**SOLEM NOVENA, October 20 – 28, 2014**

*‘’ Lord, teach us to pray … (Luke 11,1) ‘’*

With Fr. Henri de Longchamp, Friar Preacher (O.P.)

20. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name

21. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven

22. Give us this day our daily bread

23. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us

24. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

25. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you

26. Blessed are you among women, blessed is the fruit of your womb Jesus

27. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death

28. Saint Jude, pray God for us

**Fr. Henri de Longchamp,**

**Friar Preacher (O.P.)**

**OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN**

The *"Our Father"* is Jesus' own prayer. What is special about it? In his prayer he calls God, Father; however, he uses the familiar name, *Abba*, which means Dad or Daddy. Speaking like this would have angered the Jews because they addressed God as The Lord, as The Most High, as The All-Powerful. Out of respect, the Jews never pronounced the name of God.

Simply by his way of constantly speaking of God as "Father", Jesus allows us to discover the personality of God, and the secret of his love. What idea do you yourself have of God? What feeling, what image, does his name evoke in you? What do you call him? Do you say: *"Father"*?

The Son came to reveal the Father to us, but most Christians relate to Jesus instead of going to Him to whom Jesus is leading us: The Father. Human beings are naturally heathens; they make for themselves a god according to their own image. They are tempted to imagine that God is far away, vaguely displeased, judgmental, indifferent, vindictive, or absent. Perhaps because we do not have much love for him, we think that he does not have much love for us.

Ever since the morning of Easter, the Resurrection Day, the Church is sure that God loves us as much as he loves his own Son. To Mary Magdalene, he said: " …*go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'* " (John 20,17). We can, therefore, address God with the same confidence, with the same conviction that Jesus did.

If we accept to believe that God is the creator of heaven and of earth, and of all human beings, do I dare to believe that I also am a beloved child of God? Too often we forget that we are not Christians because we love God; we are Christians because we believe that God loves us: *"We have known and believe the love that God has for us"* (1 John 4,16). All the words and all the actions of Jesus are a revelation to each one of us that I am loved by God the Father.

*"Our Father who is in heaven"* this is the God who is very different from us, who eludes us and who will always be beyond our understanding; someone whom we can never box in but he invites us to call him by his name, "Father". At our Baptism, God received us and, like Jesus, I can now call him Father, Our Father. *"But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave them power to become children of God"*, says Saint John (John 1,12); *"you are all children of God through faith"*, says Saint Paul (Galatians 3,26).

In this great spiritual family which is the Church, I have sisters and brothers; I am not the only child of God. Your neighbour, your sister, your brother, your spouse, your child, they are all your sisters and brothers in the Faith; each one is the beloved child of the same Father that you are.

**HALLOWED BE THY NAME**

In the Bible, a name signifies who a person is; hence, the name Eve signifies "the Mother of all the living"; Jesus, "The Lord Saves"; Peter, "the solid rock". To discover the name of God, is to approach the mystery of who he is.

During the Last Supper, Jesus said: *"I have made known your name to those you gave me from the world"* (John 17,6); that is, I made known to them who you are. Your name is *Abba*, Daddy - Father.

When we say, *"Hallowed be Thy Name"*, we are asking that God be known for who he is, a God of Love, and that he be known by all who desire to live in the love of God forever - for eternal life. *''And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent"* (John 17,3). Unfortunately, there are people who do not honour the name of God with the respect that is due to God's name.

The best way to show respect for God's name is to live one's life as daughters and sons of God. If, by my words, actions, or by my inertia, I do not behave as a Christian, I flout God's name. If I were to speak to someone and blaspheme, I would be showing not only that I am vulgar, but also that I am a liar. *"Those who say 'I love God', and hate their brothers and sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen"* (1 John 4,20).

When I pray the *Our Father*, do I realize that it is wonderful, but at the same time, challenging? Do I use God's name to sanctify it, to bless him who has both given me life and loved me? Or, do I use the name of God for other reasons? Have I used the name of Jesus Christ to sanctify it, to bless him who has pardoned my sins, or have I used it in other ways? Do I use the name of the Virgin Mary to bless her who intercedes for me today and at the hour of my death, or do I use it otherwise?

