

Christmas Novena 2019



Communion within our Congregation - Transforming our Communities with Merciful Compassion

Day 1

Theme: Communion with our Sisters within the Community

Gathering Song: *We are one in the Spirit...* or any other appropriate hymn

Centre Piece: Image of hands intertwined/any other meaningful symbol as per the composition of the community from the culture of the place.

Introduction

The theme of the first day of our Christmas Novena is: *Communion with our sisters in our community.*

The God of the Incarnation lives in a family, in a community of shared existence. Hence, whoever shares her existence inside of family and community experiences God and has the

very life of God flowing through her and in the community. We haven't chosen our community or the sisters we live with. But we have been sent to this community. We are given the members to live with. And this is one of the clear manifestations of God who has become a human being. This day, may we hear God's invitation to grow in communion within our community, in the Word become flesh who is our common holy ground. The closer our contact with that common ground, the greater will our communion be with each other.

Opening prayer

God, your Son Jesus became a human being
in order to show us who you are and who we are,
to show us what we are capable of and who we could become.
May this prayer invite us to celebrate the Feast of Christmas
Make us alert to his presence in our humanity in each of us.
Shape us into His likeness,
like Him in His way of transforming the world with compassion.
We pray this in the name of your own Son and our Brother. Amen

Scripture Reading

“To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, but born of God.”
(Jn. 1: 12)

OR/AND

Quote from St. Arnold Janssen: “Meditating on the throne of God (in the human heart) will help us see what a tremendous value mission work has. Imagine that we could gaze into the hearts of all those in a state of grace. We would see their hearts suffused and enveloped with light and at the center the Triune God. What an astonishing sight!!”

Story

According to an old Hindu legend, there was a time when all human beings were gods, but they abused their divinity. So, Brahma, the chief god, decided to take the divinity away from them and hide it somewhere they could never find.

Brahma called a council of the gods to help him decide where to hide the divinity. “Let's bury it deep in the earth,” said the gods. But Brahma answered, “Humans will dig into the earth and find it.” Some gods suggested, “Let's sink it in the deepest ocean.” But Brahma said, “No, Humans will learn to dive into the ocean and will find it.” Then some gods suggested, “Let's take it to the top of the highest mountain and hide it there.” Brahma replied, “Humans will eventually climb every mountain and take up their divinity.” Then all the gods gave up and said, “We do not know where to hide it, because it seems that there is no place on earth or in the ocean that human beings will not eventually reach.”

Brahma thought for a long time and said, “We will hide their divinity deep in the center of their own being, Humans will search for it here and there, but they won’t look for the divinity inside their true selves”

All the gods agreed that this was the perfect hiding place, and the deed was done. And since then, humans have been going up and down the earth, digging, diving, climbing, and exploring, searching for something, which already lies within themselves.

“Divinity lies within us all”

Teilhard de Chardin rightly said: “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience, but spiritual beings having a human experience.” Jesus came to show us how to live from that Divine center which is the sanctuary of compassion, kindness, mercy... This is our vocation – to live godlike, for we are created in God’s own image (Gen. 1: 27)

Personal reflection and sharing

In what concrete way am I being called to express the Divine in my daily life?

What gifts might I be holding that could be shared more? – Peace? Kindheartedness? Understanding? Tolerance? Friendliness?

In my relationship with the members of my community what efforts could I make to call forth their sacredness? In what way could I contribute to making the community a home?

Share with each other

Intercessions

We recognize and celebrate the presence of the Divine in each one, honor each other and call forth the compassion, kindness, goodness and the divine beauty in each one. Take a moment in silence to be present to each member of the community gratefully, as the name of each person is mentioned.

Response to the intercessions:

God, may we discover your presence in each other and be a blessing to one another in our community.

May we discover your love in our deepest self when we feel unloving and irritable: **Resp.**

May we look for your goodness in others when it hides beneath layers of coldness: **Resp.**

May we embrace you in the persons whose faithfulness we take for granted: **Resp.**

May we notice your non-judgmental acceptance in those who keep an open mind: **Resp.**

May we search for your gentleness when the harshness of another hides it: **Resp.**

May we reveal your mercy when we pardon someone for having turned against us: **Resp.**

My we discover and accept the wisdom of the older/experienced sister/s and the passion and energy of the younger ones in our intergenerational living: **Resp.**

(adapted from Joyce Rupp)

“There is a longing in us SSpS to make our communities truly homes. We want to take a step further in intercultural and intergenerational living by valuing it as a gift to be celebrated and shared among us and with the world.” (Seven Statements)

Concluding prayer

Jesus, you came as a cherished one filled with the radiance of eternal light. As you grew in humanness, your life and teachings revealed the vast goodness of your inner being. We are now called to carry your loving Spirit of radiance within us, reflecting your goodness, mercy and compassion to each other in our community. As we prepare to celebrate the wonder of your birth, help us discover your presence in each piece of our life and that of our sisters. You made your home in us. May we make a home for each other in our hearts, celebrate the gift of each other in our community.

