

2016 CHRISTMAS NOVENA

Communion with the Marginalized and Excluded



Mission Congregation Servants of the Holy Spirit

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INTRODUCTION

The 14th GC encouraged us to share our faith and collective wisdom through storytelling. At the provincial/regional and congregational level we took time to listen to stories from our communities, ministries, cultures, formation and leadership. In the process, the Spirit showed us who we are, how we understand and go about mission today and the direction in which we need to move. These stories, as colorful threads, helped us to see with new eyes how much God loves and cares for us. We became aware of how our dedicated service in many parts of the world led others, especially the most vulnerable in society, to experience God's compassion.

Furthermore, we reflected on the world's current realities in the light of the scriptures, two texts from Luke's Gospel - Jesus' proclamation of his Mission and the parable of the Good Samaritan- spoke remarkably loudly to us.

Indeed, we have many stories to share. By allowing the lives and stories of those who are excluded and marginalized to touch our minds, hearts, hands and feet we can be transformed. Perhaps it is good to recall the beginning of our provinces and regions. How did we start? Who were the target groups of people we cared for? Who were the pioneering Sisters? Who were those who, in spite of their limitations and difficulties, took a prophetic stand and en fleshed our charism and spirituality? Were there perhaps, some who were misunderstood, persecuted or had to risk their lives for the sake of their commitment to people living in poverty?

With grateful hearts we acknowledge those Sisters who went before us and on whose shoulders we stand. As intercultural community in mission we are a gift for each other. Together we are called to grow in our capacity to make others feel welcomed, accepted and loved as they are.

How are we being Good Samaritan today? What concrete responses are we giving to those in need? How are we making Jesus' table fellowship real and concrete? In our personal life and ministries, what changes in attitudes, strategies and focus could we make to more relevantly respond to people's needs?

Together as congregation we prepare for the celebration of the Birth of our Savior by reflecting on the Word of God and the stories of our Sisters from different parts of the world as we join in prayer different groups of people who are often marginalized and excluded by society.

For each day of the novena, the community finds a common symbol that can be offered during the Christmas celebration together with some gestures and concrete action.

Day 1 (December 16)
IN COMMUNION WITH THE VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

*The Lord is here; go out to meet him, saying: Great his birth,
eternal his kingdom, strong God, Ruler of all, Prince of Peace.*

INTRODUCTION

The coming of Christmas, the celebration of the Saviour's birth, brings us the comforting hope of better days for humanity. In fact, there are ever less days without news of violence to minors and adults. These become our daily bitter bread: the living together at home, on the street, in school, at work, among nations. We, consecrated women, may also suffer and cause suffering to our fellow Sisters, especially in our intercultural community life. Our 14th General Chapter calls us to widen the Circle of Communion. It is difficult to single out one type of suffering, but, at the opening of this novena, we want to look at the pains very near to us, rooted in the culture of the strongest, of the patriarchal frame: violence against women.

OPENING PRAYER

Great God, who deigned to become human in a woman's body and submitted yourself to the destiny of the most vulnerable, give us a compassionate heart to commune with the victims of tragedies and of daily violence, that they be able to free themselves. We ask this through your son, Jesus, who did not hesitate to undertake the anguish and pain of humanity. Amen.

WORD OF GOD

Lk 1, 45-48a; 50b

LIFE HISTORY OF MARIA DA CRUZ

When a woman migrates, life and hope also migrate.

My name is Maria da Cruz, I am Paraguayan and I want to tell you the story of a woman victim of domestic violence. It is now three years that I live in São Paulo, Brazil, with my four sons and one daughter. I got married when I was 15 years old. My first daughter died, still in my womb, because my husband did not help me in time. I lived thirty years with my husband's physical and psychological violence, believing that I had to endure everything to be freed one day. This is how I understood the Church teaching. I faced a deep depression. I thought of suicide. But in my heart I felt that my family needed me. I found support in the Church and started to serve in social pastoral, where I dedicated myself for 15 years. There I understood that God does not want violence. Then I was able to escape and travel to São Paulo where my oldest son already lived. In the hope of better days I came with courage, relying on God's help.

When I arrived I was welcomed and accompanied by the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS). I feel that they also are my family. I started to participate in the Church and the Pastoral Ministry for Migrants believing that, through my experience, I can contribute to welcome the many who arrive in this country. It is fundamental to know someone to rely on!

REFLECTION/SHARING

What did the story of the two Marys we just heard stir in me?

How do we discover God's action in the life of the two women?

As SSps women, can we contribute to widening the circle of communion with women victims of violence?

CONCRETE ACTION:

Try to know institutions or groups in your country which receive women in situations of violence.

