

# FAN INTO FLAME

*Retreat to Mill Hill Seminarians of PCJ*

*Holy Week 2011*

*Sp 112*



*Fan into flame the fire of God's Spirit in You (2 Timothy 1:6)*

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## INTRODUCTION: FAN INTO FLAME THE FIRE OF GOD'S SPIRIT IN YOU

Biblical Text....

*2 Timothy 1:6-8*

*For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.*

This is the theme to guide us through our retreat. The aim is that we dispose ourselves to the full power of the Holy Spirit that has been poured into our hearts and that can be hindered from full activity by a number of factors for which we are responsible and which we shall talk about in the course of the retreat.

The structure of our retreat will be in five parts.

1. God intended that his disciples burn with the fire of his Spirit in living and transmitting the Christian life.
2. However, we realize today outside a lack of this fire among those who have received the Spirit.
3. When we look inside us we also find evidence of lack of the Fire of God's Spirit. Yet whether outside us or within, mediocrity makes us burn with the fire of the wrong spirit.
4. God calls us to fan this Spirit into flame, using as fuel union with Christ.

We fan into flame God's Spirit through the living Word of God.

6. We fan into flame God's Spirit through renewed dedication to our duties.

7. We fan the Spirit into flame using as fuel our weaknesses. The cross in choosing another course of action turns the very weaknesses into strengths.

8. We fan God's Spirit into flame through the cultivation the virtue of love.

Our timetable will be as follows...

## TALK 1: I HAVE COME TO SET FIRE ON EARTH...

### Biblical Texts

*Luke 12: 49-50*

*I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already! There is a baptism I must still receive, and how great is my distress till it is over!*

*Luke 24: 32*

*They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"*

*Jeremiah 20:9*

*But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.*

In this talk we reflect on the fact that God intended that we become ministers that ardently burn with the fire and zeal of the Holy Spirit.

You might have encountered a preacher in your life who is so passionately consumed by the message he has to transmit that he totally disregards fatigue, inconvenience, pain, criticism, in order to put his message across. You too might have some interest in which you can be so passionately engrossed that nothing seems to stop you. During the campaigns we have seen people who seemed so consumed by winning that they would not stop at nothing. God wants us to be so filled with his Spirit that we may proclaim his message with a fire in us.

When Jesus met the two men on the way to Emmaus and explained the scriptures to them, they seemed to be in a trance. They forgot all the gloom they had been experiencing. They forgot all the fatigue. Eight miles on foot during the night is a considerable distance. However, after their hearts had been set on fire they could not rest until morning. They felt the urgency of wanting to share the message that very night, so they set on their way back to Jerusalem. Jesus wants to kindle our hearts in the same way that he kindled the hearts of these two disciples. He wants us to feel the urgency of sharing his message with others.

In the history of salvation we have heard of men and women who were burning with fire in their ardor to serve God. The text from Jeremiah quoted above is such an example. Even though the message he had to deliver

caused him a lot of inconvenience, making him lose his friends, and attracting enmity with people who sought to kill him, Jeremiah felt the message like a fire in his heart which he could not stop. Similarly, St. Paul also felt that the Spirit of God drove him in such a way that no sacrifice was too great to stop him from carrying out his mission. He says: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:35-37).

Jesus wants that you and me are set ablaze with the fire of his Spirit. He wants that our hearts burn within us like the hearts of the two men on the way to Emmaus. He wants that when we speak out his word people feel their hearts burning within them. He wants us to be passionate ministers of his word like Jeremiah and St. Paul. He can accomplish all that if we allow him.

How will he do that? What have we to do in order to dispose ourselves to the all-consuming power of the Holy Spirit?

When we look again at scripture we read from Luke 24:49: *“I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”*

In obedience to his command the apostles gathered together and remained in prayer until they received the Holy Spirit. Then their hearts were set on fire. They who had been in hiding now proclaimed the gospel without fear

or favor. They were willing to die for what they believed, and indeed all of them with the exception of John died a martyr's death.

We have already received God's Spirit. We received the Holy Spirit at our baptism and confirmation. We receive the Holy Spirit in every sacrament, in reconciliation and in the Eucharist. All we need to do is to allow the Spirit within us to become active. This is what we are going to see. But first we must look at what prevents the Holy Spirit whom we have received to burn within us.

## DISCUSSION

*Share an experience about someone you have met who seemed to burn with the fire of God's Spirit: convinced, untiring, with an enthusiasm that was contagious, etc.*

## HOMILY

### Introduction

This morning we saw that among the people who burned with the fire of God's Spirit in the history of salvation was Jeremiah. We here in the first reading Jeremiah speaking about the plots of his enemies to destroy him of which he is aware. But because he is assured of God upholding his cause, Jeremiah can: "sing to the Lord, praise the Lord, for he has delivered the soul of the needy from the hands of evil men." Jeremiah reminds us that there is nothing that can really do harm to those who are with the Lord.



The gospel tells us something even greater. We are called to be gods. We have the potential to be gods, and this is not blasphemy. However, only the Only Son of God can transform us into this, if we allow him. For all the times we have resisted his invitation let us ask him for pardon.

### Homily

Today's gospel reading can best be understood by recalling the message of the gospels of the last two days. On Wednesday we heard that to the Jews that believed in him Jesus said "If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples, you will know the truth and the truth shall set you free." One of those who did not believe in him must have overheard him. He understood Jesus to imply that those who do not make his word his home are slaves and retorted: "We are not slaves but descendants of Abraham." To this Jesus retorted that everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. Only the Son of God can free us from that slavery. When he told his adversaries that although descended from Abraham they did not do what Abraham would have done, but performed deeds of their father, they insisted that they were not children of prostitution but of Abraham.

Yesterday we heard Jesus tell them that anyone who obeys his commandments will never see death. They retorted that now they knew he was possessed by the devil. Abraham their father and the prophets were dead, and did Jesus think he was greater than Abraham? Jesus told them a great statement whose meaning, if fully grasped, would have sent them down on their knees: "Before Abraham ever was, I

AM.” Jews understood what that implied. Only God had said and could say that. He had told Moses that I AM WHO I AM. He is the everlasting NOW.

In response to that we hear in today’s gospel that they take up stones to stone Jesus. They tell him that they are not stoning him for the good he did but for blaspheming by claiming to be God.

Jesus says that even the title ‘gods’ was applied by scripture on those to whom scripture was addressed, and what about the one whom the Father has consecrated?

Since scripture does not lie, we are gods, because it has pleased God to make us such. He has restored his image in us through his Son. But we have the potential also to do what the Jews did, to do deeds of another father and thus become his children. On the other hand, we have the potential to become gods by making Jesus’ words our home, by becoming his true disciples, by being set free from sin and from eternal death. May this truth sink into our hearts and excite them so that we may burn with the zeal to share this good news with others.

