

TANGAZA COLLEGE
THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

KIDUS WELDEGIORGIS, S.D.B.

**A RETREAT CONFERENCE ON THE GOSPEL
MESSAGE TO THE YOUTH**

Moderator:

Rev. Fr. Aelred, Lacomara, C.P.

A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies

NAIROBI 2007

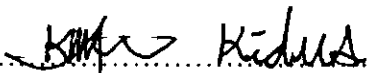
TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	i
STUDENT'S DECLARATION	iii
DEDICATION	iv
EPIGRAPH	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	vi
GENERAL INTRODUCTION	1
The Purpose and Motivation of the Study	2
Organization, Structure and Content of the Work	2
The Evening before the Actual Day of the Retreat	3
CONFERENCE I	5
THE PRODIGAL SON IN LUKE 15:11-32	5
1.1. Introduction	5
1.2. The Departure of the Younger Son	6
1.3. A Humble Request of the Young Son to Return Home	8
1.4. Forgiveness of the Merciful Father	10
1.5. The Restoration of the Younger Son	12
1.6. Celebration and Fellowship at Home	13
1.7. Conclusion	14
CONFERENCE II	16
SALVATION THROUGH THE CROSS OF CHRIST	16
2.1. Introduction	16
2.2. Jesus' Way to the Cross	17
2.3. Jesus' Death on the Cross	19
2.4. The Significance of the Cross of the Risen Christ	22

2.5. The Death of Jesus and God's Ultimate Revelation	24
2.6. Jesus and the Kingdom of God	25
2.7. Conclusion	27
CONFERENCE III	29
THE WAY TO ETERNAL LIFE BASED ON LK 10:25-37.....	29
3.1. Introduction.....	29
3.2. Background	30
3.3. The Desirc for Eternal Life	31
3.4. Who is my Neighbor?	33
3.5. Jesus' Teaching on the Love of one's Enemies	36
3.6. Application to Christian Life Today	39
3.7. Conclusion	41
CONFERENCE IV	43
MARY IN GOD'S PLAN OF REDEMPTION	43
4.1. Introduction.....	43
4.2. The Faith and Obedience of Mary	44
4.3. The Generosity of Mary	47
4.4. Mary' Intercession	49
4.5. Mary's Presence on Calvary	51
4.6. Blessed Virgin and the Church	52
4.7. Conclusion	53
GENERAL CONCLUSION	55
APPENDIX I: ABBREVIATIONS	58
APPENDIX II: BIBLIOGRAPHY	59
APPENDIX III: THE YOUTH	62
APPENDIX IV: THE PRODIGAL SON AND CRUCIFIED CHRIST.....	63
APPENDIX V: THE GOOD SAMARITAN AND VIRGIN MARY	64

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

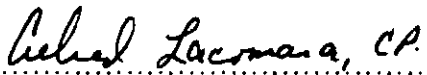
I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay (thesis) is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies. It has never been submitted to any other College or University for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed:..... 

Name of the Student: Kidus Weldegiorgis Amanuel, S.D.B.

Date:..... 22/2/2007

This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the
College Supervisor

Signed:..... 

Name of Supervisor: Rev. Fr. Aelred, Lacomara, C.P.

Date:..... 22/02/07

DEDICATION

With love and gratitude I dedicate this work:

To my beloved Parents; my father Mr. Weldegiorgis Amanuel and my mother Mrs. Leteberhan Teferi, who helped me to grow in loving Jesus Christ, his Mother Blessed Mary and the Church. And who taught me things that I will never forget.

To all my brothers and sisters at home in Ethiopia for their encouragements, support, love and prayers.

To the youth of Holy Savior Church at Adigrat (Ethiopia); with whom I shared some great moments.

And to all young people whose challenges helped me to deepen, to know myself better and belong to the Lord. It is for you I have studied and totally given myself.

EPIGRAPH

“Love to pray. Feel often during the day the need for prayer and take trouble to pray. Prayer enlarges the heart until it is capable of containing God’s gift of Himself.”

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost I would like to express my heartfelt thanks and gratitude to the Almighty God for the gift of my life, and for his sufficient Grace and strength to pursue my studies.

I am deeply grateful to AET Province: The Provincial Rev. Fr. Alfred Roca, the Economer Rev. Bro. Bullo Cesare and the council members for giving me the chance to discover my vocation with them and for giving me the opportunity to study here in Nairobi. I thank to all the confreres of AET Province for their moral support.

My sincere thanks go to Rev. Fr. Aelred Lacomara who gave me a course on how to preach retreats; whose wisdom and knowledge of the scripture motivated me to write a retreat conference as my long essay. I am very grateful for his acceptance to be my moderator and for his constant direction.

I am greatly indebted to Tangaza college staff, to all lecturers together with the other departments, and in a special way the biblical department. Their effort put to support me to grow in human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral formations. I am very grateful for their contributions in my journey of life and in broadening my Christian world-view.

I would like to thank the AFE province who welcomed me to study for four years in their province. Thanks to all the priests and brothers of Utume community for making me feel at home and for creating a good atmosphere while I was writing my work.

I extend my thanks to Bros. Madassery Jose, Shyjan George, Celestine Kharkongor, Deacon Paul Luseno and Abba Mossie Dory who have kindly read and corrected my work. I appreciate your challenging ideas, valuable suggestions and constructive criticisms. This has helped me to bring this work to a conclusion. I thank Ethio-Eritrea community of Tangaza for the moral support.

My warmest gratitude goes to my family: parents, brothers and sisters for their support, unconditional love and prayers during my whole journey of life especially during my stay in Nairobi, Kenya. My sincere thanks to all my classmates at Tangaza who showed me a friendly support and concern for the past four years of stay in Nairobi.

My thanks goes to the Holy Savior Catholic Church youth members (Adigrat) and friends for their support and prayers. I cannot forget to thank also St. Kizito Church in Nairobi; especially the youth group for the good experience that I got from them during my pastoral work. Finally, I register my appreciation to all people whose names are not mentioned here, for their support and good will in one way or another, in building my life. May the almighty God bless you and reward you.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This retreat on the Gospel message is for the youth aged approximately between 17-25 years. The youth are not a separated group of people but they are a group that forms part of the church, as the people of God. As a matter of fact, the youth are challenged by the present world's situation and not being committed to Jesus in the Church. Yes, the youth are the future leaders of the Church and the society at large but something hinders them not to accept this fact and see forward. Some youth are incapable of realizing their good talents in them. At times they appreciate the Church less; to the extend of being pessimistic.

Many Christians rather Catholic youth take Christian life just for granted. They think to be a Christian, the most important thing is just to be baptized, and that is all. And they forget to take seriously their responsibility of following Jesus in whom they are baptized as Christians. Those who don't have strong faith, try to move from one church to another. At last they even lose their little faith they have in God. Therefore, it is everybody's responsibility to understand them and give quick solutions to their challenges; and also to accept them as they are.

The Purpose and Motivation of the Study

My intention in writing these conferences is to contribute something to the life of the youth, in re-orienting the fundamental Christian faith. To help them in finding a way so that they try to improve their style of life and live it in a more meaningful way. I would like also to renew the spirit and mind of the youth. That they might find for themselves Jesus Christ as their answer. To achieve my purpose, I have selected four themes for each day that I thought urgent to the youth of today so that they reflect upon them.

The reasons that forced me to write in this way is because I have in mind to become a good preacher, especially to youth. The other reason is that I thought this would help me for my ministry in the near future. And I want to deepen my understanding of the Holy Scripture. In any case, if I am invited to say something to youth, I hope I will not be worried because I am open minded.

Organization, Structure and Content of the Work

This long essay, retreat conference has four talks and each talk has an introduction and a conclusion. Conference one on the prodigal son will help the young people to look at themselves whether one is lost at home or in the countryside. It is necessary to be found and be able to receive God's love and mercy. In the second conference on the Cross of Christ, I will highlight this mystery of Christian faith which is yet less spoken of. In the third conference, we shall deal with Jesus' perfect teaching on love of neighbor.

Finally, conference four focuses on Mary's role in the plan of salvation. As a matter of fact, anything about Mary's teaching challenges youth and that become their excuse when they drag themselves to other sects. So here, I will try to show Mary's greatness and I encourage them to review their attitudes on this regard.

After each talk I would like to give them materials for their personal reflections. The challenge I found in writing this retreat is lack of books regarding preaching retreats. Because there are not many books written on preaching. Even if there are, they are not written by Catholics but by other non-Catholics. The evening before the actual day, I would give a general introduction.

The Evening before the Actual Day of the Retreat

Ladies and gentle men, good evening! It is good to have all of you these days and I invite you to feel at home. At the same time, I invite you to use this opportunity to talk to Jesus. May be for some of you this retreat could be your first experience. Retreat is nothing but a moment of prayer and reflection. And it is also a renewal of life in the sense that one put aside his or her busy schedule in order to encounter Jesus.

In retreat Jesus is ready to waste time with each one of us. But our challenge is 'we don't like to spend our time with him. But we need to convince ourselves to talk and spend our time with Jesus. Let us allow him to touch our hearts because he is the only one who can give us perfect peace and happiness that we always desire. Our retreat will have the following structure daily: opening prayer or hymn, two sessions a day, personal reflection and conclusion.

The Retreat will take place in Resurrection Garden. Inside this holy place, switch off your mobiles taking picture is also not allowed. Because they distract a person who would like to pray. In front of the conference hall, I shall put the Holy Bible on the table. Under the table also I will place each day a poster in relation to the four themes.¹ That will help you for your meditations.

You can have a dialogue during meals, so that you share with your companions about one's spiritual experiences. In case if somebody is interested for private talk I will be available during these days. Now I invite you to use this chance to rest, relax and sleep well. Tomorrow wake up fresh and ready to dialogue with Jesus. Good night.

¹ See diagram Appendix iv and appendix v.

CONFERENCE I

THE PRODIGAL SON IN LUKE 15:11-32

1.1. Introduction

Our first conference is from Luke's Gospel on the prodigal son. And as you just heard from the reading (Lk 15:11-32), the story is about the merciful Father, the younger and elder son. The meaning of prodigal is wasteful; in one way or another, are you not wasteful as God's grace is concern?² This parable of the lost son is unique and beautiful. In this story you can see the father as the image of God's love and mercy.³ The theme of this parable could be the preciousness of everyone's soul to God the Father. Jesus tells the story and you can ask yourselves what led Jesus to give this parable? Because of the life of the Pharisees, the self-righteous ones.

During Jesus' time, the tax collectors were hated, neglected by people and considered as sinners (Lk 18:11). They were seeking the company of Jesus. And since to love the marginalized was the nature of Jesus, he was welcoming them in wherever he found them even eating and drinking with them (Lk 15:2). Jesus says: "I have come

² Cf. F. MCCARTHY, *Sunday and Holyday Liturgies Cycle C*, 54.

³ Cf. J. JEREMIAS, *The Parables of Jesus*, 128.

to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.” (Lk 5:32)

This was a big headache for Jewish leaders and they stood to attack Jesus. Yet Jesus did not run away from them but He confronted in convincing them so that they treat well those who were counted in the society as sinners. And to “change their attitude to sinners from one which is characterized by its hostility to one which is characterized by its hospitality.”⁴ Because for God each and every person is unique and God did not create human person to be lost but to have life. Now we shall see how was the departure of the younger son and why he asked to return home. We proceed to the forgiveness of the Father and the restoration of his son. Before we conclude we shall deal with the celebration with the neighbors at home.