INTERCESSIONS:

Lord God, you know the depth of the heart and the pains of many women in our patriarchal culture. Help us to overcome all these ills to be able to sing, with Mary: "He looked at the humiliation of his servant,"

Resp: compassion reaches those who fear Him from one generation to another

Lord God, help us to overcome any individualism to enter the circle of solidarity,

Resp: compassion reaches those who fear Him from one generation to another

Lord God, look at the immeasurable human suffering many times being caused by fratricide quarrels. Teach us the lesson of the Incarnation of your Son Jesus, of real love to overcome this human disintegration and of creation,

Resp: compassion reaches those who fear Him from one generation to another

FINAL PRAYER

Like Mary who sings her Magnificat of liberation, women who overcome centuries of oppression, can also bless, sing and thank the Good News brought by the God Child to us.

“And the women discovered that when among them
only one single language was spoken
one and the same language
which all learned during centuries of oppression,
silence and resistance
and without arms
but armoured in light and courage.

The women started to weave a great net
with their own hair.

They weaved night and day and the net grew
multicoloured and enormous.

And while they weaved, they spoke of their lives
and got stronger.

And while they weaved they sung
to wake up more women who came and
put their part until all women of
the world span thousands of nets
very strong and indestructible.

And with them they immobilized the dragons and
those who treat them.

And, they dismantled, piece by piece, every power plant of death
every artefact of war piece by piece
forever”. AMEN!

Day 2 (December 17)
IN COMMUNION WITH THE ENVIRONMENT
(ENVIRONMENT DEGRADATION)

O Wisdom, O Holy Word of God, you govern all creation with your strong yet tender care. Come and show your people the way to salvation.

Suggested room set up: straw, leaves, branches/twigs dried or withered, placed in the middle of a circle or in front of the altar as symbol of the present destruction of the earth

INTRODUCTION

In preparation for the birth of the Word made Flesh, we are invited to experience a new birth together with the entire universe. We are invited to be more aware that the whole of creation is precious in the eyes of the Lord so that we are able to build an attitude of solidarity with nature. We treat our environment as fellow creatures to be loved, kept, maintained and cared for. We love and treat our environment with the touch of the love of our God. We build a new solidarity and widen the circle of love with nature that has been tampered with. We exert effort that we truly experience Emmanuel. We strive to make the earth become once again a worthy dwelling place for Emmanuel, God among us.

Opening song: Any thanksgiving song for the gift of creation or How Great Thou Art

INVITATION TO REPENT

In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis said that the Earth is our common home, where we feel at home and secure. Earth is also a brother, a native land with whom we share life, and a captivating mother who welcomes us with open arms, feeds and nurtures us, growing diversity of fruits, multi-coloured flowers and herbage for us.”

Yet as we all know Sister Earth at the moment is screaming for the damage inflicted upon her, because without a sense of responsibility we use and abuse its God-given richness. We even think that we are owners and rulers that have the right to plunder it. Therefore the earth is like the poor, overburdened and devastated, abandoned and abused.

(The Sisters are requested to write on a piece of paper destruction of the environment in her area/country and to place them on top of the dry branches and when all has finished, the prayer for forgiveness is said.)

In the spirit of humility let us ask for peace in our heart and peace on our earth:

For being less compassionate with ourselves and with all your creation

Response: Lord have mercy on us who has wounded this earth.

For being ungrateful towards the earth and for our being too late to learn about the destruction of the environment and for our attitude of indifference towards the destruction

Response: Lord have mercy on us who has wounded this earth.

For causing the poor to be increasingly marginalized and even deprived of its cultural roots

Response: Lord have mercy on us who has wounded this earth.

In humility let us pray:

Jesus Word made Flesh, You live among us to save people and the universe. Listen to our prayer as we bring into your presence our sorrows and hopes, fears and worries; heal our wounds and strengthen our hope, banish our fears so that we may have the courage to fight for environmental sustainability. Amen.

WORD OF GOD

Genesis 2: 4 – 15

STORY

Gunarti a Sikep Woman Guarding the Highlands of North Kendeng

The highlands of Kendeng stretches from Tuban Regency in East Java to Rembang, Gorbogan, Pati and Kudus Regencies in Central Java. For thousands of years it has sustained the people with its water supply for agriculture and clean water. At the moment, it is in an emergency situation because of the exploitation threat of a cement industry that threatens its sustainability. The people had been protesting in different peaceful ways so that the local government from each regency care for the sustainability of the

highlands but were not heard. Ironically more and more permits were given out to exploit the highlands that has given them livelihood. It is impossible for them to live without water. Kendeng highlands serve as water reservoir. There are many cultural sites and history that need to be preserved in order to insure continuity of life now and in the future.

Gunarti a simple Sikep (tribe) woman lives in the area of Kendeng highlands. As a genuine farmer, she has a strong attachment with nature. She sees the earth as a generous mother that continuously feeds her children. For Gunarti caring for nature is caring for life, and destroying nature means destroying life.

Imagining the havoc that might happen, Gunarti did not remain silent. Her motherly instinct does not allow her to see mother earth wounded. For her, land is not a commodity but a gift from God, a sacred space. Hence this woman lover of the earth voluntarily walks on foot or rides on a bicycle till late in the evening, day by day, to reach the village at the foot of Kendeng Highlands. Tirelessly, she goes from one house to another, from one field to another, convincing the people not to sell their rice field and land. Her struggle bore sweet fruits. More and more residents joined the campaign rejecting the presence of a cement plant.

