



Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network

THE WAY OF THE HEART

A meditation on the spiritual itinerary of the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network

The “Way of the Heart” is the formation program of the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network—The Apostleship of Prayer. It is a program which draws our heart to be nearer to the Heart of Jesus, to align our hearts with His heart’s sentiments, desires and yearnings. It invites us to unite ourselves to the mission which Jesus received from the Father. Being friends of Jesus, deeply united to Him, perceiving His joys and sufferings for the world, the program leads us to commit ourselves with Him to take up the challenges that confront humanity and the mission of the Church. Every month the Pope articulates these challenges through his intentions, and his intentions help us to understand the mission of Christ in our day. The “Way of the Heart” helps us, then, to recognize the challenges of the world with the eyes of Jesus, to mobilize us each month, docile to the Holy Spirit, for prayer and service. It is thus that the program transforms us daily and deeper into praying-apostles and disciple-missionaries, for a mission of compassion in the world.



1 In the beginning... there was Love

- I have loved you with everlasting love... (Jeremiah 31:3)
- Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has born? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands... (Isaiah 49:15)
- This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son... (1 John 4:10)
- God chose us in Christ before the world was made. (Ephesians 1:4)
- Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:39)

The first and most enduring word in our life of faith is the Father's everlasting love. This is what he is continuously saying to us and what we fathom in all he does for us each day: I love you. It is his essence, "God is love" (1 John 4:8); he cannot not love us. Love is the way in which the Lord looks at us always, regardless of the course our life has taken--even if we have strayed away from him because of our sin. His love is unconditional and notwithstanding. It is the principle and the foundation of our spiritual way. Our life starts by his love, is sustained by it, and one day will be received by that love. To acknowledge his love gives us the chance to love him in return (Doc 1).

Going Deeper

In the beginning there was love. What does it mean to love and to be loved? What do I understand by the word "love?"

May we pause for a moment of silence....

Have we had the experience of being loved by our parents, friends, anyone? Love is in the beginning, precedes us, gave us life, even if it was not perfect. I can recollect the faces of people who have loved me and who loves me today.

St. Paul said: **"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in**

wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.” (1 Cor 13:4-8)

Even if I cannot recognize this love in my life, or I may well not be able to perceive it, one thing is certain: He who is the source of life, of the universe visible and invisible, has loved me from eternity. He says to me: **“I love you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands.”** (Isaiah, 49:16). He loves me, not in a general manner, but in a concrete and personal way, to the point of having given His life for me, for us, even shedding His blood, so that we could all recognize the height, the breadth, the depth of His love for each one of us.

His Love is so great that the oceans could not contain it or the rivers quench it! Such love is impossible to translate, transmit, even with the most beautiful writings, because it is at the realm of an experience. It is like falling in love. We may well read all romantic novels, watch various movies, but the experience of falling in love is a world apart.

With the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ a new world arose; “The resurrection tells us that the way of love, followed by Jesus in an unconditional way even to his giving up of his own life, is not a path which leads to nothing, it is not a blind alley with no exit. The way of love is also the way that opens up to life,” says Father Louis Evely. In Jesus Christ we have the assurance that love exists and that we are loved. St. John in his first letter tells us: “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16). Love is the way, the truth, and the life. When we recognize this love and its action in our lives, we are filled with gratitude for it, and we thanks to God, the source of all good.

Exercise. Gratitude

I become aware of the ‘light’ in my life, whatever opens me up and nudges me to live deeper (a gesture, a word or a smile, meetings or events). It is important to practice how recognizing life in the smallest daily things leads to the recognition of Him who is the source of all life. We know this: life and love do not make noise; that is why we have so much difficulty discerning the presence of the Lord. Only the one who loves recognizes the beloved. The more grateful I am, the more I find reasons to be grateful.



2. The human heart, restless and needy

- God, you are my God, I pine for you; my heart thirsts for you, as a land parched, dreary and waterless. (Psalm 63:1)
- Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice. (Psalm 130:1)
- Blessed are the poor in heart, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3)
- *Where have you hidden, beloved, and left me moaning? ... (St. John of the Cross, Spiritual Canticle)*
- *You made us for yourself, oh Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you. (Saint Augustine, Confessions)*

We yearn for happiness and seek it in a multitude of ways. God gave us the capacity to love and to live generously. But many times, we feel poor and lost, burdened with frustrations and deep desires, unable to solve our personal crisis and find inner peace. A pathway of faith, prayer and life for seekers, for those in spiritual need and for all who desire to receive Jesus Christ in their hearts is proposed here. It is the way of the humble, where our weakness of heart will not be a hindrance, but rather, our greatest asset, for the encounter with a God who leans toward the poor (Doc 1).

