



PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR THE PROMOTION OF
THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

24 HOURS FOR
THE LORD
12-13 MARCH 2021

WHO FORGIVES ALL YOUR INIQUITY,
WHO HEALS ALL YOUR DISEASES

(PSALM 103:3)

#24hoursfortheLord

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“Who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases” (Psalm 103:3)

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Introductory notes

*This resource is intended to offer some suggestions to parishes and Christian communities to prepare for the **24-hours for the Lord** initiative. Obviously, these are suggestions that can be adapted according to local needs and customs.*

On Friday evening March 12th and during the entire day of Saturday March 13th, it would be good to have the church open, offering the opportunity for Confessions, preferably in the context of guided Eucharistic Adoration. The event could begin on Friday evening with a Liturgy of the Word to prepare the faithful for Confession, and conclude with the celebration of Mass on Saturday afternoon.

Where, for health reasons, the celebrations of the Sacraments are not allowed, or can be held with a limited number of people, Eucharistic Adoration could be transmitted online, thus preparing the faithful for perfect contrition, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church says: “When it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called «perfect» (contrition of charity). Such contrition remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible” (CCC 1452).

*The **first part** of this resource offers some thoughts to help reflect on the reason for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The texts help prepare the faithful to meet the priest at the time of individual confession in a conscious way. **They can also be used to prepare (alone or with the guidance of a minister) for the aforementioned perfect contrition, in the event that it is temporarily not possible to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.** They may also help overcome any resistance that often blocks one from going to confession. A testimony is given that recounts a personal conversion: this helps to reflect on one's own change and on the awareness of the presence of God in one's life. A person's life is also presented, which can inspire us to do works of mercy and to continue to grow personally after having received absolution from our sins.*

*The **second part** can be used when the Church is open, so that those who go to confession can be helped in prayer and meditation through readings based on the Word of God.*

This Resource could be useful in preparing a catechesis on the need for conversion and on the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Mostly young people, but also adults, ask themselves: why should I go to confession? How do I confess? What do I do after confession? The resource can be a valuable aid in finding the answers.

CONFESSION

“Never give up,
even when fatigue makes itself felt,
not even when your foot stumbles,
not even when your eyes burn,
not even when your efforts are ignored,
not even when disappointment disheartens you,
not even when error discourages you,
not even when betrayal hurts you,
not even when success abandons you,
not even when ingratitude appals you,
not even when incomprehension surrounds you,
not even when boredom lands on you,
not even when everything has the air of nothing,
even when the weight of sin crushes you ...
Call on your God, clench your fists, smile ... and start again!”

St. Leo the Great, Pope

Why should I go to confession?

First of all, we must remember that *the principal agent in the forgiveness of sins is the Holy Spirit*. In his first appearance to the Apostles, in the Upper Room, the Risen Jesus made the gesture of breathing on them saying: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (Jn 20:22-23). Jesus, transfigured in his body, is already the new man who offers the Paschal gifts, the fruit of his death and resurrection. What are these gifts? Peace, joy, the forgiveness of sins, mission, but above all he gives the Spirit who is the source of all these. The breath of Jesus, accompanied by the words with which he communicates the Spirit, signifies the transmission of life, the new life reborn from forgiveness.

But before making this gesture of breathing and transmitting the Holy Spirit, Jesus reveals the wounds in his hands and side: these wounds represent the price of our salvation. The Holy Spirit brings us God’s pardon “by passing through” Jesus’ wounds. These wounds he wished to keep; even now in Heaven he is showing the Father the wounds by which he redeemed us. By the power of these wounds, our sins are pardoned: thus, Jesus gave his life for our peace, for our joy, for the gift of grace in our souls, for the forgiveness of our sins. It is very beautiful to look at Jesus in this way!

And we come to the second element: Jesus gave the Apostles the power to forgive sins. It is a little difficult to understand how a man can forgive sins, but Jesus gives this power. *The Church is the depository of the power of the keys*, of opening or closing to forgiveness. God forgives every man in his sovereign mercy, but he himself willed that those who belong to Christ and to the Church receive forgiveness by means of the ministers of the community. Through the apostolic ministry the mercy of God reaches me, my faults are forgiven and joy is bestowed on me. In this way Jesus calls us to live out reconciliation in the ecclesial, the community, dimension as well. And this is very beautiful. The Church, who is holy and at the same time in need of penitence, accompanies us on the journey of conversion throughout our life. The Church is not mistress of the power of the keys, but a servant of the ministry of mercy and rejoices every time she can offer this divine gift.

Perhaps many do not understand the ecclesial dimension of forgiveness, because individualism, subjectivism, always dominates, and even we Christians are affected by this. Certainly, God forgives every penitent sinner, personally, but the Christian is tied to Christ, and Christ is united to the Church. For us Christians there is a further gift, there is also a further duty: to pass humbly through the ecclesial community. We have to appreciate it; it is a gift, a cure, a protection as well as the assurance that God has forgiven me. I go to my brother priest and I say: “Father, I did this...”. And he responds: “But I forgive you; God forgives you”. At that moment, I am sure that God has forgiven me! And this is beautiful, this is having the surety that God forgives us always, he never tires of forgiving us. And we must never tire of going to ask for forgiveness. You may feel ashamed to tell your sins, but as our mothers and our grandmothers used to say, it is better to be red once than yellow a thousand times. We blush once but then our sins are forgiven and we go forward.

Lastly, a final point: *the priest is the instrument for the forgiveness of sins*. God’s forgiveness is given to us in the Church, it is transmitted to us by means of the ministry of our brother, the priest; and he too is a man, who, like us in need of mercy, truly becomes the instrument of mercy, bestowing on us the boundless love of God the Father. Priests and bishops too have to go to confession: we are all sinners. Even the Pope confesses every 15 days, because the Pope is also a sinner. And the confessor hears what I tell him, he counsels me and forgives me, because we are all in need of this forgiveness. Sometimes you hear someone claiming to confess directly to God... Yes,

as I said before, God is always listening, but in the Sacrament of Reconciliation he sends a brother to bestow his pardon, the certainty of forgiveness, in the name of the Church.

The service that the priest assumes a ministry, on behalf of God, to forgive sins is very delicate and requires that his heart be at peace, that the priest have peace in his heart; that he not mistreat the faithful, but that he be gentle, benevolent and merciful; that he know how to plant hope in hearts and, above all, that he be aware that the brother or sister who approaches the Sacrament of Reconciliation seeking forgiveness does so just as many people approached Jesus to be healed. The priest who is not of this disposition of mind had better not administer this sacrament until he has addressed it. The penitent faithful have the right, all faithful have the right, to find in priests servants of the forgiveness of God.

