

THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PROMOTION
OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION



“I DESIRE MERCY” (Mt 9:13)



24 HOURS FOR THE LORD
MARCH 24-25, 2017

PASTORAL GUIDE

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
---------------------	---

Part One

A Companion to the Individual Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance

I. The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation (<i>Compendium CCC</i>)	7
II. Why Should I Go to Confession?	10
III. Preparation for Confession	12
IV. Individual Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance	22
V. What Should I Do after Confession?	25

Part Two **Reflections**

Living with Pain	29
Three Days for Eternity in Rome	32
To Live with God	36

Part Three

Inspiration

Blessed Chiara “Luce” Badano	41
Jacques Fesch, Servant of God	46

Part Four

Resources

<i>Lectio Divina</i> , Guide 1	54
<i>Lectio Divina</i> , Guide 2	58

Contributors:

Most Reverend Grzegorz Ryś, President of the Committee for the New Evangelization in the Polish Episcopal Conference, Auxiliary Bishop of Kraków

Most Reverend Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst, Delegate for Catechesis at the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization

Reverend Monsignor Geno Sylva, Official at the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization

Introduction

This pastoral guide is meant to offer some suggestions for parishes and Christian communities that would like to prepare themselves for the observance of **24 Hours for the Lord**. The proposals here can of course be adapted to local needs and practices.

During the Friday evening of March 24 and all day on Saturday March 25, it would be important to plan a special opening of the parish church for confessions, preferably in the context of Eucharistic Adoration. The event may conclude with the celebration of the Saturday Vigil Mass for Sunday.

Part One of this guide offers assistance to the individual penitent to prepare his or her meeting with the priest for individual confession in a conscientious way. It is also an encouragement to overcome any inner resistance that could block going to confession.

Part Two offers three sets of testimonies by people who shared their paths to conversion during the Holy Year. These will help for us to reflect on our own changes and the awareness of God's presence in each of our lives.

Part Three presents points of reflection that can be useful during individual preparation or during catechetical meetings so that people can grasp the primary meaning of this proposal. This section also presents the lives of two very different individuals for consideration: one who converted to a deeper walk in her life as a Christian and one who was guilty of serious wrongdoing and converted to become a Christian.

Part Four offers readings that can be used when the church is open so that all who approach confession may be assisted in their preparation by a spiritual itinerary based on the Word of God that is heard, meditated upon, and prayed.



Part One



**A Companion to the
Individual Celebration
of the Sacrament of Penance**

I

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

(From the Compendium to the
Catechism of the Catholic Church)

296. What is the name of this sacrament?

It is called the sacrament of Penance, the sacrament of Reconciliation, the sacrament of Forgiveness, the sacrament of Confession, and the sacrament of Conversion.

297. Why is there a sacrament of Reconciliation after Baptism?

Since the new life of grace received in Baptism does not abolish the weakness of human nature nor the inclination to sin (that is, *concupiscence*), Christ instituted this sacrament for the conversion of the baptized who have been separated from him by sin.

298. When did he institute this sacrament?

The risen Lord instituted this sacrament on the evening of Easter when he showed himself to his apostles and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:22-23).

299. Do the baptized have need of conversion?

The call of Christ to conversion continues to resound in the lives of the baptized. Conversion is a continuing obligation for the whole Church. She is holy but includes sinners in her midst.

302. What are the essential elements of the sacrament of Reconciliation?

The essential elements are two: the acts of the penitent who comes to repentance through the action of the Holy Spirit, and the absolution of the priest who in the name of Christ grants forgiveness and determines the ways of making satisfaction.

304. Which sins must be confessed?

All grave sins not yet confessed, which a careful examination of conscience brings to mind, must be brought to the sacrament of Penance. The confession of serious sins is the only ordinary way to obtain forgiveness.

305. When is a person obliged to confess mortal sins?

Each of the faithful who has reached the age of discretion is bound to confess his or her mortal sins at least once a year and always before receiving Holy Communion.

309. Is a confessor bound to secrecy?

Given the delicacy and greatness of this ministry and the respect due to people every confessor, without any exception and under very severe penalties, is bound to maintain “the sacramental seal” which means absolute secrecy about the sins revealed to him in confession.

310. What are the effects of this sacrament?

The effects of the sacrament of Penance are: reconciliation with God and therefore the forgiveness of sins; reconciliation with the Church; recovery, if it has been lost, of the state of grace; remission of the eternal punishment merited by

mortal sins, and remission, at least in part, of the temporal punishment which is the consequence of sin; peace, serenity of conscience and spiritual consolation; and an increase of spiritual strength for the struggle of Christian living.

II

Why Should I Go to Confession?

We do well to recall and emphasize the fact that contrition and conversion are even more a drawing near to the holiness of God, a rediscovery of one's true identity, which has been upset and disturbed by sin, a liberation in the very depth of self and thus a regaining of lost joy, the joy of being saved, which the majority of people in our time are no longer capable of experiencing.

We therefore understand why, from the earliest Christian times, in line with the apostles and with Christ, the Church has included in the sacramental sign of penance the confession of sins. This latter takes on such importance that for centuries the usual name of the sacrament has been and still is that of confession. The confession of sins is required, first of all, because the sinner must be known by the person who in the sacrament exercises the role of judge. He has to evaluate both the seriousness of the sins and the repentance of the penitent; he also exercises the role of the healer and must acquaint himself with the condition of the sick person in order to treat and heal him. But the individual confession also has the value of a sign: a sign of the meeting of the sinner with the mediation of the Church in the person of the minister, a sign of the person's revealing of self as a sinner in the sight of God and the Church, of facing his own sinful condition in the eyes of God. The confession of sins therefore cannot be reduced to a mere attempt at psychological self-liberation even though it corresponds to that legitimate and natural need, inherent in the human heart, to open oneself

to another. It is a liturgical act, solemn in its dramatic nature, yet humble and sober in the grandeur of its meaning. It is the act of the prodigal son who returns to his Father and is welcomed by him with the kiss of peace. It is an act of honesty and courage. It is an act of entrusting oneself, beyond sin, to the mercy that forgives. Thus we understand why the confession of sins must ordinarily be individual not collective, just as sin is a deeply personal matter. But at the same time this confession in a way forces sin out of the secret of the heart and thus out of the area of pure individuality, emphasizing its social character as well, for through the minister of penance it is the ecclesial community, which has been wounded by sin, that welcomes anew the repentant and forgiven sinner.

St. John Paul II, *Reconciliation and Penance*, No. 31
St. Peter's Basilica, December 2, 1984

III

Preparation for Confession

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. And as he sat at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, *‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’* For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Mt 9:9-13)



This is the Word-Event that will best guide us this year to experience the **24 Hours for the Lord** and best prepare us for the Sacrament of Penance. This passage from the Gospel of Matthew is certainly relevant and lends itself very well to the proposed goal we have set for ourselves. However, it is difficult to find included in this Word-Event the elements and conditions necessary for a “good confession” that we learn about in any catechism. In this passage there is no mention of an examination of conscience, repentance, or the confession of sins. Jesus does not speak the words of

absolution to Matthew: “And I absolve you from your sins.” He knows he has met a sinner, but he does not reproach him for his faults and offenses. He does not question him about the commandments; he does not confront him with the Decalogue or the precepts and prohibitions of the Mosaic law. He imparts no moral teaching whatsoever; he does not say, “Do this, but don’t do that.” He does not reprove or judge him! He imposes no penance on Matthew at all. Jesus acts in a completely different way! He merely addresses an invitation to Matthew: “Follow me.”

