

# PRESENZA AGOSTINIANA



Digital Edition  
2024 - no 1  
January / February



## THE AUGUSTINIAN PRAYER

Connection with yourself and with God



**PRAYER**  
in Augustinian  
Spirituality

**LITURGY OF THE HOURS**  
in the Life of the  
Discalced Augustinians

**PRAYER**  
in an Augustinian  
Formation House

# Editorial

## Prayer: an Augustinian Characteristic



Dear readers,

2024 is a year of joy and gratitude for us, Discalced Augustinians, because we celebrate together with you 50 years since the first publication of our magazine *Presenza Agostiniana*.

Reflecting on five decades of history means not only celebrating a milestone but also reflecting on the profound significance of communicating Augustinian Spirituality, which over the years has transformed into a completely digital format that has overcome cultural and linguistic barriers, reaching the whole world.

We want to thank all those who have collaborated and continue to collaborate with *Presenza Agostiniana*: the editorial board, writers, and readers. Without you, it would not have been possible to celebrate this important milestone.

The first issue of the magazine in this Jubilee Year is dedicated to Prayer, which stands as a common thread weaving through the experiences of those who embrace the spirituality of Saint Augustine. Prayer, conceived as dialogue, becomes the beating heart of Augustinian life, guiding the faithful on an inner journey towards self-knowledge and communion with God.

Through articles, testimonies, and insights, the magazine aims to enlighten readers on the centrality of prayer, encouraging intentional and reflective practice that can nourish faith and foster spiritual growth within the Augustinian community.

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

### **Cover**

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# Prayer

## as an Expression of Personality

Fr. Angelo Grande, oad



Writing or speaking about prayer is akin to inviting one's readers or interlocutors into their innermost selves. Prayer, in fact, is nothing but the preferred channel through which a person establishes, maintains, and cultivates their **communion with God**.

This communion is nourished by trust and love and is manifested through attitudes of praise and admiration, gratitude and supplication, contentment and apology, listening and dialogue, and contemplative silence made blissful by the perception of the presence of the Other. Anyone familiar with the Bible struggles to find all the above-mentioned states of mind in the prayer of the **150 Psalms**.

Anna, the mother of Samuel, who also externally manifests the intensity of her prayer, responds to the priest Eli: "I am just pouring out my soul before the Lord" (1Sam. 1:15).

In prayer, everyone has their own **vocabulary** because each person expresses their unique originality that shies away from frustrating standardizations. However, it is useful, when not necessary, to draw on the received experience of others not as standardized imposition but as a helpful accompaniment from those who have gone before us or walk alongside us.

For this reason, I personally find it useful, and I hope it is equally so for the readers, to recall and reintroduce **suggestions and advice** from those who have lived not of prayers but of prayer.





# Prayer

## in Augustinian Spirituality

Fr. Antonio Carlos Ribeiro, oad - @antonio\_titto



**Pilgrims of Hope** is Pope Francis's invitation for the upcoming Holy Year. After a tough time of staying apart, locked indoors, unable to do simple things like going to church, shopping, going to school, we are starting to move forward again. The pandemic has left us with a sense of discouragement, fear, but also a strong desire to start anew. Many loved ones have left us, departed. How much pain, how much sadness, how much fear...

But we must rise and move forward, **start over**. It's not easy, but it's necessary, especially for Christians. Let's remember Jesus' words on the cross: "Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his home" (John 19:25-27).

Pope Francis, on the occasion of the Holy Year, initially invites us to resume our **pilgrimage of faith** as a sign of unity and hope. In preparation for this special moment of grace, he suggests that we embark on a journey through history, rereading some documents of the Second Vatican Council, such as *Dei Verbum*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, and *Lumen Gentium*.



The Pope also invites us to take a second step towards the celebration of the Jubilee: prayer, the path of holiness, which leads us to live contemplation even in the midst of action. In this regard, the text of our *Constitutions* is very clear in speaking about the importance of prayer in the life of the Discalced Augustinians in light of the spirituality of Saint Augustine:



Called to holiness, the Discalced Augustinians, following the example of Saint Augustine and the first Augustinian community of Tagaste, propose themselves with the help of the grace to reach the perfection of evangelical love, seeking and enjoying communally, in a peculiar attitude of humility, God, which is a common non-private good and is the sum of all goods. This charism is summarized in the formula: **Joyfully serving the Most High in spirit of humility.**

Aware of being created in the image and likeness of God – the Triune One, they tend in common spiritual work to: make His image clear, imprinted in the soul but clouded by sin; becoming true “possession” of God; to build oneself as temple of God: He, in fact, lives in the individual faithful as in as many of His temples and in the faithful gathered together as in His temple.

Integrated with baptism in the mystery of Christ, the humble Jesus, and of the Church, the Mother who generates the monasteries, they want to experience the density of this mystery: laying the foundation and hope in Christ, the way and the end of the journey of faith; faithfully imitating Christ in the joy of the new canticle; becoming chosen members of the Mystical Body, the total Christ, committed to building the City of God; offering oneself to the world as a model of a small Church, the community being the most noble part of the garment of Christ. (*Constitutions 3-5*).

Prayer is not only a path to holiness but also a fundamental element of **common life**. Living together without the presence of God means sharing only material goods. When God is present in communal life, the true meaning of being together is transformed.

Prayer does not eliminate problems, difficulties, sufferings, and illnesses, but it provides the strength and courage needed to face everything that happens. Therefore, prayer is not just a path but the journey to salvation.

There is an Italian song that suggests: **sing and walk**.



**Sing and walk with peace in your heart**

**Sing and walk in goodness and love**

**Sing and walk, do not leave the path**

**Christ walks with you.**

1. Let's sing to the whole world that He is freedom,  
in Him there is a new hope for humanity.

2. The joy of the Lord will dwell in us forever  
if we live in communion with His will.

3. He guides our steps, He is the truth,  
if we are children of light, it will shine within us.







# The Liturgy of the Hours

## in the Life of the Discalced Augustinians

Fr. Calogero Carrubba, oad



The public and common prayer of the people of God is considered one of the principal **duties of the Church**. It is inspired by the example of Christ, who "continues His priestly work through the agency of His Church, which is ceaselessly engaged in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the whole world. She does this, not only by celebrating the eucharist, but also in other ways, especially by praying the divine office" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 83).

Indeed, it is "devised so that the whole course of the day and night is made holy by the praises of God" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 84). When it is priests, religious, or the faithful praying together the divine office, it can be said to be "the voice of the bride addressed to her bridegroom; It is the very prayer which Christ Himself, together with His body, addresses to the Father" (*Ibidem*).



### 1. The Prayer of the Church

The Church continues the prayer of Christ because, through prayer, men recognize and profess the sovereignty of God and, at the same time, unite themselves with Christ, establishing an intimate relationship with Him, as Saint Augustine affirms:

No greater gift could God have given to men than in making His Word, by which He created all things, their Head, and joining them to Him as His members: that the Son of God might become also the Son of man, one God with the Father, one Man with men; so that when we speak to God in prayer for mercy, we do not separate the Son from Him; and when the Body of the Son prays, it separates not its Head from itself: and it is one Saviour of His Body, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who both prays for us, and prays in us, and is prayed to by us. He prays for us, as our Priest; He prays in us, as our Head; He is prayed to by us, as our God. Let us therefore recognise in Him our words, and His words in us (*Commentary on Psalm 86, 1*).



The prayer to the Father through the Son is realized in union with the Holy Spirit, who "comes to the aid of our weakness" and "intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings" (Rom. 8:26). He himself, as the Spirit of the Son, instills in us "the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba, Father!'" (Rom. 8:15).

The example and command of the Lord to pray incessantly belong to the intimate

**essence of the Church**, as the community of the children of God, for which it is called to manifest its character in prayer.

Therefore, although personal prayer is necessary and to be recommended, **common prayer** holds a special dignity because Christ Himself said, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Mat. 18:20).