Dear brothers, as members of the Church are we conscious of the beauty of this gift that God himself offers us? Do we feel the joy of this cure, of this motherly attention that the Church has for us? Do we know how to appreciate it with simplicity and diligence? Let us not forget that God never tires of forgiving us; through the ministry of priests he holds us close in a new embrace and regenerates us and allows us to rise again and resume the journey. For this is our life: to rise again continuously and to resume our journey.

Pope Francis, General Audience, November 20, 2013

Conversion of Joe Eszterhas

May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gal 6:14).

In April 2001 Joe Eszterhas was diagnosed with throat cancer. With this, the world collapsed on the famous Hollywood screenwriter, the author of the script of the very popular (and very scandalous) film “Basic instinct”, starring Sharon Stone.

The diagnosis was followed by radical surgery: 80% of his larynx was removed and a tube was inserted to allow him to breathe. During the postoperative visit the doctors told Joe: “You must immediately stop drinking and smoking, otherwise you will die”.

“I was twelve years old when I started smoking” – Joe wrote in his autobiography – “and fourteen when I started drinking. Now at fifty-six, not a single day has passed in the last forty-four years that I haven't smoked or drunk something alcoholic”.

Joe was born into a Catholic family in Hungary in 1944 at the end of World War II. The family fled from the horrors of war in an Allied refugee camp, from where he later emigrated to the United States. The whole family is marked by the suffering of the mother, who was mentally ill and died of cancer. These events turned young Joe off to the experience of faith.

As an adult Joe Eszterhas began working for a Cleveland newspaper as a crime reporter. So every day, he experienced the dark, brutal and indecent part of his city. In the meantime he discovered that during World War II his father had supported the Nazis and actively organized anti-Semitic propaganda.

In the 1970s the name of Eszterhas appeared in the famous music magazine “Rolling Stone”. In 1978 he wrote the first screenplay for the film “F.I.S.T” with Sylvester Stallone, and then another for “Fleshdance” in 1983. In the 1990s, thanks to the aforementioned “Basic instinct”, Time

magazine featured Joe Eszterhas as the “king of sex and violence in America”. At the end of the twentieth century, Joe was at the height of his Hollywood career; with the writing of sixteen films, he had earned about a billion dollars.

The surgery turns everything upside down.

A month after the operation, sitting on a bench amidst a sudden blistering heat, Eszterhas raved: “I was going crazy. I was shaking. I was staggering. I was delirious. I had no patience at all. I was yelling at my wife Naomi and the boys. My heart skipped beats. I had no appetite. I couldn't swallow anything”. The reason for this state of mind was obvious: “Every single end of my nervous system was craving for a drink and a cigarette”. So Joe decided to run away. “I left home and started walking. I was walking as fast as I could. I was too old to run. I tried to overcome my cravings and my addictions with this march. I was trying to get over the panic. I was trying to overcome self-destruction. I was trying to overcome death”.

Minutes pass and Joe, wandering around the neighbourhood, feels himself falling. “I started to cry. I knew I was hyperventilating. I sat on a curb. Tears streamed down my face. I watched as they splashed on the ground. My heart was beating so hard it blocked out everything around me except my sobs. It seemed that I was no longer human. I listened to my moans. I looked like a wounded animal”.

And it was exactly at that moment when the unexpected happened. “I could hear myself muttering something. I felt I was saying it. I couldn't believe I said it. I didn't know why I said it. I've never said that before. I heard myself repeat it. And then again and again: “Please, God, help me!” I actually knew, according to reality, that I could not have said it, as indeed I could not say anything. My larynx was almost completely gone. This devilish tube was there. I couldn't even whisper, let alone say something. But I distinctly heard myself say it and then repeat it again and again”.

«Please, God, help me!»

I prayed, I asked, I begged for help. I begged God to help me. And I thought to myself: «Me? Asking God? Pleading to God? Praying?» I hadn't thought of God since I was a little boy, but I felt myself begging him for help in continuation, as I groaned in pain. And suddenly my heart calmed down. My nerve endings stopped tormenting me. I stopped shaking and having spasms. My hands stopped jittering. ... I got up from the curb. I opened my eyes.

God's grace works in the human heart in different ways. Joe's conversion reminds us of the biblical scene of the woman who wanted to touch Jesus' cloak to be healed. Saint Ambrose described it as follows: “She touched the hem of his garment, she approached him in a spirit of faith, she believed, and she realized that she was cured. . . . So we too, if we wish to be saved, should reach out in faith to touch the garment of Christ” (Ambrose, *Exposition Evangelii sec. Lucam*, VI, 56, 58).

After this experience of prayer and newfound faith, Joe writes: “I walked home. I thought I could do it. It would be the biggest fight of my life. It would be terribly difficult, but with God's help I thought I could do it. I could conquer myself and win. If I fought hard and if I prayed”.

“Something happened to me on that hellish and sultry day. For a long time I didn't know how to describe it, but now I know. I was saved”.

One of the fruits of the salvation Joe received is his approach to parish life and, especially, to liturgical service. Joe Eszterhas found a very simple but significant role: the crucifer (cross-bearer).

“No one forced me to carry the cross in the parish of the Holy Angels. I did it as a way to thank Jesus for helping me. I felt honoured to do so; it was my pleasure”.

Preparing for confession

Ps 103:3 “Who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases”

Over the centuries the Church has always prayed with the Psalms, to raise to God, through mediation of Christ in the Spirit, hymns of praise and blessing, thanksgiving and glorification to Him who is the Creator, Lord and Father. The Psalter presents the entire history of salvation in the form of prayer, leads us to contemplate the wonders worked by God, his perfections and properties, and the power and tenderness of his involvement in human history, in the events of his people. But it also presents the greatest questions of human existence, such as pain, suffering, illness, loneliness, death and life after death. Essentially the Psalms are prayers addressed to God, but they are also the Word of God addressed to us. Here lies the beauty of this prayer, in a certain sense, dialogical: I turn to God and, in reality, He speaks to me; I pray to Him and, in reality, He teaches me. It is true; it is a dialogue of faith and love between unequals; God is Creator and we are creatures; he is Lord and we are servants, but he is also Father and we are his children. The Psalms teach us to know the heart of God from the Word of God, to speak with Him, and as I speak I learn to listen, to contemplate, to believe, to love. Yet, what is striking in this subtle interweaving of relationships, made up of sonship and discipleship, of fatherhood and lordship, is that God presents himself as a father full of love, fidelity, tenderness, very close to the affairs of men, of his people, attentive to their life and their invocations. The personal God is present and active in the life of his people, he responds with kindness and mercy, with compassion and tenderness to those who call upon him with faith and humility: yes, because he is our God, he is our heavenly Father.

