



THE FATHER SENDS
HIS SON
TO SAVE



Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network





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DEAR FRIENDS

IN THE LORD

The Way of the Heart is the spiritual itinerary proposed by the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network. It is the compass for our mission, a mission of compassion for the world. The Way of the Heart is part of the process initiated by Pope Francis with *Evangelii Gaudium*, "The Joy of the Gospel".

The Way of the Heart was the result of several years of international work led by Father Claudio Barriga, S.J. Like any international document, it is a group effort, which has taken into account diverse cultures, languages, ecclesial and spiritual experiences. It has its richness and its limits. We presented this itinerary to Pope Francis in a document entitled: "A pathway with Jesus, in apostolic readiness" (December 2014). It presented a new way of understanding the mission of the Apostleship of Prayer, in a dynamic of apostolic availability. The Holy Father approved it in August 2014.

The Way of the Heart is essential for the recreation of this ecclesial service as the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network. It is a deepening of the spiritual tradition of the Apostleship of Prayer for today, and articulates in an original way essential elements of this spiritual treasure with the dynamics of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is the key to the interpretation of our mission, our compass. That is why in 2017 I proposed a commentary. The idea was to help the national teams of the Pope's Prayer Network to deepen each step and enter into its inner dynamics, so that they could propose, with their own creativity, materials that would help to enter into The Way of the Heart. We call this text the "Internal dynamics of the path".



However, few teams began to create new materials and proposals with The Way of the Heart, and we quickly realized that without them, progress in the recreation process of this pontifical work would be very slow. We started in 2018, with an international team, to write 11 books. This team was led by Bettina Raed, regional director of the Pope's Prayer Network in Argentina-Uruguay. It is from the land of Pope Francis, with the support of several Jesuit companions, that this work was coordinated. I am particularly grateful to Bettina for all her availability, her writing and coordination work.

I hope that these materials will help us to propose this mission of compassion to the world with creativity (spiritual retreats, formation sessions, meetings on the first Friday of the month, etc.). This is the basis of our mission. ***The Way of the Heart helps to enter into the spiritual dynamic of recreation, the dynamic of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.***

P. Frederic Fornos, S.J.
International Director
Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network Original Spanish
December 3, 2019 - St. Francis Xavier

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STEP 4
BOOK 6



Outline to guide the step

Keyword: : ENCOUNTER

Objective: To experience being saved, healed, "looked upon with mercy", forgiven

Attitudinal keys: : Amazement. Reception and acceptance of forgiveness. "Exclamatory admiration/wonder and awe."

What you want to obtain – Fruit: to recognize that we are saved, healed, the grace to move on.

Inner dynamics for the step: From "consciousness of a broken life" to "the experience of salvation."

Referential Framework

The Father has not abandoned us amid this disheartened world. He spoke to us of his love many times and in many ways, by the prophets, and now at this final stage he did so through his Son made human, Jesus, the Christ (cf. Hebrews: 1:1).

In Jesus, the Father has united our history to His to restore creation and to heal our wounded humanity. In him, who gave his life for us on the cross and whom the Father raised from the dead, he has forgiven us our sins.

In him, God's burning love comes to us, determined to save us.

Together with him we learn to recognize the Spirit of God acting in our world, bringing up something new, even amid suffering and hardship.

Internal dynamics of the Step

The Bible presents us with several covenants of GOD with humanity: that of Noah, that of Abraham, and finally, the new covenant in Christ. Throughout the scriptures there is a GOD who wants to establish with humanity a relationship as strong and tender as a husband's relationship with his wife. The prophets Ezekiel and Hosea describe GOD as a lover abandoned by his beloved, who seeks her beyond the wilderness to commit to her forever. GOD awaits us, sings the Song of Songs. The whole history of humanity, from the beginning to the end of time, is a love story, the story of GOD's nuptials with humanity.

This love is revealed in all its fullness in Jesus. As the Evangelist John has told us: ***"In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins."*** (1 John 4:9-10)



Jesus Christ reveals to us the true face of love.

When, in the Gospel, we listen to and look at Jesus, it is love himself that we see. Love is incarnate in Jesus Christ. In the words of St. John: *"What existed from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have contemplated and what our hands have felt, about the Word of life..."* -- it is love. This is the experience of the first disciples! *"We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love..."* (cf. 1 John 4:16)

The human journey of Jesus, his words, and gestures, reveal all the height, width, and depth of Him who is the source of life. And the resurrection confirms that he is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). Love, as he lived it, is a resurrection power that transforms not only human persons in the depths of their being but the whole universe as well.

LOVE HAS A FACE, it is someone. Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Love of GOD.