## TALK 2: BECAUSE YOU ARE LUKEWARM I AM ABOUT TO SPIT YOU

Scripture texts

*Revelation 3:15- 21*

*So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth.*

*Luke 7:28-35*

*"To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: "'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.'"*

*Jeremiah 4:18*

*If I go into the country, I see those slain by the sword; if I go into the city, I see the ravages of famine. Both prophet and priest have gone to a land they know not."*

*Romans 7:21-25*

*So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

In the previous talk we saw that it is God's will that we should be filled with the power of his Spirit, a Spirit of love, of power and of self-control. We also saw that God has done all that is necessary for us to attain his purpose in us.

In this talk we reflect on the sad reality that among those whom God appointed to be light to the world there are so many whose fire has become smoldering smoke or even burnt out all together.

A preacher during a retreat once illustrated the idea that we ought to burn with the fire of God's Spirit thus giving light and heat. He brought in the retreat room a charcoal stove with live coals, a pair of tongs and a basin containing some water. He told us that while we are full of the Spirit we are like a hot charcoal stove full of live ambers. It is used to give heat. It can cook food which then can be eaten with taste. You dare not touch it with bare hands or else it will burn you. You need to hold the ambers with a pair of tongs. In the same way no wicked person would approach a man full of the Spirit to tempt him. However, if the burning charcoal is thrown into the basin of water, the fire burns out. The charcoal becomes cold, black and ugly. Anyone can touch it with no harm. It is incapable of giving heat or light. Worse still, it dirties with soot those who touch it. That is what we become when we lose the fire of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes it is not a total lack of faith, but a form of mediocrity by which we are neither cold nor warm. We 'nest' in our vocation. We do no harm to anyone, but we do no good either. We are like Jesus' generation which he compared to children singing to each other in the market place.

Bishop Fulton Sheen once gave a treat in which he treated this topic: the Nemesis of Mediocrity. By that he referred to the rampant lack of zeal among so many priests and religious leaders; the spirit of being satisfied with so little. Bishop Sheen was talking mainly of American Society and

he is dead for some years now. God detests those who are neither cold nor warm and would rather spit them out.

There are probably among you those who do not like bathing with cold water. I prefer a warm bath if I can get one. You must have the experience of bathing with water that is lukewarm. It is unpleasant and may even make you feel cold. You might prefer to bath with cold water rather than with water that is lukewarm. The same applies with regard to taking tea or soup. Some people would rather take a cold drink than a hot drink turned lukewarm.

Today we notice in the world a general decline of the fire of the Spirit among the faithful. In Europe and America the Christian faith has gone so slow. Churches are empty. Convents are closed for lack of more vocations. I know of a monastery in Austria which was and transformed into a prison. We have heard of the scandals among the clergy that have wrecked the Church and led many of the faithful to leave the Church.

It is not uncommon to find people joining the seminary especially in our part of the world with ulterior motives. They are those who join missionary congregations with the hope that these hold better prospects for personal ambitions than dioceses. About 8 years ago I was studying in England. I happened to spend Easter at Mill Hill house, the then centre of your congregation. There were about 12 seminarians in formation. By the time I finished the course I was doing around June of that same year I learnt that all the seminarians had left the seminary. They did not go back to their respective countries but scattered in England.

Evidently that was the purpose of some of them for joining the congregation. About two years later I found one engaged to Mary and English girl, and teaching in a primary school somewhere in New Castle, in northern England.

When religious leaders lose the fire of the Spirit and start minding their own business the flock gets scattered. This was the case in Jeremiah's time in the text we heard at the beginning of this talk. Jesus was aware that after he had gone many of his disciples would become cold. That is why he wondered if he would find any faith on earth when he came back.

What are the factors that make our fire to remain smoldering or burn out all together, our heat to become lukewarm and cold all together?

## HOMILY

This morning we talked about the things that prevent the Holy Spirit from becoming active in us; things that make us lukewarm, or expel the Spirit of God altogether from our hearts thus making us totally cold and spiritually inactive. Today's gospel is an illustration of one of them. It is about the reaction of the chief priests and Pharisees to Jesus' rising Lazarus from the dead.

We recall that when Jesus received a message that his friend Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was for two days. Often Jesus was interrupted by people with individual requests and he responded immediately without making them wait. Recall when Jairus invited him to go and cure

his daughter, although he was busy attending to the crowds he set out immediately. On the way he was interrupted by the woman with a hemorrhage, again he paused and attended to her. But when his dear friend, owner of the friendly home where he had often dined, was seriously sick, Jesus waited where he was for two days. He also loved the sisters of Lazarus, Martha and Mary. The journey to Bethany took another two days, making four.

Jesus could also have healed his friend at a distance with a single word, the way he healed the servant of the official or the way he healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman. He did not do any of these things for a purpose. He had told his disciples: “this sickness will end not in death but in God’s glory, and through it the Son of God will be glorified.” He wanted to give those who had often asked for a sign a definitive sign. They could have argued that other incidents of raising from the dead had been concocted. They could have argued that Jairus’ daughter had been sleeping as Jesus had said. They could have claimed that the widow’s son had been in a comma. But no one could contest the raising from the dead of a man who has been embalmed and buried for four days. The embalming alone is enough to kill in minutes because it cuts off air.

We have heard that many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him. But the chief priests and Pharisees called a meeting and became determined from that day on to kill Jesus. They were totally unmoved by the miracle. Why? Because they argued: “If we

let him go on in this way everybody will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy the Holy Place and our nation.” Their concern was no longer the truth but interests.

Brothers, one of the things that make us impermeable to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit is to replace truth for interest. If we are no longer concerned with what is true and right, but with what profits us and what is of disadvantage to us, then the Spirit of Truth is rendered unable to transform us. If your concern for instance is not to discern whether God is calling you to become a priest or not, but how to escape negative evaluation by the staff, then you are replacing truth with interest. Let us pray for docility to the voice of God that speaks to us in every situation, good and bad, and that we may not be made deaf to God’s voice by pursuit of our own advantage and avoidance of whatever is of disadvantage to us.

## DISCUSSION

*Share your personal experience of something which engages you so passionately that your heart seems to be on fire.*

## HOMILY

On this day of Palm Sunday we have started the journey of faith in which we accompany the Lord Jesus on his last week on earth. We have listened to his triumphal entry in Jerusalem which was soon followed by his passion. This reminds us of our own fickleness. The same people who



had shouted “hosanna” a few days before shouted “crucify him” even before the branches they had shaken were completely dry.

Among the many possible themes to reflect on I would like to reflect on the love of Jesus for us. It was love that made him go through all that we shall hear in this Holy Week. It was not the nails that held him on the cross but his love for us. When Peter stretched out his hand and cut off a man’s ear Jesus told him to put back his sword. He added that if he had wanted he could have told his Father to send twelve thousand angels to guard him. In fact he did not need so many. Even a single angel could have done the job. However, he added that if he did then how would the scriptures be fulfilled? In other words, how would we attain our salvation according to the Father’s plan? In the same way when his adversaries jeered at him and told him to save himself and come off the cross, he could have done so, but because he loved us and wanted to save us he remained on the cross.

In order to make sure that the disciples understood that his death was not an assassination but something that he purposely submitted to for love of us, the night before he suffered he told them as we heard: take, this is my body which will be given up for you, this is my blood, the blood of the everlasting covenant which will be shed for you so that sins may be forgiven. Little did they know that in a few hours this body would be torn through with scourges, with thorns and with nails. They had no idea that this blood

would be slowly and painful drained out of his veins in less than 24 hours.