This request, *"Hallowed be Thy Name"*, draws us out of our drowsiness and awakens us to the fact that we are really the children of God, and thereby obliged to act as adult Christians.

Do I, by my words and actions, give others a taste for God, the Father of Jesus and my Father? Is my life an invitation to others to know, to love, and to live united with God? Or, do we need to give a reason to this child of six who stated: "A Christian is someone who reads the Bible and a Catholic is someone who uses «bad words»".

**THY KINGDOM COME**

The first words of Jesus' teaching are Good News: *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near,· repent, and believe in the Good News"* (Mark 1,15).

The Jews were awaiting the Messiah to establish a Kingdom of justice and freedom on this earth. Jesus did not come as a powerful person, but he came manifesting humility, gentleness, goodness, mercy The Kingdom of God is not created as an independent country; the kingdom is founded on the faith and love of the disciples of Jesus who work in our world. The revolution that Jesus initiated was the transition from the proud holding of power to the service of one's neighbour.

The first request we make of the Father in saying, *"Thy Kingdom Come"*, is that the spirit of service be found within us, at the deepest level of our heart, of our mind, and of our way of living. Following the example of Jesus, we will place ourselves more and more at the service of God and at the service of our brothers and sisters. The model of royalty is not that of an earthly sovereign; the model is Jesus, who washes the feet of the Apostles and who gives his life for us.

From the day of our Baptism, this new life, this Christian spirit, was placed in our hearts like a seed. Inasmuch as we love and serve God and our neighbour, the reign of God draws closer or it becomes more distant. From the time a few Galileans first proclaimed the Good News, the foundations of the Kingdom of God were laid upon earth. Many mistakes were made throughout the centuries, but at the same time, many people showed great generosity and met with much success. Today, we can look at the work done by the St. Vincent-de-Paul Society, the many soup kitchens, the centres for the sick and the homeless, etc. Let us remember that there are numberless volunteers who dedicate their time and energy to the service of others, our neighbour. Where the gift of self in love exists this is where God reigns; this is where the Kingdom of God is!

Christian love makes our life fruitful, but we have not yet fully lived. This love acts like a seed in the earth which germinates slowly. One thing is certain, if we want the Kingdom of God to come, we must collaborate and act like children of God who are inspired by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Again today, men and women ask Jesus and the Christians: *"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another? Jesus had just then cured many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and had given sight to many who were blind"* (Luke 7,20-21). When, by our actions, we share the love of God with all kinds of poor, the Kingdom of God spreads and reaches out to all who set their sights on the Kingdom.

**THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN**

This is the third request we make to God our Father. We ask ourselves, "What is the will of God?"

For some people, this is simple: they always know what God’s will is; it is simply their own will. Unfortunately, in the name of God, we fought wars, tortured, hacked, and imprisoned people in the Christian countries because we scorned their belief in another religion. On the other hand, there are people who confuse the course of events in life with God’ will; they believe that they are submitting to God’s will by submitting to the natural laws or to the workings trigged by nature, by bad will, or by calculated self-interest.

Jesus tells us: *"I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given to me, …this is the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day" (John 6,38-39).*

Jesus' mission is to draw us out of evil in order that we may live a happy life. Jesus showed us the love of God in his words, actions, and in his whole life: by curing the sick, by announcing the Good News to the poor, by proclaiming mercy to sinners, by exposing hypocrisy, formality, greed, and the thirst for power wherever and whenever he saw it.

God our Father wanted his Son to witness to God's love for us, no matter what the dangers he would have to face. And Jesus chose to obey with love and with conviction to fulfill the will of God in his life and on earth.

Essentially, the will of God for us is that we know how to love people, as we love Jesus. *"Thy will be done"* may be expressed in other words: may your plan of salvation be accomplished in me and around me, Father.

How does one discern the will of God? Everything in my life that leads me to live the Gospel concretely here and now is the will of God for me. There is no magic recipe! To enlighten me, God accepts to dialogue with me; this is prayer. Prayer is a meeting of my will with God's will. If God did not take into account our will, this meeting would be useless. By prayer, my will becomes reconciled with God's will; nothing can prevent my will from coming into line with God's will.

