

Lesson #8

The Providence of God

The Grace I am seeking . . .

To understand the Providence of God in our everyday lives.

Before each prayer session:

O Holy Spirit, fill me with Yourself; fill me with love. Help me to feel loved by the Father and by Jesus. Help me to feel loved by my Associates. Set me on fire with love. Teach me how to love the Father and Jesus. Teach me to love my Associates and my neighbors. As you taught the first Apostles at Pentecost to communicate the love of God to all persons, teach me to be the apostle I have been called to be. Let me bring the message of the Father's love and Jesus' love to all, but especially to those who really do not know You, who do not feel loved. Help me, O Holy Spirit of love, to be an apostle of love. Amen.

After each prayer session:

Jesus, spark me with your Holy Spirit and grant that I may never merit the condemnation of the lukewarm, whom You have declared You will vomit from Your mouth. Fire me with a passion for life, and a passion for loving You, my brothers and sisters, and all of creation. Holy Spirit, completely fill me as You filled my brother Jesus. Produce in me the same mind that was in Jesus so that I, like Him, will be consumed with a passion for the will of His Father and my Father. Amen.

Missionary Cenacle

Practice and Devotion

It's time to go back and review! In the *Practice and Devotion* section of Lesson #4, we looked at what Father Judge called a **practice**. The **practice** is a particular virtue or character quality we need to grow in to be better apostles. Here's a checklist of the steps you need to look at for growing in virtue according to Father Judge and St. Vincent de Paul. Peace!

1. Take time to examine your life, especially your weaknesses and failings.

Yes _____ No _____ My principal weakness or failing is _____

2. Choose a virtue that will best help you to grow in this area.

Yes _____ No _____ Still uncertain _____ My practice or the virtue I
need to grow in is _____

3. Talk to your spiritual director or a trustworthy spiritual friend about your choice.

I have a spiritual director: Yes _____ No _____

I'm in the process of getting a spiritual director _____

I've spoken to my spiritual director or a good spiritual friend about my practice:

Yes _____ No _____ Will do it by _____

4. Daily do an examination of conscience on this virtue.

Yes _____ No _____ Sometimes _____ How often? _____

5. Once a week, on Tuesdays, reflect and pray about the pursuit of this chosen virtue.

Yes _____ No _____ Sometimes _____ How often? _____

Introduction

“Providence” underlies much of Christian spirituality even if the word itself may not be that common. Simply stated, it is the Judaeo-Christian belief that there is but one God and that the authority and power of that one God is absolute. In other words, no event or circumstance of life occurs apart from the knowledge and wisdom of God. God is not some far distant Omnipotent One who sets the creation spinning and then sits back to watch the show. No, in both the Old and the New Testament it is clear that God is absolutely present to every moment of creation from the very beginning. God’s “providence” watches over and “provides” for all God’s beloved sons and daughters. Jesus only deepens this understanding of God’s absolute presence to and care for creation as He reminds us that not a “sparrow . . . falls to the ground without your Father knowing . . . Every hair on your head has been counted” (*Matthew 10:29-30*).

Father Judge, following in the spiritual tradition of St. Vincent de Paul, strongly believed in and promoted this understanding of the Providence of God. God’s presence in the creation, guiding all the events of human society, drawing good even out of the most gruesome evil, leading the believer and missionary in the big and little decisions of life: this was the reality of Providence for Father Judge. It formed the very basis of his missionary vision since all the baptized -- and the Cenacle Lay Missionaries in a special way -- were called to be missionaries “in the providence of their everyday lives.”

This month we will prayerfully examine this reality of the “Providence of God.” As you pray, ask the Holy Spirit to give you a very personal and intimate sense of God’s presence in your daily life. Not just in the “big” moments or the “holy” moments but even more importantly in the seemingly small and apparently “unimportant” times of your daily life. God is absolutely present there also. As you confront the problem of evil and God’s Providence, seek the Light of the Holy Spirit to better comprehend the mystery of evil in the light of God’s power, love, and care. These are questions and problems that women and men of faith have struggled with from the very beginning of sacred history. Enter into this history, pray, and -- as the Holy Spirit instructs your heart -- be ready to share this “Good News” of God’s providential love and care with everyone you meet. Peace!