By that same love and through the same sacrifice he has availed himself to us who come much later. We are about to eat the same bread that was torn by the nails and drink the same blood that was shed that day.

How does he want that we respond to such love shown to us? By accepting the gift that God is offering. Three Sundays ago we heard what Jesus told to the Samaritan woman at the well. He said to her: “if you only knew the gift of God, and who it is that is offering it...” He is saying the same thing to us. If we only knew the gift, the giver and the price which the gift cost! The gift is everlasting happiness. The giver is God himself. The Father gives us the Son. The Son gives himself. The Father and the Son give us the Holy Spirit. The price is Jesus’ passion and death on the cross. Here is something the immensity of which our minds cannot fully comprehend.

All we have to do is to ask for forgiveness for our past failures and strive to do what Jesus commands us and avoid what he forbids us in the future. We know we are weak, but he too knows that and has put in place all the help we need in our weakness. He has given us his body and blood to strengthen us on our way. As long as we remove the obstacles to receiving his sacraments, as long as we receive his body and blood worthily and regularly we have all the help we need on our way.

### TALK 3: IF ONLY YOU KNEW THE GIFT OF GOD

John 4:7-15

We have seen so far that God intended that our hearts should burn with zeal of his Spirit, and that this is often not the case due to several factors some of which we have looked at. For the rest of the retreat we are going to look at some of the ways through which we are going to allow God's Spirit burn in us.

In this talk we are going to see that if our hearts are to burn with the fire of God's Spirit the first thing to do is to appreciate the gift God is giving us. The text for our reflection is the taken in Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman at the well: "If only you knew the gift of God, and he who is saying to you, 'give me a drink...'" we used this text to reflect on the Passion we heard this morning. Only my homily was in Lusoga and I would like to use the same talk in English for the benefit of those who did not fully understand.

If we fully knew what God is offering us and who is doing the offering, that alone would be exciting. If the Pope, or the Queen of England or even our president singled you out for a friendly chat you would be excited. If he was offering you a tremendous gift, say a million dollars you would be besides yourself with excitement. Yet no earthly personage comes any closer to who is offering us a gift, and no material gift comes any closer to what God is offering. There is a third element: if the giver had struggled so much to procure that gift it would be so much the more

precious to you. But there is no struggle that comes any closer to what Jesus went through to attain this gift for us. As he said himself, greater love has no man than that who lays his life down for his friend. That is what he has done for us. Let us then try to understand that gift in the Passion we heard this morning.

We saw this morning that the one element that helps us the events of Holy Week, the actions and experiences of Jesus' last week on earth is his love for us. We saw that it was love that held him on the cross, not the nails. In the same way as he did not invite angels to defend him against capture, so too he did not come off the cross so that we might be saved. We saw that he made certain that we understand the full meaning of his experience by enacting the Eucharist on the night before which gives the meaning of what happened on Good Friday.

Let us now strive to understand three things: the gift of God which is everlasting happiness, the give who is the Triune God, and the price which is Christ's Passion and death.

Everlasting happiness

Midas was asked to ask for anything. He asked for gold. He was happy only for a few minutes. Soon enough he saw that this was not all. Solomon was a little wiser. He asked for wisdom to rule. He got as bonus wealth. Still he did not go far enough. In his old age he abandoned God. If God asked you to ask for anything, what would you ask? We all want to be happy. We may disagree on what makes us

happy. We may not even fully know. When we obtain what we thought would make us happy, we often have an “is that all?” experience. God who knows what makes us fully happy has prepared just that. Eye has not seen, nor ear heard. No one has ever conceived what God has in store. This is the gift. The only thing we can understand is that it will last always.

The giver:

To a visionary at Medjugorje Mary said that if you only knew how much I love you, you would shed tears of joy. This is only Mary, a creature. Yet others who have beheld her in visions could not describe the beauty. They all expressed the reluctance to leave her presence. She is so attractive because being near God she reflects his loveliness. What about beholding the source itself. If we perceived God for what he really is we would die with joy. This is the giver.

The price

Think of the most expensive gift you have ever given to a person you really loved. This might also help you gauge how generous or mean you are to your loved ones. The price need not be in terms of money alone. It might be in the effort you put in the gift. Suppose afterwards the recipient did not even notice your effort; if he or she threw the gift back in your face! Compare that with the price which Jesus paid for your gift.

These are only examples to help us to appreciate something that is really mystery. However, we cannot fully

grasp it. We can only ask the Holy Spirit to make us aware of the greater gift, the giver and the price, so that this awareness may fill us with gratitude.

Have you ever reflected deeply enough on the words of the song Amazing Grace? Have you reflected on the words of St. Augustine: “Late have I loved you o beauty so ancient, so new”? These are people who spoke words that came from the heart. They had grasped the immensity of the gift of God. We pray for that level of understanding God’s gift which sets the heart on fire.

#### TALK 4: BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD

*Psalm 46:11*

Yesterday we started looking at what kindles the Spirit of God in our hearts so that the Spirit can drive out of them all fear, and fill them with his power, love and self-discipline. We saw that the first thing is to appreciate and receive what God has given us. Today we would like to look at another factor that disposes us to the Spirit of God. It is the disposition of listening to God.

We are using the text of the Psalm: “Be still and know that I am God.”

Listening is a very important skill in all human relationship. Friendships are built up or destroyed by our ability to listen or lack of the ability to listen. We all appreciate it when we meet people who listen to us and understand us. None of us likes being misunderstood. A future priest particularly needs to learn to listen. People will come to you with all

sorts of problems. Quite often you will not have a solution to their problems. But if you listen carefully and show that you have understood them, that in itself is part of the healing.

We also need to listen to God. We hear in the scriptures how God spoke to different people: to Abraham, to Moses, to the prophets, to Mary, to Joseph. We might wonder whether God ever speaks to people these days. We can say that we have never heard his voice. Yet that is not true; God is communicating to us every day. All we need to do is to learn to listen to him. Only when we learn to listen to God and to do what he is telling us, God's Spirit cannot be enkindled in our lives. That is why we want to dedicate this day to examine some of the ways through which we listen to God.

## PRAYER OF LISTENING

God communicates to us through prayer in the first place. In many of our praying we often do too much talking and too little listening. That way we fail to understand what God is speaking to us. Prayer of listening is not easy. It takes some training.

Listening to God is like switching on a radio receiver. It is not the action of switching it on that makes present the different voices broadcasted at different stations all over the world. These sounds are always around us. The receiver simply has the capacity to tap them. God too is ever around, ever speaking, but only one who has one's ear tuned in can hear him speak.

Sit comfortably straight. Close your eyes. Breathe evenly. Be aware of the sensations. Isolate the sounds you hear; birds, human sounds, wind, whatever your ear can capture.

Perceive the sensations in your body. Your feet, your hands, neck, shoulders, stomach; listen to wherever there is some kind of pain, pressure, or sensation of any kind. Try not to make any movements even when you feel the urge to do so. Slowly you can school your body to make no external movement at all. Do not shuffle your feet, scratch, cough, move hands about, shift in your position. Sit still. This is a prelude to attaining inner silence.