Going Deeper

We all desire to love and be loved, however we find that often than not, it is very difficult, full of mixed feelings. St. Paul says to the Christians in Rome, **“I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do”** (Romans 7:18-19). We all have experienced this. Despite our desire to love, to be in harmony with others, in spite of our desire for wellbeing and happiness, how often do we drag ourselves in a pathway that injure others and destroy us? How many gestures, words, thoughts—instead of opening us up to life—have led us along the way of death? The rejection of love can be so strong, in selfishness, pride, hatred, contempt of others, that it can close us in on ourselves, and separate us from

others and from God; And this self-isolation/withdrawal leads to death... As the book of Deuteronomy says: **“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord, your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him”** (30:19-20). To choose Christ is to choose life.

God does not look at our sin, but our heart. He looks at our love, our desire to return to him, as Jesus tells us in the parable of the father of the prodigal son (Luke 15). Jesus gives more importance to faith than to the fulfillment of the law: **“Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners”** (Matthew 9:13).

This is exactly what Isaac the Syrian (also called Isaac of Nineveh) said in the 7th century: “Will God be able to forgive me for these things that pain me and for which my memory torments me?...Do not doubt your salvation...His mercy is much broader than you can imagine, his grace, greater than that which you would ever dare to ask for. God is always searching for even the least repentance in the person whom He has permitted to steal a bit of His justice for his struggle against the passions and sin” (*Homily, n°40.*)

Pope Francis reaffirms when he says: “God’s forgiveness knows no bounds. In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God makes even more evident his love and its power to destroy all human sin. Reconciliation with God is made possible through the paschal mystery and the mediation of the Church. Thus God is always ready to forgive, and he never tires of forgiving in ways that are continually new and surprising.” (*Misericordiae Vultus, n°22*)

Exercise. Light and pardon

In the light of the Love of the Lord I gaze upon everything that encloses me, saddens me, dries me up, divides me up; everything that is a rejection of love. This is not a matter of keeping tabs on my sins or being hypercritical of myself, but rather, identifying, with simple observation, without judgment on my part, what shuts me in, my sin, to identify the place of the spiritual combat. This is the place where the Lord calls me to advance so that He can open me up more to life. For sin separates from God, Who is the source of life. I can ask Him for pardon and receive His mercy.

Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful.
The LORD protects the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me.

Return, O my soul, to your rest, for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.
For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.
I walk before the LORD in the land of the living.

(Psalm 116:5-9)



3. In a broken world

- God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. (Genesis 1:31)
- My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water. (Jeremiah 2:13)
- People will stagger from sea to sea, will wander from the north to the east, searching for the Lord's word, but will not find it. (Amos 8:12)
- Wake, Lord! Why are you asleep? Awake! Do not abandon us for good. Why do you turn your face away, forgetting that we are poor and harassed? (Psalm 44:23-24)
- He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. (John 1:11)

We contemplate in admiration the beauty of our world and the great deeds accomplished by the human mind throughout history. But the world we share is wounded by painful contradictions that cause death and suffering. Life and love are often suffocated by violence and selfishness. The weak and vulnerable are crushed by the boots of the powerful. Natural resources are depleted. There is too much sadness and loneliness. However, in the cry for peace and justice, we hear the Father's voice calling us to return to him. We have walked away from the paths of the Lord and from his project for humanity (Doc 1).

Going Deeper

The world is faced with numerous challenges: economic challenges, climactic and social threats, religious fundamentalisms and many others. Confronted by these challenges, one often finds nonchalance instead of hope. In the west, people are obsessed with the end of the world, their world. One need only consider all the movies which reveal this obsession with the end of the world and which expose fears of the progress of science, robotics and artificial intelligence ("Terminator", "The Matrix"); of biotechnology or viruses and mutants ("Twelve Monkeys", "Doomsday", "World War Z", "Contagion", "The Son of Man", "Prometheus"), meteorites ("Armageddon", "Deep Impact",) or extraterrestrials that are poised to destroy humanity ("The

War of the Worlds”, “Edge of Tomorrow”, “Oblivion”, “Annihilation”); without counting films set after a global disaster (“Divergent”, “Hunger Games”). The end of the world is almost always presented as a quasi-annihilation or obliteration of the human species. Today another end of the world that seems more likely: global warming (“*The Day after Tomorrow*”, “2012”). It is predicted that there will be a tipping point in this global change when the consequences will be irreversible for one or two generations. The consequences may be different from cultural and religious perspectives, but the whole of humanity will be affected. The state of “Our Common Home” (the subtitle of *Laudato si*) is a challenge that concerns us all.

Although it is subtle, hope exists in the world. Men and women are generously in solidarity with one another; they far from television cameras and interviews, yet are harbingers of light. We all know people like this.

The plan of God for humanity is in the realm of Love “since the creation of the world.” Not only does the Spirit of the Lord give birth to humanity for ages, but also, as St. Paul says, all of creation, the universe “has been groaning in labor pains” “as we anxiously await the adoption of the sons (and daughters) of God” (Romans 8: 22-24). We participate in this work of giving birth to history, which transforms not only humanity, but the entire cosmos.

