

“The Joy of the Gospel”

Formation Theme (2014-2015): An Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis
(Rev. Tim Sullivan April 2015)

Prayer - Psalm 139: 1-7

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me.

2 You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

3 You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.

4 Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.

5 You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.

7 Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?

8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,

10 even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.

11 If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,”

12 even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

13 For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.

15 My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

16 Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.

17 How precious to me are your thoughts,[a] God! How vast is the sum of them!

23 Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

24 See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

I have called you by name... Go forth and proclaim the good news to all of creation

Pope Francis in the *Joy of the Gospel* reminds us of the universality intrinsic to the Gospel, for the Father desires the salvation of every man and woman, and his saving plan consists in “gathering up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth” (*Eph* 1:10). Our mandate is to “go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (*Mk* 16:15). Its mandate of charity encompasses all dimensions of existence, all individuals, all areas of community life, and all peoples. Nothing human can be alien to it”. True Christian hope, which seeks the eschatological kingdom, always generates history.

It is no longer possible to claim that religion should be restricted to the private sphere and that it exists only to prepare souls for heaven. We know that God wants his children to be happy in this world too, even though they are called to fulfillment in eternity, for he has created all things “for our enjoyment” (*1 Tim* 6:17) (jog 180)

This inseparable bond between our acceptance of the message of salvation and genuine fraternal love appears in several scriptural texts which we would do well to meditate upon, in order to appreciate all their consequences. God’s word teaches that our brothers and sisters are the prolongation of the incarnation for each of us: “As you did it to one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it to me” (*Mt* 25:40). The way we treat others has a transcendent dimension: “The measure you give will be the measure you get” (*Mt* 7:2). It corresponds to the mercy which God has shown us: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you... For the measure you give will be the measure you get back” (*Lk* 6:36-38). What these passages make clear is the absolute priority of “going forth from ourselves towards our brothers and sisters” as one of the two great commandments which ground every moral norm and as the clearest sign for discerning spiritual growth in response to God’s completely free gift. For this reason, “the service of charity is also a constituent element of the Church’s mission and an indispensable expression of her very being”. By her very nature the Church is missionary; she abounds in effective charity and a compassion which understands, assists and promotes. (jog 179)

There are no boundaries or limits to God’s love the dignity of the human person or to the gospel call to following the will of God and building up the kingdom here on earth. It touches and effects every aspect of every human life. It calls us to love, a love that seeks and works for the good of the other. The Gospel is about the kingdom of God (cf. *Lk* 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world. To the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity. (jog 180)

As we reflect on the missionary call of the church to build the kingdom in our world, it can seem daunting and overwhelming. Some might say that it is impossible or too idealistic to take the gospel as it is stated. How can anyone live this? It is easy to dismiss our calling or distract ourselves or make excuses. Yet, God continues to call us forth, God never gives up. God, thought the Spirit continues to work in the world and calls us to work together to build the kingdom here and now.

Fr. Louis-Marie Parent, over many years articulated a spirituality known as the 3-Fives and in 1958 established the secular Institute Voluntas Dei. Fr. Parent knew that fraternal bonds and support were important to live out the gospel in a very diverse and challenging world. The spirituality and objective of the Institute would help those called to grow in holiness, community and building the kingdom, while living in the world.

The Voluntas Dei Institute seeks to be present in every milieu, and its apostolic objective is to create peace and brotherhood in Jesus Christ. In this way the Institute shares in the mission of the Church that was commissioned by Christ to reveal and convey the love of God to all people of all nations (Constitutions 12)

In the founders preface to the Constitutions we read:

Jesus tells us what he told his disciples: You did not choose me, no, I chose you (vocation) and I have commissioned you (mission) to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last (witness) and then the Father will give you anything you will ask of him in my name. (Jn 15:16)

Christ allowed himself to be guided by the will of the Father and we have been called by Jesus himself to live a special lifestyle: to be consecrated persons immersed in the midst of the world, revealing Christ with the means of the world.