Process for Daily Prayer

▮ Read each passage once slowly, then reread it. Underline or mark any phrases or ideas that strike you.

▮ Think about what you've read. What attracts, challenges, excites, or upsets you? Perhaps the questions below can help you in your reflection.

▮ Talk to God about it. Whatever is on your heart -- concerns, anger, hopes, dreams, joy, thanksgiving -- open it up to God.

▮ Rest a while and let God speak to you in the quiet.

WEEK I

Weekend Reflection: **“My Vocation is Love”**

[St. Therese of Lisieux -- the “Little Flower” -- was born on January 2, 1873. She entered the Carmelite convent of Lisieux at the age of 15 and -- after just nine brief years -- died on September 30, 1897 at the age of 24. She did nothing “extraordinary” during her life, nothing of which anyone took particular notice. Yet in 1930 she was canonized a saint and declared Patroness of the Missions! By the late 1990s she was named by Pope John Paul II as one of only three female “Doctors of the Church”: Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, and Therese of Lisieux. Her spiritual doctrine deeply influenced Father Judge. It shows the possibility of what love can do in whatever circumstances of life God places us. Following is a excerpt from the writings of St. Therese regarding her own discovery of her particular vocation in the Church: how God was calling her to “mission” in the particular circumstances and events of her daily life.]

[In a dialogue with Jesus, Therese writes:] “To be Your Spouse, to be a Carmelite, and by my union with You to be the Mother of souls, should not this suffice me? And yet it is no so. No doubt, these three privileges sum up my true vocation: Carmelite, Spouse, Mother, and yet I feel within me other vocations. I feel the vocation of the Warrior, the Priest, the Apostle, the Doctor, the Martyr. Finally, I feel the need and the desire of carrying out the most heroic deeds for You, O Jesus. I feel within my soul the courage of the Crusader, the Papal Guard, and I would want to die on the field of battle in defense of the Church.

“I feel in me the vocation of the Priest. With what love, O Jesus, I would carry You in my hands when, at my voice, You would come down from heaven. And with what love would I give You to souls! But alas! while desiring to be a Priest, I admire and envy the humility of St. Francis of Assisi and I feel the vocation of imitating him in refusing the sublime dignity of the Priesthood.

“O Jesus, my Love, my Life, how can I combine these contrasts? How can I realize the desires of my poor little soul?

“Ah! In spite of my littleness, I would like to enlighten souls as did the Prophets and the Doctors. I have the vocation of the Apostle. I would like to travel over the whole earth to preach Your Name and to plant Your glorious Cross on infidel soil. But O my Beloved, one mission alone would not be sufficient for me. I would want to preach the Gospel on all the five continents simultaneously and even to the most remote isles. I would be a missionary, not for a few years only but from the beginning of creation until the consummation of the ages. But above

all, O my Beloved Savior, I would shed my blood for You even to the very last drop. . . .

“O my Jesus! What is your answer to my follies? Is there a soul more little, more powerless than mine? Nevertheless even because of my weakness, it has pleased You, O Lord, to grant my little childish desires and You desire, today, to grant other desires that are greater than the universe ‘

“Considering the mystical body of the Church, . . . I desired to see myself in them all. Charity gave me the key to my vocation. I understood that if the Church had a body composed of different members, the most necessary and most noble of all could not be lacking to it, and so I understood that the Church *had a Heart and that this Heart was BURNING WITH LOVE. I understood it was Love alone* that made the Church’s members act, that if *Love* ever became extinct, apostles would not preach the Gospel and martyrs would not shed their blood. I understood that LOVE COMPRISED ALL VOCATIONS, THAT LOVE WAS EVERYTHING, THAT IT EMBRACED ALL TIMES AND PLACES . . . IN A WORD, THAT IT WAS ETERNAL!