God, bless us and let Christmas happen in our community! Amen

Closing hymn to the Blessed Mother

Day 2

Theme: Communion within the Province/Region

Song: freely chosen

Introduction: The theme of the second day of our Christmas novena is “Communion within the Province/Region”. We unite with all the Sisters of our Province/Region, see them in our mind’s eye and support them with our prayer. For a moment of silence, we travel inwardly to the various places where our sisters are living.

(Here pictures of the different communities of the Province/Region could be shown while the sisters look at them in silence).

Show, or represent creatively, the province symbol (if you have one). (In case the province has no symbol of its own, choose a symbol that fits to the country or to the local area.)

Give a brief explanation of the symbol

Opening Prayer

Lord, we wait with longing for your coming into our world.

You are already here and yet you constantly wish to become incarnate and encounter us in every person, also, and especially, in our fellow sisters.

Open our hearts for you and for one another,

so that we may recognize you and allow you to transform us through your merciful compassion.

We ask this in your name, you who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.

Story

The Life boat Station

A long time ago, on a dangerous coast that had already proved to be the doom of many ships, there was a small, very poor lifeboat station. The building was no more than a hut and there was only one boat; but the handful of volunteers served constantly as coastguards and, day and night, ventured out tirelessly and without regard for their own safety to rescue castaways.

Thanks to this small base, so many people were saved that it soon became known everywhere. Many of those who were saved and other people from the surrounding area were now very willing to sacrifice time, money and energy to support the station. They bought new boats and trained new teams. The small station grew and prospered. Many patrons of the station no longer liked the lowly and poorly equipped building.

Those rescued needed a more comfortable place as their first refuge. Therefore, the temporary camp beds were replaced by proper beds and the extended building was equipped with better furniture. But this made the lifeboat station increasingly popular with people as a place to stay; they made it even more comfortable as it served them as a kind of clubhouse.

Fewer and fewer volunteers were willing to join a rescue mission. So they hired a separate crew for the lifeboats. After all, the coat of arms of the lifeboat service still decorated the rooms everywhere, and a model of a large lifeboat hung from the ceiling of the room where the arrival of a new club member was generally celebrated.

About this time a large ship foundered off the coast and the hired sailors returned with whole boatloads of freezing, soaked and half drowned people. Among the dirty and exhausted castaways were foreigners and strangers.

An uproar broke out in the splendid clubhouse. Consequently, immediately afterwards the administration committee had shower cabins built outdoors so that the shipwrecked people could be thoroughly cleaned before entering the clubhouse.

At the next meeting there was a dispute among the members. Most of them wanted to stop the rescue service because it was uncomfortable and obstructed the normal activities of the club. Some, however, argued that lifesaving was the primary task, and that it was called a "lifesaving station". They were quickly outvoted.

They were told that if the lives of all these battered, shipwrecked types were so important to them, they could open their own lifeboat station somewhere else. That's what they did.

Years went by and the new station changed just like the first. It became a clubhouse, and so a third sanctuary was founded. But here, too, the old tale repeated itself.

If you visit that coast today, you will find a considerable number of exclusive clubs along the coastal road. The coast is still dangerous; it is still fateful for many ships; only - most of the shipwrecked sailors drown.

Questions for personal contemplation and sharing

- What thoughts and associations come to me when I hear this story?
- Are there comparable developments in the history of our Province/Region?
- Has the mission of our Province/Region changed over the course of time? Why?

Intercessions

Lord, you still come into our world today and wish to be incarnate in it.

We pray: *God of our life – hear our prayer*

- Show us ways in which we can faithfully fulfil your call and our mission today.
- Transform our hearts with your merciful compassion.
- Help us to discover your countenance in every person we meet.
- Send us people who are especially in need of your compassion.
- Let the communities of our Province/Region become places where God is encountered.
- May the deceased Sisters of our Province/Region live with you in all eternity.

Lord, you fill us with joy at this time of waiting for your coming. Glory to you forever. Amen.

Our Father

Song: freely chosen

Prayer

When we engage with each other
and stay together

are honest and genuine
and do away with empty words

wait patiently
and listen kindly

protect the delicate
and strengthen the weak

bear sorrows together
and rejoice at the success of others

regard obstacles as possibilities
and think ahead

give loving accompaniment
and sincere thanks

give support
instead of holding on

give space and encouragement
to follow one's own path

then Christmas will come.

Max Feigenwinter

Lord, bless us and let Christmas come in our Province/Region. We make our prayer in the name of the triune God, + Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Closing hymn to Blessed Mother

Day 3

Theme: Communion within Provinces/Regions in a Country/Continent

Opening: We acknowledge the presence of God within us. He breathes in us the breath of life. We pay attention to the life around which connects us with each another... (brief silence)

Song: (hymn to the Spirit or any appropriate song for gathering or any welcome song)

Introduction: The theme of our 3rd day of the novena is "Communion within Provinces/Regions in a Country/Continent". This season of advent invites us to listen to and reflect on the story of our personal and communal life, allowing them to challenge us to expand our awareness and consciousness. May we allow the stories of our Provinces/Regions in our country/continent to strengthen our communion with one another as a family called to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom in our respective reality.