1.2. The Departure of the Younger Son

From the story we hear about a good family that lived a comfortable life. The father is very rich and kind. He is unique and gentle person. He loves and cares for his children. The father was always grateful for the gift of his two sons. He trusts them and gives them different responsibilities in his fields. This family was really exemplary to the rest of the neighborhood. The father loves them very much; he allows them to use and access all his properties.

But what happened is that the younger son came to appreciate less the goodness of his father. For him, life within the family became lifeless and he sought absolute freedom. The younger son wanted to separate himself completely from his father. And one day, he approached his father and demanded inheritance even though his father was

⁴ D. MCBRIDE, *The Gospel of Luke: Reflective Commentary*, 204.

still alive.⁵ The younger son wanted to cut off himself: “father, give me the share of the property that belongs to me.” (Lk 15:12) This request was a selfish request, ‘give me’! ‘To me’! He was interested only about himself and he cared for nobody else;⁶ his request was to show that he is tired of the father and wants to be free from the father’s love, security and protection. Then the father gave everything that his son demanded from him.

So dear brothers and sisters, I believe you already must have experienced it in your families or neighborhood. Because today, we find many youngsters who run away from their parents. Why do youth leave their homeland? It could be poverty, seeking absolute freedom, illness, selfishness, false happiness and so on. Dear young people, it doesn’t matter what kind of reason you have, believe; there is no place that is better than one’s home. Therefore, use the freedom, the love, the peace, which are there in your homes. Most of you seem living a life as if God is dead. How many of you don’t recognize the constant care, the love and the security of God? Don’t wish any pleasure that can bring you troubles, but desire God to give you what you need. Even if you suffer, remember this, your sufferings can be a blessing if you know that God is with you.

After the younger son received his properties, he collected everything and started striking out of the family. His plan of departure was to a far place (Lk 15:3), the reason is that to distance himself from his father, not to see him again.⁷ He thought life

⁵ According to the Jewish law, elder gets two third and younger gets one third of inheritance. For more details see also, J. LARREA, *The Word of God: Commentaries on the Sunday Readings*, 187.

⁶ Cf. G. A. BUTRICK, *The Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volume*, VIII, 270.

⁷ Cf. D. MCBRIDE, *The Gospel of Luke: Reflective Commentary*, 206.

in distant country will be a joyful one, but when things came to an end (Lk 15:14), he began to suffer, feel hopeless and helpless.⁸

Brethren, let it not happen to you! Check your desires. If you desire wrongly, then that will bring you pain and sorrow in life. Ask yourselves, how many times you strayed from the help, care, and mercy of God? How many times you refused worshipping the true God and desiring money, power, and pleasure to be your gods? Yes, you have gone far away from God, but God still loves you; He desires you to change and come back. The love and care He has for you is more than anything else and that is why Jesus says: “there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” (Lk 15:7) Everywhere apart from God is a far country.⁹ Therefore, the best and the only option is start coming to God from where you are now. And always in life, seek first the Kingdom of God and other things are secondary even they are less important.

1.3. A Humble Request of the Young Son to Return Home

The young man, when separated himself from his father in the far country, the young man met with what he did not expect.¹⁰ He was imagining what would be his future life and he concluded that he would not live long. But he came to himself (Lk 15:17). This is an expression of repentance and reconciliation.¹¹ The young son remembers how he had been treated at home by his father. He knew that going back

⁸ Cf. D. MCBRIDE, *The Gospel of Luke: Reflective Commentary*, 206.

⁹ Cf. G. A. BURRICK, *The Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volume*, VIII, 273.

¹⁰ Cf. W. E. CONN ed., *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation*, 227.

¹¹ Cf. J. JEREMIAS, *The Parables of Jesus*, 130.

home things would be better. He decided to make up his mind and return to his father (Lk 15:18). The experience taught him that there is no place like home.¹²

As he had left the father, now he leaves everything else behind to come back to his same father. The first thing he tried to realize was what he did, admitted his wrong doing and decided not to commit them again. “Moreover, there was a true and deep realization of the nature of sin: I have sinned against heaven and before you.”¹³ Finally he came back and was accepted by the father.

Dear sons and daughters of God, as human beings, you all have the experience of being lost. The terrible loss is to be in sin; to reject communion with God the Father. I believe now at this moment of time your heart might be beating because, it likes to be found and showers by the mercy of God. So it is up to you, to take an action and come close to your origin of life.

One of Jesus’ invitations to each one of you is this: “come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened and I will give you rest.” (Mt 11:28) So that, through the process of reconciliation you re-establish the normal relationship with God. Living in sin, you really offend God, being self-destructive you hurt God. And your past and present life become meaningless and senseless; yet if you come back and ask forgiveness, then God will forgive and make you His own. The reason is that God thinks not like human beings do (Mk 8:33). As your sins increase day after day, God’s mercy and grace also increase (Rom 5:20). So, like the younger son (Lk 15:17), you need to make up your mind and repent.

¹² Cf. D. MCBRIDE, *The Gospel of Luke: Reflective Commentary*, 207.

¹³ G. A. BUTTRICK, *The Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, VIII, 273.

Dear brethren, let us not try to postpone our confession and live in our sins, but repent before it is too late. Humble yourself and open your heart and “let Christ complete our conversion, that we let his word reshape our thoughts, that we let his example refashion our conduct, and we let his love completely transform us and make us his witnesses so that all might believe and be saved.”¹⁴

If you always seek conversion, then God cleans your wrong desires, bad thoughts and sins and make you new creation. So imitate the younger son, who confessed his faults and sins to his merciful father (Lk 15:18). Dear friends, don't say why I confess to a priest? Yes you can confess directly to God but also “as human persons, we are in need of an external sign of God's forgiveness, we need to hear the forgiving words of Christ as they are spoken by the Church representative, in order to be truly reconciled with God and others. We, as human beings, need a visible and tangible sign that our sins are indeed forgiven.”¹⁵

1.4. Forgiveness of the Merciful Father

When the young man decided to return home, he was ready to receive any kind of treatment (Lk 15:19). What he really found was unbelievable! He found a father who waits, longs, and watches for his child's return. When the younger son sees from a distance, a welcoming face of his father, he remembered what he did and felt sorry. In the same way, when the father saw his own beloved son, he pretends as if nothing had happened. He runs to meet his child. As a matter of fact, it was regarded “undignified

¹⁴ W. E. CONN ed., *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation*, 105.

¹⁵ R. RONZANI, *About Confession*, 8.

for an old man to run, but the father is not loaded down with his own dignity.”¹⁶ The younger son wants to reveal all his sins and the father did not give him time to finish. Because he was busy and moved with love and compassion for his lost son.¹⁷ The mercy of God is greater than sin.

The lost son was able to see the father once again. They had been separated, but now, they are united. When the son arrived home, the first one he met was not his own elder brother (Lk 15:25) but his merciful father. In spite of all he had done, he continued to love him. The younger son prepared a speech of confession to narrate to his father¹⁸ and the father interrupted him and showed him a sign of forgiveness.¹⁹ However, the father forgave him. This was not because of his son’s good work, but because of the love and mercy of his father. “One of the purest joys man can have in life is that of experiencing God’s forgiveness.”²⁰ If you really want God’s mercy then forgive those who trespass against you.

My dear friends, without God’s grace life is meaningless. You need to seek God to give you another chance. So taste His compassion (Ps 34:8), share His limitless love and everlasting mercy (Sir 2:9). Search the Good Lord as the Lord searches you.²¹ Don’t be tempted to doubt if God might forgive all your sins, rather believe that Christ Jesus came on this earth to destroy sin and save sinners (1Tim 1:15). Imitate St. Paul; “if

¹⁶ D. McBRIDE, *The Gospel of Luke: Reflective Commentary*, 207.

¹⁷ Cf. L. MORRIS, *Luke: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, 265-267.

¹⁸ Cf. D. McBRIDE, *The Gospel of Luke: Reflective Commentary*, 207.

¹⁹ Cf. G. A. BUTRICK, *The Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volume*, VIII, 277.

²⁰ J. LARREA, *The Word of God: Commentaries on the Sunday Readings*, 673.

²¹ Cf. J. LARREA, *The Word of God: Commentaries on the Sunday Readings*, 675.

God forgive Paul, that great sinner, and turned him into an apostle, then I too stand a good chance; I too will be forgiven.”²²

Whenever you want to come back to God, he always extend his hands to receive you and kiss you with the kisses of love and forgiveness. God rejoices over a person who repents and seeks new life (Lk 15:7). “God’s occupation is to love. Only God can love in this fashion, because only God is defined as ‘love’.”²³ As Christians, no matter what it costs, you must be ready to ask for forgiveness and grant forgiveness.

1.5. The Restoration of the Younger Son

After the father received his lost son he showed his readiness to offer him all his belongings. The father was careful not to discourage his son. The father did not stop loving his child. He ordered something to be brought that reflects the total restoration of the lost son. The father dignified his son with the best robe (Lk 15:22). He was privileged with a ring to wear on his finger (Lk 15:22), represents authority (Gen 41:42) and membership. He was given sandals, which is a sign of freedom. This is exactly how God does with you; whenever you ask forgiveness regardless your sins, God restores and elevates you, to the level of sonship and daughtership.²⁴

²² J. LARREA, *The Word of God: Commentaries on the Sunday Readings*, 676.

²³ Cf. R. R. BARR, *Dio, Padre di Misericordia*, Milan, 1998; English trans. *God, the Father of Mercy*, 56.

²⁴ Cf. J. LARREA, *The Word of God: Commentaries on the Sunday Readings*, 189.

1.6. Celebration and Fellowship at Home

The father was not satisfied restoring his son only to himself, he also wanted to restore his son to the rest of the people, so that he may not be rejected and abused. This is why the father intended to invite all friends, relatives and neighbors to the table of fellowship. So that his son would be inserted to the community, tribe, and society. The father ordered his servants to bring him a fattened calf (Lk 15:23) that was kept for a big celebration.²⁵ The father was overjoyed and out of love, he was cheering the guests saying, “this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” (Lk 15:24) There was a nice party prepared with music and dance.²⁶ “The father does so much beyond what was expected of him. He had given his son life once. He restores him to life once again, gives him back his dignity and rehabilitates him as his reborn son.”²⁷

My dear brothers and sisters, this is the way God restores one’s life after a sinner returns to him. As Jouwen explains:

God rejoices. Not because the problems of the world have been solved, not because all human pain and suffering have come to an end, nor because thousands of people have been converted and are now praising him for his goodness. No, God rejoices because one of his children who was lost has been found. What I am called to is to enter into that joy. Not the joy that the world offers.²⁸

Dear friends, do you welcome and rejoice when someone repents and returns to the church? Or you are like the elder son who refused to welcome his own brother? (Lk 15:28) But you should always welcome and rejoice after seeing other youth coming back to the Lord and to your assemblies. The elder son as faithful and obedient to his

²⁵ Because at that time meat was rarely eaten. See, R. J. KARRIS, “The Gospel According to Luke” in *the Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 707.

²⁶ Cf. H. J. M. JOUWEN, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*, 112.

²⁷ R. BAAWOBR, *Gospel of Luke: Bible Study and Sharing on the Christian Communities*, 111.

²⁸ H. J. M. JOUWEN, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*, 114.

father, he was always available to his father; he was hard working. His weakness was envy. Ask God to make you be welcoming persons to your bothers and sisters.

1.7. Conclusion

The story of the prodigal son is not about something of a distant past but still it is happening in our families and societies. From the story God the Father represents himself as ever merciful, ever present, and compassionate. The younger son as a person who seeks absolute freedom, thoughtless and foolish yet determined to change and courageous enough to come back. And the elder son is full of himself, feels himself as a stranger, unforgiving, and refused to accept his brother as he is.

