sentencing and execution of Jesus, is not projected in the narrative. History tells us about it. The reader, however, observes the tragic moment when this man has God's Truth standing before him, and fails the great test: "What is Truth?" He then goes on to pass the sentence of death on an innocent man with callous pragmatism.

These opponents of Jesus exemplify in their response, or lack thereof, our own experience of compromise, betrayal and evasion, that is, our failures as we struggle in our life of discipleship. True, our failures, unlike the actions of Jesus' opponents, did not crucify the Lord. They do nonetheless weaken our commitment, or even seriously separate us from the love of Christ. That is why we come to seek God's forgiveness at the foot of the cross of Jesus.

### (2) *The Friends of Jesus*

It falls to another group of characters, few in number but eloquent in testimony, to exemplify the cost of discipleship and the trials of faith.

#### *[Examples of Faithful Love]*

The Passion story features one and only one heroic example, that of Jesus. But it makes room also for a few admirable, if minor, characters.

Foremost among them are the Mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple. Theirs is a largely passive role. But as they stand fearlessly by the cross of Jesus they exemplify the faithful devotion and the mystical love the true disciple. Because of their devotion and love they are chosen to be the recipients of Jesus' final words of care: "Behold your

son. Behold your mother" [Jn. 19:26-27].

Along with them are Mary, the wife of Clophas, and Mary Magdalene [Jn. 19:25]. We learn nothing more of them in the Passion story itself, but Mary Magdalene's faith and love shine forth when she is rewarded with the first meeting with the Lord in his resurrection. Likewise (in the Gospel of Luke, 24:13-25) the other Mary (not named) and her husband Clophas (named) are rewarded with the encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus.

To stand by Jesus in fidelity and love, to experience his resurrection, and to walk, and have table fellowship, with him—this is a paradigm of true discipleship.

#### *[Peter's Story]*

There are three other characters who take a more active role in the Passion drama, and who thereby serve to illuminate cost of discipleship and the struggle that accompanies the life of faith. Peter is the prime example.

When Jesus is placed under arrest in the Garden of Olives, Peter lashes out with his sword at the high priest's slave. A little later, with the assistance of "another disciple," he gains entry into the courtyard of the high priest on the cold night of the arrest. Confronted by the servant woman who is doorkeeper, in the glare of her questions, three times he denies any association with Jesus.

Superficially Peter's recourse to the sword might appear as a praiseworthy act of loyalty in defense of Jesus. In effect, however, it reveals how little he had understood the mystery of Jesus. Jesus in fact rebukes him, for, as he later would bluntly tell Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world." Peter's lack of understanding of Jesus explains how he could succumb to fear and deny the master, despite the warnings received [Jn. 13:37-38]. Here we witness a breakdown of discipleship.

After these incidents Peter plays no further role in John's Passion narrative. But by the Lord's mercy his faith is restored. For one thing, the other Gospels [Mk. 14: 72; Mt 26:75; Lk 22:62], tell us of his repentance and tears under Jesus' gaze. Then the Gospel of John, tells us that, in response to Mary Magdalene's summons on the morning of the resurrection, Peter ran to Jesus' burial site, saw the empty tomb, and was graced with the resurrection faith. Later, in a decisive encounter with the Risen Lord, as though to offset his threefold denial, three times he professed his love for Jesus and was given the commission to shepherd and feed Christ's lambs and sheep. [Jn. 21:15-19]

In spite of lack of understanding, fear, seeming confusion, and weakness, Peter remained a friend of Jesus. His story, perhaps more than that of any other character in the Passion narrative, reflects the real-life situation of a disciple of Jesus, *our* real-life situation. We too are plagued with lack of understanding, fear, confusion, and weakness in our faith. Peter's story teaches us not to despair, but to throw ourselves upon the mercy of our loving Savior.

### *[Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus]*

Two further characters appear briefly at the end of the Passion drama: Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus both depicted in somewhat ambiguous tones.

We know little about Joseph of Arimathea except that he was a “secret” disciple, keeping out of sight for fear of reprisals from the Jewish authorities. [Jn. 19:38] Nicodemus appears at several points in the Gospel where we are told that he was a person in authority and that he came to Jesus “by night.” [Jn. 3:1-2] Their faith as disciples seems to have been less than exemplary. Fear of discovery kept them in a kind of limbo. But now at the risk of public exposure they came to claim the body of Jesus and to offer to it the homage of a lavish burial. The shock of Jesus’ unjust execution may have stirred them to action and started them on a journey of explicit faith.

May it be the same for us who honor the crucified Christ today. If our faith has languished in limbo, may the grace of Christ draw it out into the light. May our act of worship through the Sacred Triduum strengthen us on our journey of faith as committed disciples of Jesus, not counting the cost.

### III. JESUS’ PRAYER ON THE CROSS

#### 1. Psalm 22 as Jesus Prayer on the Cross [Mk. 15:34; Mt 27:46]

##### **(1) Introductory Comment**

About to die on the cross, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” — the opening line of Psalm 22.