*"I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father"* (John 15,15).

**GIVE US THlS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD**

*"Give us"*. This request is precise: give us what we need to live. The first requests of the Lord's Prayer dealt with the establishment of the Reign of God, and his will; they referred to God himself. This next request relates to our most fundamental need - nourishment.

According to the Bible, God gave the earth to human beings to cultivate, and to have it bear fruit. Should we not work rather than beg God for food? Honestly, who among us expects God to give us bread to eat today, and every day? Without worrying about tomorrow, we have all provided for ourselves, such that we will have food to eat tomorrow, and for many tomorrows.

We ask for bread. In Jesus' time, many people suffered from hunger. Bread was the staple of the peasants' diet; they would have been very happy to add a few fish! In our country, many of us have never known hunger; why then ask God for bread? We ask God for bread for everyone. Jesus does not teach us to say: Give me some bread, but *"Give us our daily bread".*  We do not each pray for ourselves alone but we pray united with all our brothers and sisters of the human family. We all know that people the world over - men, women, children, and the elderly - go hungry. Give them, Lord, the bread, rice, or whatever else they are so desperately in need of.

To pray, is to become involved. What do I do to assure that others will eat? Jesus asks me to pray and to act. Can we forget the parable of the Last Judgment? It is less of a condemnation than it is a cry of suffering, and a call for us to share: *" ... for I was hungry and you gave me no food"* (Matthew 25,31-46).

What can I do for those people who are hungry here at home, and everywhere else in our world? Should not our Governments, the United Nations, Oxfam, etc., take action? Certainly, and all these institutions ask for our help and cooperation. Our smallest gesture is precious. On the day that the miracle of the loaves and the fishes took place, a little boy who had only five loaves and two fishes gave them to Jesus. Jesus accepted them and fed 5,000 people. We should not be afraid to make use of the gifts of simple and humble folk.

For example, if you wanted to collaborate with the St. Vincent-de-Paul Society, remember that the people you visit are not, initially, poor people; first of all, they are women, men, and children who are your brothers and sisters. When you take groceries to them, check to see whether these elderly or disabled people might need to have the garbage put out, or need to have windows washed or a floor mopped; doing something like this may afford them the opportunity to offer you a beverage, this bread of friendship is just as necessary for life as bread made from wheat.

**FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES**

**AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US**

The forgiveness we receive from God is related to our willingness to forgive others. *"For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"* (Matthew 6,14-15). Do we really want to forgive others and to receive forgiveness?

God is Love. There is a multiplicity of ways of offending Love. All sin is related to one sin: egoism. To be egoistic is to pay too much attention to oneself, to forget others, to refuse to love them. It is this refusal to love that offends God.

We often lack clarity about ourselves. As Jesus says: *"You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel*" (Matthew 23,24). Some people will have regret for having distractions in prayer, for their greed, for their bad thoughts; but they forget to ask themselves whether they were scornful of others, proud, racist, harsh, unjust, grasping for money, forgetful of the poor. We can ask ourselves which we would prefer: to be a sinner whom God forgives or a person who thinks of himself as being without sin.

To believe that God loves us is a condition for being forgiven*. "We have known and believe the love that God has for us,"* says St. John. *"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us"* (1 John 4,16 and 10).

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is an encounter with a priest who tells us that God loves us and invites us to believe this. Afterwards, we are able to love others and to forgive them.

Take care not to forget anyone. There is a being who has deceived us and offended us; we are very often so dissatisfied that we hound it with ill feelings such that we would not dare hold against any other person. This person is oneself. There are days when we have had enough of ourselves. We feel discouraged by our mediocrity, weary of our weakness, tired of always falling into the same sins. Jesus tells us to love our neighbour as ourselves. He invites me to love myself just as I try to love my neighbour.

We must ask God to teach us how to forgive, to calm the frustrations of our arrogance, and the deception of our ambition. Let us ask him in all confidence, that the goodness, tenderness, leniency, with which he forgives us will reach such a point in us that we will be freed from the discouragement which accompanies us everywhere and of which we are not even ashamed.