In Jesus Christ, God revealed himself as the One who can only love and go to the depths of love, that is, to die for those he loves and to forgive his enemies. Indeed, the deepest manifestation of love is forgiveness: *"But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:8)



A VIEW FROM
THE BIBLICAL
PERSPECTIVE



A view from the Biblical perspective

What has the power to transform a person's life? What might a transformative energy be like, that is capable of causing a Copernican turn in someone's life? We humans have gone sometimes through experiences of transformation -- situations, people, or bonds that have helped put us on our feet, allowed us to get going, changed our lives. Often such encounters were key in our lives. Because we got rid of something, or because from these encounters, we understood something, we saw new light, we became more aware. Encounters with each other in which we were able to open ourselves to a new hope, to a different way of looking and placing ourselves in our reality, have made us often exclaim "God sent you."

There are encounters that transform life, that open to new horizons, that change our perspective and invite us to share with others the transformation received.

A tour of the Biblical accounts could help us create an image of these restorative encounters in which God's envoys are present to communicate to the main characters that life opens up for them in a definitive way and they are invited to welcome it.

The book of Exodus tells us of the encounters between the Lord and Moses in his mission to lead his people to the promised land: *"When Moses went out in the direction of the tent, the whole people would rise up and wait at the entrance of their tents, following Moses with their eyes until he entered the tent; as soon as he entered, the cloud column came down and stayed at the entrance of the tent, while the Lord spoke with Moses."* (Exodus 33:8-9). God goes out to meet Moses in the burning bush and in the cloud. And the image of the cloud was the Lord who went out to meet Moses personally.

The first book of Kings tells us of God's encounter with Elijah on Mount Horeb, when he hid in a cave as he fled from his persecutors. Here he awaits the coming of the Lord: *"There he entered a cave, where he spent the night. And the Lord spoke to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He said, I am consumed by zeal for the Lord, for the Israelites have abandoned your covenant, brought down your altars, and murdered your prophets; I am the only one left, and they're looking for me to kill me.' The Lord said unto him, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord. For at that moment the Lord was passing by!'"* (1 Kings 19: 9-11). Elijah discovers the presence of the Lord in the soft breeze before which he covers his face, God reveals Himself to him through an intimate and quiet experience. And with this encounter he sends him on his way. *"The Lord said unto him, go back by the same way"* (1 Kings 19:15).



And just as God came out to encounter his chosen people in various ways, he himself wanted to approach us and sent his Son: ***"In the sixth month God sent the angel Gabriel to a city of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of David's family; the virgin was called Mary"*** (Luke 1:26-27). And to all of us, this account of the Gospel of St. Luke, which we celebrate every year on Christmas Eve, resounds in our hearts. An encounter that changed Mary's life completely, her life with Joseph, her image, her social situation, her decisions. This meeting opened a new hope for her and her people, "the poor of Yahweh," the "anawim," who wait on the Lord. Mary is a point of arrival and departure for the fulfillment of a promise; in the encounter with the angel a promise becomes a reality, and a new path of hope is opened. ***"See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? In the wilderness I make a way, in the wasteland, rivers."*** (Isaiah 43:19).

Mary sets out without delay; the encounter moves her closer to God's project and she sets out to visit her cousin Elizabeth's house. The encounter of "two greats", an encounter that shaped salvation. The Father who has sent his Son, and the Spirit exclaims in Elizabeth the recognition of God's gift, ***"Who am I to be visited by the Mother of my Lord? Look, as soon as your greeting came to my ears, the infant leapt with joy in my womb"*** (Luke 1:43-44). Mary cannot contain the life that inhabits her, the unspeakable joy of being "the chosen one" to realize the promise that inhabited her heart, and the Spirit that makes her overflow with hymns of praise. ***"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior"*** (Luke 1:46). It is the encounter of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit with all that is created, the supreme confirmation for Mary's eternal yes to the Father who will forever transform life in the world.

Just as this God made man in Jesus, came to meet all creation in Mary to deliver her from the powers of death, she will also go out to meet the pain and the concrete suffering leading to the salvation and life that every human being deserves. God, in Jesus, gives us life in abundance. That is the way of Jesus, his way of being in the world: to meet his own and communicate his life to them. And in this way he opens our hope to life, he welcomes, embraces, heals and cures us. He brings to reality in all that is created the promise of life and forgiveness that relieves pain and removes sin from the world. Encounters with Jesus are always encounters with Life. ***"A leper came to him and pleaded on his knees saying: 'If you will, you can cleanse me.' Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, 'I do will it. Be made clean.'"*** (Mark 1:40-41)



"Jesus, seeing his faith said to the paralytic: 'My child, your sins are forgiven. I say to you: get up, take up your mat, and go home. And the man got up, and at once picked up his mat and walked out in front of everyone.'" (Mark 2:5-11)

"And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed [him], crying out, "Son of David, have pity on us!" When he entered the house, the blind men approached him, and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I can do this?" "Yes, Lord," they said to him. Then he touched their eyes and said, "Let it be done for you according to your faith." And their eyes were opened. Jesus warned them sternly, "See that no one knows about this.'" (Matthew 9:27-30).

