



December 2011

“The Greatest Love”

Ω Invocation

Creator of this vast universe,
it is difficult for me to grasp
the length, breadth, and depth
of your love for humanity.

That your desire, yes even long,
to share your friendship with me
is beyond my comprehension.

Yet, I come before You this day,
and I believe that you will hear me and
grant me these requests.

Change my heart:
that I may accept your ways.

Open my eyes that I might perceive
Your presence and action in my life
and in the lives of those I love.

Mold and meld me
into the person Your desire.

I surrender my life to You this day,
in Jesus, my Redeemer, and in the power
of the Holy Spirit, my Sanctifier.

Amen!

Ω the Word of God

In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.
He was with God in the beginning:

through Him all things came to be,
not one thing had its being
but through Him.

In Him there was life
and that life was the light of men;
a light that shines in the dark,
a light that darkness could not overpower.

The Word was the true light,
that enlightens all men.
And He was coming into the world,
that had its being through Him,
and the world did not know Him.

The **W**ord was made flesh
He lived among us,
and we saw His Glory,
the Glory that is His, the only Son of the
Father, full of grace and truth
from His fullness we have, all of us, received
yes, grace in return for grace. *Jn 1: 1-16*

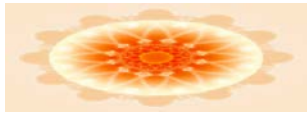
God loved the world so much that He gave
His only Son; so that everyone who believes
in Him may not be lost, but may have
eternal life. *Gv 3,16*

Ω Reflection

God, "rich in mercy", offers humanity immersed
in the darkness of sin an infinite light: Christ raised
up on the cross for the salvation of all.

God is infinite love; He, the Almighty, the Eternal
Lord, the Creator of the universe, is not far from
us, but demonstrates His "wealth" in love,
forgiveness and mercy. God is Father and Mother;
"God cannot but shower His love." God is peace,
God is life, God is everything and wants to give
everything because He is Love.

Even in the most difficult situations we can say:
"God loves us and we believe in love!" Thus, we
can find the true sense of our life and in our every
action say: "**God loves me, God is with me, I am
not alone,** He gives me strength, He does not
judge me nor condemn me, He looks for me,
raises me up, forgives me and places the greatest
trust in me. The Gospel says: "God so loved the
world that He sent His Son into the world not to
judge the world but so that through Him the world
might be saved." God does not judge or condemn.
God loves the world, that is, every person as
he/she is, with all their problems, weaknesses and
evil. And God expressed this love by giving us His
Son as a Saviour.



Identity of the lay Canossian

Ω Reading and reflection
Statutes art. 4, p. 17-18
A reflection follows:

Ω Goal of the Institution

Magdalene of Canossa permeated all her institutions with the vital sap she drew from **Christ Crucified and Our Lady of Sorrows, Mother of Charity at the foot of the Cross.**

Her only goal was **to root deeply in charity**, in generous self-sacrifice and gratuitous, joyous self-gift, the persons following her apostolic projects.

In drawing up the essential guidelines of the Institution of the Tertiaries she stated:

*“Being encouraged by the blessings which the Lord has bestowed up to now on the little works of the Daughters of Charity, the writer wishes that **the Queen of Heaven be more greatly glorified** and would like to implement this Plan now, in order **to extend somehow also the Institute** to accomplish what the Institute as such cannot pursue”.*

At the conclusion of the Plan she wrote:

*“The writer would like that this Sodality be established to **the greater glory and service of our Lord Jesus and of our most Holy and amiable Mother of Sorrows**”.*

The goal was well defined right from the first outline of the Plan of the Tertiaries:

“... to practice and spread the devotion of our Lady of Sorrows, to sanctify oneself

carrying out one’s duties ... and perform the works of charity in one’s own family and outside ...”.

Even the operational limitations of the Institute of the Daughters of Charity urged Magdalene to implement the Institution of the Tertiaries, the aim of which was to overcome them:

“... though the Plan of the Institute of the Daughters of Charity stretches far and wide, it can only respond to the smallest portion of the needs of the Diocese where it is established ...”.

Magdalene explained why:

+ the Tertiaries had no other bonds but Charity, so it would be easy for them to move about.

+ They could reach “where the Institute cannot” and spread rapidly, as one could easily join this Sodality and “at the same time care for the spiritual welfare of many souls”.

It is crystal clear that the Foundress was constantly fixed on the glory of God and on making Jesus loved by a larger number of people of any status and condition”.

Her deepest longing that guided her life and her apostolate was to prevent sin.

Therefore, the Tertiaries, too, should

“... perform those charitable works which prevent, impede and remove sins, which cause very deep sorrow to the Mother of God”.

With regard to the commencement of the Institution of the Tertiaries, Magdalene wrote to Cardinal Zurla as follows.