“Who forgives all your iniquity”,

who heals all your diseases. (*Ps 103:3*)

This simple verse contains the whole reason why the praying heart raises its hymn of praise and blesses the Lord: *“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name”* (*Ps 103:1*). It is repeated again, and again till the end of the prayer, to the point that this expression forms a framework within which the length, height and depth of God's merciful love for us unfolds. From God's forgiveness flows joy and happiness of the heart; this is after all the experience of the believer touched vivaciously by the forgiving love of God: *“Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in*

whose spirit there is no deceit" (Ps 32:1-2). Yes, it is true, the Lord forgives all our sins and at the same time heals all our infirmities: he forgives and heals, a single program, that of Emmanuel, God-with-us. He had already said this in the synagogue of Nazareth, that this would be part of his messianic mission: to bring to the poor of the earth the good news of a total salvation, beyond expectations; freedom from material, spiritual and moral imprisonment that chains humanity and relegates it to existential pessimism, to the point of despair; to give sight to the blind who are unable to see God alive and present in their lives and in the events of every day, and in Him those unable to see the unique and beautiful faces of their brothers and sisters, companions on the journey towards eternity. So great is the love of our heavenly Father, who is *merciful and gracious* (Ps 103:8).

We often turn to God in these words: Lord, I really mess up, I feel the weight of my frailties, I often fall back into sin and sometimes I am ashamed to ask you for forgiveness, since so often I fall back into the same sins, or even commit worse ones; despite this, why do you welcome me, forgive me and heal me? Why do you accept me and why are you tender, merciful and gracious? God could answer like this: Because that is who I am, because you are my son, and then because my nature is Love, Mercy and Tenderness; Father above all fatherhood, Holy above all holiness. This is why our heart must go to meet the Lord or at least be encountered by him, because despite knowing how we are formed, that we are therefore sinners, weak, fleeting, He is greater than our sin and our weakness and grants us much more than what our heart dares to hope for.

"He does not deal with us according to our sins ... (Ps 103:10)

So, the hymn of blessing and gratitude that the praying person addresses to the merciful and gracious Lord seems more than justified - a hymn through which one is reminded to recall all the blessings received from God, but also to call to mind the singular way through which the grace of mercy and forgiveness is received. God, the Father, *"does not deal with us according to our sins ... (Ps 103:10)*. This is also true! In fact, the beautiful and welcoming encounter between Jesus and the adulteress of whom the Gospel of John speaks remains imprinted in hearts and minds. In the Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et Misera* (MeM) Pope Francis reminds us that "what is central is not the law or legal justice, but the love of God, which is capable of looking into the heart of each person and seeing the deepest desire hidden there; God's love must take primacy over all else [...]. Jesus looked that woman in the eye and read in her heart a desire to be understood, forgiven and set free. The misery of sin was clothed with the mercy of love. Jesus' only judgement is one filled with mercy and compassion for the condition of this sinner" (MeM 1). Not a word of condemnation or contempt, but only an invitation to sin no more and to continue to move forward with hope,

knowing that from that day onwards she could embark on a new journey in the truth and charity of Christ the Lord, as his faithful disciple; “He did not treat her according to her sins, nor repay her according to her offence”. Forgiveness is the most visible sign of the Father's love that Jesus wanted to reveal throughout his life. Mercy is that concrete action of love which, by forgiving, transforms and changes lives.

“As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him”.
(Ps 103: 13)

Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy, and in him we always need to contemplate the mystery of divine mercy, since it is the way that unites God and man, opening the heart to the hope of being loved forever, despite the limit of our sin. However, on the one hand it belongs to God to use mercy, since paradoxically, in a particular way, mercy manifests his omnipotence of love, while on the other hand he wants this “power” of love to come out of itself, invade and penetrate the hearts of men. What, then, is the place, the particular space in which the tenderness of God touches the heart of man and envelops him with his mercy and forgiveness? Certainly the *Sacrament of Reconciliation*. This is the moment in which we feel the embrace of the Father who comes to meet us to give us back the grace of being his children again. Grace is stronger, and overcomes any possible resistance, because love conquers everything; it is precisely grace that always precedes us, and takes on the face of mercy, which becomes effective through reconciliation and forgiveness. The Sacrament of Reconciliation, therefore, needs to be rediscovered in its central place in Christian life, through the maternal mediation of the Church. In fact, as Pope Francis states: “In the Church’s prayer, then, references to mercy, far from being merely exhortative, are highly *performative*, which is to say that as we invoke mercy with faith, it is granted to us, and as we confess it to be vital and real, it truly transforms us (MeM, 5). But we are not only recipients of the gift of mercy and forgiveness. In a certain sense it makes us co-protagonists of mercy in the Spirit, especially when we leave the confessional, as a scented garden in which we experience the fragrance of the Father's tenderness, we begin a new journey of conversion in hope and charity. The grandiose gifts, received without merit and gratuity, cannot be suffocated in the hearts of the recipients; the forgiveness and mercy God uses towards us are the greatest gifts a man can receive. So, our witness of openness and welcoming others can also lead them to experience the merciful love of God, which the Spirit wishes to pour abundantly into hearts. It is true, therefore, that a new journey can begin from the confessional, recognizing and appreciating what is good in each person, since we were the first to

obtain mercy upon mercy from God. Being with and for others makes us even more aware that God has truly bestowed his benevolence on us with great generosity.

Despite this, however, the fact of feeling unworthy of so much gift can turn into the subtle temptation of suffocating in us, sinners, any positive longing for transcendence. There is a beautiful expression in Pope Francis' latest Apostolic Letter, *Patris corde* (PaC), which gives hope and joy to the heart, because seeing how God not only relies on our good part, but often, in spite of our weakness, realizes his inscrutable designs. So if “the evil one makes us see and condemn our frailty, whereas the Spirit brings it to light with tender love. Tenderness is the best way to touch the frailty within us [...]. Only tender love will save us from the snares of the accuser. That is why it is so important to encounter God's mercy, especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, where we experience his truth and tenderness. Paradoxically, the evil one can also speak the truth to us, yet he does so only to condemn us. We know that God's truth does not condemn, but instead welcomes, embraces, sustains and forgives us” (PaC, 2).

So let us welcome St. Paul's heartfelt warning that the Church, Mother and Teacher of mercy makes her own: “we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God!” (2 Cor. 5:20). Today we want to be reconciled with God, to accept his loving invitation that calls us to himself and, in faith, to show that He, our Father, is truly great in love. We must not surrender to our own weakness, nor be afraid of the setbacks and inconsistencies that we feel in our journey as believers, because having “faith in God includes believing that he can work even through our fears, our frailties and our weaknesses. He also teaches us that amid the tempests of life, we must never be afraid to let the Lord steer our course. At times, we want to be in complete control, yet God always sees the bigger picture”(PaC,2).

How do I go to confession?

When you enter the confessional, the priest warmly welcomes you, addressing you with words of encouragement. He makes the merciful Lord present. Together with the priest you make the sign of the cross saying:

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

The priest helps you to place your trust in God, with these words or something similar:

**The Lord Jesus who came to call and save sinners
welcomes you with kindness.**

Trust in him.