As a mother she cannot imagine the suffering that will befall her children with the presence of the cement factory. Even when she was pregnant she continued her struggle together with the child in her womb. She goes up and down the mountains, riding on trucks to go to the court house, meets with decision makers, and

coordinates her friends to continue the fight for the integrity of creation in Kendeng Highlands. When nine protesters of the cement plant were accused of going against the government and were imprisoned, Gunarti kept the spirit of their wives alive. Threats come and go, but it never dampened her spirit. She even asked her family to accept wholeheartedly what might happen to her even if it means death.

When the construction of the cement plant in her area could be thwarted, she did not rest and enjoy the fruit of her struggle. She went to the other four areas encouraging women to continue their fight. Her calm presence always brings peace and strength to the other women in the four areas who have been living in tents in the forest for two and a half years as a sign of protest, hopeful that the construction of a cement plant in their villages will not take place.

They had been protesting for ten years but only one cement factory withdrew and five more cement plants from within and outside the country are striving to dredge the Kendeng Highlands. Although they are facing giants, their hearts never shrivelled. Gunarti with her friends are convinced that Mother Earth will be on their side.

REFLECTION/SHARING

Learning from the incarnation event that salvation happened when the word became a human being (word and action happened simultaneously) salvation of the environment happens when words/discourses become concrete action. Each community has

the task of protecting the earth and to make sure that it bear fruits for the coming generation. The story about Gunarti guarding Kendeng highlands, her attitude and action as well as her concrete option for the integrity of creation, invites us to find concrete action as an expression of our concern for nature. We concretize our action where we live or in our place of work.

Make a personal resolution – simple and concrete- as an expression of new birth “in the earth where we live” – our home” by choosing symbols from nature for example: water, flower, soil, plants etc. Afterwards place them in between the dried branches and witness that our circle with the universe is widening and our earth becoming alive.

INTERCESSIONS

Creator God, today we commit ourselves to widen our circle of love with the universe so that our salvation does not happen only between You and I, but includes the whole of creation.

Creator God, in your wisdom you have made us caretakers of your creation. Together with Gunarti and all those involved in the environmental struggle, enable us to develop a new vision to become faithful custodians of Creation.

Creator God, we pray that businessmen and state leaders become responsible to use technological discoveries to repair the harm they have done towards God’s creation and to guard the universe, your gift to us.

Moment of silence

FINAL PRAYER: *from Laudato Si'*

Triune God, wondrous community of infinite love, teach us to contemplate you in the beauty of the universe, for all things speak of you. Awaken our praise and thankfulness for every being that you have made. Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined to everything that is. Show us our place in this world as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight. Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live. The poor and the earth are crying out. O Lord, seize us with your power and light, help us to protect all life, to prepare for a better future, for the coming of your Kingdom of justice, peace, love and beauty.

Song: Optional

Day 3 (December 18)
IN COMMUNION WITH REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

*O Adonai and Ruler of the house of Israel, You appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush and on Mount Sinai gave him Your Law. * Come, stretch out your mighty hand to set us free.*

INTRODUCTION

Every minute eight people leave their homes – fleeing from war, persecution and terror. Current figures from UNHCR calculate more than 65 million forcibly displaced persons. The UN Refugee Commission estimates that four out of five refugees take refuge in their own or a neighbouring country, where they often have to survive in difficult circumstances. The degree of willingness of the industrial countries to accept and integrate refugees is as disappointingly low as ever. People are losing their lives daily in the attempt to flee.

We are called to be brothers and sisters to one another. The struggles and joys of refugees and migrants are also ours. We pray for them and with them as a sign of our solidarity.

OPENING PRAYER

Merciful God,

We pray to you for all the men, women and children who have died after leaving their homelands in search of a better life.

Though many of their graves bear no name, to you each one is known, loved and cherished.

May we never forget them, but honour their sacrifice with deeds more than words.

We entrust to you all those who have made this journey, enduring fear, uncertainty and humiliation, in order to reach a place of safety and hope.

Just as you never abandoned your Son as he was brought to a safe place by Mary and Joseph, so now be close to these, your sons and daughters, through your tenderness and protection.

In caring for them may we seek a world where none are forced to leave their home and where all can live in freedom, dignity and peace.

Merciful God and Father of all, wake us from the slumber of indifference, open our eyes to their suffering, and free us from the insensitivity born of worldly comfort and self-centredness.

Inspire us, as nations, communities and individuals, to see that those who come to our shores are our brothers and sisters.

May we share with them the blessings we have received from your hand, and recognize that together, as one human family, we are all migrants, journeying in hope to you, our true home, where every tear will be wiped away, where we will be at peace and safe in your embrace.