My dear people, for sure you are lost somewhere. Some of you may be are lost in drugs, disco, gangs, theaters or bad company. Or some of you could be like Pharisees and Scribes of today; who are proud of being upright because you do not break any commandment of parish law. All these are different ways of distancing oneself from God and the Church. If you improve; the door is not closed you still have an opportunity to come back.

So if you are really chosen to come home, there is no better time than right now. Then if you humble yourself before God (Mt 23:12), then the loving father will accept you as are (Job 33:26) and will lift you up (Jam 4:10). For Him it doesn't matter, whatever great sin you have committed. You do not need to be afraid (Is 41:10) to come close to the Lord. Others may not receive you as you are but God does and He will never embarrass you (Heb 11:16). Because He is "a God of compassion who joyously

welcomes repentant sinners into his house.”²⁹ Out of ignorance of God’s love human beings commit sins, yet one’s sins cannot block God to forgive and love us.³⁰

In Order to reconcile with God, with others and oneself, you need to start thinking rationally and logically. Because reconciliation as sacrament is a way of turning one’s life to God. As Fr. Ronzani, put it nicely: “In the sacrament of reconciliation we confess first of all the mercy and love of God, who grants us pardon and peace. In his great love for us, God continually calls us to conversion and holiness.”³¹ During your meditation, I invite you to reflect on your lives where you might have lost in the school; Church youth group or not helping at home.

²⁹ H. J. M. JOUWEN, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*, 124.

³⁰ Cf. J. LARREA, *The Word of God: Commentaries on the Sunday Readings*, XI.

³¹ R. RONZANI, *About Confession*, 21.

CONFERENCE II

SALVATION THROUGH THE CROSS OF CHRIST

2.1. Introduction

I do not know what image of Cross you have. May be some people think the Cross is the one in the Church or the one you are wearing. This Cross of Jesus brought the fundamental truth of Christian life. "The word 'Cross' is derived from the Greek word, XYON, which means living or dead wood."³² This Cross was used as an instrument of punishment or restraint, used for cultic or secular purposes. It was an instrument of torture for serious offences. The Romans used the Cross to punish rebellious slaves, dangerous criminals and all those involved in insurrection against Roman state.³³

Crucifixion is the greatest insult to Jesus by his people. But God through His power raised Him up from the dead. Jesus Christ died on the terrible Cross but this Cross brought salvation for our sins and victory for Jesus Christ. The Cross of Christ

³² J. SCHNEIDER, "Xylon (wood, cross, tree)", in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, G. Kittel - F. Gerhard, ed., Abridged in one volume, 665.

³³ Cf. J. MOLTSMANN, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 163.

frees humanity from suffering, slavery, and sin. At the same time the Cross opens the door to reconcile with God, ourselves, neighbors and the whole universe.³⁴

The punishment of the death on the Cross was practiced by the Greeks, notably, Alexander the great hanged 2000 people on Crosses and the Jewish leader Alexander Jannaeus crucified 800 Pharisees. Dear friends, can you see, what makes the Cross of Jesus different? It is not His death on the Cross. Because Jesus Christ is not the only one who suffered and died on the Cross, but Jesus Christ is the only person who died on the Cross and saved many from the dead.³⁵

Christ doesn't lay sins on a scapegoat, but He takes them all to Himself and cancels them on the Cross once and for all, so that we sinners, may live to righteousness. As Christians, we should not focus just on the Cross but on the person of Christ. Below, we shall look at Jesus' way to the Cross and His death on the Cross. Then, the significant of the Cross of the Risen Christ and how it revealed God' ultimate love. Finally, Jesus and His Kingdom.

2.2. Jesus' Way to the Cross

God gives freedom to humankind to rule over creatures with full responsibility. But man refused to obey and chose to live envious, selfish and sinful life. This bad decision of man brought wound, corruption and destruction. In due time the merciful God could not allow human beings to live in sin forever. And to "correct the damage

³⁴ Cf. J. SCHNEIDER, "Crucifixion", in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, G. Kittle F. Gerhard, ed., Abridged in one volume, 1071-1072.

³⁵ Cf. H. LOCKYER, ed., *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 267.

done to all men,"³⁶ God planned and send his beloved son, to be the expiation for our sins (1Jn 4:10); so that you and I can be in communion with Him.

In order to save humanity, Jesus had to go through the way to the Cross. The life and death of Christ makes us free. St. Paul point out that our resurrection can take place because God first raised Jesus Christ from the dead. We are saved because Jesus lived, preached and was crucified, died and resurrected. That means His death cannot be understood in the absence of His life. His Cross also cannot be understood in the absence of Jesus Himself.³⁷ Let us reflect that if Jesus did not give Himself for us, what would be our life? But His passion, death on the Cross and resurrection brought us salvation.

You see, the Cross that had been seen as a shameful and sinful thing became a pillar of Christian faith, sign of hope, blessing, unity and something to adore. St. Paul preached to the Corinthians the importance of the Cross and spoke: "The Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1Cor 1:18) The Cross became a sign of triumph and a symbol for all the followers of Christ Jesus and shameful to the lost unbelievers.³⁸

Dear brothers and sisters, Jesus' love is tremendously wonderful and excellent in the sense that He was mysteriously present from the very beginning of creation, and He became one of us (Jn 1:14). May be some times you can deny and forget the love and mercy of God, but God will not deny or forget you, you can prefer to live in darkness without God, but God will not be without human beings. because it is God's nature to love and care for his creatures. That is why, His incarnation, His Cross and death, His

³⁶ W. F. HOGAN, *Christ's Redemptive Sacrifice*, 2.

³⁷ Cf. J. MOLTSMANN, *The Crucified God*, 126-127.

³⁸ Cf. J. SCHEIDER, "Crucifixion", in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1071.

resurrection and glorification as the judge of the living and the dead show us His spontaneous care and great love for you and me. Pope John Paul adds to this point by saying:

The whole of Christ's life was a continual teaching: his silences, his miracles, his gestures, his prayer, his love for people, his special affection for the little and the poor, his acceptance of the total sacrifice on the Cross for the redemption of the world and his Resurrection are the actualization of his word and the fulfillment of Revelation.³⁹

So friends, the uniqueness of God's love is whenever human life is threatened or destroyed, God pours out His Spirit and gives new life. Jesus gave himself for the sake of others. What about you? Are you willing to carry your daily Crosses by loving and serving your fellow brothers and sisters in the family, school, parish or anywhere?

2.3. Jesus' Death on the Cross

Jesus was not a political liberator and He didn't have a plan to have any party except to save His people. But What Jesus experienced was the opposite. Jesus was condemned to death unjustly and His crucifiers were not honest and right (Jn 19:6). Jesus gave enough evidences that He came to heal their wounds and save them from any stain of sin. He was from God and even God gave people time to accept Him as a Messiah but their sins prevented them from seeing the true message of God in their lives. Jesus shed His blood for many sinners. (Mk 14:24)

Jesus died on the Cross in public and it was not His fault, rather he bore our sins in His own body on the Cross (1Pet 2:24). Jesus could argue with those who wanted to kill and crucify Him but "He humbled Himself and became obedient even unto death, death on the Cross." (Phil 2:8)

³⁹ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 561.

I think, you don't need to hurry to blame those who persecuted Jesus instead think how many times, you betrayed and crucified Jesus? How many of you boastfully say to your companions; I am an original Catholic but you are a recent convert. Or some of you might say I am regular to Sunday Masses and an active member of the youth group? These cannot be a guarantee one has strong faith in the crucified Jesus. You need to revise the faith toward the crucified Jesus.

Are we together friends? Have you thought about Jesus' love and said at least thank you Jesus? I remember, recently one lady was very sick and in need of blood. One of her relatives was asking people to save the life of the lady by giving their blood. One of my friends went to the hospital to give blood to that lady. Some time later after she became healthy she told the gentleman, "I am poor and I don't have anything to give you but you saved me with your blood." Is this not beautiful? One's thanksgiving will not add anything to Jesus but to show gratitude, at least one needs to say thank you Jesus.

The death of Jesus on the Cross is considered a sacrifice because he died on the Cross and sacrificed Himself for the sake of our sins. We are saved not because of the blood of goats and bulls but by His own precious blood (Heb 9:12). As the letter to the Hebrew indicates again: the death of Jesus on the Cross is the expression of His loyalty to God as well as solidarity with the suffering of our brothers and sisters (Heb 4:15). Jesus' suffering is not God's punishment because God doesn't punish; but it is a sign that God loves human being in the suffering servant.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Cf. J. MAALOUF, *Mother Teresa: Essential Writings*, 43.

Mind you, Jesus did not only save few and cursed those who insulted and badly treated Him rather he forgive, and saves them too. Jesus prayed: "Father, forgive them because they do not know what they are doing." (Lk 23:34) Of course, forgiving those who wronged you is not easy and not always going to make you smile but you need to think differently from what people out there usually do. Then you will Experience peaceful life. So, be courageous to put into practice what Jesus taught: "do not resist on evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second miles. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you." (Mt 5:39-42)

Jesus' death on the Cross is the center of the Christian revelation. "All Christian statements about God, about creation, about sin and death have their focus point in crucified Christ. All the Christian statements about history, about the Church, about faith and sanctification, about the future and about hope,"⁴¹ reveal one universal truth. The event of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ is one event, by one Person that is Jesus Christ. What makes the Christian salvation unique is not the wood of the cross as such but the crucified Christ on the Cross.⁴² Because it is not the Cross that saved us but the Person of the crucified Christ.

⁴¹ J. MOLTSMANN, *The Crucified God*, 204.

⁴² Cf. J. MOLTSMANN, *The Crucified God*, 204.

2.4. The Significance of the Cross of the Risen Christ

As all the Gospels narrate, Jesus was arrested, condemned and killed. Jesus was not crucified between two candles, as today's funeral but between two thieves. Jesus died a complete human death and he died on the Cross to save the world. Jesus intended His disciples to be with him till the end but they betrayed and abandoned him. Even Jesus was killed by Judas Iscariot, his disciple (Mk 14:46). Then what was the revenge of Jesus? He did not use supernatural power to destroy and protect Himself rather he prayed for His enemies and for those who divided His personal clothes (Lk 23:34). For his disciples He gave them authority to minister healing, teaching, preaching and power to cast devils.

You, tomorrow's leaders of the Church, when you meet insults, problems and difficulties don't try to revenge violence with violence but violence with non-violence, as Jesus did to his accusers. So accept Jesus' invitation to love your enemies. Even now it is not too late to love one's enemies and turn back to God. Assimilate and put into practice what Mother Teresa used to say:

People are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered, LOVE THEM ANYWAY. If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives, DO GOOD ANYWAY. If you are successful you win false friends and true enemies, SUCCEED ANYWAY. The good you do will be forgotten tomorrow, Do Good ANYWAY. Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable, BE HONEST AND FRANK ANYWAY. What you spent years building may be destroyed overnight, BUILD ANYWAY. People really help but may attack you if you help them, HELP ANYWAY. Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth, GIVE THE WORLD THE BEST YOU'VE GOT ANYWAY.⁴³

Jesus, the savior of the world, by His Incarnation, He joined Himself with us and He restored our broken wounds and reconciled us with His Father. Only in Jesus'

⁴³ M. TERESA, *A Simple Path*. 185.

resurrection our lives gained tremendous redemption, which cannot be achieved by anyone else. Christ's favor cannot be parallel with the favor that you get from great people. Christ paid it so that humanity will be lifted up.⁴⁴

Dear youth, be courageous and ready to be broken bread and shed blood for the good of the least. Otherwise, only proclaiming all the Christian statements cannot lead you to salvation. When a guest entered the room of Mahatma Gandhi, after he saw a crucifix on the wall, he asked Gandhi, "you are not a Christian and you don't believe in Jesus Christ but you hanged the crucifix on your wall?" Mahatma replied: "yes, I don't believe in Jesus' Cross but I admire Him."⁴⁵ I think, your faith on the crucified Jesus must be beyond admiration. And if you really want to be good followers of Jesus, you must need to experience Jesus.

