



WE OFFER
OUR LIVES
ALONG WITH HIM



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 7
BOOK 9

The background features a series of overlapping, semi-transparent circles and lines in various shades of orange and white, creating a layered, abstract effect. The text is centered and rendered in a clean, sans-serif font.

Outline to guide the step

Keyword: GIVE YOURSELF

Objective: To open myself to a Eucharistic life, to be for others.

Attitudinal keys: To follow Him under the sign of the Cross.

What you want to obtain – Fruit: Perseverance and determination in the spiritual combat.

Inner dynamics for the step: The movement starts from myself towards offering and uniting my life with Christ according to my capacity to love and then towards apostolic availability for the mission of Jesus.

Referential Framework

Uniting our lives to Christ must lead us to give our life for others as He did. It makes us discover that, despite our poverty and limitation, our lives are useful to others. The knowledge that we are loved, chosen, and indwelt by Him dignifies us, fills us with gratitude, and enables us to respond to the abundant goodness we receive by offering our own lives in availability to His mission. We offer our lives by acting against the selfishness and comfort that often frustrate God's desire in us. The Lord invites us to give him our generous yes, as Mary of Nazareth did. He does not want to save us or change the world without our free will. However small our offering may be, when we offer our availability, it benefits others because the Father associates this offer with the life and heart of Jesus who offers Himself for us on the cross.

Placed with Jesus, we become closer to the suffering of the world and seek to respond as He did. We express to the Father this availability through a prayer of daily offering. We humbly beg the Holy Spirit that we may not be an obstacle to His action. We are inspired and nourished in a special way by the celebration of the Eucharist, where we recognize Christ's perfect offering to the Father, a model for our own offered life.

Internal dynamics of the Step

Realizing the height, width and depth of Jesus' love in the Eucharist, we are drawn to this love and we respond with our own self-offering.

An Act of Thanksgiving – the Eucharist

Christ's love shines through His heart, *"meek and humble"* (Matthew 11:29). This love can only be understood by following his life journey to its very end. The "outpouring of love that no word can explain without the risk of making it merely sentimental" the Church acclaims with modesty, "retelling how Love has come, commemorating it (in the Eucharist) as the death and resurrection of Christ." (Fr. Robert Scholtus)

"This is my body." "This is my blood." Everything is included here

The Eucharist reveals to us the love that endures "to the end," a love that has no measure, which is the power of The Resurrection. Jesus Christ desires to lead us on this path: *"Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me,"* (John 6:57). In our communion with his body and blood, Christ wishes to be deeply united to us. He communicates his Holy Spirit to us. As St. Ephrem the Syrian writes, "He called the bread, his living body, filled it with himself and his Spirit... And he who eats it in faith eats the Fire and the Spirit... . Take and eat them all and eat with it the Holy Spirit. It is truly my body and he who eats it will live eternally." By the gift of his body and blood, Christ makes the gift of his Spirit grow in us, the Spirit which we already received in Baptism and which is offered to us as a "seal" in the Sacrament of Confirmation. In the Eucharist, we assimilate in a certain way, says John Paul II, the "secret" of the Resurrection, a resurrection that begins every day in the heart of the world.

Why does He want to give us this immense gift of communicating His very self to us, of communicating His Spirit to us? Because He wants us to become like Him. He gives us His power of love, so that we may offer our lives, with Him, for the Kingdom of God, a new world that is already in gestation.

It is for this reason that the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network – The Apostleship of Prayer – for more than 175 years, invites us to make ourselves available every morning to Christ's mission (The Spiritual Exercises nos. 91-100). Through our morning offering we tell Jesus, "Here I am! You can count on me." To offer ourselves for the service of Christ every morning is to welcome with much gratitude the gift of God's love; it is to respond to this love with our lives at the service of the Kingdom, despite our inconsistencies, limits and fragility. Through this offering, we enter into a eucharistic existence, a life dedicated to the service of the Lord and others, to the service of the Church in the world. This offering makes us active participants in God's purpose of love for humanity.

Jesus lived his life as a eucharistic offering. His Last Supper summed up his whole life offered and given up for love. This path led him not to a dead end, but to His resurrection and to life in abundance. And this life of eternal happiness is available for each one of us! He pulls us into this "dance of love," even if he must go through the way of the Cross.

The Spiritual combat

However, entering into the same journey of Jesus, loving as He has loved us to the point of "giving up His life for his friends," can lead us to an experience of spiritual combat: ***"I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one"*** (John 17:15). It is even a criterion of fidelity to Jesus as ***"no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him."*** (John 13:16). We all experience it. In each one of us dwells an inner propensity to evil, to lying, and to all that is a rejection of life, but Christ does not leave us alone. He sends the Holy Spirit --the Spirit of Truth that comes from the Father-- who unmasks the enemy and helps us choose life.

It may seem exciting to respond to Jesus' personal call to us, to make ourselves available to him, to be at the service of the Church's mission in today's world, with all its challenges. We may imagine ourselves like the apostles, united to the Heart of Jesus, walking with Him on the roads of Galilee, through the green pastures adorned with a thousand flowers or on the shores of the lake announcing the Gospel; but we may forget about the cross. Or we may be like Peter and the other disciples, thinking that Jesus is the Messiah who would come to pave the way, to lower the mountains in one stroke, as if by a magic wand, and that just by being close to Jesus, we ourselves would avoid any suffering and even the cross itself. "No one enters in the kingdom of love" without first experiencing suffering. It is not so much that suffering is necessary, but in our world, authentic loving asks us to learn to let go of ourselves and to offer our lives. And this often leads us - not to say always - to a renewed path of purification and a self-denial for the sake of others, a path that includes suffering, the cross, and even death.

"I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world," Jesus says in the Gospel according to John (John 16:33).



A VIEW FROM
THE BIBLICAL
PERSPECTIVE



A view from the Biblical perspective

How far are we willing to live life to the fullest? What is the measure of our commitment? Have you ever thought if there is something in this world for which you are willing to give your life in exchange?

We may never find ourselves in the situation where we have to give up our life to save something or someone, but we have surely found ourselves in situations of having to give up one thing we love or value, to safeguard another value. And it is not too farfetched to think that repeated renunciations over time can end up making us feel that we are giving up our own lives for that which we are trying to give life to. What is certain is that it is love that moves us to desire to surrender or deny ourselves for the sake of the one we love. Love invites us to action and because we love, we are capable of great sacrifices.

