

NOVENA ~ 2017
SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
"Mary, the Prophetess, bearer of the Good News to the Peripheries"



MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE

Introduction

We are in the process of the preparation for the XI General Chapter, 2018. It is more than appropriate to meditate on the theme “Prophetic communities that announce the Gospel in the peripheries of the World” focusing our gaze upon Mary, our Patroness who was a Prophetess par excellence. That is why the theme for our Novena for Immaculate Feast 2017 is ***Mary, the Prophetess, bearer of the Good News to the Peripheries***. Various references in relation to ‘Mary’s prophetic role at the Annunciation of Angel that which she continues through her Apparitions in our times’ are chosen for our reflection, sharing and prayer.

As we prepare ourselves for the Solemnity of the Immaculate, let us journey with Mary who played her prophetic role all through her life. She continues to journey with the pilgrim Church amid trials, temptations and challenges. May she enable us to live our consecration joyfully and to creatively respond to the signs of the times in our mission today, especially to those in peripheries.

Outline

Each day of the Novena has a theme based on the prophetic role of Mary at a particular moment of her life. Each day according to the theme, some symbols are proposed and they are to be presented with the intentions to pray for. Appropriate readings are chosen from the Scripture, teachings of the Church, writings of our Founders and reflections of the Holy Father Pope Francis. After presenting a suitable life situation, personal reflection, sharing, spontaneous prayers and concluding prayer, a Hymn to Mary will follow.

This year the Novena was prepared by the Provinces of Vijayawada and Siliguri.

1st Day: Mary, the Prophetess at the Annunciation

Introduction

God's supreme messenger of all the Angels came into Mary's room, beginning his greeting with the words, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women." [Luke 1: 28]

The Greeting of Angel Gabriel to Mary was God's way of saying that Mary was not only born without Original sin, but also a prophetess in bringing God's Word into the world by her YES to God's plan of Salvation. The event of Annunciation in which Mary responds to God's call in profound faith and courage like a prophetess and accepts the will of God, is the beginning of the new era, of advocating the *Reign of God* to the suffering humanity.

Our vocation as consecrated women places before us a continuous invitation to be prophetic in our choices of mission with the attitudes of Faith, openness, total self-surrender and availability. The courage, wisdom of heart to discern, Faith and humility of Mary are necessary attitudes to respond prophetically to the situations of suffering, violence, injustice and oppression, especially of women, girls and children.

Presenting of the Symbols and the Intention to Pray

We present pictures/symbols of **women and girls** who suffer different types of violence – domestic violence, prostitution, human trafficking, unjust wages, child labour, abortion of the girl child, etc., as a sign of our nearness and solidarity with them. We intercede the Blessed Virgin for these suffering women and girls that they may experience the freedom of the children of God.

Scriptural Reading: Lk 1: 26-38 (Read or enact the Scene of Annunciation)

Hymn

From our Charismatic fonts: To the Roots of our Spirituality

...Mother Dones finds in her filial relationship with Mary, one of the powerful means to say her "yes" to the plan, God has for her. Many instances in her life highlight this aspect, as yes continually repeated and renewed. ... On 15th August 1919, during the colloquy with Fr. Manna, when Mother Dones confides for the first time her idea of the necessity of the project, he asks her: "So, if this institute were to be established, would you be ready to join me?". Mother Dones describes her answer in the Memoirs in this way: "I lowered my head and said Yes". (Page 109)

... Mother Igilda's availability to say yes to God's plan on her can be seen in the long waiting for the realization of her missionary vocation. Giuseppina interprets her endless waiting as participation in the mystery of the cross, the cross which Mary had given to her in the dream, indicating to her the way to realize her missionary vocation. (Page 110)

Present a suitable Life Situation about Women and Girls who suffer Violence in your Context

Evangelii Gaudium No. 212: *Doubly poor are those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence, since they are frequently less able to defend their rights. Even so,*

we constantly witness among them impressive examples of daily heroism in defending and protecting their vulnerable families.

Pope Francis' Homily 25th March 2017, Visit to Milan-Monza

As in the past, "God continues to look for allies, he continues to seek men and women capable of believing," remembering and recognizing that they are part of his people and cooperating with the Holy Spirit. God continues to walk our neighbourhoods and our streets, he pushes in each place in search of hearts capable of listening to his invitation and making it become flesh here and now".

Silent Reflection

Sharing the Reflections and Spontaneous Prayers

Concluding Prayer: Dear Mother Mary, in your response, we see your discernment, which is prophetic and courageous, obedience that flowed from your relationship with the Holy Spirit. Embracing God's Salvific will with a heart impeded by no sin, you devoted yourself totally as the handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of your son. Grant us the grace that we too may be courageous in giving ourselves totally and perseveringly to God with all we think, do and say. Amen.