We cannot know the love that God has for us without changing our feelings and our opinions of ourselves. God's forgiveness reconciles us with him, with our neighbour and with ourselves.

**LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL**

Jesus warns us against a great temptation - to renounce our faith in him and to follow him no longer. Matthew wrote his Gospel during the time of the persecutions of Christians; there were martyrs, but there were cowards and renegades as well.

Today, the primary temptation may be to believe that human beings with their intelligence, knowledge, and technology, are self-sufficient with no need of God. There is also the temptation to resign ourselves to what is in the world that surrounds us: evil, suffering, murders, rape, incest, theft, etc.

Our prayer is a call to action and to commitment in order that the spirit of Christ will reign in our world. Using abrupt words, Jesus warns us: *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord', 'Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven*" (Matthew 7,21).

Jesus is aware of the danger that threatens us, that the Evil One, Satan, tries to exploit our weakness with regard to God and to ourselves. In his prayer before the Passion, Jesus beseeches the Father: *"I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one"* (John: 17: 15).

God does not lead us into temptation; he loves us. What parent would dig a hole in order to allow a child to fall into it and hurt him/herself? Saint James makes reference to this very well: *"No one, when tempted, should say: 'I am being tempted by God',' for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it ..."* (James 1,13-14).

Satan, the Evil One, the Villain, is the Anti-Love. Whenever there is hatred, cruelty, injustice, contempt, Satan rejoices. Every time we refuse to communicate, or when we take pleasure in evil, or in suffering, the Devil leaves his mark.

God will never force us to love; he leaves us free. We must choose to live in the Kingdom of God. There are many people who say: "Father, may your will be done". But there are some people to whom God will say: "May your own will be done!" God does not damn us; we incur damnation upon ourselves.

Our pride, the pride that wants us to have no need of God, stands in the way of God's life in us. There is so much in this world that can incite us to tom away from God, to seek ourselves, to want to have mastery of our own lives, to close down our hands and our hearts. On the other hand, all of this can be an occasion to manifest our preference for our God, to abandon ourselves to him, to open ourselves up to him, to deprive ourselves, and to place ourselves back into his hands.

Our Christian life can be difficult, at times. Some days, it seems that we are on the road to our crucifixion. It is, nevertheless, a road of Hope leading towards our own Easter, our own Resurrection. It is a road to everlasting happiness!

Since Vatican Council II, we have often added to the conclusion of the *Our Father* the words which our sisters and brothers of the Orthodox and the Protestant denominations use:

**FOR YOURS IS THE KINGDOM, THE POWER, AND THE GLORY,**

**FOR EVER AND EVER**

By these words, we want to express our joy, and our hope in Jesus Christ, who was victorious over evil and death, and who leads us to the Kingdom of the Father. This conclusion expresses the hope of all Christians who await the return of Christ and the definitive establishment of the Kingdom of God. Then there will be no more tears, no shouting, no pain, and no death. Everyone will be able to come before God as a daughter or son of the Father and hear him say: *"My child... all that is mine is yours"* (Luke 15,31).

**AMEN**

In English, this Hebrew word means: This is true, and I believe!

*Translation and Adaptation by Claire Williams, S.S.A.*

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 **AVE MARIA**

While riding in a bus, or waiting in line for your turn, you may have seen someone fingering a ring with ten little balls on it; this person was probably reciting a decade of "Hail Marys". This prayer, which many of us learned at our mother's knees, is recited, chanted, or sung in all languages and in all countries. Many people, whether they live in or out of the Province of Quebec, have participated in the Novena in preparation for the feast of the Assumption at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Cape, in Cap-de-la-Madeleine, halfway between Montreal and Quebec City. Each day terminates with praying the Rosary in a candle light procession.

Christian people have accepted this prayer as their own. It took centuries for the "Hall Mary" to become the prayer as we know it today. This prayer refers to two events namely, the Annunciation and the Visitation, as recorded by Saint Luke (Luke 1:26-56). These events have always remained within the Christian tradition. This evangelist focuses on Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who allows the Son of God to come into our human history. Saint Luke writes from the faith of the early Christians for whom Jesus was the Son of God, the child of Mary, whom she conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit; he is the Messiah, the Saviour, whose reign would be without end.