Paradoxically, our surrender, which is a dying to self, makes us feel so alive and this dying becomes the source of new and fuller life for ourselves. Self-denial, in the long run, gives birth to new life. This is the process that shapes in us a "Eucharistic" life – a committed life, a life of self-denial that is able to give life to others.

And the Scriptures provide us with numerous stories of dying to self, from renunciation and letting go, that resulted in abundant life. *"Calling his disciples to himself, he said to them, 'Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury. For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood.'" (Mark 12:43-44).*

Life to the world, reconciliation, and the possibility for God to become a man rested upon a choice, the surrender of a woman, Mary. In her YES that won for us our salvation, Mary surrendered all her future and even her life in the hands of the Father, and she did this certain only of her hope placed in the Author of the invitation. *"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.' Then, the angel departed from her" (Luke 1:38).*

The Gospels tell us of Jesus' call to the first disciples and how they responded, leaving everything and followed him. From this response was born a new existence, a new life situation, a new identity. *"When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him" (Luke 5:11). "Then he called them. So, they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him" (Mark 1:20).*



The experience of surrendering is always a letting go, an experience of dying that involves entering a process of pain that cannot be avoided. No one who has surrendered himself entirely, who has offered his best, will not be able to say that he did so without pain or suffering. Suffering, though not sought, is indeed the unwanted outcome of self-surrender. The lives of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were not lacking in disappointments. Joseph not only took care of the child and the Mother, renouncing his own plans while entering into a mystery that he did not quite understand, but with generosity and dedication, assumed difficulties and contradictions that were not trivial experiences for him. Faced with the dangers that threatened the child's life, ***“Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son’”*** (Matthew 2:14-15).

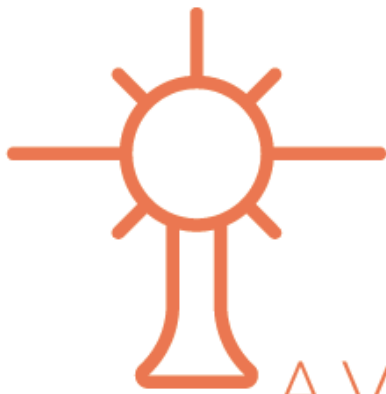
The Gospels tell us about the last moment of communion between Jesus and his disciples, in which every surrender and every renunciation takes on its ultimate meaning, where everything lived by Jesus on earth reaches its culmination. ***“Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end... he rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist... Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist”.*** (John 13:1, 4-5). ***“While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, ‘Take it; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many’”.*** (Mark 14 :22-24).

These two stories are but two sides of the same coin, in which Jesus gives himself up, stays among us to be food that gives life, bread that is broken and shared. The Eucharist is surrender and service. Jesus lived it and expressed it in this way, with gestures, with words, and with his whole life. So, we too must give ourselves and share ourselves with our brethren if we want to be part of the Eucharist with Jesus Christ. What does this mean? It means following the lifestyle of Jesus, putting ourselves at the service of others, being ready to respond to the needs of our brethren, helping them in their difficulties. Jesus is the greatest surrender of love itself, He is the culmination of all sacrifices and all renunciations, with whom we are all invited to surrender ourselves, to share his commitment, to be children of God by sharing in the mission of the Son. Just as we share his life and accompany him on his walk, we are also invited to the key moment of identification with the Master, the moment of the cross, of surrender, of taking upon ourselves the unwanted suffering - not desired and certainly not sought after.



By following Jesus, we are invited to imitate Him in this part of his life on earth, persevering in our struggles, looking at Him who opened the way for us to give us life. We can choose to walk with Him in our difficulties and in our sufferings because we are assured that by His passion and death, He has redeemed our lives forever and that by His own Resurrection, the Father will also resurrect us and make us fruitful even in our sufferings. Let yourself be won over by Jesus' passion, stay with Him, choose to be part of this moment and give up your life so that He may carry it on the wood of His cross.

- ***“Calling his disciples to himself, he said to them, ‘Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury. For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood.’” (Mark 12:43-44)***
- ***“Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.” (Luke 22:19)***
- ***“Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her.” (Luke 1:38)***
- ***“I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.” (Romans 12:1)***
- ***“Then I said, ‘As is written of me in the scroll, Behold, I come to do your will, O God.’” (Hebrews 10:7-13)***
- *Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all I possess and call my own; You have given it all to me. To you Lord I return it. Everything is yours, do with it what you will. Give me only the grace to love you in return; that is enough for me. (St. Ignatius, The Spiritual Exercises, no. 234).*



A VIEW FROM
THE PERSPECTIVE
OF FAITH.

A view from the perspective of Faith

The symbol of the Cross

The cross is the symbol that identifies us as Christians. Like every symbol it has the function of transmitting complex or abstract meanings, the depth of which is difficult to summarize in everyday language, such as feelings, values, attitudes. The symbol is the nexus between the visible and the invisible, between the concrete and the abstract.

What does the Cross symbolize for us today? What did the cross symbolize for Jesus and the early Christians?

The first answer that rises from within us is that the Cross symbolizes our participation in the Passion and Death of Jesus. Now, if this is the case, let us delve then into that of which Jesus' passion and death consist.

From the outside, the Holy Trinity can be understood as agape, as a gift and self-communication that is a "being-for". The Trinity's self-communication is shown in Jesus' "being-for" those who suffer the pain of the world, and in his firm commitment to the transformation of reality – loving the marginalized, the wounded, the discarded. This self-communication began with the Incarnation, but not abstract incarnation, but concrete and tangible, on the peripheries of power, among the poor and marginalized.

The pain of the world is God's pain in the world. The glass of water given to the thirsty could not reach Christ (cf. Matthew 25:35-45), if first the thirst had not first reached Him. Christ Jesus suffers with the suffering ones.

In his being-for, Jesus lived in opposition to the Anti-kingdom of this world. By his life, Jesus showed a way that is contrary to the values of this world - disturbing the mighty and being at the service of the weak and needy. By His attitudes and way of life, Jesus was forging the sentence that will be imposed on Him. To serve the pain of the world, Jesus submitted himself to worldly power in its three most relevant facets: the political power in the person of Pilate; the power of the community to which he belonged, in the person of Herod; the religious power, in the person of Caiaphas.

As we contemplate the scenes of His passion and the Cross, we see that they are dominated by the sign of "handing over": Judas hands him over to the Sanhedrin; the Sanhedrin hands Him over to Pilate; Pilate hands Him over to the multitude, those who anonymously, but in the name of the powers of the world, hand Him over to be killed; finally, God Himself seemingly hands Jesus over to His own fate.