The Most Important Question

Jesus does not turn his attention to Matthew’s sins, which were surely serious and numerous, or to some sort of moral standard. He does not even address the issue of Matthew’s conscience! With the invitation, “Follow me,” he directs Matthew exclusively to himself! It is as if he were telling him not to think about precepts, prohibitions, or proscriptions but to think instead of this: WHO AM I TO YOU?

What is there between us? What kind of relationship? Do you want to be my disciple? Will you follow me? Will you follow me completely? What, and how much, are you able to leave for my sake? And why should you actually do it?

That is the most important and fundamental question in every faith event (as it is, in fact, in confession). Faith is not primarily a rational acceptance of the totality of abstract truths the Church obliges people to believe. Neither is it a vision of the world or a moral code, or even the ensemble of traditions and customs. It is primarily THE ENCOUNTER

of a person with THE PERSON, an encounter between myself and THE PERSON of Jesus Christ. THE RISEN ONE! That means he is alive! The One who entered the history of humanity more than 2,000 years ago but who does not belong to the past. He has risen from the dead, he lives, and he comes toward me. Here and now. He is passing by me, he stops, he looks at me, and he says, “Follow me.”

In his dialogue with Matthew, Jesus clearly shows what his priority is in meeting a sinner. This meeting becomes a model for every encounter in the sacrament of forgiveness.

Perhaps confession too often seems almost exclusively to mean being confronted with moral standards. The examination of conscience is still understood by many as a detailed audit of our “thoughts, words, and deeds,” as an exact accounting of ourselves that is rather painful and shameful because it brings us to “self-accusation” before the priest, a person we do not know (or a person we know, and isn’t that even worse?). So one humiliation follows after another.

On the other hand, it is also possible to approach each confession as an obligatory step in a life of “self-perfection” as we identify the areas in which we need to “work on ourselves.” Thus we mentally keep a certain control over our situation although submitting ourselves after that to the direction of the confessor. In the end, confession becomes a form of step-by-step “self-purification” as we, almost by ourselves, methodically cleanse ourselves of the “dirt” in our inner lives. With great effort we try to reach the established ideal of “perfection,” understood in the strict sense, for which we no longer need anyone — like neighbors, or least of all Jesus.

Both approaches easily transform confession into being

something that causes apprehension and anxiety, when instead it should be a salvific event full of hope: a personal encounter with the Messiah who saves!

Thus, before beginning an honest examination of conscience, I should first of all ask myself the following: **WHO IS JESUS? WHO IS HE TO ME?**

What do I know about him? How do I know these things? From books? From teachings? From experience? From a personal encounter? From prayer?

Do I perhaps know his gaze, the same one with which he looked at Matthew? When did I last experience his gaze? Do I sense it today? Now?

And his voice? When was the last time I experienced Jesus talking to me? To me personally? What kind of word was it? Was it edifying? Was it a call? An invitation? A word of comfort? A reproof? A promise?

Do I really know Jesus?

What change does my knowing him bring into my life? If I had not encountered him, would I be the person I am today? Can I imagine my life without him?

Who Is He?

A very clear answer comes two chapters later in Matthew's Gospel (see 11:19): Jesus is called the "friend of tax collectors and sinners." This is the reason he willingly speaks to them and eats and drinks in their company, ignoring the continuous scandalizing of the puritanical Pharisees who call him "a glutton and a drunkard."

Do I truly know him as a Friend?

Isn't it a tragic paradox that we perceive him more easily

as a Legislator and Judge than as a Friend? The Friend, the One who died for our sins, who mounted the cross stripped of his clothes, was pierced for our sins. In our imagination we instead readily dress him in a prosecutor's robe and seat him at a tribunal so high that we can hardly see him. And it is precisely at that moment that the Sacrament of Reconciliation ceases for us to be an encounter with the One who loves us and believes in us, despite our recurring failings. Confession becomes merely a legal process that transforms the confessional into "an instrument of torture."

In His encounter with Matthew, Jesus behaves instead in a totally opposite way and invites him with a simple statement: "Follow me." It is relevant to note that even before he lets Matthew follow him, Jesus himself follows Matthew to his home, is welcomed there, and sits at table with Matthew's friends who are likewise sinners. He does everything so that his meeting with Matthew is not brief and fleeting: He enters into Matthew's world and becomes his guest.

It is clear that he is looking for an enduring relationship and immediately begins to build it! To those who do not understand his behavior and consider it inappropriate, he reveals his most profound desires and motivation through the following words:

"I desire mercy, and not sacrifice!"

This statement means, first of all: "I do not come to you so that you will bring me offerings but to demonstrate my mercy to you! I do not require any gifts from you but want you to receive the GIFT of my MERCY!"

"The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28).

In his encounter with Matthew and with each of us,

Jesus does not look out for himself or seek his own interests! He does not come to “enrich” himself at our expense. As St. Paul says, “*Love does not insist on its own way*” (1 Cor 13:5). Jesus’ friendship is completely disinterested. Of course, he desires reciprocity, but his faithfulness does not depend on that. He is ready to overlook our every transgression, and that is precisely why his friendship is merciful.

The Physician

In the passage we are meditating on, there is another answer to the question “Who is Jesus?” that he himself gives. He speaks of himself as a PHYSICIAN! Christian tradition records this idea very well. One of the most ancient representations of Jesus in early Christian art shows him as a physician and an expert in anatomy. Jesus-Physician knows what is hidden within a person, even in his or her most impenetrable depths. Jesus is also the best Physician! We can trust his diagnosis because, as we already know, he is a Friend!

In the event of some kind of illness in our lives, and in particular when it is serious, don’t we call on the physician we trust, the physician-friend?

We can rightly ask ourselves if Matthew truly needed a physician. And if the answer is affirmative and he was objectively ill, we can ask if he was aware of his sickness. After all, the encounter with Jesus was not Matthew’s initiative. Furthermore, the tax collector Matthew did not ask Jesus for anything; it was Jesus who approached the table of the tax collectors. So was it easy for Matthew to accept the need for a radical change in his life?

We do not know. We only know that in the end Matthew yielded to the Lord the right to discern and guide his life.

At this point it is worth looking at the time preceding Jesus' encounter with the tax collector. We find Jesus teaching in Peter's house. Four people bring a paralytic to him. Because Jesus is surrounded by a large crowd, they need to climb up on the roof with the sick man. When they finally succeed in lowering the stretcher in front of him, Jesus, looking at the paralytic, speaks these powerful words to him: "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven" (Mt 9:2).

All five men were very surprised since they certainly had not come for that. They had come so that Jesus would heal the sick man of a serious condition. However, as the best Physician, Jesus had discerned a far greater problem than paralysis in that man. The men were instead called on for enormous trust: to yield to Jesus' diagnosis or not. Do they trust that Jesus sees the real source of the misery of their friend, or do they deny Jesus the right to discern and guide? They trusted him and afterward glorified God for the complete healing of their loved one.

The Sacrament of Penance is an encounter with Jesus-physician. In the third century, St. Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, had already called this penitential practice "salvific medicine" (*medicina salutis*). As a Physician Jesus knows how to recognize not only our every sickness but — more significant for him than for us — he also knows how to find the right medicine.

Spiritual Medicine

Let us return to Jesus' key statement: "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice." It is striking that among the four Gospel writers who recount this event, only Matthew includes this statement. In the narratives by Mark and Luke, the attention is focused first of all on those who "need a physician" and concludes immediately with the affirmation, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mk 2:17; see Lk 5:31). Matthew, on the other hand, inserts between those two statements the words of the prophet Hosea: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Hos 6:6).