**HAlL MARY**

The Gospel tells us that the Angel Gabriel was sent to a village called Nazareth in Galilee. Rather than portraying this scene like religious art of the past, with the Angel kneeling with a lily in his band, I prefer the beautiful scene of the Annunciation in the movie *Jesus of Nazareth*, directed by Franco Zeffirelli. Suddenly the scene is illuminated and Mary appears to be looking at the invisible!

The Angel greets Mary in a special way. He tells her that the time of salvation promised by God has arrived; today is the day long-expected since the time of Adam and Eve! Yes, *"rejoice Mary",* for the salvation of God is here and he loves us.

In the Bible, many women have the name *Miriam;* this Hebrew name signifies "Princess" or "Lady". With her name, *Miriam,* Mary is "Our Lady".

**FULL OF GRACE**

We do not greet Mary with words that we have chosen but with words found in the Gospel. In truth, God alone can tell us who Mary is. The name the Angel of God gave to Mary in the Gospel *(kekharitomenè)* is practically impossible to translate: "Full of Grace", "The preferred one of God", "The AlI Gracious one", "The one so loved by God". We celebrate in Mary the marvels that the love of God accomplished in her life. God bas this same kind of love for all human persons, and he showers this love upon individuals to the extent that they open themselves to receive his Love.

Mary was, and remains, graced with the new life which God gives to all who love him; she is favoured with the beauty that he gives to those in whom he dwells; and she is filled with the transparency of those in whom he lives. With humility, Mary emptied herself of all egoism in order to receive the love that God had for her.

Applied to the Virgin Mary, the expression *full of grace* signifies that God has freely filled her with his love, and it pleases him to contemplate this chosen one who responded with love to so much Love. This is somewhat similar to a lover who' finds his loved one so gracious; and the loved one responds with love to the love of her beloved.

Let us not forget that Mary was not made full of grace as if by magic; she had to say "Yes". As always, God offers us salvation freely, without ever forcing us. This is why Mary's *Yes* at the Annunciation was so important. It showed us that she was willing to let the grace she had received bear fruit.

Mary grew in love of God. This can encourage us to grow. Grace is given to us at our Baptism; it is there like a seed in the soil which will bear a harvest. This grace, this presence of the love of God in our lives, this germ of faith, grows little by little, just as the seed in a Mother's body grows larger day by day. The fetus wants to be its own person. It needs room to grow and develop. This is what happens when grace wants to develop within us.

Perhaps, we are not full of grace because we are concerned with too many other things. If a person eats too many sweets, will he/she be hungry for a substantial meal? The Christian who has everything that is fashionable, can he/she have a hunger for the Lord? If only we really wanted to receive the Lord, we would be immediately gratified.

Unfortunately, oftentimes we adults have not clearly renewed the *Yes* of our Baptism and of our Confirmation. Beneath it all, could it be that our faith is lacking, the faith that alone is able to accept the challenge of the Gospel?

**THE LORD IS WITH YOU**

When Mary heard the Angel Gabriel's greeting, she had reason to be overwhelmed! The mission that God was confiding to her was not a human undertaking; he was inviting her to full collaboration with him in his work. Her mission came with a promise: she was assured that God's grace would be given to her.

Mary's incomparable mission was to become the Mother of God. Thanks to Mary, the Son of God shares our humanity in order that we might be united to his divinity. This is why one of the most beautiful titles that we can give to Mary is, *Mother of God.*

It is a beautiful thing to imitate Mary's spirit of prayer, her humility, her purity ... but it is even more beautiful to imitate her by endeavouring, with her help, to fulfill the greatest purpose of our lives, which is to receive Christ. Once we have received Jesus, we can share him with others. Mary began her sharing by visiting her cousin, Elizabeth, to rejoice with her because God had kept his promise and that salvation was near at hand.

**BLESSED ARE YOU AMONG WOMEN**

Elizabeth gave Mary a famous blessing when she arrived at her cousin's home. *Blessed are you among women!* This blessing signifies that God had filled Mary with everything that anyone could wish for. In faith, Mary had awaited the coming of the Messiah. God acknowledged her faith and, filling her with his love, asked this young woman from Nazareth to be the Mother of our Saviour.