For Jesus, faith defined His human existence. Faith was his way of living. He allowed himself to be determined always by the will of the God the Father and in behalf of the suffering world. He believed in his liberating mission and He waited and hoped, and hoped against all hope.

Let us now contemplate the passion and the cross. As we carry our own cross, we participate in the passion and death of Jesus. We usually associate the idea of carrying the cross with the idea of a burden, a physical pain, a bodily suffering. However, the significance of a death on the Cross is not so much the pain it entails, but the ignominy, shame and humiliation of such a death, imposed only on slaves, rebels and the worst criminals. In his kenosis, in his self-emptying and self-surrender, Jesus not only gave his life for us people, but did so by way of a shameful and humiliating death.

We seem to have lost sight of the shame and humiliation of the Cross and focused only on the physical pain. This is a trap into which we humans fall. But while physical pain leaves us focused on ourselves, humiliation and shame place us in relationship with others. In this way, we partake in Jesus' "being-for" in service to those who suffer pain in the world.

The Cross is not an individual issue, but a way of connecting to reality, our way of being in community. The Cross is not a form of mere asceticism, but a way of life, a way of acting before the world and before people. The Cross belongs to the realm of people's relationships with one another and not a matter of one's relationship to one's self.

Jesus' whole life was a giving of self, a being-for-others; in His way of being, He intended and realized the overcoming all conflicts. In the name of the Kingdom of God, Jesus lived his being for-others to the very end, even when the experience of death (a seeming absence of God) became very real for him on the Cross, leading him to the edge of extreme despair. But He trusted and believed to the end that God would accept His saving sacrifice and self-surrender for the good of the whole of humankind.

The Cross for the Christian is participation in the passion of the Lord, but a passion marked by humiliation, ignominy, being-for-others and absolute trust in the infinite love of God the Father.

The cross is a symbol of service, humble and simple, to the pain of God in the world, manifesting God's sharing in the suffering of the world in the person of Jesus.



A VIEW FROM
THE SPIRITUAL
PERSPECTIVE.



A view from the Spiritual perspective

Offering our life with the Son

The center and heart of the charism of the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network is the apostolic availability to Jesus' mission of compassion for the world. It is an attitude of the heart for a total offering of our lives with all that we are and all that we have, to join Christ in his mission for the Kingdom of God. It is complete availability, without reservations, with the deep desire to join our hearts to the heart of Jesus Christ so that He may dispose us for His kingdom.

This availability accompanies us all day, permeates everything we do. Thus, by offering ourselves to the Father in the daily offering prayer, we make ourselves available for his mission of compassion. In this prayer we the Heart of Jesus is united with the mission – the mystical and active aspects of love. In it we say to the Father, "Here I am," with all our being, with all our lives, with the desire to join ourselves to Jesus' self-offering to the Father so that with Him, we may become children of the Father in the mission of compassion.

The daily offering does not only mean to offer our day jobs but our whole being, with a deep willingness to be apostles in the mission of compassion for the world. But what is this mission of the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network? Where is the place of incarnation of that mission in this time of prayer for those who participate in this prayer network? It is none other than the challenges of humanity and of the mission of the Church, expressed by the Pope's prayer intentions, which are twelve keys to our mission. The papal prayer intentions make us aware of the concrete challenges facing humanity and call us to participate in the Church's mission to address these challenges. They are the concrete place where mission is incarnated, where the Lord invites us to go with Him. We pray and we mobilize our lives for the concrete needs of people in our world. Thus, in the daily offering prayer, we tell the Lord that we are completely His and that we surrender ourselves to the mission He has entrusted to us, and which the Pope's prayer intentions concretize. In our lives and in our offering, the prayer intentions are incarnated.

Thus, we are collaborators in Christ's mission. We become Eucharist with Jesus Christ, in union with Him and available for His mission. He makes us bread broken for our brothers and sisters through our availability and His action. The Lord invites us to this total availability to make our lives a Eucharist with Him. To live eucharistically is to live available to Christ, to his mission with all that we have and are, to collaborate with Him in his mission of compassion for our brothers and sisters.

My Life as a Permanent Eucharist

In the Eucharist we remember two actions of Jesus on the eve of the darkest moment of his earthly life: His Last Supper, that is, the Lord's supper and, the breaking of the bread.

These two are part of the greatest act of self-surrender ever made: the self-giving of Jesus Christ voluntarily and unconditionally done out of love for all people of all. That is why when we gather in the Eucharist, we do so to celebrate the Lord's Supper and to break and share bread; this is the Mass.

Although today it is difficult to understand it due to the social dynamics and the proper development of history, the Eucharist is not some mere act of worship but a source of transformation of human relations. It is a table shared between friends. Mass implies "farewell," and Eucharist is "thanksgiving". The shared table of the Lord's Supper was organized by Him, a table which Jesus, as Lord, shares with his servants; Jesus, as Master, sitting and sharing the table with his disciples. This was an unusual act in the time of Jesus, when slaves and servants did not share the table with their lords. In addition, it was, for his disciples, an act of hope because a shared dinner is a celebration. Thus, it was both a farewell in the midst of a dark moment and an act of hope, a celebration.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us two things that Jesus does at that dinner. He breaks the bread and passes it around, breaks the bread and shares it with his friends. This gesture has the sense of shared need. Bread is food and by breaking it and passing it around we share in each other's needs. The food is shared and the need is shared. Then Jesus passes the cup, which signifies an invitation to rejoice; wine is joy and everyone shares the same cup that Jesus gives through which he communicates his joy.

Jesus then promises them that every time they do these actions of breaking the bread and sharing the cup, he will be there, with them, with us. He tells them, "This is my body". For in Semitic culture to which Jesus and his friends belonged, "This is my body" meant, "This is my person, this is me. This is why I will always be with you." By saying, "This is my blood," Jesus actually means, "This is my life given up for you." Then Jesus tells them and tells us each time in this memorial, "In My Supper, by breaking and sharing the bread, we share in our need; by all of us drinking from the same cup of wine, my joy is communicated; therefore, every time you do this, I will be with you in person, in the flesh; and my whole life is surrendered for you and handed on to you".



The bread that we share is then the body and person of the Risen One, the Christ with his wounds who appeared to the disciples locked in fear in the Upper Room and while they were fishing on that frustrating night in Lake Gennesaret. We must recover the meaning of the Eucharistic celebration, going into its depths with the meaning the Lord has imprinted on them.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul tells us that by participating in the same broken and shared bread, which is the person of Christ, we are all one in Him. ***“Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf”*** (1 Corinthians 10:17). And this act is an event and invitation, both a gift and a task in progress, both grace and our work. We are one because He makes us one and we must also try to make us all one in the concrete transformation of our relationships every day. Therefore, the Eucharist, the broken and shared bread and the common cup, is the source of transformation of our relations with others and with ourselves. Without this desire for transformation worked out daily in our everyday life, the Eucharist loses its meaning.