Jesus comes out to meet the faith that awaits and believes in the promise of love and salvation beyond extreme difficulties, pains, and failures. The faith of those who believe in the infinite mercy of God revealed in Jesus are the ingredients for encounters that heal and restore life.

The encounter with Jesus is transformative; his is the visible face of an invisible God. The Bible relates to us in images and pictures of healings and cures that no person who let himself be found by Jesus came out the same way from that encounter, anyone who believed in the promise of salvation was restored, rebuilt, and restored to his dignity. The encounter with Jesus returns to life, that which was dead or paralyzed. *"Then he said to the man, stretch out your hand. He stretched it out and his hand was restored, as sound as the other"* (Matthew 12:13).

Today, Jesus also comes out to meet us and similarly seeks us and asks us as the angel asked Mary. That was the question the Father had for her. Today we are asked, if we will allow that, the Lord, through us, continues being a saving promise for ourselves and for others. Not all of us will come out the same because of this encounter! He is the one who can and wants to rebuild our ruins, resurrect us from our deaths, and free us from our paralysis. He is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Happy are you who have been invited to partake of his Life! Jesus awaits your response.

- *Look, I am about to do something new, now it is springing up; can you not see it?* (Isaiah 43:9)
- *But the LORD said: I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry against their taskmasters, so I know well what they are suffering. Therefore, I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians."* (Exodus 3:7-8).



- *It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, who took them in my arms; but they did not know that I cared for them. I drew them with human cords, with bands of love; I fostered them like those who raise an infant to their cheeks; I bent down to feed them.* (Hosea 11:3-4)
- *If you knew the gift of God.* (John 4:10)
- *Behold, I am standing at the door knocking; if one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in to share a meal with that person, and that person with me.* (Revelation 3:20)
- *Because God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting their sins against them.* (2 Corinthians 5:19)
- *The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness.* (Romans: 8:26)
- *For God loved the world so much that he gave his only begotten Son.* (John 3:16)
- *The Son of Man has come to seek out and save what was lost.* (Luke 19:10)
- *He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, death of a cross.* (Philippians 2:8)



A VIEW FROM
THE PERSPECTIVE
OF FAITH.

A view from the perspective of Faith

How a teacher treats a child.

Man is born as an unfinished being, we would say "unfinished", man is a being continuously and unlimitedly in construction, in development, in process. In the process of living he is constantly completed, growing "becoming more a person". That is why we say that the truth about man, understood as that to which he is called to be, and which unfolds "onwards", is always beyond his concrete reality, beyond his today. For that person, the gifts that the Lord has given him take the form not only of a gift but of some homework, of possibility, of opportunity to be deployed in the future. That is why we say that the gifts of the Lord are today a gift, and an ongoing work that allows him to grow in the process of living. In this same way we can understand our existence as a gift, but also a daily work, something that we can continue to deploy, develop, grow.

As men we grow as if in a roulette game with ourselves, in which freedom is experienced with the natural limits of being in this world. We grow within a limited freedom, accepting our existence and exercising it in our daily activities. With what we receive in the process we are making history, integrating it into what we are deciding, in what each one of us is doing with our life plan. Practical asceticism (practice) says, "to become what God wants us to be." Something like choosing in our lives what the Lord chooses for us, and thus concretely in history putting into the Lord's project our own perfume. It is a balance between accepting existence as a gift and unfolding it as a labor of love, while letting ourselves be shaped by the Lord, letting ourselves be molded by Him, so that our being may be all that we are called to be in Him.

St Ignatius tells us that when the God the Father – Son – and Holy Spirit, observed the roundness of the whole world full of men and women, and seeing how everyone erred in the purpose for which they were created, how they have lost their way, determined that the second person, the Son, will become man "to redeem mankind."

And God became man, and he dwelt among us. The important thing about this act of lowering himself, kenosis, becoming less, emptying of God in the person of Jesus, is not an impoverishment, for God does not need to lose anything of himself to become Man. But the essence of kenosis lies in the surrender that it implies, that is, in the free decision to want to be equal to man in everything but sin, for love. The Lord chooses to become one of us without losing any of his Divine condition.

That is why we affirm that the fullness of God's love for humanity is not in the brightness, majesty, glory or power, but in the fullness of solidarity and surrender of



his kenosis, his lowering to the human condition, out of love. It is this dedication in solidarity of God to humanity that makes his kenosis fruitful. The Lord chooses to stand in solidarity with mankind by entering history as a true human being, equal in everything except in sin.

