

# PRESENZA AGOSTINIANA



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## SPIRITUALITY CENTERS

Grow together in faith



**BRAZIL**  
Saint Monica  
Seminary

**ITALY**  
Sanctuary of  
Madonna di Valverde

**PHILIPPINES**  
Chapel  
of the Holy Relics

# Editorial

## The importance of Spirituality Centers



Dear readers,

in the frenetic and chaotic rhythm of the contemporary world, there is often a need for a pause for moments of tranquility and reflection. Our religious communities scattered in various parts of the world are concerned with offering a refuge for those seeking a deeper connection with their spirituality and an opportunity to rediscover the meaning and value of their Christian existence.

The second issue of this year of *Presenza Agostiniana* is dedicated to some of our Centers of Spirituality that offer sacraments, reflections, formation, and spiritual retreats to help people find communion with God and inner peace in an era characterized by stress, anxiety, and many concerns.

These centers, distributed in various parts of the world, are witnesses to the continuous and current presence of Augustinian spirituality in the various realities where we are present, not as mere places of worship, but as spaces where faith intertwines with local culture through prayer, reflection, and community.

Each Augustinian Center of Spirituality has its own history, carries out its own activities, and proposes our charism in a unique way: Happy to serve the Most High in a spirit of humility. We invite our readers to get to know them through the pages of *Presenza Agostiniana* to perceive the importance of Centers of Spirituality in the contemporary world.

Enjoy reading.

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### Editor-in-Chief

Calogero Ferlisi (Fr. Gabriele, oad)

### Editorial and Administrative Office

General Curia - Order of the Discalced Augustinians  
Piazza Ottavilla, 1 - 00152 - Rome  
e-mail: [curiagen@oadnet.org](mailto:curiagen@oadnet.org)  
pec: [curiagen@pec.it](mailto:curiagen@pec.it)  
Tel.: +39 06 589 6345  
WhatsApp: +39 324 089 3400

### Cover, layout and publication

Fr. Diones Rafael Paganotto, oad

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Group of faithful participating in a celebration organized by our confreres in Da Nang, Vietnam

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# Spirituality centers

## An Augustinian characteristic

Fr. Diones Rafael Paganotto, oad - @freidiones



In the heart of the Christian faith, places of spirituality play a central role because they are concrete points where believers can live their faith more deeply and develop a greater connection with God and themselves.

In short, a **Center of Spirituality** is a place, usually a church, convent, or chapel, that offers the opportunity for laypeople and religious to celebrate the sacraments, participate in retreats and training courses, and stay for one or more days in an environment that offers both the possibility to pause amidst daily activities and an authentic and profound experience of faith.

Each center of spirituality is unique, however, there are some **common characteristics** that are necessary to characterize it as typically Augustinian:

**1. Importance of Holy Scripture:** the Bible is the primary source of inspiration for Christians, offering crucial teachings on spiritual life. For this reason, a center of spirituality must provide greater contact with the Word of God because "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow your righteous laws" (Psalm 119:105-106).

**2. Importance of community:** In the Augustinian tradition, community holds a prominent place. St. Augustine emphasizes the importance of spiritual union with God and among believers: "the Father and the Son have willed that we be united among ourselves and with them, by means of that same bond which unites them, and that is the love which is the Holy Spirit" (Augustine, *Sermons* 71,12,18). Indeed, the sharing of faith finds in a center of spirituality a privileged place to come together, share experiences, and support each other on the journey of faith.



**3. Importance of silence:** in a historical period dominated by frenzy and distractions, one of the most important characteristics of a spirituality center is to be a refuge of peace and silence, allowing the faithful to temporarily step away from the daily frenzy to devote themselves to prayer, reflection, and contemplation.

**4. Importance of spiritual direction:** Our religious communities always seek to offer people the opportunity to receive spiritual guidance as a significant moment to explore their inner life, discern God's will, and grow in faith; spiritual guidance will seek to accompany individuals on a sincere path of transformation towards greater conformity to Christ.



**5. Importance of the liturgy:** the liturgy plays a central role in the spiritual life of the faithful and requires even more attention in a center of spirituality because the celebration of the sacraments and active participation in the liturgy are the special occasions where the entire community gathered expresses its faith and renews its union with God, seeking to nurture, educate, and mature its faith through shared and communal rituals.

**6. Importance of prayer:** Prayer is the heart of spiritual life; through it, the faithful enter into communion with God and receive the grace to face the challenges of daily life. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* emphasizes: "the life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with him. This communion of life is always possible because, through Baptism, we have already been united with Christ. Prayer is Christian insofar as it is communion with Christ and extends throughout the Church, which is his Body. Its dimensions are those of Christ's love» (CCC 2565).

**7. Importance of hospitality:** welcoming others should be one of the characteristics of a spirituality center; hospitality goes beyond merely receiving someone because it is the ongoing challenge of seeing the face of Christ in the person before us and offering a place open to all who wish to deepen their spiritual life.

**8. Importance of solitude:** Community life should also be balanced with solitude, both interior and exterior, as a moment when a person can make use of the spaces available to listen to the voice of God speaking and discern the movements of their own heart; solitude helps create a real space in the heart, where one can understand the necessary steps still to be taken along their spiritual journey.

**9. Importance of tradition:** Throughout its millennia-long history, the Church has always emphasized the importance of tradition in many respects, especially in the spiritual realm, passing on from one generation to the next the richness of the Christian faith; in a world where traditions can easily be forgotten or neglected, spiritual centers represent a stronghold of stability and a point of reference amid the continuous changes of humanity.

**10. Importance of present reality:** Agostinian spiritual centers can be considered oases of peace and hope amidst the frenzy of our days; however, they cannot isolate themselves from the present reality nor offer believers a utopian model of Christian and Augustinian life. Indeed, people who come to our spiritual centers seek to renew their trust in God and commit themselves to fully living out their faith in the environments where they find themselves every day.



