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PROCLAIM

A magazine for Missionary Animation

Encountering **Risen JESUS**
along life's road





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PROCLAIM

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Contents

(with Page Number)

- **From the DIRECTOR'S DESK** _____ (2)
- **The Synodal Way** _____ (3)
- **Lenten Penance and the Synodal Journey** _____ (6)
- **Discovering liturgy as a gift** _____ (8)
- **Child is a sign of communion** _____ (12)
- **Pope Francis' 15 tips to be happy** _____ (13)
- **Types of Revelation** _____ (15)
- **SAINT OF THE MONTH**
 - St Agnes of Bohemia** _____ (16)
Feast Day: 2nd March
 - St Peter Chanel** _____ (17)
Feast Day: 28th April
- **My Catholic conversion testimony** _____ (19)
- **STORY CORNER**
 - God's amazing grace at work** _____ (22)

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St Peter Chanel

1803-1841

(Feast: 28 April)

Patron Saint of Oceania

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Two Journeys: Conversion and Vocation

Proclaim We have an opportunity once again to experience the Grace of God during the season of Lent and Easter. We may tend to take them as routine liturgical seasons, forgetting the significance and goal of these seasons, but these seasons have a lot to teach us, touch us and change us.

Pope Francis, in his message for the season of Lent 2023, with the title “Lenten Penance and the Synodal Journey of the Church”, beautifully connects the season of Lent and the Church and explains how our understanding of the season of Lent can help us have a better understanding of the Church. Leaving aside the connection that it has with the Synodal church, let me take some key points from the message that will certainly make our life more meaningful.



Journey to Mount Tabor

The Journey to Tabor indicates that Jesus, along with his disciples, retreats to a place where they can keep themselves free from everyday normal activities. In a way, the season of Lent invites us to opt out of our regular, routine activities and set ourselves aside for forty five days to examine ourselves, to experience Christ's love and to become a committed Christian.

One of the reasons why Jesus takes Peter along might be that he needed an instruction about the correct understanding of the Messiah as the suffering servant. We, like Peter, who need special lesson/tuition from the Lord, are given the opportunity to utilize the Lenten Journey. That is why the Pope says: “we are invited to ascend 'a high mountain' in the company of Jesus and to live a particular experience of spiritual discipline, asceticism, as God's holy people.” We are like Peter who need conversion. We have to seek the Lord's help to ascend from the lack of faith to a deeper understanding of faith; from our misunderstanding of the Cross to the proper understanding of Cross. In other words, the Pope says that “we must allow ourselves to be taken aside by [Jesus] and to detach ourselves from the mediocrity and vanity.” Only then we will be able to understand that only through suffering we can see victory and only through the passion of the Lord we can be saved. This way, the Tabor Journey is intended to teach us the correct understanding of the Passion that we may be touched by the Lord and be converted.

Journey to Emmaus

The second journey involves Jesus who accompanies the two travellers, who are going away from Jerusalem. In the first journey, the messiah shows his divine form for a short period and in the second, the Risen Lord shows his human form for a short period. But both the journeys hint at one thing – 'how the Messiah has to suffer'. Jesus says: “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” (Lk 24: 26). Then they identified the Risen Lord in the breaking of the bread. The two who had experienced the Risen Lord return to Jerusalem with joy. They become, so to say, arguably, the first proclaimers, evangelizers and missionaries of the Risen Lord. The journey not only makes them believers but also joyous evangelists.

In fact, the first journey calls for the inner conversion keeping the transfiguration of the Lord a secret and the second journey calls for a sound public proclamation of the Risen Lord to others.

Taking the messages of these two journeys, we who are in the season of Lent and Easter, need to believe in the Messiah and promote religious vocations and lay missionaries that we may have lots of people who would dedicate their life to share with others the joy of the resurrection. May the Lenten and Paschal season help us to become true believers and bold proclaimers of the Risen Lord.

Fr Dr Ambrose Pitchaimuthu
National Director (PMO-India)

Telling the Story of Jesus in our Context

The Synodal Way

We, the members of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI), came together for the 34th Plenary Assembly from 24 to 30 January 2023, at St. John's National Academy of Health Sciences, Bengaluru. We prayed, reflected on and discussed the theme: 'Telling the Story of Jesus in our Context: The Synodal Way.'

The Church, as the People of God, is the icon of the Holy Trinity, called to live in communion of love by participating in the one mission which emanates from the Triune God. The Apostle John testifies: *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life ... we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life ..."* (1 John 1:1-2). This calls for a personal encounter with our Lord Jesus Christ, which itself urges us to live and joyfully share the Good News in our context. Christ commissioned his Apostles: "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). The Church continues this mission, living it by her words and deeds. This Good News is Jesus Christ himself, in whom God's love in all its fullness is manifested to the whole of humanity. The Church, in the midst of her ups and downs, lights and shadows, successes and struggles, has striven to be faithful in bearing witness to this love of God in our beloved Motherland.

Down the centuries, millions have been attracted to the person of Jesus Christ and his salvific message and have become his followers. Through them the story of Jesus is told and retold, fulfilling what the Church has been proclaiming

from the very beginning: *"Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him"* (Acts 10:34-35).



This love of God is lived and experienced first and foremost in the family, where the story of Jesus is recounted by grandparents and parents to their children in various ways, by reading Bible stories, praying together and participating in popular devotions. The faith life is

further nourished and sustained in the larger family of the parish, where the celebration of the Holy Eucharist occupies the central place. The proclamation and the breaking of the word play an essential and prominent role in all the liturgical celebrations. The Holy Eucharist is the sacrament in which the community is being transformed into the body of Christ, where *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:28).

The story of Jesus is read, lived and shared in a dynamic manner and in a synodal way in the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC). The Gospel sharing in the BECs (also known as SCCs/BCCs) strengthens the bonds of communion and leads the members to bear witness in society.





Witnessing to the love of Christ, the Church in India has substantially contributed to nation-building, especially through her engagement in the fields of education, healthcare and social uplift. Standing firm on the teachings of Christ, the Church has always upheld the dignity of the human person, stood for a just society, promoted peace and harmony and cared for the weak, the suffering and the deprived sections of society.

From the very beginning, ordained ministers, along with women and men in consecrated life and ably supported by catechists, have been serving their communities both within and outside the Church, through committed pastoral care. The participatory bodies and lay associations foster communion and involvement of the members of the body of Christ in the mission of the Church.

The Catholic Church in India recognises the changing circumstances and growing challenges she has to face, but has never ceased to tell the story of Jesus. A few challenges have been identified:

- Changing social conditions and the excessive use of social media, mobiles and internet have placed enormous pressure on the harmonious life of families.
- Addictions to drugs, alcohol and pornography are ruining the lives of many young adults, causing disruptions within families and in society.
- Poverty and inhuman living conditions deprive a substantial part of our population of equitable opportunity and dignity of life, creating uncertainties about their future.