Listen to your thoughts whatever they are. You probably are asking yourself what this is all about if it is the first time you are doing it. What other thoughts are coming in your mind. What memories? Just be aware of them and leave them. Do not try to suppress them.

Listen to your emotions. These are different from your thoughts. What are you feeling? Sad, angry, curious? Rebellious? Expectant? Just be aware of these emotions.

Listen to the imperceptible reality. You probably do not hear your heart beat. Yet you know that it is beating each second without ceasing. You do not hear your blood flow through your veins and arteries, yet you know this is an ongoing process. You know that your digestive system is busy. Your brain is working without ceasing. Since you have your eyes closed, you do not see your friends, yet you know they are there with you, each a little world near you with its unique sensations, thoughts, feelings and



physiological activity. You know you are breathing in oxygen yet you cannot see it nor do you give it a thought, unless your attention is drawn to it.

Listen to the spiritual world. You believe that besides the presence of your friends with their thoughts and feelings, there is another presence right there with you. God is here. He is aware of all that is going on in you. He is aware of all that is going on in the minds of others. He has his own thoughts and feelings. He has his own plans. He knows you and loves you. He wants that you get to know his plans for you. Just be there aware of his presence as he is of yours... take some time with him. Then open your eyes.

If we practice this exercise of listening regularly we come to a time when it becomes easier. It raises our sensitivity to the presence of God. It paves the way to better meditation and contemplation.

We can also exercise listening during liturgical prayer. During the Divine Office we can try to perceive the meaning of the words we are saying. We can be surprised how a text we have always said or even one which we know by memory can strike us as if for the first time. We can do the same to the prayers of the Mass or any other prayers for that matter. We listen to the word of God when it is read. We try to listen with a disciple's ear: have the attitude of one receiving instructions from what God is saying.

When we train ourselves in the prayer of listening all our prayers take on a new quality. We become more and more

aware of God speaking to us through prayer. If we add to the listening the effort to do what we have perceived in prayer, then by degrees we begin to be moved by the Spirit.

## WORK

God communicates to us also through our work and assigned duties. You are now students of Philosophy. God communicates to you through all that you are learning, if you take studies, not as something to do in order simply to pass exams, but to do everything you have to do with all your energies. What does not seem to be of any value to you now can one pop up in your minds exactly when you need it.

Besides studies you have all sorts of community and individual activities you have to do. When you do all this without complaining or arguing, but with all your heart no matter how unpleasant, you some how discover what God has to say to you day by day. God speaks to us using very ordinary events. All he wants is that we carry out our ordinary duties extra-ordinarily well. Recall the story of Mary and Joseph carrying out a very ordinary Jewish practice of taking a first born male child for circumcision. This was the occasion God choose to reveal to them through the prophet Simeon what the child was destined to become. It was also the occasion that served as the fulfillment of the old man's dream.

The Benedictines had their motto *ora et labora*; a motto that kept civilization alive in Europe for centuries. Emmanuel Kant espoused the Philosophy of duty. Do your duties as

well as you can and you will discover the will of God for you.

## RELATIONS

God also speaks to us through the people we meet every day. We usually respond to people with the first emotion that comes at hand, depending on our characters and the attitude we have towards these people. However, in every human encounter there is the best way of responding to the situation. If we learn to listen to people and respond in the most appropriate way: that is the most respectful, kind, loving and helpful way we can, we learn to radiate the Spirit of God who is living in us. We help people meet God who is living in us.

Some of us are introverts. We like to focus on our jobs, and we tolerate interruptions less kindly. If, however, we put aside our spontaneous tendencies and reflect on the best way to respond to people, we grow in the Spirit.

Cardinal Wamala is a very busy man. After all, he is the only cardinal in this country. Yet he is a very approachable person. There are people who are less busy and less approachable. Learn to value every person. There is a saying that to be courteous to superiors is a duty, to equals is courtesy, and to inferiors is nobility. Learn to be noble.

## HOMILY

This morning we talked about the importance of prayer of listening. We said that listening must become something

habitual to us; for we need to be people who know how to listen even in our human relationships. The gospel of today is an illustration of the sensitivity of Jesus to other's feelings and his capacity to listen.

The scene is in the house of Lazarus after he has raised him from death. The family which through the illness of Lazarus and his death had known nothing but sorrow is now full of joy and gratitude to Jesus. They are full of joy and gratitude as they host him. At the same time Jesus has been for sometime preparing his dear ones for his coming death. We have heard that it was six days before the Jewish Passover. That is, six days before his own passion and death. Some of the disciples have been trying hard not to believe that what he says is going to happen to him. They saw yesterday's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. They argue to themselves that too many people love Jesus for anything to happen to him.

But among the disciples who are more sensitive is Mary Magdalene. She is so grateful to Jesus for so many things. She is grateful to him for her own conversion. She was lost to the family and to herself when Jesus rescued her from a loose living. She is so grateful to him for the restoration of the life of her brother. And now with the heart of a woman who loves intensely she is sensing the truth in Jesus' words: he has only days to live among her dear friends. Perhaps this is the last time he is hosted in their home. She cannot stop him from going to his destiny even if she wanted to, and she knows it. She cannot give him a hug; she is too respectful to do that, and it would not help much.

Typical of Mary she does what is in her power to do. Why do I say typical of Mary? Recall the time when she had just been converted. Oblivious of what others would say, she entered the home of a Pharisee to show gratitude to Jesus. Just to do that was so daring. A former prostitute to enter the home of a Pharisee. Recall how the woman caught in adultery was being dragged by Pharisees to be stoned to death. Mary had entered the house, and, not afraid to embarrass Jesus, had wept at his feet, anointed them with oil and wiped them with her hair. Like her trademark, she anoints his feet again, this time not with tears but with her most expensive oil, and she wipes them with her hair. She must have heard very long hair.

What has all this got to do with listening? We see the sensitivity of Jesus in both scenes. In the first incident anyone of us would have been so concerned with “what are the others thinking?” I am sure I would have been embarrassed. Imagine I come to attend a graduation at PSJ. While we are in the main hall and the Rector of Guest of Honor is giving a speech, a beautiful girl known to the seminarians comes in. She comes straight to where I am and kneels down. The speech is interrupted. Everyone’s attention is distracted. People croon their necks to see what she is doing. She takes off one shoe, then the sock. Starts kissing the toes one after the other while weeping, then dries the foot with her hair. Or since we have short hair, let us say that she uses her scarf. Jesus at that occasion looked in her motives and could point out to the guest, that she had done this out of the deep gratitude to God. I might have pulled away my foot in self-conscious embarrassment!

In the same way even on this occasion Jesus is sensitive to the motives of Mary. Filled with love and gratitude and aware of Jesus' coming death, she does what is in her power to do in order to show him love. Perhaps Judas was quite right: the oil could have been sold for a high price and the money could have been given to the poor. Judas evaluated the act as we often do. But Jesus looked at the motive as we all should learn to do.

Let us pray for the grace to learn to be more sensitive to the feelings of others.