The converted tax collector, who went on to become an apostle and a Gospel writer, recalls this saying by the Lord quite well. It left a great impression on him! On the one hand, as we saw earlier, he understands it as the declaration of Jesus' priority and of his attitude toward human beings. On the other hand, however, he certainly also perceives it as a prescription for himself by the Divine Physician.

What is the medical prescription for a professional thief (like Matthew)?

What can help a person who steals for a living and who lives to steal?

Is there a specific medicine for someone who acquires wealth by harming others?

There is! ALMSGIVING!

Thus MERCY!

To Heal Through the Opposite

The “salvific medicine” is inspired by the principle that “one thing is the cure to its opposite” (*contraria contrariis curantur*).

Do you sin by too much talking? Let your penance be silence!

Do you sin through gluttony? Try to fast!

Do you readily judge your neighbor? Try to think well of him or her (and, in addition, to speak well of him or her).

Are you greedy? Have you stolen? You need to start giving alms! Not once, not twice, but generously and spontaneously! Without counting the cost! Every opportunity you get!

Jesus is not the one who requires Matthew to give alms, but Matthew needs to share his goods! He needs to learn generosity in giving. He needs to perform works of mercy. Jesus desires mercy from the former tax collector not for his own sake, but so that he can be healed in acting mercifully! And here it is not simply a question of restitution and giving back what he stole. It is a question of a radical choice for good, of a lifestyle that is not exclusively based on individual good gestures but that represents a total reversal of his former way of life, which was unhealthy and destructive!

Rather than focusing on Matthew’s wrongdoings, Jesus offers him salvation, pointing out the path of GOOD that he needs to walk on. This brings to mind an important lesson from Jesus about the struggle against evil: “When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest, but he finds none. Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when

he comes he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and brings with him seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. So shall it be also with this evil generation” (Mt 12:43-45).

Confession cannot be reduced to being an excessively detailed and exacting purifying about which we can then boast that we have eliminated, cleansed, and cast away evil from ourselves. This is all, of course, important, but the most significant question by far is: “To whom or to what do I want to open myself now? With whom and with what do I want to fill myself? With what kind of good do I want to fill myself?”

The approach to the Sacrament of Reconciliation cannot just be that of “spring cleaning.” The sacrament is a CHOICE OF LOVE in the future; it is a decision based on full awareness of MERCY; it is an experience of power and joy that heal, because it is precisely the merciful who are blessed (see Mt 5:7)!

What are, then, the **24 Hours for the Lord**? They represent both an encounter with Jesus and our subsequent response to his friendship. They represent healing and, finally, the acceptance of his mercy that we share with others afterward.

IV

Individual Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance

At the time you present yourself as a penitent, the priest cordially receives you, speaking words of encouragement to you. He makes the merciful Lord present.

Together with the priest you make the sign of the cross and say:

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.**

The priest helps you to prepare yourself to trust in God with these or similar words:

**May God, who has enlightened every heart,
help you to know your sins
and trust in his mercy.**

The priest, according to the occasion, reads or recites from memory a text from sacred Scripture that speaks about the mercy of God and invites you to repent. For example:

After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mk 1:14-15, NAB)

At this point you confess your sins. If necessary the priest will help you, asking you questions and giving suitable advice. He will invite you, finally, to demonstrate your commitment to conversion

by reciting an act of contrition or some other similar formula. For example:

**Remember your compassion and your mercy, O
Lord,
for they are ages old.
Remember no more the sins of my youth;
remember me according to your mercy
because of your goodness, Lord.
(Ps 25:6-7, NAB)**

Now the priest will stand and lay his hands on your head, saying:

**God, the Father of mercies,
through the death and the resurrection of his Son,
has reconciled the world to himself
and sent the Holy Spirit among us
for the forgiveness of sins;
through the ministry of the Church,
may God give you pardon and peace,
and I absolve you from your sins
in the name of the Father, and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit.**

You answer:

Amen.

After absolution, the priest says:

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good.

You answer:

His mercy endures forever.

Then the priest will dismiss you, saying:

The Lord has freed you from your sins. Go in peace.

(See Rite of Penance)

V

What Should I Do after Confession?

Live a New Beginning

In the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation — this gift of a personal encounter with our merciful Lord — one touches the grandeur, the power, and the majesty of God’s forgiveness in an absolutely intimate way. Through the Sacramental Grace received, the heart is healed of evil and a repentant sinner comes to know the joy and the peace of God’s kingdom.

Such moments of divine forgiveness provide the newly confessed with the possibility of a fresh beginning, one similar to that which Jesus had offered to the woman caught in adultery when he commanded her: “Go, and do not sin again” (Jn 8:11). Out of his great mercy, Jesus demands that she “go.” He propels her forward, indicating that she has a future, that she has something for which to live. Having been treated mercifully, she now possesses the freedom to run forward to what lies ahead, no longer tied down to the sins of her past. She has an invitation to a new beginning.

Yet, how often do we — after having been truly contrite for our sins committed against God and others, having confessed all of our grave sins, and having received absolution — upon leaving the confessional still find it difficult to believe that we are truly forgiven? We may be left wondering: “How can God really forgive the terrible things that I have done? I cannot even forgive myself.” Such thinking is a tragic consequence of our secular culture in

which it is taboo, and even a sign of weakness, to forgive and to allow oneself to be forgiven. As the late Cardinal Francis George observed: “The culture is bizarre in its insistence that we should try everything ... and that everything is possible ... while in fact nothing can be forgiven.... But in the end everything can be forgiven ... [and] a new beginning is possible.” It can be difficult to believe we have been forgiven when we have lost the conviction that new beginnings are indeed possible.

However, such fresh starts are truly offered in the forgiveness granted by the power of our risen Lord, through the ministry of the Church. Yet, such hopeful opportunities require new steps, whereby we actively cooperate with the grace received. St. Augustine, the Doctor of Grace, once stated, “God created us without us: but he did not will to save us without us.” When we take these active steps towards a new beginning, cooperating with the grace freely given by God — a gift which cannot be earned or merited — we come to be overwhelmed by the reality and the effects of having been forgiven by our crucified and risen Lord. But what are some of these steps to a new beginning?

First, we are to express our desire to make amends for the hurt that our sins have caused by doing the penance asked of us by the confessor. This penance is not a punishment, but medicinal, an act or prayer which is to be a remedy for sin, and the very opportunity for God’s grace to enter more deeply into the wounds caused by sin. Penance brings about true healing and conversion. These penitential moments of prayer, works of mercy, personal sacrifices, or acts of service and generosity allow us to participate more profoundly in the Cross of Christ. Thus, by being more closely united with him, we will be better able to “forget what lies behind and strain toward what lies ahead” (see Phil 3:13).

Second, we are to “forgive those who have trespassed against us.” Having ourselves been treated patiently, tenderly, and mercifully by our God should make us more sensitive to the truth that each person — even some of the greatest of saints — has had an imperfect past, as well as an open future. Jesus himself enjoins us to forgive one another from the heart, for vengeance begets only vengeance, and hostility leads to only further hostility. Such vicious cycles continue until one of the offended parties is willing to let go and forgive. And, it is in the act of forgiving that we “remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not” (Is 43:18), setting both ourselves and others free to step forward in faith, hope, and love.

Finally, we are able to witness to the incredible joy that comes from having been forgiven by the Lord, a joy not predicated on the conditions and situations of this world but on the conviction that comes from knowing that we have been embraced by God’s mercy. In fact, the very “joy of God is forgiving” (Pope Francis, Angelus, September 15, 2013), and his “mercy ... is a wellspring of joy” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, No. 2). It is when we possess this joy of having been divinely loved that we are truly free to, “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36).