“... I think that by this means, by and by, ignorance and moral disorder will be largely

removed and Christian spirit revived in the families and in the country-side".

The real good, that is, salvation of souls, was Magdalene's constant yearning. She was ready to achieve it or facilitate it at all costs. She followed this criterion even on 19th February 1895, when she replied to Mgr. Zoppi who had manifested to her the urgent spiritual needs of his Diocese:

"Your description of the spiritual needs of your people aroused in me a pleasant idea ... to reach the hearts of the adult ladies you know and be useful to them through the Tertiaries ..."

Magdalene always looked beyond her actual field of action. Christ on the cross had communicated to her a thirst that not even death could quench: from Heaven she still urges her Daughters to continue the good work she has begun.

M. Maria Nicolai



Ω Reading and Reflection:
Statutes n. 5 + 6, p. 18-19
A reflection follows:

*"During Holy Week, while reading and meditating on the text: **"Inspice et fac secundum Exemplar"** (Contemplate and act accordingly) I was deeply struck for several days and I felt urged to follow the Crucified One ..."*

It was Holy Week when Jesus Crucified is proposed for meditation and contemplation to every baptised person. The reading, Magdalene said, "made such a strong impact that it lasted several days."

The initiative is always God's **"Every perfect gift comes from on high"** (Jm 1:17). It comes from God the Father. He works in that soul who remains meditating on **the eternal Word**

made flesh, nailed by men to the cross.

"INSPICE", "CONTEMPLATE"

Contemplation: **"a pure and profound gaze of the soul on the wonders of wisdom united to a ecstatic sense of wonder and admiration."**

Thus, contemplation is the point of arrival, the result of a journey that involves dialogue between faith and reason.

"Contemplate" is the imperative that is directed to Him from on high:

"Stop meditating, look and contemplate my Crucified Son! He is the most sublime Word in all Scripture; He is my Word."

All Scripture speaks of Him and of Him alone. Contemplate the One who loves you and learn to love thus: "Inspice et fac secundum Exemplar", **"Live what you contemplate!"**

St. Peter says: *"Christ suffered for you and left you an example to follow the way He took."* (1 Pt 2:21).

And the most sublime example is *the breadth, the length, the height and the depth of his love* (Eph 3:18), shown through the particular virtues that Magdalene sees and proposes to those who follow her.

"... have in yourselves the very same sentiments that were in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2,5) who loved us even to dying on the Cross for us.

His love is the human translation of the infinite love of the Father. A person cannot love with a love greater than that of giving up his life. (cf. Jn 15,3).

Christ lives through the power of the love of God; Christ is the living love of the Father. The contemplation of Love Crucified and Risen guides the Foundress to the discovery and the desire of "God alone", the fount and unfathomable ocean of love. God alone is for Magdalene her God Crucified and Risen out of love and for love. He is the God in whom all is lost and for whom one is ready for anything: *"If the Lord is God, follow Him."* (1

Kings 18:21). The Foundress “decides in her heart to make the holy pilgrimage.” (Ps 84:6) **“I will follow you, Lord.”** (Lk 9:61)

Jesus anticipates and ratifies Magdalene’s desire with a word formally addressed to His disciples and which has the tone of an invitation and a command:

“Follow me!” (Jn 21:19)

The following of Jesus is a personal and irrevocable attraction for Magdalene.

The following of Jesus, proposed by Magdalene, is the vocation of many people who, since the foundation, belong to the Canossian Family.

And the virtues that Magdalene desires as an expression of their identification with Christ Crucified, are: **humility, meekness, zeal, fortitude and, to the highest degree, patience, amiability and generosity** in loving God and all those whom He Himself loves.

In particular Magdalene proposes **patience, docility, meekness and kindness** to the lay people of her time and also to the Lay Canossians of today.

The Word took flesh in the womb of the Virgin of Nazareth and became similar in everything to us. Christ is the New Man.

Mary is the New Woman, channel of grace, the way of entry for the Word and the way of return to God in Christ Jesus. **The path of conforming to Christ and Mary passes through the cross.** Each one of us becomes like Christ and Mary when we receive the Word that purifies us and introduces us into the mystery of His death and Resurrection.

“It is necessary to live our spirit and more than ever to conform ourselves in everything to these two great models: Jesus Crucified and Our Lady of Sorrows.” (Ep. III/1, p. 60).



Ω Reading and Reflection:
Statutes n. 7 + 8, p. 19-20
A reflection follows:

Ω “love one another as I have loved you!”

Charity is the distinguishing mark of every Christian. **Charity is the God’s love that acts as leaven to our human love**, it is the grafting of a love that does not cease with death because it is of a divine nature and lets one love as God loves.

“I give you a new command: love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another.” (Jn 13:34)

With Christian love, it is not we alone who love, but God who loves in us and with us.

Jesus came on earth to teach us how to love one another. He loved us to the utmost, offering himself for us. He loved us with the same strength of love with which the Father loved Him.