Symbol: (write the name of the Provinces/Regions in the country/continent you belong to on a sheet of paper and place it at the center)

Reflection: The Holy Spirit filled our founding generation with the burning desire to reach out to people far beyond their own horizon, and to share with them the good news: "God is with us". Their total commitment to mission and sense of communion sustained them in difficulties and let them make daring decisions and joyful sacrifices. Their courage continues to inspire us. Let us take a look at the names of the provinces/regions. We let our thinking expand to connect us to where they are, keeping in mind that we share the charism without boundaries.

How far do I know the life story of these Provinces/Regions in my continent/country? Where am I invited to widen my horizon to communion? Any plan of action to express our response to the call to communion? Listen to the urging of the Spirit.

Sharing

Reading: God's communion with us calls us to communion with one another. Let us listen to the reading. (Is. 42, 1-7)

Intercessions:

Response: Lord, unite us in your love!

- Create in us a heart that feels deep gratitude for who we are and where we belong: our biological family, our religious and missionary community.
- Lead us to a deeper connectedness with one another, beyond the familiar boundaries of our own community/province/region.
- Help us to be aware of each other's struggles and difficulties, ready to reach out and express solidarity.
- Make the joy of the other be my joy, their struggle my struggle and may we remain in solidarity with one another both in pleasant and unpleasant situations.
- *In silence we add our other intentions.*

Prayer: Loving God, source of our provincial/regional story, you desire that we witness to your love as one family. Keep us constantly connected to your love and sustain us as we venture into the world that is busting with competition and manipulation which separate one from the other. Strengthen us as we face the obstacle of bringing the world into your loving communion. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Our Father

Prayer in preparation for our 15th General Chapter

Most Holy Trinity,

We praise and thank you for calling us to share in your loving unity and for entrusting us with the mission of widening the circle of Communion.

As we prepare for our 15th General Chapter, send us your Holy Spirit to guide us in this discernment process, grant that we may be united as we listen with compassion to the longings of our Congregation and the cry of our broken world.

Help us to be attentive to your promptings and inspirations; empower us to joyfully renew our commitment.

Triune God, we long to be immersed in your life of love and to share in your work of transforming the world with compassion.

In union with our Founding Generation and the thousands of SSpS who have gone before us, we entrust our whole Congregation into your providential care.

May the Holy Triune God live in our hearts and in the hearts of all!

Hymn: "I thank my God..." (or any appropriate hymn) or a Hymn to the Blessed Mother

Day 4

Theme: Communion within the Whole Congregation

Gathering Song: One Heart, Many Faces

Symbol / Center Piece: *Place globe/clothes with the continental colors arranged with the Congregational Logo at the center. Or a cut-out of “a large HEART with 5 small hearts inside” representing the continents as seen on the sarcophagus of St. Arnold Janssen*

Introduction: Today, we hear God’s call to grow in Communion within the whole Congregation – to see and feel the presence of God become human in our members in all the continents.

We treasure our name, Missionary Sisters, Servants of the Holy Spirit, entrusted with the mission of widening the circle of our relationships. Our congregation today is comprised of 45 provinces/Regions and Generalate community, blessed with nearly 3000 members of 50 nationalities with a missionary presence in 50 countries. It is a privilege indeed, to be part of a great family of missionary disciples.

God breaks out in diversity.... challenges our culture toward a revolution of consciousness, towards a “participatory consciousness,” ... “When I love with participatory consciousness, I see that what the other is, is some of my life-energy living there, and what I am is some of the other’s life-energy living in me. I can no longer divide the world into “we’s” and “they’s.” I have an awareness of one large life circulating through all. “The greatest story is that all of life is one.” (Beatrice Bruteau).

May this time of praying together bring about a participatory consciousness within us.

Opening prayer

God, we worship your many-faceted FACE.

You are everywhere, so that our human eyes can see you.

In Jesus, your Word made flesh, you have become accessible and visible,
in the nearest and in the farthest.

That is the way of your Incarnation.

We thank you for our Congregation’s many faces;

We thank you for every member who gives a face to you,

We thank you for the diverse expressions of your presence.

May we hear your call to grow in ‘participatory consciousness.

This we pray in the name of your own Son and our brother Jesus. Amen

Quote from Blessed Josepha: “God has gathered us together that we may be of one heart and mind.”

Story

Ubuntu – This is a word in South Africa – *I am because we are!*

“One day, a western anthropologist went to Africa to study the social behavior of an indigenous tribe. He proposed a game to the children and they willingly agreed to be part of it. He put a basket filled with fruits underneath a tree and told the children that whoever would reach the basket first would win the whole basket and could eat the fruits all by him or herself.

He lined them all up and raised his hand to give the start signal. Ready. Set. Go!

The children took each other’s hands and started running together. They all reached the basket at the same time. Then they sat down in a big circle and enjoyed the fruits together, laughing and smiling all the time.

The anthropologist could not believe what he saw and he asked them why they had waited for each other as one could have taken the whole basket all for him or herself.

The children shook their heads and replied, “Ubuntu, how can one of us be happy if all the others are sad?”