The Eucharist must be a place of transformation of human relations. The Church is the Eucharist, and the Eucharist is the Church, that is why the Church must be the place where human relations are transformed. St. Paul tells us that, if by sitting at the table of the Lord some are fed and others go hungry, we have lost our senses, since supper is a place for transformation of human relations where we share to fill each other's needs and to communicate our Lord's joy. If in the Eucharist there is no transformation of the human person, then there is no real celebration of the Lord's supper: ***“When you meet in one place, then, it is not to eat the Lord's supper, for in eating, each one goes ahead with his own supper, and one goes hungry while another gets drunk.”*** (1 Corinthians 11:20-21)

We say that, in the Eucharist we celebrate the Life of the Lord surrendered unto death. We celebrate the past and announce the future. The past which we have been given, and which becomes a gift, and so the source by which human relations are transformed and the future in which relationships will be transformed with our acceptance of His grace and our cooperation with our daily actions.

We do not receive the grace of the Eucharist and the celebration of Mass by "attending and participating" only; there will only be Eucharist if there is a transformation of our human relations.



A VIEW FROM
THE POPE'S
PERSPECTIVE.

A view from the Pope's writings



"Faith also means believing in God, believing that he truly loves us, that he is alive, that he is mysteriously capable of intervening, that he does not abandon us and that he brings good out of evil by his power and his infinite creativity. It means believing that he marches triumphantly in history with those who **'are called and chosen and faithful'** (Rev 17:14). Let us believe the Gospel when it tells us that the kingdom of God is already present in this world and is growing, here and there, and in different ways: like the small seed which grows into a great tree (cf. Mt 13:31-32), like the measure of leaven that makes the dough rise (cf. Mt 13:33) and like the good seed that grows amid the weeds (cf. Mt 13, 24-30) and can always pleasantly surprise us. The kingdom is here, it returns, it struggles to flourish anew. Christ's resurrection everywhere calls forth seeds of that new world; even if they are cut back, they grow again, for the resurrection is already secretly woven into the fabric of this history, for Jesus did not rise in vain. May we never remain on the sidelines of this march of living hope!

Because we do not always see these seeds growing, we need an interior certainty, a conviction that God is able to act in every situation, even amid apparent setbacks: **"We have this treasure in earthen vessels"** (2 Cor 4:7). This certainty is often called 'a sense of mystery'. It involves knowing with certitude that all those who entrust themselves to God in love will bear good fruit (cf. Jn 15:5). This fruitfulness is often invisible, elusive and unquantifiable. We can know quite well that our lives will be fruitful, without claiming to know how, or where, or when. We may be sure that none of our acts of love will be lost, nor any of our acts of sincere concern for others. No single act of love for God will be lost, no generous effort is meaningless, no painful endurance is wasted. All of these encircle our world like a vital force. Sometimes it seems that our work is fruitless, but mission is not like a business transaction or investment, or even a humanitarian activity. It is not a show where we count how many people come as a result of our publicity; it is something much deeper, which escapes all measurement. It may be that the Lord uses our sacrifices to shower blessings in another part of the world which we will never visit. The Holy Spirit works as he wills, when he wills and where he wills; we entrust ourselves without pretending to see striking results. We know only that our commitment is necessary. Let us learn to rest in the tenderness of the arms of the Father amid our creative and generous commitment.

Let us keep marching forward; let us give him everything, allowing him to make our efforts bear fruit in his good time.

Keeping our missionary fervor alive calls for firm trust in the Holy Spirit, for it is he who **'helps us in our weakness'** (Rom 8:26). But this generous trust has to be nourished, and



so we need to invoke the Spirit constantly. He can heal whatever causes us to flag in the missionary endeavour. It is true that this trust in the unseen can cause us to feel disoriented: it is like being plunged into the deep and not knowing what we will find. I myself have frequently experienced this. Yet there is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail, and instead letting him enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever he wills. The Holy Spirit knows well what is needed in every time and place. This is what it means to be mysteriously fruitful!"

(Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, 278-280)

One more teaching from the Pope's writings

SPIRITUAL COMBAT, VIGILANCE AND DISCERNMENT

"The Christian life is a constant battle. We need strength and courage to withstand the temptations of the devil and to proclaim the Gospel. This battle is sweet, for it allows us to rejoice each time the Lord triumphs in our lives.

Combat and vigilance

We are not dealing merely with a battle against the world and a worldly mentality that would deceive us and leave us dull and mediocre, lacking in enthusiasm and joy. Nor can this battle be reduced to the struggle against our human weaknesses and proclivities (be they laziness, lust, envy, jealousy, or any others). It is also a constant struggle against the devil, the prince of evil. Jesus himself celebrates our victories. He rejoiced when his disciples made progress in preaching the Gospel and overcoming the opposition of the evil one: ***"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven"*** (Lk 10:18).

More than a myth

We will not admit the existence of the devil if we insist on regarding life by empirical standards alone, without a supernatural understanding. It is precisely the conviction that this malign power is present in our midst that enables us to understand how evil can at times have so much destructive force. True enough, the biblical authors had limited conceptual resources for expressing certain realities, and in Jesus' time epilepsy, for example, could easily be confused with demonic possession. Yet this should not lead us to an oversimplification that would conclude that all the cases related in the Gospel had to do with psychological disorders and hence that the devil does not exist or is not at work. He is present in the very first pages of the Scriptures, which end with God's victory over the devil. Indeed, in leaving us the Our Father, Jesus wanted us to conclude by asking the Father to "deliver us from evil". That final word



does not refer to evil in the abstract; a more exact translation would be “the evil one”. It indicates a personal being who assails us. Jesus taught us to ask daily for deliverance from him, lest his power prevail over us.

Hence, we should not think of the devil as a myth, a representation, a symbol, a figure of speech or an idea. This mistake would lead us to let down our guard, to grow careless and end up more vulnerable. The devil does not need to possess us. He poisons us with the venom of hatred, desolation, envy, and vice. When we let down our guard, he takes advantage of it to destroy our lives, our families, and our communities. **“Like a roaring lion, he prowls around, looking for someone to devour”** (1 Pet 5:8).