# Chapel of the Holy Relics

## Spirituality Center in the Philippines

Deac. Anthony Booc, oad



OAD Tabor Hill has been considered to be a **Pilgrim Center** in Cebu. One of its main facets is the Chapel of Holy Relics. The Chapel of Holy Relics at Barangay (village of) San Jose (Talamban), Cebu City, is a place dedicated to God that houses particles of the remains of his sons and daughters who bore heroic witness to Jesus in their lives from the time of our Lord until recent times. Located around 10 kilometers from the heart of Cebu City, it houses an astounding 4000+ relics of saints and blessed of the Catholic Church and stands as a prayer center for all the faithful.

Through the inspiration of the Local Community at that time, headed by Fr. Luigi Kerschbamer, the Chapel was first established in 2012. By that year, the Chapel housed only 400 relics.. Later in 2016, a large number of relics were entrusted to the same Chapel. .



### 1. Who is a saint?

The belief in the Communion of Saints is integral to the Catholic Church. A saint is someone who is in heaven and has been triumphant in his or her battles on earth. There are many canonized saints, but there are more unknown and uncanonized saints in heaven. Saints are not worshipped in the Catholic Church, but they are given veneration, that is, reverent respect, because they have lived holy lives and are now enjoying the beatific vision of God.



### 2. What are relics?

Simply put, relics are remains. They don't only refer to bodily remains; they could also refer to things that were touched by the holy person or were touched by him or her. Relics that come from bodily parts are known as **first-class relics**. It could be from the bone of a saint, flesh, or hair. In the course of canonization or beatification, other body parts may be used as relics, like the heart or even blood.

There are also **second-class relics**. The most popular source of second-class relics are clothes or any piece of linen used by a holy person. There are many sources of this type of relic, which could include books, furniture, or even the coffin that formerly encased the body of a saint for burial.

There are also **third-class relics**; these are things that are touched by first-class or second-class relics. The relics found in the Chapel of Holy Relics belong to the first and second types.



### 3. Whose relics are found in the Chapel?

The Chapel houses the relics of many **saints and blessed**, as well as our Lord, the Virgin Mary, and Saint Joseph. It also has relics of the founders of monastic, mendicant and clerical orders. Specifically, it has particles of the relics of all the apostles of our Lord Jesus.

It is also the only Chapel in the Philippines that contains relics of all holy popes, from St. Peter, the first pope, to the most recently canonized St. John Paul II and Blessed John Paul I. As mentioned above, the Chapel also houses holy founders of religious orders like St. Francis of Assisi, St. Dominic de Guzman, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. Clare of Assisi.

The Chapel, being a property of the Discalced Augustinians, also holds the relics of almost all canonized and beatified **Augustinians**. Also venerated here are the relics of thaumaturgi (wonderworkers) like St. Padre Pio, St. Anthony of Padua, and St. Vincent Ferrer, as well as the relics of saints beloved by Filipinos like St. Roche, St. Isidore the Farmer, St. Therese of Lisieux, and other saints venerated in many towns, cities, and barangays in the Philippines. You may look at the Calendar of Saints, and for sure, a relic of your birthday saint, your patron saint, is found in the Chapel.



Celebration in the Chapel



#### 4. Why is St. Rita of Cascia given prominence in the Chapel?

St. Rita of Cascia (1381-1457), an Augustinian nun and mystic, is given prominence due to the Augustinian character of the Chapel.

People from all walks of life come to the Chapel on Thursdays in order to pray and give thanks to God for the favors they receive from Him through the intercession of the Saint of the Impossible. And, yes, relics of this beloved saint are also venerated in the Chapel.

St. Rita's feast day is celebrated every 22nd of May. A day prior to the feast, the reliquary image of the saint is taken from its niche and dressed up.

On this day, people come to whisper their ardent petitions to the saint, who is a known intercessor for all problems.



#### 5. What is the most significant relic venerated in the Chapel?

All relics in the Chapel are significant since they have been either parts of the bodies of holy men and women or things that they have touched, but probably if there should be any, then it would be the relics associated with our Lord, like pieces of the Holy Cross. These are considered first-class since they were soaked with the blood of Jesus during his passion and crucifixion.



**Celebration in the Chapel**



## 6. Takeaway points

The OAD Friars always emphasize the important catechism of the relics. The practice of venerating the relics of the saints is a declaration of belief in **Catholic tenets**:

- (1) *the reality of eternal life for those who have obediently witnessed Christ and His Holy Gospel on earth;*
- (2) *the truth of everyone's bodily resurrection on the last day;*
- (3) *the doctrine of the splendor of the human body and the deference that should be shown to both living and deceased bodies;*
- (4) *the conviction that the saints have a special intercessory power in heaven due to their close relationship with Christ the King;*
- (5) *the reality of our closeness to the saints because of our membership in the communion of saints, we as members of the pilgrim Church or the Church militant and them as members of the Church triumphant*



## 7. Conclusion

Relics themselves hold no power. The veneration of these relics is a manifestation of the great power of God that operates in the lives of the saints, which can serve as an inspiration for believers to grow in their Catholic faith. Furthermore, the veneration of these relics is just one of the most beautiful treasures that Jesus Christ has granted to His chaste spouse, the Church.

Through the veneration of relics, the faithful can feel enveloped by the presence and guidance of the saints, drawing inspiration from their lives of faith and virtue. The presence of relics makes the Chapel of the Holy Relics a **Spirituality Center** that offers pilgrims and devotees the opportunity to pray, meditate, and reflect, creating a deep and meaningful spiritual experience.



Relics present in the Chapel

# The flourishing of our spirituality

## The mission in Vietnam

Fr. Augustine Tran Nhu Huynh, oad



**Seat of the Religious Community**

Missionary of the Discalced Augustinians were present in Vietnam since the early 18th century. History mentions nearly 22 **missionaries** of the Order in Vietnam and had also 6 Vietnamese priests.