Ubuntu signifies that we are all bound together in ways that can be invisible to the eye; that there is a oneness to humanity; that we achieve ourselves by sharing ourselves with others, and caring for those around us,”

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 12: 12-14, 27

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by[c] one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.... Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

We are a body today, not something that represents Christ, but something that IS Him. The Word became flesh and continues to dwell among us. If we are the body of Christ, then God’s presence in the world depends very much upon us. We have to become as Teresa of Avila so simply put it, God’s physical hands, feet, mouthpiece and heart in the world.

Jesus loves to approach his brothers and sisters through us, through our open hands that caress and console them, through our words pronounced to anoint the world with the Gospel and not ourselves. (Pope Francis)

Pause for reflection

Intercessions: God, you are the common ground on which we live, move and have our being. May we as a whole Congregation be in the process of becoming the body of Christ your Son. May we be enabled to see things from a wider perspective, move from our individual concerns to the Congregational ones.

Note: A candle is lit for each continent after the short pause and placed on the respective color on the Centre piece.

1. *We are invited to spend a moment of gratitude for and communion with our Sisters in Africa - 178 sisters in 11 countries*

Jesus, Immanuel, God with us, may we be promoters of Africa's hopes and aspirations. May the spirit of 'Ubuntu' (I am because we are) inspire our life in communities and widen the communion among peoples by the witness of their own lives. Recognizing our own vulnerabilities, may we be wounded healers in our societies affected by violence, ethnic conflicts, exclusion and marginalization.

Response: God, may we be your transforming presence through our compassion

2. *A moment of gratitude for and communion with our Sisters in the PANAM Provinces/Regions: 603 sisters in 12 countries*

Jesus, into the emptiness of human hearts you came offering fullness of Life. Into the ache of human life, you came as the Compassionate One. Today, may we be the greeting of hospitality for the lonely, bearers of hope for the discouraged, healing for the wounded and offering a home for the homeless.

Response: God, may we be your transforming presence through our compassion

3. *A moment of gratitude for and communion with our Sisters in the continent of ASIA: 1418 members in 9 countries,*

God sent a present into the world, the gift of a loving presence named Jesus. What Jesus gave most was his personal presence, gifts that were treasures of the heart: Belief in self, inner healing, peace of mind, compassion, forgiveness, dignity and justice - Lord Jesus, may we trust in the power of these gifts that you have blessed us with. Like the Founding Generation, may we respond 'audaciously and creatively to the cries of the victimized, abandoned and exploited ones in our society.'

Response: God, may we be your transforming presence through our compassion

4. *A moment of gratitude for and communion with our Sisters in Europe: 733 members in 16 countries*

God of new life, shoot of Jesse, we raise our yearning hearts to you. Aware of our strengths and in the midst of our challenges, may we experience the sprouting of new life in our efforts towards solidarity and collaboration.

Response: God, may we be your transforming presence through our compassion

5. *A moment of gratitude for and communion with our Sisters in Oceania: 78 members in 2 countries*

God of hope, come! Be the morning star in our midst, the Light that can never goes out, the Beacon of Hope guiding our way to you. Come into our midst and make of our lives a home, where your everlasting goodness resonates with assuring love and vigorous hope.

Response: God, may we be your transforming presence through our compassion

Our Father

Hymn

Concluding prayer

May we learn from Mary and Elizabeth in the Gospel story of the visitation, the way of healthy/holy human encounter: entering, greeting, hearing, feeling, blessing and responding. May we grow in greater awareness of the presence of our large SSpS family in this world. May we nurture in our hearts warm and positive thoughts and energies for our sisters in the different parts of the world. May we help bring to birth Christ in each other in the form of peace and goodness, compassion and hospitality. May our call and response to live for the common cause keep us united, moving away more and more from an attitude of 'us' and 'them' to a more inclusive one. May we find each other in you Triune God and keep alive our shared bond of being human, being SSpS. Amen.

Closing hymn to Blessed Mother

Day 5

Theme: Communion with the Deceased Members of the Congregation

(with our Sisters who have gone before us)

Gathering Song

Centre piece: a few photos of the deceased sisters

Introduction: *Our story of today gains meaning only in our connectedness to our past. We are like dwarfs sitting on the shoulders of giants. We see more, and things that are more distant, than they did, not because our sight is superior or because we are taller than they, but because they raise us up, and by their great stature add to ours. (John of Salisbury)*

Ours sisters who went before us, have embodied/incarnated the love of God in their unique ways. In doing so, they have opened a path for us to follow.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote the following thoughts in a letter to Mr. and Mrs. Bethge:

“We can find nothing to fill the absence of a dearly loved person and we should not even try; we just have to hold out and persevere; that sounds very harsh at first but at the same time it is a great consolation, because while the gap really remains unfilled, it keeps us connected with one another. The more beautiful and complete the memories, the more difficult the separation. But gratitude transforms the torment of memory into quiet joy. You do not carry the good past within you like a thorn but like a precious gift.”

The Story of the Water Beetles and the Dragonfly

At the bottom of a small, calm pond there was a community of water beetles. It was a contented community, living in the dim light, busy scurrying back and forth over the mud at the bottom of the pond in search of food.



Again, and again, however, the water beetles realized that one or the other of them apparently lost interest in staying with them. It grasped the stem of a water lily and slowly climbed up it before disappearing. Then it was never seen again.

One day, when that happened again, the water beetles said to one another: “There goes another of our friends climbing up the stem. Where could he be going?”