Therefore, it is truly in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation that Jesus offers to a repentant sinner the opportunity of a new beginning. By means of this sacrament of Mercy he lovingly commands that we “go” forward, reminding us that only by being forgiven by God is everything possible. Know that you are forgiven, and live a new beginning!



Part Two



Reflections

The Jubilee of Mercy, which ended November 20, 2016, offered various opportunities for all who were seeking God with sincere hearts. The encounter with divine grace brought many people to reflect profoundly on their lives.

We present some testimonies here that can help us reflect on our own daily walk with Christ.

Living with Pain

For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? (Luke 9:24–25)

Elisabetta (the victim of a crime) and Ciro (in prison for life) in Italy

My name is Elisabetta.

To lose a son is not only a sorrow but also the most debilitating thing a human being can experience. To lose a son leads to a fork in the road, a choice to make. To live or die?

After I lost Andrea almost six years ago, as I followed his white coffin, I asked God to give me the strength and courage to continue to coexist with the absence I already felt was unbearable.

I experienced the most excruciating suffering that was made more severe by feelings of hate and rage toward the one who, in a single instant, had cut off the young life of my

son and had taken away from my husband and me our life of happiness up until then.

And the more hate and pain I had, the more my heart was locked up in a hellish grip, incapable of handling all that suffering.

Then, my inner world was dismantled when I joined the program at the Opera di Milano Prison that set up meetings between victims and the perpetrators of crime.

It was not easy, but there behind those bars, shaking hands that were at one time bloodied, I discovered the significance of the word “mercy.”

I discovered that I was able to identify with the heart of a perpetrator; I understood that we were just two faces of the same coin called “pain.”

I finally succeeded at asking myself how different those people would be if they had lived in a less destitute environment or if perhaps they had been blinded by false idols like wealth and power.

Through them — through the help of “prisoners” themselves — I was finally able to be freed of what I was and would no longer be: a mother clinging only to hate and rancor.

In trying to share a bit of light, I received much more light than I succeeded in giving, and it is in that light that the pain subsides.



My name is *Ciro*, and I have been in prison for twenty-five years. Facilitated by the support of those who work in maximum security at the Opera di Milano Prison, I have been on a path of reformation for several years and have

become conscious of the serious evil I have done. Meeting with the victims of crime and being confronted with their pain made me understand even more the evil I had done.

I met Elisabetta (the devastated mother deprived of her fifteen-year-old son) in the Opera di Milano Prison thanks to the charismatic renewal and the Prison Fellowship of Italy during the meetings of *Progetto Sicomoro* (“Building Bridges”), which makes offenders meet the victims of their crimes for the sake of reparative justice.

Elisabetta came to the prison to throw all of her rage and pain in our faces, but she discovered that our own suffering was similar to hers. For different reasons, but with the same anguish, we too had seen our lives shattered. Pain is neutral; it is neither good nor bad; pain is pain.

I told Elisabetta about my daughter, Speranza, whom I had left when she was eleven days old. Today she is a wise and courageous young woman. I have tried to instill in her my own persistent hope. I had told her, “I have been incarcerated for twenty-four years, but I will bring flowers to Andrea’s tomb.”

On March 12 this year, I miraculously obtained permission to leave the prison for twelve hours. That was the first time I had been out in twenty-four years.

Elisabetta was waiting for me outside the prison. For that day, she was my family. She accepted me as part of her family; she had me meet her friends and family members; she brought me to her parish. But above all she shared with me what was the most intimate and precious thing to her: the gravesite of Andrea, her son. And that is where we first went with a bouquet of flowers in my hand and a prayer in my heart.

I understood that the *Ciro* of yesterday was buried forever.

I am now part of the *Casa dello Spirito e delle Arti*, a social, spiritual, and cultural center; its project called “the Meaning of Bread” produces the hosts for Mass that are sent to all the continents. Some hosts have also been sent to the Vatican, and today they will be used in the Eucharistic Celebration presided over by the Holy Father Francis.

I believe in miracles, and I believe that sooner or later the cell that keeps me imprisoned will definitively be opened and that my life will be restored.

The two of us, with such different stories, have both rediscovered what God always and despite everything wants us to be: brothers and sisters in faith.

Three Days for Eternity in Rome

Do your best to come to me soon. (2 Timothy 4:9)

Jan Michael, Damian, and Tobias in Germany

It was supposed to be nothing more than a small vacation trip in the spring of 2016. We had spontaneously planned a historical and cultural weekend in Rome with a visit to the Holy Door. The pope had just announced an extraordinary Jubilee Year. Who are we? We are a young lawyer from Düsseldorf, a teacher in training from Berlin, and a dad from Dubai with his eight-year-old son. We had in common the fact that each of us had spent a school year at a Capuchin boarding school in the United States, although at different

times. The experience there had allowed us to become friends and deeply shaped our faith. But now we really just wanted to see each other again and relive memories in the Eternal City. Then, however, it turned out completely differently, and this vacation trip suddenly became a genuine pilgrimage!

After some unholy haggling and a breakneck taxi drive from the airport, we began three days in Rome, which in retrospect felt like three weeks. They were that intense. The prior evening's carbonara was still in our stomachs as we set out for St. Peter's Square that first morning. We were also registered as pilgrims and were able to avoid the tourists and the long waiting lines at the security checkpoints on our way to the Holy Door. "Are you from Germany?" asked a young volunteer as we joined people from all over the world on the way to the Holy Door. He pressed a German prayer sheet in our hands. It was more from a sense of obligation than from any religious enthusiasm that we read the various prayers along the separate Pilgrim's Way to St. Peter's Basilica. Suddenly, we were standing before this awe-inspiring, wondrous Holy Door, which is only opened each Jubilee Year — that is, in a Holy Year (a "Jubilee" in Latin). Here, we were supposed to receive deliverance from all worldly punishments for sin. While we had read this, we weren't completely convinced. And it certainly wasn't accomplished by just walking through the Door.

We knew that this Door stands for Jesus, who in his mercy accepts everyone who desires to repent and turn to him. Thus it was about aligning our life's journey with him, and then, with him, to continue going forward. We also knew that this new alignment or course correction needed to be sealed with the sacrament of confession. And so we were soon standing in line before one of the confessionals. Waiting in the aisle of the greatest church in Christendom

felt like an eternity. While the tourists flowed around us in St. Peter's Basilica, time seemed to stand still for us. I waited for the priest, but it is actually Jesus who is waiting for me. And he has already been waiting here much longer than I have. He has not grown tired of waiting. What should I say to him now in the person of the priest? Where have I distanced myself from him in my life, and how should I proceed differently in the future? Suddenly, there were many unpleasant, definitely painful memories.

After a full ninety minutes, which felt like an eternity, came the moment of confession. What the Holy Door symbolized was palpable here. In the name of God, the priest stated: "I have waited for you. It is good that you are here." And, like an embrace, I heard these words: "I will set you free from your sins!" I had a feeling like I had just reached the finish line of a marathon. It was no longer the Holy Door, which was so impressive, but the mercy of God himself, which is greater than this basilica. Our excursion had become a genuine pilgrimage. We had arrived at a spiritually deep goal.

But it wasn't over yet. Our spiritual friend, a Capuchin who participated on the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization to organize the Holy Year, advised us that there were three other papal basilicas in Rome with holy doors. We got back on the road, and even our youngest member liked the trip, although that may have been because we still had time for a visit to the Colosseum. From there, we took a bus to Santa Maria Maggiore. We had actually only planned a short visit. But once there — just like at St. Peter's Basilica — we were filled with a deep peace and an almost unknown certainty of faith. We again experienced a form of repentance. This time it was not connected to confession, which we certainly had already experienced. Rather, each of

us enjoyed the time spent with himself and before God. The encounter that had begun at St. Peter's continued.