Final Hymn

2nd day: Mary, the Prophetess at the Visitation

Introduction

Inter-generational relationships are a great challenge in today's society and religious communities. The icon of *Visitation*, Mary visiting Elizabeth opens a new way of looking at inter-generational relationships. The young and the elderly enrich each other with their experiences, holiness of life, convictions, commitment to Spiritual and moral values, talents, productivity, newness and positive attitudes. As Pope Francis says, "*The elderly who have faith are like trees that continue to bear fruit... they pass on history, doctrine, faith and they leave them to us as inheritance*" (September 2014)

"The wisdom of our grandparents is the inheritance we ought to receive. A people that does not care for its grandparents, that does not respect its grandparents, has no future since it has lost its memory." (Pope Francis November 2013).

The invitation of the X general Chapter (n.29) enabled us to take initiatives to build enriching and constructive inter-generational relationships. We continue this journey of the elderly and of the young in our communities and we wish to grow in mutual enrichment and accompaniment. By our new way of accepting and living creatively the challenges of the age differences, we set an example to the elderly and the young in the families, to view the differences of age and experience positively.

Presenting the Symbols and the Intention to Pray

(Place a picture of Visitation or enact a relevant scene that focuses on inter-generation relationship)

We present pictures/symbols about the reality of **the elderly and the youth**. Today we pray for all the elder persons in the families, grandparents, especially the abandoned and the destitute. We remember our aged and sick sisters who rendered their valuable service in various missions, especially of one's own Organism. We also pray for the young people that they be open to the wisdom and experience of the elderly and give their best energies in caring for the elderly. We pray in a special manner for the preparation of the forth coming Synod on Youth in October 2018.

Scripture Reading: Lk 2: 39-45

Hymn

Homily of Pope Francis, Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, 2nd February 2014

The Feast of the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple is also known as the Feast of the Encounter... It was also the first encounter within the history of the people, a meeting between the young and the old: the young were Mary and Joseph with their infant son and the old were Simeon and Anna, two people who often went to the Temple... It is a meeting between the young, who are full of joy in observing the Law of the Lord, and the elderly who are full of joy in the action of the Holy Spirit. It is a unique encounter between observance and prophecy, where young people are the observers and the elderly are prophets!

... It's good for the elderly to communicate their wisdom to the young; and it's good for the young people to gather this wealth of experience and wisdom, and to carry it forward, not so as to safeguard it in a museum, but to carry it forward addressing the challenges that life brings, to carry it forward for the sake of the respective religious orders and of the whole Church.

From the Preparatory Document of the Synod for Youth, Part II - Faith, Vocation, Discernment

Through every phase of this Synod, the Church wants again to state her desire to encounter, accompany and care for every young person, without exception. The Church cannot, nor does she wish to, abandon them to the isolation and exclusion to which the world exposes them. That young people's lives might be a good experience; that they do not lose themselves in violence or death; and that disappointment does not imprison and alienate them, all of this has to be of great concern to one who has received life, been baptized in the faith and is aware that these are great gifts. (from the Introductory part)

In the task of accompanying the younger generation, the Church accepts her call to collaborate in the joy of young people rather than be tempted to take control of their faith (cf. 2 Cor 1:24). Such service is ultimately founded in prayer and in asking for the gift of the Spirit, who guides and enlightens each and every one. (n.4 - Accompaniment, last paragraph)

Presenting a suitable Life Situation - on the Challenges of Inter-generational gap either in the Communities or in the Society in your Context:

Pope Francis, General Audience on 4th March 2015

... We old people are all a little fragile. Some, however, are particularly weak, many are alone, and stricken by illness. Some depend on the indispensable care and attention of others. Are we going to take a step back? Abandon them to their fate? A society without proximity, where gratuity and affection without compensation— between strangers as well — is disappearing, is a perverse society. The Church, faithful to the Word of God, cannot tolerate such degeneration. A Christian community in which proximity and gratuity are no longer considered indispensable is a society, which would lose her soul. Where there is no honour for the elderly, there is no future for the young.

Silent Reflection

Sharing Reflections & Intercessory Prayers

Concluding Prayer: Mary, woman of relationships, illumine our heart and mind so that we may discover the worth of each other in the community and in the mission. Inspire the young to imitate you, to obey without hesitation the inspiration of the Spirit that is revealed to us through the wisdom and experience of the elderly. Guide the elderly to be open and to welcome the newness of the young. Obtain for us that courage to decide, to move our hands and feet “with haste” towards others, to bring them the charity and love of your Son Jesus and to bring the light of the Gospel to the world, as you did. Amen.

Final Hymn

3rd Day: *Mary, who Sings the Magnificat in a Prophetic way*

Introduction

Magnificat is a hymn of gratitude for the wonders of God in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of her cousin Elizabeth. It is not pride that urges her to call her blessed, but the loving relationship with God who has worked wonders in her life, leads her to sing this hymn of thanksgiving. Mary is not only an icon of humility, contemplation, generosity and charity, but also she is a woman of courage, who is able to challenge the unjust ways of those who oppress the poor and humble.