## 2. Dimensions of the Liturgy of the Hours

The first dimension that can be noticed in the Liturgy of the Hours is the **consecration of time**. In fact, Christ commanded, "We must pray without ceasing" (Luke 18:11). Therefore, the Church, obeying the command of the Lord, does not cease to raise prayers, among which the Divine Office stands out, which has the characteristic of sanctifying the course of the day and night (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 12). Another dimension of the Liturgy of the Hours is that it extends to the various hours of the day the prerogatives of the Eucharistic mystery, which are praise and thanksgiving, the memory of the mysteries of salvation, supplications, and the anticipation of heavenly glory.

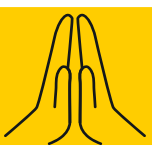
In the Liturgy of the Hours, the sanctification of man is accomplished, and divine worship is exercised in such a way as to realize in it a **dialogue between God and man**, in which God speaks to his people who respond with song and prayer (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 33). In addition to the praise of God, the Church in the Liturgy of the Hours expresses the vows and desires of all Christians. Indeed, it implores Christ and through Him, the Father for the salvation of the whole world (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 83).



### 3. The Liturgy of the Hours in the Constitutions and the Directory

The *Constitutions* of the Discalced Augustinian, when addressing liturgical life, affirm that the religious express the **union of minds and hearts**, the foundation of religious life, also through communal prayer and especially through the Liturgy of the Hours. In fact, with this prayer, they put into practice the exhortation of Saint Augustine: "When you pray to God in Psalms and hymns, think over in your hearts the words that come from your lips" (*Rule* 12). Through the prayer of the Liturgy, they actively associate themselves with the Church in the hymn of praise to the Father, which Christ, the high Priest, introduced on earth and cooperate "in the building up and growth of the mystical Body of Christ" (*Liturgia horarum* 24).

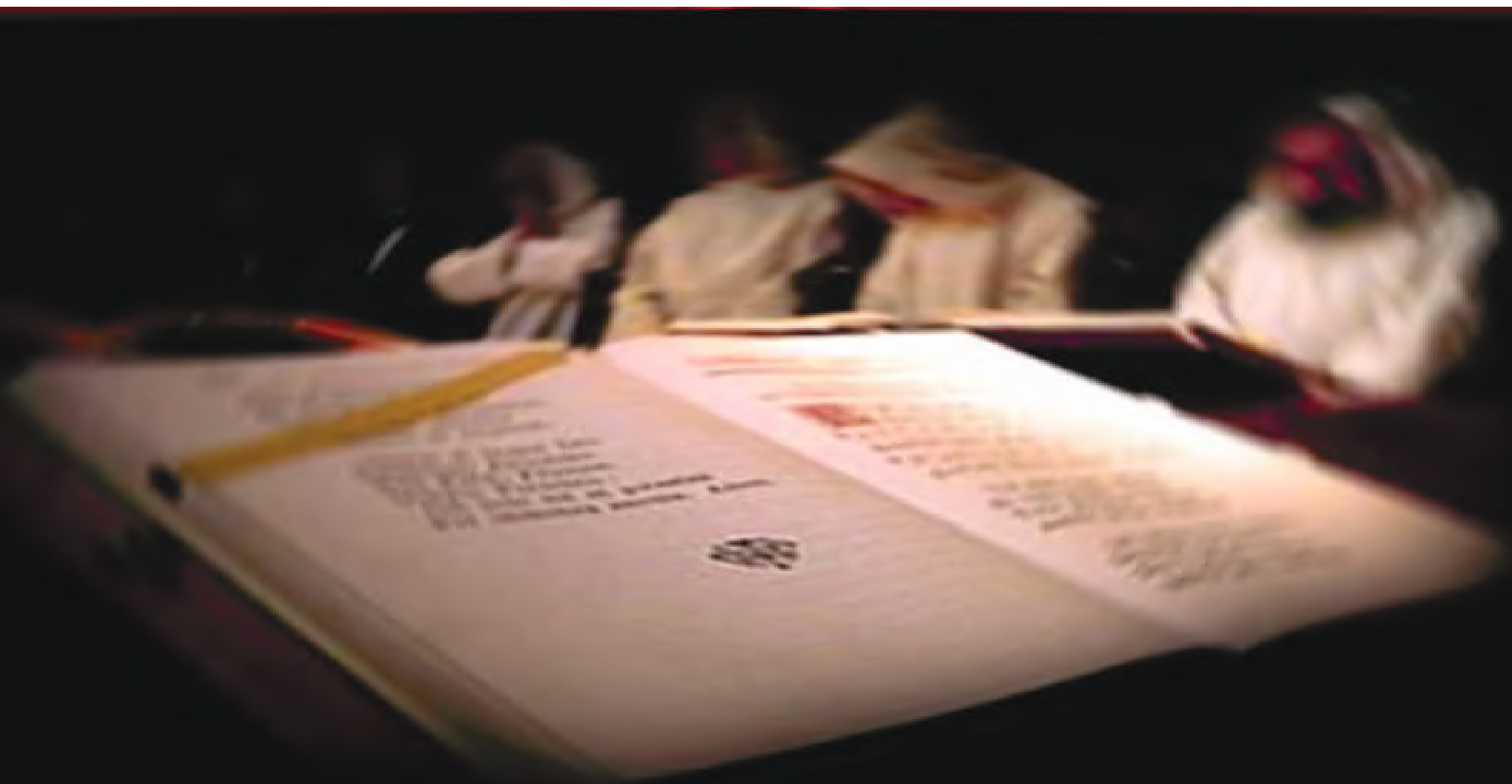
The Directory, finally, prescribes that the common Office be celebrated according to liturgical norms, and in houses with fewer than three religious, at least Lauds and Vespers are to be recited in common. Likewise, it establishes that brother religious recite Lauds and Vespers in common daily (*Directory* 5).



### 4. Conclusion

Considering that the public and communal prayer of the people of God is considered among the main tasks of the Church, the Augustinian Friars, faithful to the word of Christ who invites to pray incessantly (Luke 18:11), dedicate themselves to the **daily celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours**. In this way, they collaborate in sanctifying the activities of the day and raise their hymn of praise to the Lord, give thanks for all the gifts received, remember the mysteries of salvation, and lift their supplications for the needs of the Church and the entire people of God.

Through the recitation of the Divine Office, they associate themselves "with that canticle of praise which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven; it is a foretaste of the heavenly praise sung unceasingly before the throne of God and the Lamb, as described by John in Revelation" (*Liturgia horarum* 16).



# Prayer

## an Augustinian Formation House

Fr. Ghylain Lwanga, oad



### 1. Prayer as a Basis

Reading the Gospels, **one of the most important characteristics** of Jesus' life was certainly the significant emphasis he placed on prayer. On numerous occasions, we find him in prayer, sometimes in private with the Father, and other times in the company of his disciples. Communion with the Father was an integral part of Jesus' life. Therefore, the young person called to follow Christ must imitate his example; they must be someone who listens to the Master.

Even Saint Augustine, after his conversion, gave importance to prayer when he said: "Be assiduous in prayer, at the hours and times appointed. When you pray to God in Psalms and hymns, think over in your hearts the words that come from your lips" (*Rule 10; 12*).



### 2. Prayer in the Formation

The prayer is indeed a **key element** of religious formation. It is considered as a place of encounter with the Lord, a source of inspiration for an evangelical life, and a means to remain in communion with Him. Prayer is also a process of conversion that helps young religious individuals to grow in their aspiration towards an evangelical way of life, following Jesus. Indeed, Saint Augustine says: "The main purpose for you having

come together is to live harmoniously in your house, intent upon God in oneness of mind and heart" (*Rule 3*).

Living united in the house requires communion with the author of life, and this communion is achieved through prayer. By praying, we communicate with God. Therefore, prayer is an act of **communication with** God that helps young people to become adults, responsible individuals.

Indeed, prayer is a means that helps to strengthen faith, to find meaning in life, and to develop qualities such as patience, tolerance, compassion, and gratitude. Furthermore, prayer helps young people to overcome difficulties and find inner peace.