One day, I went to an office where I found a lady with a big crucifix around her neck and also I saw a crucified Jesus somewhere on the wall. I was very much surprised the way she dealt with people, she was not charitable at all. Another time I went for a purpose to a governmental office and I met a gentle man without any Cross on his neck and there was no a crucifix on the wall of the office but he was kind, humble and careful with his responsibility and service for people.

Dear friends, what does Cross mean to you? How do you understand the Cross of Jesus? The Cross of Jesus is the sign of love? Therefore, in our family life, school, and job or anywhere we are, we must witness the love of Jesus. You can witness the love of Jesus, if you really love, serve and sacrifice to each other as brothers and sisters with that same love of Jesus.

⁴⁴ Cf. J. MOLTSMANN, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 180-181.

⁴⁵ This is a common story people tell about Mahatma Gandhi from India who lived his life well. I heard from a preacher giving homily on Sunday 2001.

Before Easter many people thought that the death of Christ was a curse from God and everything was finished and even His own disciples abandoned Him, (Mk 14:50) stopped their hope and faith in Him. After the crucifixion of Jesus they were scattered and disappointed. But when Jesus resurrected and appeared and the reality of His resurrection penetrated into the mind and heart of His disciples then they came back to believe and follow Him. I think the faith of some of you is exactly like the Apostles: who feel that Jesus is not present especially when they face problems and sufferings. But friends, always see the active presence of Jesus in your life and invite Him to enlighten your hearts and minds.⁴⁶

2.5. The Death of Jesus and God's Ultimate Revelation

In death of Jesus, God showed His ultimate love for all mankind. The sinless Jesus died on the Cross yet God raised Him up (1Cor 15:4). And Jesus Christ became the first man who defeated death forever (Heb 2:14). In the resurrection, God did not only raise His Son Jesus from death but also human race. The Cross and death prove God's ultimate love to His creature. Jesus Christ knew how painful is to die on the Cross but for the sake of we sinners, He accepted the horrified Cross and sacrificed Himself.⁴⁷

Some times, I wondered the words of Jesus when He was on the Cross, “*Eli, Eli, lama Sabachthani?*” that is, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46) These words seem that God has really forsaken Jesus on the Cross on the

⁴⁶ Cf. R. A. KERESZTY, *Jesus Christ, Fundamentals of Christology*, 21-22.

⁴⁷ Cf. J. FUELLENBACH, *The Kingdom of God*, 229-230.

contrary God was present in the earthly life of Jesus especially in His passion, suffering above all in His death on the Cross. The resurrection is God's saving activity that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The Cross of Christ revealed God and this mystery sets us free from the slavery of sin and restores our wounds and unites us with God.⁴⁸

Brothers and sisters: is it not beautiful? When God allows Himself, to be like a criminal and murderer of His beloved Son, for the benefit of mine, you and the whole humanity. Now what is your task? What is God demanding from each one of you? Is He asking you to carry that big and bitter Cross, die and resurrect, then after He sees the result He might be happy and satisfy? Absolutely it is not; but he is inviting you to participate in the saving act of salvation by your faith and communion with Him.⁴⁹

2.6. Jesus and the Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God is the person of Jesus Christ and it is the love of God that offered by the words and deeds of Christ. The Kingdom of God is not just a space ruled by God but God's Lordship exercise among humankind. The Kingdom of God is not the outcome of human initiative but rather God's initiative. The main concern of the Kingdom of God is preaching, healing, teaching, curing, and the whole activities of Christ Jesus. The Kingdom is offered by God to everyone, because His Kingdom is not the same with this earthly Kingdom that deals with specific people or nation. That is why it is there without any payment for everyone who is created in the image and likeness of God. But it seeks one's collaboration that is to be open and faithful to it. The

⁴⁸ Cf. E. SCHILLEBEECKX. *Jesus. An Experiment in Christology*, 524-525.

⁴⁹ Cf. W. F. HOGAN. *Christ's Redemptive Sacrifice*. VI.

author of the Kingdom of God does not force anybody to live it; so it is up to you whether to accept it or to refuse it.⁵⁰

The Kingdom of God manifested as liberation, freedom, salvation, justice, love and fellowship. It manifests through the activity of Jesus Christ (Lk 4:1-4). Jesus says: 'the Kingdom of God is at hand;' which means that the reign of God with all its attributes is among people (Mk 1:15). Please understand that the Kingdom is not only as something eschatological but also something present among you. Therefore, you need to prepare well for the Kingdom of God. In any circumstances, if you are not ready and vigilant for it, then you can miss in the Kingdom the love, peace and harmony of life that you seek everyday.

For instance, for some of you, your schoolteacher gives enough time to study before exam; you can prepare well and get good results. But if he does not give you enough time to prepare, you can get nothing. So ladies and gentlemen, the Kingdom of God has great advantage for those who seek to be with God in that Kingdom. But only saying 'I go everyday to the Church' and the things of this world as the rich young man (Mk 10:23-27) prevent you not to rely and get ready for His Kingdom.⁵¹

For sure, the Kingdom of God cannot be understood fully only by the preaching and teaching of a priest, sister, catechist or somebody else unless the person himself or herself experiences it. Therefore, you all have the chance to participate in the present and active Kingdom in the form of Holy Eucharist. In the Eucharist, Jesus continues being tangibly present in the form of bread and wine. So as Christians rather Catholics, you need to nourish your souls by receiving it. The Kingdom of God is offered to

⁵⁰ Cf. J. FUELLENBACH, *The Kingdom of God*, 211-212.

⁵¹ Cf. J. FUELLENBACH, *The Kingdom of God*, 145.

everyone but only those who believe and accept can enter first; may be those who are marginalized, unpopular or new converted youth group.⁵² One way of participating in the Kingdom is when you receive his real body and blood of Christ through the Holy Communion.⁵³

2.7. Conclusion

Salvation comes in the personal intervention of God through the Cross of Jesus Christ. So that the chaotic, corrupt, evil and hopeless life of humankind will be transformed and make communion with God. Jesus went through so much suffering on the Cross for our sins. The sacrifice of Jesus is beyond the material sacrifice such as sheep, goat, or bull. God's love for you is very special and unique. "It is the only love in the world that is truly and totally free, that asks nothing for itself."⁵⁴ The plan of salvation was reached in the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. And it is the ultimate revelation of God through His beloved Son.

God sent His beloved Son to this earth not only to die on the Cross but also to establish His Kingdom. Jesus knew how painful it is to die on the Cross but He looked forward beyond the agony, to establish the Kingdom of God. The Cross of Christ and the Kingdom are inseparable realities. What God wants to communicate for the good of human race is already communicated in the Person of Jesus Christ. So, His passion, death and resurrection even his birth and Baptism are the same reality for one purpose that is to save mankind and make them citizens of the Kingdom.

⁵²Cf. R. O' TOOLE, "The Kingdom of God in Luke -Acts", 147-148.

⁵³Cf. R. O' TOOLE, "The Kingdom of God in Luke -Acts", 148.

⁵⁴R. CANTALAMESSA, *The Power of the Cross*, 15.

Dear brothers and sisters, the death of Jesus on the Cross inaugurated the Kingdom of God; in which everyone is welcomed. While Jesus was on the Cross, one of the thieves said “‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom’ Jesus answered him, ‘In truth I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise’.” (Lk 23:42-43) So, if you ask Jesus to include you in His Kingdom, absolutely he will not tell you, you cannot apply now, and wait for next year but as Jesus canonized the thief before he died, he always welcomes you to his Kingdom. So, take action now, and come near to Jesus just as you are because, even dark side of you cannot block God to love you. In your life meditate on how through suffering you have helped others; it may be in school, playground, hospital or at home.

CONFERENCE III

THE WAY TO ETERNAL LIFE BASED ON LK 10:25-37

3.1. Introduction

In the pervious conference we have consistently stressed the cross of Christ in relation to Christian life. And now, we shall reflect on the way to eternal life that the lawyer asked Jesus. For a better understanding please one of you read Lk 10:25-37. As we just heard the reading, talks about the lawyer who seeks to inherit eternal life yet he does not know how to attain it. And Jesus is trying to assist him by telling him the story of the Good Samaritan.

This story is found only in the Gospel of Luke and it is told by Jesus with an important message to the hearers. But in this particular moment of time, Jesus was replying to the tricky question that was asked by one of the lawyers. First, we shall try to see the background of the text and follow the lawyer's desire to inherit life. Then we move on to the question of the lawyer: who is my neighbor? This will link us to Jesus' teaching about the love of one's enemies. Finally, we deal with the application to Christian life today before we come to the conclusion.

3.2. Background

Noticing the story of the Good Samaritan; simply you can see when a Jew put a question to Jesus and He perfectly responds his question by giving an example of a Samaritan person. History tells that the existence of enmity between Jews and Samaritans. As a matter of fact, 721 years before Jesus Christ, Samaria was destroyed by the king of Assyria. And about 100 years later, Jerusalem also was conquered by king Nebucadnezzar and destroyed the beautiful temple of Solomon.⁵⁵

As the first historian, Josephus illustrated that the Samaritans wanted to give a hand in rebuilding the temple but the Jews refused the help. That attitude angered the Samaritans and they took an action to stop or delay their construction and built for themselves another temple, on mount Gerizim.⁵⁶

The Jews did not regard the Samaritans as true Israelites but as foreigners. They despised and tested them (Sir 50:25-26). This hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans continued in Jesus' time. "A Jew from Jerusalem would not ask a Samaritan for food or water, not even if he was dying of hunger or thirst."⁵⁷ That is why the Samaritan refused to welcome Jesus, who was on his way to Jerusalem (Lk 9:51-56).⁵⁸

Yet he would still speak good things about them (Lk 10:30-37). Jesus appreciates the Samaritan leper, who gave thanks to God after he was healed by him (Lk 17:15-19). In the *Act of the Apostles*, Jesus tells seriously his followers to be His witnesses even to Samaria (Acts 1:8) and they really received the word of God (Acts

⁵⁵ Cf. J. LARREA, *The Word of God: Commentaries on the Sunday Readings*, 576.

⁵⁶ Cf. H. G. M. WILLIAMSON, -- C. A. EVANS, "Samaritan Literature", in *the Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 1053.

⁵⁷ J. LARREA, *The Word of God: Commentaries on the Sunday Readings*, 576.

⁵⁸ Cf. J. R. DONAHUE, *the Gospel in Parable*, 128.

8:14). Since the Jews saw when Jesus showed concern about their enemies, the Samaritans, they insulted Him: “are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” (Jn 8:48)

Dear brothers and sisters, “the history of the Samaritans provides a lesson for us all. We should never judge and still less, condemn others. For all we know, they might be in the eyes of God worthier than we are. Or rather, we are all equally unworthy; the one gets most from the Good News is the one who acknowledges his sinfulness with greater humility.”⁵⁹ So if you would like to be great parishioners, humble yourselves and be courageous even when people abuse and insult you.