(Prayer of Pope Francis when he visited the refugees on Lesbos, on 16 April 2016)

WORD OF GOD

Ruth 2: 8-10

STORY

The word used in the Bible for 'foreigner' is the same as the word for 'guest'. They are under God's special protection. Jesus himself was threatened with death soon after his birth. His family fled with the infant Jesus, setting out on a dangerous journey into an uncertain future.

Refugees are mainly foreigners to us because they come from a different cultural background. To accept them is lived hospitality. Many have suffered traumatic experiences, either in their home country or in the course of their flight. Practical help, compassion, as well as a listening ear are often a great help and encouragement to them.

One of the many thousands of people who have fled Syria is Homan. With many others he lives in our local area. Every day they come to our parish to learn German. At times he sighs over the new language. He misses his family and friends. Many of them are no longer alive. We know Homan and his friends and have taken the likeable young man to our hearts. At long last Homan has received his residence permit and no longer lives in constant fear that he might be deported. His wife is still in Syria. He speaks to her every day. She is still not allowed to join him. Homan is an extremely courageous and strong personality. He enriches us – as do so many of the refugees.

REFLECTION AND SHARING

How does Homan's story speak to you? Or Ruth's story? Have you experienced being a foreigner? What is it like? Or have you welcomed a foreigner in your heart and home?

INTERCESSIONS

God our refuge, we pray for the vast numbers of refugees who are attempting to escape death and persecution, seeking a life worthy of their human dignity for themselves and their children: may they find people with open hearts and helping hands who will provide them with protection and shelter.

Living God, we implore you: fill us with renewed courage and strength, enable us to stand up for our fellow human beings and to accept them as sisters and brothers in one great family.

Just and merciful God: we pray for all those who preach rejection and hate rather than solidarity and communion. Give them positive experiences that will help them change their views.

FINAL PRAYER

God of goodness, protect all those who are fleeing violence, persecution and hunger. Be their refuge and home when they no longer know where to turn.

Give to your faithful the strength and courage to raise their voices for the homeless and those with no voice.

Open our hearts to all who seek refuge with us, for in your family there are no strangers, only brothers and sisters. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Day 4 (December 19)
IN COMMUNION WITH THE VICTIMS
OF ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

O Root of Jesse, you stand as a sign for the peoples; before you kings shall keep silence and to you all nations shall have recourse. Come, save us, and do not delay.

INTRODUCTION

Today's world offers to the modern person a very fast pace of life. It is not always easy to cope with the demands of modern life. People do not succeed in family relationships, community and at work. They put many demands on each other. So often, a person, especially a young one, flees into the world of alcohol, drugs and other addictions.

Entering the path of substance abuse, especially alcohol and drug abuse - is not only an escape from life. It is also the result of too much self-focus, only on their own experiences, on finding a rapid improvement of mood in the face of anxiety and hardships of life.

When one enters the path of addiction, she/he becomes increasingly helpless in the face of his/her own weakness and calls louder with its erroneous behaviour, which is a cry for help. But those who love them, do not always understand their cry. They cannot act quickly and come to the rescue, as did Mary to Elizabeth.

THE WORD OF GOD

Luke 1: 39-44

STORY

Emily comes from a family with many children. As a small child she experienced violence, abuse, loneliness. At the age of 11 she and her friend started taking drugs and occasionally got drunk to unconsciousness. Emily went through: undercutting, jumping from high floors, accidents, broken legs, arms, ribs and pelvis. She was in different centres and reformatory homes, from which, she successfully escaped.

The change in her life came when she completed 19 years of age. While staying at the center for addicts she realized that she is pregnant in the second month. Thoughts of the child began to dominate her life. She wanted to give a birth. In the complex center there was rigor, but they were allowed to read. Everyone could benefit from talking with a priest. There was access to the chapel and the sacraments. Eventually, Emily asked for a Bible. She began a regular prayer. Slowly, God began to guide her life and she felt better. The child developed well. In the end, she gave birth to a pretty, healthy girl!

Today, she trusts God because despite all the difficult moments she survived. She realized that He still cares for her. She experienced God's miracles in her life. God rescued her from situations where she brushed with death, and set on her way people who helped and supported her and are still supporting her until now. She prays and thanks God everyday of her life!

REFLECTION AND SHARING

Mary, by adopting the message of the Angel, offered herself and her life totally to God. She has taken an extremely difficult task, because, then, she did not know how to react to her newly married husband - Joseph. She did not know him well, or cope in such exceptional circumstances, when she becomes the Mother of the Son of God in human form. And yet, despite of everything she turns out to be a brave woman. In her goodness she goes to her cousin Elizabeth, to help her. We see Mary not focused on herself or on her needs. She was from the outset open to be of service to other people - selfless, strong and brave.

What touched me most in the story of Emily? How can I or we as a community concretize our help to those who are addicted in any form?

INTERCESSIONS

Let us pray for the people enslaved by alcohol, drugs and other addictions, that through the word of God they find the strength to fight for freedom, overcome their addictions and live in sobriety and joy.