Magnificat is a revolutionary song, where the poor, the suffering homeless, hungry, abandoned, those subjected to exploitation, injustice, violence, depressed and lonely or in any other adverse situation of life can find a blessing in this canticle. *All are encompassed in the hope Mary proclaims* (Sister Elizabeth Johnson, Feminist Theologian). The prophetic tone in Magnificat is evident in ‘hoping against hope’ where the Mighty God exalts the lowly and scatters the proud hearted.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian recognized the revolutionary nature of Mary’s song. Before being executed by the Nazis, Bonhoeffer spoke these words in a sermon during Advent 1933: *The song of Mary is the oldest Advent hymn. It is at once the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung. This is not the gentle, tender, dreamy Mary whom we sometimes see in paintings. This song has none of the sweet, nostalgic, or even playful tones of some of our Christmas carols. It is instead a hard, strong, inexorable song about the power of God and the powerlessness of humankind.*

Presenting the Symbols and Intention to Pray

The world today is crying for Justice and Peace. The concerns of justice and peace are numerous and complex. In a world and Church where spiritual and moral values are at stake, larger part of humanity which lives in the peripheries is at threat. Periphery does not just mean a geographic area, but the modern poverties such as: cultural and ethnic conflicts, migration, human trafficking, violence, war, religious fanaticism, global economies that ignore human dignity and wellbeing, individualism that excludes peoples and groups, global warming, plight of refugees, prisoners and so on.

*We place symbols related to the issues of **Justice and peace** at universal and local levels. (According to the symbols chosen a brief explanation can be given)*

Scripture Reading: Lk: 1:46-55

Hymn

Pope Francis Message for World Day of Peace on 1st January 2017

... I pledge the assistance of the Church in every effort to build peace through active and creative nonviolence. On 1 January 2017, the new Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development will begin its work. It will help the Church to promote in an ever more effective way “the inestimable goods of justice, peace, and the care of creation” and concern for “migrants, those in need, the sick, the excluded and marginalized, the imprisoned and the unemployed, as well as victims of armed conflict, natural disasters, and all forms of slavery and torture”. Every such response, however modest, helps to build a world free of violence, the first step towards justice and peace.

Message of His Holiness Pope Francis to the United Nations Conference to Negotiate a Legally Binding Instrument to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons, Leading towards their Elimination, New York, 27-31 March, 2017

*... International peace and stability cannot be based on a false sense of security, on the threat of mutual destruction or total annihilation, or on simply maintaining a balance of power. Peace must be built on justice, on integral human development, on respect for fundamental human rights, on the protection of creation, on the participation of all in public life, on trust between peoples, on the support of peaceful institutions, on access to education and health, on dialogue and solidarity. From this perspective, we need to go beyond nuclear deterrence: the international community is called upon to adopt forward-looking strategies to promote the goal of peace and stability and to avoid short-sighted approaches to the problems surrounding national and international security. ... Achieving a world without nuclear weapons involves a long-term process, based on the awareness that “everything is connected” within the perspective of an integral ecology (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 117, 138).*

Presenting a suitable Life Situation about Justice and Peace in your Context

Silent Reflection

Sharing the Reflections and Spontaneous Prayers

Concluding Prayer: O God of justice and love, our hope is in you. We pray for our country, its leaders, the people and our environment. Enable us to take up the challenge of building a just nation, the poor being its very foundation and that we commit ourselves for the safeguarding of the creation. Fill our hearts with your Spirit to be fully human by affirming the dignity of all and to work fearlessly for Justice and Peace in our parishes, work places, families and communities. Grant us a listening heart and courage to act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with you our God.

Final Hymn

4th Day: Mary, the Prophetess at the Flight to Egypt

Introduction

Mary's faith was tested when it became clear that she and her family would have to flee into Egypt to escape Herod's murderous attempt to eliminate her son. However, Mary believed that the words of the Angel to Joseph were words of guidance from God: *"Rise, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him"*.

Mary's faith prompted her to set out immediately that weary journey into a strange country. A prophet never gets tired of moving forth in order to fulfil God's command.

Presenting the Symbols and the Intention to Pray

... Migration today is not a phenomenon limited to some areas of the planet. It affects all continents and is growing into a tragic situation of global proportions. Not only does this concern those looking for dignified work or better living conditions, but also men and women, the elderly and children, who are forced to leave their homes in the hope of finding safety, peace and security. Children are the first among those to pay the heavy toll of emigration, almost always caused by violence, poverty, environmental conditions, as well as the negative aspects of globalization. The unrestrained competition for quick and easy profit brings with it the cultivation of perverse scourges such as child trafficking, the exploitation and abuse of minors and, generally, the depriving of rights intrinsic to childhood as sanctioned by the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. (Message of Pope Francis for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 15th January 2017)

We are aware of the situation of thousands of refugees, of the hardships, violence, abuse they face; the lack of food, shelter, the feeling of insecurity, loneliness and the anxiety they experience. With sentiments of solidarity and concern towards the immigrants, we place the pictures of the refugees of different continents or of our own country (while placing the pictures, according to each context a brief explanation can be presented).