Among the most prominent missionaries was the monk Bishop Hylario Costa (1694-1754) in Eastern Dang Ngoai from 1737 to 1754. His body is currently buried in Loc Thuy Parish, Nam Dinh Diocese.

After an absence of more than 200 years, it was until 2008, The Order officially returned to Vietnam, and is present with two official communities in the Dioceses of **Da Nang and Saigon**. Up to this point, the number of vocations in Vietnam is increasing rapidly with nearly 40 Aspirants from two Communities and 3 native Priests and 4 Deacons.



**Da Nang Community**

Our confreres dedicate themselves with commitment to the formation of Aspirants, dealing above all with the spiritual life, oriented by the formators and the Community towards learning the English language, philosophy and elements of our spirituality.



## VIETNAM

Official language: Vietnamese

Currency: Đồng

Population: 98.000.000 abitanti

Catholicism: 7,5%, with three Archdioceses and twenty-four Dioceses

Typical gastronomy: Pho, Goi Cuon, Banh mi, Xi ma, Chè Chuối, Tiet Canh

In addition to training Aspirants, the Communities also have **different ministries** depending on the characteristics of the Dioceses.

*\* The Community of Saigon is in charge of a station mission in Xuan Loc Diocese.*

*\* The Community of Da Nang Diocese is in charge of Tung Son sub-parish, an antique church, with nearly 600 parishioners. Pilgrimage activities to visit churches and relics of the Saints are becoming known to many people.*



The rapid development of the two Communities in Vietnam is a testament to the great care and support from the Order itself and from local benefactors. The Discalced Augustinians aim to continue their mission in a territory where spirituality is deeply rooted in history and culture. Despite the challenges faced, faith is a point of strength and hope for many Vietnamese. **Augustinian spirituality** stands out for the importance given to personal and communal prayer. In fact, those who attend our Communities find a point of reference in the relics of the saints, pilgrimages, the sense of community, and solidarity among believers, who support each other in faith and in the difficulties of daily life. In this way, the Order of the Discalced Augustinians is becoming a Center of Spirituality for all those who, in the light of our charism, desire to live a profound experience of faith.

# Saint Monica Seminary

## Center of Spirituality in Brazil

Fr. Dorian Ceteroni, oad



### 1. The beginnings

Since its origins in the years 1982-1983, the Saint Monica Seminary in Toledo - Brazil, in the West of Paraná, Brazil, has attracted some **ecclesial movements**, such as the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and the Cursillos de Cristiandad, thanks to the commitment of the confreres who were part of the first Community of the Augustinian Recollects formed by Fr. Luigi Bernetti, Fr. Luigi Kerschbamer, and Fr. Rosario Palo.

In addition to their commitment to the formation of Novices,

Philosophy course Professed, Postulants, and seminarians at the fundamental and intermediate levels, the Priests provided assistance to individuals and ecclesial movements requesting support, help, and collaboration.



Construction of the Seminary



### 2. The Santa Rita Hall

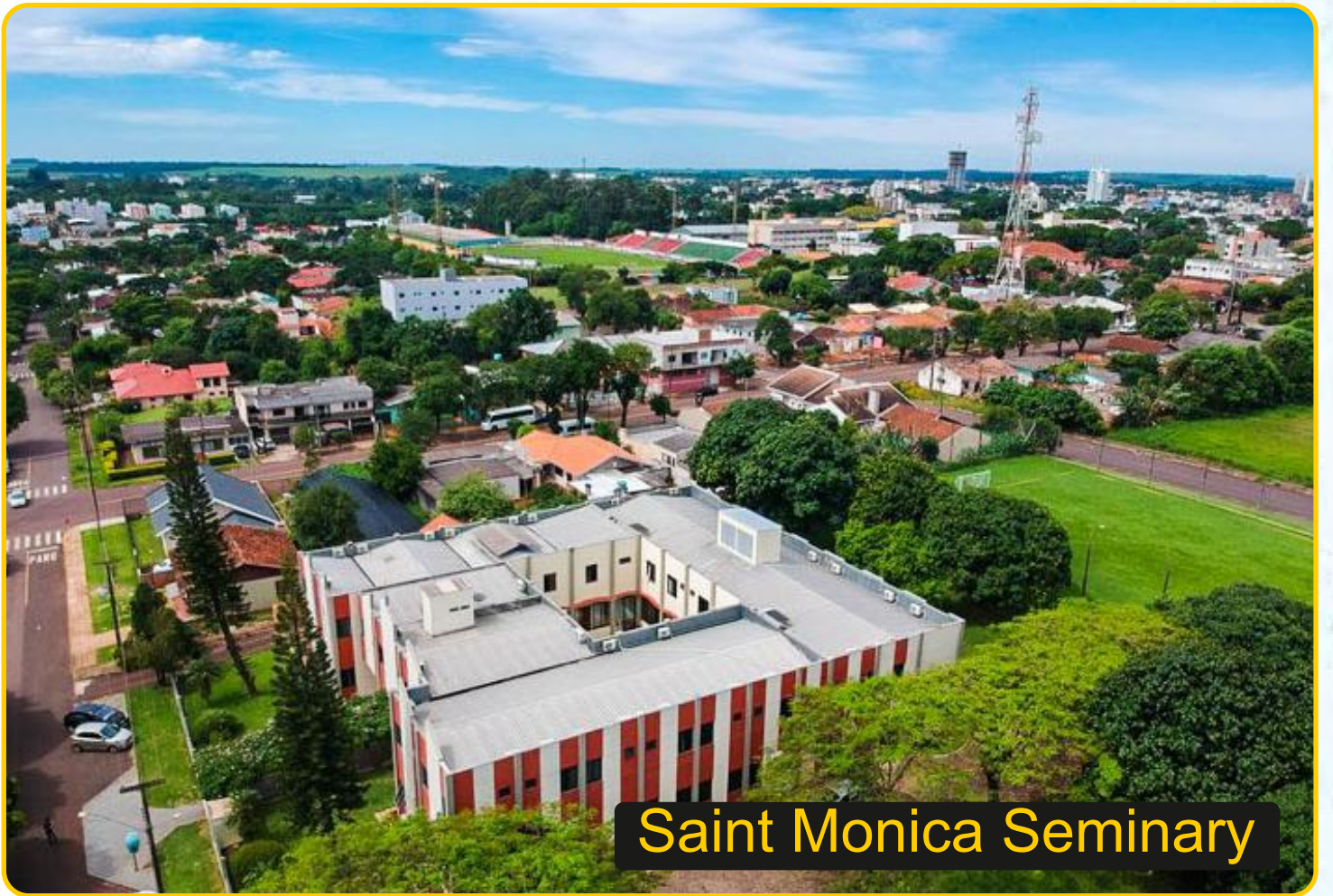
In 1999, the Santa Rita Hall was completed, a large structure near the Seminary, featuring a small Chapel for the Blessed Sacrament, a spacious kitchen equipped with barbecue facilities, and an adequate number of bathrooms. This facility is capable of accommodating large groups for retreats, celebrations, and activities related to the Augustinian Recollect spirituality. Subsequently, the **Santa Rita Association** (originally from Cascavel, a city near Toledo) arrived in Toledo, making our Seminary the venue for its work, meetings, retreats, and fundraising activities.