Let us pray for the people who had lost their sense of life, as a result of abuse of alcohol and drugs. May a particular grace, love of God and support from other people, help them to discover the true meaning of life and liberate them from the sinful attachments, so they can enjoy their families and the community of the Church.

Let us pray for the families and friends of those who are addicted to alcohol and drugs, that they find comfort in people who are supporting them in any way.

FINAL PRAYER

Loving God, we ask you to liberate people addicted to drugs, alcohol, cigarettes and all kinds of addiction. Let them desire to reject the temptation of using them again. We know that by their own strength, they cannot break from the acquired habits: heal them, clean their intentions, and strengthen the weak-willed. Free them from the effects that these addictions caused. Support them in their desire to live in inner freedom. Help them overcome the power of body tensions and wrong desires. Fill them with the power of God's Word in Scriptures and embrace them with your love flowing from the Eucharist. We believe that with your grace they will become a people not only free but also devoted to your service. Amen.

Through the intercession of Mary, our Mother may we be graced with inner wisdom and tender, loving care to help those who come to us in their need.

Song: Magnificat or any appropriate song

Day 5 (December 20)
IN COMMUNION WITH PRISONERS

***O Key of David, opening the gates of God's eternal Kingdom:
Come and free the prisoners in darkness!***

INTRODUCTORY PRAYER

God, loving Father of all humankind, you have revealed yourself through history as the One who is with us. You told Moses that you have seen how your people were treated in Egypt, that you heard them cry out to be rescued from slavery, that you know all about their sufferings and plan to lead them into freedom.

You have sent Jesus, your Son, whose coming into our lives we expect every year anew, as the one who announces release to the captives and freedom to those in prison.

You have sent your Spirit in whom we enjoy the freedom of being your children and through whom even creation will be set free from its slavery to share the glorious freedom of the children of God.

As you are with us, you ask us today to be in loving communion with all who are deprived of their freedom, justly or unjustly. We, who often feel imprisoned within ourselves and the many influences that take away our freedom, desire to stand in solidarity with all, pleading:

“Maranatha! Come, Lord, to set us free“!

Song according to choice....

WORD OF GOD

Mt 25, 33-40

STORY

Thomas, a young man from Singapore, was among the 16 prisoners suffering from HIV-Aids, whom we visited every second week. He had smuggled drugs to Taiwan so as to get money for his medical treatment and was sentenced to death. He was very sick, withdrawn and difficult to approach.

I knew it would not be easy to find trust in that group. But my 70th birthday became an occasion to open up hearts. I was allowed to bring two delicious cakes and Coca Cola to have a celebration together. Prison personnel were alarmed: "How can you eat with them and shake hands with them?"

But the prisoners, feeling accepted and respected, opened up. I so desired to let them experience, through human love and care, that they are loved by God and precious in his eyes, despite drug addiction, sickness or crime.

Slowly things also changed for Thomas. His death sentence was changed to life imprisonment. He is taken care of medically, can laugh again and knows he is accepted. While the group kept changing, Thomas is still there, but he even sings and dreams of being released someday. My hope is, that one day he will come to fully entrust himself into the hands of God.

REFLECTION/SHARING

There are people who are actually put into prisons of iron or stone,
judged for their possible crimes;

There are people held in slavery so as to be “used”;

There are people drawn into slavery by drug dealers;

There are people who are slowly imprisoned by their own habits
and addictions;

There are whole groups or nations imprisoned in poverty by the
unjust systems of this world;

There are people whose own “freedoms” make them unfree;

And here am I – Maranatha, Emmanuel, come to set me free!

What is the thread that weaves through Thomas’ story and the
gospel reading? What keeps me from making friends with
prisoners? Who are really those in prison?

INTERCESSIONS

God with us, Emmanuel, we bring to you all who are imprisoned in
one way or another;

Let them experience your love through the human care and
respect they receive,

Resp: Emmanuel, come!

Let them take responsibility for the hurts they caused and find
healing from the hurts they suffered,

Resp: Emmanuel, come!

Let them find support through friends who don't give up on them
and experience reconciliation in broken relationships,

Resp: Emmanuel, come!

Let them (us) find through you the strength to be freed from all
that binds us,

Resp: Emmanuel, come!

FINAL PRAYER

Father of Mercy, the secrets of all hearts are known to you alone. You know who is just and you forgive the unjust. You alone are the Almighty Judge. We are not worthy of judging anyone. Your mercy is enough for sinners. Hear our prayers for those in prison. Give them repentance and let them believe in you. Give them patience and hope in their sufferings, and bring them home again soon. Comfort their near and dear ones. Let them trust in Jesus Christ and live with hope. Amen.

Day 6 (December 21)
IN COMMUNION WITH THOSE WHO ARE LIVING
IN THE SLUM AREAS

O Radiant Dawn, splendour of eternal light, sun of justice: come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death.