We pray for the **migrants** in different parts of the world that they are protected and cared for, and the concerned governments take the necessary steps to help and support the migrants.

Scripture Reading: Mt 2: 13-18

Hymn

Presenting a suitable situation of Refugees in your Context

Message of Pope Francis for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees on 15th January 2017

How should we respond to this reality?

Firstly, we need to become aware that the phenomenon of migration is not unrelated to salvation history, but rather a part of that history. One of God's commandments is connected to it: "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex 22:21); "Love the sojourner therefore; for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt" (Deut 10:19).

This phenomenon constitutes a sign of the times, a sign which speaks of the providential work of God in history and in the human community, with a view to universal communion. While appreciating the issues, and often the suffering and tragedy of migration, as too the difficulties connected with the demands of offering a dignified welcome to these persons, the Church nevertheless encourages us to recognize God's plan. She invites us to do this precisely amidst

this phenomenon, with the certainty that no one is a stranger in the Christian community, which embraces “every nation, tribe, people and tongue” (Rev 7:9). Each person is precious; persons are more important than things, and the worth of an institution is measured by the way it treats the life and dignity of human beings, particularly when they are vulnerable, as in the case of child migrants.

Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See on 9th January 2017

... The issue of migration is not one that can leave some countries indifferent, while others are left with the burden of humanitarian assistance, often at the cost of notable strain and great hardship, in the face of an apparently unending emergency. All should feel responsible for jointly pursuing the international common good, also through concrete gestures of human solidarity; these are essential building blocks of that peace and development which entire nations and millions of people still await.

Silent Reflection

Sharing Reflection and Intercessory Prayers

Concluding Prayer: Dear Mother, you remained firm in your heroic faith even in the midst of inconveniences and struggles. Your faith sustained you through during the journey and while you were living in a foreign land. Grant us also the grace to remain firm in our faith and to abandon ourselves to the will of the Father. May the refugees who are driven out of their land find a shelter and feel accepted by the people and rulers of different nations, Amen.

Final Hymn

5th Day: Mary, the Prophetess at the Presentation of the Lord

Introduction

Today we contemplate Mary who, after forty days of Jesus’ birth, brings Him to the temple to fulfil the Law. Here the encounter with Prophet Simeon takes place - an encounter of God with His people, which brings joy and renews hope. The presentation of Jesus in the temple reminds us of the meaning of consecrated life, its beauty, richness and the commitment demanded of consecrated persons in today’s challenging world.

... We can say that at this moment faithfulness is put to the test; the statistics you have examined show this. We are facing a “hemorrhage” that weakens consecrated life and the very life of the Church. The abandonment of consecrated life worries us. It is true that some leave as an act of coherence, because they recognize after serious discernment that they never had this vocation; however, others, with the passage of time, have less fidelity, very often many years after their perpetual vows. What has happened? (Pope Francis, Address to Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life on 28th January 2017)

Our Founders and pioneers were moved by the Spirit and were not afraid to soil their hands in daily life, with the people’s problems, going with courage to the geographic and existential fringes. They did not stop in face of obstacles and the incomprehension of others, because they kept in their heart the wonder of the encounter with Christ. They always had in their heart a

healthy restlessness, a consuming desire to take Christ to others, as Mary and Joseph did in the Temple.

Presenting the Symbols and Intention to Pray

“His father and His mother marvelled at what was said about Him” (Lk 2: 33). Joseph and Mary kept the wonder of this meeting full of light and hope for all peoples. As Christians and as Consecrated persons we are custodians of this wonder, a wonder that calls to be always renewed.

Let us present on the altar, symbols that express the **meaning of Consecrated life** and also of the **Challenges** (According to the symbols placed, a brief explanation can be given)

We pray for the Pope, Bishops, priests, deacons, men and women religious, that we may live a life worthy of our call, above all a life of witness in every sense.

Scripture Reading: Luke 2: 22-35

Hymn

From our Charismatic Fonts:

M. Dones: *If God wants it, it will be Done* – p. 51

On 2nd February 1926, I renew my double offering and then I repeat it every day: Jesus I offer myself to You, ready to work for the Opera if that pleases You. You dispose otherwise; I offer you the renunciation of my ideal with all the sufferings that will accompany it. Receive O Jesus the double offering and as a sign of your acceptance, give me the grace to know more and more my nothingness, my misery. Give me a great horror for sin and the grace to do your Holy will in everything.