There is no cause here for thinking horrible Lutheran thoughts evoking such horrible words as discouragement, despair, or outright vicarious damnation. No, *Jesus died praying*. He died praying the psalms. He died praying the psalms of the Just Sufferers of the Old Testament. Psalm 22 is such a psalm, a Lament uttered in the certainty of being heard, followed by a Thanksgiving for having been heard.

Despite total abandonment, in Psalm 22 the psalmist lives within a domain of peace. The sufferer makes no allusion to sin. There is no recrimination against unjust charges, no claims of personal innocence, no curses or angry sallies against the “enemies”—all features that occur in most laments. The Psalmist asks little of God: only that God *hear* his prayer. Then a sense of simple abandonment and peace takes over, and there arises a sense of mystic presence with the certainty of having been heard. The Lament then modulates into a Song of Thanksgiving.

How does Psalm 22 speak of Jesus, and of Jesus’ suffering? How is it messianic? Obviously, the primary messianic psalms are the royal psalms. But the Christian Church has always regarded the psalms of the just sufferers,

the Laments, much like the Fourth Servant Song of Is 53, as speaking of the suffering and victorious Messiah and as realized in Jesus.

Psalm 22 comes from an individual sufferer, but because of its sheer beauty and power as a prayer it became the property of the “great congregation of God’s afflicted ones.” From the ranks of this innocent, suffering, yet trustful community (the *’anawim*) came Jesus the Messiah (the *’anaw* par excellence). He turned to this psalm for his prayer while dying on the cross.

The early disciples of Jesus also turned to this psalm in preaching the saving message of Jesus’ death and resurrection in the Gospels. Psalm 22 is quoted 13 times in the New Testament, 9 times in the Passion story alone. It received consecration on the lips of the dying Jesus. But even if it were not so, it would still remain one of the most precious gems of the Psalter. The early disciples also turned to this psalm for their own prayer. What Jesus had made personal as the corporate representative of the Old Testament *’anawim*, became again the property of the “great congregation” of the New Testament *’anawim*, the Church.

When we pray Psalm 22, with Jesus we pour out our lament, and we give thanks to God for the victory achieved by him on the cross.

##### **(2) Text of Psalm 22(from NRSV): Lament, Prayer and Thanksgiving** *[Lament]*

##### **<sup>1</sup> My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**

Why are you so from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

<sup>2</sup> O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.

<sup>3</sup> Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

<sup>4</sup> In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted and you delivered them.

<sup>5</sup> To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

<sup>6</sup> But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people.

<sup>7</sup> All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;

<sup>8</sup> “Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver— let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”

<sup>9</sup> Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother’s breast.

<sup>10</sup> On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God.

<sup>11</sup> Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

<sup>12</sup> Many bulls encircle me, strong bull of Bashan surround me;

<sup>13</sup> they open wide their mouths at me,  
Like a ravening and roaring lion.

<sup>14</sup> I am poured out like water,  
and all my bones are out of joint;  
my heart is like wax;  
it is melted within my breast;

<sup>15</sup> my mouth is dried up like a potsherd;  
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;  
you lay me in the dust of death.

<sup>16</sup> For dogs are all around me;  
a company of evildoers encircles me.  
My hands and feet have shriveled;

<sup>17</sup> I can count all my bones.  
They stare and gloat over me;

<sup>18</sup> they divide my clothes among themselves,  
and for my clothing they cast lots.  
*[Prayer for Deliverance]*

<sup>19</sup> But you, O Lord, do not be far away!  
O my help, come quickly to my aid!

<sup>20</sup> Deliver my soul from the sword,  
my life from the power of the dog!

<sup>21</sup> Save me from the mouth of the lion!  
*[Thanksgiving for Deliverance]*

From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.

<sup>22</sup> I will tell of your name to my brother and sisters;  
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:

<sup>23</sup> You who fear the Lord, praise him!  
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;  
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

<sup>24</sup> For he did not despise or abhor the affliction  
of the afflicted;  
he did not hide his face from me but heard  
when I cried to him.

<sup>25</sup> From you comes my praise in the great congregation;  
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

<sup>26</sup> The poor shall eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek him shall praise the Lord.  
May your hearts live forever!

<sup>27</sup> All the ends of the earth shall remember  
and turn to the Lord;  
and all the families of the nations  
shall worship before him.

<sup>28</sup> For dominion belongs to the Lord,  
and he rules over the nations.

<sup>29</sup> To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;  
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,  
and I shall live for him.

<sup>30</sup> Posterity will serve him;  
future generations will be told about the Lord,

<sup>31</sup> and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,  
saying that he has done it.

## 2. Psalm 31 as Jesus' prayer on the Cross

### **(1) Introductory Comment**

According to Luke 23:46, the dying Jesus prayed with the words of Psalm 31:5:

**"Into your hand I commit my spirit."**

Psalm 31 could not be more dissimilar from Psalm 22. Psalm 22 is a deeply personal utterance that scales authentic poetic heights, while Psalm 31 is a kind of compilation that draws freely from other biblical texts, especially from Jeremiah and other psalms.