“Then, in the excess of my delirious joy, I cried out: O Jesus, my Love . . . my *vocation*, at last I have found it MY VOCATION IS LOVE!

“Yes, I have found my place in the Church and it is You, O my God, who have given me this place; in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be *Love*. Thus I shall be everything, and thus my dream will be realized.”¹

As you consider the “providence of your daily life,” how would you describe your “vocation”? Look beyond, as St. Therese did, the outer roles you fulfill -- teacher, business person, parent, student -- to the deeper meaning of your life. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you discover what is the essence or the heart of your call as a person. This is the core of the “providence of your everyday life.”

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

¹Therese of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul: the Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux*, trans. John Clarke, O.C.D. (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1975) 193-194.

WEEK I

Monday: “Ordinary things extraordinarily well”

From Father Judge:

“The Spirit of God has led us . . . to magnify God in this great Saint [Therese of Lisieux]. . . to study and adore the infinite love and wisdom and power and goodness of the Divine Majesty in the creation of this prodigy of holiness. We . . . felicitate her upon the grace she has received from the Most High, and we must not pass the precious opportunity of placing our petitions before this favorite of Heaven . . .

“I would suggest that in her honor we do the ordinary things well. In this did she become a saint, that she did the ordinary things extraordinarily well. Her little way, as she called it . . . The ordinary things are, for example, our getting up in the morning, our morning prayers, the different exercises and duties of the day, our employments . . . our recreations [and] companionship. Let us determine within ourselves to sanctify these to a high degree; by avoiding all that is sinful, by avoiding anything that, even though not sinful, may be at least trifling and savoring of those things that do not make for God’s honor and glory.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p.242)

From the Word of God:

“I Yahweh, my heart is not haughty, I do not set my sights too high. I have taken no part in great affairs, in wonders beyond my scope.² No, I hold myself in quiet and silence, like a little child in its mother’s arms, like a little child, so I keep myself.³ Let Israel hope in Yahweh henceforth and for ever.” (*Psalm 131:1-3*)

How do you look on the daily events of your life, your “daily routine”? Exciting, boring, challenging, tedious? Do you consciously make a connection between these events and your relationship to God? If so, in what way -- how do you make the connection?

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

Tuesday: “The ‘Little Way’”

From Father Judge:

“This was the aspiration of St. Therese’s life: God’s Will. She ever dwelt in the thought of Him, doing His will and giving Him pleasure. Sacrifice became the search of her life. Her constant desire was to suffer for God. All this came out of love. This is the Little Way of which we hear so much. God’s love actuating us, we too, can practice her Little Way. We have the same obligation to God as she. If there be a difference it is only of generosity and the giving of self. We too must love God with our whole strength, with our whole heart . . . with our whole soul and with our whole mind.

“She is a most genial, sunshiny saint. We must imitate her in her childlike faith, and trust, and love. She is a saint of our own day. There is a delightful coincidence here, at touching providence. . . . Her day was our day. She touched those things that we touch. . . . Surely this is great encouragement of God’s sweet way of telling us that since this saint is so near to us, the way of perfection is near also. All we need to do is to sacrifice, to surrender self to love of God and our neighbor.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 243)

From the Word of God:

“**25** And now a lawyer stood up and, to test him, asked, ‘Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’**26** He said to him, ‘What is written in the Law? What is your reading of it?’**27** He replied, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.’ **28** Jesus said to him, ‘You have answered right, do this and life is yours.’” (*Luke 10:25-28*)

Is your life very complicated? If so, what are the things that complicate it? St. Therese presents us what she called the “Little Way” -- an uncomplicated life with a simple goal: love the Lord God with “all your heart, soul, and strength;” be willing to sacrifice anything necessary to live out this commitment. How could the daily circumstances of your life become less “complicated”? Ask St. Therese to help you understand the implications of her Gospel teachings for your daily life.