M. Guiseppina Rodolfi *The Unquenchable Thirst of the Apostolate* p. 66

... Father I ask you to offer my vows to Jesus, offer it in the strict sense of the word, since I have already consecrated my life to the Lord three years ago on the 2nd February. I bound myself to the Lord through the vow of chastity and I am happy. I asked the Lord for a gift at the beginning of that year and He in his boundless mercy gave me all his love. How could he be more generous with this poor creature?

Presenting an Experience of Consecrated life/ a Challenge in your Particular Context

Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Plenary of the Congregation for Institutes of consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, 27th November 2014

... In these days you have set out to discern the quality and maturity of the “new wine” which has been produced in the long season of renewal, while evaluating whether the wineskins that hold it, represented by the institutional forms present today in consecrated life, are suitable to hold this “new wine” and help it to fully age. As I have had the opportunity to point out at other times, we must not be afraid to discard the “old wineskins”: that is, not to renew those habits and those structures which, in the life of the Church and thus also in consecrated life, we recognize as no longer corresponding to what God asks of us today in order to help his Kingdom move forward in the world: the structures that give us false protection and that condition the vitality of charity; the habits that distance us from the flock to which we are sent and prevent us from hearing the cry of those who await the Good News of Jesus Christ.

New Wine in New Wine Skins: Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, 2017

...at the basis of every journey, we find it important to underline the need for consecrated men and women to have a new aspiration to holiness, which is unthinkable without a jolt of renewed passion for the Gospel at the service of the Kingdom. We are moved to this journey by the Spirit of the risen one who continues to speak to the Church through his inspirations.

Pope Francis confirms us in this journey: “For new wine, new wineskins. The newness of the Gospel, What does the Gospel bring us? Joy and newness. To what is new, newness; to new wine, new wineskins. To not have fear of making changes according to law of the Gospel. This is why the Church asks us all of us, for a few changes. She asks us, to leave aside fleeting structures; they aren’t necessary! And get new wineskins, those of the Gospel. The Gospel is newness, the Gospel is a feast. And one can fully live the Gospel only in a joyous heart and in a renewed heart. Room for the laws of the Beatitudes, the joy and freedom that the newness of the Gospel brings us. The Lord gives us the grace of not being prisoners, but the grace of joy and of the freedom which brings us the newness of the Gospel” (n. 10)

Silent Reflection

Sharing the Reflections and Intercessory Prayers

Concluding Prayer: Lord Jesus, as we journey on in our religious missionary life, enkindle in us a profound desire towards holiness and renewed passion to proclaim the Gospel. Grant us always the assistance of your Spirit that we may be guided by His inspirations. Mary our Mother, intercede for us that we may live our consecrated life in its fullness and as a witness of the Gospel values. Enable us to experience beauty, richness and the demands of consecrated life in today’s challenging world, with commitment and creativity. Grant us all the wisdom, courage and spirit of discernment of a prophetess, to make the right and relevant choices to wake up the world with the joy of the Gospel and to respond to those in peripheries. Amen.

Final Hymn

6th Day: Mary, the Prophetess at the Wedding of Cana

Introduction

Mary, Mother of us all is attentive to the needs of all her children and comes close to us in a very tangible way as a *vigilant mother*. Her presence becomes evident when the wine runs out. As a *tender mother*, and as a *skilled, wise house wife*, she immediately notices and intervenes so that no one’s joy is marred and above all to help the newly married couple in difficulty, turning to Jesus with the words: “they have no wine” (Jn: 2:3). At Cana, the Blessed Virgin once again showed her total availability to God. As a Prophetess, she exhorts us: “Do whatever He tells you”.

The wine is the symbol of joy and Mary intercedes with her son that the joy of the wedding may not fade away but may be renewed in faith among the community of believers and in each Christian. To be like Mary is to become concretely sisters and mothers of everybody. To be sensitive to the needs of *all* and of *each one*, especially the poor and defenceless, by our nearness and addressing their needs with compassion and prophetic courage.

Presenting the Symbols and Intention to Pray:

There are many situations of Cana in our world and in the Church. The ‘shortage of wine’ situations in the families such as, conflicts, broken families, victims of domestic violence, divorce, unemployment, migration, negative influence of modern media and life style that creates economic constraints, consumerist mentality, loss of spiritual and moral values etc., are the challenges of family life today. A loving and empowering attitude can transform the world, empower the powerless and the weak. Pope Francis urges to reach out with compassion to the people at the periphery. Mother Teresa the *saint of the gutter* is one of the best examples of our time, who was keen interest to address the needs of the poorest of the poor, the most neglected ones.

Today we pray for all the families that they may live in serenity and allow the Spirit of God to guide and motivate their hearts to live the values of the Gospel with courage and faith. We also pray for the needs of the hungry, thirsty, the poor and destitute on the streets and in the slums and the unemployed Youth.