For the third one, our faithful Capuchin friend drove us to the Basilica of St. John Lateran. Once again we plunged into a world of stillness and calm when we entered through the Holy Door. It wasn't even surprising anymore. Indeed, we were looking for exactly this rest that God can grant. Upon leaving the basilica, our spiritual guide told us that the *Scala Sancta* was directly nearby. Tired, but inspired and reverent, we resolved on short notice to go further on the way of Jesus. It had become clear to us that it was, in fact, about going along the way with Jesus. We were embraced by humility and thankfulness as we stood before the wood-clad steps which, as tradition holds, Jesus trod in order to enter the palace of Pilate.

You climb these steps on your knees. The path of discipleship isn't always simple or even comfortable, and it demands all your efforts. Anyone hoping for a "fast track" is on the wrong path. Each one of us was alone with his life on these steps, and yet it was clear to us what Jesus suffered for us, for me. He died to save us.

Silence reigned when we met up outside. A calm, humble, inspired peace. We had felt how the mercy of God stands above everything else. That morning none of us would have thought that the day would become one that we would never forget.

The next day we ended our pilgrimage with a celebration of holy Mass with the German congregation in the Vatican followed by a visit to St. Paul Outside the Walls. This Basilica was a crowning conclusion, thanks to both the impressive architecture and the religious experience. We visited the grave of St. Paul and answered Jesus' question, which he asked Peter following his resurrection: "Do you

love me?” At the grave of St. Paul the topic became the sending of missionaries. God’s mercy is a gift to us. We are invited to accept it and to live it out.

We are all believing Catholics, but in our religious expression, we are often passive or only Christians by habit. Our trip to Rome, which unexpectedly became a genuine pilgrimage, gave us a deep experience of God. In our everyday life, God is rarely the express goal of our journey. But he is always with us on our path and offers us his mercy. The Holy Door, the sacrament of confession, and the Eucharist allowed us to experience God’s mercy deeply. Our trip became a turning back, a new beginning, which we want to nurture. In doing so, we build on the fellowship of our group of friends and the Church.

To Live with God

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:21)

Kenny in Mexico

I am the oldest of two daughters and the single mother of a ten-year-old son. I am a forty-eight-year-old public accountant. Currently, I balance my mission as mother, my professional life and caring for my elderly parents, especially my mom, who is at the final stages of Alzheimer’s.

I joyfully bear witness of the amazing tokens of love that God has given me during this Jubilee Year of Mercy, particularly through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I was born into a non-practicing Catholic family. Therefore, I was not raised in the Christian faith. I only received my first

Communion when I was a little girl. Since childhood, I was induced into Masonry by my own parents, thus, during my adolescence and youth, God did not have any significance in my life. This led me to make very serious mistakes that have been a heavy burden during my whole life. I re-encountered God in 2000, during a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. During this pilgrimage I went to confession and, after many years, I received Jesus in the Eucharist. Those experiences brought peace to my heart and sparked the need to remain close to God. Since then I started looking for opportunities to learn more about my Christian faith and to receive Catholic formation. I also continued practicing my faith, attending Mass and receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Eucharist on a regular basis.

This Year of Mercy I have received these sacraments more frequently, and I have been able to experience God's great love with more intensity and in many different ways. In light of my mother's severe illness and wanting to help her and my dad, a priest advised me to do the first Fridays as atonement for my mother and then for my father. I did. When I finished, my mom received the anointing of the sick in February of that year, and my father agreed to go to confession, despite being a Thirty-Third-Degree Mason. After that, my dad began a conversion process, looking for opportunities to live out his faith, like he did this past April during his fiftieth wedding anniversary to my mother. On this occasion, he told me that he wanted to give thanks to God and asked me to bring a priest to my mother's bedside to bless their marriage again, even though she was unconscious. That day, my dad received the anointing of the sick and received Communion once again after a very long time. All these things have filled me with hope and have motivated me to "put my heart into" nurturing my faith, as

Pope Francis told us when he came to Chiapas last February.

As for me, as I said before, I made terrible mistakes during my youth. Even though I had confessed my sins, whenever they came to mind I was feeling distressed and couldn't find peace. I knew God had forgiven me, but I continued to ask for forgiveness every time those thoughts came back. That made me feel really guilty, because I wondered if asking for God's forgiveness time and time again meant I was an arrogant person, or maybe I did not trust him enough after all. Many times I even thought that my lack of faith was a new offense. I felt at a dead end, I couldn't find peace in my heart.

Recently, God made me cross paths with a Missionary of Mercy, and I had the opportunity to make a general confession, in which I came clean once again before God. Since then, I have finally found lasting peace. During that confession, I felt God's embrace and received internal healing through his merciful love. From that day on, I have not asked again to have my old sins forgiven, and I have decided not to do it again. I don't experience fear or anxiety when I remember those mistakes. Now, I even enjoy thinking about them, for every time those memories come back to me, I lift up my heart and mind to God and pray: "Father, thank you for forgiving me. Thank you for loving me so much, though I was not a good daughter. Thank you for giving me a new opportunity." That makes my heart feel joyous and at peace.

Remembering my sins, particularly the most serious ones, motivates me to lift a prayer to God for so many women that have lived through painful and sad experiences, just like the ones I went through, and that also may be suffering, just as I did. I ask God to let them feel his love and tenderness and to give hope and peace to their hearts. I also pray for so many girls, teenagers, and young women that are susceptible to

making the same mistakes I made, and I ask God to protect them and to deliver them from any evil, so they don't have to go through such terrible suffering. I also ask Our Lady of Mount Carmel to intercede for them. I have a great devotion to Our Lady, and I trust in her. I believe she has taken me by the hand and has guided me to find Jesus again.

I would like to add that feeling so loved by God has motivated me to be more merciful towards others, especially those who need me the most. For now, my mom is my priority; she relies entirely on my care. I also believe my dad needs me a lot during this journey of faith that he just started. Of course, my son needs me a whole lot; I am making every effort to give him a solid Christian formation and to be a role model of trust and faith in God. I also look for opportunities to practice works of mercy with others, as much as I can. I have tried to invite other people to seek God in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, so they can experience God's forgiveness and peace, just like I did.

In conclusion, I can say that this Year of Mercy has brought many blessings to me and my family. I thank God for that. I also thank our Holy Father, Pope Francis, for this wonderful initiative of the Jubilee Year of Mercy.



Part Three



Inspiration

Verba docent, exempla trahunt: Words have the power to teach us, but actual illustrations or examples lead us to desire a transformed life.

The lives of Chiara “Luce” Badano and Jacques Fesch have inspired many people throughout the world to discover true happiness in God.

Blessed Chiara “Luce” Badano

“Goodbye. Be happy, because I am happy.”

Chiara Badano was born on October 29, 1971, in Sassello, a small village in Northern Italy. Her father, Ruggero, a man of strong character with a great sense of freedom, was self-employed, initially in the fabric store that belonged to the family and then as a truck driver. Her mother, Maria Teresa, came from a large family that was poor but happy. Both parents were solid in their faith. Ruggero and Maria Teresa had one primary desire: to have children. The years went by, but the couple remained infertile. Ruggero decided to undertake a pilgrimage to the *Santuario delle Rocche* (the Shrine of Our Lady of the Rocks) in Molare, Italy. His prayer was heard and one month later Maria Teresa announced the joyful news: “Very soon there will be three of us.” When Chiara was born, her mother immediately understood that the child was not only her daughter but primarily God’s daughter.