## DISCUSSION

In place of the usual discussion we shall have an exercise in listening to sensations, to our bodies, to the imperceptible, to God's presence; we shall use our memory, our imagination to go back 200 years, to go forward to the day of our death, to go forward 200 years and 6000 years from now, with God

## TALK 5: THE LOVE OF CHRIST URGES US ON

Scripture Texts

*(2 Corinthians 5:14-15)*

*(Philippians 3:7-11)*

*(1 Corinthians 13:1ff).*

*(Romans 8: 35-39).*

Maybe some of you have ever fallen in love. Maybe some are in love even right now. The experience of falling in love is something beautiful. It can happen to anyone including a

person who has made a decision to belong to Christ alone. If it has not yet happened to you it may still happen to you one day. It requires a lot of maturity, self control and the help of God in order not to make a mess of your life and the life of another person. I will narrate to you an experience of falling in love I had right at the moment when I was deciding to enter the seminary 30 years ago. I wrote about this experience in my book “In God’s Own Image”... Somehow by this experience God showed me what I was about to give up.

Some of you I am sure have stories to tell. However, it would take too long to listen to eleven love stories. We can say that when people who are committed to Christ or who intend to be committed to Christ fall in love, they are faced with about four choices each of which has its own consequences, good or bad. On one extreme they may ignore each other and live as if the other does not exist or does not mean anything to them. That can bring a lot of stress for both. The emotions that are denied and repressed may eventually come out in some unhealthy manner. On the other extreme they may give free reign and go where their heart leads them; forget about what everyone will feel, think and say and get into a new union. In this case they compromise what they believe in, and they hurt so many others in the process. They carry with them the sense of guilt before God and before society. Others may want to take a middle course by compromising and cheating; entering into an illicit and clandestine relationship while outside they give the impression of being loyal to their commitments. They too will experience an illusory

happiness which sooner or later will yield bitter consequences. There is a fourth alternative of remaining steadfast to their commitment, drawing out of this new relationship whatever joy and consolation is permissible and honorable, and accepting the pain of staying away from a total union; which pain like all unsolicited but graciously accepted pain, leads to growth and purification.

With the help of God it is possible for us to develop a love for Christ that is stronger than the love of any human being or any other created thing that we value. This is the love which Paul attained as he gives testimony in *Philippians 3:7-11*. Paul came to a point when he regarded all that he had previously cherished and passionately defended as a loss in comparison to his love for Christ. Paul is firmly convinced that his love for Christ is so strong that nothing at all can shake it *Romans 8: 35-39*. This love for Christ goes hand in hand with the love for neighbor *1 Corinthians 13:1ff*.

But just how does one acquire such strong love for neighbor and for Christ? In the first place love as a virtue is a gift from God. Paul did not decide on his own to follow Christ. He was on his own business contrary to Christ's interests when he was called. We must constantly ask that Christ powers his love in our hearts and makes us learn to love our neighbor. In the second place, since love is God's commandment it is something that we can choose to do and to develop with our wills. It is a conscious decision we make.

Yesterday we mentioned that one of the important of opening ourselves to the work of God's Spirit in our lives



and of growing in love of each other is learning how to listen. We listen to God not only in silent meditation. We do not have to guess at what God has said to us. It is all there in the scriptures. We grow in the love of God by listening to what he has told us in the scripture and trying to live by it. Every day we hear the word of God in the readings of the lectionary. Quite often they do not make any impression on us unless we make a conscious effort to listen to what they are saying and try to see how we can apply them concretely in our individual lives. Jesus told us explicitly that if we love him we will obey his commandments. It does not help at all to call him Lord, Lord when we do not obey what he tells us to do. We grow in the love of God to the extent that we seriously strive to do what he commands us. At times doing what God commands us to do is not fun at all. It requires all our strength. Yet we must believe that God never commands us what is beyond our power to do.

Every day God gives us new opportunities of exercising our love for neighbor. Usually our love must be expressed among people who love closest to us. The situation defines what shape love must take. It may be cooperation in common activities, it can be refraining from joining others in criticizing someone in his absence, it may be a call to overcome our prejudices against particular individuals, it can be assistance of a brother in some difficulty he has.

This afternoon we shall spend time to share on a particular form of brotherly love, and that is, exchanging positive strokes or Affirmation.

## DISCUSSION

Each member comes forward in class. The others will make an effort to tell him the good they see in them. Let him swallow the complement and say thank you. Do this in turn until all eleven have received their complements. Avoid flattery or ridicule; it does more harm than no complement at all.

## HOMILY

One of the amazing things about Jesus we observe in today's gospel episode is his love and self-control. He was troubled in spirit to be eating with a man who is about to betray him. Betrayal by a person who is your friend is a painful thing, and Jesus had human feelings being human. But he finds a way of making Judas aware that he knows what Judas is going to do as a last warning and attempt to dissuade him, without openly exposing him to the rest of the apostles. They did not have as much self-control and could have acted in an uncharitable manner. Jesus also knows that the rest of the apostles are going to desert him, starting with Peter his future successor. Yet he lovingly and fondly tells them: "my little children, I will not be with you any longer." Some of these 'little children' were old enough to be his father.

Jesus puts aside his pain and considers others. This we see over and over again. We shall here him tell the women of

Jerusalem not to mourn for him but for their own children. He sees what will happen to this city in the future, even in the middle of his carrying the cross. He makes provisions for his mother now that he is about to die, even while hanging on the cross. He forgives those who crucify him because they do not know what they are doing. He promises paradise to the repentant thief. Right now he considers the positive side of the suffering he is about to undergo. He says: "Now has the Son of man been glorified, and in him God has been glorified." Such self-control is a life of constant discipline and love.

We who aspire to gain such love and power and self-control may still be at the level of the apostles: betrayers and deserters. He knows which one of us is about to betray him in a moment of temptation. He knows which one will desert him in a moment of trial, in spite of all our efforts and avowal of loyalty like Peter. Yet he can look at us with love and call us his little children.

He also sees beyond our future betrays; he sees the hero in each one of us. He knows that if in humility we ask forgiveness from him like Peter, one day we shall be able to gain the full maturity and heroism that is within each of us.

Like in the case of Isaiah God has great plans for each of us. Isaiah perceived that he had been called as a prophet to the Israel nation. A time came when he felt that he had toiled for nothing, because of the hardness and resistance of the Israelites. Yet God told him that it is not enough that he is a prophet just for the small nation of Israel. His vocation was for the good of the ends of the earth. And in

fact that prophecy is finding fulfillment right now as we listen to the prophecy of Isaiah. We belong to nationalities that Isaiah never heard of or dreamed that his words would ever reach.

## TALK 6: DO YOU WANT TO BE WELL AGAIN?

Last evening we did not have time to evaluate the exercise of exchanging strokes. Quickly, each one will say three strokes that struck me most. We all have stroke filters. There are those that we do not find convincing. These we forget first. Those that strike us most are the ones we are likely to retain longest. That is why it is important that when you give a complement you do not do it hurriedly or jokingly. Better to give someone a complement you strongly believe in, otherwise the person will not swallow it.