We present the symbols of the **challenges of family life**, of the above-mentioned situations and pray for the families, especially for the broken ones.

Scripture Reading: John 2:1-12

Hymn

Presenting a suitable situation about Family Life in your Context

Redemptoris Mater n. 21

... the description of the Cana event outlines what is actually manifested as a new kind of motherhood according to the spirit and not just according to the flesh, that is to say Mary's solicitude for human beings, her coming to them in the wide variety of their wants and needs. At Cana in Galilee there is shown only one concrete aspect of human need, apparently a small one of little importance ("They have no wine"). But it has a symbolic value: this coming to the aid of human needs means, at the same time, bringing those needs within the radius of Christ's messianic mission and salvific power.

AMORIS LÆTITIA – POST SYNODAL APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION on Love in the Family

... I thank God that many families, which are far from considering themselves perfect, live in love, fulfil their calling and keep moving forward, even if they fall many times along the way. The Synod's reflections show us that there is no stereotype of the ideal family, but rather a challenging mosaic made up of many different realities, with all their joys, hopes and problems. The situations that concern us are challenges. We should not be trapped into wasting our energy in doleful laments, but rather seek new forms of missionary creativity. In every situation that presents itself, "the Church is conscious of the need to offer a word of truth and hope... The great values of marriage and the Christian family correspond to a yearning that is part and parcel of human existence". If we see any number of problems, these should be, as the Bishops of Colombia have said, a summons to "revive our hope and to make it the source of prophetic visions, transformative actions and creative forms of charity (n.57)

Silent Reflection

Sharing Reflections and Spontaneous Prayers

Concluding Prayer: God almighty Father, you have given Mary to humanity as a caring and providing mother. You have revealed your glory in our Lord Jesus Christ through the intercession of our Blessed Mother at the wedding at Cana. We place in your hands the spiritual

and material concerns of all the families, of our brothers and sisters who are hungry and thirsty, unemployed and exploited sections of youth. May Mary, mother of all the living, who brought Christ to the world, intercede for us to lead all to Christ and enable us to do what He tells us. Amen.

Final Hymn

7th Day: *Mary, the Prophetess at the Foot of the Cross, Mother of Mercy*

Introduction

The prophetic characteristics of Mary at the foot of the Cross, can be seen in two different dimensions. Firstly, her faith and fortitude in enduring the moments of suffering and secondly, her attitude of forgiveness towards the persecutors of her son Jesus. She becomes the perfect model of following Christ by the *Martyrdom of Heart*. She teaches us to live a life of faith by her Obedience to God's will and is a model of charity manifested through sacrificial love. Mary lived the *Paschal Mystery* by participating in the Suffering, Death and Resurrection of Jesus, with *Faith, Hope and Charity*.

....Jesus' death on the cross. There can be no more difficult experience for a mother than to witness the death of her child. It is heartrending. We see Mary there, at the foot of the cross, like every mother, strong, faithful, staying with her child even to his death, death on the cross. Then she encourages and supports the disciples. (From the Homily of Pope Francis on July 11, 2015 at the Marian shrine of Caacupé, Paraguay)

Presenting the Symbols and the Intention to Pray

We join Mary at the foot of the cross in praying for the persecuted Christians in the five continents, by remembering the persecuted Christians in different parts of the world and the modern martyrs of the 20th and 21st century. We listen to what Pope Francis says on modern martyrs:

... We have come as pilgrims to this Basilica of St. Bartholomew on the Tiber Island, where the ancient history of martyrdom joins the memory of the new martyrs, of many Christians killed by the insane ideologies of the last century, and killed only because they were disciples of Jesus. The memory of these heroic, old and recent witnesses confirms us in the awareness that the Church is a Church of martyrs. And martyrs are those who, as the Book of Revelation reminds us, "Are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." They had the grace to confess Jesus until the end, until death. They suffered, they gave their lives, and we receive the blessing of God for their witness. And there are also many hidden martyrs, those men and women who are faithful to the gentle strength of love, to the voice of the Holy Spirit, those who in their daily lives seek to help their brothers and sisters and to love God without reserve.

(Pope Francis during a liturgy of the Word at the Basilica of St. Bartholomeu, Rome, a Shrine dedicated to the modern martyrs of 20th and 21st Century. 22nd April 2017)

Remembering the modern martyrs of the respective continent/country, we place pictures or symbols. We pray for the Persecuted Christians in different parts of the world. Inspired by the words of Pope Francis, Let us invoke Mary Mother of Mercy, to bestow on us the gift of

forgiveness, because, *“forgiveness is the true antidote to the sadness caused by resentment and vengeance. Forgiveness brings peace and serenity by freeing the heart from resentment”*

Scripture Reading: Jn. 19:25-27

Hymn

From the Charismatic Fonts: Bl. Paolo Manna, *Apostolic Virtues* Chapter 10 *Spirit of Sacrifice*, n.12

The final, most comforting and consoling word, is a word of hope, of love and of joy. It was the sacrifice of the cross that exalted Jesus on earth and in heaven, and it is likewise sacrifice which gives nobility to the missionary and makes him admired by other people and angels. The missionary is great because he is the most beautiful imitation of Christ crucified. ... To go to the missions is to go to suffer; but to go to suffer in the missions is to go to pure joy. How to explain this? The explanation, I repeat, is found in the infinite goodness and generosity of Jesus' most Sacred Heart. All the saints and truly apostolic men have experienced this and continue to experience it. There is no kind of person who is more truly happy than the missionary, who remains happy even in the midst of difficulty, persecution and illness....

