

# A.M.D.G. Sodality Manual for the Formation of Candidates

*“The authentic Sodality must mould Christians who, filled with a holy discontent, are ardent followers of the Cross and valiant servants of the Church. Their ideal is Our Lady who has crushed the serpent’s head, who stood beneath the Cross and who epitomizes the Church.”*

Hugo Rahner, SJ, *True Source of the Sodality Spirit*



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## Introduction

A Marian Sodality is a community of lay Catholics filled with holy restlessness, who, directed by a Jesuit, are conformed to Christ through the *Spiritual Exercises*, consecrated to Mary, and committed to devout prayer, continual formation, and magnanimous service to neighbor, for the greater glory of God. There are five inter-related dimensions of the Marian Sodality:

1. **Ecclesial/Communal:** ‘Sodality’ comes from the Latin word *sodalis*, meaning ‘a very close friend or companion.’ A Sodality is a group of companions, of friends in the Lord. Jesus is the first and true master, and the Jesuit director of the Sodality is His companion and acts as His representative. Those gathered around the Jesuit are the community of disciples, always striving to approximate to the ideal communion of the apostolic Church (Acts 4:32-33). The communal dimension of the Sodality is thus the foundation upon which the other dimensions build.
2. **Christocentric:** The Marian Sodalities strive to conform their members to the person of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29). The 1601 *Manuale Sodalitatis* describes this goal as follows, “The first aim of a Sodality must be the cultivation of a *more* perfect life like to the life of Christ.” All of the activities of the Sodality, from prayer to community to ministry, help the Sodalist to this end. The Marian Sodalities take the spiritual itinerary for conforming one’s soul to Christ from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius.
3. **Marian:** The Sodality takes Our Lady as the model disciple of Jesus, who surrendered herself completely to God at the annunciation (cf. Lk. 1:38), who stood beneath the cross suffering with her son (Jn. 19:26-27), and who was at the heart of the Apostolic Church (cf. Acts 1:14). Thus, Sodalists have a special devotion to Mary, and express their devotion by making a formal consecration to Her as part of their final initiation into the Sodality.
4. **Formative:** In order for a Sodalist to be conformed to Christ, consecrated to Mary, and committed to magnanimous service, he or she must be well formed. The Jesuit director of each Sodality is tasked with forming its members deeply, and much time is given in meetings to the formation of members at all levels: associates, candidates, and consecrated Sodalists. This formation is not focused on one off themes, as speaker events often are, or even short programs that lack a larger continuity, as in the case of Bible studies and book clubs. Sodality formation is systematic, and covers the spiritual, intellectual, and moral dimensions of living Faith in Christ.
5. **Magnanimous:** The Marian Sodality satisfies lay people who have a **holy restlessness for more**, *magis*, and desire to commit themselves to greater spiritual and apostolic activities than the ordinary Catholic obligations. As Fr. Hugo Rahner, SJ articulated it, “The Sodality enrolls men who have written the word *more* on their standards. They should be Sodalists who in the meditation on the kingdom are called ‘prompt’ and ‘diligent’, who want to lay at the feet of their King and Lord ‘offerings of greater value’.” The Sodalists concretize this striving in the requirements of daily prayers, weekday Mass, regular meetings, monthly confession, monthly service, and an annual retreat.

These dimensions or ‘marks’ of the Sodality are not separate ‘pillars’ of an edifice, but rather interpenetrate each other, mutually informing and strengthening one another, as one complex alloy from which the whole building is made. For example, being centered on Christ makes one

more magnanimous, and by drawing closer to Mary one draws closer into communion in the Church. Individual Sodality communities become living stones, strengthening the spiritual house of God (1Pet. 2:5), always with the purpose of being a source of renewal in the Church and an instrument for the salvation of souls in the world.

The Sodality commitments incarnate these five dimensions in specific activities, which form the Sodality *way of life*. This way of life unifies prayer, community, formation, and service, within an overall spirituality based on the *Spiritual Exercises*. The principal commitments of the Sodality are:

- **Daily Commitments:** To pray morning and evening, offering their days to Christ, examining their consciences and striving to overcome their faults;
- **Weekly Commitments:** To participate in Sodality meetings, growing in friendship and being formed by the Jesuits; to attend Mass once during the week, growing in love for the Jesus in the Eucharist;
- **Monthly Commitments:** To engage in regular Christian service, helping those in need, and to go to confession once a month;
- **Annual Commitment:** To make an annual retreat based on the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius.

The Jesuit director and the Sodality moderators lead the weekly meetings, with the help of the Sodality officers, especially the Sodality Prefect and Assistant Prefect. The content of the meetings is at the discretion of the director, however it tends to rotate between the activities of prayer, formation, community, and service. A typical rotation over the course of a month is:

- **Formation Meeting:** The director or one he delegates presents on a spiritual or moral theme.
- **Prayer Meeting:** These meetings are typically a Sodality rosary, or a guided meditation, or Eucharistic Adoration.
- **Social Meeting:** The Sodality shares a meal together, or engages in an activity that fosters community.
- **Service/Planning Meeting:** The Sodality plans and prepares for its monthly service work, or the Sodality director and officers organize other meetings or events, or the annual retreat.

## The Formation of Candidates

The formation of the candidates follows an itinerary based on the five dimensions. It begins with fostering the relationship with Christ, using the method and spiritual itinerary laid out in *The Spiritual Exercises*. From the foundation of this relationship with Christ, formation continues with the specific commitments of the life of a Sodalist. The third part presents Our Lady as the perfect model of the disciple of Christ, and as the spiritual mother and queen of the Sodality. The final part of formation explains the service component, how Christ commissions his disciples to evangelize through love of neighbor, which is the mission of the Sodality.

Candidates continue in candidacy until the director calls them to make their consecration. The members of the Sodality has always been selective. Not every candidate shows the commitment to live the Sodality way of life. Only those who have been proven worthy should make their consecration. As Fr. Hugo Rahner, SJ explains, and not “one of the essential principles of the Sodality: its membership must be selective; it must be formed from the spiritual élite. Even more today than in the past, the Sodality must be a union of Christians who embody the whole case of mind, the spirit of the first Christians so often stressed in the Gospels, which is called ‘watchfulness’ or ‘alertness’ (cf. Mk 13:35; 1Cor. 16:13; Rev. 16:15). “Be sober and watch, because your adversary the Devil goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.” (1Pet. 5:8)” (*True Source of the Sodality Spirit*)

### 1. Theme and Method for Formation Meetings

The theme and method of this stage of the formation of candidates are taken from the *Spiritual Exercises*. This is appropriate both because the Sodality draws its spiritual inspiration from the *Spiritual Exercises* (Mark 1), and because the *Exercises* are, in essence, an inculcation of the retreatant into God’s plan of salvation as it is revealed in the Word of God, and most especially in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Fr. Gilles Cusson, SJ explains this dynamic well,

The Exercises are above all – and we shall return to this point when treating the role of the intellect – to open the human mind to God’s plan or mystery, to enlighten this concrete retreatant with a light that ‘comes from above,’ so that by this light, he or she may fit himself into God’s order, may choose, may commit himself. Thus, we come back to our first conclusion: The Exercises ought to present the divine message with intelligence, depth, and simplicity – never merely as it is in itself, that is to say, just for the presentation itself, but in function of this or that person who is hearing the word of God, and in the manner of the God who reveals himself by means of the events in sacred history.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cusson, S.J., Gilles. (1988). *Biblical Theology and the Spiritual Exercises*. Trans. Mary Angela Roduit, R.C. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, p. 97.

Thus, we should present the message of the Gospel in such a way that the power of God's revelation through His Word will have the effect of personal transformation that leads to a commitment to God's plan in the person's life.

The *Spiritual Exercises* provide the stages of the movement, the presentation of the divine message, and the subjective appropriation and commitment to that message. Cusson outlines those stages as follows,

The subjective stages are made clear in the text by the very sequence of the unfolding history of salvation, in which man finds himself exposed to Satan's stratagems, but also delivered from evil by Christ and associated with the universal work of redemption. These stages are: the encounter with the true God, the God of revelation, the purification which flows from this saving encounter, and the Christian commitment which is conscious, realistic, and generous. These stages correspond to the major divisions of the *Exercises*: the preparation (or the Foundation) then the First Week on the one hand, and on the other the Second, Third, and Fourth Weeks taken as a unit.<sup>2</sup>

Through the meditations, the candidates are immersed in each of these stages, with the hope that they appropriate the spiritual movements personally and intimately. The objective content of the meditations must lead to *subjective appropriation*. That is the goal.

The role of the formator of the candidates parallels the role of the director in giving the *Spiritual Exercises*. Cusson argues that, "the role of the director must be modest, sober, and respectful: to open ways....The director clearly exposes the truth, in a way which encourages the retreatant to reflect on it and disposes him for light. This light is the source of spiritual sentiments apt to bring about an interior renewal."<sup>3</sup> The formator should adopt the same attitude of modesty and encouragement. The formator presents the mysteries, and then encourages the candidates to enter into the mysteries of salvation at a personal level in silent meditation, as the time permits. He should always give primacy to the action of the Holy Spirit on the candidates, and not his own actions. Because every person comes with his or her own history, and receives the Word of God according to his or her own mode of receiving (*quidquid recipitur, ad modum recipientis recipitur*), the formator should accompany each candidate in the way best suited to the candidate's needs. This is the art of spiritual formation needed for this process.

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<sup>2</sup> Cusson, p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> Cusson, p. 107, 108.

## 2. Overview of the Program

### Part I: Introduction to the Sodality

- a. History of the Sodality
- b. Magnanimous
- c. Conformed to Christ
- d. Devoted to Mary

### Part II: Becoming a companion of Jesus

- e. Guided contemplations on:
  - i. Humanity created by God (Gen 2)
  - ii. First Principle and Foundation
  - iii. Sin enters human history (Gen 3)
  - iv. Personal Sin (Rom. 7:14-24)
  - v. God's response to human sin: The Covenants (Exod. 19-20)
  - vi. God promises a Savior (Isa. 9:1-7)
  - vii. The coming of Jesus (Lk. 1:26-38)
  - viii. The Spiritual War: The Baptism and Temptations of Jesus (Matt. 3:1-4:11)
  - ix. Jesus brings the Kingdom of God (Mk 1:14-39)
  - x. The call to discipleship (Lk 5:1-11)
  - xi. People's response to Jesus: Faith or rejection (Jn. 9)
  - xii. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross (Jn. 19)
  - xiii. Jesus' resurrection (Jn. 20)
  - xiv. Receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2)
  - xv. New life in the Spirit (Gal. 5:13-24)
  - xvi. The Commission of the disciples (Matt. 28:16-20)
- f. Three Key Questions:
  - i. What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I do for Christ?