And yet Psalm 31 is peculiarly similar to Psalm 22, in that it is also basically a lament followed by a thanksgiving. We see here a devout Israelite who has drunk deeply from the wellsprings of the prophetic tradition and liturgical prayer. In fact, we see a mystic who is imbued with the word of God, and who is capable of using the traditional texts to express powerful human experiences: loving trust, harrowing pain, and the joy of deliverance. This just sufferer, voices his full trust in God who delivered him from sickness, rejection, and persecution. He gives thankful praise for God's "steadfast love" (*hesed*), the dominant theme of the psalm.

With Jesus on the cross, with Stephen being stoned, we pray this psalm with trust in God's steadfast love.

### **(2) Text of Psalm 31 (from NRSV): Prayer, Lament, Trustful Prayer, Thanksgiving**

*[Initial Trustful Prayer for Deliverance]*

<sup>1</sup> In you, O Lord, I seek refuge;  
do not let me ever be put to shame;  
in your righteousness deliver me.

<sup>2</sup> Incline your ear to me;  
rescue me speedily.  
Be a rock of refuge for me,  
a strong fortress to save me.

<sup>3</sup> You are indeed my rock and my fortress;  
for your name's sake lead me and guide me,

<sup>4</sup> take me out of the net that is hidden for me,  
for you are my refuge.

<sup>5</sup> Into your hand I commit my spirit;  
you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God,  
*[Rejoicing for delivery]*

<sup>6</sup> You hate those who pay regard to worthless idols,  
but I trust in the Lord.

<sup>7</sup> I will exult and rejoice in your *steadfast love*,  
because you have seen my affliction;  
you have taken heed of my adversaries,  
<sup>8</sup> and have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy;  
you have set my feet in a broad place.  
*[Lament]*

<sup>9</sup> Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress;  
my eye wastes away from grief,  
and my soul and body also.

<sup>10</sup> For my life is spent with sorrow,

and my years with sighing;  
 my strength fails because of my misery,  
 and my bones waste away.

<sup>11</sup> I am the scorn of all my adversaries,  
 a horror to my neighbors,  
 an object of dread to my acquaintances;  
 those who see me in the street flee from me.

<sup>12</sup> I have passed out of mind like one who is dead;  
 I have become like broken vessel.

<sup>13</sup> For I hear the whispering of many—  
 terror all around!—  
 as they scheme together against me,  
 as they plot to take my life.

*[Prayer of Trust against Enemies]*

<sup>14</sup> But I trust in you, O Lord;  
 I say, "You are my God."

<sup>15</sup> My times are in you hand;  
 deliver me from the hand of my enemies and  
 persecutors.

<sup>16</sup> Let your face shine upon your servant;  
 save me in your *steadfast love*.

<sup>17</sup> Do not let me be put to shame, O Lord,  
 for I call on you;  
 let the wicked be put to shame;  
 let them go dumbfounded to Sheol.

<sup>18</sup> Let the lying lips be stilled  
 that speak insolently against the righteous  
 with pride and contempt.

*[Praise and Thanksgiving]*

<sup>19</sup> O how abundant is your goodness  
 that you have laid up for those who fear you,  
 and accomplished for those who take refuge in you  
 in the sight of everyone!

<sup>20</sup> In the shelter of your presence you hide them  
 from human plots;  
 you hold them safe under your shelter  
 from contentious tongues.

<sup>21</sup> Blessed be the Lord,  
 for he has wondrously shown his *steadfast love* to me  
 when I was beset as a city under siege.

<sup>22</sup> I had said in my alarm,  
 "I am driven far from your sight."  
 But you heard my supplications  
 when I cried out to you for help.

*[Closing Exhortation]*

<sup>23</sup> Love the Lord, all you his saints.  
 The Lord preserves the faithful,  
 but abundantly repays the one who acts haughtily.

<sup>24</sup> Be strong, and let your heart take courage,  
 all you who wait for the Lord.

**C. EASTER VIGIL  
 CULMINATION OF LENT, HOLY WEEK AND SACRED  
 TRIDUUM**

(Cf. NCE 5, 9-12, Pius XII, *Holy Week Ordinal*, 1955)

**I. HISTORY AND MEANING OF THE HOLY NIGHT**

**1. Holy Saturday and Easter Vigil**

Holy Saturday has been from the earliest times consecrated to Our Lord's "Sabbath rest," his burial in the tomb. The early Church commemorated this burial by spending the day in rest, prayer, expectation of the Resurrection, and strict fasting. There was no liturgy of any kind. In our own day, too, the Church keeps Holy Saturday in quiet mourning because Jesus is lying in the tomb.