- Massive displacement of peoples, loss of land and fishing rights in the name of industrial and corporate development result in forced migration, dispossession, loss of livelihood and further marginalisation.
- Greed and consumeristic life styles are eroding the life of faith and centrality of prayer.
- Some civil legislations and policies often seriously hamper pastoral engagements of the Church in India.
- Misuse of anti-conversion laws in some States and false propaganda about 'forced conversions' are discouraging and hindering the life and service of the Christian community. This calls into question the Constitutional rights of the minorities.
- The growing culture of intolerance, hatred and even violent attacks on Christians in some quarters is a matter of grave concern to Christians in India.

In the present context, the story of Jesus needs to be told even more courageously, creatively and authentically, considering that the Good News is to be proclaimed in season and out of season (cf. 2 Timothy 4:2). Assured by the words of Jesus: *"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33), we continue to tell the story of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, that God loves everyone unconditionally.

Following the Synodal Way, let us:

- Accompany youth and families so that faith is deepened, family prayer is nurtured, and the



bonds of communion are strengthened; also, foster respect for life from the moment of conception to natural death.

- As grandparents, parents and elders, continue to transmit the story of Jesus to the younger generations.
- As pastors and consecrated persons, take more seriously our responsibility to care for families, individuals and all to whom we are sent.
- Promote, foster and sustain BECs in all our parishes.
- Utilize the occasion of celebrations of the Eucharist and Sacraments to catechize and tell the story of Jesus in a meaningful way so that the people may experience the Lord in their lives.
- Stand in solidarity with those affected by persecution, displacement, discrimination and marginalization.
- Make it our mission to protect and preserve mother earth (which Pope Francis has described as our 'common home' in Laudato Si), by employing all means at our disposal to promote eco-friendly lifestyles at all levels.
- Basing ourselves on the shared faith of all



Christians, shun all fundamentalism and unitedly tell the story of love, justice and human fraternity.

- Join all our brothers and sisters, irrespective of caste, creed and language, to continue building our Nation, based on our Constitutional values in which justice, liberty, equality and fraternity reign supreme.
- Make efforts to uphold the secular ethos of our Nation with a preferential option for the deprived sections of our society, to ensure the integral development of all.

As we journey towards the celebration of the Synod in 2023-2024 and look forward to the Jubilee Year 2025, may all our efforts help us to be credible witnesses of Jesus Christ, while we continue joyfully to share his story.

On the occasion of the 74th Republic Day of our Nation, we pray for God's abundant blessings on our Motherland India. May Mary, our blessed Mother, who received, treasured and shared the Word, never cease to intercede for all her children.

Given on Monday, 30 January 2023, the anniversary of the martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi – National Peace Day.

His Eminence
Filipe Neri Cardinal Ferrão
President, CCBI and Archbishop of Goa and Daman

Most Rev. George Antony
Vice President, CCBI and
Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore

Most Rev. Anil Joseph Thomas Couto
Secretary General, CCBI and
Archbishop of Delhi ♦

Lenten Penance and the Synodal Journey

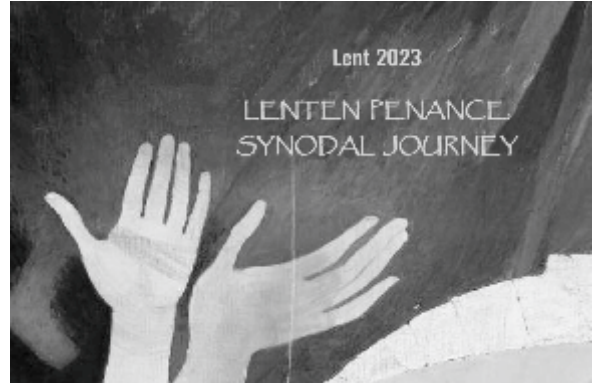
Message of the Holy Father Francis for Lent 2023

Dear brothers and sisters!

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke all recount the episode of the Transfiguration of Jesus. There we see the Lord's response to the failure of his disciples to understand him. Shortly before, there had been a real clash between the Master and Simon Peter, who, after professing his faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, rejected his prediction of the passion and the cross. Jesus had firmly rebuked him: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a scandal to me, because you do not think according to God, but according to men!" (*Mt 16:23*). Following this, "six days later, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John his brother and led them away to a high mountain" (*Mt 17:1*).

The Gospel of the Transfiguration is proclaimed every year on the Second Sunday of Lent. During this liturgical season, the Lord takes us with him to a place apart. While our ordinary commitments compel us to remain in our usual places and our often repetitive and sometimes boring routines, during Lent we are invited to ascend "a high mountain" in the company of Jesus and to live a particular experience of spiritual discipline – *ascesis* – as God's holy people.

Lenten penance is a commitment, sustained by grace, to overcoming our lack of faith and our



resistance to following Jesus on the way of the cross. This is precisely what Peter and the other disciples needed to do. To deepen our knowledge of the Master, to fully understand and embrace the mystery of his salvation, accomplished in total self-giving inspired by love, we must allow ourselves to be taken aside by him and to detach ourselves from mediocrity and vanity. We need to set out on the journey, an uphill path that, like a mountain trek, requires effort, sacrifice and concentration. These requisites are also important for the synodal journey to which, as a Church, we are committed to making. We can benefit greatly from reflecting on the relationship between Lenten penance and the synodal experience.

In his "retreat" on Mount Tabor, Jesus takes with him three disciples, chosen to be witnesses of a unique event. He wants that experience of grace to be shared, not solitary, just as our whole life of faith is an experience that is shared. For it is in togetherness that we follow Jesus. Together too, as a pilgrim Church in time, we experience the liturgical year and Lent within it, walking alongside those whom the Lord has placed among us as fellow travellers. Like the ascent of Jesus and the disciples to Mount Tabor, we can say that our Lenten journey is "synodal", since we make it together along the same path, as disciples of the one Master. For we know that Jesus is himself the Way, and therefore, both in the liturgical journey



and in the journey of the Synod, the Church does nothing other than enter ever more deeply and fully into the mystery of Christ the Saviour.

And so we come to its culmination. The Gospel relates that Jesus “was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light” (*Mt 17:2*). This is the “summit”, the goal of the journey. At the end of their ascent, as they stand on the mountain heights with Jesus, the three disciples are given the grace of seeing him in his glory, resplendent in supernatural light. That light did not come from without, but radiated from the Lord himself. The divine beauty of this vision was incomparably greater than all the efforts the disciples had made in the ascent of Tabor. During any strenuous mountain trek, we must keep our eyes firmly fixed on the path; yet the panorama that opens up at the end amazes us and rewards us by its grandeur. So too, the synodal process may often seem arduous, and at times we may become discouraged. Yet what awaits us at the end is undoubtedly something wondrous and amazing, which will help us to understand better God's will and our mission in the service of his kingdom.