### B. Spiritual Exercises – Candidates retreat

### C. Living as a disciple of Christ:

- a. After retreat: Start chastity training
- b. Mass
- c. Confession

### D. How to be a disciple of Christ in the Church:

- a. St. Ignatius as example: Autobiography
- b. Personal

### E. Meetings on Devotion to Mary

- a. Mary as Model Handmaid of the Lord (Lk 1:26-38)
- b. Mother-Son relationship to Mary (Jn 19)

- c. The Rosary
  - d. Devotion to Mary
  - e. Consecration to Mary
- F. Integrating service into one's life
- a. Call of the Eternal King
  - b. St. Peter Claver, SJ
  - c. Virtues – love of neighbor
  - d. Virtues – generosity
  - e. Positions of Leadership in the Sodality
  - f. Apostolic work as a Sodality

3. *Structure of the Weekly Meetings*

<b>30+min Meeting: Mediation &amp; Discussion</b>	<b>20min Meeting: Lectio &amp; Discussion</b>
Opening Prayer	Opening Prayer
Brief intro to the topic (5min)	Brief intro to the topic (5min)
Guided/personal meditation (15+min)	Read the passage, each person identifies a line that speaks to them, meditates on it (5min)
Journaling (3min)	Discussion of the lines chosen (10min)
Discussion (7min)	Concluding prayer and homework
Concluding prayer and homework`	

## Formation Meetings

### *Part I: Introduction to the Sodality*

#### Session 1: History of the Sodality

##### *Beginnings*

In 1551 Ignatius established the Roman College, a school that became the model for all other Jesuit schools. One of the teachers at the school, a teacher who had the youngest students, perhaps around 12-14 years old, was a priest by the name of Jean Leunis. Leunis established an after-school activity which helped the young men grow in a love of God and love of neighbor. In many ways this organization was not that extraordinary since the church had supported confraternities and third orders, organizations that helped men and women move towards a love of God. What was perhaps unique about this organization, especially as it developed a few decades after its foundation, was that it saw the need to establish a structure that made sense and was applicable to lay people. The world of the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century was a world that was becoming more and more complex thanks to new inventions such as printing, new information that came from exploration of foreign regions, and new scientific insights and inventions. Lay people, especially people living in the cities and dealing with challenges of urban living were searching for structures that would help them to follow the gospel in a changing world. In short, Leunis desired to establish a structure to help young men find God and move them towards that same God within a complex world.

In 1563 John Leunis created a structure for young men to help them move towards God. In order to promote this love of God Leunis advised the love and imitation of the Mother of God, who Leunis saw in Mary's yes at her Annunciation a model for all Christians. This emphasis on the Annunciation and the designation of Mary's Annunciation as the founding dedication to this group also can be based in the fact that the church used by the Roman College was the Church dedicated to Mary's Annunciation. In a few years after 1563, the Roman College supported three sodalities, one for the youngest, middle group, and then older students. These same students become adults and although they were graduates, they still appreciated the structure of the sodality as a means of helping them move towards God and love of neighbor. The Jesuits quickly realized that the sodality movement provided a structure for spiritual growth that could be used for men who were not students. Soon, sodalities were established among all sorts of groups of men, usually falling upon occupational lines or social class, which again reflected how groups fell in line with contemporary practices.

Two important events must be noted that assisted in shaping the identity and advancing the progress of the Marian Congregations. The first occurred on December 5, 1584 when Pope Gregory XIII identified the Sodality at the Roman college as the Mother and head of all sodalities and gave those sodalities that were established in imitation of this "primary" sodality all the spiritual privileges given to the sodality in Rome. This ability to "aggregate" sodalities created a body of multiple members sharing the same goals and spiritual gifts. The second important event occurred on 1 November, 1587 when superior general Claudio Acquaviva established a set of rules that were to be followed by all the sodalities throughout the world. Although there had been previous rules and practices established by Jean Leunis and others, this

rule became the standard rule on which all sodalities needed to conform. Acquaviva took several years to establish this rule and it was done after consultation with various groups and after an examination of various practices of the Sodality. This rule was binding on all congregations, though each congregation could establish secondary rules specific to their own sodality. Acquaviva instilled within the movement both structure and adaptability, a method encouraged and practiced by St. Ignatius. Many of these structures imitated the life of a Jesuit. No one was admitted to the Congregation without going through a “novitiate” or probationary period. At the end of this period, those seeking admittance to the Congregation made a consecration of themselves to Mary, the Mother of God, and to live a life in conformity to the rules of the Congregation, which included various spiritual practices, such as a daily examination of conscience, frequent reception of the sacraments, and participation in the functions of the Congregation. If one was a member of a congregation and in good standing, one could enter other congregations in a different city.

### *The Activities of the Sodalities*

These organizations very much fell in line with the two great values of the Catholic faith, love of God and love of neighbor. How the sodalities achieved these goals provides a key to their success. First, prior to the suppression of the Jesuits in 1774, all the sodalites were under the direction of the Jesuits. This direction was experienced by means of the Jesuit director leading weekly meetings, his admonition to frequency of the sacraments, and encouragement in the practice of those structures the church had identified as means of moving towards God such as veneration of the saints and the Blessed Mother. In keeping with Catholic reform, all these sodalities established themselves in good theology and proper practice.

One spiritual practice deserves attention, the promotion of frequent communion. Prior to the Council of Trent Catholics had to receive communion and go to confession at least once a year. There was a movement among some Catholic reformers to advance frequency and this amounted to perhaps four times year. The sodalites advanced monthly communion and in fact most members received communion and confession twice a month. This was considered a very devout practice and since the reception of communion was a public event, it provided an external sign of an inner spiritual desire. The movement towards daily communion, provided one is correctly disposed to receive the sacrament, was finally promoted by Pope St. Pius X (Pope 1903-1914), who was directly influenced by the work of the Jesuits in their promotion of frequent communion in the Sodalities.

Whereas the Jesuit director provided the spiritual direction for the organization, the members supervised and organized the charitable aspects of the sodality. The sodality had a governance structure that developed lay leader leadership and lay initiative. Each sodality had a prefect, assistants to the prefect, sub prefect, treasurer, and other offices. These officials organized and directed important charitable events. A few examples of the teamwork between the Jesuits and the congregation must suffice.

One important work of the Jesuits was the promotion of frequent communion. During this time, it was presumed that one went to confession prior to going to communion and it was an important step in spiritual growth since awareness of one’s sins was the first step in spiritual progress. One Marian Sodality in Rome helped the Jesuits promote the work of promoting confession by building confessional boxes in the piazza in front of the Pantheon and then these same members encouraged men walking by to go to confession. The congregation members

talked to men in the streets and gave them information on how to confess their sins by providing a sheet of paper with a short examination of conscience and the act of contrition. These same sodality members shared their own personal experience of how they thought it would be difficult going to confession but in reality it wasn't that bad and they shared how much better they felt afterwards. Street ministry, faith sharing, and evangelization played an important part in the work of the members of the Marian Sodality! These men who "worked" the crowds were called *pescatori*, which is Italian for fishermen. They "fished" the piazza and brought the fish into the boat. Although the Jesuits performed the necessary sacramental ministry, the members of the congregation did the necessary work of getting penitents into the confessional. Teamwork between laity and Jesuits created success.

Another important work was the production of a massive display of the Blessed Sacrament during the last three days of Carnival, the three days before Ash Wednesday which culminated in Mardi Gras. Carnival in Rome made spring break in Fort Lauderdale look like a Holy Hour at the Missionaries of Charity. The event occurred up and down the long central street in the center of Rome called the *Corso*. The *Corso* was directly behind the church of the Gesu in Rome which meant that one of the most decadent events in western Europe was occurring behind the main church of the Society of Jesus. The Jesuits were not amused, but what could be done? A Marian sodality comprised of nobility came to the rescue. They established an incredible, and very expensive, theater set which framed the Blessed Sacrament, complete with moving parts, over five thousand candles, choirs, and holy cards to be distributed. The Jesuits preached and heard confessions, and the members of the congregation commissioned the event, organized its construction, and paid for its expenses. By today's standards each of these exhibitions of the Blessed Sacrament would have cost over two hundred thousand dollars. All this was done to keep people off the streets and in the church during the evenings of the most decadent nights of carnival.

Another congregation, comprised of merchants who were less financially able than the nobles, collected funds and gave food to the many homeless that came to Rome in search of support. We would call their work today as running a soup kitchen.

Although the works of these various congregations were different, each one reflected the pattern established by the Jesuits by providing the spiritual formation for the members and how this spiritual growth could be experienced in acts of charity. It was a team effort and both groups were needed for success.

All congregations had some charitable aspect, but the charitable work was always age appropriate. The youngest members of a congregation, such as the young students at the Roman College, gathered funds and would visit the hospitals and give sweets to the sick on some occasion. Younger members of the sodality and their Jesuit directors knew the importance of building a firm foundation in the spiritual life prior to acts of service. Student involvement in the works of charity, especially younger students, was limited. Congregations comprised of adults performed more elaborate works with greater interaction with the poor of Rome.

Common to all groups was the idea that spiritual formation provided the basis for good works. The work of feeding the poor would have made no sense to these members of the Marian sodality if it did not have its foundation in the love of Jesus which was perfected at various meetings and spiritual exercises.....

### *19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Sodalities*

In the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century various popes and general superiors of the Jesuit order saw the sodality movement as an important defense against the enemies of the Catholic faith and the human dignity that faith defended. On August 31, 1885, the superior General of the Jesuits, Fr. Anderledy approved a new Rule for Sodality and recommended that Sodality be promoted within the houses and schools of the Jesuits. In 1907 Superior General Francis Wernz wrote on several occasions identifying the importance of promoting Sodality as a response to the needs of the times.....

Prior to World War I, Pope Leo XIII had begun to establish an invigorating agenda for the church in terms of its outreach to the social needs of the times. In his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) Pope Leo XIII saw the laity playing a key role in promoting the Kingdom of Christ. To align the work of the sodality with the vision of lay involvement in the church, the superior general of the Jesuits, Francis Wernz, created a new rule for the Sodalities and this promulgated on 8 December 1910. With the promulgation of this rule, Fr. Wernz identified the Sodality as one of the more important works of the Society of Jesus.....

Although the Great War was to be the War to end all Wars, the subsequent peace only created a fertile field for future aggression. Economic dislocation led to fascist and dictatorial governments, governments that perceived the Catholic church as a block to these government's desire for power and subjection of various groups. In 1917 a new constitution was established in Mexico that was hostile to the church. This hostility broke out into open warfare, known as the *Cristero War* fought between the state and defenders of the church. In Mexico members of the Marian sodality bravely, and at risk of their own lives, worked to promote the faith. One promoter of the Sodality, Fr. Miguel Pro, SJ, was shot before a firing squad because he defended the truths of the Catholic faith. His last words before the shots were fired were: *Viva Cristo Rey – Long live Christ the King*. The story of Miguel Pro was told and retold in Sodality journals throughout the world and provided inspiration to the men and women in Germany who were supporting Catholicism under the growing Nazi regime. When a young sodalist was photographed waving the Marian Sodality flag in Germany in 1935 it was not simply an act of piety, it was an act of courage in support of the Catholic faith against totalitarianism.