The encounter with the Lord cannot happen without **inner preparation**. Sensing his imminent death, Jesus takes his disciples with him and leads them to Gethsemane to pray, but sleep overtakes them (Matt. 26:46).

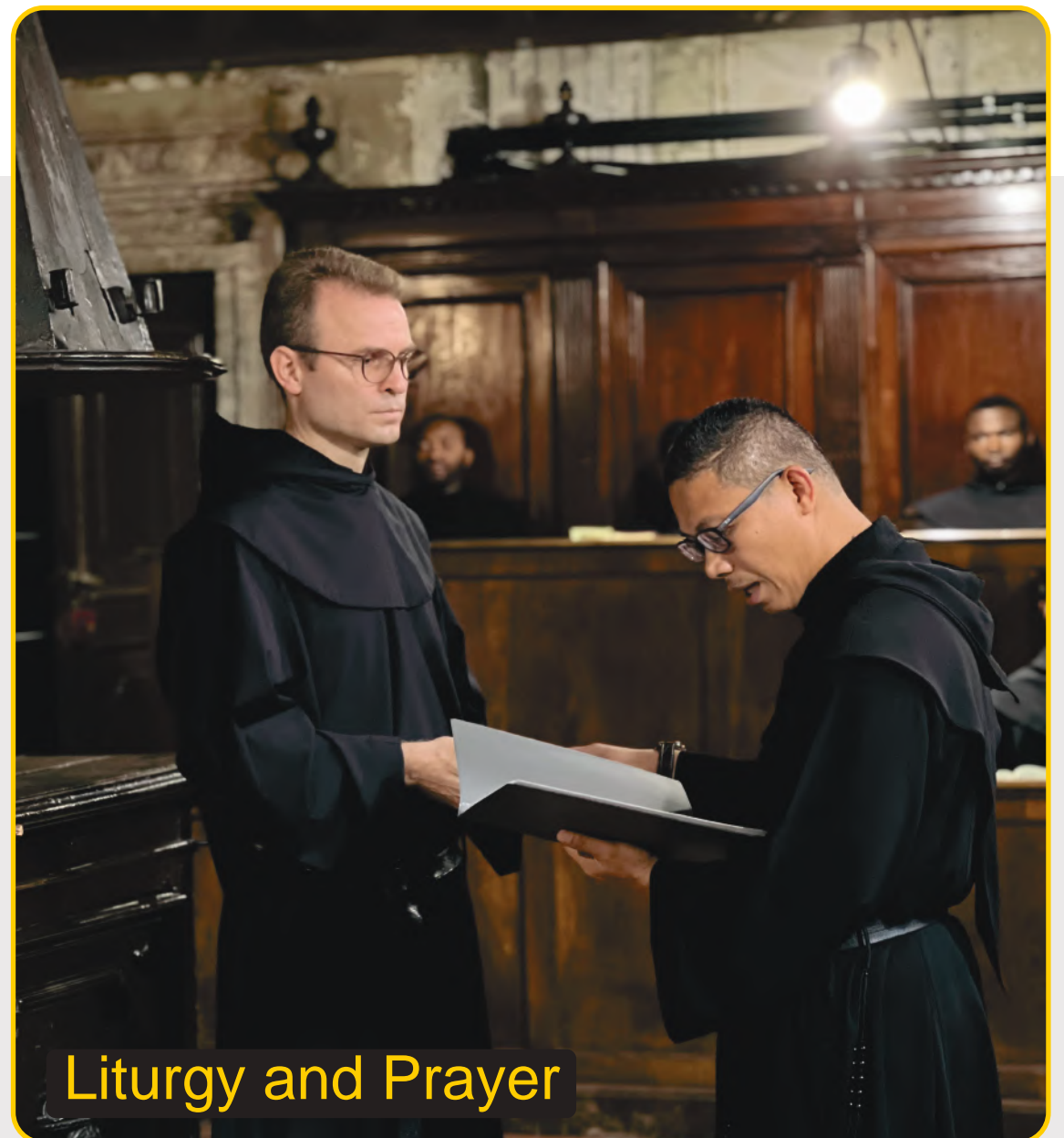
Like the disciples, we too sometimes find our eyes weighed down by sleep: the sleep of fatigue, the sleep of discouragement. Indeed, let us not forget that the secret of everything is prayer. Jesus invites us to pray always without growing weary.

The importance of prayer was understood by the Lord's disciples; after Jesus' Ascension, we find them in prayer, awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit and persevering in prayer (Acts 1:14).

The prayer is an integral part of the believer's life. Eternal life is to know God, and this is manifested through dialogue and mutual communion between the believer and his God. And it is in prayer that young people in formation will increasingly discover the voice of God in their **vocational journey**, and prayer will allow them to engage in an exchange with the Lord to grow ever deeper in his love.



Professed in the Mass

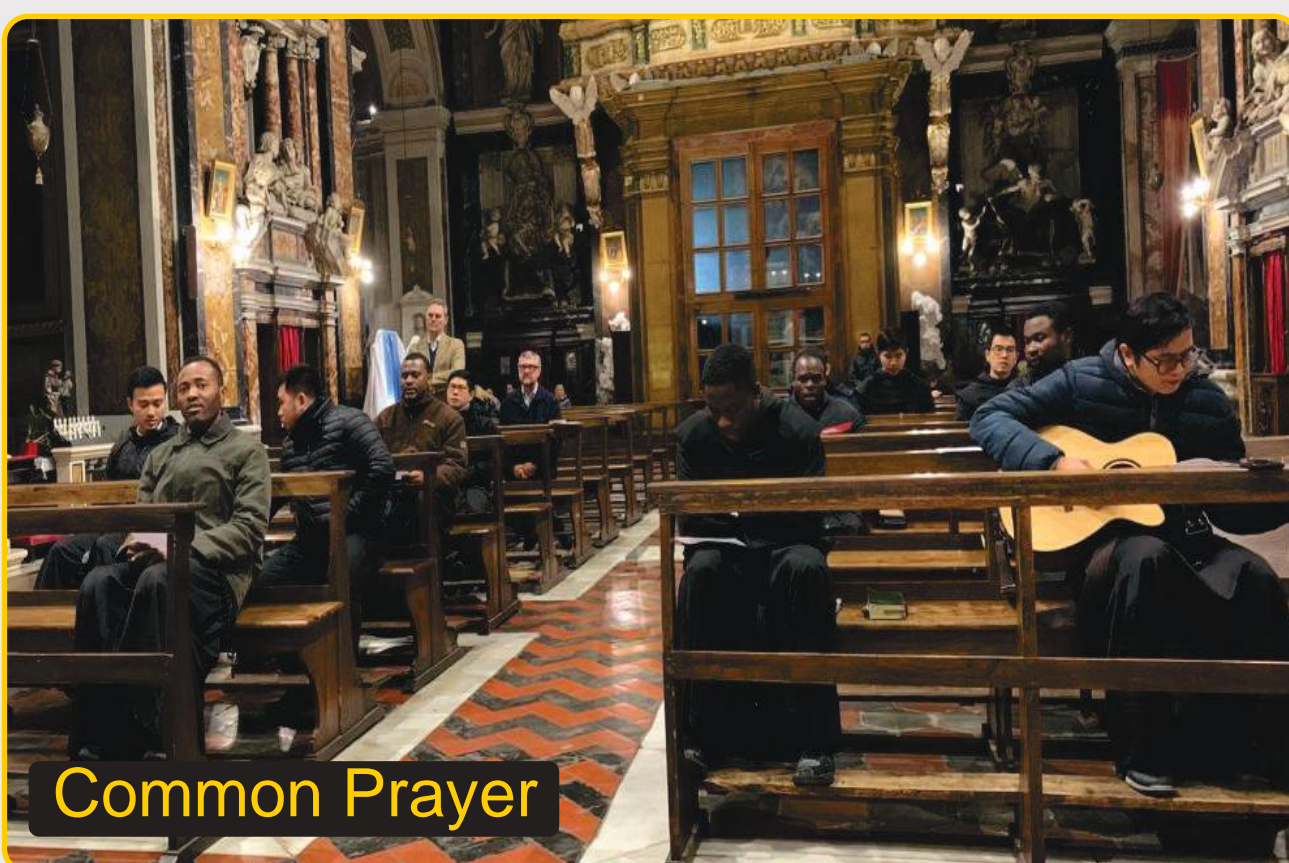


Liturgy and Prayer



### 3. The Fruits of Prayer

In the apostolic writings, Paul strongly encourages **perseverance in prayer**, as Jesus did in the Gospels. He exhorts us to pray without ceasing (1Thess. 5:17). To Timothy, his son in the faith, he recommends praying before all else and in every place. He invites us, who desire to follow Christ, to offer requests, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving for all people, for this is good and pleasing in the sight of our Savior God.