What we did as a class exercise should become our normal and spontaneous way of dealing with each other. We should learn to point out the good in others. When we do this then our brothers are also ready to accept our corrections, because they can sense that we give them in a manner that is constructive and is meant to help them and not to put them down.

Today we shall have our penitential service. For that reason I suggest that at midday we have our usual sharing. Then we have the penitential service at 3.30 pm. Then in the evening at 6.00 pm we shall have Holy Mass in place of adoration.

The theme for today and for our penitential service is “Do you want to be well again?” It is taken from John 5:1-14. The first thing if we are to repent of our faults is to want to be well again. We are not paralytic. As I can see the majority of you are sleek and in good health. Yet all of us suffer different degrees of paralysis of our sins.

Like the paralytic we make efforts to get well again without success. We make resolutions which we break again. We find ourselves repeating our mistakes over and over again. We cannot overcome them without the help of Jesus.

Jesus can and does make us well again in the Sacrament of Reconciliation when we allow him to. We can in our pride refuse to go to confession for a long time. We are like a paralytic who would answer him: No thanks I am quite alright. I am here simply admiring the wonders of nature; how the water wells up now and again. If the man had answered like that he might have died a paralytic. But when we admit our mistakes, Jesus, in the words of a priest tells us to pick up our sleeping mats and go home again. It is as simple as that.

We must never forget that while we receive forgiveness so simply, it has cost Jesus his blood. Recall another paralytic who was lowered through the roof for Jesus to heal. Recall that before he healed him he asked the skeptics around him what they thought was easier, to say to the man that your sins have been forgiven or to say to him that pick up your mat and go home. If I had been there I might have answered that it is easier to say your sins have been forgiven you. I have said that to so many people, but I have

never dared tell a paralytic to pick up his sleeping mat and go home. There are here men and women paralyzed by leprosy. Does any of you feel the courage and the faith to tell any of them to go home promising that his or her feet and hands will be normal again? For Jesus however, it is evident that it was easier to heal physical ailment. To forgive sins he had to shed his blood; the blood of the new and everlasting covenant, shed for us so that sins may be forgiven. That was not easy at all as we are going to hear on Good Friday, two days from now. This is the price that was paid for something that we get so easily. The embarrassment we feel in going to a priest for confession is nothing in comparison with what Jesus paid to obtain for us this sacrament.

After he had cured the man he met him later in the temple and told him that now that you are well be careful not to sin again or something worse may occur to you. The essential condition for us to receive absolution is that we resolve not to sin again. We must have that intention at least at the time when we leave the confession. We must know that sin is like a disease. Each time you suffer the same disease after you have been cured of it, the body becomes correspondingly weaker. The medicines also become less effective. Your immunity is weakened. Should you get another disease you will have less resistance than when you had never contracted the disease at all. The more we repeat the same mistakes with the complacency and presumption that we shall go to confession, the more we are weakened. Although God's forgiveness is never weakened our seriousness in repentance can dwindle. That

is why what Jesus told the paralytic is important for us also to take to heart: “now that you have been made well again be sure not to sin again or something worse might happen to you.”

## DISCUSSION

Share about the difficulties and benefits of going to confession

## PENITENTIAL SERVICE

We are going to use today’s gospel as text for our reflection during this Penitential Service. This is Matthew 26:14-25. This gospel reading focuses on Judas’ betrayal of Jesus. We are told that Judas went to the chief priests and asked them what they were willing to give him if he betrayed his master and they promised him 30 silver pieces, enough money to buy a plot of land. From then on he sought an opportunity to betray Jesus. Then during supper Jesus showed him that he knew his plan, and that Judas should consider changing his mind for his own good not out of pity for Jesus, but Judas went on with his plans. Our sins are all a form of betray of Jesus. That is why we should learn some fundamental lessons from this tragedy.

1. Temptation hides from our sight the real consequences of our sinful actions. How could Judas have hoped to enjoy that money with his Master betrayed? How could he have hoped to escape the wrath of criticism of his fellow apostles

and all the disciples of Jesus? All this he did not consider; he only looked at the glitter of the money. We must strive not to suppress the voice of conscience within us.

2. By sinning we gain so little in exchange for so much. The bigger the sin the greater the loss. Judas' sin is so big that he gets absolutely nothing in exchange for everything. Judas could have been counted among the apostles. He could be one of the great saints, the foundational pillars of the Church. We cannot be categorical about his final destiny. But we must not take lightly the words of Jesus which he told him that if he went on with his plan, it would have been better if he had not been born. We also recall as the apostles were electing another person to replace him, Peter said of him that he had abandoned his position to go to his proper place.
3. Sin grows. Little faults lead to big ones. Judas' decision to betray his master for money was the result of growth of greed in him. We heard in yesterday's gospel John telling us that he was a thief and he used to help himself from the common fund of which he had charge. What seem to be small faults in us can grow into big sins unless we check them with the sacrament of Reconciliation and with a firm resolution not to commit them again.



4. Judas could have done well if he had pursued another vocation besides wanting to be an apostle. Even if he had betrayed Jesus his sin would not be as serious as when he was an apostle. This tells us about the importance of praying for discernment of the vocation. We don't have to be priests at all costs. It is better to be a good Christian and a bad priest.
5. One sin can mar and overshadow all the good that you have done. We hardly know any good thing that Judas did. All we know is that he betrayed Jesus. Even in the list of apostles' names he is mentioned as the one who was to betray him. Yet this is something that happened only one day among all the time he was Jesus. One single did can bring down all your reputation. It also mars the image of all that is associated with you. We know Judas as one who came from Iscariot. That place got a bad name just as Magdala is associated with the former life of Mary of Lazarus.
6. The greatest sin of Judas was the sin of despair. I am sure that if after realizing his mistake Judas had to Jesus for forgiveness he would have obtained it, the way Peter did. It is true he felt remorse and threw the 30 pieces of silver to the Pharisees, but this was remorse not repentance. Remorse makes us look down on ourselves with misery. Repentance makes us look to God for forgiveness.

There is no sin so great that Jesus cannot forgive, if we turn to him with sincere repentance.

## HOMILY

I said a lot in the first talk and in the Penitential service. I don't believe in too much food for thought. I will say little in the homily today.

I invite you to reflect on the words of Isaiah in the first reading. It is a prophecy of the suffering Messiah, obviously pointing to Jesus and chosen specifically to suit our meditation during this time of Holy Week. It is he whose beard was torn, who was spat on. Yet I would like to invite you to take the opening words as applying to us his disciples as well.

The Lord has given me a disciple's tongue, so that I may find words to say to the wearied. He also has given me a disciple's ear. Each morning I listen to what he has to say.

If we are to be messengers of God we must first have disciples' ears. We must learn to listen to what the Lord has to say. You cannot claim to be a messenger of anyone if you ignore to listen to the message when it is given. Only then can we ask to have a disciple's tongue.