Alert and trustful

God's word invites us clearly to **“stand against the wiles of the devil”** (Eph 6:11) and to **“quench all the flaming darts of the evil one”** (Eph 6:16). These expressions are not melodramatic, precisely because our path towards holiness is a constant battle. Those who do not realize this will be prey to failure or mediocrity. For this spiritual combat, we can count on the powerful weapons that the Lord has given us: faith-filled prayer, meditation on the word of God, the celebration of Mass, Eucharistic adoration, sacramental Reconciliation, works of charity, community life, missionary outreach. If we become careless, the false promises of evil will easily seduce us. As the sainted Cura Brochero observed: “What good is it when Lucifer promises you freedom and showers you with all his benefits, if those benefits are false, deceptive and poisonous?”

Along this journey, the cultivation of all that is good, progress in the spiritual life and growth in love are the best counterbalance to evil. Those who choose to remain neutral, who are satisfied with little, who renounce the ideal of giving themselves generously to the Lord, will never hold out. Even less if they fall into defeatism, for “if we start without confidence, we have already lost half the battle and we bury our talents... Christian triumph is always a cross, yet a cross which is at the same time a victorious banner, borne with aggressive tenderness against the assaults of evil”.

Spiritual corruption

The path of holiness is a source of peace and joy, given to us by the Spirit. At the same time, it demands that we keep **“our lamps lit”** (Lk 12:35) and be attentive. **“Abstain from every form of evil”** (1 Thess. 5:22). “Keep awake” (Mt 24:42; Mk 13:35). **“Let us not fall asleep”** (1 Thess. 5:6). Those who think they commit no grievous sins against God's law can fall into a state of dull lethargy. Since they see nothing serious to reproach themselves with, they fail to realize that their spiritual life has gradually turned



lukewarm. They end up weakened and corrupted.

Spiritual corruption is worse than the fall of a sinner, for it is a comfortable and self-satisfied form of blindness. Everything then appears acceptable: deception, slander, egotism and other subtle forms of self-centeredness, for ***“even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light”*** (2 Cor 11:14). So, Solomon ended his days, whereas David, who sinned greatly, was able to make up for disgrace. Jesus warned us against this self-deception that easily leads to corruption. He spoke of a person freed from the devil who, convinced that his life was now in order, ended up being possessed by seven other evil spirits (cf. Lk 11:24-26). Another biblical text puts it bluntly: ***“The dog turns back to his own vomit”*** (2 Pet 2:22; cf. Pr 26:11).

DISCERNMENT

How can we know if something comes from the Holy Spirit or if it stems from the spirit of the world or the spirit of the devil? The only way is through discernment, which calls for something more than intelligence or common sense. It is a gift which we must implore. If we ask with confidence that the Holy Spirit grant us this gift, and then seek to develop it through prayer, reflection, reading and good counsel, then surely, we will grow in this spiritual endowment.

An urgent need

The gift of discernment has become all the more necessary today, since contemporary life offers immense possibilities for action and distraction, and the world presents all of them as valid and good. All of us, but especially the young, are immersed in a culture of zapping. We can navigate simultaneously on two or more screens and interact at the same time with two or three virtual scenarios. Without the wisdom of discernment, we can easily become prey to every passing trend.

This is all the more important when some novelty presents itself in our lives. Then we have to decide whether it is new wine brought by God or an illusion created by the spirit of this world or the spirit of the devil. At other times, the opposite can happen, when the forces of evil induce us not to change, to leave things as they are, to opt for a rigid resistance to change. Yet that would be to block the working of the Spirit. We are free, with the freedom of Christ. Still, he asks us to examine what is within us – our desires, anxieties, fears and questions – and what takes place all around us – “the signs of the times” – and thus to recognize the paths that lead to complete freedom. ***“Test everything; hold fast to what is good”*** (1 Thess. 5:21).



Always in the light of the Lord

Discernment is necessary not only at extraordinary times, when we need to resolve grave problems and make crucial decisions. It is a means of spiritual combat for helping us to follow the Lord more faithfully. We need it at all times, to help us recognize God's timetable, lest we fail to heed the promptings of his grace and disregard his invitation to grow. Often discernment is exercised in small and apparently irrelevant things, since greatness of spirit is manifested in simple everyday realities. It involves striving undisturbed for all that is great, better and more beautiful, while at the same time being concerned for the little things, for each day's responsibilities and commitments. For this reason, I ask all Christians not to omit, in dialogue with the Lord, a sincere daily "examination of conscience". Discernment also enables us to recognize the concrete means that the Lord provides in his mysterious and loving plan, to make us move beyond mere good intentions.

A supernatural gift

Certainly, spiritual discernment does not exclude existential, psychological, sociological, or moral insights drawn from the human sciences. At the same time, it transcends them. Nor are the Church's sound norms sufficient. We should always remember that discernment is a grace. Even though it includes reason and prudence, it goes beyond them, for it seeks a glimpse of that unique and mysterious plan that God has for each of us, which takes shape amid so many varied situations and limitations. It involves more than my temporal well-being, my satisfaction at having accomplished something useful, or even my desire for peace of mind. It has to do with the meaning of my life before the Father who knows and loves me, with the real purpose of my life, which nobody knows better than he. Ultimately, discernment leads to the wellspring of undying life: to know the Father, the only true God, and the one whom he has sent, Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 17:3). It requires no special abilities, nor is it only for the more intelligent or better educated. The Father readily reveals himself to the lowly (cf. Mt 11:25).

The Lord speaks to us in a variety of ways, at work, through others and at every moment. Yet we simply cannot do without the silence of prolonged prayer, which enables us better to perceive God's language, to interpret the real meaning of the inspirations we believe we have received, to calm our anxieties and to see the whole of our existence afresh in his own light. In this way, we allow the birth of a new synthesis that springs from a life inspired by the Spirit.

Speak, Lord

Nonetheless, it is possible that, even in prayer itself, we could refuse to let ourselves be confronted by the freedom of the Spirit, who acts as he wills. We must remember



that prayerful discernment must be born of a readiness to listen to the Lord and to others, and to reality itself, which always challenges us in new ways. Only if we are prepared to listen, do we have the freedom to set aside our own partial or insufficient ideas, our usual habits, and ways of seeing things. In this way, we become truly open to accepting a call that can shatter our security but lead us to a better life. It is not enough that everything be calm and peaceful. God may be offering us something more, but in our comfortable inadvertence, we do not recognize it.