With the Resurrection nothing can obstruct the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ! This Love, vulnerable and fragile, but even stronger than death itself, reveals a new future for humanity. By His Spirit, which is love, he begets in us this new life, and makes us like Him. Love can only understand itself by gazing at and listening to Jesus, following his way to the end. Let us place our confidence in Him.

Exercise. Contemplating the world

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius of Loyola shows God as one who contemplates the world: as “the three Divine Persons gazed on the whole surface or circuit of the world, full of people; and how, seeing that they were all going down into hell, they decide in their eternity that the Second Person should become a human being, in order to save the human race. And thus, when the fullness of time had come, they sent the angel St. Gabriel to Our Lady” (Sp. Ex n°. 102). **“And the Word became flesh and lived among us”** (St. John 1:14).

We, too, are invited to contemplate our world with its challenges, its joys and sufferings, its fears and hopes, and bring it into our prayers.



4. The Father sends His Son to save

- See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? (Isaiah 43:19)
- I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians... (Exodus 7:3-8)
- I myself taught Ephraim to walk, I myself took them by the arm... I was leading them with human ties, with leading-strings of love. (Hosea 11:3-4)
- God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. (2 Corinthians 5:19)
- The Spirit comes to help us in our weakness. (Romans 8:26)
- This is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son. (John 3:16)
- The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. (Luke 19:10)

The Father has not forsaken us in this broken world. He has spoken of his love many times and in various ways through the prophets, and now, in these final times he has spoken to us by his Son made man, Jesus, the Christ (cf. Hebrews 1:1). In Him, the Father has joined our history to his own history in order to restore creation and heal our wounded humanity. In Him, who gave his life for us and whom the Father rose from the dead, he has forgiven our sins. In Him, God's passionate love comes forth, determined to save us. With Him we learn to recognize the Spirit of God working in this world, bringing forth something new, even in the midst of suffering and difficulties (Doc 1).

Going Deeper

The Bible presents us various covenants of God with humanity: with Noah, with Abraham, and finally, the New Covenant in Christ. The pages of Scripture reveal a God who wants to establish a relationship with humanity as strong and tender as the loving relationship between husband and

wife. The prophets, like Ezekiel and Hosea, describe God as a lover abandoned by his beloved who looks for her even out in the desert to commit himself to her forever. God is waiting for us, sings the "Song of Song"s. The entire history of humanity, from the beginning to the end of time, is a story of love, the story of the marriage between God with humanity.

This love is revealed in all its fullness in Jesus. As St. John the Evangelist reminds us, **"God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son"** (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 itself that we see. Love has become flesh in Jesus Christ. To say this in the words of St. John: **"What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life..." is love. This is the experience of the first disciples! "So, we have known and believe the love that God has for us: God is love"** (1 John 4:16).

The traces of Jesus on earth, his words and actions, reveals the height, the breadth, and the depth of the One 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 the power of resurrection that transforms not only man most deeply, but the entire universe.

LOVE HAS A FACE, Love is someone. Jesus Christ is the incarnate Love of God.

Exercise

From what has Jesus Christ come to save me? What does it mean to me, concretely, that He is the Savior?



5. He calls us his friends

- I have called you by your name, you are mine. Do not be afraid... since I regard you as precious, since you are honored, and I love you. (Isaiah 43: 1 and 4)
- Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach. These he called apostles... (Mark 3:13-14)
- I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. (John 15:15)
- Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper... (John 21:20)
- And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20)
- Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. (Hebrews 7:25)
- *Whoever wishes to come with me has to be content with the same food I eat, and the drink, and the clothing which I wear, and so forth. So too each one must labor with me during the day, and keep watch in the night... (Saint Ignatius, Spiritual Exercises n°93)*

Jesus Christ calls us his friends and invites us to a personal and intimate covenant of love with him. He is alive to intercede for us, actively drawing us to him. He sees us as a precious treasure of his heart. Friendship with him will make us see the world with his eyes. We will be one with his joys and sufferings, and we will offer ourselves to work with him for our brothers and sisters. He is always with us and shall be until the end of age (Doc 1).

Going Deeper

God does not want to do anything “without us”; it is always “with us.” For this reason, the first thing that Jesus does is call others to be with Him, at the service of His mission: “As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for

they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him" (Mark 1:16-17).

Those who follow him, his disciples, walk with him from town to town, sharing His food, listening to His words and meditating on His actions, working with Him during the day and watching with Him at the night. Every day they desire to know Him more intimately, with the heart; and every day the desire to love and serve Him grows.

Committing oneself to follow Jesus Christ

Remember: it happened out of the way, north of Galilee, in the region of Caesarea Philippi, where nobody could disturb them, Jesus asked them: **"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"** (Matthew 16:13). Jesus was appraising what is in the air concerning Him, all the people who come to listen to Him, those who want healing or bread and fish; all who, from Judea and Samaria, from all places, Jews or Greek, who come to him: What are they looking for? Do they have eyes to see and ears to hear? Do they understand who He really is or do they project unto Him their own desires, fears, and dreams? And those whom He had called to be with him in his mission: do they really know Him; do they recognize who He is? Are they ready to follow Him to the end? Jesus asks them to make their stands clear.