3.3. The Desire for Eternal Life

Let me tell you a question a woman asked a theologian: “One day a peasant woman asked a great and holy theologian: ‘Father, what must a poor woman do to be saved?’ The theologian smiled and gave his reply: ‘good woman, it is very simple: all you have to do to be saved is just to will it’.”⁶⁰

As Christians, one’s life does not stop only in this present world rather there is hope to see God face to face in heaven. When we pray, the our Father, we always say: “your Kingdom come” (Mt 6:10); we seek to live long life here on this earth as well as in the life to come. We believe that this eternal life is open to everyone. Because “God so loved the world that he gave his only son” (Jn 3:16a), once and for all. And it is not his intention that anyone should perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16b). One achieves

⁵⁹ J. LARREA, *The Word of God: Commentaries on the Sunday Readings*, 578.

⁶⁰ J. LARREA, *The Word of God: Commentaries on the Sunday Readings*, 569.

eternal life just by doing ordinary activities. For example, one can attain by being humble, obedient, charitable and generous to his others.

In the Gospel of Luke, there is an 'expert' in Jewish law, (today's professor of theology), approach Jesus and asked a question about eternal life. He said: "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Lk 10:25) Jesus questioning and said: "what is written in the law? What do you read there?" (Lk 10:26) Even if the lawyer doesn't expect Jesus to question him back, quoting from Moses' laws, and replied: "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Dt 6:5) and "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Lev 19:18) Since Jesus is not interested about the right answer but to move him from the level of knowledge to the level of action so that he might be serious in doing them.⁶¹

Dear brethren, yes, these two commandments are very important because they are the way to relationship here with God, others and oneself. But the danger is if you limit yourself only in knowing the laws. "The law is powerless to suppress the strong internal tendency toward selfishness and sin."⁶² So you should experience the spirit, which is the only 'law' that can unite you with God. Only this new covenant of the spirit enable you to love God and neighbor. Then you have not to worry about the other laws including the Ten Commandments. If you fulfill those inseparable commandments, then you fulfill the other commandments and go beyond them. Because if you love God you don't disobey him or if you love your neighbor you don't kill him or her.⁶³ When you practice this kind of love, you can arrive to eternal life. Even loving Jesus Christ but fail to love others might be prevent you attaining eternal life.

⁶¹ Cf. D. MCBRIDE, *The Gospel of Luke: Reflective Commentary*, 138.

⁶² A. LACOMARA. "Pauline Literature: Romans", Class Notes. 2006, photocopy, 7.

⁶³ Cf. A. LACOMARA, "Pauline Literature: Romans", Class Notes, 2006, photocopy, 8.

3.4. Who is my Neighbor?⁶⁴

Jesus told to the lawyer to love his neighbor as himself. Since the lawyer realized that this is the only option to enter eternal life, he is eager to do so, to love his neighbor. But he was not sure who is this neighbor that Jesus talks about. The lawyer wanted a definition of ‘neighbor’ from Jesus,⁶⁵ and asked Jesus: “who is my neighbor?” (Lk 10:29) Definitely he meant: “whom am I bound to love and whom may I exclude from my love or even hate?”⁶⁶

The lawyer dare to ask Jesus the reason is that he grows up in a culture where by the Jewish people draw boundaries between themselves and other people. In Jesus’ time, the understanding of neighbor was in a very limited way. For instance Jewish people love all Jews and beyond their people they don’t share their love, their love deserve only those who have the same nation, tribe, religion, and so on. To break this mentality of the Jewish people and the lawyer, Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan so that they understand humanity as one big neighborhood.⁶⁷

The story of the Good Samaritan⁶⁸ goes as follows: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho,⁶⁹ and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat

⁶⁴ In this sense, neighbor means more than the person who lives nearby. See also, L. MORRIS, *Luke: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* 205.

⁶⁵ Cf. W. J. HARRINGTON, *Come, Lord Jesus: A Biblical Retreat*, 198.

⁶⁶ J. LARREA, *The Word of God: Commentaries on the Sunday Readings*, 571.

⁶⁷ When people asked Jesus a particular question, His answer is always both particular as well as general. Because he considers also others might have the same problem. Here there is one evidence, the replay is not tackled only to the problem of the lawyer but also to all Jews including the religious leaders.

⁶⁸ The ancient interpretation of the story: The person who was robbed is Adam. Jerusalem represents heaven and Jericho as the world. The robbers as devils. The priest stands for the law and the Levite for the prophets. The Good Samaritan as Jesus Christ. The inn as the Church and the inn keeper as St. Paul. The Samaritan’s promise to come again as Christ’s Second coming. But this interpretation is not accepted by the modern scholars. Further reading on this part is found in a book, A. M. HUNTER, *Interpreting the Parables*, 25-26.

⁶⁹ The road from Jerusalem to Jericho, until recently times, was not safe for one who travels alone. See, W. J. HARRINGTON, *Come, Lord Jesus: A Biblical Retreat*, 199.

him, and went away, leaving him half dead.” (Lk 10:30) By chance a priest, after finishing his service, was coming back and when he saw a wounded person on the road, he passed the victim and went where he was supposed to go. Another Levite, religious personage, also did the same. Both, “the priest and Levite may have thought they had good reason to avoid the man; they were forbidden to come into contact with the dead, it made them ‘unclean’ for Temple service and the worship at the Temple could not be compromised.”⁷⁰

But the Samaritan one helped the victim because he was moved by compassion and mercy (Lk 10:33). The first thing he did with that wounded man is: he “bandaged his wounds, having poured oil, and wine on them.”⁷¹ Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn and took care of him.” (Lk 10:34) The following day, “he took out two denarii,⁷² gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend’.” (Lk 10:35) At this time, the Samaritan became a good neighbor of the victim.

So then, Jesus asked the lawyer, “which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” (Lk 10:36) Even if the lawyer was in the habit of saying that Jews are neighbors only to Jews; didn’t want to say directly Samaritan⁷³ yet he answered: ‘the one who showed pity on him.’” (Lk 10:37) By then, Jesus commanded him to do the same and inherit eternal life. This kind of helping

⁷⁰ A. LACOMARA, “The Parables: Parables of the Lukan Tradition”, Class Notes, 2004, photocopy, 1.

⁷¹ Because oil was used to ease pain and wine like today’s alcohol, to cleans the wounds. See also, L. MORRIS, *Luke: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, 207.

⁷² A denarius represented a day’s wages. See, W. J. HARRINGTON, *Come, Lord Jesus: A Biblical Retreat*, 200.

⁷³ Cf. J. A. HARGREAVES, *A Guide to the Parables*, 72.

a neighbor, who is in need, is a reflection of real love. This is what is required from each one.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this is a good lesson to each one of you. Let me request you to pause for a while and meditate and ask yourself: 'who is my neighbor'? Or 'whose neighbor am I?' Is it not your heart that says: 'my neighbor is my family member, my close friend, my classmate, my tribe, my church-person, and so on. My dear, you need to go beyond that. Otherwise, even if tirelessly you serve the church and God, and not those who are in need, you are far from the Kingdom of God. And this story of a Good Samaritan is really for you.

There was once "a wise old priest on his eighty-sixth birthday told his friends. 'I have two lessons from my life to pass onto you. First, remember the only thing that really counts in life is doing some good for another person. Secondly, never forget that someone always needs you'."⁷⁴ So everyone is your neighbor and you are also everybody's neighbor. Friends, you must move from limiting yourselves in external laws, that religion offers you. Genuine religion is to be at the disposal of others; to show love and care to those who are sick, weak and needy. Spending long time, worshipping God and in the contrary mistreating others cannot justify true and unshakable religion. "God hates this kind of worship." (Am 5:21-24) God desires to love each other as he has loved us (Jn 13:34). As Christopher Owczarek used to say: "what is really important is not who you are but what you do."⁷⁵ What matters is not what position you hold for

⁷⁴ A. McBRIDE, · O. PRAEM, *the Human Face of Jesus: Meditation and Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, 67.

⁷⁵ C. OWCZAREK, *Sons of the Most High: Love of Enemies in Luke – Acts*, 204.

status, what matters is rather active and practical love. And this love is the beginning and the end of everything and it is the right way to God.⁷⁶

3.5. Jesus' Teaching on the Love of one's Enemies

I guess, by now, you have come to understand who must be your neighbor. As the lawyer motivated himself to do the same as the Good Samaritan, you also will be enthusiastic to do good to all, who need your support. Jesus' command to the lawyer, do likewise (Lk 10:37), must not be understood to love one's neighbor and hate one's enemies, even it is not meant to love them only in pray for them. As Fr. Lacomara in class used to say that: loving and praying for one billion people in China is easy since we don't meet them. Therefore it must be understood to love in action for those who are in my next door, whom I hate most. Through the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus teaches you to love your enemies. That is why, many preachers, whenever they want to pass a message about love of enemies, they bring out the story of the Good Samaritan.⁷⁷

My dear friends, don't cheat yourselves and pretend that you are free of enemies. For sure you might have your own enemies that you cannot tolerate with. Even without going far from this room, be honest, how many enemies do you have at this moment of life. You all must admit that you have your own ones.⁷⁸ As Church members, because of race, age, language, or other reasons may be would like to chase some of the youth from the group, but don't try to deceive yourselves, because they

⁷⁶ Cf. R. R. BARR, *Dio, Padre di Misericordia*, Milan, 1998; English trans. *God, the Father of Mercy*, 81.

⁷⁷ Cf. C. OWCZAREK, *Sons of the Most High: Love of Enemies in Luke Acts*, 200.

⁷⁸ Cf. G. MOTTE, *Homilies: for Sundays of the Year. Cycle C*, 200.

might be better than you are. You may think that they are not active members of the church, but they might be capable of loving God and the Church.⁷⁹

In his letter St. Paul says: “for us in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.” (Rom 12:4-5) Therefore, if you believe that you are one in Christ then one cannot say: ‘I am better than the other’ if one says, then one hates his or her own body and also hates Jesus who is the head of that body. So dear, you need not to oppose one’s neighbor but to forgive and love them. As Christians, your vocation is always to follow and obey Jesus, the Master to love and to be loved.⁸⁰

Jesus himself teaches and acts. He teaches about how to love your enemies and he himself really loves his enemies by his word and deeds and being good to them. Jesus practically has shown his love to his enemies. Jesus commands his disciples not to use any weapon against those who came to arrest him (Lk 22:51). Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with Judas, his betrayer (Lk 22:19-21); Peter denied Jesus (Mk 14:68), yet Jesus loved him, prayed for him (Lk 22:32), appeared to him (Lk 24:34), and at least singled him out to be a leader (Mt 10:2). Jesus prayed for those who also persecuted and divided his clothes (Lk 23:34b). Imagine what Jesus did good towards his enemies. Jesus showed active love to everyone, without exception.⁸¹ The Ugandan proverb says “anger cures by silent.” So whenever you get angry try to control it with patience. And

⁷⁹ Cf. G. MOTTE, *Homilies: for Sundays of the Year, Cycle C*, 201-202.

⁸⁰ Cf. C. OW CZAREK, “The Gospel according to Mark: A Story of Discipleship”, Class Notes, 2004, photocopy, 8.

⁸¹ Cf. C. OW CZAREK, *Sans of the Most High: Love of Enemies in Luke Acts*, 216-223.

whenever someone angers and shouts on you, you should cool the anger by responding with a soft voice.