INTRODUCTION

When a poor person dies of hunger, it has not happened because God did not take care of him or her. It has happened because neither you nor I wanted to give that person what he or she needed. (St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta 1910–1997)

Sixty five million people live in the slums where the dwellings are unfit for human habitation by reasons of dilapidation, overcrowding, lack of ventilation, light and sanitation facility. Despite these negativities, the slums are the hub of manifold activities such as small scale business activities, small industries that produce commodities, recycling of waste materials that include plastic bags, cell phones, oil cans, newspapers, paper bags etc.

We remember today all the people who live in the slums, pavements and foot paths. They contribute to the society by their hard labour under varying circumstances, and inhuman surroundings, sometimes risking their lives; they live in a very

harmful and hazardous situation. The women and girls become victims of harassment and human rights violation.

OPENING PRAYER

O God of the universe, we thank you for the earth which offers at all seasons abundance of fruits, food, sun, moon, birds, animals and all produce of the earth. Thank you for the vast nature around us and all its life so vibrant with beauty. You have created everything in abundance; each one has space to live and food to satisfy the hunger.

We have disturbed this universe, disturbed the growth, and disturbed the flow of sharing. We created poor and rich, slums and mansions and caused injustice. We come together as children of One Father and Mother. O GOD, Almighty and merciful, who heals those that are broken in heart, and turns the sadness of the sorrowful to joy; Let your goodness be upon all that you have made, especially the less fortunate.

Lord our God, you promise us that where two or three are gathered you are there in the midst. As we sit in your presence, we remember and send our positive vibration to all those who are this day destitute, homeless, forgotten by their fellow human beings. Bless the congregation of your poor and those who are cast down. May we reach out in love and service to those in need!

WORD OF GOD

Gen.1: 1-31

STORY

This is a story from one of the Slums in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India where the Holy Spirit Sisters extend their social service. During the heavy rain fall in the month of July 2016, the slum was submerged with the sudden surge of floods. The slum dwellers were caught unaware. They were all asleep when it occurred and they had to run out of the small houses leaving behind everything, even the little that they owned. The whole area seemed as if it was an enormous lake. The people were in deep trouble and they were dismayed and distraught as they could not grasp how this could happen to them as they were already very poor and desolate. One of them, a poor lady, ran out of her house in horror when the water forcefully entered her room, not realizing that she had not picked up her ten-month old baby. She rushed back to the room, only to find the lifeless child. It was a heart breaking scene and no one could console the lady who lost everything especially her beloved child.

Amidst the insecurity and hopelessness the slum dwellers experience God's providence day in and day out as they come face to face with various problems including the natural calamities. Our mission here enables us to reach out and thus give them some hope.

REFLECTION/SHARING

How are we affected by the lives of these people living in slums or in dwelling places that are inhuman? What is my and our community's response to make a difference in their lives?

INTERCESSIONS

“And all things, whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.” (Mt. 21:22) Trusting in the words of Jesus, We bring our prayers to God our Father, for our suffering people.

Our response; Lord, Listen to our prayer.

Jesus our Saviour, You came for the least, the lost and the last of this world. We pray for the slum dwellers especially those deprived of their human needs and their human rights that they may be given the dignity that is due to all people, we pray to the Lord.

For all who are lonely or afraid, for teenagers and old people on the street, prisoners with no one to listen to them, and all whom the world has forgotten, that we may reach out in communion to lead them true peace and joy. We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the people affected by natural and human made calamities that we may be sensitive to the suffering people and generously support them in their struggle, let us pray to the Lord.

FINAL PRAYER

Lord God, You came to give honor to the least, those forgotten, overlooked and misjudged. You came to give first place to the last, those left behind, misunderstood and undervalued. You came to give a warm welcome to the lost, those who are

orphaned, abandoned and destitute. Lord God, no one is a stranger to you and no one is ever far from your loving care. In your kindness, watch over the people in pavements and slums, those exposed to extreme poverty, neglect, and unjust systems; those separated from their loved ones, young people who are lost, and those who have left home or who have run away from home. Bring them back safely to the place where they long to be and help us always to show your kindness and compassion to all and thus expressing our communion especially to those in need. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Day 7 (December 22)
IN COMMUNION WITH THE ELDERLY
THE SICK AND THE DISABLED

O King of all the nations, the only joy of every human heart; O Keystone of the mighty arch of people, come and save the creature you fashioned from the dust.

INTRODUCTION

The Messiah is the King of all nations, the only joy of every human heart has come and saved us. He is the Word that came to illumine the world so that darkness fades away and the light gives way to feasting and joyful singing. He is the Good Shepherd who takes care of his flock like no other! He comes, He comes, and He comes!

OPENING PRAYER

Loving and merciful God, You will all Your children to enjoy Your life of love. Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, whose birth we are about to celebrate, is the only joy of every human heart. He came to show us how to love and have called us to serve You and one another especially the elderly, sick and disabled in our society. Bless our sick today so that they may bear their illness in union with Jesus' sufferings and restore them quickly to health. Bless those who have grown old in your service, give them courage and strength in their faith. Bless those who are in their pain and

disabilities that they may be silent witnesses of your liberating power at work in their lives. We ask you this in Jesus' name. Amen.