Kenosis does not consist on the assumption of a simple nature, but of the assumption of all the world with its history of sin that are inseparable from his particular humanity and with what is its own doing, its historicity, its possibility in time, and its part in the act of "becoming". God incarnates himself and becomes Man. He was not a man in a theoretical or abstract way of "being a man", but he was man as we are. And more, carried to the extreme and, therefore, with a whole series of enslaving conditionings that man does not experience as necessarily belonging to the idea of man, but as belonging to the concrete man who lives a concrete life in time and space. Jesus lived a concrete life in a specific time.

Assuming man as "history", as a being whose essence is to do what he is and, in its becoming, putting himself in play as himself, then also the Incarnation must necessarily be history. As such, the Divinity seriously enters as part of an evolution and in a way that we do not know or understand, runs the risk of success. God has not only become man and servant, but he also took a risk and a gamble. Jesus is the Son of God, but according to the flesh, in a way having-to-become the Son of God. The Son of God becomes the Son of God in history, and in the process he realizes, he develops, as what he is and at the same time driven by the action of the Spirit he allows his being made, so that his Being may become what he is called to be in the historical time in which he lived.

And in all this, God chose him in solidarity with us, to teach us the way a teacher teaches a child, how to live our process of making us more human. In the imitation of Jesus' ways, to make us more human is to stand in solidarity with the crucified in history, with the marginalized, poor and excluded, assuming their cross, out of love and in solidarity with their lives. To become more human in the style of Jesus is to open ourselves to love, which means passing through the cross, which opens the way to the resurrection. For death on the cross in Jesus did not have the last word, nor in us who are called in Him to the Resurrection. **Sacramental life. Reconciliation.**

The sacraments respond to an intimate need of man. Interestingly, while for many Christians the sacraments have lost the strength of the visible sign, non-believers invent signs to fill that felt undeniable intimate need. All our language is symbolic, which means that reality itself must be distinguished from its message. An old piece of furniture may be for some just that, an old piece of furniture, but for its owner it can



be the memory of a loved one who no longer lives. Furniture is a sign of that love and that lost affection.

Thus, also the sacraments are visible signs that make present an invisible reality. For Jesus Christ continues to act today as yesterday. Of all the signs of God in the world, Jesus is the very visible sign of the face of the Father *"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father"* (John 14:9), we could say that Jesus Christ is the sacrament of God, the visible sign of the Father on earth.

But after Easter, Jesus Christ is no longer accessible to our direct experience, as Jesus was to the disciples. Today, however, the Church is that "mystical body" of Jesus that is a sign of God's life on earth. And what was visible in Jesus Christ, so it is today in the sacraments of the Church. We could say that the Church is all "a sacramental body."

Today in our life of faith, we agree to a diversification of that "sacramental body" and we would say "several sacraments". Let us obey the sacramental body of the Church in the practice of some sacraments that are signs of God's coming to man's encounter in his rooted experiences of life (birth, love and commitment, failures, sickness, death, and consecration to others).

The sacraments as visible signs that make present an invisible reality, are encounters with God, encounters that have a sense-dimension i.e. accessible to the experience of the senses, we can touch, see, hear, taste... Unfortunately, over time the rituals and sensitive signs of the sacraments have been losing "their symbolic strength" by the precise weakening of their nature as "signs". The immersion in baptism has been replaced by a few drops of water, bread by a host, a glass that does not look much like the glass we usually place in a meal, etc. Let us say the signs are no longer such signs or have lost their symbolism, even if they have not lost their validity. It is as if validity has almost overtaken the strength of the sign. The word of the rite that joins the sign, and which by that union should be imposed by its own force, today adds "the word explaining the sign". And if a sign needs to be explained, it is because it has lost its strength as sign or its symbolism.

Although this reality is undeniable, the sacraments are still visible signs of the invisible God. The sacramental body of the Church is diversified into seven sacraments in which God himself goes out to meet man. What a good time and what an opportunity to recover the value and depth of the sacramental signs, the beauty of their symbolism, and the meaning of the sensible dimension of the grace that comes close to us! For by meditating again on them, noting the gestures, words, and rituals, we can rediscover the depth of symbolism and the implied force of the sign, and enter into deeper intimacy with the Lord. They are indeed the gestures and words of Jesus.



Within the framework of the sacraments proposed by the Church, we now want to dwell on one of them, the Sacrament of Forgiveness and Reconciliation, which brings us par excellence to the grace of the Infinite and Limitless Mercy of the Father.