The priest, as is appropriate, reads or says from memory some text from Sacred Scripture, which speaks of God's mercy and His invitation to man to repent.

Rm 5:8-9

**But God proves his love for us
in that while we still were sinners
Christ died for us.
Much more surely then, now
that we have been justified by his blood,
will we be saved through him from the wrath of God.**

Then, you can confess your sins. If need be, the priest will help you, asking questions and giving suitable advice. The priest will invite the penitent to show repentance, reciting an act of contrition or some other similar prayer, for example:

**Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;
God, be merciful to me, a sinner! (Lk 15:18, 18:13)**

The priest extends his hands (or at least his right hand) over the penitent's head and says:

**God, the Father of mercies,
through the death and 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.**

The penitent answers: Amen.

After absolution the priest continues: Give thanks to the Lord for he is good.

Response: His mercy endures forever.

Then the priest dismisses the penitent who has been reconciled, saying:

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

Prayer of the Penitent

Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord! Ps 25:6-7

Or

O Jesus, fire of love, I have never offended you! O dear and good Jesus, with Your Holy Grace I do not want to offend you again, nor ever again hurt you, because I love you above all things. Merciful Jesus forgive me!

What do I do after confession?

“You think: times are bad, times are heavy, times are difficult. Live well and change.”

Saint Ambrose

«The Beatitudes provide the “identity card” of Christians — this is our identity card — because they outline the face of Jesus himself, his style of living. [] The Beatitudes always bring you to joy. They are the paths to reach joy. It will do us good to take Matthew’s Gospel today, chapter 5, verses 1-11, and to read the Beatitudes — in order to understand this very beautiful path, so sure of the happiness the Lord offers us.»

Pope Francis, *General Audience*, January 29, 2020

The life of Carlotta Nobile

Rome, December 20, 1988 – Benevento, July 16, 2013

She was an Italian art historian, violinist, writer and blogger.

Multifaceted personality of artist and scholar, one of the most esteemed young Italian violinists of her time.

In October 2011, at the age of 22, she is diagnosed with melanoma: her initial reaction is anger at what seems to be an irrational and unjust error of fate, in the face of a life always dedicated to study and self-discipline. However, in a few weeks, as Carlotta herself confided to her loved ones, her state of mind goes from the angry question of “Why me?” to that of “Why not me?!” seeing the suffering of others, especially of children with the same illness.

She takes the treatment options and undergoes various operations while continuing her musical and artistic career, often alternating between hospitals and concerts. Sandro Cappelletto says this about her in *La Stampa*: «*The more the treatments exhaust her, the more the diagnoses indicate the end is close, the more does music become her fight against destiny, her real life: and the quality is never reduced*». In April 2012 she opens the Facebook page “Il Cancro E Poi_“ (“The Cancer And Then_”), and in August the site “ilcancroepoi.com” (cancerandthen.com), - anonymous because, as she wrote to a friend six months before her death, «*I hate feeling pitied, I hate those who consider me weak, I have never felt so strong. And I can live a hundred years or ten, but I love my life now more than I ever loved it. And I don't want cancer to stop me. In no way. I just want it to make me grow, I just want it to form me*» - emphasizing with this gesture her artistic and human willingness, generous towards those who ask for words and comfort («*I love to communicate - she writes -. I've been doing it since I was 4 years old with the violin, then I started doing it with words too*»). With this she gives life to a community of thousands of people marked like her by pain and physical fragility, who recognize themselves in her thoughts and reflections, finding support and moral help. Her “reading” of the disease is quite different from all those that normally cross the web: hers is not so much looking at symptoms and treatments as it is deepening of an inner “journey” and “curing” of herself, arising from a cold and lucid analysis of the effects and profound reactions that such a

serious and difficult pathology unleashes in the psyche of those who find themselves having to face it.

«I don't even know how many centimetres of surgical scars I have anymore. But I love them all, one by one, every centimetre engraved on my skin that will never be healed again. These are the attachment points of my wings.»

(Carlotta Nobile, Il Cancro E Poi_ (The Cancer And Then_)

Ever since she was little, Carlotta's personality and nature have always been complex, multifaceted and difficult. Her writings reveal a dramatic view of her life and being; her amazing although very short journey of growth, dominated in recent years by cancer, has enabled her to tame the inner whirlwind, indicating and guiding her towards the Light. In fact, awareness of courage and struggle arises first as a “secular” construct, as a feeling forged by education and culture, but then - three months before her death - it becomes an unexpected religious “recovery” with total abandonment to Faith, lived as a source of serenity for a long time and always vainly pursued and sought after. Until March 2013 her religiosity is still poorly shaped, nourished by doctrine instilled by the family in its growth but undeveloped and still latent in its development; it often happens that a 24-year-old girl – what’s more a musician and art lover - directs her spirituality towards the Infinite without fuss, without too many questions. Her mother worries about this lack of depth; she is sure that if Carlotta turned to religion with complete abandonment she would draw great comfort in her terrible battle. From March 4th onwards Carlotta - suddenly, upon awakening from a cerebral crisis - receives the Grace and the gift of Faith, a strong and very intense Faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ and in obedience to His Holy Church, capable of conveying towards the Transcendent her inner struggles and dominating the disease and her human frailty, conquering it with so much effort and so much discipline. It is as though an award had been granted to her for a way of facing a terrible fate with dignity and courage, opening up to others and always giving - in all circumstances - a smile, love, hope and trust; it is as if that result of the highest acceptance of the Cross, initially conquered “secularly”, was suddenly blessed by the miracle of Grace, which transformed it into a joyful sublimation of pain. It will be “joyful sublimation of pain” until the end, for those three and a half months that remain.

In fact, in the last months of her life, Carlotta lives a profound experience of Faith, which started suddenly on March 4, 2013, upon awakening from a crisis, where she was hospitalised in Milan for a few days. The event, perceived as an enlightenment, is told by Carlotta herself in her anonymous blog about cancer, in what will be her last post before her death:

«My soul is healed. In an instant, on an ordinary day, waking up from a crisis. I opened my eyes and I was another person. And this is a miracle. »

(Carlotta Nobile, Il Cancro E Poi_ , (The Cancer And Then_) April 5, 2013)

Continue Noble in the post cited above:

«And in a moment you understand that it was precisely that cancer that HEALED YOUR SOUL, that restored order to the true essential nature of your life, that gave you back the Faith, the hope, the trust, the abandonment, the awareness of having finally become who for a whole life you did everything to become and never did: a PEACEFUL woman! You understand that it was cancer that finally allowed you to love yourself in an unconditional way, with all your strengths and all your limitations, to enjoy every little moment, to savour every moment, every smell, every taste, every sensitivity, every word, every sharing, every smallest fragment of infinity condensed into a very

banal and precious instant. You understand that it was cancer, with its torment, with its aggressiveness, with its harshness that finally brought you the LIGHT.»