Naturally, this attitude of listening entails obedience to the Gospel as the ultimate standard, but also to the Magisterium that guards it, as we seek to find in the treasury of the Church whatever is most fruitful for the "today" of salvation. It is not a matter of applying rules or repeating what was done in the past, since the same solutions are not valid in all circumstances and what was useful in one context may not prove so in another. The discernment of spirits liberates us from rigidity, which has no place before the perennial "today" of the risen Lord. The Spirit alone can penetrate what is obscure and hidden in every situation, and grasp its every nuance, so that the newness of the Gospel can emerge in another light.

The logic of gift and of the cross

An essential condition for progress in discernment is a growing understanding of God's patience and his timetable, which are never our own. God does not pour down fire upon those who are unfaithful (cf. Lk 9:54) or allow the zealous to uproot the tares growing among the wheat (cf. Mt 13:29). Generosity too is demanded, for "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Discernment is not about discovering what more we can get out of this life, but about recognizing how we can better accomplish the mission entrusted to us at our baptism. This entails a readiness to make sacrifices, even to sacrificing everything. For happiness is a paradox. We experience it most when we accept the mysterious logic that is not of this world: "This is our logic", says Saint Bonaventure, pointing to the cross. Once we enter into this dynamic, we will not let our consciences be numbed and we will open ourselves generously to discernment.

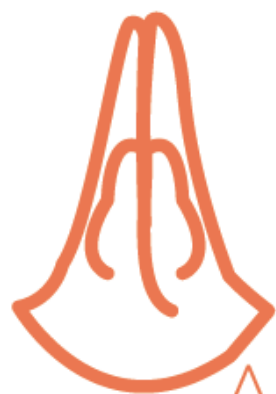
When, in God's presence, we examine our life's journey, no areas can be off limits. In all aspects of life, we can continue to grow and offer something greater to God, even in those areas we find most difficult. We need, though, to ask the Holy Spirit to liberate us and to expel the fear that makes us ban him from certain parts of our lives. God asks everything of us, yet he also gives everything to us. He does not want to enter our lives to cripple or diminish them, but to bring them to fulfilment. Discernment, then, is not a solipsistic self-analysis or a form of egotistical introspection, but an authentic process of leaving ourselves behind to approach the mystery of God, who



helps us to carry out the mission to which he has called us, for the good of our brothers and sisters.

I would like these reflections to be crowned by Mary, because she lived the Beatitudes of Jesus as none other. She is that woman who rejoiced in the presence of God, who treasured everything in her heart, and who let herself be pierced by the sword. Mary is the saint among the saints, blessed above all others. She teaches us the way of holiness and she walks ever at our side. She does not let us remain fallen and at times she takes us into her arms without judging us. Our converse with her consoles, frees and sanctifies us. Mary our Mother does not need a flood of words. She does not need us to tell her what is happening in our lives. All we need do is whisper, time and time again: "Hail Mary..."

(Gaudete et Exultate, 158-176.)



A VIEW FROM
THE PERSPECTIVE.
OF PRAYER



A View from the Perspective of Prayer

For what reasons would you give your life?

In our usual conversations we often hear people say "I will give my life for" or "I will give my life as long as..." when you want to express the sacrifice you are willing to make for something or someone. However, there may be different reasons behind these phrases. One of the reasons may be selfishness, but it can also be the projection of deep love. When we use the expression, "I will my give life," we can also come up with two other possibilities. The first is that perhaps we would realize that we would surrender our life for very few reasons, and that it would mostly be for a purely personal benefit. But we might also be surprised to recognize how much we value the lives of others and the sacrifice we are willing to make for others.

But what if what you would give up your life for, for example, well-being in a relationship, peace in one situation, or the happiness of others, did not depend solely on you giving up "your" life, but simply transforming it? If the other person's happiness depends on your willingness to change your attitude, would you do it? If to achieve well-being and harmony in a relationship you had to look for new ways to bond, would you change the way you act? Even if a person's happiness depended on you being the one "losing at the end," would you still be willing to do so? What if you realized that you could achieve what you want simply by changing the way you think you are and your way of acting, what choices would you make?

Giving up our life for the other person's well-being can be very laudable. Giving up our life for the other person to live can be a huge gesture of love. This has been the greatest gesture of love mankind has ever known. Jesus, in sharing bread and wine with his disciples, was anticipating the definitive surrender of self-love that He would seal with His death on the cross. There was and will never be a greater gesture of love and self-surrender than what was done by the Son of God.

On the cross Jesus reveals his love that reaches the extreme surrender so that another may live, regardless of whether he is good or bad, just or unjust, sinner or holy, because His surrendering is for all and forever. When we hear in the Gospel Jesus saying that "the disciple is not more than his teacher, nor the servant more than his lord" and adds that it is enough for the "disciple to be like his master, and the servant to be like his lord" we can fall into temptation and believe that we need to make a sacrifice identical to that of Jesus.

Jesus' surrender on the cross was unique and forever. However, as disciples we are called to surrender ourselves out of love. The offering of our life is an inner attitude



that springs from the Eucharist and has its culmination on the cross. It means being to change inwardly to make our lives food for others. There are situations that do not improve in our surroundings because we are not willing to sacrifice and give in a little and so act differently. Our lives become an offering when we offer it to God as an instrument of love and redemption for others.

When we understand our own lives as God's gift and want to give it up as Jesus, we become eucharistic people. Would you be willing to cooperate with Jesus in his mission to give life? Jesus Christ said, "**No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends**" (John 15:13).

Jesus, through his words, gestures, and way of proceeding consoled many people. He gave them hope, helped them believe and regain faith. If you examined carefully and courageously the course and rhythm of your own life and you decided to cooperate so that others may live better, you would realize how much you could help in the happiness of others.

The Eucharistic celebration is not an artistic spectacle but a **fraternal meal**. A privileged place to meet Jesus. To sit at his table, we need to confess that we are hungry for Him. This is a condition to feed on his nourishing Body and Blood and a fundamental element for the affective bond with Him.

Just as at the last supper Jesus took the bread in his hands and distributed it among his disciples and did the same with the chalice, he repeats that same action with each of us. As we receive communion we enter in communion with Jesus, we feed on his Body and Blood and he embraces each of us. In his hands pierced by the nails of the cross he molds us as *eucharistic disciples*. He assumes the primary responsibility of accepting us as his disciples, but he demands absolute availability from us at the same time.

The account of man's creation in the book of Genesis tells us that God took mud in his hands and shaped man. In every Eucharist we are also welcomed by Jesus at the very moment we receive Him as food. Through the gesture of receiving communion, we accept the grace that outlines the traits that define us as his disciples.