From the example and the spirit of the Crucified One we learn to love each other mutually. Magdalene points out:

“... they are strictly bound more than anybody else, to observe the most perfect fraternal charity.”

Only on this condition will their apostolate produce in the hearts of our sisters and brothers, whom we meet every day in our families, in our work place, along the streets and everywhere, fruits of conversion and eternal life. It is not we who convert, but the love of Christ in us.

God is love and the one who receives His love cannot keep it for himself but he becomes a channel for others, capable of receiving and, in turn, of giving this power of divine love.

From the Father to Christ, from Christ to us, from us to our brothers and sisters, because everyone may be transformed, through grace, into sons and daughters of God, united to the Only-Begotten whom the Father loves eternally and infinitely.

Death on the Cross is the price of love paid by Christ for us. Every human love that does not unite and conform itself to His, is destined to perish.

"Christ gave up His life for us, and we, too, ought to give up our lives for our brothers." (1 Jn 3:16)

John reminds us again:

"We are in God only when the one who claims to be living in Him is living the same kind of life as Christ lived." (1 Jn 2.6).

And this is the only law of love.

The love of Christ on the Cross surpasses infinitely His sufferings. He suffers as a man but loves as God. The powerful attraction for Magdalene is not the suffering of Christ, but the love that makes Him accept **"with invincible patience, meekness and gentleness"** the physical, moral and spiritual sufferings that accompany His death on the Cross.

As members of the Canossian Family contemplating the Crucified One, we are called to consider and to reflect on these interior dispositions of Christ in order to learn from Him to live out and to practise such dispositions in the daily events of our lives. No more envy, jealousy, hatred, desire for vindication, for revenge, but **patience, docility, meekness and gentleness.**

Magdalene wants us to be beneath the Cross like John and like Mary, to be strong in trial like them; to be patient and loving like them: *"I appeal to you by the gentleness and patience of Christ"* (2 Cor 10:1) says Magdalene with St. Paul, to be strong and unshakeable in faith, keeping firm in the hope we profess (Heb 10:23), but **above all, "be rooted and founded in Christ"** to be able to understand always better "... with all the Saints the breadth and the length, the height and the depth, until knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you are filled with the utter fullness of God." (Eph 3:17-19).

The Spirituality of the laity

The forms and tasks of life are many but holiness is one, that holiness which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit. But each one is bound to pursue the holiness and perfection of his/her own state. Everyone must advance along the way of a living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity.

The Laity are called to **follow Christ in their daily family life, in their work and in their commitment to transform the world;** to discover and to meet the absolute of God while remaining faithful to the brothers and sisters of their time and obedient to the Christ of yesterday, today and always.

"Lay people, while carrying on their activity in the world, **cultivate intimate union with Christ** nourishing it in the Church by the spiritual helps common to all the faithful, by **prayer** and the **sacraments**, chiefly by active participation in the **Eucharistic liturgy**. They meditate on God's Word and try to **overcome the difficulties of life with prudent, patient effort by a continuous exercise of faith, hope and love.** Doing everything in the name of the Lord, they see that nothing of what concern them remain foreign to their spiritual life (cf. AA 4).

For every Christian, and more so for a Lay Canossian, life accompanied by the Sacraments in which we are touched and transformed by the Lord, is a precious and indispensable gift. The Sacraments are the greatest treasure of the Church. Through them an amazing event touches our lives. Christ, through these visible signs, comes to us, purifies us, transforms us and makes us partakers of His divine friendship.

Lay people look at the **Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of the Apostles**, as at the perfect model of their spiritual and apostolic life and have a genuine devotion to her.



Prayer

Jesus, we believe in you and love you.

Thank you for offering your life
freely for us.

Help us now to overcome sin
and to love more fully.

May the grace that you offer me now
through the action of the Holy Spirit
guide me to know your will for me.

Transform my heart, I pray,
so that I can hear your call more clearly
as you invite me to the goodness,
truth and love
for which you gave your life.

Draw me near to my sisters and brothers
who also hear your voice
so that together we will have the courage
to live as you have lived and died.

Lord Jesus,
you told the disciples of John the Baptist
to look and listen
to your words and deeds.

You pointed to
your love for the poor, the sick, the weak,
as proof that you are
God's Chosen One.

Fill me, Lord Jesus,
with the same love for the poor,
with that same courage to stand
with the persecuted,
with that same compassion
for the sick and the suffering.

May everyone be able to recognise me
as your disciple
by what I say and do.

Amen!



Questions for

Reflection

- + In every event of my life, do I believe in the love of God who takes always care of me?
- + "Contemplate and act as the Exemplar"
Do I live what I contemplate?
- + Do I follow in the footsteps of Christ, Crucified and Risen, and of Our Lady of Sorrows in my journey of conformation to the two Great Models?



Personal Notes