God saw in Mary all that he wanted for humanity. In Eve, God found egoism which drives out faith; in Mary, God found faith which dispels egoism.

Elizabeth understood the unique relationship between faith and love which united Mary with her God. Mary was the woman chosen by God to give the Saviour to the world. The benefits of this blessing fan upon each one of us because Mary shares her Son Jesus, the love of God, with us.

By saying that Mary is blessed among women, we are saying that she is more blessed than any other woman; more blessed than Eve, the mother of all the living, and more blessed than Mary Magdalene, to whom the Resurrected Jesus first appeared and then commissioned to tell the Apostles the Good News that he had risen from the dead.

Mary is more blessed than all other women because of her great faith which never faltered. Mother Teresa of Calcutta was somewhat like her. She was a woman of faith, a woman blessed by God, a woman whose faith was known and felt during the end times of the 20th century, and whose example will continue into the 21st century.

*All generations shall call (Mary) blessed*, because she has revealed to us that faith and love are fruitful. We recall both the woman in the Gospel who, after having listened to Jesus, cried out, *Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!* and Jesus who said, *Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!* (Luke 11,27). Jesus was not looking down on his Mother; on the contrary, he was clearly showing that she was a fulfilled woman. She was fruitful not only in the flesh, but also in her whole life and being because of her union with God. Our lives can be fulfilled and fruitful by our union with God just as Mary's was, as Mother Teresa's was, and as the lives of all the saints were.

**BLESSED IS THE FRUIT OF YOUR WOMB, JESUS**

At the Annunciation, the Angel Gabriel revealed the name *Jesus,* which means *God Saves.* Hence, the name *Jesus* signifies that the Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit and bon of the Virgin Mary, came to accomplish the mission of salvation. From what does Jesus save us? He saves us from eternal death by offering us the possibility of sharing in the life and the love of God now, and throughout all eternity. Jesus is blessed and filled with the love of the Father, and we share in this blessing for the remission of our sins.

In our salutation to Mary, we say that Jesus is the fruit of Mary's womb. Our Saviour, Jesus, is the Christ, a man from Nazareth who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, died and rose again. He is seated at the right band of the Father and will come to judge the living and the dead. The expression *the fruit of your womb* reflects the physical and biological role of a mother to carry her child in her womb. It is for this reason that the Church selected March 25th for the feast of the Annunciation, nine months before the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day.

Our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at the same time the son of a Jewish maiden and the fruit of her womb. Just as a tree gives its sap to nourish the fruit, Mary gave her blood to the Son of God, who later would shed it on the Cross for the remission of sin.

**HOLY MARY, MOTHER OF GOD**

The first part of this prayer is above all a prayer of praise, inspired by words of Scripture. Christian people through the centuries added prayerful thoughts and the second part of the *Hail Mary* developed into the prayer as we know it today.

*Holy Mary, Mother of God.* This five-word expression names *God* and *Mary.* This may help us to understand that holiness means being in union with God. In the Book of Leviticus we read, *You shall he holy, for I the Lord your God am holy* (19,2); *You shall he holy to me; for the Lord am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to he mine* (20,26).

Paul, in his writings to the Christian community, does not simply say, *Greetings to the Christian Community of* ... , but *To the saints who are in Rome, Corinth, Ephesus,...* . By our Baptism, we were consecrated by God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and we are sanctified for God. If we have been sanctified, we are called to become ever more holy by loving God and our neighbour just as Jesus bas invited us to do.

Mary is the greatest of all the saints and the most ordinary, because she did only what she was called upon to do each day. She is like us, and we can be like her by being faithful to the *yes* of our Baptism and Confirmation, just as she was faithful to her *YES* at the Annunciation. This presupposes much perseverance but the reward is great! Every day we can renew our *yes* to God; one way of doing so is by using Mary's words, *Here am l, the servant of the Lord* (Luke 1,38). What a beautiful example of how one can attain holiness, a road that is accessible to all!