Common Prayer

Prayer is, first and foremost, drawing near to God and communicating with Him. Indeed, the entire spiritual life consists of great inner movements, including prayer and meditation. Prayer involves speaking, expressing oneself, and making requests, while meditation allows for the necessary silence to receive what God, the Universe, life has to impart to us.

If prayer held a prominent place in the life of Jesus, it is evident that in the life of a disciple of Christ, we must consider prayer as **indispensable**. A Christian without a prayer life is a person who has not grasped the richness of communion with God. We may question our understanding of the Gospel in such a case. Knowing God is engaging in dialogue with Him. This is having eternal life (John 17:3).

Today, the world offers us many temptations, which we must resist by following the example of Jesus, who, through prayer, was able to resist. The young person in formation must not allow themselves to be ensnared by Satan's traps. It is through prayer that they will find new strength to defeat the devil, remaining attached to Christ, the source of life.



However, the young person in formation remains a sign for the world. Through their way of living, they must stand out from others, being a reflective person who communicates more through their actions than their words. And by praying with faith, they will encounter Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life. Without true prayer, we cannot do anything, neither for ourselves nor for others.



# SMIRS

## Institute of Theology in Cebu City - Philippines

Fr. Annacletus Nzewuihe, oad



The St. Monica Institute of Religious Studies (**SMIRS**) is a renowned institution located OAD Tabor Hills, San Jose Barangay, Cebu City, Philippines. The institute offers various programs that cater to the spiritual needs of individuals seeking to deepen their understanding of the faith especially those candidates preparing for priestly and religious life and those lay involved in the Catholic Church ministries.



### 1. History

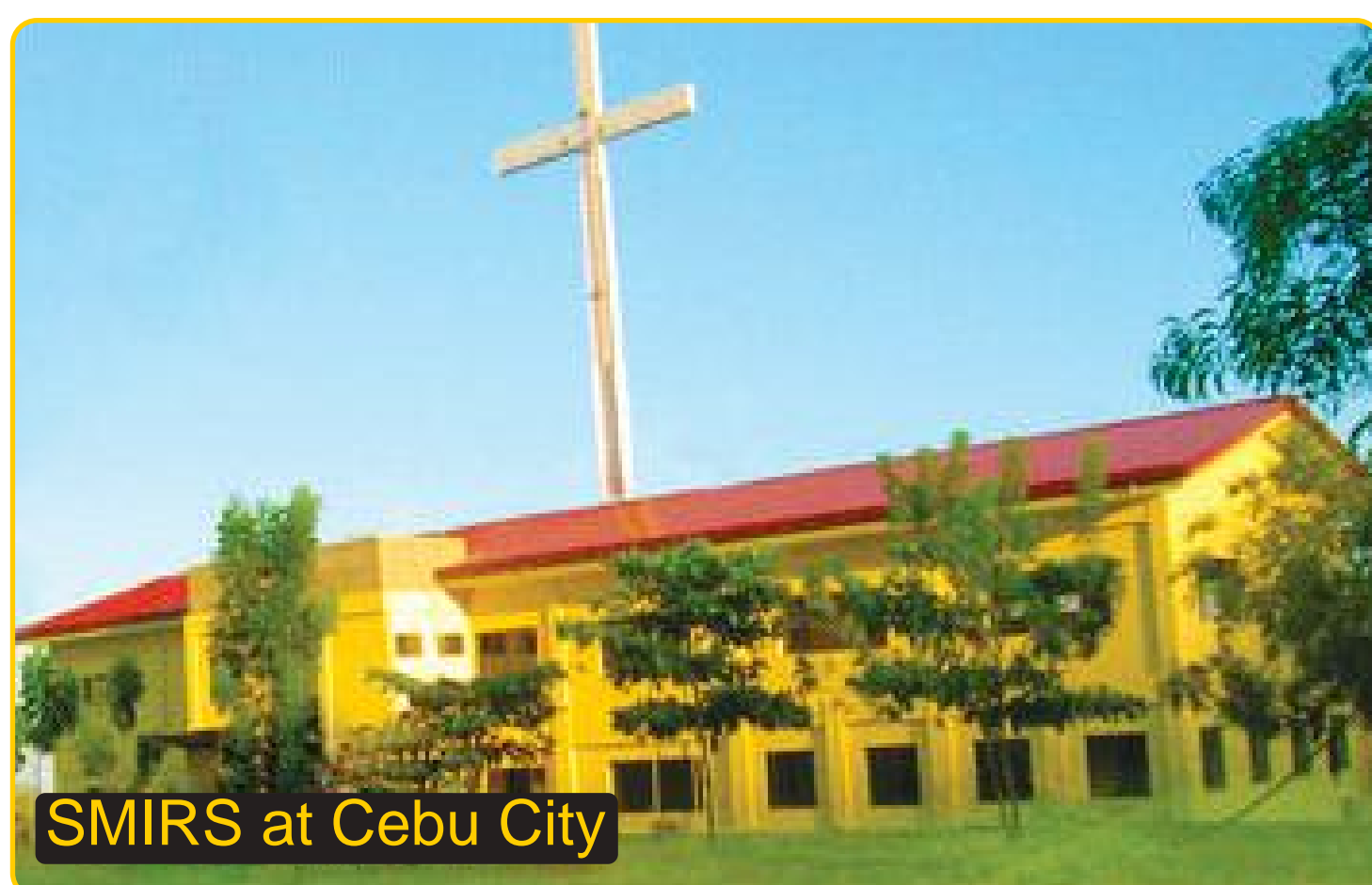
SMIRS was founded in **2004** by the Order of the Discalced Augustinians (OAD) in the Philippines, who recognized the need for an institution focused on a balance program of studies and integrated human, Christian, Augustinian and religious formation for the OAD candidates to the priesthood and religious life. The Institute is named after Saint Monica, the mother of Saint Augustine.

The community started with a theological school affiliated to the University of San Agustin at a time when the university was operating under autonomous status granted by the Commission on Higher Education.

While the Institute operated as an extension of the Graduate School of the University of San Agustin in June 2004, the *Memorandum of Agreement* between the OAD and the University of San Agustin was signed on August 27, 2004 in the presence of the Superior General, Fr. Antonio Desideri and His Eminence Ricardo Cardinal Vidal.

A team of instructors with qualified credentials was formed to cater to the subjects contained in the 4-year curriculum. The first year of operation had 14 students and in the second year another 14 were added, not to mention some religious sisters attending as observers to enhance their formation to consecrated life. To date, more than 130 graduates of General Theological Program and some with Master of Arts in Religious Studies were produced by the Institute.

This year 2024, SMIRS will **be gratefully celebrating her 20 years of**



SMIRS at Cebu City

**establishment.** The Institute's Authorities, Staff and Students are grateful to God for these years of existence and wish to extend their gratitude to all those who have been instrument to the daily sustenance of the institute and for all their generous support that kept the school till today.



## 2. Mission

Since its inception, SMIRS has been committed to fostering intellectual growth, promoting pastoral leadership, and nurturing spiritual development among its students who are preparing to be ministers of God in the church in the future.