During those years, the **Equipes Notre-Dame**, a lay movement of marital spirituality aimed at fully living the sacrament of marriage, also sought the support and participation of our friars as spiritual advisors.

Both the Santa Rita Association and the Equipes Notre-Dame continue their activities

to this day, with the Santa Monica Seminary serving as a point of reference for living their spirituality in the light of our Discalced Augustinian charism. All the friars who have been part of the community in Toledo have consistently continued these activities



**Saint Monica Seminary**



*"For God has given us a spirit not of timidity, but of strength, love and self-control»  
(2Tim 1:7)*



### 3. Spirituality Center

Over the years, by decision of the Provincial Council, the Community in Toledo has returned to being a Novitiate House and has officially become a **Center of Discalced Augustinian spirituality**.

Since then, various annual meetings, retreats, and, in 2017, even the General Chapter of the Order have been organized. This was made possible because the structure of the house underwent a **radical renovation** in 2016 and 2017 to provide everything necessary for the conduct of meetings with a large number of participants.



ore recently, the **Mothers Monica Movement** has been created, which is a group formed by mothers who come together to pray for their children. The movement is growing significantly, and every 27th of the month (as the feast of Saint Monica is celebrated on August 27), it is solemnly observed. Augustinian spirituality is very present, and Saint Monica herself serves as a model of prayer and intercession, so much so that the number of participants increases every month. Small groups of mothers are created to gather and pray for their children.

Other **groups and movements**, which we do not list due to their quantity, monthly seek the structure of the Seminary to organize study meetings, training, retreats, symposia, and celebrations. To God, our gratitude for the grace of being able to offer such a physical structure and also adequate spiritual-sacramental assistance to so many people and movements in the city of Toledo and throughout the region.

The Santa Monica Seminary is a reference point and of great importance for Brazil and for the entire Order. The confreres who are currently part of the Community and are in service to the people of God look with hope towards the future with the mission of maintaining and improving the Santa Monica Seminary as a Center of Augustinian Spirituality. Indeed, places like these are an important point of reference for believers who wish to deepen their spiritual life and live their faith more authentically. The Santa Monica Seminary is and will always be a privileged place to encounter God, grow in faith, and share one's spiritual experience.

# Sanctuary of Santa Maria di Valverde

## Sign of mercy and hope

Fr. Leandro Xavier Rodrigues, oad - @leandro\_xr



The Sanctuary of Santa Maria di Valverde can boast of being one of the oldest centers of spirituality of the Augustinian Recollect Order, even though the order did not exist at the origin of the devotion. In fact, we are talking about events from the 11th century, but after five centuries, it was entrusted to the care of the friars, just a few years after the birth of the new reformed Order.

### 1. Brief historical notes: origin of the Sanctuary and devotion to the Madonna of Valverde

The history of the Sanctuary and devotion to the Madonna of Valverde has its roots in a legend that tells of a conversion in the area of "**Vallis Viridis**" (Valverde) of a brigand, a former Norman soldier, who lived by wrongdoing and misconduct.

One evening in June of 1038, this brigand, named Dionisio, attacked a farmer named Egidio, who was very devoted to the Madonna. Terrified, Egidio invoked Her help, and She appeared to them along with a host of angels, stopping **Dionisio** and inviting him to throw down his sword and change his ways.

Shaken by this experience, Dionisio left his old life to devote himself to a hermitic life. The cave where he used to hide to attack passersby became the place of encounter and intimacy with God.

One evening, during prayer, the Madonna revealed to Dionisio her desire for a church to be built in her honor, and she would indicate the exact location, a miracle that occurred through the flight of a flock of cranes flying over the site, forming the symbol of "M"aria in the sky.

However, construction work was interrupted due to a lack of water. Then the Virgin ordered Dionisio to strike the **rock of the cave**, from which water gushed forth, serving both for construction and as medicine for those who drank it with faith..

On the night before the last Sunday of **August in 1040**, Dionisio was in prayer in the new church dedicated to the Madonna when he had another vision of the Virgin Mary holding the Baby Jesus in her arms, assuring him of her protection. The next morning, to Dionisio's astonishment, the image he had seen during the night was impressed on the bare pillar of the church. From that moment, Valverde became a destination for pilgrimages.



Our Lady of Valverde





Sanctuary of Valverde

## 2. Mary's message

Every Sanctuary has its own charisma, in the sense that it originated from an apparition, a revelation, or even a mystical experience that somehow imprints a characteristic sign on that devotion, transmitting to those who approach it a specific message of that place, because that place of devotion has its own charisma.