Living according to the style of Jesus (Living in the footsteps of Jesus)

Following Jesus Christ today means participating, by our decisions, words, and actions, in His mission and His loving plan for humanity. By this, the disciples is called to enter in the human itinerary of Jesus, in His manner of living. A manner where there is no disparity between words and actions. Jesus says what He does and does what He says. His word acts and his actions speak. To say that our words and actions should cohere is another form of speaking of holiness. Jesus calls us to enter into his manner of life, a surrendered life, which goes to the end in love, in openness to the world, and especially to those who suffer, are excluded and rejected.

"Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it" (Matthew 13:16). It is about seeing and listening to Jesus. No one has ever been lost while looking for God. Only Jesus reveals God. In Him is the way, the truth, and the life.

Making a decision

The love that Jesus Christ reveals opens us to life and makes us grow in liberty. But the enemy always wants to make us doubt the love of God. He wants us to believe that we need to be perfect, impeccable, to be loved by Him, to the extent of refraining from the sacraments, from

prayer, and from God Himself. He wants us to believe that we will never be worthy to be in the presence of the Lord; that His love depends on our own merits. This is not true; the Lord loves us gratuitously – that is the Good News! - without waiting for anything in return, with no merit on our part, only out of love, as we are. Grace does not require anything; it does not depend on what we do. The word gratuitously must be taken literally. If the love of God depended on us, it would not be totally free.

How far does God need to go for us to really believe that He loves us without expecting anything from us except an open heart? Hasn't He already given us everything with His Son? Let us not be deceived by the enemy, who does not want us to follow Jesus, to the end, in the Way of Love.

I know, from experience, that the Lord has been faithful in my history all the days, and so will also be faithful tomorrow. What is up to me is to commit myself to following him, whatever happens, living in harmony with his manner of life, and being His friend. Any decision is always subject to uncertainty. Nevertheless, life never grows without the risk of a decision.

We can take decisions out of duty or obligation, but the true decision is one that is a free response to a call which comes to us as gift. For St. Ignatius of Loyola, love is a mutual communication (*Spiritual Exercises*, n°231); and it is in this mutual sharing that a decision is made. It may come with much love and generosity, but if it is not inscribed and incarnated in a decision, no matter how small, it is just empty. But, if this love and generosity is incarnated in a decision, no matter how fragile, it can move the entire world. It is what Incarnation truly means.

Making a decision with Christ is to decide to live the Gospel: **“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me”** (Mark 8:34).

It is only then, when we take the decision to follow Him to the end, desiring to be like Him daily, that Jesus tells us: **“I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father”** (John 15:15).

This is how the true “servant of Christ,” as the Scripture says, is a “friend.” That is, someone to whom Jesus has made known “what He has heard from the Father.” This means familiarity, nearness, intimacy, the reality of being as close as possible to his heart. To grow in this intimacy with Christ we are invited to “eat” His Word and encounter Him in the sacraments

Exercise

Before the cross, as did St. Ignatius, I can ask myself and meditate: “What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I to do for Christ?”

Take, Lord, and receive
all my liberty,
My memory, my understanding,
and all my will –

All that I have and possess.
You, Lord, have given all that to me. I now give it back to you, O Lord.

All of it is yours.
Dispose of it according to your will.
Give me love of yourself along with your grace,
for that is enough for me.

St. Ignatius of Loyola



6. Christ abides in us

- On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you (John 14:20).
- ... And we will come to him and make our dwelling with him (John 14:23).
- Remain in me, as I remain in you... As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. (John 15: 4 and 9).
- ...Yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me. (Galatians 2:20).
- Do you not realize that you are a temple of God with the Spirit of God living in you? (1Corinthians 3:16-17)
- As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. (1 John 2:24).
- ...and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith (Ephesians 3:17)
- We are reflecting the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into his image (2Corinthians 3:18)

Out of his unlimited love for us, God desires to inhabit our hearts. Jesus left this surprising promise to his disciples before his death. He wants to dwell in each one of us. Saint Paul gives witness to this by saying it is no longer he, but Christ living in him. This is the ultimate horizon towards which the Spirit leads us in our life of faith. He seeks to conform the Christian to Christ in body, soul and spirit. We long for this, and we ask for this with a humble heart, knowing we will never accomplish it through our own efforts. We believe this being conformed to Christ is the life of the Holy Spirit in us and in the Church. It is given in a privileged way through the Eucharist. Christ gives himself to us through his Body and his Blood, molding our hearts to his own Heart, so we can be and act as Him (Doc 1).

Going Deeper

As a disciple of Jesus, the part I am to play is to remain in Him, closest to his heart.