The idea that the Sodality considered as a fighting unit in defense of the faith could be seen in the name of the monthly journal that came out of the General Secretariat. The Latin title *Acies Ordinata* was Latin for a well organized Army. The Sodality army fought for the recognition of God's action in the world and for the dignity of the human person. And, like any army, its members required training. No better example of training the Sodalists for action could be found than in the work of Fr. Daniel Lord, S.J. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States, many consigned the Sodality movement to the pages of history, considering only to be a pious organization for children and old ladies. Inspired by the meeting of 1922, the Provincial of the Missouri province put Daniel Lord, S.J. in charge of the Sodality in the United States and the head of its national Magazine, *The Queen's work*. Fr. Lord turned the sodality around and by means of his personality, his publications, and persistence, he saw the renovation of the Sodalities in the United States. By the mid 1940s there were 13,000 active sodalities in the United States. Members of the Sodalities throughout the world, and especially in the United States, saw themselves as men and women in defending and promoting Catholic Action. The Sodality theme song written by Daniel Lord captures the spirit and direction of the movement:

An army of youth  
Flying the standards of truth,

We're fighting for Christ, the Lord.  
Heads lifted high,  
Catholic Action our cry,  
And the Cross our only sword.  
On earth's battlefield  
Never a vantage we'll yield.  
As dauntlessly on we swing  
Comrades true, dare and do  
'Neath the Queen's white and blue,  
For our flag, for our faith,  
For Christ the King.

Written in 1932, “An army of Youth” set to song the spirit of the movement. We must recall that songs had power and Daniel Lord knew that his song stood in competition to the values and practices that were being sung by Nazi youth in Germany and Fascist youth in Italy. This was not some pretty little song; it was a political statement against totalitarianism which identified a fight for the well-being of humanity. In an effort to promote the ideals of the sodality, Fr. Lord established The Summer Schools of Catholic Action, five-day meetings around the country in various cities which promoted spiritual formation and addressed the social needs of the time. These schools handled controversial topics such as issues of race (referred at the time as “the social question”), the United States’ involvement in the United Nations, and the benefit of worker’s unions. Fr Lord was not an individual case. Many sodality leaders, particularly in Spain, Brazil, Italy, Germany, and Austria directed sodalities during times of challenge and conflict....

### *Pope Pius XII and the Sodalities*

Pope Pius XII became pope in 1939 and his papacy witnessed the calamities brought on by secularism and materialism. The war and its aftermath present a sad commentary on the human condition in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. A member of a Marian sodality himself, the pope saw the sodality movement as providing one of the great needs of church: the Christian formation of the laity. To that end he identified the Marian Sodalities under the care of the Society of Jesus as a type of template or model for Catholic formation of the laity. He did this in the Apostolic Constitution *Bis Saeculari*, published on September 27, 1948. That the pope would charge the Society of Jesus with such a work demonstrates the admiration Pope Pius XII had for both the for Society of Jesus and for the potentials he saw in lay formation within the framework of the Marian Sodalities. To understand the seriousness of this request of the Pope, we need to note that *Bis Saeculari* was an Apostolic Constitution. In terms of importance, an Apostolic Constitution is one of the highest forms of papal teachings, it is not considered on the same level as Dogmatic pronouncements (such as the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption) but it rates higher than an encyclical. In brief, Pius XII saw that there was serious work to be done and he handed the job to the Jesuits and the Marian sodalities.....

To conclude, we may note at this point that groups have always been established to supply structures to attain values. The church exists as the primary structure instituted by Christ to continue the work of the redemptive action of Christ by moving men and women towards love of God and love of neighbor. The Society of Jesus exists as one of those structures within the

Church, and within the Society of Jesus several structures were created that helped move men and women towards the two values identified by Jesus: love of God and love of neighbor. The Sodalities of the Blessed Virgin Mary established by the Society of Jesus provided an important structure for bringing its members and those with whom they worked to the Heart of Christ by providing for their spiritual and social needs. The description of how a revival of the Sodality and its traditional practices will affect the church and individual members of the Sodality and those with whom they interact must be the task of future historians.

**Reflection questions:**

- What inspires you about the history of the Sodality?
- What more would you like to learn about the Sodality?
- Why do you want to join the Sodality?

## Session 2: Magnanimity and the Commitments

The Marian Sodality satisfies lay people who have a **holy restlessness for more**, *magis*, and desire to commit themselves to greater spiritual and apostolic activities than the ordinary Catholic obligations. The members constantly strive to grow more fully, to give more generously, and to sacrifice more lovingly to Christ, with Mary, in community with others, and for the salvation of souls.

Again, we draw upon Hugo Rahner, SJ to explain the importance of this last mark of the Sodality, magnanimity. “The Sodality enrolls men who have written the word *more* on their standards. They should be Sodalists who in the meditation on the kingdom are called ‘prompt’ and ‘diligent’, who want to lay at the feet of their King and Lord ‘offerings of greater value’. This oblation consists in a readiness to become like the king who through His labours alone brought the world back to the Father. Basically this means self-denial, one’s own sanctification through assimilation to the Crucified....It is here, above all, that the élite are distinguished from the masses.” (*True Source of the Sodality Spirit*)

The Sodalists concretize their desire for more in the commitments:

- Daily prayers, morning and evening
- Weekday Mass,
- Regular meetings,
- Monthly confession,
- Monthly service,
- Annual retreat.

The virtue of magnanimity extends beyond the activities of the Sodality to all aspects of the Sodalists’ lives. God bestows natural and supernatural gifts upon us in order for us to use them for His greater glory (cf. Matt. 25:14-30). If the Sodalists are students and athletes, they are expected to strive to attain the maximum level of excellence that their abilities and circumstances allow. If the Sodalists are employed in the world, they should embody the highest standards of professionalism in their respective fields and distinguish themselves in their work. They serve the Lord in these areas, and not men (Col. 3:22-23). In this way the Sodalists will shine as lights in the world (Philip. 2:15), be the leaders in their various domains, and exercise influence over their peers. This is how they fulfill their commission, their being ‘sent out,’ for the salvation of souls.

### Reflection Questions:

- What has been your experience of service and ministry?
- How would you describe your *holy restlessness* for more?
- What are you willing to commit yourself to in order to satisfy your desire for more?
- What do you think about the Sodality commitments?

### Sessions 3: Conformed to Christ

The Marian Sodalities strive to conform their members to the person of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29). The 1601 *Manuale Sodalitatis* describes this goal as follows, “The first aim of a Sodality must be the cultivation of a *more* perfect life like to the life of Christ.” All of the activities of the Sodality, from pray to community to ministry, help the Sodalist to this end. Most important activities in drawing close to Christ are the participation in a weekday Mass, monthly confession, and the annual silent retreat.

The Marian Sodalities take the spiritual itinerary for conforming one’s soul to Christ from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. In the *Spiritual Exercises* Jesus stands as the eternal King calling the retreatant to follow him in spreading the Kingdom of God in the world, in the midst of confrontation with the forces of Satan (SpEx. 91-98, 143-47). This call develops through the retreat into an invitation *to imitate* Christ the king, especially in poverty and humility (SpEx. 147, 167), and to share in his salvific mission, especially in His suffering and death (SpEx. 203). This call finds concrete expression for the retreatant in service in the Church. The grace of the Second Week of the retreat summarizes the movement of the soul to union with Christ through, “an intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me, that I may love Him more and follow Him more closely.” (SpEx., 104) The Sodalist slowly appropriates these graces through the annual silent retreat, and in his meditation throughout the year.

The interior conformity to Christ leads to concrete service to Him in His Church. Guided by St. Ignatius, contemplation of Christ leads to action in the world, which in turn challenges the Sodalist to a deeper conformity to Christ in his interior life, which then bears more fruit in his ministry, and so on in an ongoing cyclical movement of his spiritual life. Fr. Hugo Rahner, SJ explains how this movement strengthens the Church, “The authentic Sodality trains its members to open their eyes to the Church, militant and suffering, in its earthly pilgrimage. To put this more accurately and in a more Christian way; the Sodality must become a brave friend of Our Lord Jesus Christ visible in the modern Church, Christ who here and now wants to carry on the fight with the help of His faithful friends who understand His needs and see Him in their neighbour.” (*True Source of the Sodality Spirit*)

#### Reflection Questions:

- What is your current relationship with Jesus?
- What attracts you, and also what makes you hesitant, about conforming your life to Christ?
- How are you moved by the image of fighting alongside Christ in the spiritual battle?
- Where can you see yourself contributing to the life of the Church with your gifts and talents?

## Session 4: Devoted to Mary

The Sodality takes Our Lady as the model disciple of Jesus, who surrendered herself completely to God at the annunciation (cf. Lk. 1:38), who stood beneath the cross suffering with her son (Jn. 19:26-27), and who was at the heart of the Apostolic Church (cf. Acts 1:14). She teaches the Sodalists how to follow her Son, Jesus, and leads them in the spiritual battle that rages in the world. In this way she is both Mother and Queen.

Hugo Rahner, SJ beautifully articulates the intermingling of the Christocentric and Marian dimensions of the Sodality, “It is no accident of history that the first Sodality in Rome was dedicated to the mystery of the Annunciation. Nor was it pure coincidence that in 1522 Ignatius at Montserrat made his own dedication to Mary on the feast of the Annunciation. On that occasion he offered his weapons to his Queen and exchanged his worldly garb for pilgrim’s dress. Under the banner of his Queen he turned away from the vanity of the world toward the poor Christ. This is the conversion which must take place in the soul of every Sodalist. .... All real putting on of Christ, all growth into a ‘genuinely Catholic adulthood’ within the Sodality means to imitate Mary’s *Fiat*, its design in Christ’s redemption of the world. This is the *Fiat* that accepts the Cross of Christ that challenges all that is noble in the soul, that longs for a more perfect following of the suffering of Christ. .... In this way the Sodalist must learn through the Sodality to love Mary as the exalted Queen of his *magis*. She is Our Lady of Christian Discontent. She will lead him to the Cross.” (*True Source of the Sodality Spirit*)

Sodalists express their devotion to Mary by making a formal consecration to Her as part of their final initiation into the Sodality. Pope Pius XII describes the Marian consecration as follows, “These sodalities are to be called Sodalities of Our Lady not only because they take their name from the Blessed Virgin Mary, but especially because each Sodalist makes a profession of special devotion to the Mother of God and dedicates himself to her by a total consecration, under-taking, though not under the pain of sin, to strive by every means and under the standards of the Blessed Virgin for his own perfection and eternal salvation, as well as for that of his neighbours.” (*Bis Saeculari*, Art. VIII) The consecration to Mary binds the Sodalist to a lifelong spiritual commitment, and is at the heart of the spirit of the Sodality.

### Reflection Questions:

- What is your current relationship with Our Lady?
- Have you reflected upon how Mary is the model disciple of Jesus?
- How does the image of Mary as the Queen who leads her subjects into the spiritual battle resonate with you?
- In what ways can you grow in your devotion to Our Lady?