Members enter the Institute for the sole purpose of better accomplishing the will of God as it is made known to them... For its part the Institute aids its members to rely on the action of the Holy Spirit who alone can form in them the filial attitudes of docility and availability to the will of the Father. (Constitutions #3)

This objective compels one to a genuine fraternal life. From the aspect of this objective, members are encouraged to find in Christ their own solidarity with everyone, *especially with those who suffer the most and who are the least favored, and to work at building up a more loving world.*

The team is the institutes vehicle directed towards the will of God. (Louis-Marie Parent, OMI , June 1982)

Why the team? [It is there] to help us discern the will of God, cling to it, love it, and serve it; to help us grow each day in personal and collective charity; to give to our brothers and sisters through out the world the greatest number of opportunities to attain salvation. (Louis-Marie Parent, OMI , May 1966)

How is being a part of Voluntas Dei and your team helping you to discern and carry out the will of God in your life? What is God calling you to?

To the ideal of life, which the institute proposes to its members: to do all things the will of the Father, like Christ and the Virgin Mary, is attached a proper spirituality known as the Spirituality of the Three Fives:

By the first five, members of the institute develop a life of intimacy with the Lord through daily prayer and especially through the following spiritual exercises:

- Mental prayer or meditation
- Reading with word of God and of works of spirituality
- Sharing in the Holy Eucharist
- Visit the Blessed Sacrament
- Devotion to Mary – rosary- meditate on the mysteries

By the second five, members develop in a special way a spirit of recollection, humility, and fraternal charity through acquiring the following attitudes:

- *Presence of God* – Walking in the presence of God by living the present moment by turning inwardly to Him at least once every hour, and by taking advantage of every opportunity to intensify this union with God
- *Absence of criticism* – Avoiding all inner and outer criticism; having positive regard for others so as to welcome Christ inhabiting them.
- *Absence of complaint* – Avoiding all inner and outer complaining; opening oneself to a sense of the marvelous, so as to welcome Christ who is present in events.
- *Being of service* (availability) – Fully accepting one’s responsibility, accepting any act of devotedness requested by legitimate authority, and enjoying to work freely in the building up of the Kingdom.
- *Peacemaking* – Applying oneself to maintaining peace of heart, implicating oneself in the cause establishing an evangelical climate of justice and fraternity, and being an instrument of reconciliation in one’s milieu.

By the third five, members of the Institute daily take advantage of five concrete occasions for exercising charity in order to develop positive contacts with others, in the manner of Christ. (Constitutions # 7)

**In what ways are the 3 Fives transforming your life towards discipleship?
In what ways is it helping you grow in the mandate to love and to build the kingdom?**

In his book, *It is Possible to Get along with Others!*, Fr. Parent talks about truly loving another and accepting them as they are, with their strengths and challenges:

“When I have accepted myself and have had the opportunity to discover my humanness in my own style, then, I will be ready to accept others whatever their thoughts, words or actions may be. I will thus accept them, continue to love and appreciate them.” (p. 39)

“Unconditional acceptance of others involves a consent on our part to leave them as they are without obliging them to change either their positive qualities or their shortcomings.” (p.42)

What are the challenges to loving someone enough to accept them as they are without needing to change them? In what ways do you still need to grow?

How does being a member of Voluntas and your team help you to get beyond the obstacles that prevent you from doing what God is calling you to?

Our world is facing very challenging times. As Fr. Parent says the Voluntas Dei member must rapidly be a saint. The church claims us and we must be ready.

Sending Prayer

Lord Jesus, empty my heart of all sadness, hate and spite, just for today
So that I may love without criticizing, and serve without complaining.
Lord Jesus, help me to follow your footsteps, just for today,
So that following your example and Mary's
I may be, every day of my life, an element of peace. Amen.
(Fr. Louis-Marie Parent, O.M.I.)

The Parable of the Good Samaritan Luke 10:25-37

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

²⁶ “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

²⁷ He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’^[a]; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^[b]”

²⁸ “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

³⁰ In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii^[c] and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

³⁶ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

³⁷ The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”