The disciples' experience on Mount Tabor was further enriched when, alongside the transfigured Jesus, Moses and Elijah appeared, signifying respectively the Law and the Prophets (*cf. Mt 17:3*). The newness of Christ is at the same time the fulfilment of the ancient covenant and promises; it is inseparable from God's history with his people and discloses its deeper meaning. In a similar way, the synodal journey is rooted in the Church's tradition and at the same time open to newness. Tradition is a source of inspiration for seeking new paths and for avoiding the opposed temptations of immobility and improvised experimentation. The Lenten journey of penance and the journey of the Synod alike have as their

goal a transfiguration, both personal and ecclesial. A transformation that, in both cases, has its model in the Transfiguration of Jesus and is achieved by the grace of his paschal mystery. So that this transfiguration may become a reality in us this year, I would like to propose two “paths” to follow in order to ascend the mountain together with Jesus and, with him, to attain the goal.

The first path has to do with the command that God the Father addresses to the disciples on Mount Tabor as they contemplate Jesus transfigured. The voice from the cloud says: “Listen to him” (*Mt 17:5*). The first proposal, then, is very clear: we need to listen to Jesus. Lent is a time of grace to the

extent that we listen to him as he speaks to us. And how does he speak to us? First, in the word of God, which the Church offers us in the liturgy. May that word not fall on deaf ears; if we cannot always attend Mass, let us study its daily biblical readings, even with the help of the internet. In addition to the Scriptures, the Lord

speaks to us through our brothers and sisters, especially in the faces and the stories of those who are in need. Let me say something else, which is quite important for the synodal process: listening to Christ often takes place in listening to our brothers and sisters in the Church. Such mutual listening in some phases is the primary goal, but it remains always indispensable in the method and style of a synodal Church.

On hearing the Father's voice, the disciples “fell prostrate and were very much afraid. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Rise, and do not be afraid.' And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone” (*Mt 17:6-8*). Here is the second proposal for this Lent: do not take refuge in a religiosity made up of extraordinary events and dramatic experiences, out of fear of facing reality and its daily struggles, its hardships and contradictions. The light that



Discovering liturgy as a gift

By Edward McNamara, LC

Throughout his long life, Benedict XVI -- Joseph Ratzinger --- took a keen interest in the Church's liturgy. Indeed, the first translated volume of his collected works was volume XI that collected his thoughts on this subject. The liturgy has been one of the principal subjects of his theological writing and reflection and one of the linchpins of his thought.

In his autobiography he describes how the gift of the Schott missal helped him to discover the liturgy as a gift. Ratzinger indicated his interest in liturgical themes stems from his reading of Romano Guardini's, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. For him, this seminal work: "Was the discovery of a new world, of liturgy proper... of the liturgy as a symbolic world filled with reality, full of meaning." His youth coincided with the major contributions of the German liturgical movement which culminated in the reforms of the Second Vatican Council which he mostly approved and embraced.

Liturgy was not a marginal theme in his thought he considered that a person's concept of the Church and of mankind's relationship with God largely depend on the underlying concept of liturgy. In the introduction to volume XI of his collected works he affirms that his interest in



fundamental theology or the question "Why do we believe?" led naturally to the question of the right response to God. This fundamental grounding of liturgy is the principal key to Ratzinger's thought and underlay his practical conclusions. Ratzinger developed his theology in an original manner with a combination of a sound biblical theological foundation, and an openness to true organic development united to a love of tradition, and what we could term a mysticism of Christian existence.

With this in mind we can explore the underlying principles of his Liturgical Theology.

1. The "Givenness" of Liturgy

The first aspect that we can observe is that Ratzinger insists on the fact that liturgy is essentially something given and not created by humans even though human contribution is necessary.

Firstly, liturgy is the fruit of divine initiative. Ratzinger examines the text of Exodus 7:16 "Let my people go that they may serve me." He points out three fruits:

- ♦ The people receive not only Instruction about worship but an all-embracing rule of life.
- ♦ Through this rule it is formed as a people so to speak it receives its interior land.



- ♦ The three aspects of worship, law and ethics are interwoven in the Covenant and this principle remains valid albeit with some differences in Christianity.

Ratzinger notes that whenever Israel falls from true worship, she loses her freedom spiritually as well as materially. Therefore: he can say that: “Worship ultimately embraces the ordering of the of the whole of human life in Irenaeus' sense. Man becomes glory for God, puts God, so to speak, into the light (and that is what worship is), when he lives looking toward God. On the other hand, it is also true that law and ethics do not hold together when they are not anchored in the liturgical center and inspired by it.”

Hence, a first answer to the reality found in the liturgy is that only when man's relationship with God is right can his other relationships be in good order. This also means that liturgy cannot be a merely human creation, a doing as you please: “We do not know how with what we must serve the Lord (Ex 10:26).”

It also means that the Christian community does not invent itself but receives its being as a gift from God and returns this gift to its origin. Since the liturgy is given, the author explored the question as to what, or rather who is given in the liturgy. His answer is that Christian cult came to be through Christ.

2. Liturgy as making the mystery of Christ present

Christ's central role is essential to understanding Ratzinger's Liturgical Theology. This is grounded in two principal points of view the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery.

Ratzinger, commenting on John 1:14: “The Word was made flesh and lived [pitched his tent] among us and we have seen his glory” concludes that “The Word to which Christian worship refers is first of all not a text, but a living reality: a God who is self-communicating meaning and who communicates himself by becoming a man. This

incarnation is the sacred tent, the focal point of all worship that looks at the glory of God and gives him honor”

However, the Incarnation is only the first movement and can only be understood in the light of the Cross and resurrection. This is the line of movement that orders liturgy. In the Christian concept of sacrifice, a concept which occupied his reflection for more than 50 years, Ratzinger draws together many strands of reflection on the Last Supper saying that, at this central moment of history: “The New Covenant also is accomplished and concluded by a truly new sacrifice: it becomes evident that Jesus, the man who lays down his life, is the real worship and the true glorification of God.” He thus asserts that during the Last Supper and on the Cross Christ is the Paschal Lamb and the new Adam who goes down into the darkness of death's sleep and thus begins a new humanity. It



was this sacrifice which Christ commands to be repeated in memory of him thus making it present throughout history.

Along with the theology of Sacrifice Ratzinger always developed the central importance of the Resurrection for the grounding and understanding of the sacraments and the liturgical life. As he wrote: [H]is self-giving would be meaningless were death to have the last word. Thus, only through the Resurrection does the covenant come fully into being. Now man is forever united with God. Now the two are really bound together indissolubly. Thus, the day of Resurrection is the new Sabbath. It is the day on

which the Lord comes among his own and invites them into his “liturgy” into his glorification of God and communicates himself to them.

From the two central themes Ratzinger derives other key concepts which we can outline briefly.

3. Cosmological and Temporal Dimensions

The first of these realities is the cosmos and the time in which liturgy takes place. For Joseph Ratzinger Christian Liturgy is a cosmic liturgy embracing the whole of creation.