The human being, created from mud, is then composed of the "water" of his qualities and talents and the "land" of his frailties and deficiencies. We are not only qualities and virtues, but we are not also just imperfections and limitations; both elements constitute a perfect duality, which cannot be separated without tearing apart the essence of the human being.



"We hold this treasure in earthen vessels " (2 Corinthians 4:7). It is not our qualities and talents that establish the Kingdom of God, nor can our limitations prevent it from being fulfilled. Our weaknesses are no excuse, nor are our shortcomings reason enough for God to stop his plan. Our weakness will never be greater than His power. Human frailty is no obstacle that God may interrupt His saving action and that will be implemented with our collaboration.

To be *eucharistic disciples* means to let the Holy Spirit imprint in us the image of Jesus. To do this we must be willing to detach ourselves from our selfish ways of acting and proceeding and willing to assume His lifestyle. There are times in our lives when we must open our hearts to God and encourage ourselves to "reevaluate" the lifestyle we have chosen. Not because it is bad or wrong, but for the simple reason that it is good to put ourselves in God's hands and let Him remake us. If we do not detach ourselves from the present lifestyle of the old man in us, we will not be able to accept the Lord's project for us.

We invite you to make the daily offering prayer of the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network every morning to set out to live the day with a eucharistic attitude. That is, internally disposed to live the day of study, work, and daily chores in a disposition for mission. The offering prayer in the morning of all that we are makes us disposed to live for Him, with Him, and in Him all day.

Suggested Exercises.

Offering prayer.

Now that you have taken this step, you will be able to taste more flavor from the "Offering Prayer". We invite you to say this prayer with your heart every morning, feeling and stopping at every sentence and word as needed. Enjoy its deep meaning. Pray it without concern for time and without any sense of rush, so that the beauty and depth of each word penetrates your heart as a drop that slowly cuts into the stone.

*Loving Father, I know you are with me.
Here I am, on this new day.
Place my heart once more next to the Heart of your Son Jesus
that has given himself up for me
as He comes to me in the Eucharist.
May your Holy Spirit make me his friend and his apostle
available on His mission.*

*I put in your hands my joys and hopes
my jobs and sufferings
everything I am and possess
in communion with my brothers and sisters
in this Worldwide Prayer Network.
With Mary I offer you my day
for the mission of the Church
and for the Pope's prayer intentions for this month.
Amen*

Exercise

We invite you to participate in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist with the desire to find the Risen Christ. Live it as the celebration of the Lord's Supper, where we share needs and food and communicate His Joy. Listen to the words of the readings as if He were speaking to you and the words of the Eucharistic prayer as if He were pronouncing them. See the gestures for the consecration of bread and wine as if He were making them, creating room in your heart for His words, "every time you perform these gestures know that I will be with you in Person." Welcome the reception of communion as if He were feeding me. Receive the closing prayer and final blessing as if He were sending me on a mission.

To what extent do I live to imitate the lifestyle of Jesus or rather do I seek a comfortable life, with all securities and without any struggle? Is my life a eucharistic presence?

Examination of Consciousness – A Thematic Spiritual Review

Let us remember ... what is spiritual discernment?

It is the art of interpreting in which direction the desires of our heart are leading us, without letting ourselves be seduced by what leads us to where we would never have wanted to go. Discernment is the generic spiritual term for decision-making practice in my concrete life situation to seek and find God's will for me.

Six things to remember about spiritual discernment

- 1.- Remember that in our sense of feeling three different forces can act: our natural self (instinct), *the good spirit and the evil spirit*.
- 2.- Be attentive to the where the feelings are coming from and where the internal motions (feelings, thoughts) of *our hearts are leading us*.

- 3.- Remember that each of these forces *moves in its own* direction.
- 4.- Remember that *both the good spirit* and the evil spirit act in our natural (instinctive) feelings.
- 5.- Recall that *God supports the good spirit, which* moves us to freedom. The evil spirit moves us *into* slavery.
- 6.- Be aware that to choose well it is essential to learn to distinguish these *internal forces* and so have inner freedom.

In other words, spiritual combat/struggle demands spiritual discernment from us, which will lead us to take a position in this fight. For it is not only to feel these forces but to choose, to choose or decide which ones move us to Life. In this fight it is a mistake to identify God with the good spirit. God supports the good spirit but does not identify with it. The good spirit manifests itself through everything we hear, see, experience in our lives, and the Lord supports it. God comes to support the good spirit so that we may choose life and be free, but also, in the face of the evil spirit, he acts on our behalf by sharpening our consciousness, and our guilt, so that we may react. It is not a struggle between God and the evil spirit. The Creator is always different and is not to be confused with the action of the good spirit in the face of the action of the evil spirit. The risk of identifying the good spirit with God is to fall into a trap, thinking that everything that happens to us as good comes from God (likewise, as if to believe that everything that happens to us as evil comes from the devil). The wisdom of St Ignatius and of His spiritual tradition is an invitation precisely to put a distance, when speaking of the good or evil spirit. The good spirit can be supported by the Spirit of the Lord, but it is not given automatically. In this sapiential perspective the personification of these forces helps us to be placed on the side of the spiritual life, where it is not so much about doing good or bad things, but of not being deceived by other external forces.

To dig deeper. Resources. Appendix One. "Decisions in difficult times."

To dig deeper. Resources. Appendix Two. "Proven in our fidelity."

Spiritual Review: The Practice of Discernment.

We invite you to practice a simple exercise to train yourself in discernment. We will give you step by step so that you may dispose yourself to listen to the Spirit of the Lord, and so you can scrutinize (search) your heart and discover your inner movements. And then decide for what opens you to act and choose the Life of the Lord.

1. Put yourself in the presence of the Lord, with humility become aware that He

accompanies you and is with you in this time of prayer. Get in touch with the silence in your heart.

2. Make a time for gratitude, review with your heart and your head everything you want to thank the Lord for, then go into detail of those things for which you want to thank Him in particular.
3. Make an assessment of your life, the places and situations of the things that are happening to you currently, what resonates the most for you. Then ask the Lord to show you what decision you must make at this time. What step you must take and then decide. It can be big or small, related to work, family, or even a trip. Ask Him to show you which paths will be open for you.
4. Now, ask for light to understand how this situation in your hands has impacted your life, how does it impact you at this moment. What forces are you struggling with? Which ones do you feel are throwing you toward God and which ones are taken you away?
5. Now beg the Lord to show you the consequences of the paths you might take, how it would affect one decision or another, in a sense or in its opposite. How would others be impacted; will my choice be a cause of pains, or joys?
6. Reflect on the possible feelings created by the paths you might take. What emotions are awakened within you? Where do these emotions come from and where do they direct you? By which choice are you most in connection with Life, with your brothers and sisters, with the Love that comes from the Father? In which ways do you feel that the Lord's attitudes are reflected in your choice and in which possible decision they are not?
7. Write down what you have discovered. Then intentionally leave this whole thing in the hands of the Lord.
8. If you feel inclined to decide at this moment, put the decision in the hands of the Lord and have Him confirm it in you and for you; ask Him to reveal to you if your decision is what He expects of you at this time.
9. Close your prayer period, thank the Lord for his presence, and ask Him again to let his will be done.