Chiara’s special sensitivity was very soon obvious. Asked by her mother to share her toys with poorer children, at first she did not want to, but a few minutes later Maria Teresa

found her selecting certain toys using a specific guideline: “I cannot give broken toys to children who don’t have any.”

Her mother also remembered Chiara’s first lesson in prayer. When asked to say a prayer together, Chiara responded that she had other things to do. The mother, respecting the freedom of her four-year-old, did not force her, but said she would say a prayer for her, too. She began to pray the Angelus and a few seconds later she heard Chiara’s voice repeating her words. Ruggero, when asked about his daughter’s upbringing, reproached himself for being strict and demanding by nature, but he immediately emphasized that he “always, and I mean always, brought her up in love and never did anything out of spite or irritability or anything like that.”

The most decisive event in Chiara’s life occurred when she was nine years old. Thanks to some of her friends, she was introduced to the Focolare Movement, a movement that introduces its members to a whole new world full of prayer and ideals, a world of dedication to Jesus and communion with him. In 1981, the family went to Rome for a few days to visit the city. On the last day, they attended a Familyfest, a large gathering of Focolare members.

That meeting transformed the Badano family. The father confessed: “I heard words from the stage talking about a love different than the one I experienced for Maria Teresa and Chiara: powerful, natural, and supernatural. Little by little I understood that Jesus was close by, and that I could address him as a close family member and say anything to him. Whenever our little girl said she was hungry, immediately those nearby offered her bread, or fruit, or a drink. And at mealtime, even though we had our own picnic food, we only ate what was offered by others.” The mother, on the other hand, recalled, “Getting back home, if someone asked us

when we were married, we would have answered ‘when we first encountered the Focolare ideal of unity.’”

Other meetings and conferences followed that brought a revelation for Chiara. In a 1985 letter to the foundress of the Focolare Movement, Chiara Lubich, she expressed her spiritual daughterhood in a very affectionate way:

Very dear Mamma, during this conference I discovered the Gospel in a new light. I understood that I was not an authentic Christian because I was not living Christianity to the fullest. Now I want to make this wonderful book the sole purpose of my life! I do not want and cannot remain illiterate when it comes to such an extraordinary message. Just as it was easy for me to learn the alphabet, so it should be easy for me to live the Gospel as well. I have rediscovered the saying, “Give and it will be given to you.” I need to learn to trust Jesus more and to believe in his immense love.

The adventure of joyfully living the Gospel continued throughout the years that followed. The family moved to Savona. Growing according to the light of the Word of God, Chiara became immersed in her studies and sports activities, and was involved with many friends. She especially liked swimming and tennis. During one particular tennis match on a summer day in 1988, she experienced such severe pain in her shoulder that she had to throw her racket down. At first she thought it was a fracture in her shoulder bone, but the symptoms led the doctors to do a more extensive examination that ended in the shocking diagnosis of osteogenic sarcoma, a painful bone cancer; a tumor was

growing in her bone cells.

At first her parents and the doctors did not tell her the true nature of her problem. Chiara underwent her first surgery and began chemotherapy soon after. She knew that she was still very ill, and a couple days after the surgery she insisted on knowing the real diagnosis. The truth should have been overwhelming for an adolescent, but she reacted in an extraordinary way. When she returned from Turin (where the surgery took place), her mother asked her how she was. She answered, "Not now. I can't talk now." She threw herself on the bed and closed her eyes. The mother felt desperate and did not know how to comfort her daughter as she struggled alone. After a very long twenty-five minutes, Chiara opened her eyes and turned to her mother: "Now I can talk." The mother discovered that Chiara had just gone through her Gethsemane, asking the reason for this trial, and had concluded, "If you want it, Jesus, then so do I." Chiara wrote to Lubich: "Jesus sent me this sickness just at the right time. He sent it so that I could find him again."

A second, very painful surgery took place. Her parents, the Focolare group, and many of her friends kept watch at her bedside. Her disease was intensifying, but she never stopped smiling. The doctor had sent her to a better hospital. This too did not succeed in the desired outcome, but he did not give up. The medical team tried to find a vein for the intravenous drip that would not rupture, and they found a good one on her thumb, a small vein that nevertheless was at risk of bursting from one moment to the next. The doctor told Chiara: "You need to cooperate and stay still. If you move a finger, the needle will come out and we will not be able to do therapy."

Chiara remained immobile for three days, later saying: "It was a minor trial for me, even if it hurt and I felt an impulse

to move a finger. But then, to overcome that temptation, I said to myself that this little needle is one of the thorns that pierced Jesus' head." She refused morphine and justified it by saying: "It reduces my lucidity, and I can only offer Jesus my suffering. That is the only thing I have left. If I am not clearheaded, what meaning does my life have?"

Numerous testimonies indicate the extraordinary spirit in which Chiara and her parents faced their hour of trial. One of her doctors confirmed this, saying: "We studied the family because we could not understand why they were not in despair. There were three of them, but I saw only one person." The doctor in charge of her care wrote her in a letter: "I am not accustomed to seeing young people like you. I always thought of your age as a time of great emotion, intense joy, and enthusiasm. You have taught me that it is also an age of absolute maturity."

Chiara experienced the presence of Our Lady but also the dark night of trial. Two days before her death, when she was listening to her mother read a meditation by Chiara Lubich, she encouraged her mother, "Louder, Mamma. With more enthusiasm please!" On October 6, 1990, she received Communion and was very joyful. That night she asked that only her mother and father be at her bedside. At 4:10 a.m. on October 9, the moment arrived. Her last words were addressed to her mother: "Goodbye. Be happy. Because I am happy." When her father asked if those words were for him as well, she nodded with a smile.

Chiara "Luce" Badano was proclaimed Blessed on September 25, 2010.

Ball, Ann. Chapter 6 in *Young Faces of Holiness: Modern Saints in Photos and Words*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2004.

"Benedict XVI and Vatican Prelates Remember Examples of Blessed Chiara 'Luce' Badano." *Catholic News Agency*, Sept. 6, 2010.

Chiara Badano: A Teen's Life and Beatification. DVD.

Swaim, Colleen. Chapter 4 in *Ablaze: Stories of Daring Teen Saints*. Ligouri, MO: Ligouri Publications, 2011.

Zanzucchi, Michelle. *Chiara Luce: A Life Lived to the Full*. Trans. Frank Johnson. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2014.

Jacques Fesch

“In five hours I will see Jesus.

Jacques Fesch was born on April 6, 1930, in Saint-Germain-en-Laye just outside of Paris. His parents had just moved there from Belgium. Nothing seemed to be lacking to the happiness of this well-to-do family: his father was the manager of a bank for foreigners in Paris, while his mother ran the household. Nevertheless, family relationships were at high risk: there was no love, no ideals; instead the home was ruled by selfishness and a desire to satisfy all whims. His father was an atheist with a very authoritarian personality who tried to squelch any enthusiastic interests his son had.

In this kind of home atmosphere, despite being a graduate of the prestigious Christian school Saint-Erembert, seventeen-year-old Jacques lost his faith. Surrounded by girls and going to jazz clubs, he dedicated himself to all of life's pleasures. After finishing his military service, he married Pierrette Polack in 1951 in a civil ceremony right before the birth of their daughter, Véronique. In December 1953, he abandoned his family to be with another woman, Thérèse Troniou, who became the mother of his son, Gérard.

Jacques was accustomed to an easy life and to having plenty of money. To earn a living he decided to set up, with money from his mother, a business of transporting coal. However, his enterprise failed after a few months.