This cosmological principle reveals the intuition that Man exists for God. The creation narrative in Genesis 1 reveals that creation exists to establish the covenant and thus moves towards the Sabbath which is a sign of the covenant between God and man. This then leads inevitably to worship which essentially: “Consists... in the union of man and creation with God. Belonging to God has nothing to do with destruction or non-being it is rather a way of being. It means emerging from the state of separation, of apparent autonomy, of existing only for oneself and in oneself. It means losing oneself as the only possible way of finding oneself (cf. Mk 8:35; Mt 10: 39). That is why St. Augustine could say that the true “sacrifice” is the *civitas Dei*, that is, love-transformed mankind, the divinization of creation and the surrender of all things to God: God all in all (cf. 1Cor 15:28). That is the purpose of the world. That is the essence of worship.

4. Ecclesiological Dimension

Ratzinger was a pioneer in the field of ecclesiology, especially in introducing the concept

of *communio*. However, his concept of Church is also intimately related to liturgy and cannot be separated from liturgy. He insists, for example on the bond established by the Eucharist which gathers us into one family through a sharing in Christ's Body and Blood. This is true of all. Ratzinger affirms that: “all eucharistic assemblies taken together are still just one assembly, because the body of Christ is just one, and hence the People of God can only be one.”

In a later discourse he developed this notion and its implications for charity and the construction of solidarity in the light of 1Cor: 10 and 1Jn: 3-7. The Church is not one through a central government rather: “[O]ne common center for all is possible because she is always derived from the one Lord, who in the one bread makes her to be one body. That is why her unity goes deeper than any human union could ever go. It is when the Eucharist is understood in the full intimacy of the union of each individual with the Lord that it automatically becomes also a social sacrament to the highest degree.”

5. Eschatological Dimension

Ratzinger sees Christian liturgy basically as the liturgy of a promise fulfilled but also as a liturgy of hope in which the new temple is still under construction. It is a liturgy of pilgrimage that will only be fulfilled at the end of time. The following text illustrates very well Ratzinger's views on this: “Finally, the essence of the liturgy is summarized in the exclamatory prayer that St. Paul (1Cor 16:22) and the *Didache* (10:6) have handed down to us *Maran atha*—Our Lord is here—Our Lord, come! Even now the *Parousia* is accomplished in the Eucharist, but in this way, it causes us to reach out toward the Lord who is to come; thus, it teaches us to cry, “Come, Lord Jesus.” And it allows us again and again to hear the answer and experience it as true: “Surely, I am coming soon.” (Rev 22: 17, 20).”

6. Liturgy as *Logiké latreia*

The final principle leads us to the answer to the question as to what people hope to achieve



through worship. Ratzinger developed the important concept of Christian Liturgy as true worship as *logiké latreia*, *rationabile obsequium*.

Christian worship must be in conformity with the Logos and from this derive certain consequences: “The relationship to a text, the rationality, the intelligibility and the sobriety of Christian liturgy.”

The Liturgy has the character of “word.” This does not mean a reduction to words alone as an expression of reason: “The sacrifice is the “word” the word of prayer, which goes up from man to God, embodying the whole of man’s existence and enabling him to become word (logos) in himself. It is man, conforming himself to logos and becoming logos through faith who is the true sacrifice, the true glory of God.” In this way the Greek philosophy of the word is brought into the concept and elevates it to a mystical union with the Logos.

The Concept of *logiké latreia* is also seen as a sacrifice in which the word is not a mere discourse but the transformation of our being into logos



“Thus the Canon, the “true sacrifice” is the word of the Word; in it speaks the one who, a Word, is life”. The Canon is also the true sacrifice not the presentation of the gifts.

There are numerous practical and rubrical conclusions that derive from these principles but Pope Benedict XVI – Joseph Ratzinger often lamented that comments on his liturgical theology often got lost in the minutiae of practical rubrical considerations. It is our hope that this brief recalling of the fundamental principles of his profound theological legacy will be a small tribute to this great pontiff who has left a permanent seal on the history of theology and of the Church.

----- ZENIT News/ Rome, 01.01.2023 ♦

Continued from Page 7: Lenten Penance and the Synodal Journey



Jesus shows the disciples is an anticipation of Easter glory, and that must be the goal of our own journey, as we follow “him alone”. Lent leads to Easter: the “retreat” is not an end in itself, but a means of preparing us to experience the Lord’s passion and cross with faith, hope and love, and thus to arrive at the resurrection. Also on the synodal journey, when God gives us the grace of

certain powerful experiences of communion, we should not imagine that we have arrived – for there too, the Lord repeats to us: “Rise, and do not be afraid”. Let us go down, then, to the plain, and may the grace we have experienced strengthen us to be “artisans of synodality” in the ordinary life of our communities.

Dear brothers and sisters, may the Holy Spirit inspire and sustain us this Lent in our ascent with Jesus, so that we may experience his divine splendour and thus, confirmed in faith, persevere in our journey together with him, glory of his people and light of the nations.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 25 January, Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul

FRANCIS ♦

Child is a sign of communion

By Fr Yesu Karunanidhi

On 6 January 2023 (Solemnity of the Epiphany, in India on 8 January 2023) we celebrated the World Missionary Childhood Day (Holy Childhood Day). In the light of the Synod for a Synodal Church 2021-2024 we celebrated this day with the theme 'To live in communion.' In fact, this theme reminds us of the humble origin of the Holy Childhood Society, which encouraged children to be in communion with other children across the world through prayer and work of charity.

At Christmas we celebrated God incarnating in human history taking the form of a child. The Infancy Narratives of Jesus as narrated in the Gospels of Matthew (Chs. 1-2) and Luke (Chs. 1-2) present us a baby who is vulnerable, and dependent, yet promising and praiseworthy. Let us take this presentation of Jesus in the Infancy Narratives and reflect along with the theme, 'to live in communion.'

1. Child in communion with God

“No one has ever seen God; the only One, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him know” (Jn 1:18) – with these words John the Evangelist records the close union that existed between the Father and the Son, between God and Jesus. This communion was never severed or disconnected. For during his ministry Jesus says, “He who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone” (cf. Jn 8:29). In Ps 127:3 we read, “children are a gift from the Lord.” Though the gift leaves the hands of the giver,

the bond continues to exist between them. Every child we come across is a sign that God continues to be in communion with us.

2. Child in communion with each other

A child allows himself / herself to be in the hands of the other, so that he / she be led, guided, and protected. When Joseph was asked to take the child and the mother to fly to Egypt and return from Egypt (cf. Mt 2:13-15; 2:19-22), and when parents of Jesus took him to Jerusalem to present him at the Temple (cf. Lk 2:22-38), child Jesus surrenders himself totally to his parents. A child, thus, remains in communion with his / her significant other.

3. Child in communion with self

Luke makes a very inviting note about the growth of Jesus from babyhood to boyhood: “And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom” (Lk 2:40). During growth and development, a child begins to develop communion with self – physical, mental, and spiritual.



What does it mean to live in communion? To live in communion primarily means to make oneself vulnerable in front of others, and to embrace dependence on others. It is not in growing up, but only in growing down we become persons of communion. May our celebration of the World Missionary Childhood inspire in us to live in communion with God, with each other, and with self.