Mary's life demonstrates that in as much as we are close to Jesus, and in as much as Jesus is actively present in our lives, to this same extent we are able to make great strides on the road to holiness. RecaIl the words of Jesus, *Why do you call me 'Lord. Lord’* *and do not do what I tell you?* (Luke 6,46). Also, *My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it* (Luke 8,21).

**PRAY FOR US, SINNERS**

We should not hesitate to have confidence in the Blessed Virgin Mary and to caIl upon her to intercede for us. On the Cross, Jesus confided us to his Mother and gave Mary to us to be our Mother. She interceded with her Son at the marriage feast of Cana to gladden the hearts of the guests. Why would she not do the same for us, her children, her sinful children!

We are aIl sinners. It is part of our daily reality when we experience more egoism than faith, when we do our own will rather than God's will, when we love our neighbour less than we love ourselves. It is for sinners that Jesus said, *Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance* (Luke 5,31-32). A sick person seeks the help of a physician to regain his/her health. We often flee from reality rather than face it. We must turn to Jesus to be cured of the effects of sin in our lives. We, "poor sinners", are like the "poor of Yahweh", those men and women of the Bible - the humble folk - who learned through the trials of life and the experience of sin to place their full trust in God alone, who is aIl merciful. .

Pray for us, Mary, pray with us! Help your children to walk with Jesus on the road that leads to the Father.

Everyone can say this prayer to Mary! We have more difficulty saying *Your will be done* because the will of God is often very difficult to accept in our lives, especially when we have great trials to surmount. It is not always easy for us to say, *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us,* because of the great difficulty we so often have to pardon others who have affronted us. However, there is no one who cannot say, *Pray for us, sinners.* Those who recognize themselves as sinners and turn to Mary with confidence are on the road to conversion. Mary receives us with one hand and with the other, leads us to Jesus.

**NOW, AND AT THE HOUR OF OUR DEATH**

There are two important moments in life: the present moment, and the moment of death. Just as fabric is woven with many threads, our lives are woven with many moments which pass and never return. What is important is not yesterday for it lies in the past; nor is tomorrow, for it lies in the future. What is important is the present moment which God calls us to make holy. He invites us to weave our day by living and loving in the same manner as Jesus does.

When we say, *Pray for us now,* we can make known to Mary all our needs. We might be in need of money on one day; on the next, it might be for the needs of a daughter, or a grandchild; still on another day, for the success of a national or international event. Let us take the time to stop, and to ask for strength and courage, light and wisdom, perseverance and confidence, as we live each day.

The day will come when the time of our death will be at hand. This will be the hour of truth; a moment when we will meet our merciful God in whom we have placed our trust. We prepare for this hour by the holiness of our daily lives.

We pray to the Blessed Virgin Mary requesting that she help us to be ready for the hour of our death. We ask her to be present with us, just as she was with Jesus. With Mary, we will not be alone. She will accompany us and pray for us. Even if we do not have the strength to pray, our Blessed Mother Mary will not abandon us who have prayed to her during our lives asking, that she be with us *at the hour of our death.*

When we ask Mary to accompany us during our lives, and allow her to teach us to meditate on the mysteries of the Rosary, the mysteries of our salvation, we may feel sure that Mary's peaceful presence will be with us at the hour of our death. By trying to make holy every *moment* of our life, we will not fear the *moment* of our death.

**AMEN**

The *Amen* does not indicate the end of a prayer. It is an act of faith. *Amen* means "Yes, it is true!", I believe.

The *Hail Mary* is a prayer of praise and of trust. It is not primarly a prayer of petition but, rather, a framework in which everyone, according to the circumstances of their lives and the call of the Holy Spirit, make their requests, give thanks, and contemplate the mysteries, to the rhythm of the *Aves.*

This prayer is one of praise of God who has done marvellous things in the history of salvation, in the life of Mary, and even today, in the life of so many believers who have chosen to live and to love as the Lord Jesus has invited all of us to do.

We place our confidence in the Blessed Virgin Mary, trusting that she will lead us to Jesus, our Saviour. God wanted Mary to be a means of his coming to us.

We ask our Mother Mary to grant that we, who have fingered the Rosary and contemplated the mysteries, may dwell forever in the great Communion of the Saints!

*Translation and Adaptation by Claire Williams, S.S.A.*