Carefree and irresponsible, especially with regard to his children, he dreamed of an adventurous life at sea. He wanted to buy a boat and sail to islands as far away as Polynesia. He needed 2 million francs to reach his dream islands, but after his failures no one wanted to lend him any

money. Money thus became a real obsession that led him to an act of desperation.

On the night of February 25, 1954, armed with a revolver and accompanied by two criminals he already knew, he entered a currency-exchange shop to withdraw the gold he had ordered the previous day. The owner, Alexandre Silberstein, was an acquaintance of his father. When Silberstein turned to open the safe, Jacques attacked him, striking him on the head with the butt of his revolver. The gun accidentally discharged, but it wounded the assailant.

Panicked and bleeding from his hand, Jacques escaped from the store on foot. He shot and wounded a pedestrian as he was being chased by numerous police officers. He succeeded in sneaking into a nearby building and hiding on the roof. When he thought it was safe, he came down and tried to blend in with the other pedestrians on Boulevard des Italiens. However, he was recognized by Jean Vergne, a police officer.

When he was commanded to stop, Jacques turned and shot Vergne. He tried to escape again, firing shots at other pedestrians. Officer Vergne, who had been shot through the heart, died in a few moments. Fesch succeeded in reaching the Richelieu-Drouot Metro Station, but his flight ended very soon with his arrest. Still in handcuffs, he declared he was sorry about only one thing: he had not taken a machine gun for the robbery instead of the revolver.

He then began a life of detention, long days in solitude at the La Santé Prison in Paris followed by interrogations and proceedings. His lawyer, Paul Baudet, a recently converted and fervent Catholic, decided from the beginning not only to defend his client during meetings in the justice system but also to fight for his soul. Jacques's response to these attempts was ironic: he began to call his lawyer "Pope Paul." Fesch also

told Father Jean Devoyod, the Dominican prison chaplain, “I don’t have any faith, so you don’t need to worry about me.”

Neither the lawyer nor the chaplain, however, decided to give up. They often came to the cell of the twenty-four-year-old murderer. After a couple weeks, Fesch asked to speak to the chaplain. The mask of cynicism fell away, and he confessed, “Father, I have committed grave evil.” On Father Devoyod’s advice, Jacques began to write a diary, a retelling of his life. The chaplain brought him carefully selected books: first of all, the Bible, followed by *Confessions* by St. Augustine, *The Life of St. Teresa of Avila*, and *The Story of a Soul* by St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus. In the solitude of his cell Jacques meditated and wrote.

Outside the prison, his lawyer and the chaplain organized a group to pray for his conversion. Finally, on the night of February 28, 1955, a transformation occurred that the murderer himself described: “Tonight I was in bed with my eyes open, and I was really suffering for the first time in my life. I experienced an unaccustomed intensity because of what was revealed to me about certain family issues. And then a cry escaped from my heart, ‘My God!’ Instantly, like a violent wind that passes by without our knowing where it came from, the Spirit of the Lord overpowered me.”

A long process of reconciliation began for him with God, with himself, and with others. Revealing his first steps in the school of the love of God and neighbor, he wrote to his Benedictine friend Father Thomas: “Yes, Jesus is the one who loved me first when I had done nothing to deserve his love. Jesus has filled me with grace and has given you to me as a brother to love. Every day I reread your letters and I get light and strength from them.”

Three years went by, during which time Jacques Fesch lost his mother, who had wanted to offer her life for her son’s

redemption; he reconciled with his wife and his sister-in-law, who then became like a mother to him. While faith was transforming Fesch's life, justice was pursuing its lengthy, relentless course leading to a trial. The accused wanted a punishment that would be an example to others. At 7:45 p.m. on April 6, 1957, on his twenty-seventh birthday, he was given the death penalty. The prisoner was transferred to cell 18—the cell for those awaiting execution—and the execution was set for October 1. His lawyer, Paul, held on right up to the last moment: he asked for clemency from the president of the republic, René Coty. The president was under a great deal of pressure from public opinion and especially from the police who were already losing so many officers to Algerian terrorists in Paris. Clemency was denied, but René Coty asked to have a message sent to Fesch: "Tell him that I highly admire the person he has become." The president would later admit that the night before Fesch's execution was a sleepless night for him.

Jacques had only a few months left before his execution. He wrote to his lawyer: "May God take possession of my soul. A veil has been ripped away, and if I continued to live I would never remain at the heights I have reached. It is better to die."

The time went by quickly; sheer agony was intertwined with divine hope. He wrote in his diary the night before he was to die: "The last day of struggle. At this time tomorrow I will be in heaven." In his goodbye letter to the chaplain, he said: "My Father, here I am at the end of my life, with my soul at peace and my heart steady. Within a few hours a new and eternal light will shine around me, if Our Lord judges me worthy of being counted among his children."

Toward 12:30 am he noted:

I have now recited the words of the wedding Mass, uniting myself with my whole soul to Pierrette who is now my wife before the Lord. I will recite my Rosary and say prayers for the dying, and then I will entrust my soul to God. Good Lord, help me!... I have said my prayers and I am full of peace and strength. Jesus, in his infinite love has listened to my prayer and heard me. Jesus, I love you!... I am more tranquil now than before because Jesus has promised that he would bring me straight to heaven and I would die as a Christian. What peace, what extraordinary lucidity of spirit! I feel very light, and for the moment every fear has been swept aside. I am not alone because the Father is with me. Only five more hours to live! In five hours I will see Jesus!

When he heard the procession arrive, he took his notebook and quickly scribbled: "Peace has disappeared to be replaced by anguish! It is horrible! My heart is bursting in my chest! Blessed Virgin, have mercy on me!... Blessed Virgin, have mercy on me! Goodbye to everyone, and may the Lord bless you."

After he made his confession and received Communion, they tied his hands and brought him to the guillotine. He wept. He refused a cigarette and cognac. He made his last request to the chaplain: "The crucifix, Father, the crucifix!" He kissed it fervently. Jacques was tranquil and composed as he climbed up the scaffold, where generally people curse and put up resistance; all the people present observed this with great amazement. At 5:29 pm, the blade fell.

The process for the beatification of Jacques Fesch began on September 21, 1987.

Inspiration

Fesch, Jacques. *Light over the Scaffold: Prison Letters of Jacques Fesch* (and) *Cell 18: Unedited Letters of Jacques Fesch*. Ed. Augustine-Michel Lemonnier. Trans. Mary Thomas Noble. Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1998.

"Benedict XVI Greets Sister of Young Murderer Being Considered for Sainthood." *Catholic News Agency*, December 4, 2009.

Knowles, Leo. Chapter 15 in *Modern Heroes of the Church*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2003.



PART FOUR



Resources

Just as a fruitful field produces fragrant herbs that are good for our health, so too “lectio divina,” when we examine the readings word by word, always offers healing for the wounded soul.

Cassiodorus
Commentary on the Psalms

We present the following two guides for *lectio divina* that can be used at various meeting times, whether as a community or as an individual, during the **24 Hours for the Lord**.

Lectio Divina, Guide 1

THE WORD OF GOD

... IS HEARD

1 Peter 1:18-21

You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake. Through him you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

... IS MEDITATED UPON

The passage that we have heard speaks of God's mercy which is implemented in the Redemption, that is, in the salvation which we were given with the Blood of his Son Jesus (see 1 Pt 1:18-21). The word "redemption" is not often used, yet it is fundamental because it indicates the most radical liberation that God could fulfill for us, for all of humanity, and for all of creation.

It seems that people today no longer likes to think that one has been freed or saved through God's intervention; men and women delude themselves that their freedom is a force for obtaining everything. But, in reality, this is not the case.