From the Revised text of our Constitutions Article 44

As a woman of faith, Mary accepts at the foot of the Cross the new motherhood as another service of love. We shall entrust ourselves to her so that, she may teach us to serve as she did and fulfil our mission in obedience to the Father.

Presenting a suitable Experience of Modern Martyrs in one's own Continent/Country

Pope Francis, Morning Meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, 30 January 2017 'When Martyrs don't make the news'

“a Church without martyrs is a Church without Jesus”. “The martyrs”, the Pope said, “are those who carry the Church forward; they are those who support the Church, who have supported it and support it today. And today there are more [martyrs] than in the first centuries”, even if “the media doesn't say so because it isn't news: many Christians in the world today are blessed because they are persecuted, insulted, imprisoned”. Today, Francis stressed, “there are so many in prison just for carrying a Cross or for confessing to Jesus Christ: this is the glory of the Church, it is our support, and also our humiliation, we who have so much, so much seems easy for us, and if we lack something we complain”. However, “we think about these brothers and sisters who today, in greater numbers than in the first centuries, suffer martyrdom”.

Silent Reflection

Sharing Reflections and Intercessory Prayers

Concluding prayer: Today as we look around, so many Christian communities have become the object of persecution, they have become martyrs of modern days. “These are the living blood of the church,” those who “witness that Jesus is risen, that Jesus lives.” O Lord, make us worthy witnesses of your Gospel and your love; pour out your mercy on humanity; renew your church; protect persecuted Christians. Grant us the grace of being witnesses to the end, to the point of death. Mary, at the foot of the cross you endured the pain and suffering caused to your

son Jesus, by the total self-surrender to God the Father just as your son Jesus did. Be with the Christians who suffer for following your Son and grant endurance in their battle. Amen.

Final Hymn

8th Day: *Mary, the Prophetess at the Cenacle*

Introduction

After the Ascension, assured by the angels, the Apostles go back to Jerusalem. They go to the Upper Room. Along with Mary, they await the Holy Spirit. Mary's presence tells us of her courage, strength and faith. This is one of the moments that Mary ponders silently in persevering prayer.

For us Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate, Mary in the Cenacle, Queen of the Apostles, is an icon with special significance. This significance is made clear in the words of Msgr. Balconi when he says in his circular of 1953; *Missionary sisters of the Immaculate have the real need, much more than others, to have for themselves and to know to point out to others that the Virgin is a source of comfort and refuge in times of trials and pain. (To the Roots... p.117).* Blessed Paolo Manna too underlines the same in his words to the parting missionaries, "...have trust in the efficacious and powerful help of the divine Mother who is obliged to protect the missionaries because they have the same vocation as hers: to give Jesus to the world. (To the Roots ... p. 116)

Presenting the Symbols and the Intention to Pray

The Church today is faced with many challenges to continue the mission of evangelization. Besides the challenges that come from outside forces, there are challenges within the church that call for *pastoral and missionary conversion*. "*Mere administration*" can no longer be enough. *Throughout the world, let us be "permanently in a state of mission"* (EG 25)

Today we pray for missions and missionaries. We offer the **symbols and challenges the missions and missionaries** meet today in different continents or in one's own context (According to the symbols/challenges placed a brief explanation can be presented).

Scripture Reading: Acts 1:13-14

Hymn

Presenting a suitable Experience or a Challenge of Mission in your Context or other Contexts

From the Revised Text of our Constitutions - Articles 4 & 17:

n. 4: The Immaculate: ... *In the Queen of the Apostles, the Mother of Jesus, we find a parrying and maternal presence, which efficaciously accompanies the Church in her mission. The certainty of her protection and her intercession inspires us with courage for the proclamation and sustains us in the work of evangelization. ...*

n. 17 Mary, the First Missionary: *In our evangelizing activity, we are inspired by Mary, the first Missionary, who journeying along, taking the Word in herself. Always intimated united with*

her Son, she participates in His mission and puts herself on journey along the path of faith, of service and of love that leads her to the foot of the cross, where her motherhood assumes universal dimensions. In the Upper Room, the first among the disciples, Mary is the mother of the evangelizing Church. Her journey of docility to the Spirit guides our every departure and our every service to the Gospel.