*** The writer is executive secretary, CCBI Commission for Bible ♦**



Pope Francis' 15 tips to be happy



In a book published in November 2022, Pope Francis talks about how to achieve happiness and reminds us that God, as our creator, wants the best for our lives. The book is only available in Italian for now and is titled “I want you to be happy: The hundredfold in this life,” (“Tivogliofelice. Il centuplo in questa vita,” Pienogiorno).

In the first chapter the Argentinian Pontiff offers 15 “steps towards happiness.” Here they are!

01. “Read inside yourself”

Pope Francis explains that “our life is the most precious book that has been given to us” and it is precisely within those pages that we can find the truth and happiness that we long and search for. The Pontiff cites Saint Augustine who said “return to within yourself; truth dwells in the inner man.” He invites everyone, including himself, to read their own lives and journeys “with serenity.”

02. “Remember that you are unique”

“Each of us is, and is in the world to feel loved in our uniqueness and to love others as no one else can do in our place,” the Head of the Catholic Church exhorts, adding that we should not sit on the bench, waiting to be called as someone's backup. It is through our uniqueness that we learn to love. “Each person is unique in God's eyes,” and remember “we are in the world to live a love story, a love story with God, to embrace the boldness of strong choices, to

venture into the wonderful risk of loving,” the Pontiff explains.

03. “Bring out your beauty”

The Bishop of Rome states that “beauty is one of the privileged ways to reach” God, who is “inseparably good, true and beautiful.” This beauty is not “according to the fashion of the worlds,” or “turned in on itself,” or one which “comes to terms with evil,” he specifies. He cites Narcissus and Dorian Gray, as examples of those who sought the wrong kinds of beauty. “I speak of the beauty that never fades because it is a reflection of divine beauty,” Francis explains.

04. “Learn to laugh at yourself”

In a world which is constantly pressuring us to be perfect, Pope Francis recommends “occasionally looking in the mirror and laughing at yourself!” “It will do you good,” he adds.

05. “Live a healthy restlessness”

The Pontiff warns against becoming “a Peter Pan who doesn't want to grow up” and stays locked up in his room. He encourages us to live a healthy restlessness in our “desires and intentions.” “That restlessness that always pushes you to change, to never feel like you have 'arrived,’” he explains.

06. “Learn to apologize”

We are all aware that in our roles as mothers, fathers, friends, sons, daughters, etc we sometimes fail to live up to our and others' expectations or



aspirations. “We are all 'in deficit' in life,” explains the Pontiff. However, he adds that “we all need mercy” and in fact reminds us that “God always goes before you and forgives you first.”

07. “Learn to read your sadness”

In a world where sadness is seen as “an evil to be escaped at all costs,” Pope Francis offers a different view. He sees sadness as an “indispensable wake-up call.” “Sometimes sadness works like a traffic light, telling us: it's red, stop,” he explains, calling us to embrace this essential emotion.

08. “Have big dreams”

“The Lord does not want us to narrow our horizons, he does not want us parked on the sides of life, but running toward high goals with joy and



boldness,” the Pope exhorts. Additionally fulfilling God's dreams for us needs to occur in our everyday lives, not just on weekends or vacations, the Pontiff underlines. Dreaming is how we can embrace the beauty of life, he says.

09. “Don't listen to those who sell illusions”

Pope Francis warns against those who “talk about dreams and sell illusions,” as they are “manipulators of happiness.”

10. “Be revolutionary, go against the tide”

In a society where the norm is to enjoy the moment and not worry about taking concrete and definitive decisions, the Head of the Catholic Church asks us to be “revolutionary, to rebel

against this culture that basically believes you are incapable of taking responsibility.” “Have the courage to be happy,” he urges.

11. “Take risks, even if you end up being wrong”

In order to be happy the Pontiff says we must be active in our lives and not observe it “from the balcony” or be like “a parked car.” “Don't confuse happiness with a couch,” he says, encouraging us to take risks and to overcome our fears so as to not live with an “anesthetized soul.”

12. “Walk with others”

Pope Francis underlines the importance of having a community and close knit relationships to allow us to be happy. “Walk in community, with friends, with those who love you: this helps you get to your goal. And if you fall, get back up,” he states, saying that the importance is to not “remain fallen.”

13. “Live gratuity”

Pope Francis encourages us to learn from God who “gives freely, to the point that he even helps those who are not faithful.” He calls on us not to be constantly measuring what we give and receive in return. “We received life for free; we did not pay for it. So we can all give without expecting anything,” the Pontiff explains.

14. “Look beyond the darkness”

“Do not stop looking for the light in the midst of the darkness we so often carry in our hearts and see around us,” Francis encourages. He invites us to “look up” so as to “overcome the temptation to remain lying on the floors of our fears.”

15. “Remember that you are destined for the best”

Finally, for the last tip, Pope Francis reminds us again that “God wants the best for us: he wants us happy.” God does not ask us for anything but simply leaves in our hearts a joy that is “full and unselfish” and “never watered-down.”

----- Aleteianewsletter@daily.aleteia.org 01 January 2023 ♦

Types of Revelation

By Fr Antony Netikat, CM

Revelations could be **natural** or **supernatural**.

The unveiling or manifestation of God through creation is natural revelation. Everything around us reveals the existence, power, beauty and love of its creator, the almighty. In fact, the creation is an open book where God can be discovered and even experienced. “The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech ... yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” Ps 19: 1-4). “Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales ... who taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding? Lift up your eyes on high and see who created these ... he is great in strength, mighty in power, and not one is missing” (Is 40: 12, 14, 26). “Friends you should turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven and



the earth and the see and all is in them...” (Acts 14: 15-17) “For what can be known about them is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse” (Rom 1: 19-20).

Revelation is *divine/supernatural* when God manifests Himself through a more direct contact with human beings. In the Old Testament, the prophets received the Word of God directly and

passed it over to the chosen people. Later, the revelation of God reached its plenitude in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. “Long ago, God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds...” (Heb 1:1-4). St John adds: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, and

the glory as of a father's only begotten son full of grace and truth” (Jn 1: 1-14). the message of Jesus was meant for the entire human race. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news” (Mk 1:15). Moreover, Jesus commissioned his apostles to go and preach the gospel news to the entire creation, irrespective of caste, creed, colour, language or culture. “God therefore made disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Mt 28: 19-20). It is equally relevant to point out that the Son takes great pride in revealing the Father. “All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. (Mt 11:27). St John too emphasises the same truth when he stated: “In my Father's house there are many dwelling places ... No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you know him and have seen him ...” (Jn 14: 2-10). Jesus



SAINT OF THE MONTH - I

St Agnes of Bohemia

1211 - 1282

Feast Day - March 2

Agnes was the daughter of King Ottokar I of Bohemia,[2] making her a descendant of Ludmila of Bohemia and Wenceslaus I, patron saints of Bohemia. Agnes's mother was Constance of Hungary, who was the sister of King Andrew II of Hungary, so Agnes was a first cousin to Elizabeth of Hungary.

When she was three years old, Agnes was entrusted to the care of Hedwig of Andechs, the wife of Duke Henry I the Bearded of Silesia. Hedwig placed her to be educated by a community of Cistercian nuns in a monastery which she herself had founded in Trzebnica. Upon her return to Prague, Agnes was entrusted to the priory of Premonstratensian Canonesses to continue her education.