## *PART II: Becoming a Child of God*

### **Session 5: Creation Part I: Creation of the world**

**God created the universe:** “In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw how good the light was. God then separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." Thus evening came, and morning followed--the first day. (Gen. 1:1-5)

**God created the earth:** “Then God said, "Let the water be gathered into a single basin, so that the dry land may appear." And so it happened: the water was gathered, and the dry land appeared. God called the dry land "the earth," and the basin of the water he called "the sea." God saw how good it was. Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth vegetation: every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree." And so it happened: the earth brought forth every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree on earth. God saw how good it was. Evening came, and morning followed--the third day. (Gen. 1:9-13)

**God created human beings:** Then God said: ‘Let us make mankind in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that move upon the earth.’ God also said: ‘See, I give you every seed-bearing plant all over the earth and every tree with fruit to be your food; and to all the animals, all the birds of the air, I give you all the green plants for food.’ And so it happened. God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good. Evening came, and morning followed--the sixth day. (Gen. 1:26-31)

**Now consider how the Father has created you as a child of love to be loved. Imagine how he took earth into his hands and formed you.** “Then the Lord God formed a human from the dust of the earth, and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the human whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden....” (Gen. 2:7-9)

#### **Points:**

- God created a magnificent and beautiful universe
- God created humans in his own image and likeness to serve Him and rule over the earth
- God created you out of love
- God is creating you and the universe at every moment

#### **Reflection Questions:**

- What is the most beautiful place of nature you have ever visited?
- How do you react to the idea of being created in the image and likeness of God?

- What are the implications for you in your life of being created by God *out of love*?

Spiritual Reading:

## Session 6: Creation Part II: First Principle and Foundation

### First Principle and foundation

“Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul.

The other things on the face of the earth are created for man to help him in attaining the end for which he is created.

Hence, man is to make use of them in as far as they help him in the attainment of his end, and he must rid himself of them in as far as they prove a hindrance to him.

Therefore, we must make ourselves indifferent to all created things, as far as we are allowed free choice and are not under any prohibition. Consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short life. The same holds for all other things.

Our one desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we are created.”

*Spiritual Exercises, 23, San Ignacio de Loyola*

**God created you to serve Him:** “‘Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.’ Then I said, ‘Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.’ But the Lord said to me, ‘Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.’” Jer. 1:5-8

**We should become indifferent to all created things:** “<sup>25</sup>Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup>Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup>And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? <sup>28</sup>And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; <sup>29</sup>yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>30</sup>But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? <sup>31</sup>Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ <sup>32</sup>For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. <sup>33</sup>But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.” Matt. 6:25-33

Points:

- God created you to praise, reverence, and serve Him.

- You have a specific purpose in life, and a special service to offer to God
- The other things on the face of the earth are created to help you serve God.
- You should become indifferent to all created things and focus on serving God.

**Reflection Questions:**

- How do you react to the idea of being created to serve God?
- What things in your life have helped you to praise, reverence and serve God?
- What things in your life have hindered you in praising, reverencing, and serving God?
- How do you react to the idea of becoming ‘indifferent’ to all created things?

Spiritual Reading:

**My Mission in Life**

*By St. John Henry Newman*

“God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments. Therefore, I will trust Him, whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still, He knows what He is about.”

## Session 7: Sin enters the World

“<sup>3</sup> Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?’” <sup>2</sup> And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; <sup>3</sup> but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” <sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die. <sup>5</sup> For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” <sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.

<sup>8</sup> And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup> But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” <sup>10</sup> And he said, “I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” <sup>11</sup> He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” <sup>12</sup> The man said, “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” <sup>13</sup> Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent beguiled me, and I ate.”

<sup>14</sup> The LORD God said to the serpent,  
“Because you have done this,  
    cursed are you above all cattle,  
    and above all wild animals;  
upon your belly you shall go,  
    and dust you shall eat  
    all the days of your life.

<sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
    and between your seed and her seed;  
he shall bruise your head,  
    and you shall bruise his heel.”

<sup>16</sup> To the woman he said,  
“I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing;  
    in pain you shall bring forth children,  
yet your desire shall be for your husband,  
    and he shall rule over you.”

<sup>17</sup> And to Adam he said,  
“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,  
    and have eaten of the tree  
of which I commanded you,  
    ‘You shall not eat of it,’  
cursed is the ground because of you;

in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;  
<sup>18</sup> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you;  
and you shall eat the plants of the field.  
<sup>19</sup> In the sweat of your face  
you shall eat bread  
till you return to the ground,  
for out of it you were taken;  
you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return.”

<sup>20</sup> The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. <sup>21</sup> And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them. <sup>22</sup> Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”— <sup>23</sup> therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. <sup>24</sup> He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.”  
*Gen. 3:1-24*

Points:

- Sin is disobedience to God, greed/lust (‘delight to the eyes’), pride (‘to be like God’)
- Sin leads to guilt, which leads to shame (hiding) and blame (‘it was the woman...it was the serpent’)
- The negative consequences of sin: humans are expelled from God’s presence, and there is moral disorder (loss of innocence, need to wear clothing, strife between man and woman)

**Reflection Questions:**

- What strikes you most about the story of the Fall of the first human beings?
- How can the tragedy of ‘sin entering the world’ become a powerful interpretative lens for understanding all of human history?
- How do you see in your own experience of sin an echo in the story of the Fall of Adam and Eve?

Spiritual Reading:

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## Session 8: Personal Sin

“For there is no distinction; <sup>23</sup> since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..... 7.....  
<sup>14</sup> We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. <sup>15</sup> I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup> So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. <sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. <sup>21</sup> So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. <sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, <sup>23</sup> but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. <sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Rom. 3:22-23; 7:14-25

### Points:

- We have all sinned against God; as it was with the first humans, so it is with us
- Our sins have offended God, and disordered our nature
- Our sins enslave us, and we cannot free ourselves from them
- We *need* God’s mercy

### Reflection Questions:

- How has the claim that, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” sunk into your heart and shaped your self-understanding?
- What resonates with you from St. Paul’s description of his own struggles with sin?
- What does your own sinfulness reveal about God’s mercifulness?
- Where can we, as fallen human beings, go from here?

### Spiritual Reading:

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## Session 9: God's mercy – Election and Covenant

### Election of Israel and Covenant

“**19** On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone forth out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. **2** And when they set out from Reph'idim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, they encamped in the wilderness; and there Israel encamped before the mountain. **3** And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: **4** You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. **5** Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, **6** and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.” **7** So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him. **8** And all the people answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. **9** And the LORD said to Moses, “Lo, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you for ever.”.....

### Theophany: God reveals Himself to Israel on Mt. Sinai

**16** On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. **17** Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God; and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. **18** And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. **19** And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. **20** And the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.....

### The Law of the Covenant

**20** And God spoke all these words, saying,

**2**“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

**3**“You shall have no other gods before me.

**4**“You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; **5** you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, **6** but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

**7**“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

**8**“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. **9** Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; **10** but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work,

you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; <sup>11</sup> for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

<sup>12</sup> “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

<sup>13</sup> “You shall not kill.

<sup>14</sup> “You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup> “You shall not steal.

<sup>16</sup> “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup> “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

*Exod. 19:1-9, 16-20; 20:1-17*

Points:

- God saves the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt
- Election: God chooses the people of Israel among all the nations of the world
- Covenant: God forms a covenant with Israel at Sinai
- Theophany: God reveals Himself to Israel on Mt. Sinai, overcoming the estrangement caused by sin
- Law: God gives the Law of the Covenant, which is a condition of the bond with God, overcoming the moral disorder of sin

**Reflection Questions:**

- (How) have you experienced being saved from ‘slavery’ in your life?
- What is your reaction to being chosen by God, “you shall be my own possession among all peoples”?
- Have you ever had an experience of God revealing Himself to you? (an experience of felt presence of God, consolation, illumination, etc.)
- How committed are you now to following the Law of the Covenant, the Ten Commandments?

Spiritual Reading:

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## Session 10: Prophecy of the Coming of a Savior

<sup>2</sup>The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—  
on them light has shined.

<sup>3</sup>You have multiplied the nation,  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as people exult when dividing plunder.

<sup>4</sup>For the yoke of their burden,  
and the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

<sup>5</sup>For all the boots of the tramping warriors  
and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

<sup>6</sup>For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>7</sup>His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onward and forevermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.” *Isa. 9:2-7*

### Points:

- The history of Israel is a history of turning away from God and the Covenant, worshipping other gods and breaking the moral law. This is a mirror of all human civilizations, all human beings, who continue to fall away from God.
- God does not give up on Israel, or humanity as a whole, and promises to send a savior
- The savior will liberate humans from slavery to sin, and bring them back to God.
- All human sin leads to slavery, both individual (we cannot overcome our sins) and collective (eg. We can't break out of the 'sin of the world'). Thus, we all need a Savior.

### Reflection Questions:

- A few weeks ago you prayed about your own sinfulness. From that reflection, where in your life are you 'enslaved', and in need of a Savior?
- How does this *hope* for a Savior to 'enlighten your darkness' move your heart?

- What does this prophecy reveal about the God who promised it?

Spiritual Reading

## Part III: Becoming a Companion of Jesus

### Session 11: The Coming of Jesus

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" <sup>29</sup>But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

<sup>32</sup>He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup>and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end."

<sup>34</sup>And Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no husband?" <sup>35</sup>And the angel said to her,

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.

<sup>36</sup>And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. <sup>37</sup>For with God nothing will be impossible."

<sup>38</sup>And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her." *Lk. 1:26-38*

#### Points:

- When the proper time comes (Kairos), God sends the angel Gabriel to Mary of Nazareth to proclaim the coming of the Savior
- Mary is afraid, and does not understand how God will accomplish His will through her
- Mary surrenders to God's will in a total self-gift, "Let it be done to me according to your will."
- "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." Jn. 1:14

#### Reflection Questions:

- How do you resonate with the immense joy of Gabriel's proclamation of the coming of a Savior?
- How do you relate to Mary's fear and confusion at God's call to her?
- What challenges you about Mary's radical surrender to God's will?

- What does it mean for you, in your life and your understanding of the world, that, “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us”?

Spiritual Reading:

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## Session 12: Jesus is anointed by the Holy Spirit and defeats Satan

### The Baptism of Jesus

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” <sup>15</sup> But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness.” Then he consented. <sup>16</sup> And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; <sup>17</sup> and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

### The Temptation of Jesus

**4** Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”

<sup>4</sup> But he answered, “It is written,  
‘Man shall not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”

<sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup> and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,  
‘He will give his angels charge of you,’  
and  
‘On their hands they will bear you up,  
lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”

<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’” <sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; <sup>9</sup> and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

<sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to him, “Begone, Satan! for it is written,  
‘You shall worship the Lord your God  
and him only shall you serve.’”

<sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him.” *Matt. 3:13-17, 4:1-11*

#### Points:

- Jesus receives John’s baptism on behalf of Israel, symbolically repenting on behalf of the whole nation and receiving forgiveness
- The Father sends the Spirit upon Jesus, anointing him as the Messiah, King of Israel
- Jesus is led into the desert to confront the ‘ruler of this world’ (cf. Jn. 12:31), Satan
- Jesus defeats Satan in the desert, opening up the way to bring His kingdom to earth

#### Reflection Questions:

- How have you embraced the spirit of repentance and seeking of forgiveness in your own life?
- How have you lived consciously as a son of God, from the spirit of Sonship that you received at baptism?
- Where do you find yourself most tempted by the evil spirit in your life?
- How do the temptations of Jesus instruct you in your spiritual life?