Prayer and Word of God

That will only be possible by remaining in the Word of Jesus: **“Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them”** (John 14:23). Again he said, **“Abide in me, abide in my love.”** To meditate His Words, to see Him and listen to Him in the gospels is not only important to be as close as possible to His Heart; all the more, it is essential for being in deep communion with Him. Like the vine and the branches, we let ourselves be transformed by Him.

Yes, it is about staying with his Word to recognize with all our heart, in order to enter into his Love, and recognize His voice in the mist of all the noise that invades our hearts.

How much time do I dedicate each day to prayer, to being with Him and meditating on His Word? He who is nourished by *eats* his Word, who meditates the Scriptures, the Bible, enters all of the height, the breadth and the depth of His Love.

Being born to life in the Spirit

In order to remain in Christ and so that He may remain in me, to the point that I may say with St. Paul: **“And it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me”** (Galatians 2:20), I must enter into the life of the Spirit.

Do they remember that man who asked Jesus “how to obtain eternal Life” (Mark 10:17-21)? Jesus, after looking with love at this man who has kept all the commandments since his youth, answers him: **“You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”** Jesus invites this man who faithfully observes the Law of God, the Torah, to pass from obedience to the law to life in the Spirit. Being faithful to the law of God is a good thing, but it is necessary to go farther. The law, the commandments, is intransigent. I may presume that keeping the letters of the law is enough for eternal life; and I run the risk of too much self-discipline, believing that I gain eternal life by with my own powers. Jesus invites me to go much further. His invitation is to “Follow him.”

To where, then? He does not say. It is about following Him. **“The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes”** (John 3:8.) Following Jesus is to enter into the life of the Spirit. It is to leave port and wade into the deep waters, to leave the known for the unknown, stability for movement; life is movement.

“Follow me!” To where? **“The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”** It is about beginning a journey without knowing where we are going. It is about being **docile to the Holy Spirit** without trying to govern one’s life. I can do this with confidence because I have discovered in my life that

He is faithful. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is to let oneself be led by the Spirit to discern constantly, in different contexts, how to be faithful to the Gospel.

In fact, as Jesus says to Nicodemus (John 3): it is a question of being “born again,” **“being born from above.”** Nicodemus is a man of the Torah. He knows the wisdom of the law, but in spite of his expertise, he is in the dark. Because to be part of the Kingdom of God, to be part of the New World, **is not a question of observances or of knowledge, but of birth.** It is not enough to practice this or that virtue, or even to obey the Law and the commandments to fully attain the spiritual life; rather, it is necessary to become familiar with our interior life, and little by little, learning to decipher it to make ourselves docile to the Holy Spirit.

This required listening. Often we live on the surface, in deeds, action, in constant agitation, in the chatterbox within, but we do not listen to what is going on within. We know that the Holy Spirit speaks to us through the affective resonance of the happenings and encounters of our life. Everything that we experience produces something in us: peace, joy, sadness, isolation; Just like the rich man who “returned very sad” on hearing the invitation of Jesus. It is in the happenings of life that the Spirit intends to speak to us and that we do well to discern them.

He who enters into the life of the Spirit learns to receive these interior movements; grows in familiarity with his interior life and succeeds little by little in deciphering, discerning, and recognizing the voice of the one who intends to speak to us.

It is said that St. Ignatius “would follow the Spirit, not going ahead, not know where he was going...he followed Him with ignorant prudence, his heart offered to Christ with simplicity.”

The Holy Spirit leads us as near as possible to the Heart of Jesus.

Nearer the Heart of Jesus

The Holy Spirit helps us to discern what is really Love: the love of one’s enemies and forgiveness of offenses. **Love leads us to the depths of the Heart of Jesus.** Love is its interpreter. This excess of love finds its highest expression in the Cross of Jesus. “Before the Cross, we should let ourselves be transformed by the power of love which is expressed in this voluntary death and in the pardon given to the executioners. It is from this folly of love that we should draw strength to follow with fidelity the demands of the Spirit in our lives” (Michel Rondet, S.J. *Laissez-vous guidez par l’esprit*, Ed. Bayard)

“It is not fortuitous that the Heart of Jesus, pierced for our salvation, is the symbol of love. Saint Paul, after his dazzling conversion cried out: **“The Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”** (Galatians 2:20) – Dany Dideberg (*Le Coeur de Jésus, source de vie.*) The heart is the symbol of love par excellence.