She was educated by Cistercian nuns at Trebnitz, Germany. Though she early perceived a call to religious life, Agnes was for years promised into a series of arranged marriages for political reasons. At age three she was promised to a prince named Boleslaus. When he died prior to the



marriage, she was betrothed to Prince Henry, son of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II. When Henry chose to marry another, young Agnes was betrothed to Emperor Frederick himself. With the help and intervention of Pope Gregory IX, though affronted,



Frederick released Agnes from her marriage obligations. The Emperor is said to have remarked: "If she had left me for a mortal man, I would have taken vengeance with the sword, but I cannot take offence because in preference to me she has chosen the King of Heaven."

On land donated by her brother, Wenceslaus I, King of Bohemia, she founded the Hospital of St Francis (1232–33) and two friaries for the Franciscan friars, who had just come to Bohemia at her brother's invitation. Through them, Agnes learned of Clare of Assisi and her Order of Poor Ladies, the monastic counterpart of the friars. She began a correspondence with Clare (which lasted for over two decades).

Agnes built a monastery and friary complex attached to the hospital. It housed the Franciscan friars and the Poor Clare nuns who worked at the hospital. This religious complex was one of the first Gothic buildings in Prague. This was the first Poor Clare community north of the Alps. In 1235, Agnes gave the property of the Teutonic Knights in Bohemia to the hospital. She herself became a member of what became known as the Franciscan Poor Clares in 1234. As a nun, she cooked for and mended the clothes of lepers and paupers, even after becoming abbess of the Prague Clares the following year. As can be seen in their correspondence, Clare wrote with deep maternal feelings toward Agnes, though they never met.^[10]

A lay group working at the hospital was organized by Agnes in 1238 as a new military order, dedicated primarily to nursing, known as the

SAINT OF THE MONTH - II

St Peter Chanel

1803 - 1841

Feast Day : April 28

Approximately 4,500 missionaries went forth from this unique Society, the Paris Foreign Mission Society, mostly to Southeast Asia, to build the Church and preach the Gospel. From its beginnings in the seventeenth century until today, but most conspicuously in the nineteenth century, hundreds of priests and bishops from the Society were martyred, died violent deaths, or fell victim to tropical diseases. Of these, twenty-three Paris Foreign Missionaries are canonized saints. Other non-martyr French saints of the same era—Saint John Vianney, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, Saint Catherine Laboure—together with the missionary martyrs, sparkle as the jewels in the crown of the vibrant Church of nineteenth-century France.

Peter Chanel, was just one such Frenchman who left the comfort and familiarity of home to become a daring and rugged missionary priest. Peter Chanel grew up in rural France working as a shepherd. While in school he loved to read about French foreign missionaries and wanted to emulate them. So he decided, “I will become a missionary priest!”

Protomartyr of the South Seas Peter Chanel was born in 1803 at Clet in the diocese of Belley, France. His intelligence and simple piety brought him to the attention of the local priest, Father Trompier, who saw to his elementary education. Entering the diocesan Seminary, Peter won the affection and the esteem of both students and professors. After his ordination he found himself in a rundown country parish and completely



revitalized it in the three year span that he remained there. However, his mind was set on missionary work; so, in 1831, he joined the newly formed Society of Mary (Marists) which concentrated on missionary work at home and abroad. To his dismay, he was appointed to teach at

the seminary at Belley and remained there for the next five years, diligently performing his duties.

In 1836, the Society was given the New Hebrides in the Pacific as a field for evangelization, and the jubilant Peter was appointed Superior of a little band of missionaries sent to proclaim the Faith to its inhabitants. On reaching their destination after an arduous ten month journey, the band split up and Peter went to the Island of Futuna accompanied by a lay-brother and an English layman, Thomas Boog. They were at first well received by the pagans and their king Niuliki who had only recently forbidden cannibalism. However, the king's jealousy and fear were aroused when the missionaries learned the language and gained the people's confidence; he realized the adoption of the Christian Faith would lead to the abolition of some of the prerogatives he enjoyed as both high-priest and sovereign.

In 1837, Father Peter Chanel stepped ashore the speck of volcanic rock called Futuna to preach there, for the very first time, the name of Jesus Christ. Peter struggled with this new language and mastered it, making the difficult adjustment to life with whalers, traders, and warring natives. Despite little apparent success and severe want, he

maintained a serene and gentle spirit, plus endless patience and courage. A few natives had been baptized; a few more were being instructed. On unknown Futuna, Father Chanel gave his all, at first drip by drip and then all at once. A lay brother who was with him later said of Father Chanel, "Because of his labours he was often burned by the heat of the sun, and famished with



in-law, Musumusu, to stop the conversion.

On April 18, 1841, a band of native warriors entered the hut of Father Peter Chanel on the island of Futuna in the New Hebrides islands near New Zealand. They clubbed the missionary to death and cut up his body with hatchets. Two years later, the whole island was Catholic. Peter Chanel's death bears witness to the ancient axiom that "the blood of martyrs is the seed of

hunger, and he would return home wet with perspiration and completely exhausted. Yet he always remained in good spirits, courageous and energetic..." His apostolic labours generated few converts, but there was some progress nonetheless. Like so many missionaries, Peter had to overcome the counter-witness given by fellow European Christians trading in the area who cared little about their religion. In 1841, when the local Chieftain's son asked to be baptized, the Chieftain sent his son-

Christians." He is the first martyr from Oceania, that part of the world spread over the south Pacific, and he came there as the fulfilment of a dream he had had as a boy. Peter was declared a martyr and beatified in 1889. Pope Pius XII canonized him in 1954.

Source: www.catholic.org/saints;
www.mycatholic.life/saints;
www.spcthegap.qld.edu.au/www.catholicnews
agency.com; www.ewtn.com ♦

Continued from Page 16: St Agnes of Bohemia

Knights of the Cross with the Red Star, following the Rule of St. Augustine. That next year, Agnes handed over all authority over the hospital she had founded to these monastic knights. They were recognized as an order by Pope Gregory IX in 1236–37.

Agnes lived out her life in the cloister, leading the monastery as abbess, until her death on 2 March 1282.

In 1874, Pope Pius IX beatified Agnes. Pope John Paul II canonized Blessed Agnes on 12 November 1989. While she was known by her contemporaries because of her supposed visions and healing, such as her prophecy that King Wenceslaus would be victorious in his battle against the Austrians, her canonization was based

on her practice of the Christian virtues of faith, hope and charity to an extraordinary degree, and the church's view is confirmed either through a miracle granted by God in answer to the saint's prayers, or as in this case, by the continuing devotion of the Christian faithful to a saint's example across centuries.

Though Agnes died in 1282, she is still venerated by Christians around the world more than 700 years later. She was honoured in 2011, the 800th anniversary of her birth, as the Saint of the Overthrow of Communism, with a year dedicated to her by Catholics in the Czech Republic.