Reconciliation is the sacrament of LOVE, of God's encounter with human beings who fall due to their fragility and vulnerability. It is the celebration of God's mercy. And it is God himself who seeks us out and embraces us and helps us to rise again. The grace of this sacrament reaches us beyond the personal existential situations of the priest, who is only a mediator of grace. God activates His grace by the strength of the sign plus the word (the person who recognizes his sin in a fraternal conversation and the priest who intercedes for him to receive the forgiveness that comes from God).

Reconciliation, like every sacrament is a celebration. It celebrates life dedicated to following Christ. What does this mean? It means that God comes to meet us, to give his grace, to embrace and forgive the fallen person. But it is the person who allows God to enter while allowing, the effectiveness of God's grace, by making oneself present and available to that gift. Opening the doors to the grace of reconciliation is in addition to receiving God's forgiveness, the commitment to complete with one's way of life what grace begins, to bring that grace to towards one's brothers and sisters. In other words, may God's grace not die in that act of forgiveness, but continue to act in the life of the person so that the sacramental grace may become life and the sacramental life become one of mercy for others.



A VIEW FROM
THE SPIRITUAL
PERSPECTIVE.



A view from the Spiritual perspective

Learn to meditate.

People need to pause on their ongoing march in life and so invest some time in healing passivity – a moment to ruminate and observe what we are living in the present moment. We need to take account of and let events flow through our hearts and our inner senses and that are part of our daily lives. We humans are the only creatures with the ability to be self-conscious, that is, with the ability to think about ourselves. The capacity to be self-conscious allows us to meditate, examine at a distance the events and circumstances we are experiencing and so become more aware of their existence. When we meditate we apply our faculties (memory, intelligence, and will) to review the events of the past or the day before, and so try to relive them in our conscious self and take a real view of what went on. For example, if we recall happy events from our past life, we most likely will take a new look at our feelings then, and try to recreate those feelings as were experienced then and so relive today what was lived and enjoyed at other times.

When we meditate on something, we apply our memory, we review that event and bring it to the present with its situations in time, place and people, and remember the decisions, feelings and desires connected with them. This internal elaboration moves us to act, since from it are awakened desires that mobilize the will.

However, meditation should not begin and end on a mere act of being focused on ourselves, turned in on ourselves in search of mere tranquility or complacency. But on the contrary, it must be a means to open our lives to the awareness of the Presence of the Lord in what we are experiencing. And becoming aware of our experiences and the Lord's presence in them, we examine our response, on how we are open to welcome Him or close ourselves to His presence.

The presence of the Lord is healing, saving. It is a loving presence that opens us to Life in abundance. By pondering the events we live, we can realize the ongoing saving action of the Lord.

The Bible is a story that tells how the Lord rescues his people from the path of falling away from him and leads them down the path that leads them back to his love. The Bible is God's love story with his chosen ones. To meditate, today, the different moments of this story is to bring to our present awareness those mysteries lived and narrated by others. It is to bring to our present a living and effective experience, a mystery that has an updated message of salvation and proclaimed for my current life.



To spend time pondering how God has approached his children through history to rescue them from their falls and failures, is to realize how God saves and how He saves me in particular. Just as the Bible is the story of salvation of God's chosen people, each person's life is also a story of salvation established between God and the person who is a chosen daughter/son of the Lord.

The whole of humanity is saved by the Lord in his infinite love and so is every single life. Learning to look at my life and meditate on it helps me discover the loving hand of God present by making my existence a story of love and salvation. We can look at the moments when the Lord has reached out and touched me, has relieved my sufferings, has made the waters to flow in the desert for us, and has fed us *manna*.

Life itself is a story of salvation as is the history of the people of Israel, and as is the history of salvation of all humankind. If we want to reflect deeper on God's love, enjoy his loving hand touching our lives, and deepen our personal relationship with Him, it will help a lot to stop the fast pace our life is part of, and ponder what we live and how our Creator and Lord acts in it. As well as contemplating the life that grows in our personal contexts, and among the people who are part of our life.

Practice frequently the pause to ponder the Word of the Lord in the Bible, feed on it and relish its message. And also practice a time of silence to meditate on what you live, but not with your head, but with your heart. A time to feel, let yourself be impacted, and reflect on how you are living and how the Lord becomes present in what you live.

To dig deeper. Resources. Appendix Two. "Ready to start living"



A VIEW FROM
THE POPE'S
PERSPECTIVE.



A view from the Pope's writings

Forgiveness is the most visible sign of the Father's love, which Jesus sought to reveal by his entire life. Every page of the Gospel is marked by this imperative of a love that loves to the point of forgiveness. Even at the last moment of his earthly life, as he was being nailed to the cross, Jesus spoke words of forgiveness: **"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do"** (Luke 23:34).

Nothing of what a repentant sinner places before God's mercy can be excluded from the embrace of his forgiveness. For this reason, none of us has the right to make forgiveness conditional. Mercy is always a gratuitous act of our heavenly Father, an unconditional and unmerited act of love. Consequently, we cannot risk opposing the full freedom of the love with which God enters into the life of every person.