Evangelii Gaudium No.24

An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers take on the "smell of the sheep" and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be. It is familiar with patient expectation and apostolic endurance. Finally, an evangelizing community is filled with joy; it knows how to rejoice always. Evangelization with joy becomes beauty in the liturgy, as part of our daily concern to spread goodness.

Silent Reflection

Sharing Reflections and Intercessory Prayers

Concluding prayer: Heavenly Father, Mary persevered in prayer to know your will. In the cenacle along with the Apostles she awaited with humble faith the gift of the Holy Spirit. Grant all the missionaries the grace to be docile to the Holy Spirit, to recognize the presence of Christ in our lives and to seek new paths of evangelization as prophets to bear radiant witness through our presence and prayers. Amen.

Final Hymn

9th Day: Mary, the Prophetess at the Apparitions

Introduction to the theme:-

“What a beautiful Lady”, said the children of Fatima to one another as they returned home on that blessed day of 13 May 1917, a hundred years ago. That evening, Jacinta could not restrain herself and told the secret to her mother: “Today I saw a Lady”.

The Marian apparitions and her messages tell us the concern Mary has for the “the little ones,” for her children. She is there to encourage them and to give her maternal comfort and exhortation as a messenger of God.

Although the Fatima apparitions happened 100 years ago, they contain a *prophetic message* that is both relevant and needed in the world today. Mary warns us about the risks of living a life without God, which can only lead to the loss of sense of existence. In Lucia's account, the three children found themselves surrounded by God's light as it radiated from Our Lady. She enshrouded them in the mantle of Light that God had given her. This mantle of Light is the symbol of God's protection over evil that surrounds us. We need to take refuge under the protection of the Virgin Mary and to ask her, as the Salve Regina teaches: “show unto us... Jesus”.

Presenting the symbols and the intention to pray

We present the pictures of different Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin, especially in the places we know more, to express the faith of the pilgrims and of ours. We pray for the conversion of sinners, fundamentalists and extremists.

Scripture Reading: Revelations 12: 1-6

Hymn of Mary: Salve Regina / Hail Holy Queen

From our Charismatic Fonts:

To the Roots of our Spirituality p. 113

During the long waiting for the realization of the Project, **M. Dones** often feels the need to have recourse to the Blessed Mother and she visits the Marian Sanctuaries: “I went to the Shrine of Maria Bambina to recommend to her the matter, as I have done other times”.

To the Roots of our Spirituality p. 110

Giuseppina interprets her endless waiting as participation in the mystery of the cross, the cross which Mary had given to her in the dream, indicating to her the way to realize her missionary vocation.

To the Roots of our Spirituality p. 118

The Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate, already on the occasion of parting of the first sisters, insert themselves in the beautiful tradition of PIME, going to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of S. Celso in Milan, to place under the protection of Mary their lives and activities. Among the feasts of Mary, they celebrate specially the solemnity of the Immaculate and the feast of Mary Queen of the Apostles.

Presenting a suitable Experience or a Challenge of Mission in your Context or other Contexts

Revised text of our Constitutions: Article 4

Mary, all fair, the first missionary, continually reminds us of the beauty of our vocation which is her own vocation: to give Jesus to the world.

Evangelii Gaudium: No.286 b

...Through her many titles, often linked to her shrines, Mary shares the history of each people which has received the Gospel and she becomes a part of their historic identity. Many Christian parents ask that their children be baptized in a Marian shrine, as a sign of their faith in her motherhood which brings forth new children for God. There, in these many shrines, we can see how Mary brings together her children who with great effort come as pilgrims to see her and to be seen by her. Mary offers them maternal comfort and love, and whispers in their ear: “Let your heart not be troubled... Am I not here, who am your Mother”.

Moments of Silent Reflection

Sharing the Reflections and Spontaneous Prayers

Concluding prayer

Hail, Mother of the Lord,
Virgin Mary, Queen of the Rosary of Fatima!

Blessed among all women,
you are the image of the Church robed in paschal light,
you are the honour of our people,
you are the victory over every assault of evil.
Prophecy of the merciful love of the Father,
Teacher of the Message of Good News of the Son,
Sign of the burning Fire of the Holy Spirit,
teach us, in this valley of joys and sorrows,
the eternal truths that the Father reveals to the little ones.
Show us the strength of your protective mantle.
In your Immaculate Heart,
be the refuge of sinners
and the way that leads to God.
In union with my brothers and sisters,
in faith, in hope and in love,
I entrust myself to you.
In union with my brothers and sisters, through you, I consecrate myself to God,
O Virgin of the Rosary of Fatima.
And at last, enveloped in the Light that comes from your hands,
I will give glory to the Lord for ever and ever. Amen.

(From the prayer of Pope Francis to Our Lady of Fatima on the 100th Anniversary of Fatima Apparitions, 12 May 2017)

Final Hymn