## RÉSUMÉ

### INTRODUCTION

Prayer: We gather together Lord

As we recall the great events of our salvation

As we hear waves of unrest in the country

To reflect on our own call and role in all this

We ask for the gift of the Spirit to enlighten and empower us

Our Father, Hail Mary

Self-introduction

Name

Diocese of origin

Present activity

Short history

Students' self introduction

Names

Diocese of origin

Present class

Introduction of what we would like to do tonight

Get acquainted with each other

Be introduced to the theme

Agree on the time table

Theme: Fan into flame the fire of God's Spirit

Source: Paul's letter to Timothy

Read 2Timothy 1:6-8

Tonight reflect on these two statements

God did not give us a spirit of timidity

But of Power and Love and Self-control

Fan into flame the flame of God's Spirit

Timetable

Lauds 7.30 am

Breakfast 8.00 am

Talk 9.00 am

	Break tea	10.00 am
	Mass	12.00 noon
	Sharing	03.30 pm
	Adoration	12.00 pm
	Super	07.00 pm
Last day		
	Lauds	7.30 am
	Breakfast	8.00 am
	Talk	9.00 am
	Break tea	10.00 am
	Sharing	12.00 noon
	Penitential ser.	03.30 pm
	Mass	12.00 pm
	Super	07.00 pm

## TALK ONE

### Prayer

Song: Spirit of God in the clear running water  
 Lord Jesus you came to set fire on earth with your Spirit  
 The fire of your love, of power and of self-control  
 You were anguished as long as it was not yet ablaze  
 You kindled this fire by your baptism on the cross  
 The Spirit came upon your apostles and transformed them  
 It is your desire that we too burn with the same Spirit  
 Send him now to fill us with the power of your love  
 Let him burn away all our timidity and fear  
 Let him take away our laziness, consume all bad habits  
 Let the Spirit make us completely docile to you

### Scripture texts

Luke 12:49-50 I have come to bring fire on earth  
 Jeremiah 20:9 When I say will no longer speak in his name...  
 Luke 24:20 Were our hearts not burning?

### Purpose of the talk

It is God's desire that we burn with the fire of his Spirit  
 God has already done what is necessary that this happens

The ball is on our side

Jeremiah  
 Is called the suffering prophet  
 Was called for the hard task of prophesying doom  
 To a people he loved so passionately  
 Yet the message was unwelcome, turning friends into enemies  
 They once threw him in a well to kill him  
 Fortunately the well was dry, the king saved him  
 He tried to suppress it, yet it burnt within him

The men going to Emmaus  
 Were disciples of Jesus  
 Who had hoped in him as the promised Messiah  
 But were now convinced that it had all been an illusion  
 They were leaving the mad city with total discouragement  
 Jesus explained to them scriptures that were already familiar  
 Yet they seemed to hear them for the first time  
 “Were our hearts not burning...”  
 That very moment they forgot all the fatigue  
 They were so eager to share their new discovery

Jesus wants to set our hearts burning as well  
 To make you a priest who is eager to share  
 Who even in adversity can't hold back the message  
 Even if you choose another career, you can still burn

His dream  
 Do not imagine I have come to bring peace on earth  
 How I wish the fire was burning already  
 Before his passion the disciples were cold  
     In spite that he spent a night in prayer  
     Mt, 17:17 how long must I put up with you?  
     John 14:9 Have I been with you all this time Philip..  
     What were you arguing about on the road?  
     Mt 26:31 this very night you will all desert me  
     Could you not watch with me for one hour?  
     Only John was with him at the cross

But the same men became transformed  
 Luke 24:49 I am going to send you what the Father promised

They stayed in prayer  
At Pentecost they were transformed  
The transformation persisted to the end of their lives  
Certainly, they had difficult moments of doubt  
The same thing can happen to us  
We already received the Holy Spirit  
    Baptism and confirmation  
    Eucharist and Penance  
Yet we do not always burn with zeal  
It is our duty to fan God's Spirit into flame  
Yet first we must what blocks the Spirit  
This will be the subject of our next talk

## TALK TWO

### Scripture Readings

Revelation 3:15-21 because you are lukewarm...  
Luke 7:28-35 To what can I compare this generation...  
Jeremiah 14:18 for both prophet and priest ply their trade...

### Recap

Yesterday we say that it was Jesus' dream to set fire...  
We saw that he accomplished the dream among the apostles  
He has given us the potential to realize that dream  
We shared about role modes, different gifts of the Spirit  
We shall share about our own giftedness

### Today's focus

On the sad reality of mediocrity  
This is observable in the world around us  
It is observable in the Church  
We also sense it within ourselves

### Scripture: the Church in Laodicea

Neither hot nor cold  
Ever had lukewarm water for bathing?  
Or taken tea or soup that is lukewarm?  
They were pampered into self sufficiency by wealth  
They lacked real wealth: not what we have but what we are  
We can be harmless leaders who do not good either

### Luke 7:32: Scholarly indifferentism

People went to John the Baptist, including tax collectors  
John was the greatest among those born of women  
Pharisees rejected him as possessed, fanatic  
Jesus came eating and drinking  
They considered him too lax  
That way they don't have to change  
Education can make us rationalistic  
Beware of intellectual pride, philosophy can pamper  
We can despise the faith of the people as simplistic  
We can remain unmoved by scripture

Romans 7:21-25 Looking inside self  
I have the desire to do good  
Yet I find myself doing what is wrong  
How many of your Lenten resolutions have you done?  
What are the things you never fail to confess?

Jeremiah 14:18  
If I go in the city behold the disease of famine  
If I go out behold the sword  
Ancient warfare of laying siege  
Social decadence due to failure of religious leaders

Illustration of a religious leader who no longer has fire  
Charcoal stove gives heat and light  
It cooks food to give it taste  
We can't touch the embers with bare hands  
But when it loses the fire  
It becomes incapable of giving heat  
It becomes cold and ugly  
Anyone can touch it  
We only can give soot

### TALK THREE

Recap. We have seen so far  
God's plan that his Spirit direct our lives  
The unfortunate fact that we remain lukewarm  
Yesterday's gospel: we are driven by interest not truth

In this talk we see  
If our hearts are to burn we must accept the gift of God  
Sub-theme: If you knew the gift of God  
Story of the Samaritan woman  
    Know the gift  
    Know the giver  
    Know the price

We heard the reading of the Passion on Palm Sunday  
Not nails held Jesus on the cross  
But for his love for us



He could have gotten off as his tormentors challenged  
 In the same way as he could have got angels to defend him  
 To make sure they understood the meaning of his death  
 He instituted the Eucharist the day before  
 My body which will be given up for you  
 The blood of the new and everlasting covenant shed for you  
 We try to understand the three things  
 The gift: everlasting life  
     Think of the story of Midas  
     Think of the request of Solomon 1 Kg. 3:4-15  
     God does not tell us to ask for anything  
     He has already offered it  
     Something far beyond our imagination  
     Story of “Embraced by an Angel”  
 The Giver  
     The Father gave us the Son  
     The Son gave himself  
     Both Father and Son give us the Holy Spirit  
     People were excited by an sms from the president  
     I was excited to shake hands with the pope  
     Here it is God, not some important personage  
     God in all his might could not have given more  
     Jesus: no greater love than this...  
 The price: the Passion and death of Jesus  
     What is the most expensive gift you gave?  
     Suppose it was thrown in your face  
     We sometimes through God’s gift in his face  
     And choose to go off with his enemy  
 We cannot fully understand what God has done  
     Full understanding itself is a gift  
     Think of the words of the composer: Amazing grace...  
     Think of “Late have I loved you o beauty so ancient...”  
     These people had understood the gift and giver  
     We pray for a similar understanding  
     This understanding inevitably kindles the heart