But even though they paid great attention, this time again the friend finally vanished from sight. Those left behind waited for a long time but he did not come back.

“Isn’t that strange?”, said the first water beetle.

“Wasn’t he happy among us?” asked the second.

“Where might he be now?” wondered the third.

No one had an answer. They were faced with a riddle. Finally, the oldest beetle called an assembly. “I have an idea”, he said, “The next one of us who climbs up a water lily stem must promise to come back and tell where he went and why.” “We promise”, they all said solemnly.

Not long afterwards, on a day in spring, precisely the water beetle who had suggested realized that he himself was climbing up the water lily stem. Higher and higher he climbed. And before he knew what was happening, he broke through the surface of the water and fell onto a large, green water lily leaf.

When the water beetle regained his senses, he looked around in amazement. He couldn’t believe what he saw. Everything was so different and even his body appeared to have changed in some astonishing way. As he began to look at it with curiosity, his eyes fell on four glittering wings and a long body that now apparently belonged to him. While he was still wondering about his unaccustomed form, he felt an urge to move the wings. He gave into the urge, moved his wings – and suddenly without knowing how, he found himself in the air.

The water beetle had become a dragonfly. The new born dragonfly flew back and forth through the air in wide and narrow circles. It felt wonderful in this totally other element. After a while it settled on a leaf to rest.

At the moment the dragonfly looked down into the water. And there were his old friends, the other water beetles, running back and forth at the bottom of the pond. Then the dragonfly remembered its promise.

Without thinking about it, the dragonfly sprang down, wanting to report to its old friends. But it only struck the surface of the water.

“I can’t go back,” it said sadly. “I really did try but I cannot keep my promise. And even if I could go back, none of my friends would recognize me with my new body.”

And after thinking about it for some time it realized: “I will have to wait until they become dragonflies, too. Then they will see for themselves what happened to me and where I went.”

And with that the dragonfly flew up happily into its wonderful new world of light and air.



(Author unknown)

Prayer

Lord, you are not a God of the dead,
all who died live with you.

Before you we remember all those whom we loved,
they will keep a place in our hearts.

We believe that all are held in your hand
And that is our hope for them and for us.

That you may reward what can be rewarded

And fill up any gaps that are still there, that is our hope for them and for us.

That you will remove all that separates,
and can give eternal peace;

that is what we ask,

it is what we hope and believe for them and for us.

Be with our deceased with the power of your life

and lead us also with the power of your life to a reunion with them,
through your Son our Lord Jesus Christ.

Reading from the Gospel according to John

Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they may always see my glory which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

I have made your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and so that I may be in them. (John 17,24-26)

Whether we know it or not, we transmit the presence of everyone we have ever known, as though by being in each other’s presence we exchange our cells, pass on some of our life force, and then we go on carrying that other person in our body... this is how we survive long after we are dead. This is why it is important who we become, because we pass it on. (Natalie Goldberg).

Pause for silent reflection and sharing

Recall an experience/s with one or two deceased sisters whom you have known, how have they been channels of God's love? How have they given birth to God's love in their life?

In what way am I invited to follow the path opened up by them?

Intercessions

Let us remember our sisters who lived and loved deeply, who found the source of their inner strength in Jesus, the God incarnate....

In a quiet moment individual names are mentioned accompanied by a few outstanding qualities with which they made God present in the community/mission situation.

After each name a bell will be rung to remind us of how their goodness has resonated in our lives and/ or a candle is lit as a sign of the light they brought into the world.

After each, an Antiphon is sung – Laudate Omnes Gentes... /Bless the Lord my soul...

Our Father

Hymn

Concluding prayer

God, author of our life, we thank you for the thousands of our sisters who have enkindled our spirits with their teachings and the spark of their beliefs, on whose faces we have seen God's glory radiated, who took the risk of leaving their homelands and moved over to the frontiers, who offered their lives in dedicated service for God's Reign, who led us by their words and example into deeper relationship with God, who faced their struggles with hope and optimism, who taught us how to trust and have confidence in difficult times.

As our congregational story continues may we take the challenge of providing our shoulders for those who follow us. We pray this in the name of Jesus who prayed, that we may all be ONE. Amen.

Closing hymn to the Blessed Mother

Day 6

Theme: Called to a Lifelong Process of Nurturing a 'Contemplative Stance' in order to be a 'transformative presence': Formation

Song: freely chosen

Introduction: The topic for Day 6 of our Christmas novena is "Called to a lifelong process of nurturing a 'contemplative stance' in order to be a 'transformative presence'". For as long as

we live, we are invited to change and allow ourselves to be changed by the One who came into the world as a child more than 2000 years ago: our God. Today let us be open to the possibility that the Infant in the crib would like to transform something in me as well.

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,

You are coming into our world and you wish to transform it.

As long as we live, we have the chance to let you into our lives and allow you to bring in a new vitality:

everything that has become hardened in us,

(a Sister brings a stone to the front)

everything that is dried out in us,

(a Sister brings a dry sponge to the front)

everything that is dead in us,

(a Sister brings a broken-off twig to the front)

everything that has frozen in us

(a Sister brings frozen water - block of ice - to the front)

Open our hearts for your love, goodness and mercy.