The Institute's **primary objective** is to provide opportunities for those preparing for priesthood and religious life, as well as laypeople and religious to engage in rigorous study and reflection on matters related to the Catholic faith. Through this process, SMIRS aims to empower its graduates with the necessary skills and knowledge to become effective witnesses of Christ in their respective ministries and communities.

The mission of the SMIRS extends toward the integration of and excellence in the Catholic Theology and Church Doctrines, Augustinian Studies and Spirituality, Religious Vows, Consecrated Life and Theological Research.



## 3. Academic Offerings

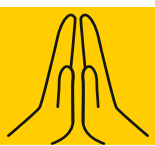
SMIRS offers a wide range of programs designed to meet the diverse educational requirements of its students. These include certificate courses for Lay Persons and Lay Ministers of the Church and also Religious Men and Women, General Theology Certificate program for candidates to Priesthood and Master of Arts in Theology in collaboration with CICM-MaryHill School of Theology, Inc. Manila.

Currently, the Institute is in the process of an ecclesiastical affiliation to the Faculty of Sacred Theology of the Pontifical and Royal University of Santo Tomas, Manila for the award of Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology.

The curriculum combines **theoretical instruction with practical application**, ensuring that students acquire both foundational knowledge and real-world experience. Some notable courses offered at SMIRS include Sacred Scripture, Systematic and Dogmatic Theology, Moral Theology, Liturgy, Spirituality, Canon Law, Church History, and Pastoral Theology.

Additionally, the institute hosts workshops, seminars, and conferences featuring esteemed local and international speakers, further enriching the learning experience for its students.





## 4. Community Involvement

Beyond academics, SMIRS actively engages with the broader Cebuano community through **numerous outreach initiatives**. The institute collaborates with parishes, schools, and other organizations to conduct catechetical training, retreats, recollections, and values formation sessions. Furthermore, SMIRS conduct social and sport events such as the famous Cebuano Sinulog dance, showcasing its commitment to celebrating and preserving Cebuano culture and traditions within a Christian context; indoor and outdoor sports activities.



SMIRS entrance

Moreover, SMIRS maintains strong **partnerships** with teachers both locally and abroad. These connections enable the exchange of ideas, resources, and best practices in religious education and formation, ultimately benefiting the wider community.



## 5. Impact

Over the years, SMIRS has made significant contributions to the religious landscape of the Archdiocese of Cebu and beyond. Its alumni serve in various capacities within the Church and society, including parish priests, religious sisters, teachers, youth ministers, counselors, and social workers. Many have also pursued advanced studies overseas, bringing back valuable insights and expertise that continue to strengthen the institute's academic offerings.

In addition to forming competent Ministers and Leaders, SMIRS has played an instrumental role in cultivating a vibrant **faith community** in the City of Cebu. By offering accessible and high-quality religious education, the institute helps ensure that the richness of the Catholic tradition and Augustinian teachings remain relevant and engaging for generations to come.





## 6. Conclusion

SMIRS stands as a testament to the power of faith-based education in shaping candidates for priesthood, religious life and Catholic Church lay ministers and instructors.

With its comprehensive academic programs, dynamic community engagement, and far-reaching impact, SMIRS continues to be a beacon of hope, knowledge, and spiritual guidance for countless people in Visayas region and beyond.

As it moves forward into the future, SMIRS remains steadfast in its mission to form disciples who will go forth and make a difference in the world.



Visit of the Archbishop of Cebu, Msgr. José Palma



Pontifical and Royal University of Santo Tomas



Theology lesson

# Sunday Liturgy

with **Saint Augustine - March/April 2024**

Fr. Gabriele Ferlisi, oad



The purpose of this column is to point out to our confreres and readers some of Saint Augustine's thoughts, which can help them give a more Augustinian touch to the reflection on the Word of God on Sundays and in particular to the preparation of the homily for this Year B.

**March 3, 2024**

**Third Sunday of Lent**

Ex. 20:1-17

1Cor. 1:22-25

John 2:13-25



## Zeal for the Temple of God

The liturgy of the Third Sunday of Lent this year, Year B, presents the theme of the Temple: a central theme in the Bible and Lenten catechesis.

In his commentary, Saint Augustine:

- 1) highlights the zeal with which Jesus defends the sanctity of the material temple because it is a sacred place and a figure of the reality of the true temple, which is the Body of Christ, the Church, and each person (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 10,4);
- 2) specifies that the merchants who profane the temple by turning it into a market, and worse, into a tavern (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 10,6), are those who seek their own interests and buy to sell sacred things;
- 3) explains that the whip Jesus used to drive out the sellers signifies the rope of sins that each one weaves, covering the sins committed with other sins (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 10,5).

Very interesting is the description that Saint Augustine gives in *Sermon* 27,1 of the house of God: it has an extension as large as the world, and its foundations are faith, its master walls hope, its decoration charity, and the time of consecration is the end of the world: "This is the house. When all the earth sings the new song, then we have the house of God. It is built by singing, founded by believing, raised by hoping, brought to completion by loving. Now it is being built; at the end of the world, it will be consecrated. Well then, let the living stones hasten to the new song, hasten and let themselves be inserted into the building of the temple of God. Let them recognize the Savior; let them receive the one who dwells in them" (*Sermon* 27,1).

**Message: the liturgy invites us to do our best to zealously safeguard the stability and decorum of the church, both material and, above all, spiritual.**

**March 10, 2024**

**Fourth Sunday of Lent**

2Chron. 36:14-16.19-23

Eph. 2:4-10

John 3:14-21



## **Bronze Serpent, Figure of Christ Raised on the Cross**

This Fourth Sunday of Lent is characterized by the theme of Christ as Savior and Judge. Jesus is depicted as the serpent raised by Moses in the desert, because with His death, He frees us from our death. While "the bite of the serpent is lethal, the death of the Lord is vital. The gaze is turned to the serpent to immunize oneself against the serpent. What does this mean? It means that one turns their gaze to death to vanquish death. But whose death does one gaze upon? The death of life, if one can put it that way. [...]. Just as those who turned their gaze to that serpent did not perish from the bites of the serpents, so those who turn their gaze with faith to the death of Christ are healed from the bites of sins. And while those were healed from death to temporal life, here instead it is said: so that they may have eternal life" (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 12,11).

Furthermore, Jesus is presented as the envoy of love, as Savior and not as a condemning judge: "Many have loved their sins, and many have confessed their sins. Whoever acknowledges their sins and condemns them is already in agreement with God. God condemns your sins; and if you also condemn them, you unite with God. Man and sinner are two distinct things: man is the work of God, the sinner is your work, O man. Destroy what you have made, so that God may save what He has made. It is necessary for you to detest in yourself your own work and love in yourself the work of God" (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 12:13).

**Message: the liturgy invites us to constantly keep our eyes fixed on the Crucified Jesus, because every day we draw from Him inspiration and courage for a new beginning.**



**March 17, 2024**

**Fifth Sunday of Lent**

Jer. 31:31-34

Heb. 5:7-9

John 12:20-33



## The Glory of the Cross

The glorification through the humiliation of the Passion is the central theme of the fifth Sunday of Lent. The evangelist John recounts the solemn welcome of Jesus in Jerusalem by the common people of the Jews and by some Greeks who showed a strong desire to see Jesus. Christ indeed is at the center of the aspirations of both the circumcised and the uncircumcised. They, says Saint Augustine, "were like two walls of opposite origin, converging through the kiss of peace in the one faith in Christ" (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 51,8).

Jesus himself acknowledges this moment of glory, but immediately emphasizes its significance using two images:

- 1) the grain of wheat that to become a stalk must go underground, that is, it must pass through the humiliation of the Passion to reach the sublime greatness of glorification (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 51,9);
- 2) the turmoil of the soul that Jesus confesses to have felt before drawing everyone to Himself on the cross.