Looking at the history of the origin of devotion to the Madonna of Valverde, we find characteristic traits that reveal the charisma of this Sanctuary and the message that the Blessed Virgin Mary wanted to leave to her devotees. Using the words of Saint Paul, the intervention of Mary in the life of the brigand Dionisio opens up the possibility of a new life, the possibility of:

**depose the old man with the former conduct (...) and to be renewed in spirit (...) and put on the new man**

*(Eph 4:22-24)*



Interior of the Sanctuary

The message that Mary delivers to every pilgrim who enters her Sanctuary is a message of mercy and hope, an appeal to conversion. Each of us, like the brigand Dionisio, needs to throw away our swords of aggressiveness, judgment, and everything that makes us less worthy of the dignity of being children embraced by God's love.

### 3. Activities in the Sanctuary

The Sanctuary of Valverde is also a Parish church, and consequently, its activities embrace catechesis, the sacraments, movements, and parish groups, but special attention is given to the pilgrim. In this sense, many parishioners have also become **operators of the Sanctuary**, meaning collaborators who commit to welcoming those who come from near and far to have an encounter with God, drawn by Our Lady.



One of the activities that best reflects the charisma of the Sanctuary is the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Every day, the friars are available for confessions and spiritual direction. It often happens that with the visit of groups of pilgrims, people who have not approached this sacrament for many years find the opportune occasion to feel once again embraced by the **mercy of God**.



# Sunday Liturgy

with Saint Augustine - May/June 2024

Fr. Gabriele Ferlisi, oad



May 5, 2024

6th Sunday of Easter

Acts 10:25-26.34-35.44-48

1John 4:7-10

John 15:9-17



## Intense life of communion and friendship between us and Jesus

**a. The same theme continues.** Today's Gospel passage is a continuation of last Sunday's, where Jesus, using the image of the vine and the branches, had presented to us the strong message of an intimate communion of life between him and us. Today, the Gospel continues to offer us the same passionate invitation from Jesus to remain in his love. It does so not merely by repeating "remain in my love" but by expanding its horizon and revealing all the richness and depth of its contents.

**b. The call to the Father's love.** This call is very important because it is from it that Jesus' invitation develops: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Remain in my love." Jesus speaks to us of this wave of love that originates from the Father and, passing through him, reaches us, in our concrete experience, made of faithful observance of the commandments. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love" (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 82,2-3).

**c. You are my friends.** Another new element in Jesus' discourse is telling us that he considers us his friends, but under two conditions: that we open ourselves to mutual knowledge of communion in love and that we carry out with love what he commands us (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 85,2).

**d. The new law of love.** "This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you." This is almost Jesus' only commandment: to love one another (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 87,1); and this is the new standard of Christian love: the love with which Jesus loves us, and no longer the love with which one loves oneself (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 83,2).

**e. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.** It is simply sublime: this entire grand project of love and this intensity of communion of life between us and Jesus aim to make possible in our lives the very fullness of the Lord's joy (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 83,1).

**Message:** Jesus had bequeathed this testament to the apostles before his passion and death; the liturgy proposes it to us before the celebration of Jesus' Ascension, so that we may know how to live well in the time of history as a story of love.

**May 12, 2024**

## **Ascension of the Lord**

Acts 1:1-11

Eph 4:1-13

Mark 16:15-20



## **Ascension of the Lord**

**a. The event of the Ascension.** "The resurrection of the Lord is our hope, the ascension of the Lord is our glorification" (*Sermon 261,1*). Today we celebrate precisely the exaltation of the human nature of Jesus.

**b. Descending – Ascending.** At Christmas, we celebrated the mystery of Christ who, while remaining God, "descended" among us by assuming human nature; today we celebrate his "ascent" to the right hand of the Father, in the sense that, without abandoning us, he brings human nature to the fullness of its elevation and is constituted Lord of history (*Sermon 262,1.4*). Indeed, the verbs "descend" and "ascend" are to be understood not in a spatial but existential sense.

**c. Let us ascend together with the Lord.** The invitation that St. Augustine addresses to us is to ascend together with Christ: "If we want to celebrate the Lord's ascension rightly, faithfully, devoutly, holily, piously, let us ascend with him and lift up our hearts. However, as we ascend, let us not become proud. For we must indeed lift up our hearts, but turn them to the Lord. To have our hearts lifted up but not turned to the Lord is to be proud; instead, to have our hearts lifted up and turned to the Lord is to take refuge in him. For it is to the Lord who has ascended that we say: Lord, you are our refuge" (*Sermon 261,1*), our hope..

**d. We proclaim and serve the Lord here on earth in our brothers.** And as we ascend with him, let us proclaim him here on earth through our preaching (*Sermon 163,4-5*) and serve him in needy brothers, in whom he is identified (*Sermon 261,7*).

**Message:** we are invited to walk with our feet on the ground and our hearts lifted high.



**May 19, 2024**

**Pentecost**

Acts 2:1-11

1Cor 12:3-7.12-13

John 20:19-23



## Pentecost

**a. Solemnity of Pentecost.** "We celebrate with great solemnity this day sanctified by the descent of the Holy Spirit. Such a joyful and beloved solemnity urges us to speak to you about this gift of God, about this grace of God, about the richness of his mercy towards us, namely the Holy Spirit" (*Sermon 270,1*).

**b. Who is the Holy Spirit.** "The Holy Spirit is God, just as the Son is God, just as the Father is God. I have said 'God' three times, but I have not said 'three gods,' because it is right to say 'God' three times instead of 'three gods.' You know very well that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one God" (*Tractates on the Gospel of John 6,2*). The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Holy Trinity. He is the mutual gift of love from the Father and the Son. He is the soul of the life of the Christian and the Church. He is the gift of communion and unity in the Church. He is the principle of our sanctification. He has the task of being the memory of what Jesus taught, the intelligence that understands its meaning, the prophecy of future things.