“No one can truly know Jesus Christ well without penetrating His Heart, that is, the inmost depths of His divine and human person.” **St. John Paul II** (May 15, 2004)

“Indeed, it is only possible to be Christian by fixing our gaze on the Cross of our Redeemer, “on him whom they have pierced.” Benedict XVI (May 15, 2006)

“The Heart of the Good Shepherd is not only the heart that shows us mercy but is itself mercy. There the Father’s love shines forth; there I know I am welcomed and understood as I am; there, with all my sins and limitations, I know the certainty that I am chosen and loved. Contemplating that heart, I renew my first love: the memory of that time when the Lord touched my soul and called me to follow him, the memory of the joy of having cast the nets of our life upon the sea of his word (cf. Luke 5:5).” **Pope Francis (June 3, 2016).**

The beloved disciple, the one who best knew the Heart of Jesus, who reclined next to Him (John 13:23), was also the first to recognize Jesus resurrected at the shore of the Lake of Galilee (John 21:7). The nearer one is to the heart of Jesus, the more one will perceive His joys and His sufferings for the men, women and children of this world; and recognize his presence today, as it was yesterday, at work in the world.

“Where is God?” Where is God, if evil is present in our world, if there are men and women who are hungry and thirsty, homeless, exiles and refugees? Where is God, when innocent people die as a result of violence, terrorism and war? Where is God, when overwhelming diseases break the bonds of life and affection? Or when children are exploited and demeaned, and they too suffer from grave illness? Where is God, amid the anguish of those who doubt and are troubled in spirit....? And Jesus’ answer is this: ‘God is in them.’ Jesus is in them; He suffers in them and deeply identifies with each of them. He is so closely united with them as to form with them, as it were, ‘one body’”. **Pope Francis (July 29, 2016)**

The nearer we are to the Heart of Jesus, the less indifferent we are to what surrounds us, wanting to commit ourselves with Jesus in this world, at the service of His mission.

Exercise

Before the heart of Jesus I ask myself: “Where is my heart directed? What is my heart set on, where is it pointing to? What treasures does it seek? Jesus says: **“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”** (Matthew 6:21). *Pope Francis, June 3, 2016*



7. We offer our lives along with Him

- The Spirit comes to help us in our weakness. (Romans 8:26)
- This poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury. ... She, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood. (Mark 12:43-44)
- And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19)
- I am the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said. (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)
- Here I am, I have come to do your will. (Hebrews 10:9)
- Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. You have given all to me, to you oh Lord I return it. All is yours, dispose of it wholly, according to your will. Give me your love and your grace, for this is sufficient for me. (St. Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises* n°234)

To come closer to Christ leads us to give our lives for others, as He did. We learn that despite our weakness and limitations, our life is useful to others. Knowing ourselves loved, chosen, and inhabited by Him dignifies us, fills us with gratitude, and enables us to respond to so much good received by offering our own life in apostolic readiness. We offer it moving against our selfishness and laziness that make vain God's work in us. He invites us to comply generously to his call, as did Mary of Nazareth. He does not want to save us or change the world without us. Even if I may consider my offering meaningless, it will be made useful to others because the Father joins it to the life and Heart of his Son, who laid down his life for us on the cross. We come closer to the world's suffering as we are put with Jesus, and we will strive to respond as He did. We tell the Father our readiness to collaborate with his Son through a prayer of self-offering. We are at the same time humbly praying to the Holy Spirit that we may cease to obstruct his work in us. Through the Eucharist we are inspired and nourished in a special way, for there we find the perfect offering of Christ to the Father and a model for our own life-offering (Doc 1).

Going Deeper

Responding to this love which wants to attract us to Him, knowing fully the height, the breadth and the depth in the Eucharist, leads us to offer ourselves.

Thanksgiving: The Eucharist

This love which shines out from this “meek and humble” heart (Matthew 11:29) of Jesus can only be understood by following the itinerary of His life to the end. This “overflowing love that cannot be captured in words without watering it down,” is what the Church proclaims without shame, “recounting how the Lord came and commemorating (in the Eucharist) the death and the resurrection of Christ.” (*Fr. Robert Scholtus*)

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

The Eucharist reveals to us the love which goes “to the end,” a love without measure, which is the power of resurrection. Jesus Christ desires to lead us, in turn, by this road. **“Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me”** (John 6:57). In the communion of His body and blood, Christ wants to be deeply united to us. He shares His Holy Spirit with us. As St. Ephraim the Syrian writes: ‘He called the bread his living body, he filled it with himself and with his Spirit. (...) And the one who eats it with faith, eats the Fire and the Spirit. (...) All should take and eat it with the Holy Spirit. This is truly my body and he who eats it will live eternally.’ By the gift of His body and of His blood, Christ increases in us the gift of His Spirit, which we have already received in Baptism and that He offers us as a seal in the sacrament of Confirmation. With the Eucharist, we assimilate into ourselves in a certain manner, as John Paul II says, the secret of the resurrection, a resurrection which is (begins today) already in the heart of the world.

Why does he want to give us this immense gift of communicating Himself to us, of communicating to us His Spirit? It is because He desires that we become like Him. He gives us His ability to love, to offer our lives, with Him, for the Reign of God, a new world which is already in gestation.