Dear friends, Imitate Jesus and try to love your enemies as you love your favorite ones. And do the things that you normally fail to do; to do good to all those whom you hate most (Lk 6:27b); Love them (Lk 6:27a); pray for those who accused you (Lk 6:28); Then you will be the children of the most high. Pray like Thomas More who prayed for those who judged and condemned him: "I verily trust and shall therefore right heartily pray, that through your lordships have now here on earth been judges to my condemnation, we may hereafter in heaven merrily all meet together, to our everlasting salvation."⁸²

What about your own prayers toward your enemies? My dear friends, God always can hear your prayer of 'Our Father', only after you forgive your enemies' offences. If not, then, it is senseless to call God the Father in one's prayer. Because this prayer is an invitation to love your enemies.⁸³ So let us be courageous to be today's St. Stephen, who forgives his own enemies fault. The secret of loving one's enemies is not just to change or convert the person but to be like God.⁸⁴

My dear brothers and sisters, your gathering as one group of the church must make difference. Your aim should reflect as you are not like other people over there rather do extra effort and witness Jesus. You have to love not only those who love you but also to all your enemies (Lk 6:32-34). No matter how much your enemies despise you, you still love them. Treat them the same you would treat other friends (Mt 5:47). Our world today seeks this kind of love. Humanly speaking, it is impossible, but with

⁸² D. Mc BRIDE, *The Gospel of Luke: Reflective Commentary*, 89.

⁸³ Cf. C. OWCZAREK, *Sons of the Most High: Love of Enemies in Luke - Acts*, 214-215.

⁸⁴ Cf. C. OWCZAREK, *Sons of the Most High: Love of Enemies in Luke - Acts*, 246.

the help of God all things are possible (Mt 19:26). Young People, if you once succeed to do this challenge then you become holy.⁸⁵

3.6. Application to Christian Life Today

As you yourselves notice, in the world today, there is so much suffering, so much sorrow, problem, killing, hunger, violence, division, confusion, injustice etc. This is because of the evil done by man or woman to man/woman. And when the question arises, whose fault is it and whose responsibility is it; everybody tries to exclude him/herself. Yet pointing out one's finger to blame others. This should not be like that but the right thing to do is to blame one self and to be motivated in transforming the world to a better one. What do you think is the reason for all these crisis? Because God is far from each one's heart and the world is in need of God's love and care.⁸⁶

Jesus, the king of peace requires you today, more than spending a lot of time kneeling in the church, to be Good Samaritans to the world. He challenges you to spread God's love and mercy through action. What could you do if a neighbor faces suffering? Would you say 'I am busy, no time to solve and ignore it. Or will you prefer to share the suffering? In 2004 there was a Congress on the Consecrated Life and the idea regarding the role of religious men and women is to have passion for Christ and passion for humanity.⁸⁷ We can also apply this idea not only to the religious groups but also to us who are called to follow Christ. Now you and I are called to be passionate for Christ and for humanity. So, even if you see someone suffering on the road while you

⁸⁵ Cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No.. 2841.

⁸⁶ Cf. J. L. GONZALEZ BALADO, ed., *Mother Teresa: Loving Jesus*, 112.

⁸⁷ Cf. Acts of the Congress on Consecrated Life: *Passion for Christ Passion for Humanity*, 2005, 219-220.

are going into the Church, first you must stop and assist the suffering person and we see Christ in him or her.⁸⁸

One's riches, power, money, health, education can not lead one to attain salvation, but when one loves, cares, and respects one's neighbor especially to those who are half dead, marginalized and victims of H.I.V. Aids.⁸⁹ This love and concern must not be theoretical but practical. It is good also to keep in mind, that you can be judged not only with what you do wrong to others but also by not doing right to others too. At the Mass we say: 'for what I have done and what I have failed to do.' So, be courageous not only in being careful and not harming others but doing good to them.⁹⁰

As members of the church, you should promote giving service to your neighbors with unselfish love. The mother Church urges her followers to be compassionate to those who are victims of Aids. And one's "proper task is to help and comfort the suffering, not to go on about their sins."⁹¹ Because God will take care of that. What you have to do is not to judge (Mt 7:1) those victims rather since you are still young just try to know about this terrible disease. So that you can live long without being affected.⁹²

There was a victim of Aids and since he was dying, a priest was bringing him holy Eucharist. Before he died he said: "things were very bad and I got very down. What keep me going was the Communion brought to me everyday in hospital."⁹³ Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, do you really believe and realize that the holy Eucharist touches and transforms you? This I leave to you so that you meditate upon it.

⁸⁸ Cf. J. L. GONZALEZ – BALADO, ed., *Mother Teresa: Loving Jesus*, 72.

⁸⁹ Cf. J. LARREA, *The Word of God: Commentaries on the Sunday Readings*, 573.

⁹⁰ Cf. J. A. HARGREAVES, *A Guide to the Parables*, 74.

⁹¹ G. MOORE, "Because they Suffer", in *the Aids: Meeting the Community Challenge*, 83.

⁹² Cf. B. HARING, "A Call to Radical Conversion", 88.

⁹³ V. COSSICK, "Speaking Personally four People with Aids", 45.

Know that serving people in need can be a good way to encounter Jesus. Because whatever you do to one of the least is done to Jesus Himself (Mt 25:40). That is why the Gospel tells us clearly to clothe the naked, to feed the hungry, to care for the sick and dying, to visit the prisoners and to welcome the unwanted is a proof of love for Jesus (Mt 25:35-36). Therefore each one of you is invited to put into practice what the word of God says.

3.7. Conclusion

One inherits eternal life when one loves the Lord with all his or her heart, soul, strength and mind and loves one's neighbor without discrimination. It is clear that Jesus narrows the Law of Moses, even the Ten Commandments into two inseparable commandments; to love God and one another (Mt 22:37-40). Without doubt there was strong hostility between Jews and Samaritans. And purposely, Jesus use two enemies to each other in order to give a lesson to his hearers about the love of one's enemies. According to Jesus' advice you don't need to be interested in knowing the definition who is your neighbor rather to be neighbors to anybody. This practical teaching of Jesus is very much applicable and necessary to one's Christian life and to all human beings.

The parable of the Good Samaritan shows clearly the stress of doing good to others. This neighborhood, as Fr. Owezarek tells: "does not depend on whether one is recognized as such or not. In fact, the story does not tell us that the Samaritan was recognized by the wounded man as his neighbor. It was his actions that determined his

status and not somebody else's recognition."⁹⁴ But today you can see that some people give charity yet they expect to be recognized, honored and appreciated even to the little thing they have done.

What is important for one's salvation therefore is, to love everybody without exception. When Jesus says love one another is beyond just not to harm anybody rather it must include also to do right thing. Jesus says: "do like wise" (Lk 10:37), so you and I are called by Jesus to help and heal those who are physically, emotionally, spiritually, or psychologically wounded. We are not doing extra things for them because they should deserve it. So let us be passionate for Christ and passionate for humanity.

⁹⁴ C. OWCZAREK, *Sons of the Most High: Love of Enemies in Luke – Acts*, 206.

CONFERENCE IV

MARY IN GOD'S PLAN OF REDEMPTION

4.1. Introduction

Praise the Lord! In God's love, today we are gathered together to reflect on Mary's role in the plan of salvation. God created man and woman out of His love. God freely decided to share His glory and happiness with human beings. Human's pride and sin make creatures to be far from God. Since God loves sinners and hates sin; God did not want His creatures to live in darkness. God planned to send His Son, Jesus Christ in order to re-establish communion with us. He did this through Mary. While she was still young, God entered and called her to be the instrument of redemption.⁹⁵

Mary was from a poor family but she was committed and faithful to religious practices. In due time, God blessed Mary "in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him in love" (Eph 1:3-4). That is why, God allowed the child Jesus to be born from her (Is 7:14).

⁹⁵ Cf. G. KOCHOLICKAL, (2005) "The Church we Believe: Ecclesiology and Mariology", Class Notes, Photocopy, 127.

Mary played a great role in every situation that can reveal God to be God. Starting from the time, that God honored Mary, her significance is expressed in our Christian life. She is the Mother of the redeemer and the mother of the redeemed. Here, we shall see the faith and obedience of Mary and her generosity. Then we shall deal with Mary's intercession and her active presence in Calvary. Before the conclusion, we shall see Mary's membership in the Church.

4.2. The Faith and Obedience of Mary

When the fullness time had come, God sent an angel to a very young girl to ask her if she would be the Mother of the savior. Gabriel, the angel of announcements, said: "Greetings, O favored one! The Lord is with you!" (Lk 1:28). He greets Mary in such a way as to show that she has found favor with the Lord. Yes, like the holy prophets, saints or others may grow day by day in grace but Mary's grace is very special.⁹⁶ Many times you are favored by God but how do you respond to his favor? Do you live and act by the grace of God or you aside it? But from this moment, let Mary be your model of faith. So that you live and act according to the graces that God has given you.

When God called Mary to that unique mission, she responded positively: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." (Lk 1:38) She accepted the big task not because it was easy for her, but because of her great faith in God. Mary is always willing to work for God in all times and in all situations no matter what comes on her way. She was always humble and faithful to God. You as youth how much are you willing to work for God? Do you recognize God's presence in your day-

⁹⁶ Cf. C. A. DOLLEN, *A Voice Said Ave!* 21.

to-day lives? Learn from Mary, the first perfect Christian listener, how to become active listeners of God's Word and put into practice.⁹⁷

Mary kept herself holy and she recognized her body as the temple of the Lord and kept it pure all the time, even when she conceived Jesus and was married to her husband Joseph, she remained virgin and uncontaminated.⁹⁸ With this purity, she brought forth Jesus.⁹⁹ Dear young people, do you identify your bodies as the temple of the Lord and keep it holy? How do you respond to your body's requests or desires? Are you able to say no to some of the things that your bodies want you to fulfill after which you already know that you are sinning before God? Keep yourselves pure and clean and give meaning to your lives. Only that can make you someone in the future. Above all, that will allow you be close to God. In life always remember and try to "know that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit so you need to keep it holy." (1Cor 3:16)

Mary is always at the disposal of God and she submits herself to God. That is why Mary responded positively to the call of God and said she was the handmaid of the Lord (Lk 1:38). She always accepts any offer from the Lord even without knowing what will happen to her. She is always ready to respond to the will of God. It was this that caused Mary to be chosen from all mankind. Elizabeth affirmed Mary's greatness by saying: "Blessed is she who believed that there will be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." (Lk 1:45) In view of the annunciation, the stress is not on Mary's merit but God's gratuitous love and mercy. In the same way, if you trust and leave everything in the hands of God then you can also be beloved children of God.

⁹⁷ Cf. J. HICKEY, *Mary at the Foot of the Cross*, 23.

⁹⁸ Cf. G. BIGOTTO, *Mary, the Mother of Jesus*, 90.

⁹⁹ Cf. Vatican II: *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium*, No. 63.

You as young people of today, how is your Christian faith? Are you able to stand firm with your catholic beliefs? What respect do you give to our Mother? Look around you, how many youth lost their faith because they are swept away by the Protestant sects? This is one way of disobeying God. So now, if you really want to live a profound life without offending God follow Mary's example. Because she is a model of obedience (Lk 1:38) and contemplative discipleship (Lk 2:19).