(Carlotta Nobile, Il Cancro E Poi_, (The Cancer And Then_) April 5, 2013)

She wrote to her mother: «*There's a bigger picture. All this has a unique meaning and I am proud to be able to grow like this and live this thing. And how wonderful that I have received faith! How could I live without it? What a vile life! What a dry life without faith! Without trust and abandonment to God! I want to go to Medjugorje this summer! However, this rosary is a wonderful thing, even though I can't see it in the dark, I hold it in my hand and have been praying for an hour. It gives me peace inside... there are no words! Because now I am FINALLY healthy where I had not been for two years; that is INSIDE, in my soul!!!! Everything will be fine, because you are in His hands, and in God's hands everything will be fine ... this peacefulness is so beautiful!*» Her spirituality was greatly inspired by the preaching of Pope Francis and his invitation to young people to carry the Cross with joy (homily of March 24, 2013). On Good Friday 2013, Carlotta, eager to go to confession, was looking for a church in the centre of Rome that was not closed during lunch hour. The only one open was the Church of Saint James in Augusta, in via del Corso. Carlotta met the parish priest Father Giuseppe Trappolini, to whom, during a touching conversation in which Carlotta - as recounted by Father Giuseppe - wept “for Joy”, told her story, the fight against melanoma and the peacefulness she felt in listening to Pope Francis’ words. The priest was quite struck by the coincidence that just the day before he and the other parish priests of Rome had had lunch with the Pope, and the Holy Father had urged them to keep the churches open all day Good Friday to allow anyone who wanted to be able to confess. Father Trappolini therefore told the Pope Carlotta’s story in a letter, and the Pope phoned the parish to assure the girl of his prayers: “This girl gives me courage”, he said. Just at that moment Carlotta had a cerebral crisis in the hospital in Carrara. After regaining consciousness, she had a Trinitarian apparition: lying on the bed in her room, she saw a Triangle of light on the wall.

Carlotta, happy, then wrote to the Pope:

«Dear Pope Francis, You have changed my life.
I am honoured and fortunate to be able to carry the Cross with Joy at 24.
I know that cancer has healed my soul, dissolving all my inner tangles and given me immense Faith, Trust, Abandonment and Peace in the moment of greatest seriousness of my illness.
I trust in the Lord and, despite my difficult and tormented journey, I always recognize His help.

Dear Pope Francis, You have changed my life.
I would like to offer You a prayer ... I have an immense desire to know You and, even if only for a minute, to pray the Our Father with You!
“Give us this day our daily bread” and “Deliver us from evil” Amen.
I entrust this dream of mine to Father Giuseppe and I trust in God!
Pray for me Holy Father. I pray for you every day.
Carlotta»

(Carlotta Nobile, Letter to Pope Francis, April 12, 2013)

Through Father Trappolini, Carlotta was at the point of seeing the meeting with the Pope concretised, but in May 2013 her condition worsened and she returned to Benevento. She spent her

last three months, the most painful, in the family home, during which time she devoted herself to prayer, in a paradoxical state of complete trust, acceptance and gratitude to God.

Although her pain was inexpressible, and despite the metastases and wounds that increasingly tormented her body, Carlotta, before the astonishing eyes of her family, experienced a paradoxical state of grace, smiles, gratitude and peacefulness, without ever complaining, in prayer, in particular the Our Father and the Holy Rosary. The Capuchin Father Giampiero Canelli heard her last Confession: «It was almost she who encouraged me! » he says. In early July, Carlotta said to her brother: «I have earned the Faith, not that of the litanies or anything else, but that of entrusting myself to the Father».

In those days she said she saw a scene that troubled her. She struggled to describe it and that her parents mistook it for a dream: «You were there. You were not there. You neither. Yes you.» she said one after another to the people who were looking after her. A few days later, at the time of her death, the various loved ones were present and absent exactly as she had said. On July 14, Carlotta told her family «It's over!« but she kept smiling and thanking God.

On the last night of her life, between 14 and 15 July 2013, her father was awakened by the following words of Carlotta, repeatedly whispering in a calm tone and looking up at the ceiling:

«Lord, I thank you. Lord, I thank you. Lord I thank you.»

The following day, a few hours before dying, with exertion, she greeted her dear ones for the last time:

«My three wonderful men: dad, Fanfy and Matteo. My sweet mom. What more could I want?!

I'm lucky.»

After two years of battle, Carlotta died at the young age of 24, on July 16, 2013, the day of Our Lady of Carmel.

<https://www.carlottanobile.it/>

<http://www.synod.va/content/synod2018/it/giovani-testimoni/carlotta-nobili--il-violino--la-malattia--e-limmensa-gioia-per-l.html>

VIGIL

« Adoration is essentially an embrace with Jesus
in which I say to him:
“I am yours, and I ask you, please stay with me always.” »

Benedict XVI

Catechetical and prayer meeting with children who had received their First Communion,
October 15, 2005

General Introduction

The vigil that takes place during the “24 hours for the Lord” initiative plays a fundamental role, because it distinguishes the entire event. It would be good that the Blessed Sacrament be exposed during the Vigil, while one or more priests remain available to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

This Vigil is inspired by the words of Psalm 103: 3: “who forgives all your iniquity”, emphasizing the Lord's willingness to totally forgive man's transgressions. The entire Psalm is a prayer from David, a hymn blessing the goodness and love of God. The text lends itself to various spiritual interpretations. We will focus on two aspects: the first highlights the connection between the pure exaltation of God's kindness (*Bless the Lord, O my soul*) because of his forgiveness (*He forgives all your iniquity*). When man blesses the Lord, it means that he recognizes him as the source of grace. David, therefore, raises the hymn of blessing to God, because he experienced the grace of his forgiveness. The second aspect shows the mercy of God which embraces both collective history and the actions of each single person.

The “24 hours for the Lord” event is closely linked to the liturgical season: that is, to the Fourth Sunday of Lent. The joy celebrated on this Sunday, formerly called “Leatare”, arises from personal conversion, from reconciliation with God and from the grace received in the Sacrament of Forgiveness. The Sunday readings (*2Chron* 36: 14-16,19-23; *Ps* 136; *Eph* 2: 4-10; *Jn* 3: 14-21) show, among other things, how God's grace acts in history, despite man's sins. We note that God, rich in mercy, intervenes always and freely to save man, even if man is solely responsible for being defeated by evil. The initiative was set up precisely in the days prior to the Fourth Sunday of Lent to give all the faithful the opportunity to free their lives from sins, thus preparing themselves for Easter.

During the *24-hours for the Lord* initiative, the topics indicated above should be emphasized. However, the planning and choice of themes and biblical passages is always left to the discretion of the pastors and organizers of the event who, in various parts of the world, know the needs of the faithful entrusted to their pastoral care, especially in this time of the pandemic.