Mercy is this concrete action of love that, by forgiving, transforms and changes our lives. In this way, the divine mystery of mercy is made manifest. God is merciful (cf. Exodus 34:6); his mercy lasts forever (cf. Psalm 136). From generation to generation, it embraces all those who trust in him and it changes them, by bestowing a share in his very life.

The Bible is the great story of the marvels of God's mercy. Every one of its pages is steeped in the love of the Father who from the moment of creation wished to impress the signs of his love on the universe. Through the words of the prophets and the wisdom writings, the Holy Spirit shaped the history of Israel as a recognition of God's tenderness and closeness, despite the people's infidelity. Jesus' life and preaching decisively marked the history of the Christian community, which has viewed its mission in terms of Christ's command to be a permanent instrument of his mercy and forgiveness (cf. John 20:23).

Through Sacred Scripture, kept alive by the faith of the Church, the Lord continues to speak to his Bride, showing her the path she must take to enable the Gospel of salvation to reach everyone. I greatly desire that God's word be increasingly celebrated, known and disseminated, so that the mystery of love streaming from this font of mercy may be ever better understood. As the Apostle tells us clearly: **"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness"** (2 Timothy 3:16).

(Pope Francis, Misericordia et Misera)



A VIEW FROM
THE PERSPECTIVE.
OF PRAYER



A View from the Perspective of Prayer

The Father sends his son to save

Along the Way of the Heart, with less or greater awareness, we have recognized and accepted that our way of being, acting, in short, of living, has caused pain to others and to ourselves. It is not easy to eradicate an attitude or way of proceeding, but if we let God into our lives, little by little, we will regain our resemblance to the Son which we have lost because of our inner disorders, our sin. We are loved by a God who invites us to **let ourselves be loved and saved**. This is how the path of internal conversion and transformation begins. God wants to love us and save us; the Son came to save those who were lost. The good news is that the love offered is limitless. It is a free gift of love. Before Jesus I can only be quiet, let myself be loved and forgiven. I must look at myself through His eyes, from His viewpoint so that I can accept myself and reconcile myself with my smallness and fragility.

Jesus comes to reveal to us the project of mercy that his Father enacts for the human being and the whole creation. It is his plan of love to get our friendship back. God the Father wants and seeks our friendship, and on our part, we can prepare to meet Him and let ourselves be reached by Him. His love and mercy return life and bring order to all corners of our being. The experience of reconciliation makes us experience a vital need for transformation. His merciful love places our human love within a process of reconfiguration in the image of His Love. It is a personal process that we commonly call "conversion of the heart". God's grace requires our collaboration, our trust, and our hope to restore the beauty of human beings molded in our interior since we were created.

This path of conversion of the heart, of the healing of love, of the restoration of the human being will undoubtedly encounter impediments and obstacles that should not make us forget the initiative of His love and mercy.

It is especially important to understand that in order to forgive, God does not have to recover from the offenses He has received. This is because to forgive brings Him joy; he deeply desires to do so. He rejoices in His forgiveness, he is glad to recreate us in his love. The Father's love shows his gratuitousness and depth in forgiveness. Jesus, in the parables of mercy, reveals to us the Father as one who rejoices in recovering from the death of sin. At the heart of the parable of the Merciful Father (Luke 15), for example, is the joy of the Father embracing the son who returns to the house. It is the joy he cannot contain and overwhelms him so much so that has to go out to meet his son and kiss him. God the Father when he forgives, dignifies, and returns life.



The Good Father welcomes us with our hands full of broken pieces and leftovers, of wounds suffered and caused to others. We are aware of the damage we have done to others and done to ourselves. We stand before the Father because we accept that we have sinned and because we trust in His mercy. As we let ourselves be embraced by Him, we open ourselves to repentance and forgiveness.

When there is a false awareness of the damage we have caused, and we have broken down, we tend to turn on ourselves and end up doing a monologue in our minds. However, when there is an authentic awareness of guilt, we open ourselves to the dialogue that liberates and the embrace of the Father.

One who has experienced forgiveness lives differently, relates to God, to others, to oneself, to creation, in a new way. One who has experienced reconciliation does not live in fear of the possible loss of one's self-image, of showing one's weakness, of being harmed, of losing dignity. It relates to others with a new freedom that arises from the conviction of being welcomed and forgiven by the Father. The one who lets oneself be embraced by the Father can experience God's free and foundational love, and can offer oneself as a collaborator in building a world more in accordance with the Father's project. Simply put, it humanizes the environment in which one lives.