Spiritual Reading:

“Jesus’ Baptism, then, is understood as a repetition of the whole of history, which both recapitulates the past and anticipates the future. His entering into the sin of others is a descent into the ‘inferno.’.....he goes down in the role of one whose suffering-with-others is a transforming suffering that turns the underworld around, knocking down and flinging open the gates of the abyss. His Baptism is a descent into the house of the evil one, combat with the ‘strong man’ (cf. Lk 11:22) who holds men captive (and the truth is that we are all very much captive to powers that anonymously manipulate us!). Throughout all its history, the world is powerless to defeat the ‘strong man’; he is overcome and bound by one yet stronger, who, because of his equality with God, can take upon himself all the sin of the world and then suffers it through to the end – omitting nothing on the downward path into identity with the fallen. This struggle is the ‘conversion’ of being that brings it into a new condition, that prepares a new heaven and a new earth.”

Pope Benedict XVI (2007). *Jesus of Nazareth*. New York: Doubleday, p. 20.

## Session 13: Jesus brings the Kingdom of God

Texts:

“<sup>14</sup>Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.”

<sup>16</sup>And passing along by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup>And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men.” <sup>18</sup>And immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup>And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zeb’edee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. <sup>20</sup>And immediately he called them; and they left their father Zeb’edee in the boat with the hired servants, and followed him.

<sup>21</sup>And they went into Caper’na-um; and immediately on the sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught. <sup>22</sup>And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup>And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; <sup>24</sup>and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” <sup>25</sup>But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” <sup>26</sup>And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. <sup>27</sup>And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” <sup>28</sup>And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.” *Mk. 1:14-29*

Points:

- Jesus preaches that the ‘time of the fulfillment’ of the prophecies has come, and announces the ‘Gospel’, that is, the Good News of salvation from sin and new life with God.
- Jesus calls disciples to form the New Israel, the new people of God
- Jesus casts out demons, installing God’s reign on earth, the Kingdom of God
- Jesus cures the sick, that is, heals people of the consequences of sin

**Reflection Questions:**

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Spiritual Reading:

**Jesus, the kingdom, and salvation**, “The power of God manifested in Jesus’ exorcisms is evidence that the kingdom of God has already come to humans. The verb *εφθασεν* used in the Greek text can be understood properly only in the sense of the presence of the kingdom. What is noteworthy and hence deserves to be highlighted is the link between the kingdom of God as the eschatological salvation and the person of Jesus. From the Qumran writings we know that this Jewish community also was familiar with the conception of salvation as present. But at Qumran salvation is not linked with a mediating person but rather with entry into the community of God. Further, the idea of the reign of God is not found in the sayings about the presence of salvation

[in the Qumran scrolls]. For Jesus the reign of God can be experienced as eschatological salvation in his mighty works, though not yet in its finality. Since the kingdom is linked with his person in its present experience, he remains the guarantor for its final, perfected manifestation. . . . It would be inadequate to construe his mighty works merely as signs of the coming kingdom. Its salvific power is already genuinely at work in them. Hence this has been referred to as dynamic presence. Perhaps this formulation is particularly appropriate. It is important to take into account that the logion has to be accorded essential significance. Jesus understood his exorcisms and miraculous healings, framed in an exorcistic context of that time, as anticipatory revelation of the reign of God taking place in his ministry, and thus interpreted the kingdom by it. The newness of this understanding vouches for the authenticity of its interpretation.”

Gnilka, Joachim. (1997). *Jesus of Nazareth: Message and History*. Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, p. 129

## Session 14: The People's response to Jesus – repentance and faith, or rejection

Texts: *Jn. 9*

Points:

- Jesus works miracles as a sign of His power and authority from God
- Some people come to believe in him, and 'follow him', that is, practice his teaching
- Others reject Jesus, refusing both his authority as king and his message

**Reflection Questions:**

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Spiritual Reading:

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## Session 15: Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross

Texts: *Jn. 12:23-25; Jn. 19:17-30*

Points:

- Jesus is rejected by the chief priests and the people
- Jesus interprets his death as a sacrifice that will bring a new life to His followers
- Jesus is condemned and crucified as a criminal
- Mary is at the cross with Jesus, and Jesus gives her to the beloved disciple as the mother of all believers

### Reflection Questions:

- Where in your spiritual life have you experienced the dying and rising of the Paschal mystery?
- What challenges you most about Jesus' crucifixion?
- Where are you being called to participate in the passion and death of Jesus?

Spiritual Reading:

“Death cannot therefore be understood without reference to glory, its redemptive significance can lie only in this reference: ‘I lay down my life, that I may take it again’ (Jn 10:17), says Christ; ‘I die in order to rise’, explains St. Augustine [*In Johan.Tract. 47,7*], to rise to a new and ever new existence, for ‘the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God’ (Rom 6:10). Death is the part of the man Jesus in this divinizing union: the man consents to the will of God which has the power to save man; he receives it, delivers himself up to this life-giving will. Consequently we see why death was necessary, for it is only in death that man can commit himself completely, in a fullness of receptive submission. We see that this death, if it is also to have its saving power, must be that of the Son of God, for the Son alone can go to his Father; in him alone God can realize this total communion; in him alone the reception could be vast enough to receive in its whole extent the infinity of divine holiness, this pleroma, thanks to which Christ is placed at the summit and at the origin of all in order to realize the salvation of all. The earthly life too was redemptive because – according to St John’s thought, prepared to some extent in St Luke – it was already paschal, wholly oriented to his death and glory. As for the sufferings of the passion, they are redemptive because of the obedience unto death that they prepare: ‘Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered and was made perfect’ (Heb 5:8-9). For the man who loves, the ordeal of suffering is undoubtedly the best key for opening to God the deepest recesses of his feeling. It is in this way that the death of Christ is a sacrifice in the sense of St Augustine’s very appropriate definition: ‘a work by which man dies to the world in order to live to God’ and ‘to adhere to him in a holy society.’ [*De Civ. Dei. 10,6*] It is the sacrifice *par excellence*, for the communion of the man Jesus with his Father is total. In his glorifying death, Christ is the culmination of the work of creation, for God creates by imparting himself and in order to impart himself.” Durrell, *The Mystery of Christ and the Apostolate*, p. 55-56

**God’s response in Christ to man’s desire to be God**, “man wishes to be God. Nor is this desire of his entirely misconceived. Yet man pursues it in the style of a Prometheus, hunting the prey

which is equality with God, taking it by violence. But man is not God. By making himself like unto God he sets himself over against truth, and so the adventure ends in that nothingness where truth is not. The actual God-man does just the opposite. He is God's Son, his whole being a gesture of gratitude and self-offering. In reality, the Cross is but the definitive radicalization of that gesture which the Son is. Not the grasping audacity of Prometheus but the Son's obedience on the Cross is the place where man's divinization is accomplished. Man can become God, not by making himself God, but by allowing himself to be made 'Son.' Here in this gesture of Jesus as the Son, and nowhere else, the Kingdom of God is realized. This is why the first are to be last, and the last first. This is the reason for the Beatitudes about those whose life-style is cruciform and therefore Son-like. This is why little ones are lauded, and all called to become as children. In her theology of childhood, Therese of Lisieux rediscovered this mystery of the Son. Here is where equality with God happens, for God himself is Son, and as Son he is man. The answer to the question of the Kingdom is, therefore, no other than the Son in whom the unbridgeable gulf between already and not yet is spanned. In him death and life, annihilation and being, are held together. The Cross is the *Pontifex* joins shore to shore. But if the answer to the question of the Kingdom is indeed the Son, then manifestly, the message cannot make its peace with any eschatology of (merely) changed living conditions. Our departure-point is a person, not a program."

RATZINGER, Joseph. *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*. 2nd Ed. (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 1988), p. 64-65

## Session 16: Jesus rises from the dead

Text: *Jn. 20:19-29*

<sup>19</sup> On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." <sup>22</sup> And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe."

<sup>26</sup> Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." *Jn. 20:19-29*

Points:

- Jesus defeats death, rises to a new life
- The risen Jesus brings consolation and hope to His disciples
- Jesus gives the Holy Spirit and the power to forgive sins to His disciples
- Thomas doubts, and then touches and believes

**Reflection Questions:**

- When have you ever seriously meditated on the resurrection of Jesus, and its meaning?
- How do you imagine the consolation and hope that the resurrected Jesus brings to the disciples in the upper room?
- Do you truly believe in the resurrection of Jesus?

Spiritual Reading:

## Session 17: Call to Discipleship

Text: Matt. 28:16-20

<sup>16</sup>Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup>And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” *Matt. 28:16-20*

Points:

- The disciples worshipped the risen Jesus
- Jesus gave his authority to the disciples to, “make disciples of all nations.”
- They are to baptize and teach what Jesus taught them
- Jesus is always with us

**Reflection Questions:**

- How have you incorporated the worship of Jesus into your life?
- How do you respond to this call to discipleship and making disciples?
- How do you react to the promise that Jesus will be with you always?

Spiritual Reading:

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## Session 18: The Life of the Disciple, *in the Spirit*

Texts: Gal. 5:13-24

<sup>13</sup>For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. <sup>14</sup>For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>15</sup>But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another.

<sup>16</sup>But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup>For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. <sup>19</sup>Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, <sup>20</sup>idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, <sup>21</sup>envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. <sup>24</sup>And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup>If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. <sup>26</sup>Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another.” *Gal. 5:13-24*

Points:

- We are called to be free from sin
- Love is the fullness of the Law
- Do not gratify the desires of the ‘flesh’ (human nature disordered by sin)
- Live in the Spirit
- We belong to Jesus Christ

**Reflection Questions:**

- What in your life is pulling you towards the ‘works of the flesh’?
- When have you experienced the ‘fruits of the Spirit’ in your life?
- Where do you still need to grow in becoming free from the “passions and desires” of the flesh?
- What fruits of the Spirit do you need to pray for most?

Spiritual Reading:

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## Session 19: The Consummation of All Things

Texts: Rev. 20:7-21:4

<sup>7</sup> And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison <sup>8</sup> and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. <sup>9</sup> And they marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city; but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, <sup>10</sup> and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

<sup>11</sup> Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it; from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. <sup>13</sup> And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done. <sup>14</sup> Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; <sup>15</sup> and if any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

**21** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; <sup>3</sup> and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; <sup>4</sup> he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." *Rev. 20:7-21:4*

Points:

- Jesus will come at the end of time to defeat Satan and all evil once and for all
- Jesus will judge all of humanity on the basis of what they have done
- The just will rise from the dead to life in the New heaven and the new earth
- The evil ones will be thrown into the lake of fire with Satan, the beast, and all the demons
- The New Heaven and the New Earth will be a dwelling place with God, with no more evil, pain, or suffering

**Reflection Questions:**

- How does the story of the last battle between good and evil motivate you to fight the battles of our time?
- How are you challenged by thinking on the final judgment?
- What stirs in your heart when you meditate on the New Heaven and New Earth?