Hence, in spite of its name, the Easter Vigil is not a vigil in the modern sense (the day before a feast) but the Vigil in the ancient sense (the night celebration of the greatest feast of the liturgical year). It is not the preparation for Easter but the true celebration of Easter itself. The reason why Pius XII "restored" the Vigil was to emphasize the truth that had become obscure with the passing of time: the Vigil *is* the Easter Feast. And that is what Vatican II re-emphasized.

**2. Time of Celebration**

The earliest references to Pascha (the ancient name for the comprehensive commemoration of the Redemption—Easter Vigil to Pentecost) show that it was essentially a night celebration. Ancient Christian writers (such as Tertullian) and Church Fathers (such as Jerome and Augustine) leave no doubt that this was the accepted practice both in the East and in the West in antiquity. The Eastern Churches in fact have never abandoned it, whereas in the West, beginning with the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Roman Ordinal had the service start at noon, and by the end of the century at 11 A.M. of Holy Saturday.

By 1570 the Vigil had been advanced to the early morning hours of Holy Saturday, a practice that the Missal of Pius V made into law. This is the situation that continued in the West until 1951 and Pius XII's reform. Thus for some 380 years the celebration of the greatest liturgical feast was held a whole day ahead of time.

This was no trifling matter for it had the unhappy effect of de-emphasizing the Easter Vigil and simultaneously eliminating any real observance of Holy Saturday as a day of quiet mourning and reflection while the Lord "rested in the tomb." Pius XII was not merely reviving an ancient practice; he was restoring the Easter feast to its proper place in the life of the Church.

**3. Reasons for Night Celebration**

A nighttime celebration is hardly a matter of sentiment; it is rooted in the very nature of the events it commemorates. There several reasons for holding the Paschal festival at night, and it hard to say which one had the greatest influence upon the practice, though all have their importance. We may mention the following.



A first reason is that Easter is the feast of the triumph of light over darkness; hence the celebration calls for a setting in which the symbols of light and darkness can be effectively displayed. Another reason is the Easter commemorates in a special way the Resurrection of Our Lord, which took place during the night.

But, above all, a night celebration for this feast may have been determined by the fact that Easter is the Christian Passover, the fulfillment of the Jewish Passover, which was always celebrated at night. The wording of the *Exultet* (Easter Proclamation, *Praeconium paschale*) lends support to this idea. An important part of the Jewish Passover service was the vigil, or night watch, that commemorated the vigil God is represented as keeping through the night of the Exodus: “At night the Lord struck down all the firstborn of the land of Egypt...” [Ex 12:29-32] Prior to this, the lintel and doorposts of Israelite homes had been marked with the blood of the lamb. Then the Lord offered an explanation and gave a command: “None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning. For the Lord will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over that door.... You shall observe this rite as a perpetual ordinance for you and your children.... And when your children ask you, ‘What do you mean by this observance?’ You shall say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.’” [Ex 12:22b-27a]

By means of this feast, celebrated during the night, the people of Israel kept alive all that God had done for them—not only the deliverance but what the deliverance had led to—especially their birth as a nation, for it was on that night that Israel began to exist as a nation.

When the Christian Church took over the feast of the Jewish Passover, it gave all that it meant a new, Christian direction. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt prefigured a mightier and more far-reaching one—the “mighty deeds” of God who “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.” [Col 1:13-14] This new deliverance, like the old, was associated with the night and the darkness; for the New Exodus, the death of Christ, took place in the darkness, and the Resurrection, which completed our Redemption, happened during the night.

Hence, just as the Exodus Passover of old marked the beginning of Israel as the people of God, so in the death and Resurrection of Christ, the Christian Passover, the new People of God came into being, and the Easter Vigil is the “memorial” of that event. This was probably the real reason for having Baptism during this night, for Baptism is the sacrament of entrance into God’s people and, at the same time, the means whereby this People renews itself.

## II. ELEMENTS AND RITES OF THE EASTER VIGIL

The altogether special character of this greatest feast of the Church year is apparent in the beautiful rites that make up its celebration. All of them express the Christian’s passing over with Christ from the death of sin to new life under God.

### 1. Blessing of the New Fire

This is a brief rite of Gallican origin preparatory to the Vigil, specifically to the lighting of the Paschal Candle. The formula originated in Germany in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, though the practice is much older. The fire was struck from a flint, the ancient kindling method. Later it acquired meaning as a symbol: just as fire is struck from a stone, so light arises from the risen Christ, the cornerstone.

For the whole first part of the service, before the Easter Eucharist is celebrated at the altar, the Paschal Candle holds center stage. The presiding celebrant wears the cope, and the liturgical color is purple. Only the deacon wears white when chanting the *Exultet* (Easter Proclamation).