**c. The manifestations.** The Holy Spirit manifested himself especially in the form of a dove to indicate unity; and in the form of tongues of fire to indicate the diversity of charisms: unity in diversity, diversity in unity: harmony! Therefore, uniformity, as the suppression of the diversity of charisms, is not a virtue, not a fruit of the Spirit: "When the Lord sent the Holy Spirit, he manifested himself visibly in two ways: in the form of a dove and in the form of fire. In the form of a dove, when he descended upon the Lord just baptized; in the form of fire, when he descended upon the Apostles gathered together [...] In short, the dove says that those who have been sanctified by the Spirit must be without deceit; the fire indicates that simplicity must not be coldness. It should not surprise us that the tongues of fire were divided. Tongues are different, for this reason the Spirit manifested himself in distinct tongues: 'And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them.' Tongues are distinct from one another, but this distinction does not mean a break in unity. You should not fear dispersion in the division of tongues, if you recognize unity in the dove" (*Tractates on the Gospel of John 6,3*).

**c. Let us welcome the Holy Spirit.** Thus St. Augustine exhorted the faithful: "Welcome the rich Spirit of God: you will expand, you will not be constrained. So says the psalmist: 'You have enlarged my steps'" (*Sermon 169,12,15*).

**Message:** always ready to welcome the Holy Spirit and love the unity in the diversity of charisms..

**May 26, 2024**

**Trinity**

Deut 4:32-34.39-40

Rom 8:14-17

Matt 28:16-20



## God, one but not only

**a. Solemnity of the Holy Trinity.** Today's liturgy presents to us in a single solemnity the first of the principal mysteries of the Christian faith. In the Advent season, the Person of the Father emerged; in the Christmas season, Lent, and Easter, the Person of the Son; in Pentecost and Ordinary Time, the Person of the Holy Spirit.

**b. Essence of the mystery.** In its essence, the content of the mystery consists in the fact that God is One and One, but not only. He is One and Triune, Absolute Simplicity and Communion. His revelation has been progressive, and it was Jesus who revealed it with his simple way of referring to the Father, of whom He is the Only-Begotten Son, and to the Holy Spirit, the mutual gift of love. They are one God, in that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are terms of Relationships:  $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$ ; and not  $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$ .

**c. Thus St. Augustine presents the content of the mystery:** "All the Catholic interpreters of the sacred books of the Old and New Testaments who have written before me about the Trinity of God and whom I have been able to read, understood this to be taught according to the Scriptures: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with their absolute equality in one and the same substance show the divine unity and therefore are not three gods, but one God alone, although the Father has begotten the Son and therefore the one who is Father is not the Son; although the Son has been begotten by the Father and therefore the one who is Son is not the Father; although the Holy Spirit is neither Father nor Son but only the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, equal to the Father and the Son, belonging with them to the unity of the Trinity. [...] Thus the same Trinity did not descend in the form of a dove upon Jesus on the day of his baptism or on the day of Pentecost, after the Lord's ascension, it rested upon each of the Apostles, with the sound coming from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind and by distinct tongues of fire, but only the Holy Spirit. Nor finally did the same Trinity pronounce from heaven the words: You are my Son, when Jesus was baptized by John, or on the mountain when the three disciples were with him, or when the voice resounded saying: I have glorified it and will glorify it again, but it was only the voice of the Father addressing the Son, although the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit work inseparably, as they are inseparable in their very being. This is my faith, because this is the Catholic faith" (*Trinity* 1,4,7).

**Message:** Let us seek in our Christian commitment to become aware of the importance of this Trinitarian mystery and work to make the image of God in us clear, banishing hypocrisy and twisted and unhealthy interpersonal relationships.

June 2, 2024

9th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Exod 24:3-8

Heb 9:11-15

Mark 14:12-16.22-26



## Free in the law

**a. Law-Freedom:** continuous Grounds for Conflict. The gospel presents us with one of the many episodes that were a direct cause of conflict between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees, regarding the interpretation of law observance and freedom, often becoming a basis for condemning Jesus to death: an attempt that ultimately succeeded.

**b. Not Contradiction but Inclusion.** However, law and freedom are not in contradiction with each other but include and presuppose each other. It's just a matter of observing them from the right angle, as suggested by St. Paul when he said that the letter kills and the spirit gives life; or as suggested by St. Augustine when he distinguished between being "in the law" and being "under the law": "It is not the same to be in the law or under the law: the one who is in the law acts in conformity with it; the one who is under the law is compelled to move according to it. The former is free, the latter is a servant. Consequently, one thing is the law written and imposed on the subject, another is the law accepted in the soul by the one who does not need the written precept" (*Exposition on the Psalms* 1,2). Whoever is under the law is a slave to the law and proposes not legality but legalism that suppresses the value of freedom. Whoever, instead, is in the law is truly free in their observance motivated by love.

**c. Love and do what you will.** In this regard, the thought of St. Augustine is famous: "Thus once for all a brief precept is given you: Love and do what you will. Whether you hold your peace, through love hold your peace; whether you cry out, through love cry out; whether you correct, through love correct; whether you spare, through love do you spare: let the root of love be within, of this root can nothing spring but what is good" (*Commentary on the First Letter of John* 7,8). "This is our hope, brothers: that He who is free may set us free, and by setting us free, make us His slaves. We were slaves to lust, and, freed, we become slaves to charity [...] Therefore, do not abuse your freedom by indulging in sin, but use it to avoid sinning. Your will shall be free if it is good. You will be free if you are a slave: free from sin, a slave of righteousness" (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 41,8). It is very interesting what St. Augustine says on this subject in the *Rule* 8,1: "May the Lord grant you to observe these rules with love, as lovers of spiritual beauty, and may the good fragrance of Christ exhale from your holy coexistence, not as servants under the law, but as free men under grace".