Spiritual Reading:

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## ***Part IV: Growing as a Companion of Jesus***

### **Session 20: Being a Companion of Jesus in the Church I**

Text: Autobiography of St. Ignatius

**Conversion from the way of the world to the way of Christ**, “He continued his way to Montserrat [the Shrine of Our Lady], thinking as usual of the great deeds he was going to do for the love of God. As his mind was filled with the adventures of Amadis of Gaul and such books, thoughts corresponding to these adventures came to his mind. He determined, therefore, on a watch of arms throughout a whole night, without sitting or lying down, but standing a while and then kneeling, before the altar of our Lady of Montserrat, where he had made up his mind to leave his fine attire and to clothe himself with the armor of Christ. Leaving, then, this place, he continued, as was his wont, thinking about his resolutions, and when he arrived at Montserrat, after praying for while and making an engagement with his confessor, he made a general confession in writing which lasted three days. He arranged with the confessor to have the mule taken away, and his sword and dagger hung in the church at the altar of our Lady. This man was the first to whom he had made known his purpose, because up to then he had not revealed it to any confessor. On the eve, then, of our Lady’s Annunciation, March 24<sup>th</sup>, at night, in the year 1532, he went as secretly as possible to a poor man, and removing his fine clothes gave them to him, put on his desired attire, and went to kneel before our Lady’s altar. Alternating between kneeling and standing, with his pilgrim’s staff in his hand, he thus spent the whole night. At daybreak he left, and to avoid being recognized, he took, not the highway that let straight to Barcelona where he would meet many who knew him and honored him, but byways by which he came to a small town called Manresa, where he decided to spend a few days in the hospital and to make a few notes in his book which he carried very carefully with him and which brought him many consolations.” (Ch. 2, no. 17-18)

**Commitment to ‘help souls’**, “After the pilgrim understood that it was not God’s will that he remain in Jerusalem, he kept thinking on what he ought to be doing, and finally felt more inclined to study so as to be able to help souls. He then made up his mind to go to Barcelona, and left Venice for Genoa.” (Ch. 5, no. 50)

**Engaging in studies so as to be able to help souls better**, “On his arrival at Barcelona he [Ignatius] told Isabel Roser and Master Ardevol, who was then teaching grammar, of his inclination to study. Both thought very well of it, Ardevol offering to teach him without charge, and Isabel to supply him with what was necessary for his support. In Manresa the pilgrim had known a friar, a Bernardine, I think, a very spiritual man. With him he wished to remain to make greater progress in the spiritual life and even to be of help to souls. He, therefore, answered that he would accept their offer if he did not find what he wanted in Manresa. But when he went there, he discovered that the friar had died. Returning to Barcelona he began his studies with great diligence.” (Ch. 6, no. 54)

Points:

- St. Ignatius went through a conversion from the world to Christ, symbolized by his change of clothing, general confession, all night vigil, and putting on the clothes of a beggar.
- St. Ignatius committed himself to 'helping souls'. Following Christ necessitates serving the needs of others, to loving one's neighbor in a concrete way. Who one is called to serve is different for different people.
- St. Ignatius decided to study and develop his natural human talents, so that he could be a better help to others. We have to develop our natural talents in order to be a better instrument in God's hands.

**Reflection Questions:**

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Spiritual Reading:

## Session 21: Being a Companion of Jesus in the Church II

Text: Autobiography of St. Ignatius

Points:

- St. Ignatius placed himself at the service of the Church
- St. Ignatius became obedient to the Pope

**Reflection Questions:**

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Spiritual Reading:

## Session 22: Being a Companion of Jesus in the Church III

Text: The Discernment of Spirits

Points:

- Going from sin to sin
- Going from good to better
- Consolation
- Desolation
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**Reflection Questions:**

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Spiritual Reading:

## Session 23: Mary as Model Disciple - the Handmaid of the Lord

<sup>35</sup> And the angel said to her [Mary], “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. <sup>36</sup> And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. <sup>37</sup> For with God nothing will be impossible.”

<sup>38</sup> And Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

<sup>39</sup> In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, <sup>40</sup> and she entered the house of Zechari’ah and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit <sup>42</sup> and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! <sup>43</sup> And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” <sup>46</sup> And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup> for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.” *Lk. 1:35-48*

### Points:

- Mary surrendered her life to God, “I am the handmaid of the Lord” and received the Son of God in her womb.
- Mary went “with haste” to *share* her son, and her joy, with Elizabeth.
- To be a disciple is to receive Christ into one’s soul, and then to bring Him to others.

### Reflection Questions:

- What would it mean for you to surrender your life completely to God as Mary did?
- How are you challenged by Mary’s eagerness to share what she had received with Elizabeth?
- What must you receive, and then do, in order to become a disciple of Christ?

### Spiritual Reading:

“The angel announced to Mary the news of Elizabeth and Mary went to help her neighbor. No sooner is the Word of God conceived than she gets up, prepares for a trip and hurries off to help her cousin.

Mary has understood the Christian attitude. She is the first to be incorporated into Christ and immediately understands the lesson of the Incarnation: It is not worthy of the Mother of God to hold fast to the prerogatives of her maternity in order to enjoy the sweetness of contemplation, but rather to communicate Christ. Her role is to communicate Jesus to others. Not the sacrifice of spiritual benefits but their conscious enjoyment: something that happens so many times in our lives: for example, when we celebrate Mass in a shed with dogs, chickens and goats... Willingly,

if it involves communicating Christ and the denial of that spiritual egoism that refuses to sacrifice consolations when the good of others demands it.

Real charity: gets up and goes off and takes the role of a servant for three months. Real, active charity that does not consist in pure sentiment... is ready to give real service and accept the bother and sacrifice it includes.

When service is difficult. Mary was about fifteen at the time and, carrying the blessed Christ in her womb, she set out for that steep and craggy mountain where Jesus would later lay the scene for the parable of the wounded Samaritan, left half dead by bandits. Excuses? The trip would take four days, four days of travel on unsafe roads. But the difficulties did not curb her charity. But no one had asked her for anything. It would have been enough to await the request. No one would find it strange. This is the way our egoism reasons when there is a question of service.

She left right away. She did not wait until the family advised her. As soon as she received the angel's visit, she got up and left, before the news had even arrived. Mary, the Mother of God, takes the first step! How sincere she is in her resolution. She told the angel: "*Behold the handmaid of the Lord*", and here she is acting upon it; she receives the angel's news and leaves. This anticipation of the needs of others in granting favors, duplicates them. Asking for help can be so humiliating. Let us avoid this and above all let us avoid any brusqueness or lack of warmth in granting favors, for it does more harm than good.

Be like the Holy Virgin who does not seem to notice that she is sacrificing herself. No ostentation, no harping on the service given, no making sure that the community or the whole city knows about it five minutes later. On the contrary, look at it as though you were the one benefitted! That's charity, that is what wins hearts! Service given with bad humor is a lost cause: "*God loves a cheerful giver*" (2 Cor 9,7). He who gives promptly gives twice! This is the great secret of fervor: promptness, swiftness and enthusiasm for doing good.

Do not take refuge behind our dignity, waiting and hoping that others will take the first step. True charity only thinks about the possibility of doing some service just as true humility does not consider what makes us superior but rather the root of our own inferiority. "*Considering others greater than oneself*" (Rom 12,10). Imperfect religious are stingy in their charity. They give the least amount possible, they think, discuss, haggle, and look at the clock... The Christian is magnanimous, beautiful, heroic, universal. He gives without measure and without hope of a return."

*With Great Haste... Meditation on the Visitation of Mary to St. Elizabeth, St. Alberto Hurtado, SJ*

## Session 24: Mary as Mother of all the Faithful

“<sup>25</sup> So the soldiers did this. But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Mag’dalene. <sup>26</sup> When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” <sup>27</sup> Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.” Jn. 19:25-27

### Points:

- Mary stood at the cross with Jesus, sharing in his redemptive sufferings.
- Jesus gave his mother to the care of the Beloved Disciple
- The Beloved Disciple represents the ideal disciple, and of all the faithful
- Therefore, Mary is the Mother of all the Faithful

### Reflection Questions:

- How do you see your relationship with Mary?
- What moves you about the idea of Mary as your spiritual mother?
- How might this idea of Mary as your spiritual mother change the way you pray to Mary?

### Spiritual Reading:

“Notwithstanding the great joy that marked the beginning of Jesus's ministry, in the synagogue of Nazareth you, Mary, must already have experienced the truth of the saying about the “sign of contradiction” (cf. *Lk* 4:28ff). In this way you saw the growing power of hostility and rejection which built up around Jesus until the hour of the Cross, when you had to look upon the Saviour of the world, the heir of David, the Son of God dying like a failure, exposed to mockery, between criminals. Then you received the word of Jesus: “Woman, behold, your Son!” (*Jn* 19:26). From the Cross you received a new mission. From the Cross you became a mother in a new way: the mother of all those who believe in your Son Jesus and wish to follow him. The sword of sorrow pierced your heart. Did hope die? Did the world remain definitively without light, and life without purpose? At that moment, deep down, you probably listened again to the word spoken by the angel in answer to your fear at the time of the Annunciation: “Do not be afraid, Mary!” (*Lk* 1:30). How many times had the Lord, your Son, said the same thing to his disciples: do not be afraid! In your heart, you heard this word again during the night of Golgotha. Before the hour of his betrayal he had said to his disciples: “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (*Jn* 16:33). “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (*Jn* 14:27). “Do not be afraid, Mary!” In that hour at Nazareth the angel had also said to you: “Of his kingdom there will be no end” (*Lk* 1:33). Could it have ended before it began? No, at the foot of the Cross, on the strength of Jesus's own word, you became the mother of believers. In this faith, which even in the darkness of Holy Saturday bore the certitude of hope, you made your way towards Easter morning. The joy of the Resurrection touched your heart and united you in a new way to the disciples, destined to become the family of Jesus through faith. In this way you were in the midst of the community of believers, who in the days following the Ascension prayed with one voice for the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Acts* 1:14) and then received that gift on the day of Pentecost. The “Kingdom” of Jesus was not as might have been imagined. It began in that hour, and of this “Kingdom” there will be no end. Thus you remain in the midst of the disciples as their Mother,

as the Mother of hope. Holy Mary, Mother of God, our Mother, teach us to believe, to hope, to love with you. Show us the way to his Kingdom! Star of the Sea, shine upon us and guide us on our way!”

*Spe Salvi*, no. 49-50, Pope Benedict XVI

## Session 25: Devotion to Mary as Queen of Heaven

“And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; <sup>2</sup> she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery. <sup>3</sup> And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads. <sup>4</sup> His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth; <sup>5</sup> she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, <sup>6</sup> and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days. . . . . <sup>13</sup> And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had borne the male child. <sup>14</sup> But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. <sup>15</sup> The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. <sup>16</sup> But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river which the dragon had poured from his mouth. <sup>17</sup> Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.” Rev. 12:1-6, 13-17

### Points:

- The woman clothed with the sun, with a crown on her head, is an apocalyptic image of Mary as the Queen of heaven. Mary is sometimes depicted with a crown and with the moon under her feet because of this text.
- St. Ignatius’ devotion to Mary was often under the image of Mary as the queen whom he honored and served.
- The woman gives birth to the savior, and then is protected from the attacks of the dragon by the whole of creation.
- To serve Mary is to follow her lead in the fight against the enemies of Christ and his Church.