Source: www.catholic.org;
www.catholicreadings.org;
www.franciscanmedia.org ♦

My Catholic conversion testimony

By Joanna Stamps



Joanna Stamps explores the longing she experienced before her conversion and how each misconception gave way to a calling to a life of holiness.

I often hear from others that people who convert to Catholicism have far more zeal than people born into Catholicism. What I experience is that converts know what they have been missing, whereas life-long Catholics sometimes don't know what they have. When I began exploring Catholicism, I found something I didn't know I had been looking for. And even better, I found a groundswell of support to help me achieve my calling.

For years before my conversion, I had been mildly obsessed with something called the Faith & Work movement — a worldwide initiative to integrate faith and work in the workplaces and marketplaces. At the time, this was my ultimate goal: Being able to show up authentically as a Christian in the workplace, ensuring that my life at church, at work, and in my home all mirrored the teachings of the gospel.

I longed for more, but didn't know exactly what I was missing. I often heard beautiful examples of people sharing their faith through sacrificial love in the workplace, but it felt like there should be something more. I reached out to pastors and

pastoral staff, but often found my interest in discussing these theological topics was not reciprocated. When I did speak with leadership, the answer was often to become involved in a ministry and spend time serving others. I loved the idea of serving but the more involved I became in volunteering, the further I felt away from God.

I was left to create my own map to ensure that I was living out my faith in the various aspects of my life. I created self-facilitated silent retreats for myself. I devoured Christian non-fiction books and spent hours on Saturdays surrounded by books, journals, Bibles, and commentaries. It felt as if I was feeding myself, as best I could, to keep myself going.

When I was almost depleted, I began dating someone who happened to be Catholic. I experienced, for the first time, a devout Catholic family. They made me feel welcomed and a part of their life of faith. When we travelled together, I was involved in their morning prayers and reciting of scripture. I was intrigued by how much of their life was influenced by their faith.

It was out of this relationship that I explored Catholicism empathetically. I didn't show up with my normal laundry list of issues I had with the Catholic Church: eating flesh, worshiping Mary, going to priests for confession instead of God.

I was exploring in the context of a raging crisis within the Church. I couldn't mistake the irony of looking at Catholicism during this time.



The stories I heard in the news made me feel ill. I wondered: How could I feel drawn to a Church that lets something like this happen to the most vulnerable? At worst, I was expecting to encounter a den of wolves, maybe people mourning the funeral of the church. Instead, I experienced something very different: a joyful family.

One of my first encounters was in a large, elegant room with a jovial priest and one other woman who would later become a dear friend. I was expecting a friendly welcome and a hand-off — similar to what I had experienced before. But that did not happen. We instantly began to engage in deep theological discussions. My heart was overjoyed, after desiring this type of conversation for so long. And then he said something I wasn't expecting: "Johanna, you know you're called to be a saint, right?" Inside I was thinking, "Whoa! I didn't come here for a calling. I just wanted to learn how to share my faith with others in the workplace." As I came to understand it, the call to holiness is deep, daily walks with God, walking close enough to him to feel his love for me, walking close enough that I can't help but arrive at sainthood.

Suddenly, it was less about which program I could lead and totally about my holiness, my relationship with God. The priest was ready, willing, and available to help in his father/shepherd role. As a pastor's child, I had seen this availability before, being called to someone's crisis at all hours of the day and night. I had never faulted my parents in their desire to love others with the love of Christ. As a family, we've come to understand that it's challenging to be 100% present for your congregation and your family at the same time.

Before converting, I was invited to a four-day silent retreat and expected it would be similar to my self-facilitated retreat a year prior. Instead, it



was a beautiful feast. There was a mass filled with liturgy, wisdom, and scripture. Morning readings from the doctors of the church during breakfast. Talks on the transformational power of Christ's saving grace. Lectures on ways to live out our



faith, continue in our formation and understand church teachings. Long hours of meditation in front of a beautiful monstrance displaying the body of Christ. Every aspect of the retreat was beautiful. From that long weekend, I began to thirst for that beauty.

In that abundant long weekend, I experienced the fullness of a call to holiness. Instead of rigor it felt like a quiet walk in a garden, being fed along the way. I was no longer walking alone. I was filled with the unmistakable love of Christ and the family of support to help me move forward.

Then, there was Confession. It was a surprise to me that I was able to experience this before I became a Catholic. Was I about to experience all the misgivings I had on my original list? What I actually experienced was a bounty of grace. I had always been quite aware of what was keeping me from God, but something was revealing in the examination of conscience; something freeing about sharing my sins (or what I thought were sins) and not melting from embarrassment, not receiving condemnation. There was peace and weightlessness when I physically heard the words God had been trying to share with me for so long: "Johanna, you are forgiven." I felt free to walk into my calling of holiness in a way I hadn't before.

As I went a little further in my exploration, I found myself quickly wading into the writings and teaching of Church leaders. Writings from the third century seemed like they could have been written today. Letters from modern popes echoed the same literary beauty as Paul's letter to the Romans. Instead of a confused mix of thoughts and ideas, everything seemed to speak in unison, with one voice. Each piece was building on millennia of resources.

When I was inching closer to the day of my conversion, I realized these writers were not just names on a page or figures from the past. These were men and women alive in the resurrection of

Christ, still interceding on my behalf. Still praying for me on my walk of holiness. Suddenly, the veil between my reality and the Kingdom of God was more transparent.

Then, on a warm early December day, I was ready to join in the feast of the Eucharist. I suppose it's no surprise the weight this experience had for me; my father is a sacramental theologian. Sitting in Protestant churches, receiving the bread and grape juice once a month, never seemed enough. Having it served to me in my seat made me feel uncomfortable. Having Eucharistic services with no liturgy left me with questions. When I experienced the fullness of the Mass, it was as if my whole being was rejoicing. All my questions and misgivings had been answered in the Body and Blood of Christ.

It wasn't long before daily Mass became part of my routine. The idea of uniting myself to the whole Church each day made me excited when I woke up in the morning. Today, my days are ordered — with my little one in tow — around the feast of our risen Saviour, food for my journey of holiness. The Eucharist is like the fountain in the centre of my life from which everything else is fed.

My final hold-out had to do with Our Lady. For years after my conversion, she was smiling at me from a distance, waiting patiently. I had seen



Mary as a distraction, someone in the way of my personal relationship with Christ. But when I became a mother of a little boy, this began to change. I saw how unique my relationship with my son was. I imagined, many, many, many years

in the future, a young lady coming to sit with me and hear all the little details about my sweet boy. I imagined telling her those little intimate details about my son, things only I could know — things he loves dearly, ways to get him to laugh, his sensitivities. Soon after, I began to see Mary standing in front of me, but instead of standing between me and Jesus, she was holding her hand out to draw me in closer to Jesus, into the feast.

It is clear that my original desires for unity of life were not misguided. What has changed since my conversion is the shift from pushing myself to that goal to that of being drawn into a life of holiness. After walking for so many years alone, I felt relief and joy to be a part of a global family on a similar mission. It felt as if we were all walking together toward the same goal, encouraging each other along the way with beauty, truth, and goodness.