Regarding this image, what Saint Augustine says is truly touching: "Yet I feel the same Lord of mine, who with those words had torn me from my weakness to transfer me into His strength, I feel that He says: Now is my soul troubled. What does it mean? How can you expect my soul to follow you, if I see your soul troubled? How can I bear what makes your solidity tremble? On whom shall I lean if the cornerstone fails? I seem to hear in my anxious soul the Lord's answer saying to me: You may follow me with greater courage, for I stand in for you in such a way that you remain steadfast: you have heard the voice of my power as yours, now listen to in me the voice of your weakness; I who give you strength to run, do not slow down your pace, but by making your anguish pass into me, I open the way for you to pass through. O Lord, mediator, God above us, man for us! I recognize your mercy, for you, so strong, willingly trouble yourself for love, and those many who inevitably trouble themselves for their weakness, you, by showing the weakness of your body, console them so that they do not fall into despair and perish" (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 52:2).

The same path that leads to glory through humiliation, Jesus proposes to us when he says that "whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life".

**Message: the liturgy encourages each one to live their turmoil together with Jesus, with serenity and trust.**

**March 24, 2024**

**Palm Sunday**

Isa. 50:4-7

Phil. 2:6-11

Mark 14:1-15,47



## Glorious Entry in Humility

This Sunday of Passion or Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week, a week known for the great mysteries it commemorates. It is characterized by two moments: 1) a moment of joy symbolized by the red color of liturgical vestments, the blessing of palms and olive branches, and the procession, recalling the triumphant yet humble entry of Jesus into Jerusalem; 2) a solemn moment marked by the narrative of Jesus' passion and death.

The first moment invites us to cultivate in our hearts the sentiments of simplicity, humility, and joy characteristic of children and of good and simple people who welcome and follow Jesus: "The palms are a tribute and a symbol of victory; because in dying, the Lord would have conquered death, and through the trophy of the cross, He would have achieved victory over the devil, the prince of death" (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 51,2). And also, "'Hosanna,' according to some who know Hebrew, primarily expresses a ection; a bit like interjections in Latin: we say 'ouch!' to express pain, 'ah!' to express joy, 'oh!' to express wonder" (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 51,29).

The second moment urges us to meditate on the Passion of Jesus, which continues today in the Church: a Passion prompted by love and lived with love, in humility. Jesus, hailed with hosannas, says Saint Augustine, is a teacher of humility because He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even to death, and death on a cross. "He certainly does not lose His divinity when He teaches us humility by His example: in that, He is equal to the Father, in this, He is similar to us. And inasmuch as He is equal to the Father, He created us so that we might exist; inasmuch as He is similar to us, He redeemed us so that we might not perish" (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 51,3).

The Passion of the Lord is a great mystery that can be understood and accepted only if we have "Christian eyes, not pagan ones" (*Exposition on the Psalms* 56,14), so that we do not limit ourselves to merely "seeing" but also to "perceiving," that is, to see beyond Good Friday to the radiant dawn of Easter Sunday. And we must have such humility as to not be ashamed to be carried by the ship of the cross: "If you want to live an authentic Christianity, deeply adhere to Christ in what He has done for us, so that you may come to Him in what He is and has always been. That is why He reached out to us, to become a man for us, even to the cross. He became a man for us, so that He could carry the weak across the sea of this age and bring them to their homeland, where there will be no need for a ship anymore" (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 2,3).

**Message:** the liturgy invites us to embrace the feelings of simplicity, humility, trust, and love of children to welcome Jesus as they do.

**March 31, 2024**

**Easter Sunday**

Acts 10:34a.37-43

Col. 3,1-4 or 1Cor 5:6b-8

John 20:1-9 or Luke 24:13-35

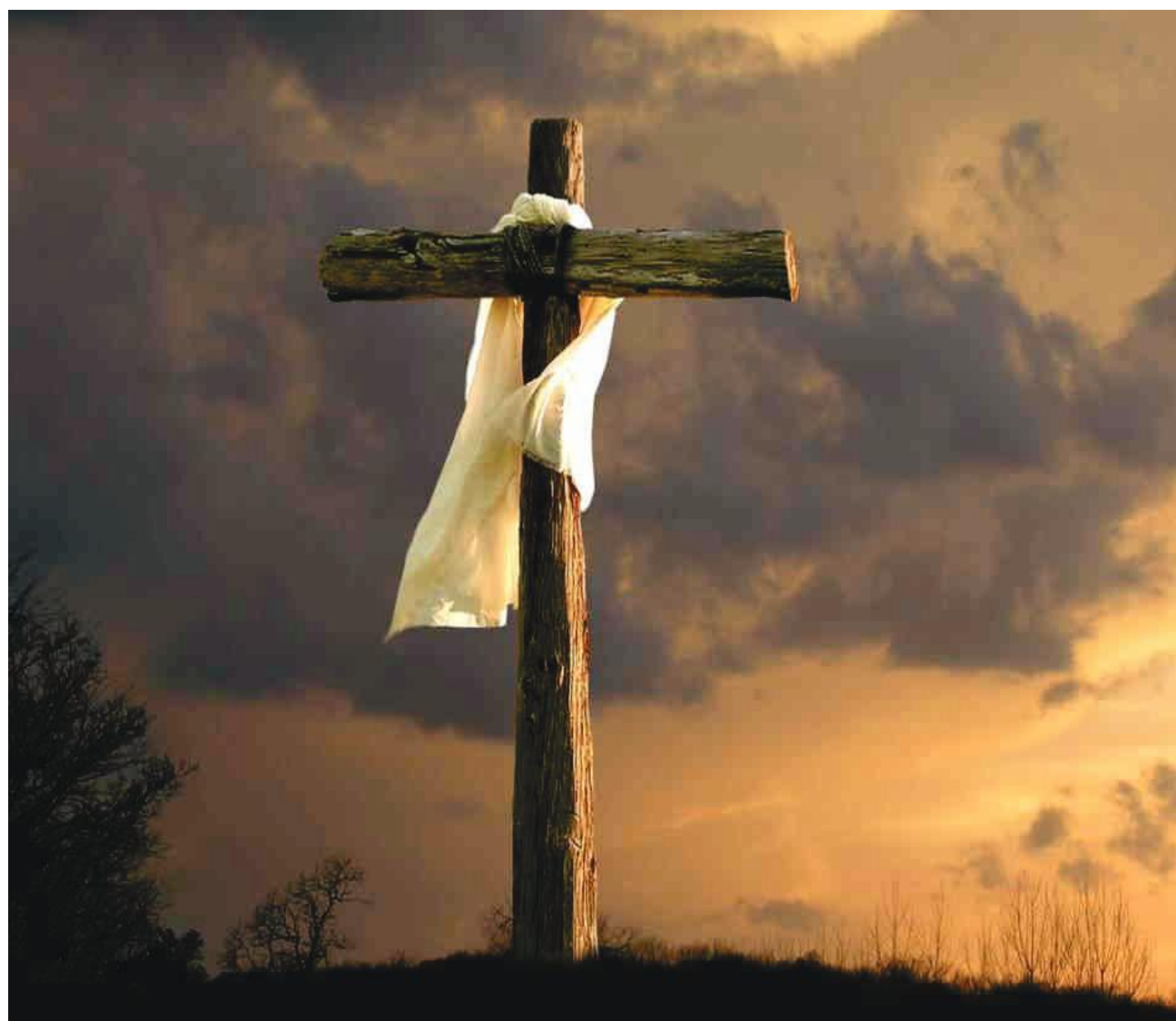


## The Resurrection of Christ, Foundation of Our Faith

The resurrection of Christ is the most shocking and overwhelming event in history. St. Augustine says: "The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is the center of the Christian faith" (*Sermon 229/H,1*). It is the truth that distinguishes us from adherents of other religions. Indeed, Jews, pagans, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists do not believe it; only Christians believe that Jesus rose from the dead and is alive (cf. *Sermon 234,3*). Therefore, only Christians can be called the men and women of the resurrection or the men and women of Sunday".