### Reflection Questions:

- How does the image of Mary as the Queen of heaven move you?
- How does the idea that serving Mary means to engage in a spiritual combat against the dragon resonate with you?
- How might you grow in your devotion to Mary?

### Spiritual Reading:

“It is no accident of history that the first Sodality in Rome was dedicated to the mystery of the Annunciation. Nor was it pure coincidence that in 1522 Ignatius at Montserrat made his own dedication to Mary on the feast of the Annunciation. On that occasion he offered his weapons to his Queen and exchanged his worldly garb for pilgrim’s dress. Under the banner of his Queen he turned away from the vanity of the world toward the poor Christ. This is the conversion, which must take place in the soul of every Sodalist. This is the realization in the spiritual order of the

juridical fact that every Sodality is aggregated to the *Primaria* of the Annunciation. All real putting on of Christ, all growth into a 'genuinely Catholic adulthood' within the Sodality means to imitate Mary's *Fiat*, its design in Christ's redemption of the world. This is the *Fiat* that accepts the Cross of Christ that challenges all that is noble in the soul, that longs for a more perfect following of the suffering of Christ. In this way the Sodalist must learn through the Sodality to love Mary as the exalted Queen of his *magis*. She is Our Lady of Christian Discontent. She will lead him to the Cross."

*True Source of the Sodality Spirit*, Fr. Hugo Rahner, SJ

## Session 26: Praying to Mary

“On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; <sup>2</sup> Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. <sup>3</sup> When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” <sup>4</sup> And Jesus said to her, “O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” <sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” <sup>6</sup> Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup> He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast.” So they took it. <sup>9</sup> When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom <sup>10</sup> and said to him, “Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now.” <sup>11</sup> This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him. <sup>12</sup> After this he went down to Caper’na-um, with his mother and his brethren and his disciples; and there they stayed for a few days.” Jn. 2:1-12

### Points:

- Mary intercedes to Jesus on behalf of the wedding couple
- Jesus does not want to help, but he relents and performs the miracle in obedience to his mother
- There is an abundance of fruit which brings much joy

### Reflection Questions:

- What does this story teach us about the relationship between Mary and Jesus?
- How might this story be a paradigm for how Mary intercedes to Jesus on behalf of those who ask for her help?
- When have you prayed for Mary’s intercession for your needs?

### Spiritual Reading:

“Throughout the devotional life of the Church, Mary has occupied a singularly important place. Men and women have come to her in the thousands of shrines that circle the world simply because they have had a natural conviction of the close ties that joined this unselfish Mother to her powerful Son. She, the fairest representative of the human race, was the one who could best present to Christ her Son the needs and the problems of her human children. Her son had worked His first miracle, changing water into wine at Cana, at His Mother's request. He could not refuse, now that she was with Him in heaven, the requests that she made for her poor, sinful, and struggling children.

So it happened that the shrines of Mary rose in every country. If Catholic churches were named in her honor, it was because hers was the first house that had held the Son of God, and there seemed a singular fitness in naming for her the house that men built to hold her Eucharistic Son. Never would the Catholic believe that Mary had power of herself. Her power came from her relationship to her Son. Out of all the women of the world the Trinity had selected this one

woman for the most important office ever held by a mere human being. At the moment of the Incarnation she bore the closest possible relationship to the Trinity. God the Father looked upon her as His beloved daughter. God the Son accepted her as His loving Mother. God the Holy Spirit took her to Himself as His pure and immaculate bride.

So by virtue of her closeness to God, Catholics have known Mary's intercessory power. She could plead with the heavenly Father, for she was the lovely daughter who had always done His will. She could plead with her Son, for she was the woman who had given Him the devotion of a lifetime. She could plead with the Holy Spirit, for she was the person in the world whom He loved most and to whom He united Himself in the miracle of the Word made flesh.

So to Mary the Catholic world has flocked in pilgrimage and procession and May crowning and rosary crusade and singing of the litanies and personal prayer. It is glorious and really assuring to feel that we have a Mother in heaven. It is inspiring to know that this Mother has, because of all that she did for God, the power to win for us graces and favors.

The prayers to Mary have filled the liturgy of the Church. The hymns to Mary are among the dearest that rise from the lips of each generation of her children.”

*Devotion to Our Blessed Lady in the Sodality*, Fr. Daniel Lord, SJ

## Session 27: Consecration to Mary

*“I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Rom. 12:1-2*

The prayer of the Sodality consecration to Mary:

*Most holy Mary, Virgin Mother of God, I [here each candidate will utter his own name in a low voice], most unworthy though I am to be thy servant, yet touched by thy motherly care for me, and longing to serve thy Son, do, in the presence of my guardian angel and all the court of heaven, choose thee this day to be my Queen, my Advocate, and my Mother. And I firmly resolve to serve thee evermore and do what I can that all may render faithful service to thee.*

*Therefore, most devoted Mother, through the precious blood thy Son poured out for me, I beg thee and beseech thee, deign to receive me as thy servant forever. Aid me in my every action, and beg for me the grace never by word or deed or thought to be displeasing in thy sight and that of thy most holy Son. Remember me, my dearest Mother, and forsake me not at the hour of death. Amen.*

Points:

- We are invited as disciples of Christ to offer our very lives to God, as He did.
- A Sodalist makes such an offering through the consecration to Mary, the Mother of God.
- The consecration binds the Sodalist to Mary in special service for the rest of his life
- The consecration is a promise to serve to Jesus Christ and his mission of salvation, in union with Mary, Jesus' first disciple.
- Mary becomes the Sodalist's Queen, Advocate, and Mother.

**Reflection Questions:**

- What have you offered to God in your life?
- What promises have you made that you have kept in your life?
- What is your current devotion to Mary?
- What is your reaction to the idea of the consecration to Mary?

Spiritual Reading:

Consecration is an act by which something or someone is set aside for sacred use, the worship of God. In the Old Testament, priests were consecrated for the service of God (Exod. 28:41), altars were consecrated for sacrifices (Exod 29:37), and animals for sacrifice were anointed as a consecration before they were offered to God (Exod 29:36). Consecration makes something holy, that is, something 'given to God' or 'close to God'. In the New Testament the idea of consecration develops from the ritual sense to the spiritual sense. So, Jesus speaks of himself as consecrated by the Father (Jn. 10:36), and he even consecrates himself in his sacrifice on the cross, giving himself to God, so that his disciples might be consecrated in truth (Jn. 17:19). Jesus

not just someone given to God, but one who is holy, God-like, in union with God. St. Paul develops this sense of consecration to describe the growth in the spiritual life, “*If any one purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work.*” (2Tim. 2:21).

The Catholic Church consecrates objects and persons for sacred use in the same manner as that of the OT. Churches, altars, tabernacles, images are consecrated for use in worship, and priests and bishops are consecrated to receive their sacred offices. In the Mass the bread and wine are consecrated by the priest to become the body and blood of Christ in what is called ‘the act of consecration.’

There is also a tradition of people consecrating themselves to God. So, religious such as monks, nuns, and friars, make an act of consecration when they take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The promises are specific to certain practices, but their essence is to give their very selves to God for the rest of their lives. Following the example of consecrated religious, the tradition developed of lay people making a consecration, again focusing on a specific promise or offering to God.

One particular type of consecration became the consecration to Mary, the Mother of God. The Sodality of Our Lady developed such a devotion. Pope Pius XII, in *Bis Saeculari*, explains the nature of this consecration, “These sodalities are to be called Sodalities of Our Lady not only because they take their name from the Blessed Virgin Mary, but especially because each Sodalist makes a profession of special devotion to the Mother of God and dedicates himself to her by a total consecration, under-taking, though not under the pain of sin, to strive by every means and under the standards of the Blessed Virgin for his own perfection and eternal salvation, as well as for that of his neighbours.” (Art. VIII) This consecration binds the Sodalist to Mary in a special way, as a Mother and Queen, and shapes his or her spiritual life thenceforth. Such a consecration sets a Sodalist apart from the average Catholic, not only in the fervor of devotion to God and Mary, but also in terms of where in the spiritual landscape he or she stands, as now being able to say, “you are not your own” (1Cor. 6:19), you belong to Mary, the Mother of God.

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### Session 28: Call of the Eternal King

Text:

Points:

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**Reflection Questions:**

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Spiritual Reading:

### Session 29: St. Peter Claver, SJ

Text:

Points:

-

**Reflection Questions:**

-

Spiritual Reading:

### Session 30: Service work in the Sodality

Text:

Points:

-

**Reflection Questions:**

-

Spiritual Reading:

## Session 31: Virtue – Gratitude

*“On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance, and lifted up their voices and said, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.’ When he saw them he said to them, ‘God and show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then said Jesus, ‘Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?’ And he said to him, ‘Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.’” Lk. 17:11-19*

### Points:

- The man who was healed falls at the feet of Jesus and gives him thanks.
- Jesus is surprised that only one man who was healed returned to thank him.
- We can find ourselves in this story, either as one of the nine who forget to give thanks, or the one who returns to thank Jesus for what he has received.

### Reflection Questions:

- How aware are you of God’s gifts to you?
- What experiences in your life have made you more aware of what you have freely received?
- How often do you give thanks to God for what you have received?
- How might you cultivate the virtue of gratitude in your life?

### Spiritual Reading:

**“Gratitude is rare.** To explain the little gratitude that we have toward God, there are reasons that depend on the actions of divine providence and those which depend on our innate indifference. God showers blessings upon us every moment, but He does it without revealing Himself. We do not see Him act. He is there, behind the screen of second causes. But because He who is the first cause of everything is hidden, we attend only to the gifts He grants. The figure of the donor, His hands, His heart, escape us. God preserves us in existence at every moment. For this, as much power is needed, according to our way of speaking, as was required at the time of our origin to create us out of nothing. Who gives any thought to this fact? If from this example taken in the natural order, we then pass to the supernatural order, who thinks at the time of a child’s baptism of an unheard-of marvel? The Blessed Trinity comes to take its abode, without a sound but nevertheless really, in this weak, whimpering creature? A priest consecrates, and the little bell rings for the elevation. I ask you, who even among the fervent realizes fully the sublime beauty of what has taken place? Are we not all more or less like the patriarch Jacob? He stretches himself out on the ground in the evening, and God sends him the great vision of the ladder. In the morning he awakens, and not seeing anything extraordinary around him, the landscape having remained unchanged from the evening before, he cries out, ‘Indeed the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.’ (Gen. 28:16) God is everywhere around us and works for us incessantly, but we do not notice Him.