### 2. The Paschal Candle

The Paschal Candle is the symbol of the risen Lord and one of the most impressive of the Church’s sacramentals, as it evokes Christ’s victory, the triumph of light over darkness. Yet the origin of the symbol is uncertain. The explanation most favored by liturgists is that the symbol comes from the ancient practice of lighting and blessing a lamp (or lamps) in the early evening to provide light in the darkness. In the liturgy of the hours the ceremony, though practical in origin, became in time an elaborate rite called *Lucernarium*, “the lighting of lamps,” accompanied by psalms, chants and prayers before Vespers. It was the deacon’s special function to light the lamps. Thus, the lighting and blessing of the paschal candle on the greatest night of the year is a liturgical development of a custom once observed every evening. It is still the deacon who carries the paschal candle into the church, sets up on its stand and chants to *Exultet* or *praeconium paschale* (which was originally a candle blessing).

One of the happiest changes introduced by Pius XII in 1955 is to have the candle lighted and blessed at the beginning of the service and then (carried aloft by the deacon) have it lead the procession into the church.

The presiding celebrant first prepares the candle to be the symbol of Christ by marking it (using a stylus) with the sign of the cross and the monogram of Christ (the Alpha and Omega), and inserting the grains of incense that represent the five wounds. Also this “consecration” of the candle was restored in 1955.

The full meaning of the paschal candle as the symbol of Christ is made clear when the candle, lighted from the new fire, is carried by the deacon into the dark church, dispelling

the darkness. The deacon heralds the Resurrection with the chanted words *Lumen Christi*, and the community responds with *Deo gratias*. All present receive the Easter light from the paschal candle. This signifies that we share the glory of the Resurrection, and are thereby made light bearers, children of the light.

Upon reaching the sanctuary and setting the candle of its stand, the deacon chants the beautiful hymn in its honor, the *Exultet*. This hymn, which retains the form and style of the ancient Eucharistic prayer, is in the present version ascribed to St. Ambrose. It expresses the full meaning of the paschal feast, Christ's victory over death, sin and hell. The Jewish Passover was the prelude to the true Passover, our Lord's passage from death to life. We partake of this passage; it becomes ours through the sacred mysteries of Baptism and Eucharist. As Christ rose from the dead we rise with him to newness of life.

### 3. Reading Service and Baptismal Rite

*Readings.* — The Scripture Readings make up to oldest part of the Easter Vigil. In early Roman practice these readings (originally six in number) were related to Baptism and (together with the Collects) were intended to be a scriptural commentary on the whole rite of Christian initiation. From the Middle Ages onward the reading were expanded to 12 in number, but Pius XII's Holy Week Ordinal reverts to the practice of the time of Pope Gregory I (590-604).

*Baptismal Rite.* — When the readings are finished, the blessing of the baptismal water follows immediately. Pius XII's Ordinal gives prominence to the blessing of water by having it take place in the sanctuary so that all can see and hear.

The modern formula for the blessing of the water harks back to the sacramentaries of Popes Gelasius I (492-496) and Hadrian I (772-795). Its general theme is that the water, made productive by the Spirit, gives birth to divine life. The font is compared to a womb in which a person is conceived in holiness and reborn as a new creation. During the Preface the priest plunges the candle into the water to signify that the water of Baptism derives its power from Christ's Passion and Resurrection. He pours in the chrism to signify the grace of the Holy Spirit bestowed through the waters of Baptism.

The Ordinal also strongly recommends that at least one candidate be baptized in the sanctuary. This gives poignancy not only to the blessing of the water but also to the entire Vigil. Since the Vigil is primarily a solemn celebration of the mystery of Baptism it would appear anomalous indeed if the Sacrament itself were omitted from the celebration. The conferring of Baptism completes the celebration as nothing else could, except obviously the Eucharist, which climaxes the whole Vigil.

Whether Baptism is conferred or not, the restored Easter Vigil features something new—the renewal of the baptismal

promises. By this action the members of the congregation renounce Satan and bind themselves to serve God faithfully. This is not just more than a moving ceremony; it is after Baptism and Eucharist a high point of the Vigil service. The whole Lenten observance is in fact intended to lead us a heightened awareness of our baptismal commitment. And as a further reminder, after the promises, the priest sprinkles the people with the Easter water.

### 4. Easter Mass

The true climax if the Easter Vigil is the celebration of the Eucharist, for the Eucharist in its very essence *is* the paschal mystery. No other way of celebrating our redemption, however beautiful and meaningful, can take its place. For everything else that is done in the Easter Vigil is only an unfolding of what is daily celebrated in the Eucharistic mystery. The Mass that climaxes and concludes the Easter Vigil *is* the true and original Easter Mass.

The joyful and solemn singing of the triple Alleluia is a special feature of the Easter celebration. It is a thanksgiving for all the wonders God has wrought for our redemption.

The Easter Preface, sung for the first time in this Mass, extols the Paschal Lamb whose sacrifice frees us from sin and enables us to pass with to eternal life through Christ's Resurrection.

### D. DÉNOUEMENT—THE EMPTY TOMB AND FIRST APPEARANCE

(John 20:1-18)

In his resurrection narrative Matthew 28:13-15 reports that a story was spread among the Jews to discredit the fact of Christ's resurrection: the body of Jesus was stolen, the "resurrection" was a matter of theft.