WORD OF GOD

Lk 5: 17-26

STORY

Battle with Disease

He was 47, having been tormented by cancer for three months. He was still living in illusion, still unable to tear himself away from the transitory world..., not knowing that he was in the later stages of cancer. Every day, the priests and sisters came to visit him, neighbours came to encourage him, and members of the SSPSA came to comfort and pray for him, but he was unmoved, refusing to speak a single word with closed eyes or gazing blankly at the ceiling with no response. So some members of the SSPSA decided to fast and start a novena, praying to the Blessed Mother for him, totally relying on God. In time, God's grace started to work on him: He, a lukewarm believer, finally opened his mouth to speak. He repented of his sins before the Heavenly Father, received the Holy Communion, and fell asleep in the loving embrace of the Lord. This is how the members of the SSPSA bring the love of God to those in need.

REFLECTION/SHARING

“The mystery of human suffering overwhelms the sick person and poses disturbing new questions: Why is God allowing me to suffer? What purpose does it serve? How can God who is good permit something which is so evil? There are no easy answers to these questions asked by the burdened mind and heart. Certainly, no satisfying answer can be found without the light of faith.

Our Saviour knows well the many special needs of those who suffer. From the beginning of his public ministry, together with his preaching of the Good News of the Kingdom, "he went about doing good and healing". When he sent forth his own disciples on their mission, he gave them a special power and clear instructions to follow his example.

And indeed, it was the suffering and death of Christ that displayed the works of God most eloquently. By his Paschal Mystery, Jesus won for us our salvation. Suffering and death, when accepted with love and offered with trust to God, become the key to eternal victory, the triumph of life over death, the triumph of life through death. “(Address of St. John Paul II to the elderly, sick and disabled)

How does pain and suffering make you the person God wants you to be? What could be an alternative to suffering and pain? Why?

Concrete Action: Make friends with one sick or elderly or disabled person this week and share life with her/him.

INTERCESSIONS

Lord Jesus Christ, though You are the Son of the Most High, yet You deigned Yourself to be born into the world. Come, help the elderly people living alone in the peripheries of society and be their comfort, that they may spend the rest of their life in Your love.

Lord, being Emmanuel, You willingly chose to be in the company of the humble and insignificant. Come speedily to bring those afflicted with disease and loneliness the consolation they need.

Lord Jesus Christ, hope and strength of the nations, come quickly. Fill us with confidence and strength, and endow the disabled all over the world with indomitable will and tenacious spirit for life, that, with the strength which Your birth brings them, they may always keep hope despite the sorrows and hardships in the journey of life.

FINAL PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Most High, please hearken to our humble prayers. You willingly became man through the Virgin Mary and dwelt among us to share our weakness and woes. We ask that all, especially the elderly, the sick and the disabled, may experience Your presence in communion with us and attain the true faith and the happiness we desire. You are God, forever and ever. Amen.

Conclude with an appropriate song.

Day 8 (December 23)
IN COMMUNION WITH THE VICTIMS
OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

O Emmanuel, our King and Giver of Law: come to save us, Lord our God!

INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking is a worldwide issue which destroys human dignity. It is God's teaching to love others as we love ourselves. This is a big challenge that our Church faces in this current era. As prophetic women we are called to protect the rights of others especially our brothers and sisters who have no power to speak up for their rights. Facing this issue we are invited by Pope Francis to imitate the Good Samaritan who is able to take time to feel and listen to the cry of our brothers and sisters that we meet in the reality of life.

Let us unite ourselves with our brothers and sisters who are enslaved by human trafficking in our prayer.

Opening Song : The Lord Hears the Cry of the poor or similar song fitting to the theme

OPENING PRAYER

O Holy Triune God, We praise you, we glorify you. In your powerful Spirit You send us to mission among the marginalized and the lowly. For our salvation You have sent your only Son, Jesus Christ to become human like us in everything except sin. Hear the cry of our trafficked brothers and sisters whose stories pain us so much.

Unite us with your all-embracing love that your Kingdom of peace may come in our world! Amen.

WORD OF GOD

Proverbs 31: 8-9

STORY OF ADOLFINA ABUK

The recent data has shown that approximately forty (40) young women were trafficked from Kota Foun village to Malaysia. Until now their families do not have contact with them. They do not know where they are. Adolfina Abuk is one of the victims of human trafficking from Kota Foun village. She is 30 year old. In November 2013, Adolfina Abuk was recruited by a pander man whose name is John Pandie and helped by Goris Usboko. They brought Adolfina to BIDAR PUTRA SUKSES legal Agent. However, through the medical checkup she failed to get admission, then they offered her to KHALIFA FIRDAUS AULIA agent. From there the agent provided her some false documents and they brought her to Malaysia. In Malaysia she worked as housekeeper and took care of an elderly man for two years. On March 08, 2016 Adolfina finished her contract and returned to the agent in Malaysia. A month later on April 7, 2016 Adolfina's parents got a sudden news from a member of an agent in Kupang that Adolfina has died, and the agent will bring Adolfina's death body to Kota Foun - Timor. When they got home, the family found many stitches all over her body. The stitches started from her neck until her stomach, from her hind-head to her pelvis. She had no more eyes and tongue. Forensic experts declared that Adolfina's death was caused by violent acts

and some parts of the victim's organs were already taken away by some people especially the agent that recruited her.