### Why the act of thanksgiving?

What benefits have not been showered upon us, and at every moment, at every period of our life! He has given us general benefits, that is, those which have been granted us in common with our fellow men. Some are natural benefits: the air which we breathe, the light by which we see, the nourishment which sustains our life. Someone has written the *History of a Mouthful of Bread* in order to explain to children the complexity of human labor. Why did he not write it to show God's laborious concern to lavish upon us maternal care? What are we to say of supernatural benefits, of that which constitutes divine life within us, the gift of sanctifying grace to Adam at the beginning of the world? And after Adam lost all by Original Sin, the more beautiful restoration of it – *Melius reformasti* – of the divine in the human, with all that it includes, the coming of the Word of God on earth, the Virgin Mary, and the Church, with its teaching authority which protects the faith and its sacraments to nourish it? 'If during our whole life,' St. Gregory of Nyssa used to say, 'we conversed with God without the least distraction, and if we did nothing but express our gratitude to Him, we would be far from counterbalancing our thanks with His benefits for the shortest instant of time.' Nothing is more true. Only benefits are accorded to all of us. How can one count the particular favors distributed by God to each one: the gift of life, the blessing of a Christian country, the good examples given, the temptations warded off, the sacraments received, the sermons heard, the interior inspirations, the holy aspirations, the possibilities and fruitfulness of the apostolate?

### **Examples of grateful souls**

However little we may be in the habit of meditating on the goodness of God, we know that Fr. Martinez, a Peruvian Jesuit, had trained himself to say *Deo gratias* four hundred times a day and encouraged others to do the same; that St. Paul never separated from his prayer that of thanksgiving, as if for him there could be no real prayer if the act of thanksgiving was not connected with it; that St. Paul of the Cross, touching with his cane the flowers along the road, entreated them at least to excite in him gratitude to God; that St. Gertrude devoted the sixth of her *Exercises* to giving thanks; that St. Ignatius of Loyola prescribed, in the examination of conscience, which he recommends to be made twice a day, that we should train ourselves to be grateful by the examination of the mercies of God on our behalf, and we know that he himself not only thanked God for graces received but even thanked for those graces which God would not have failed to bestow on numerous persons if they had deigned to correspond to grace. Dominating all these is the Virgin Mary as she sings her *Magnificat*. It can be said without deceiving ourselves that the lives of most of the saints are a perpetual *Deo gratias*. On the contrary, when the supernatural begins to ebb, sighs and complaints begin.

### **Gratitude in time of trial**

When a trial is sent to us, it is more difficult than at other times to know how to be thankful to God. We need to acquire sufficient supernatural strength in order to believe that God remains a Father when He make us feel the weight of the Cross. Behind the suffering that occupies the foreground, we must learn to discover the heart of the One who, by this trial, wishes either to make us grow more spiritually, to permit us to expiate our sins, or to identify us more with His divine Son and to make us participate more fully in the Redemption. Such out to be always the attitude of souls who have faith.

### **The Practice of Gratitude**

It is a good practice to offer each day to God in thanksgiving with an intention that we have previously determined upon. On Sunday, we should thank God for favors received personally, or granted by God throughout in the world; on Monday, for certain other favors; and so on.”

*Uncommon Virtue*, by Fr. Raoul Plus, SJ, p. 4-12 (selections)

## Session 32: Virtue - Generosity

Text:

St. Ignatius of Loyola, letter to Fathers and Brothers Studying at Coimbra (May 7, 1547)

### The Advantages of Fervor

Therefore, give serious thought to your vocation so that you can give much thanks to God for so great a favor and ask Him for the special help needed to correspond to it with courage and diligence. Both of these you must have in large measure if you are to attain the end you have in view. Sloth, tepidity, weariness in study and in the other exercises which you have undertaken for the love of our Lord you must recognize as the sworn enemies of your vocation.

For his encouragement each one should keep before his eyes, not those who he thinks will accomplish less, but rather those who are active and energetic. Never permit the children of this world to show greater care and interest in the things of time than you show for those of eternity. It should bring a blush to your cheek to see them run to death more enthusiastically than you to life. Hold yourselves as worth little if a courtier serves with greater dedication to gain the favor of an earthly prince than you do for the favor of the King of Heaven, or if a soldier battles with greater courage for the glory of victory and hope of spoils, than you fight for victory and triumph over the world, the devil, and yourselves, all for a heavenly kingdom and eternal glory.

For the love of God, therefore, be neither careless nor tepid. For if tautness snaps the bow, slackness snaps the soul; while on the contrary, according to Solomon, *the soul of them that work shall be richly supplied* [Prov. 13:4]. Try to maintain a holy and discreet fervor in your work and in the pursuit of learning as well as virtue. With both alike, one energetic act is worth a thousand that are listless, and what a lazy man cannot accomplish in many years an energetic man can usually achieve quickly.

In the matter of learning, the difference between the earnest and the careless student stands out clearly. The same holds true in the mastering of passion and the weaknesses to which our nature is subject, as in the acquiring of virtue. It is certain that, because the negligent do not struggle against self, they never achieve peace of soul or do so tardily, and never possess any virtue in its fullness, while the energetic and industrious make notable advances on both fronts.

Experience proves that in this life peace and satisfaction are had, not by the listless but by those who are fervent in God's service. And rightly so. For in their effort to overcome themselves and to rid themselves of self-love, they rid themselves of the roots of all passion and unrest. And by acquiring habits of virtue, they naturally succeed in acting with ease and cheerfulness in accordance with these same virtues.

By this means they dispose themselves to receive the holy consolation of God our faithful consoler, for *to him who conquers I will give the hidden manna* [Rev. 2:17]. On the other hand, tepidity is the cause of a lifetime of uneasiness, for we never uproot its cause, self-love, nor do we ever deserve God's help. Therefore you should rouse yourselves to work earnestly at your praiseworthy tasks,

since even in this life you will perceive the advantages of holy fervor, not only in the growth of perfection in your souls but even in the peace of mind it grants you in this present life.

But if you look to the eternal reward, as you often should, Saint Paul will easily convince you that *the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed in us* [Rom. 8:18], because *this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal measure of glory beyond all comparison* [2 Cor. 4:17].

If this is true of every Christian who serves and honors God, you can understand what your crown will be if you correspond with our Institute, which is not only to serve God for your own sakes but to draw many others to His honor and service. Of them Holy Scripture says that *they that instruct many to justice shall shine as stars for all eternity* [Dan. 12:3]. And this is to be understood of those who engage in the discharge of their duty, not only later in the exercise of arms but even before that, while they are getting themselves ready. If this were not so, we certainly could not apply to works that are in themselves good the words of Jeremiah, *Cursed is he that does the work of the Lord carelessly* [Jer. 48:10], and of Saint Paul, *Do you not know that in a race all indeed run, but only one receives the prize?* [1 Cor. 9:24], and *for he is not crowned unless he strives according to the rules* [2 Tim. 2:5], and that means a good worker.

#### God's Manifold Gifts

But more than anything else I should wish to awaken in you the pure love of Jesus Christ, the desire for His honor and for the salvation of souls whom He has redeemed. For you are His soldiers in this Society with a special title and a special wage. I say special because there are many general reasons which likewise oblige you to work for His honor and service. His wage is everything you are and have in the natural order, for He bestows and preserves your being and life, and all the perfections of body and soul, as well as eternal blessings. His wage is also the spiritual gifts of His grace with which He has so generously and lovingly bestowed on you and continues to offer even when you oppose Him and rebel against Him. His wage is also those incomparable blessings of His glory which, without any advantage to Himself, He has promised to you and holds in readiness for you, actually sharing with you all the treasures of His happiness so that you may, by a remarkable participation in His divine perfection, be what He is by essence and nature. Finally, His wage is the whole universe and everything material and spiritual contained in it. For He has placed under our ministry not only all that is under heaven, but even the whole of His sublime court, without exempting any of the heavenly hierarchy: *Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to minister for them who shall receive the inheritance of salvation?* [Heb. 1:14].

As though this wage were not enough, He has made Himself our wage, becoming a brother in our own flesh, as the price of our salvation on the cross, and in the Eucharist to be with us as support and company. Oh, what an unworthy soldier he would be whom such a wage would not induce to labor for the honor of such a prince. We know indeed that, to oblige us to desire and labor for this glory, His Majesty has bestowed on us these inestimable and priceless favors, in a sense stripping Himself of His own possessions to give us a share in them; taking on himself our miseries to deliver us from them; wishing to be sold as our redemption; to be dishonored to glorify us; to be poor to enrich us; accepting a disgraceful and painful death to give us a blessed and immortal life. How extremely ungrateful and hardhearted is he who after all this does not recognize his obligation to serve our Lord Jesus Christ diligently and to seek His honor.

Points:

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## Reflection Questions:

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Spiritual Reading:

## Session 33: Positions of Leadership in the Sodality

Text:

### Sodality Offices and Duties

#### *Prefect*

- I. The Prefect is the *Primary Communicator* in the Sodality. He ensures that all members are duly informed.
- II. The Prefect is the *Executive Decision Maker* after the Moderator and Director.
- III. The Prefect is the *Primary Social Coordinator*. He handles the major planning and logistics of social events.
- IV. The Prefect is the *Candidate Instructor* for new grade-level candidates.
- V. The Prefect is the *Primary Discussion Leader*. He is well informed on the topics being discussed and is responsible to see that all members are also knowledgeable on the topics being discussed.
- VI. The Prefect is the *Calendar Manager*. He is responsible for setting dates of future events. He is responsible for creating and maintaining a calendar that is accessible to all members.
- VII. The Prefect, along with Director and Moderator, decides if a candidate has given cause for dismissal from the Sodality.

#### *Assistant Prefect*

- I. The Assistant Prefect knows fully how to perform all the duties of the Prefect in case of the absence of the Prefect.
- II. The Assistant Prefect is the *Primary Prayer Organizer*. He is responsible for choosing and providing prayers for meetings and events or delegating this duty.
- III. The Assistant Prefect seeks out ways to assist the Prefect in the general maintenance of the Sodality.

#### *Doorkeeper*

- I. The Doorkeeper maintains the *Attendance* for the Sodality. He records those members who are “with us”, “with us in spirit”, or “absent” at the weekly meeting and Mass, as well as other Sodality events.
- II. It is the Doorkeeper’s duty to be physically *with us* at every event to maintain an accurate attendance record. In cases where this is impossible, he delegates this duty.

III. The Doorkeeper is to help with the duties of absent officers.

*Service Coordinator*

I. The Service Coordinator plans monthly service projects for his grade level sodality.

II. The Service Coordinator organizes entire Sodality service projects with other grade level sodality Service Coordinators.

III. The Service Coordinator ensures that every member has contributed to monthly charitable service.

*Sacristan*

I. The Sacristan is the weekly *Mass Organizer*. He is responsible for the presence of a reader, altar server, and extraordinary minister of the Eucharist at the grade level sodality's specified weekday Mass.

II. The Sacristan ensures that all readers, altar servers and extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist are duly trained.

Points:

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**Reflection Questions:**

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Spiritual Reading:

Session :

Text:

Points:

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**Reflection Questions:**

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Spiritual Reading:

## Candidates Retreat

### Friday

- A. Principle and Foundation I
- B. Principle and Foundation II

### Saturday

- A. Sin of the World
- B. Personal Sin
- C. God's mercy
- D. Reconciliation
- E. Adoration and Confession

### Sunday

- A. Call of the King
- B. Incarnation
- C. The Two Standards