It is for this reason that the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network - The Apostleship of Prayer - for more than 170 years invites us to make ourselves available every morning for the mission of Christ (*Spiritual Exercises*, n 91-100). Through **The Morning Offering**, we say to Jesus: “Here I am!” “You can count on me.” Offering myself for the service of Christ, each morning, is to receive with gratitude the free gift of the love of God; it is responding to this love with my life at the service of the Kingdom, despite my inconsistencies, limitations and fragilities. By this offering, I enter in a Eucharistic existence, a life offered to the service of the Lord and others, at the service of the Church in the world. This offering allows me to participate actively in the loving plan of God for humanity.

Jesus lived His life as a Eucharistic offering. His last meal summarized His life offered and given up out of love. This road did not lead him to a dead end, without an exit, but rather to the Resurrection and to life in abundance. And He desires this life of eternal happiness for each one

of us! It is for this that He wants to sweep us into this 'dance of love,' even though it must pass through the cross.

The spiritual combat

Entering the same journey as Jesus, loving as He has loved us to the point of "giving his life for his friends," can lead, however, to a spiritual combat. **"I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one"** (John 17:15). Included here as a criterion of fidelity to Jesus is that **"servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them"** (John 13:16). We all experience this. Within all of us is connivance with evil, lying, all that is a rejection of life; but Christ does not leave us alone. He sent the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, and who unmasks the enemy, and nudges us to choose life.

Responding to the call of Jesus, putting myself at His service, for the service of the mission of the Church in today's world, with all its challenges, with many others, can seem exciting. Often we imagine ourselves, like the apostles, united to the Heart of Jesus, walking with Him on the roads of Galilee, through the green pastures interspersed with thousands of flowers; or on the shore of the lake announcing the Gospel... but we forget the cross. We are like the disciples, like Peter, for whom Jesus is the Messiah who will come to smoothen out the road, to lower the mountains, at one stroke, without any effort on our part, as if we had a magic wand, as if we could, for the sole fact of being near Jesus, avoid the same suffering and the cross. "No one enters the Kingdom of Love without suffering." It is not that suffering is necessary, but in our world, "learning to love" demands learning to give up oneself and offering one's life. And this leads us often, to not say always, to a road of renewed purification and from self-centeredness towards others...which passes through suffering, sometimes through the cross, and through death to self.

Jesus in the Gospel of St. John says: **"I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!"** (John 16:33)

Exercise

To go to mass with the desire to meet the Risen Christ; To listen to the words of the readings as if He was speaking to me and to the words of the Eucharistic Prayer as if He were saying them. To see the gestures of the consecration of the bread and wine as if He were making them. To receive communion as if he were feeding me. To receive the final prayer and blessing as if he were sending me in mission.



8. A mission of compassion

- He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted (Isaiah 61:1)
- Never turn your face from the poor, and God will never turn his from you. (Tobit 4:7)
- Make your own the heart of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:5)
- Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, "I do will it. Be made clean." (Mark 1:41)
- The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. (Luke 4:18)
- *Contemplate how the Three Divine Persons were looking upon the whole extent and space of the earth, filled with human beings. (St. Ignatius, Spiritual Exercises n°102) [...] The first point is, to see the various persons: and first those on the surface of the earth, in such variety, in dress as in actions: some white and others black; some in peace and others in war; some weeping and others laughing; some well, others ill; some being born and others dying, etc. (St. Ignatius, Spiritual Exercises, n°106)*

God, the Father of Jesus and our Father, wishes to make his compassion present in the world in and through us, his disciples. We are invited to make our own the Father's loving gaze upon humanity and to act with the Heart of Jesus Christ. We are sent out to the margins of human life in different ways, together with his Son. We are sent to the places where men and women are suffering injustice, to help heal and support the brokenhearted. Even if we are physically constrained or limited by illness, and even if we feel incapable of changing the unjust structures of society, we participate of this mission making ours God's gaze of compassion towards our brothers and sisters. We can convey it to others, since we ourselves have been graced by God's compassion. It is our way of giving love in return to his love for us (reparation). We go beyond the boundaries of the Church, for the Spirit of Jesus is where compassion is. Through both prayer and concrete actions, we can join people from different cultures and religious traditions, people open to this Spirit, and work to relieve the suffering of those most in need (Doc 1).

Going Deeper

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius invites us to contemplate God (the Trinity) who gazes upon the world, and, to save humanity, decides to become incarnate. **“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life”** (John 3:16). The decision of God, which finds its origin in His deep love for humanity, awaits our own personal decision.