As in previous years, the initiative usually takes place in three ways:

1. In small communities such as hospitals or parishes/rectories with a relatively small number of the faithful.

In this case, the entire initiative often takes place on Friday evening. The event can begin with the penitential liturgy, then the Blessed Sacrament can be exposed and, with silent Eucharistic Adoration or Adoration animated by a prayer group (according to the possibilities and needs of the community), everyone is invited to sacramental reconciliation with God.

2. In larger parishes (especially in urban areas), in prefectures (and/or vicariates/deaneries) or where the event is organized among several parishes/communities. It would be appropriate to begin Friday evening with Holy Mass or the Liturgy of the Word. Then the Blessed Sacrament is exposed and Eucharistic Adoration begins, animated by various parishes or by various parish groups.

Those organizing the event should plan the entire program of Adoration as well as its duration, ensuring the opportunity for the faithful to go to confession.

3. In cathedral churches, basilicas, sanctuaries, or in parishes and places of worship that are most significant for the local Church and carefully chosen by the Bishop or by others who have been given the responsibility.

The event should be organized in a solemn way, emphasizing the universality of the Church which is celebrating simultaneously throughout the world. The church should remain open at night, with Eucharistic Adoration animated in turn by various prayer groups and different communities. It is desirable that the Ordinary and the Bishops be present at least at the beginning and at the end of the event, and they too should be available for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. One or more priests should always be present and available to hear confessions.

Whenever possible, a group of specially trained and prepared faithful could invite people who pass by the church to enter and take part in the event (especially churches in the city centre, in historical and tourist centres, in places with a large influx of people, etc.). A simple invitation, a word of welcome, an explanation of the event often constitute an opportunity to open a much more serious conversation, becoming a real moment of evangelization. It is not uncommon that lay faithful, especially among those who have systematically received training in various communities

and prayer groups, can perform an excellent service in helping people prepare for confession by conversing with people who have not attended church for some time and may feel uncomfortable about facing the priest directly.

Songs can be chosen to adapt the Vigil to the particular needs of a specific community (parish, hospital chapel, monastery, rectory, sanctuary, etc.). To develop the recurring themes in the proposed biblical texts, a meditation could be prepared or testimonies could be given, according to the needs and possibilities of the community itself.

Celebrating the vigil in this time of the pandemic

While this pastoral resource is being prepared, the pandemic caused by the sars-cov-2 virus is still raging around the world. We are perfectly aware that the health restrictions imposed by the authorities greatly affect the planning and unfolding of the entire initiative, as well as the individual celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation itself.

1. In the event of an absolute ban on liturgical celebrations

Where the Sacraments cannot be celebrated due to the pandemic, it is all the more necessary to spread the Gospel message of the Lord's mercy among the faithful. This initiative could be an opportune time to comfort the Christian community.

The role of chaplains in hospitals, clinics, nursing homes and many other public and private health facilities is of crucial importance in bringing forgiveness and peace to those most exposed to the risk of the pandemic.

We must remind the faithful that the Church gives us a special way to receive the absolution of sins in cases where it is not possible to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Pope himself explained it to us: "I know that many of you, for Easter, go to Confession to reconcile yourselves with God. But many will say to me today: "But Father, where can I find a priest, a confessor, because we can't leave the house? And I want to make peace with the Lord, I want Him to embrace me, for my Father to embrace me... How can I do this if I can't find a priest?" You can do what the Catechism says. It is very clear: if you don't find a priest to hear your confession, talk to God, he is your Father, and tell him the truth: "Lord, I have done this, this, this ...Pardon me". And ask him for forgiveness with all your heart, with the Act of contrition, and promise him: "afterward, I will go to confession, but forgive me now". And immediately you will return to God's grace"(Pope Francis, *Homily in Santa Marta*, March 20, 2020).

In fact, in number 1452 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church we read: “When it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called “perfect” (contrition of charity). Such contrition remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible.”

In some regions, despite the prohibition of public celebrations, the priest, alone, could bless the people in their homes at a distance throughout the territory of his parish.

Where possible, modern means of communication can be used to transmit the Vigil, thus preparing the faithful for perfect contrition, with a view to sacramental confession, once the health emergency has ceased.

The pandemic can never become an excuse for closing the church.

2. In case of partial prohibition of liturgical celebrations

In most of the world, where the pandemic is present, the faithful are allowed to gather and celebrate the Sacraments, albeit with restrictions on the number of participants and with time limits. Always in accordance with the decisions made by the local Bishop and with the health regulations in force, the faithful could be invited to come to church at different times. To facilitate the groupings of people, while maintaining the necessary distance in the church, the faithful can be invited and divided according to geographical areas (neighbourhoods, village, etc.) or by age. The whole initiative can take place for more than one day, so as to allow people to have a quiet time of adoration and access to a priest who is available to hear confession.

A place for hearing confessions should also be prepared in compliance with health regulations. In recent months, priests have resorted to various solutions in this regard, among which we want to point out two: the first is to prepare a place (a room, the sacristy, etc.), where in privacy, a priest can hear the penitent's confession, while maintaining the distance indicated by the competent health care authorities. The second solution is to use the confessional, sealing it with plastic film (which needs to be replaced and/or disinfected after each penitent), with plexiglass, or with other similar materials suitable for this purpose, following the health regulations.

BEGINNING OF THE PRAYER VIGIL

PENITENTIAL LITURGY

While the priest and ministers go to the presbytery, the assembly sings a hymn or another suitable song.

GREETING

C: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

R: Amen

C. Mercy and peace be with all of you.

R: And with your spirit.

C: Brothers and sisters, tonight we hear David's words in one of his Psalms: "who forgives all your iniquity". How comforting these words are! The certainty and totality of forgiveness is guaranteed to each of us! And in fact, it only depends on us, if we want to turn to him and ask for mercy for our transgressions. Tonight we also embrace in faith the people who are far from the Church and all those who are unable to come and pray with us, so that in the next few hours, dedicated in a particular way to reconciliation, they too may find forgiveness and peace.

Everyone gathers for some time in silent prayer

C: Lord our God, true light of our conscience, open the doors of your mercy to us, call your children back with the strength and sweetness of your love, shatter the hardness of our pride and create a new heart in us. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ ...

LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading

Lv 19:1-2,17-18

From the book of Leviticus

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

«Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: "You shall be holy, for I the Lord God am holy.

You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself.

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord”».

L: The Word of the Lord

R: Thanks be to God.

Psalm Response

From Ps 103

R. The Lord is good and abounding in love.

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me
bless his holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul
and do not forget all his benefits. R.

who forgives all your iniquity
who heals all your diseases
who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy. R.

The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities. R.

As far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion for his children,
so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him. R.

Gospel acclamation

1 Jn 2:5

Praise and honour to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

Whoever obeys his word,
truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection:

Praise and honour to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

Gospel

C. The Lord be with you.

R: And with your spirit

C: From the Gospel according to Matthew

(5:38-48)

R: Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus said to his disciples:

«You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect».