It follows that the sanctification of Sunday cannot be reduced to a mere disciplinary fact of religious duty, but is a matter of religious identity. Not by chance, in the liturgical reform of Vatican II, the Sundays following Easter are not called second, third... Sunday "after Easter" but second, third... Sunday "of Easter", and it is said that Sunday is the weekly Easter, an indispensable day - as Saint John Paul II said in the Apostolic Letter "Dies Domini" - for the Christian: the Lord's day, Christ's day, the Church's day, man's day, the day of all days. Sunday is the day that with the radiance of the light of Christ's resurrection clarifies the meaning and value of the Cross and Good Friday. "If we remove faith in the resurrection of the dead, the whole Christian doctrine collapses," said St. Augustine (*Sermon 361,2*).

Therefore, if the light of Christ's resurrection Easter fades, we plunge into darkness and there is no more Christianity. If Sunday, as Saint John Paul II said, is reduced to a mere "weekend", "it may happen that man remains closed in such a narrow horizon that he is no longer able to see the 'heaven'. Then, as dressed for a party, he becomes inwardly incapable of 'celebrating'".



**Message:** the liturgy invites us to place the event of the Resurrection back at the center of life and to restore all its value to Sunday, the weekly Easter.

**Aleluia.**

**April 7, 2024**

**Second Sunday of Easter**

Acts 4:32-35

1John 5:1-6

John 20:19-31



## **Easter, Feast of Divine Mercy**

The Easter of the death and resurrection of Jesus is the sublime gift of God's Mercy, who loves us and wants to save us. It was therefore very beautiful and significant that Pope Saint John Paul II instituted the feast of Divine Mercy and assigned it to the second Sunday, the Octave of Easter. Etymologically, "Mercy" means an open heart pouring out love on misery. Saint Augustine writes: "The word 'mercy' derives its name from the pain for the 'miserable.' Both words are in that term: misery and heart. When your heart is touched, struck by the misery of others, behold, then that is mercy" (*Sermon 358/A,1; cf. City of God 9,5*).

"Now is the time of mercy, then will be the time of judgment. Why is now the time of mercy? Now He calls those who have strayed, forgives the sins of those who return; He is patient with sinners until they convert; and when they have converted, He forgets the past and promises the future; He exhorts the lazy, comforts the afflicted, teaches the zealous, helps those who struggle; He does not abandon those who labor and cry out to Him, He gives them what to offer to Him, He Himself gives the means to appease Him. Let not pass in vain, brethren, the great time of mercy, let it not pass in vain for us. Judgment will come: even then there will be repentance, but by then it will be fruitless" (*Exposition on the Psalms 32, II, d.1,10*).

Therefore, let no one despair of the mercy of God: "Whoever you are who have sinned and do not know if you can repent of your guilt and despair of your salvation, listen to David who laments. The prophet Nathan was not sent to you, David himself was sent to you. Listen to him as he cries out, and cry out with him; listen to him as he mourns, and mourn with him; listen to him as he weeps, and add your tears to his; listen to him when he is corrected, and rejoice with him. If you could not avoid sin, do not deny yourself the hope of forgiveness" (*Exposition on the Psalms 50,5*).

And these words of Saint Augustine, placed on the lips of God addressed to those who have a past full of great sins, are very comforting and hopeful: "I do not care what you have been so far; be what you have not been so far" (*Exposition on the Psalms 149,9*).

Speaking of himself, Saint Augustine, witness and apostle of mercy, says: "I attribute to your grace and your mercy the disappearing like ice of my sins; I attribute to your grace even all the evil I have not committed" (*Confessions 2,7,15*).

**Message: today's Feast of Divine Mercy invites us to be passionate witnesses and apostles of Mercy.**



**April 14, 2024**

**Third Sunday of Easter**

Acts 3:13-15.17-19

1John 2:1-5a

Luke 24:35-48



## The Reactions of the Apostles in the First Appearance of the Risen Jesus

The liturgy of this Third Sunday of Easter presents us with the passage from the Gospel of Luke where the evangelist describes the first appearance of Jesus to the apostles gathered in the upper room and their reaction, not one of complete acceptance and joy as one might expect, but of doubt and deep disturbance. They thought He was a ghost. This fact certainly surprises, but today we can only thank the apostles for their doubts and disturbances because they convince us that they were not visionaries.

The attitude of Jesus is very beautiful and encouraging, as He gently reassures them of the reality of His resurrection and the mission He assigns them to proclaim to all nations the conversion and forgiveness of sins, using references to Scripture. Here's what Saint Augustine says about it: "The Gospel readings on the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ are solemnly proclaimed in order. Today we heard how the Lord Christ showed His true flesh to His disciples, the flesh in which He had suffered and in which He had risen.

They heard Him speak, they saw Him there present, and moreover, they even touched Him, while He said to them: 'Touch Me, and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.' For when they saw Him, they had doubted and believed they were seeing a ghost, not a body.

Therefore, let anyone who still believes that the resurrection of the Lord was not in the body, but only in the Spirit, may God forgive him, for He also forgave His Apostles, provided that he does not remain stubborn in error and changes his mind, for they too heard and changed their minds. And what a condescension it was that, while showing Himself to them present in the body, He also confirmed them concerning the truth of Holy Scripture! 'These are the words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you.' How? Was He not with them and speaking to them at that very moment? Why then, 'When I was still with you'? Undoubtedly, when I was still with you in a mortal form, just as you are. 'These are the words which I spoke to you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.' Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." And it is He who still today opens the Scriptures of life to us, He who died for us" (*Sermon 229/I,1*).

**Message: the liturgy invites us not to be disturbed by our doubts, but to live them as opportunities for purification and strengthening of our faith.**

**April 21, 2024**

**Fourth Sunday of Easter**

Acts 4:8-12

1John 3:1-2

John 10:11-18



## Christ the Good Shepherd

Today is the Sunday known as Good Shepherd Sunday, because of the Gospel that the liturgy presents to us. The Gospel image of the Shepherd and the sheep is one of the most beautiful and rich in meaning. Jesus makes it His own and defines Himself as the good Shepherd who "knows" His sheep, cares for them with love, defends them, and gives His life for them. He is also the gate and the gatekeeper. Opposed to Him are the mercenaries, who, precisely because they are such, prioritize their own interests, do not attend to the true good of the sheep, do not defend them from danger, but rather flee from the wolves; in short, they are thieves and brigands. Unfortunately, it must be acknowledged that Christ's flock has both good shepherds and mercenaries (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 46,5).

But God also speaks to us through the mercenaries: "Listen now in what sense even the mercenaries are necessary. There are many in the Church who seek material benefits, and yet they preach Christ, and even through them, the voice of Christ is heard. The sheep do not follow the mercenary, but the voice of the shepherd that is heard through the mercenary. Listen to how the Lord Himself pointed out the mercenaries: 'The scribes and the Pharisees - He said - sit on the seat of Moses; do what they say, not what they do.' [...]. But if they were to pretend to teach you their own things, do not listen to them and do not imitate them. Certainly, these seek their own interests, not those of Christ; however, no mercenary has ever dared to say to the people of Christ: Seek your interests, not those of Christ. The evil they do is not preached from the pulpit of Christ; it causes harm because they act badly, not because they preach well. Take the grape, but beware of the thorns. Is it clear? I think so [...]. Listen to the voice of the shepherd even from the mouth of the mercenary, but try not to be mercenaries yourselves, for you are members of the shepherd" (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 46,6).

This autobiographical testimony of Augustine, a true shepherd witness, is very beautiful: "I will tell you right away: I preach Christ to you with the intention of entering into you, that is, into your hearts. If I were to preach something else to you, I would try to enter into you through another way. Christ is the door through which I enter into you; I enter for Christ not into your domestic walls, but into your hearts: I enter for Christ, and gladly you listen to Christ in me. Why do you gladly listen to Christ in me? Because you are His sheep, because you have been redeemed with His blood. You recognize the price of your redemption, which I have not given, but which is announced to you through me" (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 47,2).

**Message:** the liturgy invites us to cultivate daily the sentiments of maturity and responsibility of a good shepherd, following the model of Jesus who gives His life for each sheep.