Grant this we pray, you who live and reign in the unity of the Holy Spirit in all eternity. Amen

Story

A Child Did It

(Adapted from a true event)

During the service the priest and the sacristan noticed a man in the church who had not been there for the past 10 years. Not only that, over recent years he had made life difficult for the parish priest because he mocked and laughed at his efforts in the pastoral work.

Now he was sitting there and staring, as it seemed, at a newspaper. Already during the service, the sacristan had wanted to rebuke him. But when he noticed how sad the man looked and even that there were tears running down his cheeks, he let him be.

When the parish priest visited him on another evening, the man pointed to a picture of his granddaughter and said, "This child did it. "Never will you see me in a church again", I had sworn. Never! But this child did it. "

He unfolded the newspaper that he had taken with him to the church, an illustrated weekly. There was a picture of his little darling. In a survey of "What children want from the Christ Child, "the five-year-old answered the reporter: "A different grandfather. One who would sometimes go to church with me. Mine is so stubborn. He never does and I have asked him so often."

“But you didn’t have the child with you at all”, remarked the parish priest.

“Not yet”, replied the man. “It was a kind of first rehearsal, as it were, so that I don’t make a fool of myself in front of the child.”

“You knew it would be difficult for you, didn’t you? And you didn’t want the child to see that. I understand.” The man looked at the parish priest in embarrassment.

“I would never have thought that a child had so much power.”

“That’s it, we don’t want to believe that a child has such power that it can change our mind,” the priest repeated very thoughtfully and the man noticed that he meant the Child in the crib.

(Author: Rudolf Hempel, from: “The 100 best Christmas Stories”; shortened)

Reflection

In a moment of silence, the community is invited to contemplate the ‘Child in the Crib’ ...

What transformation can the Child in the crib bring about in me/us if we allow it?

Perhaps we will find something in ourselves that seems to be so hardened and immovable as it was in the man in the story. Let it be changed – let us be changed by the Child in the crib – in a time of silence.

Intercessions

God sends his Son as a child in the crib to transform us. We pray: *We are waiting for you, O God, Come and transform us.*

Sung refrain: Ostende nobis Domine, misericordiam tuam. Amen. Amen! Maranatha! Maranatha! (Taizé) or some other refrain.

- We are waiting for you, O God. Come to us and transform all suffering, sickness and need.
- We are waiting for you, O God. Come to us and transform our hardness of heart and lack of love, our wounds and hurts.
- We are waiting for you, O God. Come and strengthen us in our efforts to contribute, to be available, to give our energy and love so that the face of the earth may be renewed.
- We are waiting for you, O God. Come and share our laughter and tears, our joys and suffering, our range and our limits.

God, you know us and you love us. We glorify and praise you forever. Amen.

Our Father

Song: freely chosen

Prayer

a word

a sound

an image

a hope
a longing
an anticipation

no longer
being satisfied
with what is

wanting more
to be different
being impelled

and setting out
leaving
trusting the dreams

the star in the night
the word in the silence
the Child in the crib

Andrea Schwarz

May the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless us this day (evening). Amen.

Closing hymn to the Blessed Mother

DAY 7

Theme: Leadership at the Service of Communion

Gathering Song

Centre piece: Picture of the Good shepherd/image of a community seated in a circle facing each other

Introduction: Today, on the 7th day of the Novena, we reflect on and pray with the theme: Leadership at the service of Communion.

Congregational structures and leadership styles have to facilitate participation and communion. We experience the value of communal discernment and participative leadership.”
(GC 14)

The word “authority’ (augere: Latin) means to give increase, to empower, to build up, to edify. As such, authentic authority leads us to the threshold of our own vision and there empowers us. This is what we must seek in our discernment processes. The task of authentic authority is

primarily to listen to the depth pulsations of the community of which it is a part and respond to it adequately.

Jesus came into a world/ society where power was misused often for self-glory/self-promotion and naturally it had its detrimental effect on others. He came to empower people, to show how God's power works and what it does to human beings and creation. His goal was to build up...to nurture; to enhance rather than to dominate.

All of us, irrespective of the different roles we occupy at different times in our life, hold immense power within us. We pray that all of us who are gifted with power, authority and energy may harness them for promoting life and bringing about communion.

Scripture Reading: Jn. 10:10 - *I came that you may have life and have it to the full.* or Phil. 2: 1-11

Story

The Messiah is Among You

There was once an old stone monastery tucked away in the middle of a picturesque forest. For many years people would make the significant detour required to seek out this monastery. The peaceful spirit of the place was healing for the soul.

In recent years however fewer and fewer people were making their way to the monastery. The monks had grown jealous and petty in their relationships with one another, and the animosity was felt by those who visited.

The Abbot of the monastery was distressed by what was happening, and poured out his heart to his good friend Jeremiah. Jeremiah was a wise old Jewish rabbi. Having heard the Abbot's tale of woe he asked if he could offer a suggestion. "Please do" responded the Abbot. "Anything you can offer."