## TALK FOUR

### Introduction

Yesterday we started seeing how we fan the Spirit into flame

By appreciating the gift of God

By recognizing the Giver

By understanding the price

Today we see another element: Listening to God

We use Psalm 46:11

Be still and know that I am God

Listening is important also in human relationships

Friendships are built through listening

Friends are lost through not listening

We all appreciate being understood

We resent it when we are misunderstood

For a future priest listening is an invaluable skill

People will come to you with their problems

Often you have no solution

However, listening alone is therapy

### We need to listen to God

In order to allow him to work in our lives

Too often we do the talking to God

### God spoke to people in different ways

To Abraham and the other patriarchs

To Moses and other prophets

To Mary and Joseph

### We may think he speaks only in spectacular ways

Yet God communicates all the time

e.g. A radio that not create the sounds; it captures

We too hear only if we tune in

We can hear God speak

When we pray

In our duties, work and study

Through the different people we encounter

Through painful events

### Prayer of listening

It is best learnt through practice

It will replace the time for discussion  
 Sit still, breath evenly, close eyes, do not move about  
 Be aware of sensations
 

- Hear and isolate sounds
- Listen to your body

 Listen to your mind and heart
 

- Thoughts
- Emotions
- Memories
- Imagination

 Listen to faith
 

- So many things in fact we accept on faith
  - Date of birth
  - Who your father is
  - When you travel you trust the driver
- The imperceptible. E.g. heart bit, flow of blood
- Be aware of others' presence
- Be aware that God is hear and sentient

 Listen to your

Benefits of the prayer of listening

- Heightens our listening capacity
- Paves the way to meditation and contemplation

We can also

- Listen to vocal prayer, Psalms, Mass texts
- Listen to the daily readings
- Let words strike you as if for the first time

The Spirit starts moving us

- When we start acting on our incites
- Then the Word of God begins to transform us

Listening to God through work

- God communicates through duties assigned to us
- Study with all your strength, not just for marks
- You don't know when what you read will be helpful
- Dedicate yourself to community activities
- God speaks through ordinary activities
  - Mary's life was no spectacular

Yet she is spouse of the Holy Spirit  
God spoke through Simeon and Anna  
They were carrying out an ordinary event  
Recall Benedict's motto: ora et labora  
Recall Kant's philosophy of duty

God speaks through relations  
Through our daily encounters  
We usually respond spontaneously with our emotions  
    According to our character  
    According to mood  
    According to our attitude towards these people  
Try to listen deeply to people  
Try to respond with love, kindness, in a helpful way  
Politeness  
    To superiors is duty  
    To equals is courtesy  
    To inferiors is nobility

## TALK FIVE

Scriptural texts

2 Corinthians 5:14-15  
Philippians 3:7-11  
1 Corinthians 13:1-13  
Romans 8:35-39

Recap

Yesterday we saw

That need to listen to perceive what God is saying to us  
We can only be moved by the Spirit if we are docile to him  
In the same way listen counts very much in human relations

Today we investigate another factor: Love

Sub-theme: the Love of Christ urges us on  
Love is the greatest power on earth  
Example of zwei Kraftsquelle of Schoenstaff card

Often the happiest moments of our life involve love  
When we loved intensely  
Or when we felt loved  
Or both

When we are motivated by love we do not count the cost  
We start with the commonest and most abused form of love

Who has ever fallen in love?  
Who is in love right now?  
Falling in love is a beautiful and painful thing  
It happens also to celibates  
If it has not happened to you it might some time  
In itself it is not sinful  
All depends on how you handle it  
With maturity, self-control and intelligent love  
With the help of God  
I narrate to you my experience of love...

Some of you have your own stories of falling in love

It would take too long to hear 11 stories  
You can write down your story and pray about it

There are 4 courses of action we could take while in love

Each of these has its consequences  
We can indulge our feelings without reserve  
We might end up dismissed or causing a scandal  
We can ignore the other person  
We may end up repressing and acting abnormal  
We can cheat and live a double life  
A kingdom divided in itself does not stand  
We can love within acceptable limits

In this case we observe the boundaries  
We do what is best for the other  
We relate with prayer and prudence  
The pain involved is an invitation to grow

With the help of God we can develop a love for Christ greater than any

Like the love of Paul in Phil. 3:7-11  
He counted his earlier values as rubbish  
Romans 8:35-39 Who will separate us from Christ?

This love goes hand in hand with love of neighbor 1 Cor. 13  
How do we develop such love?

John 15:9-10

To love Christ is to keep his commandments

Then we become his friends

God's will becomes our will

Then our will becomes God's will

In that case whatever we ask we get, like God

How do we grow in love of neighbor?

By consciously choosing acts of love

By recognizing and responding to daily opportunities to love

Usually among those closest to us

In the smallest things

e.g. affirming rather than saying hurtful things

listening and attending to each other's needs

Responding graciously to others' requests

Fighting back our prejudices

Seeking the good of others

Cooperating in communal activities

## TALK SIX

### PENITENTIAL SERVICE

Basic text

The gospel of today

Matthew 26:14-25

Judas is the dominant figure

He went to the chief priests and Pharisees

He looked for an opportunity to betray him

Jesus warned him in vain

Our sins are a form of betrayal of Jesus

Fundamental lessons from the text

Temptation hides from us the real consequences of sin

Judas only saw the money

He dreamt of being rich

He forgot friendship  
 He forgot whom he was betraying  
 He did not reflect what would happen  
 How would fellow disciples react  
 He refused to listen to warnings  
 We too receive warnings  
 By sinning we exchange so much for so little  
 Recall Essau and the bowl of porridge  
 The bigger the sin the greater the loss  
 Judas did not enjoy the 30 silver pieces  
 He could have been an apostle  
 He could have been a great saint  
 Yet he might be in hell  
     Jesus' words, better if he had not been born  
     Peter: he went to where he belonged  
 Think of people who die for stealing a chicken  
 You can lose a vocation due to one silly mistake  
 Sin grows  
     Little faults lead to big ones  
     Judas used to help himself on the common fund  
     Watch your small faults  
     It is they that grow into big ones  
     One who is faithful in little things...  
 Judas could have done well to pursue another vocation  
     He could have been a wealthy man  
     Betrayal would not have been so grave  
     You don't have to become a priest at all cost  
     Important is for you to discern  
     Better a good Christian than a bad priest  
 One bad deed can undo all the good  
     Now we know him as the betrayer  
     He might have done a lot of good things  
     We recall Thomas as the doubting one  
 His greatest sin was that of despair  
     He could have turned to Jesus like Peter  
     After all, Jesus forgave the repentant thief

No sin is too big for him to forgive if we repent  
Never turn away from confession  
Don't confuse remorse with repentance  
Fight pride in the humiliation of confession