In his gospel St. John never refers to that story. And yet his resurrection narrative in 20:1-9 is conceived and reported as an answer to the theft theory. Jesus was laid to rest on Friday, just before the Sabbath began at sunset. [John 19:42, see v. 31]

#### 1. Mary Magdalene and the Empty Tomb (John 20:1-2)

On the Sabbath nothing happened since the Jews were supposed to stay home for the sacred rest. After the Sabbath, very early on the first day of the Jewish week, Mary of Magdala came to Jesus' tomb "it was still dark." In the presentation of the evangelist the only detail she catches sight of is that the stone had been "removed" from the tomb (not "rolled back" as in the other gospels). Without a look into the tomb and without even considering how the stone had been removed from its place—this is how the evangelist sees it—she rushes to the conclusion that the Lord had been taken from the tomb. Her reaction is immediate. She runs "to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved" [John] and conveys to

them the message: “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”

## 2. John and Peter at the Tomb (John 20:3-10)

The two disciples hasten on a run to the tomb, and John arrives ahead of Simon Peter. He bends down and peers in: there he “sees” the wrappings with which Jesus had been prepared for burial. [Cf. 19:40; see 11:44] The Greek verb used by the evangelist (*kéimena*) would suggest that the wrappings rather than just lying there had been *laid* there, in some part of the tomb. There seems to be no sign of a hurried theft having been perpetrated. John looked and observed but did not enter the tomb, which might seem surprising. But John had already reminded his readers [Cf. 8:12; 15:26-27] that according to Jewish Law the testimony of two witnesses was required for a case to be valid. Thus he leaves everything untouched until both he and Peter together can witness the state of affairs in the tomb. Their verification, therefore, is valid and meaningful to the readers of his gospel.

Meanwhile Peter arrives, and he goes into the tomb. He tries to analyze the “evidence” available. He observes [*theôrei*] the wrappings there, and the face cloth that had been over his head “laid” not with the wrappings but apart, “rolled up (or folded up” in a place by itself. There was a certain order in the tomb, and the “evidence” did not suggest the idea of a theft conducted a hurry, nor of a violation of the tomb. Above all, the wrappings and the face cloth were there. If there had been a theft, the perpetrators would have wasted no time in removing the wrappings and the face cloth just to leave them there in good order. They would have taken away the body just as it was, wrapped for burial. The Jewish theory of a theft—John seems to want to tell his readers—clashes against the evidence. The findings are evidence that Jesus was not restrained or impeded by the wrappings and bands. He could move about freely as a living person and could come out of the tomb in no hurry, leaving everything behind in order. Here John certainly presents the evidence of the empty tomb to his readers as a valid “proof” of Christ’s resurrection.

This was John’s reflection while Peter is in the tomb. Then he too steps inside and is again confronted with the facts: the Lord is not in the tomb where he had been laid; the tomb is empty but not violated, because there is order in the place.

On this “evidence” (he “saw”) John “believed.” He believed, of course, that Christ had risen and was alive. The evidence was there, still he “believed.” From the historical evidence, guaranteed by two witnesses, he rose to the realm of theological faith. The complex mystery of Christ’s resurrection remains something to be “believed” because it is not just the resuscitation of a dead man who comes back to the life he had before (as was the case with Lazarus). Christ’s resurrection is a divine declaration that he was right (John

16:10), that he enjoyed God’s protection and pleasure—that he had been exalted and had entered a new mode of existence that is beyond the laws and understandings of the world of our experience.

Still the factual historical evidence retains its value as the starter that sets in motion a process of which the final result is “faith,” the work of the Holy Spirit. It was a flash that flooded John’s mind and soul with light. In no time he saw the connections between what he was witnessing and the prophetic Scriptures of the Old Testament, and he “believed.” Peter (at this point receding into the penumbra) also rose to the realm of “faith” from what he witnessed. As he would later express it in his first address to the people in Acts 2:25-28, quoting Psalm 16:8-11 (David speaks):

<sup>25a</sup> “I saw the Lord always before me,  
for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken;  
<sup>26</sup> therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;  
moreover my flesh will live in hope.  
<sup>27</sup> For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,  
or let your Holy One experience corruption.  
<sup>20</sup> You have made known to me the ways of life;  
You will make me full of gladness with your presence.”

## 3. Mary Magdalene meet the Risen Lord (John 20:11-18)

Like other accounts of Jesus’ appearances, this Johannine story of Jesus’ appearance to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection manifests a triple dimension: divine initiative, recognition, and mission.

While Mary Magdalene is looking for the *dead* Jesus, Jesus takes the initiative of showing himself to her as living.

However, a mere sense encounter is insufficient for the recognition of Jesus. Jesus is not recognized until (again by divine initiative) he makes himself present to her by a personal address, “Mary!” At this point the sense encounter through sight becomes personal encounter with the Master through experience.