C. The Gospel of the Lord.

R: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ

GENERAL CONFESSION OF SINS

After a brief pause for reflection following the homily, the celebrant says:

On the day we celebrate Christ's victory over sin and death, we too are called to die to sin in order to rise to new life. Let us recognize ourselves in need of the Father's mercy.

C: I confess to Almighty God

R: and to you my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

C: May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life.

R: Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Everyone stands

C: At the Saviour's command and formed by divine teaching, we dare to say:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us;
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.

SIGN OF PEACE

If the health regulations allow it, the Celebrant says:

C: Confident in the words of Jesus and with a heart willing to receive the grace of forgiveness, let us offer each other a sign of peace.

All offer one another a sign of peace

EXPOSITION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

Proceed with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament followed by Eucharistic Adoration with group animation that will continue until the end of the "24 Hours for the Lord".

Individual confessions and absolution follow.

At the end of the Vigil a solemn blessing is given with the Blessed Sacrament. In places, especially where the "24 hours for the Lord" initiative has been celebrated in a solemn way, with the conclusion on Saturday evening, one could end by celebrating the evening Mass for the 4th Sunday of Lent or with First Vespers for the 4th Sunday of Lent.

CARRYING OUT OF THE VIGIL

The present text is a proposal that should be adapted to local traditions and needs.

During the Vigil, always observing the decisions made by the local Bishop, it is necessary to apply all the epidemiological-health regulations in force.

Considering the duration of the vigil, the number of participants, the various organizational possibilities and other factors, animation of Eucharistic Adoration could be done by different groups with different themes changing hourly.

During the celebration of the Vigil, there should be moments for silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

EXAMPLE OF A SHIFT

After the Blessed Sacrament is exposed, there is a moment of silence and then the music group leads a song. This is followed by the reading of a biblical passage.

Listen to the words of Psalm 103

Of David.

[1] Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name.

[2] Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits—

[3] who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,

[4] who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

[5] who satisfies you with good as long as you live]
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

[6] The Lord works vindication
and justice for all who are oppressed.

[7] He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.

[8] The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

[9] He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger forever.

[10] He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.

[11] For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
[12] as far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.
[13] As a father has compassion for his children,
so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.
[14] For he knows how we were made;
he remembers that we are dust.
[15] As for mortals, their days are like grass;
they flourish like a flower of the field;
[16] for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.
[17] But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting
on those who fear him,
and his righteousness to children's children,
[18] to those who keep his covenant
and remember to do his commandments.
[19] The Lord has established his throne in the heavens,
and his kingdom rules over all.
[20] Bless the Lord, O you his angels,
you mighty ones who do his bidding,
obedient to his spoken word.
[21] Bless the Lord, all his hosts,
his ministers that do his will.
[22] Bless the Lord, all his works,
in all places of his dominion.
Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Remain in silence

TESTIMONY/MEDITATION

A testimony of conversion could be given now by a person willing to share how the Lord touched his/her heart with the grace of forgiveness, or read (for example: Joe Eszterhas' testimony found in this resource). In case a testimony is not possible, a meditative text could be read, such as:

Exposition on Psalm 103, St. Augustine

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His rewards” (ver. 2). But the rewards of the Lord cannot be before your eyes unless your sins are before your eyes. Let not delight in past sin be before your eyes, but let the condemnation of sin be before your eyes: condemnation from you, forgiveness from God. For thus God rewards you, so that you may say, “How shall I reward the Lord for all His rewards unto me?” This is what the martyrs considered (whose memory we are this day celebrating), and all the saints who have despised this life, and as you have heard in the Epistle of St. John, who laid down their lives for the brethren, which is the perfection of love, even as our Lord says: “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends this the holy martyrs, then, considering, despised their lives here, that they might find them there, following our Lord's words when He said, "He that loves his life, shall lose it; and he that loses his life for My sake, shall keep it unto life eternal."..."Forget not," he says, "all His rewards:" not awards, but “rewards.” For something else was due, and what was not due has been paid. Whence also these words: “What,” he asks, “shall I reward the Lord for all His rewards unto me?” You have rewarded good with evil; He rewards evil with good. How have you, O man, rewarded your God with evil for good? Thou who hast once been a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious, hast rewarded blasphemies. For what good things? First, because you are: but a stone also is. Next, because you live, but a brute also lives. What reward will you give the Lord, for His having created you above all the cattle; and above all the fowls of the air, in His image and likeness? Seek not how to reward Him: give back unto Him His own image: He requires no more; He demands His own coin. However, instead of giving thanks and being submissive, showing respect and a true religious spirit, that is, in exchange for all these goods that you owed to your God, in exchange for the goods that - as I said above - you received, you have paid him with blasphemous offences. So what will he do? After confessing the sin, he says, I forgive you. He also offers you the reward, but it is not what you offered him: as reward you have paid him evil for good; but he gives you good for evil.

After the testimony/meditation, a song is sung and then there is time for silent prayer.

An intercessory prayer can now be said by the whole assembly

PRAYER FOR THE INTERCESSION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

The Blessed Virgin, Mother of Jesus and our Mother,
who with Joseph her husband adored the Son of God made man on the very night of his birth,

and on many other nights, in Bethlehem and Nazareth, she kept vigil while he slept,
may she be the model for all those who keep night adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.
May your presence as the Sorrowful Mother at the Cross of Christ the Saviour,
teach us to discover in the Eucharist the very sacrifice that redeemed us,
help us to personally benefit from the fruits of this Redemption
and make us feel responsible for becoming involved in the saving function of the Church
that has been given the charge to apply the Redemption of Christ to all men.

and help us prepare the new advent of her Son for humanity.

May she teach us to be an authentic Church.

“The Church of the new Advent,

the Church which is continually preparing for the new coming of the Lord,
must be the Church of the Eucharist and of Penance”.

(St. John Paul II, Adoration, October 31, 1983)

Proceed with a song followed by silent prayer until the end of the prayer time

Depending on the length of the entire vigil, this schedule can be repeated, changing the biblical passages and songs, and alternating the testimonies, meditations and prayers.

Given that it is the season of Lent, it would also be good to include the Way of the Cross. The Holy Rosary and/or the Chaplet of Divine Mercy could also be prayed.

Some biblical passages that could be used in other shifts of the vigil: Lk 6:27-38 (love for enemies - do not judge); Mt 18:23-35 (Parable of the merciless servant); Eph 2:4-10 (God, rich in mercy, dead due to our sins, reborn again in Christ).

As an alternative, the *Lectio divina* could be celebrated either individually or as a community. The following is proposed:

LECTIO DIVINA
IV SUNDAY OF LENT YEAR B

The Word of God

...is listened to

Let us listen to the Word from the Gospel according to John (3:14-21)

Jesus said to Nicodemus: “¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God”.