WE OFFER
OUR LIVES
ALONG WITH HIM



RESOURCES

Resources

Appendix One

Decisions in difficult times

It is funny, but reality sometimes seems to go against everything we know about how to **make good, healthy choices** in life. It is true, and we all agree, that to make a good and healthy decision we must first calm down, reflect, consult with others, meditate, and pray. We know that in the silence of the soul, where God dwells, there is an inexhaustible source of Wisdom that we must hear because there is where the truth abides. However, there are situations in our lives in which it is not in the moments of serenity that we make important and profound decisions in our lives, but it is in the limited (imperfect)situations, the "strong ones", those that shake our hearts, those that shake the soul – and even take down, - the structures and schemes of thought and understanding of our reality.

What are these situations? Any failure and death. And while they are not the same thing, there are failures that are experienced as true "deaths." Surely you have heard stories about people who have made very radical decisions in their lives after experiencing a failure or feeling the closeness of death. Stories of people who faced a "limit situation", in which they believed that they could do nothing, have discovered that the best decision of their lives has been the result of experiencing that moment. These people have completely changed their view of life and, as a result, their way of life. Is it possible for failure and death to teach us to make good choices? Do we need to experience the limits of failure or death to understand the value of life?

Sometimes our decisions or choices are wrong because we are not willing to change internally. We are faced with a problem in the same way and in the same place, thinking about how to carry out our ideas and thoughts, without first asking ourselves if there are other ways to understand and deal with difficult situations. We believe that the way we solve problems is by a kind of "wildcard" that applies to everything.

Failure or death is a call for us to explore new paths and solutions because they make us skip the rigid schemes of thought to connect with the source of Wisdom that nests in us. When life situations "tighten all around us," or when we go through difficult times, we must connect with the inner Wisdom that nests in us. If we do, we will always find creative solutions in difficult times. Then you must open your mind and heart to listen to the Lord who dwells in you!

Appendix Two

Tested in our fidelity

More than once it happens that things take an unexpected course that we do not like, because it is out of the realm of our expectations. And this experience encompasses the reality of the world around us, such as war, hunger, refugees, migrants, our common home that suffers and moans over the aggression and neglect of the men and women that inhabit it. Alongside are, our nearest worlds, like work, family, and friends. Most people do not always satisfy us or give us what we expect. Other times, they simply do not recognize and do not value the efforts we make for them and for their well-being. Many things often make us taste failure and frustration. Projects fail and are not fulfilled. Despite our efforts, things do not always go as expected. The natural feelings are anger, tiredness, boredom, and heartbreak that invade us. Some say these feelings are masks that our pain uses when the felt pain is not accepted for what it is. It is true that these situations do hurt us, but it is less compromising to say that we are angry about the situation than recognizing the pain it causes us.

And in this state of things the evil spirit makes his appearance to finish giving his predicted blows to bring down the victim. And how does the evil spirit do it? Planting in our mind feelings of failure and helplessness such as: "you know how you have ruined everything", "it is useless to insist", "you are useless for this and good for nothing", "stop insisting that it is not worth it", "you will not achieve it", "the outcome of things depend on you and they fail".

So, how do we go on?

The first awareness to treasure is to realize that failure and frustration are a necessary part of life. Who told us that we are only making progress from successes to successes? They are good, but not exclusive. You need to fail, make mistakes, and feel frustrated. Well, these experiences also shape us and help us grow.

Another idea that can help us keep walking is that this situation of failure is temporary, it will not last forever no matter how painful. And it is not the only thing that exists in my life. In addition to this there were other situations of success and there will continue to be. And then we will recognize that "other forces" bid on us in the opposite direction, implying other ideas: "This thing you live is part of your life and not your whole life," "it is temporary and it is going to go away," "you will be able to overcome this, as you have done with other things," "there are very good situations in your life," "you have other situations where things are going very well," "none of what happens defines who you are, except that there is one aspect that needs to be improved, overcome or polished." And so, we could go on, illustrating the battle among these two groups of thoughts that are borne in us in the face of these situations. The

ultimate thing is that there are always feelings and identifying them and then deciding what to do with them is the essential thing to do. Dare to take sides. Take a position in the battle you might be experiencing. That is why failure and disappointment are not as bad as they seem because they can become a source of interesting wisdom. Experiences of rupture and disappointment are precisely the ones that force us to stop and think, they help us to reflect on ourselves and others, even with the risk of centering ourselves in our disillusioned ego.

Failure invites us to become aware of at least two things: first, to recognize that part of what has happened is that we have appropriated as true this reality by pretending to experience this utopia as if we had control of what happens to us, as if we were superheroes. This is the childish tendency to control as if we had convinced ourselves that things will be what we imagine. And the second thing is that we must go on living, and that has its own price. Pain will not be taken away from us. In these difficult times it will be of great help for us to be faithful, to desire a good measure of humility, to help us recognize that we do not control it all, that we are not superheroes but rather that we are part of a greater reality along with others who live in our circle. That we are not sole owners but that we are collaborators, and our reality does not have to respond to our cravings.

It will also help us a lot to keep on moving, to recognize that we need help, that we are fragile and needy. We always need others and the Lord in the school of life.

That is why it is so important to be vigilant in these times of trial, to be attentive so that the forces that close on us do not win over our hearts. Practicing the pleading and confident prayer in the silence of the heart that will help us to pause and create a distance which will give us lucidity to recognize the choices that will open us to true Life, choices which invite us to go on moving, being faithful and to continue being in tune with the Father.

In times of trial, we must ask for the grace to persevere, which will not always be to solve the problem with our hands, but will often be to continue walking -- open, confident, hopeful that the Lord will do his work within our availability. In short, it is about insisting, re-starting and continuing, repeating the cycle over and over again.

Original : Spanish

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ALONG WITH HIM

STEP 7
BOOK 9

The background features a series of overlapping, semi-transparent circles and lines in various shades of orange and white, creating a layered, abstract effect. The text is centered and rendered in a clean, sans-serif font.