Jeremiah said that he had received a vision, an important vision, and the vision was this: the messiah was among the ranks of the monks. The Abbot was flabbergasted. One among his own was the Messiah! Who could it be? He knew it wasn't himself, but who? He raced back to the monastery and shared his exciting news with his fellow monks.

The monks grew silent as they looked into each other's faces. Was this one the Messiah?

From that day on the mood in the monastery changed. Joseph and Ivan started talking again, neither wanting to be guilty of slighting the Messiah. Pierre and Naibu left behind their frosty anger and sought out each other's forgiveness. The monks began serving each other, looking out for opportunities to assist, seeking healing and forgiveness where offence had been given.

As one traveler, then another, found their way to the monastery, word soon spread about the remarkable spirit of the place. People once again took the journey to the monastery and found themselves renewed and transformed. All because those monks knew the Messiah was among them.

Pause for reflection and sharing

What learnings do I receive from the story? How could we learn to connect to the power within each of us and draw out the best in each other? In what way do our encounters relate to the deepest desires and highest aspirations of our members? How is God calling me to leadership in peace-making and reconciliation? How can my woundedness and vulnerability contribute to healing and renewal?

At Christmas we gaze at the power of God hidden in the tenderness, helplessness and vulnerability of the little babe in the manger- the power that manifested itself in his adult years in the way he taught, related and acted.

As we pray the following prayer, we allow our attitudes to be shaped by his style of leadership especially in his relationships.

Jesus' leadership (*adapted from Jesus CEO, Laurie Beth Jones*)

Jesus beheld the people – To behold someone means to be fully centered and to hold, or embrace, a person in that moment. People respond to how we behold them in our consciousness. We don't have to say anything; they can sense how we perceive them.

People flocked to Jesus because he did not see them as black or white, rich or poor, male or female. He saw them as brothers and sisters – family related by blood, equals with equal rights and responsibilities. He beheld them

Resp.: Jesus, help us to behold each other in our essence.

Jesus treated all as equals: Jesus, representing God, treated everyone as his equal. He could move mountains, raise the dead, heal the sick, and make the lame walk and the blind see. Yet, he called fishermen and prostitutes his brothers and sisters. He not only accepted these “less-than-pure” individuals, he radiated so much love for them that people swarmed to him. People felt good about themselves in his presence. His approach empowered them.

Resp.: Jesus, may we learn to behold everyone as a brother or a sister.

Jesus had compassion for the crowds: Jesus desperately wanted to show people how loved they were. He personally felt another people's pain. Once we lose compassion, we lose our souls. 'We are most like God when we have compassion'. All that matters is to be kind to one another.

Resp.: Jesus, may we respond to each other with all the goodness within us.

Jesus served them: Jesus, the leader, served his people. He asked people: “What would you like me to do for you?” “How can I help you?” If they wanted to see, he opened their eyes. If they wanted to walk, he let them walk. If they wanted bread, he gave them bread. If they wanted wine, he gave them wine. He did all of these things ... because he was coming from one power: love.

Resp.: Jesus, may we learn to act from the source within us, namely LOVE.

Our Father

Concluding Prayer

Jesus, celebration of your birth reminds us of the purpose of your coming to this world – to give us life, life in abundance. Your incarnation tells us, we humans are valuable and precious. May we, your disciples realize that each of us is born an original and so to make a difference in the world in a unique manner- a difference, by promoting life, life in our communities and among people around us, especially those most deprived of a life of dignity. Let the power of love within us make each step we take a step not of domination but of kindness, a step not of competition but of compassion, a step of justice for the powerless, a step of hope for the despairing. May our SSpS family be a ‘home where the great are small and the small are great’. Amen.

Closing hymn to the Blessed Mother

Day 8

Theme: Called to Intercultural Living

Opening: We bow to the presence of God in all creation and we also bow to the presence of God in the heart of every person. I become aware that there is indeed God within each one of us and around us. In silence we sense God with us, so close to us. (Brief silence)

Song: (appropriate to the Spirit or for gathering)

Introduction: The theme of our 8th day of the novena is “called to intercultural living”. Our interculturality as SSpS is an essential aspect of our identity. It is the expression of the Spirit’s many faces in our present reality. We experience both the richness and the struggles of living in an intercultural community and become aware of the lights and shadows we encounter on our intercultural journey, to look beyond the differences and disagreements and consider them as opportunities to discover the Love dwelling in each one of us.

Symbol: (of interculturality)

Reflection: “Christ has called us to this Congregation, a religious missionary community dedicated to the life-giving Spirit. In the power of the Holy Spirit we follow him, praising the Father and bringing the fullness of life to others. Living in a religious missionary community, we endeavor to make the presence of the Divine Love visible in our life and activity. As a community of sisters of different nations and languages, we become a living symbol of the unity and diversity in the Church.” (SSpS Prologue).

We listen to a story of a sister missioned to a foreign land.