Obviously, as young people, always the devil tries to stop you not to think about the things of God, and occupy your minds with other things. But you must be victorious over Satan by contemplating the things of God. St. Paul gives the best method try to "take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in evil days, and having done all, to stand." (Eph 6:13)

As Catholics, you need to defend your faith against the Protestants particular when they say; "Catholics worship Mary." With respect you must express your belief. Be courageous to tell them the truth that Mary became the first to listen, welcome and put into practice the Word of God. Or you are afraid to preserve your faith. The term 'woman' (Jn 2:4), the Protestants might tell you that Jesus is revoking Mary. But "this is not a rebuke, nor an impolite term, nor an indication of a lack of affection."¹⁰⁰

Because it is Jesus' way of calling people; Jesus speaks to the Canaanite 'woman, great is your faith' (Mt 15:28); to the woman caught in adultery "woman where are they?" (Jn 8:10); to the Samaritan "woman, believe me." (Jn 4:21) What Jesus said: "who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" (Mt 12:48) interpreted by Protestants also as Jesus is rebuking Mary. If you accept their interpretation, then

¹⁰⁰ G. BIGOTTO, *Mary, the Mother of Jesus*. 158.

indirectly you mean that Jesus committed sin by dishonoring His beloved Mother. So, first know yourselves then witness.¹⁰¹

This new religious movement is a great problem and challenge to the Catholic youth. As some of them are known to you, most devout youth of this parish joined to this movement. Now the important thing is not to blame or judge them but you must strengthen your faith that you have already. And you must be proud of your Catholic faith. The little formation concerning veneration of Mary might open the door to change Churches. You need to grow loving Mother Mary. Get used to pray Rosary then you will come to understand why Catholics honor Mary. At the same time, you need to go one step ahead in helping the youth who went astray from your parish.¹⁰² You need also to pray for Christian unity so that as Jesus said: “they may be one, as we are one.” (Jn 17:22)

4.3. The Generosity of Mary

Why did God call Mary? He called her not because of the qualities she has but because of her simplicity, generosity and faith. And that attracted the eyes of God.¹⁰³ God is always interested not with some material offering but one’s faith, life and love. St Peter says: in the eyes of God, the genuineness of one’s faith is more precious than gold, which is perishable (1Pet 1:7). God calls those who are not qualified and he qualifies for those he called. Dear young people be like Mary; who is so humble and generous.

¹⁰¹ Cf. J. LAFRANCE, *In Prayer with Mary Mother of Jesus*, 24.

¹⁰² Cf. J. J. McNALLY, *Make Way for Mary*, 124-125.

¹⁰³ Cf. J. LAFRANCE, *In Prayer with Mary Mother of Jesus*, 66.

Mary generously accepted to be the mother of our savior. She experienced in her life and came to know that everything is possible before God. And nothing before God is impossible (Lk 1:37). But you, young people always have doubt on whatever you hear and read about God. Many at times you are told not to do something because it is sin and you end up doing the same thing. God is always generous with you and every minute He calls you to tell you something to live it. But your hearts are not softened enough. So, imitate Mary and respond to God's will.¹⁰⁴

Mary generously, traveled long and stayed with her cousin Elizabeth. She showed her concern and also shared the great joy that she experienced.¹⁰⁵ Mary is always very much concern about other people's welfare. My bothers and sisters in the Lord, how many times are you so concerned about others and willing to give them your time and share your joy and sorrows? Are you always ready to rejoice with others over the good that the Lord has done to you? Are you courageous to rejoice with others when you see the Lord has done something good for them? I think, you need to reflect and see where something is missing. Contribute something to the society, at least by giving your time and listen for the people who never meet someone to listen to them. Mary initiated Elizabeth to recognize God's presence. But for young people, it is so difficult to recognize the presence of God in others (Lk 1:42-43).

¹⁰⁴ Cf. J. LAFRANCE, *In Prayer with Mary Mother of Jesus*, 93.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. G. BIGOTIO, *Mary, the Mother of Jesus*, 99-100.

4.4. Mary' Intercession

Firstly what is intercession?¹⁰⁶ I think intercession is simply the act of praying for somebody to God. There is a belief that the saints in heaven intercede for those who are on the earth is something Biblical. In the Bible some Holy people intercede to God on behalf of others. Moses prayed for the health of his sister (Ex 33:12). When the people were tired living in the wilderness, began to complain about God and Moses. But at last, the people asked Moses to intercede for them and God heard his prayer (Num 21:4-9). Job prayed for his friends and God heard his prayer. Mary is unique and exceptional intercessor for humanity. Because she is full of Grace. Yet, her intercession is completely depending on Jesus, who is the only great mediator (1Tim 2:6).

One Biblical example in which Mary interceded is found in John 2:1-11.¹⁰⁷ Mary initiated Jesus to reveal His divinity to the people in a special way to the disciples.¹⁰⁸ The Gospel narrates that there was a wedding feast in which Jesus, Mary and the disciples participated. The incident is that, in the middle of the feast, something to drink is finished. Automatically Mary saw the restlessness of the hosts of the feast and she went straight to Jesus with human problems of the people and says: "They have no wine" (Jn 2:3), and Jesus immediately understood what Mary wanted of him and He listen and did what his Mother told him. Mary was so concerned about others when the wine got finished. Mary is always sensitive to notice any need in your life and present to the Lord.

¹⁰⁶ From the Webster's New International Dictionary, "intercede" is defined: to beg or plead in behalf of another; to mediate. See also, T. A. KNOTIE, ed., *Webster's New International Dictionary*, 1293.

¹⁰⁷ In the episode, both the disciples and His mother are the first community of Jesus. See, M. ANTONIO, (2006), "The Gospel of John". Class Notes, Photocopy, 37.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. G. BIGOTTO, *Mary, the Mother of Jesus*, 148.

Dear brothers and sisters, always the Church invites you to benefit from Mary's intercession. So when you are really in need of her protection and care don't be afraid to go to her. All that you ask, she will present to Jesus. She will tell him: "Jesus my children are having problems" and Jesus will hear and give fast solution to the problem. And whenever you are threatened with difficulties, go quickly to Mary. Because her Son is in a position to do everything.¹⁰⁹

So, on your daily basis you need to do what Jesus tells you to do (Jn 2:5). I know you want things to happen just 'now', you really lack patience and you hate waiting. But you need to be patient until Jesus changes your whole being of life.¹¹⁰ And pray hard to the loving Jesus. Believe also that "no prayer, sincere, trusting and humble, has ever remained unanswered."¹¹¹ At this special moment of prayers, As Mother Teresa used to say: "love to pray. Feel often during the day the need for prayer and take trouble to pray. Prayer enlarges the heart until it is capable of containing God's gift of Himself."¹¹²

Dear friends, you can also intercede for another person. However, "intercession depends on the life of faith, not on words. We intercede with our whole being, opening a door for God, becoming channels, bringing people to God."¹¹³ As Christians, if you would like your prayers to be effective then do God's will not yours (Lk 22:42). Dear youth, give Mary a room in your life and "keep her name on your lips, her love in your

¹⁰⁹ Cf. J. LAFRANCE, *In Prayer with Mary Mother of Jesus*, 178.

¹¹⁰ Cf. W. BARCLAY, *The Daily study Bible: The Gospel of John*, I, 98.

¹¹¹ J. LAFRANCE, *In Prayer with Mary Mother of Jesus*, 181.

¹¹² J. MAALOUF, *Mother Teresa: Essential Writings*, 51.

¹¹³ M. HOLLINGS, "Intercession", in *the Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 310.

heart. Imitate her and her powerful intercession will surround you. Following her, you will not stray; praying to her, you will ward off disaster and despair.”¹¹⁴

4.5. Mary's Presence on Calvary

There was a prophecy: “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too.” (Lk 2:34-35) Mary remained strong until this prophecy was fulfilled. Mary was able to see God in her life, not only in the moments of joy but also in the moments of sorrow and pain. Mary followed her Son to the Cross and showed there her as a motherly love and care. With the same spirit she is concerned about her children.

Standing by the Cross of Jesus, Mary saw, what had happened to Jesus. She heard the ugly jokes and blasphemies of the soldiers. All these contributed to Mary pain and lament.¹¹⁵ Imagine how painful is when your own mother sees you suffering. May be you might try to kill the offenders. But what Mary did was the opposite, because of her great faith; she preferred to die in silent.¹¹⁶

Ladies and gentlemen, when you face problems and sufferings, don't lose your emotions and get angry rather try to be firm and strong and slowly your sufferings will go away from you. As Pope Pius IX said:

We must follow her, imitate her, and be encouraged by her example. In fact she did not say, as did the mother of Ishmael, (cf. Gen 21:16) that she had not strength to assist at the death which threatened her son; but as a courageous woman she ascended the summit of Golgotha and at the foot of the Cross she gathered from the lips of her Divine

¹¹⁴ C. A. DOLLEN, *A Voice Said Ave!* 123.

¹¹⁵ Cf. J.-M. PERRIN, *Mary: Mother of Christ and of Christians*, 94-95.

¹¹⁶ Cf. J. LAFRANCE, *In Prayer with Mary Mother of Jesus*, 198-199.

Son that testament which comforts, teaches, and renders the Man-God master of Truth even from the Cross.¹¹⁷

The men disciples run away from Jesus but “Mary stood before the Cross.”¹¹⁸

What about you? How many of you can stand with those who are suffering? Or you will abandon and run away from them while they undergo suffering? This is not good. But if you help and love your neighbors, then God will bless you and He will invite you to His Kingdom (Mt 25:34). When Jesus was about to die, He proclaimed, the universal Motherhood of Mary: “Woman, here is your son.” (Jn 19:26) Not only this, through the beloved disciple also, Jesus introduce her children “Here is your Mother.” (Jn 19:27) Therefore, it is one’s responsibility to make Mary, as part of one’s life, family and community.

4.6. Blessed Virgin and the Church

Mary’s faith did not stop in the death of Her Son on the Cross but she remained faithful. Her strong faith was witnessed when visited by the risen Jesus while waiting and praying with the disciples (Acts 1:14). As the early fathers witness: “the Christian community has gathered together in prayer with Mary. The early Churches began to see her as a model of life lived as an intimate associate of the savior, as one who believed in his Son from the first moment of his Incarnation”.¹¹⁹ Mary always stays with the Church and she is always part of it and will never abandon the Church.

Brethren, how persistent are you being ‘the Church’, as people of God? In your personal and community prayers do you recognize Mary’s presence? Why some young

¹¹⁷ J. HICKEY, *Mary at the Foot of the Cross*, 15.

¹¹⁸ J. HICKEY, *Mary at the Foot of the Cross*, 52.

¹¹⁹ M. L. TROUVE, ed., *Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church*, XX.

people do abandoned the Church? Dear friends, keep your faith gently and love your Church as Christ loved it and gave his life. Notice, whenever you pray individually or as a community Mary also prays with you. Because Mary is in the Church, for the Church and prays with the Church. That is why, the Catholic Church teaches that Mary as the Mother of the Church. Take out the tendency that you are not holy enough to come to the Church. Friends, God is not like human and you need to know that God is good all the time. God doesn't see one's sins, rather he accepts you as you are. Therefore, you need to bring yourselves to Him and pray.

4.7. Conclusion

Mary was of low state, poor, and ignorant and yet she came to be the Mother of the Savior. Mary assures you that God alone is the true riches but other things are nothing and meaningless (Lk 1:53). Mary lived her life as a 'pilgrimage of faith.' Mary, through her obedience cooperated in God's plan of salvation.¹²⁰ "In the event of the Incarnation Mary is presented as the woman 'full of Grace', full of faith and mother of Jesus, the son of God."¹²¹

As Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, she is always ready to visit you especially when you need her most. Mary has no power except the power of God. Mary is always ready to request Jesus to help whenever you face problems. Mary is always with you in your difficulties and never abandons you. She always cares for you as a Mother does.

¹²⁰ Cf. E. A. JOHNSON, "Blessed Virgin Mary", in *the Encyclopedia of Catholicism*. 835.

¹²¹ G. KOCHOLICKAL, (2005) "The Church we Believe: Ecclesiology and Mariology", Class Notes, Photocopy, 145.

Mary intercedes on our behalf and she directs us to Jesus. Therefore, you must be courageous to be close to her and trust her.

When your life seems meaningless for you, because of uncertainty, unemployment, and nothing to look forward, pray for Mary, and she will stand and help you in coping life. Mary did not get frustration even when her beloved Son was hanging on the Cross and people were convinced that the mission of Jesus came to an end. The same, persevere in your faith and celebrate life. Pope Paul VI reminds you by saying: "Love for the Church will become love of Mary, and vice versa."¹²² Then you become true followers of Jesus, the head of the Church.