We propose in this step of the Way that you recognize forgiveness for what it is; a sacrament, a feast, a celebration of the new life that God gives us in his mercy. For even though we have failed to love, and we have not been able to respond to his infinite mercy, he remains faithful and redoubles his commitment to us. In us pride, selfishness and vanity often rule, but the love of the Lord always has the last word. He becomes strong in our weaknesses. We invite you to prepare for the feast of forgiveness and to receive the grace to experience his mercy.

First Step: I allow the Father to embrace me

The Father is the one who goes out to meet the returning son and hugs him. The Father "first" in the embrace, in forgiveness. We must let the Father exercise the leading role in forgiving me. It is He the Father who offers forgiveness, it is not our merit. In the gospel this attitude is reflected in the woman who gets down on her knees in the house of Simon (Luke 7:40). God has loved us when we were sinners (Romans 5:8). We must let the Father be pleased to exercise His love.



Second Step: I accept Love within me

My conscience is not everything. I am not the last reference of myself or my life but the Father. To celebrate the feast of forgiveness, it is necessary to experience the mercy and embrace of the Father. To make room for forgiveness is not to deny my sin or to justify myself in any way, but to admit to myself and to recognize my truth, but always facing the Father's initiative of love. One who is not capable of mercy with oneself will hardly be able to show mercy to others. Often the harsh and accusatory thoughts we have toward others are a reflection of how we think and look at ourselves. They are expressions that excessively denigrate and condemn our misery, fragility, or sin. This means that we cannot feel the love that God the Father has for us. We must encourage ourselves to feel that where sin abounded, grace will abound all the more. Within us, God has also left an indelible mark of the love He has for us. Rather than looking at our past, we should encourage ourselves to look more at the project, the mission Jesus has for us. "Change; everything changes! For me to change, is not so strange."

Third Step: I offer forgiveness to those who have offended me

The experience of authentic forgiveness makes us go out to meet others. We need to have the courage to start again. It is good to recall people who have been the source, conscious or not, of our woundedness. Those present and those who are no longer around. I may even feel that I have to forgive God for what He did not give me in my life, if this is the image I have of Him. In our hearts live the people we love, who have done us good and have shown us their love, but we also keep in the bottom of our hearts all those who have harmed us. It's time to free them, to let them go. To open the doors of the prison that we have in our hearts to finish the process of forgiveness that the Father, revealed in Jesus Christ, initiated in us.

To dig deeper. Resources. Appendix One. "Listen, understand, heal."



Exercise

What is Jesus Christ coming to save me from? What does it mean for me, specifically, that He is my Savior? Collect personal experiences of "having been saved, healed, liberated...."

Exercise - Practice of Rereading/reviewing

Reread/review in five steps

We recommend this practice to gather together the experiences of the day and discover how God has made himself present in your whole day. Examining or reviewing the day is a way of praying, a way of encountering the Lord aimed at discovering His passage through our lives.

Make yourself present. Start this moment of prayer by making yourself present, aware of where you are going and what you are to do. Make sure it is a quiet moment in which you can contact the silence of your heart. The silence that is there and with which you must come in contact with, will awaken you to His Presence.

Be thankful. "Re-view" the day as a spectator from dawn to this moment and appreciate what you have experienced. Just watch, as if were a movie; look again at the people, places, and things. Do not judge; just get back in touch with what has been lived. Give thanks for the day, the gifts, and all that you have found in it, what you liked and what you did not.

Ask for Help. With the whole day before the eyes of your heart and having recognized the gifts you have received, ask the Lord to enlighten you to discover your lack of care for the gifts He has given you. Tell him to show you the times and circumstances in which you did not care for those gifts, but instead damaged, caused harm, prevented good, depriving your brothers and sisters of help and affection. Ask Him to show you if it resulted in doing harm to a person, a situation, or something you were responsible for. May the Lord show you how He sees your attitudes of infidelity and lack of love for His Infinite Love. His merciful heart is the best mirror of your heart.

Be Sorry. Ask forgiveness from the Lord and from your brethren in your heart, for your faults and sins resulting in not taking care of the gifts the Lord gives you for your own fulfillment. Embrace in your heart the people you have hurt and need your forgiveness, and may the Lord send them that embrace.

Purpose. Start the day by making a purpose of living as the Lord wills, where He wants



you to be, doing what He expects of you. Close this prayer by praying an Our Father or a Hail Mary.

Suggestion: Take note of your reviews of the day and return to them when you need them. Do not create theories or obsess about what you do not like about yourself. In rereading the "gospel of your daily life" you must seek the Father's gaze upon you to look at yourself as He sees you. Seek not sterile perfectionists but rather the way in which your Creator and Lord desires you to lead your life.