<https://www.catholicmom.com/articles/my-catholic-conversion-testimony> ♦



Continued from Page 15: Types of Revelation

has revealed to us not only the Father but also the Holy Spirit. "...the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'you are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased'" (Lk 3: 21-22). The Word of God also speaks of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. "Go therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 11:27). Some other references to the Holy Spirit are Mt 13:11; Mk

2:25-26; Lk 10: 21; Mt 1:25. In the first two quotations, reference has been made to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. From these the theologians have evolved the concept of the Holy Trinity. Though the term Holy Trinity is not explicitly contained in the Bible, it is accepted as a truth and a dogma of faith.

----- ***Relevance of the Catholic Church in Modern World*** (Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, India) ♦

By Saji Thomas



Sister Ambika Pillai is seated at a table answering questions from children who are busily creating decorations out of coloured paper.

Sister Pillai, a member of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Garden, is the secretary of Navjeevan (New Life) Children's Home in Khandwa, a town in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh.

The children at the centre mostly come from broken families -- typically abandoned or orphaned -- who end up loitering around train stations; oftentimes, their fathers were addicted to drugs and their mothers were unable to make enough money to support their families. "In some cases, children run away after being scolded or questioned by parents for something," Sister Pillai told Global Sisters Report, adding that in such cases, "we do our best to reunite them with their families."

Wearing a loose black skirt and a shawl swung around her neck, the nun gets up from the table and walks with the help of a crutch and a prosthetic leg.

Six years ago, she lost her left leg in a train accident.

Sister Pillai, a founding member of Navjeevan, had played a key role in developing the

children's home since its inception in 2003, helping rebuild the shattered lives of runaway children until Jan. 4, 2017, a day that changed her life forever.

"I used to move around in trains looking for abandoned children," the 45-year-old nun said, recalling the day of the accident. "On that day when I was about to get down at Lonavala station, the train suddenly accelerated and I could not put my feet on the platform." She was pulled under the train wheels that cut her left leg instantly. "I was in full consciousness and could see my dismembered leg was moving with a wheel."

"I cried for help and after the initial shock, people pulled me up from the track and put me on the platform," Sister Pillai said.

The surgeon in the hospital told her 80% of her leg would be amputated, prompting her tears at the realization that she would be disabled for life. She smiled as she welcomed visitors, "despite crying within," she recalled.

"I realized on the hospital bed that I had to decide whether to be happy or unhappy for the rest of my life," Sister Pillai told GSR. "God wanted me to live and that's why he took only my leg," she paused before adding, "God could have avoided it."



She recovered from the trauma with long counseling and confidence-building therapies. "I could not have been here now if they had not supported me and believed in me," the sister said about her superiors and fellow sisters in the congregation, standing with her throughout her recuperation.

In August 2022, she resumed her work as the secretary of the children's home with the additional responsibility of being the superior of the local six-member community.

Sister Pillai's "dedication to serving the runaway children even after losing a leg is amazing," said Pranay Barve, one of her friends who is tasked by the railways to identify such children. The nun and her team teach the children art, craft, basic computers and etiquette in addition to helping them with their daily school classes.

"It is a round-the-clock job, as we have to monitor them every moment," Sister Pillai said, adding that the children often come to the center with psychological issues.



Sister Pillai said it was love for children that prompted her to work on the streets and railways because that's where children often become victims of exploitation and abuse, she stresses. Her only regret now is that she cannot drive vehicles as she did before the accident. "Standing even for five minutes is painful," she said.

"But I can help them and their families through counselling," she emphasized, which



mainly focuses on reuniting broken families, drug addiction among men, and women's various issues.

For this, Sister Pillai has enrolled in a Master of Science course in applied psychology with a specialization in counselling and psychotherapy.

She already has a master's degree in social work, diplomas in counselling, psychology and family counselling from different universities. She completed the diplomas from her sickbed. Sister Indu Toppo, who also is a Daughter of Our Lady of the Garden, assists Sister Pillai's outdoor engagements and coordinates work in the children's care home. She said Sister Pillai is proof that a disability is no hindrance when it comes to work.

"She never gives us the feeling that she has some problem, but does everything together with us and encourages us," Sister Toppo told GSR.

Sister Pillai and her team have so far supported more than 600 boys until they turned 18, the legal age limit to stay in a care home. They send the girls to a government center in the city. The sister's center now has 24 boys, who study in government and private schools.

Durgesh Sanjay, a 12th grader in the center, said he was surprised that Sister Pillai is still working for them after the accident. The nun had found him on a railway platform in Khandwa.

The 16-year-old boy, who had lost his father as a child and mother during the COVID-19 pandemic, now wants to become a police officer.



If Sister Pillai "had not brought me to this center, I do not know what would have happened to me," he said. GovindaJugunu, a former resident of Navjeevan, recalled how the nun brought him to the center from a railway platform as a child. He said they still do not know how he landed at the station: Either his parents abandoned him there or he ran away from home.

"I am still in search of my parents and family but unable to trace them," said Jugunu, who is now 24 and working in a nongovernmental organization as a child project coordinator in Indore, the commercial capital of Madhya Pradesh.

He calls Sister Pillai his mother who had helped him complete 10th grade even after leaving the centre. "She keeps supporting me," he told GSR.

Sister Pillai, who was born in a Hindu family in the southwestern Indian state of Kerala, said even her vocation to Catholic religious life had come with great difficulties.

"Ours was a traditional Hindu family that offered special prayers for deities," she said. "But whenever we performed those prayers, my mother would behave as if possessed."

Someone told her parents to meet a Catholic priest in the nearby church. The priest prayed over her mother, and the association led her family to become Catholics.

However, their relatives pressed them to return to Hinduism; everyone except Sister Pillai stopped going to church.

After completing 12th grade, she told her parents that she wanted to become a nun, but they asked her to continue her studies.

"I left home saying I was going for studies and later everyone came to know that I was in a convent."

Following the accident, one of her aunts remarked it was a punishment for her becoming a nun, Sister Pillai said.

"Now I realize all that what happened in my life is as per God's plan and therefore, I accept it without any complaint."

* ucanews.com 16.02.2023 ♦

Holy Father's Prayer Intentions

March 2023: For victims of abuse

We pray for those who have suffered harm from members of the Church; may they find within the Church herself a concrete response to their pain and suffering.

April 2023: For a culture of peace and non-violence

For a culture of peace and non-violence We pray for the spread of peace and non-violence, by decreasing the use of weapons by States and citizens.

CONTINENTAL MEETING

National Directors of PMS in Asia & Oceania
16 - 19 February 2023, Bangkok, Thailand.





Meeting With **Sr Nathalie Becquart**,
Under Secretary to the Synod in the Vatican.



13th Jan - 2023



16th Jan - 2023

Visit of **Mgr Wolfgang Huber**
Director Missio München



Meeting with **Mr. Alessandro Cassinis Righini**
Auditor General
of the Holy See & his team

1st Feb 2023



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