REFLECTION AND SHARING

How does the story of Adolfina speak to you, personally and to us, as community? What am I and we are called to do in this issue of human trafficking?

INTERCESSION

We pray for the victims of human trafficking, enslaved in various ways that they may be healed from the hurts and suffering inflicted to them. ***Hear us O God!***

We pray for those who are working in various organization in different countries that they deal with the victims of human trafficking as persons, worthy of their dignity with love, respect and compassion. ***Hear us O God!***

We pray for all educational and international institutions that they may help in building up necessary formation programs for the prevention of human trafficking and also make use of their resources to give assistance to the victims. ***Hear us O God!***

FINAL PRAYER

God of Justice, we pray for those that enslave: the trafficker and abuser, the pimp and the client, the slave master and unjust 'employer'. We ask you to guide them with your voice of justice and conscience of goodness. Speak to them in their dreams, thoughts and words. Help them to understand their actions and recognize your grace. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Day 9 (December 24)

IN COMMUNION WITH STREET CHILDREN

The day has come at last when Mary will bring forth her firstborn Son.

INTRODUCTION

While we sleep tonight in our comfortable beds in our comfortable homes and in a safe neighbourhood, an estimated 200 million street children will be sleeping down in conditions that are too dreadful even for stray animals.

Our loving God must have grieved over the loneliness and desperation of these children. Where the world sees a filthy urchin, God sees a precious child created in his image. While we see their disposable lives, God sees their eternal souls. When the communities in which these children roam see a problem that needs to be fixed, God sees a child who needs to be loved.

On the 9th day of our Christmas novena, united with the whole congregation, we remember all street children with and without names who are alive in our dreams, like the child Jesus who was born in a crib where animals fed. With them, we pray:

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, embrace the lonely street children with the warmth of your love. Send them dreams of hope and rescue and make those dreams come true. Jesus, you seem to hang around in places

where orphaned children and lepers, and the blind and lame lived their distressed and filthy lives. You reached out to them with compassion, love and healing. Jesus, use me, use us to touch these hurting people like you did. Let me/us get out of my/our comfortable chair and bring love and hope to those who need it most. Let it be done! Amen!

Song: Any appropriate song or Whatsoever You Do

WORD OF GOD

Mt. 19:13-15

STORY

“Child accused of witchcraft”

Little John was a happy boy, living with his family. One day he got surprised by being called a witch because of the death of two sisters in an inexplicable way. This caused a revolt in little John’s life. Everything was planned by the family that little John and his grandmother be killed for being the cause of the two sisters’ death. One day they hit little John and his grandmother. Then, they were thrown into a hole and stoned with the intention of burning them. At this same moment God provided the passing by of an SVD missionary at the place. The priest got informed of what was happening. Then, he approached, facing the furious family and got them out of the hole, taking them to a safe place and provided medical assistance and medication.

Finally, little John was taken to the Centre of Children's Care Arnold Janssen, where he was received and formed. Today, little John is an example for other children who face the same situation. John has a job thanks to the Centre's help and is assisted by the Sisters and SVD Brothers.

REFLECTION/SHARING

God sees these least-of-the-least through eyes of pure, complete, passionate love. And that is why, even in the midst of this darkest of injustices, there is a light that shines. God is raising up believers to go out in the name of Jesus to love, feed, shelter, and rescue street children.

Many children suffer terribly because destructive sin entered a world meant for greater, more beautiful things. But God sees and feels. He is as close as the one who reaches out to love the unlovable and rescue the lost, just as we have been loved and rescued by the King above all kings. And when that happens, right there, in the middle of darkness, poverty and hunger, a holy light shines and the Kingdom of God is truly here and now.

Concrete Action: Make friends with one child (street children) and listen to her/his story.

INTERCESSIONS

Let us pray for all children who live on the streets without shelter nor home. May the Lord touch the hearts of people to receive them, give bread and a place to shelter. Let us pray to the Lord.

For all children accused of witchcraft and who are rejected. May they be protected by the Divine Providence and receive back the right they deserve. Let us pray to the Lord.

Let us pray for all those who care and worry about the suffering children so that the Lord continue to give them strength and courage to continue this great mission of caring for the most needed. Let us pray to the Lord.

FINAL PRAYER

Loving and ever - living God who gathered all children around you, we pray to continue protecting and defending all children, especially the most vulnerable ones. Look with compassion on all children in the world, especially those who suffer most, those who need more support. Emmanuel - God with us, please inspire more people that your love will be visible and tangible through their care and attention. Mary, our mother be a mother to these street children, now and forever. Amen.