Story: *“Intercultural community, my beginning and end”*

I arrived in the country without knowing a word of the language of the people. I speak English, but unfortunately no one in the community spoke the language I knew. I found the early days distressing. It was winter and the temperature was below zero. The day I arrived, I was brought straight to my room and there, very tired, I fell straight into bed and went to sleep. But when I woke up, I was freezing and I looked for another blanket in the closet but found nothing. As I couldn't sleep anymore, I left the room and searched for someone to help me and when I met a sister, I tried to explain what I wanted. But despite all my efforts, she didn't understand me, so I took her arm and led her to my room. With the dictionary that was in my room I tried to compose a phrase to make myself understood, but it was no use. Only with the help of gestures and sign language did she finally understand that I needed more blankets. She also apologized, because the one in charge of the rooms had only put a single blanket in the room. From then on, this sister became my friend and she started looking after me. At first, during meals, I was quiet at the table and tried to understand what the sisters were talking about. There were times when I felt invisible in their midst and that the sisters didn't care. At times, I was so upset when some were hesitant to stay near me and even avoided sitting at the table where I was. Only the sister who helped me with the blanket, I could sense, exerted more effort to come closer to me. I suffered a lot but I knew in my heart that the sisters also suffered. As I struggled to learn the language and communicate, I perceived the sisters' efforts to help me as well. I was more spontaneous in expressing myself despite my broken sentences and I even learned to smile with my wrong grammar. Sometimes I got mad at the corrections from all sides, but I needed to believe that was the only way to help me. I began to know my sisters more and eventually developed that sense of belongingness to the community. I shared my culture and became interested in Brazilian culture. One discovery that fascinated me is that there is beauty in interculturality. I have something unique to share from my culture and something unique to learn from the other culture. By allowing my culture to be enriched by Brazilian culture, I came to deepen my Filipino culture. Interculturality has been my way of life and joyful intercultural living has been my life's testimony to the Divine communion.

(Leonie Pregunta, SSpS missionary to Brazil)

Reflection: How have I grown in the awareness that my story and others' stories are interconnected and that our story is the continuation of God's story of communion? Am I convinced that Interculturality is my call and living in an intercultural community is my response to the call?

Sharing: (can be with seatmate)

Reading: Lk. 1:57-66 (Birth of John the Baptist) Let us listen to the story of John the Baptist. In the reading, the people that surround him feel the great wonder as to what this child might turn out to be, while believing that the hand of God is surely with him.

Intercession

Response: God of cultures, hear and heal us!

- Create in us a heart that feels deep gratitude for our origin: family, life situations, nationality and cultural heritage.
- When we are overwhelmed with the feeling that my culture is superior to the other and that my opinion is better than the other
- When our negative thoughts of others keep preventing us from being compassionate and understanding
- In our tendency to be right and invest to prove that others are wrong
- When our cultural prejudices overshadow us and we succumb to being judgmental instead of being sensitive and appreciative of other cultural values.
- One can add other petitions.

Our Father

Prayer

God of interculturality, attune us to your Holy Spirit and one with Him may we listen to Him leading us to find beauty in our diversity. Valuing our interculturality may we witness the Love of the Trinity who calls us to be one family. This we ask through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer in preparation for our 15th General Chapter

Closing song hymn to the Blessed Mother

Day 9

Theme: Called to Intergenerational Living

Opening: We take a moment of silence...be aware of who we are, where we are and that God is so close to us, for He is Emmanuel...

Song: (appropriate to the Holy Spirit or for gathering)

Introduction: The theme of our 9th day of the novena is “Called to intergenerational living”. We experience both the richness and the struggles of our intergenerational living. We open ourselves to continue transformation as we befriend diversity and the unknown.

Symbol: (write this phrase on a poster to be seen)

“Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young” – *Henry Ford (1863 – 1947)*

Reflection: We are overwhelmed by our ever-changing community living. As individuals and community, we are caught up with the idea of generation gap, what it is to be old and how it is to be young. The thought of having more or having less, advancing or being left behind,

affects us. In our diverse community setup, preferences and deprivation take on manifold expressions.

Let us reflect on the phrase on the poster and allow it to speak to us, to our vulnerability and inclinations.

How are we challenged in our process of conversion toward greater communion and friendship among us and with those we serve.

Sharing of reflections, insights and realization

Reading: Lk. 1: 39-45 (a life-giving encounter between the young woman Mary and ageing Elizabeth)

Intercessions

Response: “The Lord hears the cry of the poor, blessed be the Lord!” (can be sung)

- That we may be instruments of bridging between young and old and conscious that each one has something to share and learn from one another/enrich each other.
- That while many intergenerational differences persist, we may strengthen our areas of commonality, our aspiration for good relationships, co-responsibility and interdependency as children of God.
- There’s evidence that our society is becoming increasingly segregated by age and this perpetuates misunderstanding and division. That our community be a living witness to unity in diversity.
- That we may be healed in our discriminating nature and change our attitude from rejection to admiration to attain intergenerational solidarity.
- That we may become more and more open to the needs of others and ready to share our giftedness to widen the circle of inclusive relationships.

Our Father

Prayer

God, you are so near! You are Emmanuel, so close to me, so close to us. You had a heart that welcomed everyone irrespective of cultural or age barriers. May we have your heart to feel with, your feet to walk with, your eyes to see with, your ears to hear with, your hands to reach out with, your life to connect with those considered weak and vulnerable in our society. This we ask through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer in preparation for the 15th General Chapter

Closing song: “We are companions on the journey...” or a Hymn to the Blessed Mother