**April 28, 2024**

**Fifth Sunday of Easter**

Acts 9:26-31

1John 3:18-24

John 15:1-8



## The Vine and the Branches

We are in the midst of the Easter season, and the liturgy of the Fifth Sunday of Easter presents to us very appropriately the famous passage of the vine and the branches. It is a very rich and expressive image that reveals to us the intimate relationship of communion of life that Jesus has merited for us through His Easter and proposes us to live. The entire parable revolves around the verb of our "remaining" in Him, like the branches are united to the vine.

Saint Augustine comments: "In this reading, continuing to speak of Himself as the vine and of His disciples as the branches, the Lord says: 'Remain in me, and I will remain in you.' However, they are in Him not in the same way that He is in them. Both presences benefit not Him, but them. Yes, because the branches are in the vine in such a way that, without benefiting the vine, they receive from it the sap that makes them live; in turn, the vine is in the branches to make the vital sap flow in them and not to receive it from them. Thus, this remaining of Christ in the disciples and of the disciples in Christ benefits not Christ, but the disciples. If a branch is cut off, another can sprout from the living root, while the cut-off branch cannot live separated from the vine" (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 81,1).

And emphasizing how remaining united in Christ is the only condition for the branches to bear fruit, Saint Augustine continues: "The Lord continues: 'Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me.' This great praise of grace, O my brothers, instructs the humble, silences the proud. Let those now reply, if they have the courage, who, ignoring the justice of God and seeking to establish their own, are not subject to the justice of God. Let the presumptuous and those who think they do not need God to perform good works reply. Do not they oppose this truth, being corrupted in mind as they are, reproved concerning the faith, those who, answering foolishly, say: 'We owe it to God if we are men, but we owe it to ourselves if we are righteous?' What do you say, O deluded ones, you who are not the asserters but the destroyers of free will, who, by a ridiculous presumption, from the height of your pride cast it down into the deepest abyss? You climb the cliffs without having where to fix your foot, and you swell with empty words. These are the babblings of your presumption. But listen to what awaits you and shudder, if there remains a shred of sense in you. Whoever deludes himself into thinking he can bear fruit by himself is not united to the vine; and whoever is not united to the vine is not in Christ; and whoever is not in Christ is not a Christian. Behold the abyss into which you have fallen" (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 81,2).

"The branch has no alternative, it must choose between one thing and another: either the vine or the fire" (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 81,3).

To the question of how we can remain in His love, Saint Augustine says: "How will we remain? Listen to what follows: 'If you keep my commandments,' He says, 'you will remain in my love.' Is it love that makes us keep the commandments, or is it the observance of the commandments that gives rise to love? But who can doubt that love precedes the observance of the commandments? Whoever does not love has no motivation to observe the commandments. With the words, 'If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love,' the Lord does not want to indicate the origin of love, but the proof. It is like saying: Do not believe that you can remain in my love if you do not keep my commandments; you will be able to remain only if you observe them. That is, this will be the proof that you remain in my love, if you observe my commandments. Therefore, let no one delude themselves into loving the Lord if they do not observe His commandments; for we love Him only as much as we observe His commandments, and the less we observe them, the less we love Him" (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 82,3).

**Message:** the liturgy invites us to become aware that each person's vitality depends on being united, incorporated into Christ; on remaining in His love.



# Some Pictures

## Sharing a Bit of our Life



**January 3-5, 2024**

**Toledo - Brazil**

The members of the *Província Santa Rita de Cássia* participated in the traditional Annual Meeting of the friars, which included moments of prayer, reflection, sharing, and planning of activities for the year



**January 4, 2024**

**Toledo - Brazil**

During the Annual Meeting of the friars, the Prior General, Fr. Nei Márcio Simon, presided over the Mass, during which Fr. Alex Sandro Rodrigues received the Ministry of Acolyte



**January 4, 2024**

**Acquaviva Picena - Italy**

The Prior Provincial, Fr. Ferdinand Puig, presided over the funeral of our confrere Fr. Luigi Pingelli, who passed away two days earlier after facing a long period of illness with faith and serenity



**January 14, 2024**

**Ourinhos - Brazil**

Emotional celebrations at the Parishes of Santo Antonio and N.S. Aparecida do Vagão Queimado marked the conclusion of our presence, after 25 years, in the Diocese of Ourinhos



## January 18, 2024 Da Nang - Vietnam

Three Vietnamese confreres were ordained deacons at the Cathedral of Da Nang: Fra Nguyen Huu Duc, Fra Nguyen Van Cat, and Fra Pham Huu Ky, in the presence of family members, friends, and confreres



## January 26, 2024 Rome - Italy

The Prior General, Fr. Nei Márcio Simon, visited the General Curia of the Augustinian Recollects for a moment of sharing with other religious who participate in the Focolare Movement



## January 29, 2024 Vatican City

Following the indications of the General Curia, the General Director for Missions, Fr. Harold Toledano, visited the Dicastery for Evangelization where he was welcomed by the Secretary, Msgr. Fortunatus Nwachukwu, to initiate forms of collaboration between the Dicastery and our missions



## February 1, 2024 Cebu City - Philippines

The Archbishop of Cebu City, Msgr. José Palma, made a visit to our Institute of Theology (SMIRS), meeting with students, teachers, and members of the Religious Community, demonstrating his appreciation for the activities carried out and expressing words of esteem and a action



**February 5, 2024**

**Rome - Italy**

Msgr. Renato Mayugba, Bishop of Laoag - Philippines, visited our General Curia with some officials from the Diocese to thank the Prior General for allowing the Postulator General, Fr. Dennis Ruiz, to become the Postulator for the Beatification Cause of the young Servant of God Niña Ruiz Abad



**February 17, 2024**

**Pessinetto - Italy**

The Postulator General and the Secretary General visited the Church of San Giovanni Battista, where our missionary in Tonkin, Msgr. Ilario Costa (18th century), had been baptized



**January and February 2024**

**Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia**

The Prior Provincial, Fr. Crisologo Suan, and the Provincial Secretary, Fr. Randy Lozano, continue the Canonical Visit to all the Religious Communities of the Province of Saint Nicholas of Tolentino



**January 2024**

**Ourinhos and Bom Jardim - Brazil**

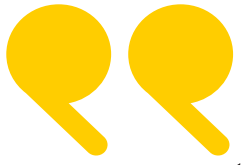
At the beginning of 2024, the two schools owned by the *Província Santa Rita de Cássia* were transferred to the administration of other entities, thus ending our educational activities in the Brazilian territory, after more than fifty years in Bom Jardim and six years in Ourinhos



# Easter Greetings

## Prayer in the Life of the Christian

Fr. Nei Márcio Simon, oad @freineisimon



Dear confreres, laymembers, and friends,

every time I hear someone say, "I prayed to God and He listened to me," I am struck. At the same time, with the same amazement, I think of those people who, despite having prayed, have not felt an immediate response from God.

The most common meaning of prayer is that it materializes in a request. However, this does not mean that we pray only to plead with God to fulfill our desires. We also pray to ask that they be in accordance with His Will.

St. Therese of Lisieux says: "For me, prayer is a surge of the heart, a simple look turned toward heaven, a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy" (*Autobiographical Manuscripts C 25r*).

This beautiful definition reminds us that the cry of gratitude and love takes us deep into our relationship with God. When a Christian prays, he enters into dialogue with the Lord and sometimes uses strong words, without neglecting another fundamental aspect of prayer: to be silent in order to listen to God intimately.

We are experiencing the strong season of Lent, which culminates in the solemn celebration of Easter. Prayer, accompanied by fasting and acts of charity, will lead us to live intensely the centrality of the Christian faith: the passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us treasure this time to convert to a true prayer dialogue with the Savior, without sparing the smile that cannot be missing from the conscious Christian who knows that Christ has conquered death. And let us move forward with joy!

Best wishes for a Happy Easter to all members of the Order, affiliates, and readers of *Presenza Agostiniana*.