As Pope Francis says: *“From the heart of the Trinity, from the depths of the mystery of God, the great river of mercy wells up and overflows unceasingly. It is a spring that will never run dry, no matter how many people draw from it. Every time someone is in need, he or she can approach it, because the mercy of God never ends. The profundity of the mystery surrounding it is as inexhaustible as the richness which springs up from it.”* (*Misericordiae Vultus*, n°25)

The words “compassion” “pity” and “mercy,” which are found in the Bible, is the translation of a Greek term which signifies that we feel the suffering of others and are driven interiorly, by love, to act in their favor. It is a movement which comes from within, from the “innermost parts,” from the “mother’s womb,” from the “heart.” It is what we see in Jesus. Often He tells us that He has compassion for the crowd, for the sick, the blind and the lepers, the possessed person in the land of the Gadarenes, or the widow of Nain who lost her only son. Jesus has this incredible capacity to be deeply moved by others, and what he feels inside becomes decision, mobilizes Him and finally leads Him to action. What He lives is also what He teaches, the parable of the Good Samaritan is significant in this sense: **“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy”** (Matthew 5:7.)

In the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network, we are invited to a mission of compassion for the world, by praying and mobilizing ourselves for the challenges that confront humanity and the mission of the Church. This requires accepting some vulnerability, letting ourselves be deeply moved by what our brothers and sisters throughout the world are living. This means letting go of our “shields” and tearing down our “walls;” to leave behind indifference and to enter into a “culture of encounter.” This is why we are totally united to the Heart of Jesus and so we can, with Him, open ourselves in confidence. It is because we have had the experience of being loved and forgiven, because we have experienced the deep mercy of God towards us, that we can, in turn, become missionaries of mercy, witnesses to the Gospel of Joy.

Exercise

To pray for the Monthly Intention of the Pope. To see/imagine/encounter the persons about which this intention speaks: their faces, their clothing and culture, their activities. To listen to what they say, their worries and hopes. To consider what can be done for them.



9 A world-wide network of prayer and service attentive to the needs of humanity

- No peace for you, as you keep the Lord's attention! And give him no peace either ... until saving justice dawns like a bright light, and salvation like a blazing torch. (Isaiah 62:1.6-7)
- Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? [...] The Lord said, "If I find fifty [or forty, or thirty, or twenty, or ten] righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake." (Genesis 18,22-33)
- All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. (Acts 1:14)
- You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5)
- After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. (Lk 10:1)
- Peace be with you! As the Father sent me, so am I sending you. (John 20:21)

The Apostleship of Prayer is a worldwide prayer network to the service of the Pope's monthly prayer intentions. These intentions are seen as actual challenges for humanity and for the Church, as they express the Holy Father's concerns in today's world. We want them to orient our action and our prayer during that month.

This network is formed by those who make themselves available to collaborate in Christ's mission through the daily offering of their lives, in any place or situation they may be. The call to the mission is the fire that makes us apostles sent from the heart of the Father to the heart of the world.

Among those first invited to be part of this network are Catholics from different countries and cultures, and from diverse spiritual families. The AP puts the richness of its diversity at the service of Church unity. Others are also invited to be in this network in different ways: the challenges implied in the Pope's intentions open us to collaboration with other Christians and with all the other who work for greater love and justice in this world.

Going Deeper

In his Lenten message (2015) Francis tells us: “As individuals too, we have are tempted by indifference. Flooded with news reports and troubling images of human suffering, we often feel our complete inability to help. What can we do to avoid being caught up in this spiral of distress and powerlessness? First, we can pray in communion with the Church on earth and in heaven. Let us not underestimate the power of so many voices united in prayer!”

With the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network—Apostleship of Prayer—we enter in a global network of missions of brothers and sisters who pray and mobilize themselves each month to the challenges that confront humanity and the mission of the Church. These challenges are instructions for our personal lives and the mission of the Church that the Pope, from his vantage point of view, confides to us in Monthly Intention. It is a very simple way of “feeling with the Church [*Spiritual Exercises*, n°352-370), united to the Heart of Jesus. It is a window open to the world. The prayer intentions of the Holy Father open our heart to the most urgent needs of humanity and of the Church, and lead us to commit our lives for the justice of the Kingdom. We live out this mission for the challenges that confront humanity with all those who desire more fraternity, justice and peace in the world, including those who belong to other religious traditions.

May this “Way of the Heart” make ours the compassion of Jesus and awaken in us the desire to be ever more available to the service of his mission for the challenges that confront humanity and the mission of the Church.

Pope Francis invites us to participate in his prayer network: *“I would also like to invite you to join in the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network, which spreads, also through social networks, the prayer intentions I propose for the Church each month. In this way, the Apostleship of Prayer moves forward and communion grows”* (Angelus for January 8, 2017).

We confide this prayer network to Our Lady, Mary, the star of the new evangelization, who, moved by the Holy Spirit, was always available to her son and the mission of the Church.

Exercise

To pray with **Click To Pray**, with Jesus in the morning, with Jesus during the day, with Jesus at night. Prayer is a source of true fruitfulness for the mission of the Church.

Fr. Frédéric Fornos SJ

International Director of the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network
and EYM [Eucharistic Youth Movement]

September 2017 – Original French and Spanish

*Commentary on the spiritual path proposed in : "A pathway with Jesus in apostolic readiness"
(2014) www.popesprayer.va*