But the full revelation of the meaning of the event (that is, the meaning of the Resurrection) requires a further divine initiative. As Mary attempts to cling to the Master, (that is, to the earthly understanding of Jesus), Jesus proclaims his return to the Father (that is, his Lordship) and commissions Mary to deliver this saving message to all the disciples: “*I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.*”

Let us hear these words aright: “*my father and your father; my God and your God.*” If Jesus is to be truly present in the world, he must return to the heavenly realm, never to be humbled again in the *kenosis* of the incarnation. He is Lord: I am ascending to my father, to my God, who is also our father, our God. By his exaltation as Lord his father becomes our father, his God become our God. We must therefore conclude that his life becomes our life; his mission



becomes our mission; and the cause for which he lived and died must be ours as well.

This is the message that Jesus commissioned Mary Magdalene to convey to his disciples. This is the paschal mystery; but this is also the test of faith. Throughout the Fourth Gospel Jesus is presented as trying to explain this mystery to all who would hear. For all of them it was a test of their faith. His enemies tried repeatedly to kill him, and finally succeeded. Most of his followers abandoned him in the end and ran off. It is also the test for all in the present day. Jesus' enemies would, if not kill him, commit him to an insane asylum or simply dismiss him as a lunatic. His followers today as always often prefer to lie low. Mary conveyed the message to the disciples; but, as the Thomas story teaches (John 20:24-29), we are neither in a worse nor in a better position than were the early disciples. The mystery continues to be for us all a test of faith.

### E. ADJUNCTS

#### 1. SPIRITUAL THEOREM

Great Sun, flame of Christ,  
 You have passed through four houses of the Zodiac:  
 Through *Virgo*, where Christ was born of flesh  
 From His soul, matched and matchless;  
 Through the *Waterbearer*, when He sorrowed  
 In tears, blameless; through the *Bull*,  
 When He offered His body on the gallows.  
 Now he enters the house of the *Lion*  
 With a mane of light whose beams  
 Enflame the hemispheres, and His voice  
 Is the shaking thunder, the roar from the grave  
 That brings the world of beasts to the yoke  
 Of His redemption.

[Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936)]

#### 2. FLOWER AND FRUIT

Your wounds, my Jesus,  
 are my delight, my whole good,  
*and yet they break my heart.*

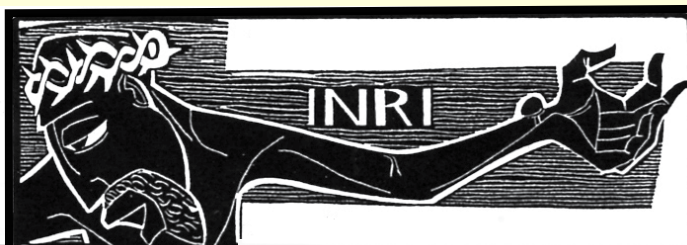
They are clefts in that divine rock  
 where love looks out  
 to make a nest for the dove, flying listlessly.  
 They are portals to the pool of mercy,  
 ports of entry to salvation;  
*and yet they break my heart.*  
 They are five roses on a red rosebush widening;  
 five pomegranates cleaved wide  
 on the wide-pierced trunk of a pomegranate tree.  
 They are flower and fruit  
 of the Promised Land,  
*and yet they break my heart.*  
 They are the wounds of a captain  
 gone ahead to spy out the land,  
 the wounds given you  
 in the good fight to save all the rest.

They are the wounds of a lover  
 who declares his passion;  
*and yet they break my heart.*

They are the wounds you chose  
 to accept for them  
 in your hands, that they might not wound;  
 in your feet, so they could not run away;  
 in your heart, to open the pardon door;  
*and yet they break my heart.*

[JOSÉ DE VALDIVIESO (1560?-1638)  
 Translated from the Spanish  
 by Sister M. Katharine Elaine, C.S.C.]

#### 3. INCARNATION HYMN (Phil 2:6-11)



**All Praise to Thee** Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872-1958.

Text: Paraphrase on Phil 2:6-11

1. All praise to thee, for thou, O King di - vine, Didst  
 2. Thou camest to us in low - li - ness of thought; By  
 3. Let this mind be in us which was in thee, Who  
 4. Where - fore, by God's e - ter - nal pur - pose, thou Art  
 5. Let ev - ery tongue con - fess with one ac - cord In

yield the glo - ry that of right was thine, That  
 thee the out - cast and the poor were sought, And  
 wast a serv - ant that we might be free, And  
 high ex - alt - ed o'er all crea - tures now, And  
 heav'n and earth that Je - sus Christ is Lord; And

in our dark - ened hearts thy grace might shine.  
 by thy death was God's sal - va - tion wrought.  
 hum - bled un - to death on Cal - va - ry.  
 giv'n the Name to which all knees shall bow.  
 God the Fa - ther be . by all a - dored.

Je - sus Christ is Lord....., Je - - -sus Christ is Lord!