**Message:** there is no true freedom except in truth and in observance not servile but for the love of the law.

June 9, 2024

10th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gen 3:9-15

2Cor 4:13-5,1

Mark 3:20-35



## Beware of anyone who undermines credibility

**a. The machiavellian operations of pseudo friends.** A cunning way to gain victory over another is to undermine their credibility by making them appear crazy and thus exclude them. The Pharisees attempted this with Jesus, as recounted in today's Gospel passage, but they did not succeed because he exposed the perverse machinations of their reasoning, based on ambiguity and falsehood. Jesus warns us to be careful not to be intimidated and ensnared by the subtle arguments of those who wish us harm, and unfortunately, in this group, unsuspected individuals such as family members and friends may be included for unknown reasons. We must have faith in our convictions, honesty, and love for the truth, always ready, as suggested by the apostle Peter, to give a reason for the hope that is in us. If we allow ourselves to be robbed of certainties in true essential values, both human and spiritual, our adversaries will prevail.

**b. Sins against the Holy Spirit.** A particularly important point emphasized by Jesus in his discourse is not to sin against the Holy Spirit; that is, not to succumb to two opposite extremes: on one hand, the despair of obtaining forgiveness from God's mercy, and on the other hand, the desire to abuse God's mercy.

**Message:** we are called to sow trust and mutual respect and not seeds of suspicion and prejudice.





**June 16, 2024**

**11th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Ezek 17:22-24

2Cor 5:6-10

Mark 4:26-34



## Language in parables

**a. Why Jesus spoke in parables.** To adapt to the limited understanding of the crowds and even the apostles: "Throughout the Gospel, it is evident from many indications how the disciples of Christ were like children when he, before the Passion, spoke to them about great things while they were small. But he spoke to them in a language suited to their understanding, so that even though they were small, they heard about those great things; for they had not yet received the Holy Spirit, as they did after the resurrection when the Lord breathed on them and when it descended upon them from above, they had a taste for human things rather than divine ones [...] Therefore, when faced with his promise - of the hour when he will no longer speak in parables, they say: Now you are speaking plainly and not using any figure of speech. If not because his words are parables only for those who do not understand them, and they understood them so little that they did not even realize they did not understand them? They were still children, incapable of spiritually judging the things they heard and that referred not to the body, but to the spirit" (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 103,1).

**b. The Images of the Kingdom.** They express the joint action of God and man and the humble way the seed sprouts, develops, and matures: "This also falls within the theme of the response given previously with the parable of the mustard seed, according to which Christians must have as the first thing the faith necessary for present life. As long as it is a hidden treasure in earthen vessels, it seems very small, but it is endowed with very strong vitality and sprouts by the impulse of our Lord Jesus Christ. He wants to be nourished through the ministry of his servants, that is, through them to pass believers into his body, after having in a sense killed and eaten them. After that, he himself feeds them down here with the word of faith and the sacrament of his passion. For he did not come to be served but to serve. Let those servants therefore say to that mulberry tree according to the parable of the mustard seed: let them turn to the same Gospel of the cross of the Lord which with the fruits of blood hanging from the wood (think here of the wounds) would have provided food to the peoples of the world, and let them tell it to uproot itself from unbelieving Judaism and to move and transplant itself into the sea of the Gentiles. It is indeed with such service, performed at home, that they will be true ministers of the Lord, hungry and thirsty" (*Questions on the Gospels* 2,39,3).

**Message:** We must be able to listen to the language of parables, always dense with spiritual richness, and not detach ourselves from the simple, humble, and reserved style of the Gospel.

June 23, 2024

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Job 38:1.8-11

2Cor 5:14-17

Mark 4:35-41



## God guides history

**a. Panic, then as now.** A highly relevant page, as today, like yesterday, we feel as though we are in the midst of a stormy sea, with the boat nearly submerged by the waters and the Lord asleep. Moments of panic now as they were then!

**b. Is There a solution?** Yes, but not in human capabilities, rather in turning to the Lord. When man has no more human resources, Christian hope comes into action. And for the Lord, just a single word is enough to calm the storm and change the course of events. One thing is certain: God firmly holds the reins of history in His hands. And He makes use of all, whether conscious or unconscious, according to the ordered plan known to Him, a just plan.

**c. Warning from St. Augustine:** We must awaken Jesus, that is, reawaken faith: "O Christian, Christ sleeps on your ship; awaken Him, and He will command the storms to calm. The tossing of the disciples on the ship when Christ was asleep foreshadows the tossing of Christians when faith in Christ sleeps within them. For the Apostle writes: 'Christ dwells through faith in your hearts,' since while as presence, beauty, and divinity He is always with the Father, He is at the right hand of the Father in heaven as bodily presence, as the presence of faith He is in all Christians. So, you are dangerously tossed because Christ sleeps, that is, you cannot overcome the craving aroused in you by the tempting voice because faith sleeps in you. It is like it is dozing, you have forgotten it. To awaken Christ means to awaken faith, to bring to mind what you have given your faith to. Remember your faith, awaken Christ: your very faith will command the waves you are buffeted by and the winds that blow upon you, those who wish you ill: they will immediately retreat, and calm will return immediately; and if the persuaders of evil continue to speak, they will no longer be able to tilt the ship, raise the waves, or submerge the vessel that carries you" (*Sermon 361,7*).

**Message:** nNever lose the certainty that God always firmly holds the reins of history in His hands.



**June 30, 2024**

**13th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Wis 1:13-15; 2:23-24

2Cor 8:7.9.13-15

Mark 5:21-43



## The miracles of Jesus

**a. The Thaumaturgic Power of Jesus.** Today's Gospel presents us with two miracles intertwined: Jesus heals a woman who had spent all her wealth in vain trying to cure her bleeding, and He restores life to a twelve-year-old girl.