The gratuitousness of God's love is accomplished in the realities that surround your day: the air, the sun, perfumes, friends, family, health, work, everything, even the stone that lies in the middle of the sea and that does not expect to be noticed by any person. It is all freely given and grace. Therefore, when you think of your sins or failures, you must first balance your heart by placing in it the "abundance" of gifts you receive out of sheer love. And only then should you ask for light to see how your attitudes have neglected those gifts causing harm to things, people, places, relationships.

Perform this practice periodically, until you reach a daily routine. You will then experience the way the Lord transforms your of heart of stone into a heart of flesh.



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RESOURCES



Resources

Appendix One

Listening, understanding, and healing

How many of us have ever felt that profound need to tell someone else what was going on! How many times have we needed an attentive look and open ears to get what we had to say! And how many of us can say that by talking to others, we "take a weight off our shoulders"?

Communicating is a reality as human as it is divine and can completely change a person's life. We cannot deny that there is a natural need in us to speak and express what happens to us. And while there are people who have a hard time communicating what they feel and live inwardly, out of fear, shyness, or shame, it does not mean that they do not have the need to let out what "eats them up inside".

We experience inner peace when by speaking, we "take a weight off our shoulders." This is what Jesus allowed people to do: he listened attentively to what they had to say. When you listen to the people in front of you and empathize with their feelings, because they are recounting their lives or putting into words their own mystery, you are opening the door to inner healing.

When we feel that someone really listens to us by expressing what happens to us, they heal us, cure us, and free our souls. When someone receives what we say with kindness and openness of heart, one's life finds rest. There are many people to whom no one listens and, above all, no one understands. This is, in short, the worst pain a person can experience: that no one will attend to or understand him. That is why Jesus' miracles and healings begin with prior dialogue. People felt understood and then opened to God's action.

Why are we looking for someone who understands us to tell them what is wrong with us? Because when our miseries or our joys pass through someone else's heart, a miracle is performed. The weight of problems and pain of wounds are relieved when we share them, and the joys and inner happiness multiply. The pain that is shared is more bearable and the shared joy has a better flavor.

When I can express what oppresses my heart, and when my own misery goes through the understanding of another, who listens to me and advises me, the pain decreases. And when my own happiness brings a smile to the face of the listener, our joy is complete.



The world needs people willing to listen, to welcome, to receive the mystery of the heart of the person who wants to communicate. Are you willing to be one of them?

Appendix Two

Ready to start living

When you look closely at what happens around you, when –with the eyes of an apprentice-- you behold the realities of your life, when you perceive the situations that you have to go through, accepting them, without judging, having openness and willingness to "experience things" personally, that is when you have really begun to learn to live.

People are looking for "nice" things to happen to them. We want our life experiences to be pleasurable, and we flatly refuse to even think that we can go through painful, distressing and unpleasant situations. Acting in this way, considered normal, we stop learning from that other dimension of life and we that it is not possible to deny what pain, sadness, death are like. To live is to learn to deal with what we must go through.

To live is to learn to love as the Lord loves. It is to discover his teaching that is sometimes hidden behind the painful cloak of anguish, sorrow, and even death, discovering the ever faithful presence of the Lord's love. When we manage to distance ourselves from our own judgments about reality or people; when we can suspend for a moment that irresistible impulse to deny or describe as "bad", painful, distressing, unpleasant, all that does not give us pleasure; when we cross the boundaries of our own hasty judgments, it is when we stand before life with the eyes of disciples, ready to drink from the wisdom present in the mystery of life, in which we learn to discover the seed of ever-present Love. That is when the Master appears in your life. The Master will arrive when the disciple is open to receive his teaching. That Master is within you, and you can hear Him when you truly dispose yourself to listen to Him. It is the presence of Love, revealed in Jesus Christ, that inhabits you and inhabits all things, available to be discovered with the eyes of the heart.

Maybe right now in your life you are going through a difficult time. Or maybe you are living one of those "dream" moments. Well, then, it is time to open your eyes, to suspend judgments, and let the reality you live reveal your wisdom to you, and to make you transparent to the Creator present in all reality. Do not be dazzled by the brightness of pleasant moments; instead, extract the love that inhabits them. Do not be blinded by the darkness of pain and grief, discover the wisdom that they contain, discovering the amount of good that inhabits them. Maybe it is time to realize what is



important in your life to make new decisions. Perhaps, the moment you are living shows you that life has good and bad times, and that you have to learn to manage the "bad ones" and capitalize on the "good ones."

Everything you live, everything, everything... provides a teaching that makes the presence of the Lord palpable. Do not be afraid to lose or fail; in every life-experience, there is much to learn and to love. And remember... "When the disciple is ready, the Master appears..." When the heart is ready, you discover the Lord in your life. The Lord is present in all that you live, in every life-experience.

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STEP 4
BOOK 6