How many illusions are sold on the pretext of freedom, and how many new forms of slavery are created in our times in the name of a false freedom! Many, many slaves. "I do this because I want to, I take drugs because I like to, I am free. I do otherwise." They are slaves! They become slaves in the name of freedom. We have all seen people like this who end up on the ground. We need God to free us from every form of indifference, selfishness and self-sufficiency.

The words of the apostle Peter clearly express the meaning of the new life to which we are called. By making himself one of us, the Lord Jesus not only takes on the human condition, but also raises us up to the possibility of being Children of God. By his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ, the blameless Lamb, conquered death and sin to free us from their dominion. He is the Lamb that was sacrificed for us, so that we can receive a new life made up of forgiveness, love, and joy. These three words are beautiful: forgiveness, love, and joy. All that he assumed was also redeemed, freed, and saved. Certainly, it is true that life puts us to the test, and at times we suffer for this. However, in these moments we are invited to turn our gaze to the crucified Jesus who suffers for us and with us, as sure proof that God does not abandon us. Let us never forget that in anguish and persecution, as in everyday sufferings, we are always freed by the merciful hand of God who raises us up to him and leads us to a new life.

God's love is boundless: We can discover ever new signs that show his attention towards us and, above all, his wish to reach us and to await us. All our life, although marked by the fragility of sin, is placed under the gaze of God who loves us. How many pages of Sacred Scripture speak to

us of God's presence, closeness, and tenderness for every man, especially for the smallest, the poor, and the troubled! God has great tenderness, great love for the small ones, for the weak, for those rejected by society. The greater our need, the more his gaze upon us is filled with mercy. He feels compassion and pity towards us because he knows our weaknesses. He knows our sins and he forgives us. He always forgives us! He is so good; our Father is so good.

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, let us open up to the Lord and receive his grace! Because, as the Psalm says, "For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plenteous redemption" (130:7).

Pope Francis, General Audience, September 10, 2016

... IS PRAYED

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!

Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my supplications!

If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,

Lord, who could stand?

But there is forgiveness with you,

that you may be feared.

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,

and in his word I hope;

my soul waits for the Lord

more than watchmen for the morning,

More than watchmen for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is mercy,
and with him is plenteous redemption.
And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.



**From the Coptic Liturgy, Troparion of the Sixth Hour
(*Coptic Orthodox Prayer Book*)**

You are she who is full of grace. O *Theotokos*, the Virgin, we praise you, for, through the cross of your Son, Hades fell down and death was abolished. We were dead but we are raised and became worthy of eternal life, and gained the delight of the first Paradise. Therefore, we thankfully glorify the immortal Christ our God.

Lectio Divina, Guide 2

THE WORD OF GOD

... IS HEARD

Luke 5:27-32

After this he went out, and saw a tax collector, named Levi, sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he left everything, and rose and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his house; and there was a large company of tax collectors and others sitting at table with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes murmured against his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

... IS MEDITATED UPON

The calling of Levi is given particular emphasis in Luke's Gospel. Except for a few textual differences, this version of the story is the same as that portrayed by the Evangelist Matthew. With him, the words are autobiography; with Luke they are the description of the life of Levi, who is called Matthew in the first Gospel. The same event always takes on its own individual emphasis from the narrator's perspective. Luke, who was originally likely also a physician

by profession, has an eye for what a person is lacking, even though their external appearance suggests they have everything. The words which he recounts Jesus saying reflect sympathy and empathy: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” (Lk 5:31). This is more than a diagnosis. With these words of Scripture, Luke transitions into the therapy that the Savior gives: “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (5:32). The true medicine, which heals man from the inside, is repentance.

The calling of Levi is set in motion, because Jesus tells him: “Follow me” (5:27b). This invitation must have been so personal that the reaction happened immediately: “And he left everything, and rose and followed him” (5:28). Jesus’ words touched his innermost being. Levi did not hesitate for one second. How great must have been the clarity which came at that moment in his life, as in Jesus there began to shine the truth of a life which is brighter than anything that can dazzle a person: the money at the customs office, the greed for more, the stinginess with his own. Levi sees his life in a new light. He opens his heart and his home to everyone. He begins sharing, and in the reflection of Jesus within himself he gains the courage to repent, which will not come to an end with the single calling at the customs office. The temptation did not disappear, but the transformation that came from Jesus’ promise to him, was greater: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” (5:31). Levi now knows that the wounds of his life take on new value in the light of faith — that is, through this encounter with Jesus. Levi understands: Repentance only brings renewal if one is never done with it; when one always gets up again, leaves everything behind and follows the Lord, the Savior and physician of the soul.

St. Francis de Sales perceived and practiced this movement in his own life. He wrote: “If the heart wanders or is distracted, bring it back to the point quite gently and replace it tenderly in its Master’s presence. And even if you did nothing during the whole of your hour but bring your heart back and place it again in Our Lord’s presence, though it went away every time you brought it back, your hour would be very well employed.”

One can meditate on what Levi learned and that which caused him to become Matthew, according to Luke’s Gospel, in the magnificent painting by Caravaggio at the Church of San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome. The artist created it for the space in which it hangs today and included the fall of light from an opposite window into the design of the scene at the customs office. Anyone wishing to immerse themselves in this scene as an observer must still insert a coin for the supplemental electrical lighting, to make visible that which happened to Levi in the light of faith. Perhaps this observation can also become a metaphor for the fact that we must not become weary of always “bringing our heart back to the point if it wanders or is distracted.” As in the case of Levi, this has not to do with money, but with the light into which the Savior daily calls us anew, even with our sins.

... IS PRAYED

Psalm 139

O LORD, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
 you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down,

and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
 behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.
You beset me behind and before,
 and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
 it is high, I cannot attain it.

Where shall I go from your Spirit?
 Or where shall I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
 If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
If I take the wings of the morning
 and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
 and your right hand shall hold me.
If I say, "Let only darkness cover me,
 and the light about me be night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you,
 the night is bright as the day;
 for darkness is as light with you.

For you formed my inward parts,
 you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am wondrously made.
 Wonderful are your works!
You know me right well;
 my frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
 intricately wrought in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance;
 in your book were written, every one of them,

the days that were formed for me,
 when as yet there was none of them.
How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
 How vast is the sum of them!
If I would count them, they are more than the sand.
 When I awake, I am still with you.

O that you would slay the wicked, O God,
 and that men of blood would depart from me,
men who maliciously defy you,
 who lift themselves up against you for evil!
Do I not hate them that hate you, O LORD?
 And do I not loathe them that rise up against you?
I hate them with perfect hatred;
 I count them my enemies.
Search me, O God, and know my heart!
 Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any wicked way in me,
 and lead me in the way everlasting!



Blessed John Henry Newman

(From his poem “Radiating Christ”)
Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as You shine,
So to shine as to be a light to others;
The light, O Jesus will be all from You;
 none of it will be mine;
It will be you, shining on others through me.

Let me thus praise You the way You love best,
by shining on those around me.
Let me preach You without preaching,
not by words but by my example,
By the catching force of the sympathetic
influence of what I do,
The evident fullness of the love my heart bears to You.



St. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort

(From his “Prayer to Mary”)

May the light of your faith dispel the darkness of my mind.
May your deep humility take the place of my pride.
May your heavenly contemplation put an
end to the distractions of my wandering imagination.
May your continuous vision of God
fill my memory with his presence.
May the burning love of your heart inflame
the coldness of mine.
May your virtues take the place of my sins.
May your merits be my adornment and
make up for my unworthiness before God.
Amen.