**b. Miracles, Not for Display but to Elicit Faith.** However, Jesus does not perform miracles for display but to elicit and confirm faith. Therefore, He revolves everything around faith. To Jairus, who had received news of his daughter's death, Jesus simply says, "Do not fear, only believe." And indeed, upon arriving at the house, Jesus took the hand of the dead girl and said, "Talitha kum," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise!" Immediately, the girl rose and began to walk. This would have been a good opportunity for a spectacle, but instead, Jesus, according to His style, "strictly charged that no one should know this." Even regarding the hemorrhaging woman, Jesus redirects everything to faith, expressed in the verb "to touch."

**c. Touching Jesus is Believing in His Divinity.** "That touching indicates believing, I think can easily be deduced from the episode of the woman who touched the hem of Christ's garment and was healed. Remember the Gospel! [...] While Jesus was walking, behold, there came - almost crossing His path - a woman who had suffered from bleeding for twelve years. She had spent all she had on doctors who had treated her in vain and not healed her. She said to herself: 'If I can touch the fringe of His garment, I will be healed.' To say this was already touching Him. Listen to the verdict! When this woman was - according to her faith - healed, Jesus said: 'Someone touched me.' And the disciples said, 'The crowds surround you and are pressing in on you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?' And He said, 'Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me.' A grace had sprung forth, which for her was healing, for Him was not a diminishment. But note the words of the disciples: The crowds surround you and yet you say, 'Who touched me?' And He said, 'Someone touched me.' The crowds press in; she touched Him. What is this: The crowds press in, and yet one touches? The Jews harass, the Church believes" (*Sermon 245,3*).

**Message:** cultivate a simple and authentic faith that believes in Jesus, trusts Him, and relies on Him, without the concern for spectacle.

# Some pictures

## Sharing a Bit of our Life



### March and April 2024 Brazil and Paraguay

The Prior Provincial, Fr. Getulio Freire Pereira, together with the Provincial Secretary, Fr. Valdecir Soares, began the canonical visit to all the brothers of our communities present in Brazil and Paraguay



### March and April 2024 Italy

The Prior General, Fr. Nei Márcio Simon, visited some of the communities in Italian territory, meeting the brothers fraternally and discussing the most important activities they carried out



### March 15, 2024 Ho Chi Minh City - Vietnam

All the foreign religious present in Ho Chi Minh City participated in a three-day Lenten retreat, a fraternal and important moment of sharing between the missionaries in view of the preparation for Easter



### March 23, 2024 Rome - Italy

The Professed of the International College spent a day of brotherhood with the religious of the International Marist College with moments of sport, meals and cultural sharing



**April 2-6, 2024**  
**Guarcino - Italy**

Fr. Gabriele Ferlisi conducted the spiritual exercises organized by the Province of Italy at the Teresa Spinelli House of Prayer, the theme was *At the sources of the missionary nature of the Order of Discalced Augustinians*, with the participation of confreres from all Communities



**April 2-3, 2024**  
**Cebu City - Philippine**

Most of the confreres of the communities of the Province of the Philippines spent days of ongoing formation, addressing the issue of the protection of minors and vulnerable adults, developing important topics such as canonical consideration, crisis management, criminal law and different types of abuse



**April 7, 2024**  
**Laoag - Philippines**

The Postulator General, Fr. Dennis Ruiz, participated in the diocesan opening session of the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God Niña Ruiz Abad, at the Cathedral of St. William



**April 9, 2024**  
**Manila - Philippines**

The Apostolic Nuncio to the Philippines, Msgr. Charles Brown, received a visit from the Priors of the various Local Communities of the OAD Laity to learn about the different activities of the lay people



**April 14, 2024**

**Rome - Italy**

Two members of the Lay OAD performed the simple Consecration, before the Prior General, Fr. Nei Márcio Simon, at the Church of Our Lady of Consolation of the General Curia while they were in Rome



**April 19, 2024**

**Cebu City - Philippines**

The Saint Monica Institute of Religious Studies (SMIRS) had the honor of hosting the members of the Commission for the Affiliation of the Institute to the Pontifical and Royal University of Santo Tomas, with the presence of the Director of SMIRS, Fr. Annacletus Nzewuihei, and of the collaborators



**March and April 2024**

**Ho Chi Minh City - Vietnam**

Construction has begun on the house that will welcome the religious community Mons. Ilario Costa, made up of religious priests and a group of Vietnamese aspirants who are attending the philosophy course



**April 26-28, 2024**

**Genoa - Italy**

The Rangers Movement, founded by our brother Fr. Modesto Paris, celebrated the 40th anniversary of its foundation with a rich program of activities for the various members who were welcomed into the Sanctuary of the Madonnetta: Mass, meals, fire revival, shows and sharing



# Prior General's Message

## The meeting place with God

Fr. Nei Márcio Simon, oad - @freineisimon



Dear confreres, lays, and friends,

along our earthly pilgrimage, we need moments of rest to refresh our energies and set the goal that gives meaning to our journey. In addition to the wonders of creation that are perpetually available to us, divine providence also offers us places made by human hands.

These places materialize in expressions of faith ranging from small votive shrines to imposing sanctuaries built around the relic of a saint or resulting from a Marian apparition, or simply following the decree of a bishop who wanted to highlight some aspect of the faith, creating centers of prayer and Christian formation.

But an intimate place prepared for this pause, not to be underestimated and common to all human beings, is the conscience. Our great inspirational father says, "Return to your conscience, question it. [...] Brothers, return to yourselves and in everything you do, fix your gaze on the Witness, God" (Augustine, *In epistulam Ioannis ad Parthos tractatus* 8,9). And the Second Vatican Council confirms that, "Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man, where he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his innermost self" (*Gaudium et Spes* 16).

Let us not miss the opportunity to frequent the Spirituality Centers that the Order makes available for the good of the Church, but let us remember to enter into ourselves daily, to listen to God who speaks to us through our personal sanctuary: our conscience. We will feel His voice sprouting in our hearts, reassuring us through the beloved Son, saying, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28).