Rome, April 1st, 2009

To Salesian Confreres of the Congregation

My Dear Confreres,

We are in the Jubilee year of the 150th anniversary of the founding of our Salesian Society. There are many initiatives under way in various Provinces, and a lively historical interest in the beginnings of our charismatic family is spreading pretty well everywhere. All of this makes for a greater awareness in us of our Salesian consecrated vocation and fosters the maturing of our charism which can lead to a deep renewal in our life and in our mission. With a sense of humble gratitude we feel the need to give praise to the Lord for the great gift we have received.

At the centre of all that we are celebrating in this "Holy Year" of the Congregation there is the fascination with the person of Don Bosco, who, still today, renews in us our enthusiasm, attracting our heart for an ever more complete gift of ourselves, re-enforces the passion for the mission to the young. In these days the memory of his canonisation which took place on Easter Sunday seventy five years ago by Pius XI, on 1 April 1934, helps us to understand that it is precisely his holiness that has conquered us. Our admiration for Don Bosco grows because of his holiness and it is this which invites us to invoke and to imitate our Founder.

1. In my first letter at the beginning of the last six-year period, with the same words that the Servant of God John Paul II used, I wrote to you "Dear Salesians, be saints!". In this way I invited you to make holiness our plan of spiritual life and of pastoral action. At the beginning of this new six-year period, the year of grace which we are celebrating once again presents us with the commitment to holiness as the main way "to make a fair copy of the Congregation", as Don Bosco himself prophetically expressed it.

Holiness is the beautiful thing about our lives, our communities, our Congregation. Holiness which is expressed in the radical following of the Lord Jesus obedient, poor and chaste, is the fascinating thing about consecrated life. Holiness lived in the total giving of oneself to God for

poor youth, is the power which emanates from a witness which is genuine, capable of raising up and attracting vocations. This then is why holiness together with its art and its liturgy, constitutes the beauty of the Church. Rightly then one can say: "Only beauty will save the world!"

2. Don Bosco's holiness is the guarantee that his life-project, his school of spirituality, his style of apostolic action constitute an authentic path which leads to the fullness of love. Following the path opened up by Don Bosco in the following of Christ, we have the certainty of living a life that is fully evangelical, completely given without conditions, with reserve without holding back. At the school of Don Bosco we too learn to be saints.

3. The many forms and the great variety of holiness that have flowered in the 150 years of the Congregation, among the young pupils, in the Salesian Family are a sign of the holiness of our Founder. "The holiness of the sons proves the holiness of the father," Blessed Michael Rua wrote to Salesian Rectors, in sending them the spiritual testament of Don Bosco, a few days after his death. The first Salesian generation had no doubts about the holiness of their "father and teacher," even though they could not proclaim it before the Church had solemnly recognised it.

In the meantime the holiness which at its beginnings the Congregation succeeded in living in its service of the young, applying the extraordinarily simple but equally effective method used by Don Bosco, would have been the most valid argument in favour of the holiness of the Founder. In this way with time the holiness of the sons and daughters has gone on increasing: following the father a good number of his disciples made their own that sympathetic form of holiness almost "homely" which is the "holiness of work and of the playground."

4. There are so many Salesian saints male and female who have drawn their inspiration from Don Bosco. The same path is being set before us: if we want to become saints we have to look at him. We are the heirs of a saint. Holiness is the greatest legacy that he has left us. Don Bosco has handed on to us an original style of holiness, consisting in simplicity and attractiveness. A holiness that makes us friendly, good, simple, easy-going. This is the holiness to which we are called, capable of attracting the young. This has been Don Bosco's gift to the young and this is the best gift that we too can offer to the today's young people. Let us remember dear Confreres: poor young people have a right to our holiness!

Paraphrasing Don Bosco, we may say that it is a fascinating thing to be saints, because holiness is luminosity, spiritual energy, splendour, light, inner joy, equilibrium, serenity, love taken to the extreme. The Church too in Vatican Council II reminds us that "everyone is called to holiness" (LG 39). This is the priority of the new millennium: "it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity... The

time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this high standard of ordinary Christian living” (NMI 31).

Holiness should not intimidate us, as though it were asking us to live an impossible heroism, reserved to the few privileged ones. Holiness is not our work, but the gratuitous participation in God’s holiness, and therefore a grace. It is a gift, before being the fruit of our efforts. Our whole being is inserted in the mysterious sphere of the purity, the goodness, the gratuity, the mercy, the love of the Lord Jesus. It is the total handing over of ourselves in faith, in hope, in love to God; a handing over that is accomplished day by day with serenity, patience, gratuity, accepting daily trials and joys with the certainty that all makes sense in God’s eyes.

Don Bosco’s holiness shines out with the splendour with the hope and with the joy of Easter. The Jubilee of Easter Sunday 1 April 1934, experienced in St Peter’s Square on the day of the canonisation, places Don Bosco’s holiness in an Easter light. With the approach of Easter in this year of grace 2009 it is my prayer for all of us that with renewed joy and commitment we may live this journey of holiness as a new life.

Cordially in the Lord

Fr. Pascual Chávez Villanueva, SDB

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