Good and faithful God,
who never tires of calling wanderers to true conversion
and through your Son raised up on the cross rescues us from the jaws of the evil one,
give us the richness of your grace, because renewed in spirit
we can respond to your eternal and boundless love.

(from the Liturgy)

.....is meditated

The Gospel passage of the Fourth Sunday of Lent of year B is the conclusion of Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus (*Jn 3:1-21*), which the evangelist places in the context of the first chapters of the Gospel, known as the "book of signs". And it is precisely because of having seen "the signs he was doing" (*Jn 2:23*) that many in Jerusalem approach Jesus. Among them, is also Nicodemus, a leader of the Pharisees who goes to the Master at night.

THE SCENE. Before getting to the heart of the commentary on the Gospel text, it may be helpful to put yourself in the scene, trying to picture it. The dialogue takes place in Jerusalem, in a house that is not specified, but which could be the one in which Jesus and his family found lodging on the occasion of the Passover holidays. The meeting takes place at night, an ambivalent symbolic element, with which the evangelist wants to tell about the darkness of unbelief that is still present in Nicodemus' heart, his fears in making a courageous choice before the people, and the need for a certain intimacy, necessary for those who are taking their first steps towards the light.

THE CONTEXT. Nicodemus begins the dialogue with certainty and without question: "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." (*Jn 3:2*). This direct affirmation, perhaps pronounced with the authority that derives from being a leader among the Jews, will come up against the perspectives presented by Jesus in the course of the conversation, which indicate the path that is still to be travelled and the need to *surrender* before the Mystery. Those three solemn revelations Jesus introduced by the formula "very truly, I tell you" (*Jn 3:3,5,8*), cause the night visitor's certainties to go into crisis. By experiencing his own inability to understand the *new life* indicated by the Lord, he is able to freely open himself to the gift that comes from above. The stirrings in Nicodemus' heart can be perceived in the nakedness of the two questions he poses to Jesus: "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" (*Jn 3:4*) and, again, before the revelation of the need to be born of the Spirit, "How can these things be?" (*Jn 3:9*).

THE VERSE. In the final lines of this nocturnal dialogue (*Jn 3: 14-21*), which the Church hears in the liturgy of the Fourth Sunday of Lent, the words of the Lord seem to extend from the speaker to all men and women, rising to a universal dimension in which salvation is offered to the whole

world. The dialogue is no longer limited to a particular historical event, but becomes timely for each disciple who listens to the Gospel.

- **Jn 3: 14-16: the lifting up of the Son.** The Gospel presents the lifting up of the Son as a founding event of faith and necessary to have eternal life. The explicit reference to the episode narrated in the book of Numbers (21:1-9) highlights the saving force of faith in the divine word. During the Exodus, the Hebrew people rebelled against Moses and God and were punished by the plague of fiery serpents. Moses asked for forgiveness and God, accepting the repentance of the Israelites, ordered him to “make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live”. And so it happened. Jesus, in his conversation with Nicodemus, revealed a more profound significance of this event of salvation, referring it to his own death and Resurrection: the Son of Man must be lifted on the wood of the Cross, so that whoever believes in him may have life. St John sees precisely in the mystery of the Cross the moment in which the real glory of Jesus is revealed, the glory of a love that gives itself totally in the passion and death. Thus, paradoxically, from a sign of condemnation, death and failure, the Cross becomes a sign of redemption, life and victory, through faith, the fruits of salvation can be gathered. The verbs “to love” and “to give” indicate a decisive and definitive act that expresses the radicalism with which God approached man in love, even to the total gift, [...] He gave us his Son out of love, to be the near God, to make us feel his presence, to come to meet us and carry us in his love so that the whole of life might be enlivened by this divine love. [...] God does not domineer but loves without measure. He does not express his omnipotence in punishment, but in mercy and in forgiveness. Understanding all this means entering into the mystery of salvation. (Benedict XVI, *Homily*, November 4, 2010)

- **Jn 3:17-18: man's unbelief.** God's will with respect to the world is a will of salvation. The drama, however, lies in the possibility that the Father's gift may not be accepted and be rejected: this is the judgment, which man builds for himself with his own hands, deciding whether to believe and trust in-entrust himself to this love or whether to remain incredulous and hesitant. Between the two extreme positions (believe/not believe), typical of the Gospel of John, there really is a dynamic space, in which man can experience a gradual growth. It is the space of those lives that have been sincerely conquered by God, but at the same time are marked by human frailties and hardships, it is a middle ground in which faith has already been confessed, even in the midst of interior darkness.

In this sense, the heartfelt prayer of that man who entrusts the pain for his sick son to Jesus is significant: “I believe; help my unbelief!” (*Mk 9:24*).

- ***Jn 3:19-20: a deviant love.*** The last verses of the dialogue with Nicodemus hasten to specify that judgment weighs on those who *love* darkness. The problem is not with those who do evil, but with those who consciously love it, choose it, prefer it to the light: it is a deviated love! And this is due to an existence that has become addicted to darkness, so much so that it is now considered inevitable. “There are people - many times, us too, - who cannot live in the light because they are used to darkness. The light blinds them, they can’t see. And we too are in this state when we are in sin: we cannot tolerate the light. It is more comfortable for us to live in darkness; the light slaps us, it makes us see what we don't want to see. But the worst part is that the eyes, the eyes of the soul, get so used to living in darkness that they end up ignoring what light is” (Francis, *Homily* of April 22, 2020).

- ***Jn 3:21: Come to the light.*** Jesus’ meeting with Nicodemus ends with the demanding words of Jesus, a sign of God's jealous love for his creature. Nicodemus’ immediate reaction to so much light being so powerfully revealed in the middle of the night is not reported. Yet in the Gospel of John, Nicodemus makes his appearance two more times. Before the chief priests who are now plotting to accuse Jesus, he will take a different position, stating: “Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?” (*Jn 7: 50-52*). And finally, after the death of Jesus, Nicodemus will go with Joseph of Arimathea, to ask Pilate for Jesus’ body for burial (*Jn 19: 39-42*). He is a man who has learned to believe, welcoming the gift of love into his own internal night, which, in a delicate but tenacious way, has gradually illuminated his life and his choices: But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God” (*Jn 3:21*). It can really be said that Nicodemus - like every disciple of the Lord -, by the grace of God, was born from above, he saw the Kingdom, he has already received eternal life here and now. Nicodemus came to the Light!

...is prayed

See, O Christ,

my anguish and my little courage,
my poverty and my weakness:
have mercy on me, O Word of God!

Shine on me, light up my soul,
light up my eyes, to see you, light of the world,
You, joy, happiness, eternal life,
You, kingdom of heaven and paradise,
crown of the righteous, judge and king!

Reveal and manifest yourself to me,
Show your mercy,
show your love for men.
Open the doors to the wedding hall for me.
Do not close the door of your light to me, my Christ!

(Simeon the New Theologian, *Hymn 53*)