If you really want to be good Christians, live the spiritual life of Mary and allow her in your life to intercede for you. Follow Mary's good example and practicing her virtues. Such as: her humility, her kindness, her faith, her love, her patience, her prayerfulness and so on. If you do that then you become holy as our Father is Holy (Mt 5:48) and you will be called sons and daughters of the Most High.

¹²² G. ΚΟΧΟΛΙΣΚΑΛ, (2005) "The Church we Believe: Ecclesiology and Mariology", Class Notes, Photocopy, 151.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

To sum up, we can say that: for the last few days, we put aside all our daily activities and spend time with the Lord. I believe these days of spiritual exercises will help you to deepen your relationship more and more with Jesus,

In the first conference, we have seen how God's love and mercy is unconditional and total. God welcomes and forgives sinners and rejoices as well. You, young people could be wasteful, selfish and irresponsible. And if you changed your life, God can still give you another chance. Believe that there is no better place than God's house.

Some of your companions left this Church and join sect. As experience teaches, they might like to come back, and then what will be your attitudes? I think, you should not judge them rather you must receive them with an open heart and integrate them in the church. Because this is how God does with you. Whenever one is lost and far, God never stop looking for his children. You may have gone far into the world, but God still loves you. Because desiring for it is more than anything else and his heart is moved by one's need.

In the second conference, we have seen how the Cross of Christ is fundamental truth of our Christian faith. As Christians we have been saved through the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For this great mystery, we need to respond by

living our Christian faith properly. That is not through extraordinary works but by doing ordinary things of everyday activities. In today's world, the situation is not good one to live an integrated life. Yet, one should not try to become desperate and disappointed rather learn from Christ Jesus, who was victimized until he fulfills his mission.

In the third conference, we have said that the only way to inherit eternal life is when one loves God and neighbor. These two inseparable commandments fulfill all the other commandments and go beyond. In line with this, Jesus teaches you love everybody, including our enemies without exception. To practice what Jesus conveyed is a big challenge in today's world. However, if you will, through the help of God it will be possible. Look at the world, there is so much evil, like weapons of mass destruction. And people thirst for justice, peace, mercy, unity, and forgiveness.

As Christians, I think we have a serious responsibility in changing the situation of the society. True discipleship does not depend on what position you hold in the society, but how you love in action for the person in need. So, try to live your daily lives rightly and this can be a good offer to the world. Then little by little the world might be transformed to the better one.

In the fourth conference, we saw how Mary offered her life for the purpose of redemption. Mary's Lowliness, poverty, and inferiority never stop God in choosing her. The power of the Holy Spirit caused Elizabeth to be the first person to recognize God's work after she experienced Mary's generosity. Mary suffered and her life was not easy when she experienced the passion and death of her son. Yet she never lost faith. Learn from Mary how to carry on life even though things are tough and rough. I think today's world need people like Mary. My dear youth, whether you notice Mary's life or not,

you all need Mary. You should seek her assistance because she is powerful intercessor. Give her homage; because by praising her you will not insult God rather magnify him.

I believe your days of retreat were good and you really encounter Jesus personally. I also believe that you realized how one's life is in need of holistic growth. I suppose that you have already taken some resolutions that can help you to live a better life. Hopefully, you will be enthusiastic in helping other youth who did not get this opportunity to participate these days.

Dear young people, remember always how it is extremely difficult to build one's life and in the contrary, how it is very easy to destroy one's life because it is fragile. Therefore, let us be serious in handling the life that God has given you. Let us not depend on those technology around us and yet cannot save life. Let us preserve our life so that we may give life, share life and be living life.

Finally, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we are almost finishing our retreat, but we are beginning to live and act according to the way that Jesus requires of us.

APPENDIX I: ABBREVIATIONS

S.D.B	Salesians of Don Bosco
Rev	Reverend
Fr	Father (priest)
C.P	Congregation of the Passion
Lk	Luke
Cf	Confers or Compare
Mt	Matthew
Mk	Mark
Rom	Romans
Ps (s)	Psalms
Sir	Sirach
1Tim	1Timothy
Gen	Genesis
1Jn	1John
Jam	James
Is	Isaiah
Heb	Hebrew
Ed.	Editor
1Cor	1Corinthians
Jn	John
Ex	Exodus
No	Number
1Pet	1Peter
Phi	Philippians
St	Saint
Act	Acts
Lev	Leviticus
Am	Amos
H.I.V.	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
AIDS	Acquired Immunc Deficiency Syndrome
Eph	Ephesians
Num	Numbers
1Sam	1Samuel
Vol	Volume
AET	Ethiopia/Eritrea
AFE	Eastern Africa
Etc	Et cetera

APPENDIX II: BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS:

- BAAWOBR, R., *Gospel of Luke: Bible Study and Sharing on the Christian Communities*, Nairobi 2000.
- BARCLAY, W., *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of John*, Vol. I, Bangalore 1975.
- BARR, R. R., *Dio, Padre di Misericordia*, Milan, 1998; English trans. *God, the Father of Mercy*.
- BIGOTTO, G., *Mary, the Mother of Jesus: Exegesis and Spirituality*, Nairobi 2000.
- CANTALAMESSA, R., *The Power of the Cross*, London 1994.
- CONN, W. E., ed., *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation*, New York 1978.
- DOLLEN, C., *A Voice Said Ave! Selected Passages on our Lady from the Writings of the Fathers, Doctors and Theologians*, Boston 1963.
- DONAHUE, J. R., *The Gospel in Parable*, Minneapolis 1988.
- FUELLENBACH, J., *The Kingdom of God*, New York 1995.
- GONZALEZ-BALADO, J. L., ed., *Mother Teresa: Loving Jesus*, Michigan 1991.
- HARGREAVES, J. A., *A Guide to the Parables*, Rev. ed., London 1979.
- HARRINGTON, W. J., *Come, Lord Jesus: A Biblical Retreat*, New York 1968.
- HICKEY, J., *Mary at the Foot of the Cross: Teacher and Example of Holiness: A Retreat Given to John Paul II and the Papal Household*, San Francisco 1988.
- HOGAN, W. F., *Christ's Redemptive Sacrifice*, New Jersey 1963.
- HUNTER, A. M., *Interpreting the Parables*, Philadelphia 1960.
- JEREMIAS, J., *The Parables of Jesus*, Rev. ed., New York 1972.
- JOUWEN, H. J. M., *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*, London 1992.
- KERESTY, R. A., *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology*, New York 1991.
- LAFRANCE, J., *In Prayer with Mary Mother of Jesus*, Paris 1988.
- MAALOUF, J., *Mother Teresa: Essential Writings*, New York 2001.
- MCCARTHY, F., *Sunday and Holyday Liturgies Cycle C: Good News for the poor*, Dublin 1985.
- MCNALLY, J. J., *Make Way for Mary*. New York 1950.
- MOLTMANN, J., *The Crucified God*, London 1974.
- MOLTMANN, J., *The way of Jesus Christ*, London 1990.
- MOTTE, G., *Homilies: for Sundays of the Year, Cycle C*, New York 1973.

- OWCZAREK, C., *Sons of the Most High: Love of Enemies in Luke - Acts*, Nairobi 2002.
- PERRIN, J-M., *Mary: Mother of Christ and of Christians*, New York 1978.
- RONZANI, R., *About Confession*, Nairobi 2006.
- SCHILLEBEECKX, E., *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, London 1983.
- TERESA, M., *A Simple Path*, New York 1995.
- Acts of the Congress on Consecrated life, *Passion for Christ Passion for Humanity*, Nairobi, 2005.

Commentaries:

- BUTTRICK, G. A., *The Interpreter's Bible: A commentary in Twelve Volume*, VIII, Nashville 1987, 270. 273. 277.
- KARRIS, R. J., "The Gospel According to Luke" in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Brown, R. E. – Fitzmyer, J. A. – Murphy, R. E., ed., Bangalore 2002, 707.
- LARREA, J., *The word of God: Commentaries on the Sunday Readings*, Year 3, Shillong 1982, I. 187. 189. 276. 569. 571. 578. 673. 675-676.
- MCBRIDE, A. – PRAEM, O., *The Human Face of Jesus: Meditation and Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, Huntington 1992, 67.
- MCBRIDE, D., *The Gospel of Luke: Reflective Commentary*, Dublin 1991, 89. 138. 204. 206-207.
- MORRIS, L., *Luke: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Rev. ed., Grand Rapids 1988, 205. 207. 265-267.

Articles:

- COSSTICK, V., "Speaking Personally four People with Aids", in *The Aids: Meeting the Community Challenge*, Cosstick, V., ed., England 1987, 45.
- HARING, B., "A Call to Radical Conversion", in *The Aids: Meeting the Community Challenge*, Cosstick, V., ed., England 1987, 88.
- MOORE, G., "Because they Suffer", in *The Aids: Meeting the Community Challenge*, Cosstick, V., ed., England 1987, 83.
- ROBERT, O., "The Kingdom of God in Luke -Acts", In *The Kingdom of God in 20th Century Interpretation*, ed., W. Willis, New York 1987, 147-148.

Dictionaries:

- HOLLINGS, M., "Intercession", in *The Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, cd., Wakefield, G. S., London 1983, 310.
- KNOTTE, T. A., ed., "intercede", in *The Webster's New International Dictionary*, New York 1934, 1293.
- LOCKYER, H., "Crucifixion of Christ", In *The Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, New York 1986, 267.
- SCHNEIDER, J., "Crucifixion", in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, G. Kittel F. Gerhard, ed., Abridged in one volume, Grand Rapids, 1985, 665. 1071-1072.

WILLIAMSON, H. G. M. - EVANS, C. A., "Samaritan Literature", in *The Dictionary of New Testament back ground*, EVANS, C. A., - PORTER, S. E., ed., Leicester 2000, 1053.

Encyclopedia:

JOHNSON, E. A., "Blessed Virgin Mary", in *The Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, ed.. Micbrien, R. P., New York 1989, 832, 835.

Church Documents:

FLANNERY, A., Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents, I-II, Mumbai 2001.

TROUVE, M. L., ed., Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church: Documents on the Blessed Virgin Mary, Boston 2001.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, Revised Edition, Nairobi 2001.

Unpublished Materials:

ANTONIO, M., "The Gospel of John", Class Notes, Tangaza College-Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi 2006, Photocopy, 37.

KOCHOLICKAL, G., "The Church we Believe: Ecclesiology and Mariology", Class Notes, Tangaza College-Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi 2005, Photocopy, 127. 145. 151.

LACOMARA, A., "Pauline Literature: Romans", Class Notes, Tangaza College – Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi 2006, photocopy, 7-8.

LACOMARA, A., "The Parables: parables of the Lukan *Tradition*", Class Notes, Tangaza College – Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi 2004. photocopy, 1.

OWCZAREK, C., "The Gospel according to Mark: A story of Discipleship", Class Notes, Tangaza College – Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi 2004, photocopy, 8.

Bible:

Revised Standard Version, (RSV) *Catholic Edition for India*, New Delhi 1980.

Electronic Version, CD-Rom:

The Bible works 5, Version 5. 0.020w copy right 2001.

APPENDIX III: THE YOUTH



Young people at a prayer meeting



Young people after a retreat

APPENDIX IV: THE PRODIGAL SON AND CRUCIFIED CHRIST



Prodigal Son's Home Coming



We are saved by the Crucified Christ

APPENDIX V: THE GOOD SAMARITAN AND VIRGIN MARY



Good Samaritan is Helping the Wounded Man



The Mother of the Redeemer and the Redeemed