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

Wednesday: “Become as little children”

From Father Judge:

“Reverentially peer into the mind of Jesus as he set that child in the midst of the Apostles and said, ‘Unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven’ (*Matthew 18:31*). Ask yourself what it was that Jesus wished to teach you and me and all of us. He has set a child in our midst . . . the Little Flower of Jesus. That is all the Little Flower . . . was with Jesus . . . a little child.

“She acted toward Him as a child, she loved Him as a child, she ever took a child’s view of god. She was never anything else in her love and devotion. We must be converted and become like unto her, if we are to enter the kingdom of heaven and be gathered around her. We are to please God and win her favor by imitation of her little way. Her little way, indeed, to many . . . will be a great and hard way because we will not be converted, because we will not become as little children. . . .” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 242)

From the Word of God:

“**1** At this time the disciples came to Jesus and said, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?’ **2** So he called a little child to him whom he set among them. **3** Then he said, ‘In truth I tell you, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven. **4** And so, the one who makes himself as little as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven..” (*Matthew 18:1-4*)

Picture yourself in a car with Jesus. As you go around together to the various activities of your daily life, who’s driving? Who should be? What can you do to make sure that the right person is behind the steering wheel of your life?

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

Thursday: “Submissive . . . to Christ”

From Father Judge:

“[St. Therese of Lisieux] was generous to God . . . She refused Him nothing; for His sake she overcame every manifestation of self and let it be submissive to the yoke of Christ. Temper, anger, disdain, she controlled. Likes and antipathies, attractions and disgusts, she ordered by charity’s Christlike rule. Resentments, spites, offended pride and feelings, she suppressed. Any groaning of wayward nature was stifled in its first breath. She was cast out that God might come into her heart and take full possession . . .

“Whoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, he is great in the Kingdom of Heaven’ (*Matthew 18:4*) . . . Apply these words of our divine Lord. First of all, ask ourselves: In our dealing with God are we simple, are we humble? Our fundamental relations with God are these. The thought is very simple. He is our creator. He is everything. He has everything. He knows everything. He wants for nothing. He is infinitely self-sufficient. He is our God, our Creator. We are His creatures. We are nothing, having nothing of ourselves. These truths are the basis of the sanctity of the Little Flower of Jesus. She knew well these fundamental relations with God and acted upon them.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 242)

From the Word of God:

1 Then from the heart of the tempest Yahweh gave Job his answer. He said:**2** Who is this, obscuring my intentions with his ignorant words?**3** Brace yourself like a fighter; I am going to ask the questions, and you are to inform me!**4** Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundations? Tell me, since you are so well-informed!**5** Who decided its dimensions, do you know? Or who stretched the measuring line across it?**6** What supports its pillars at their bases? Who laid its cornerstone**7** to the joyful concert of the morning stars and unanimous acclaim of the sons of God? . . . **12** Have you ever in your life given orders to the morning or sent the dawn to its post,**13** to grasp the earth by its edges and shake the wicked out of it?**14** She turns it as red as a clay seal, she tints it as though it were a dress,**15** stealing the light from evil-doers and breaking the arm raised to strike.**16** Have you been right down to the sources of the sea and walked about at the bottom of the Abyss?**17** Have you been shown the gates of Death, have you seen the janitors of the Shadow dark as death?**18** Have you an inkling of the extent of the earth? Tell me all about it if you have!**19** Which is the way to the home of the Light, and where does darkness live?—**20** You could then show them the way to their proper places, you could put them on the path home again!**21** If you do know, you must have been born when they were, you must be very old by now!” (*Job 38:1-7,12-21*)

Take a while today to really “look around.” Notice the sky, the stars, the sun, trees, the weather conditions. Listen to the song of birds, the sounds of voices. Where did all this come from? How much do you really know or understand about any of it? On a scale of 1 to 100, how much do you really feel that God is totally in control of, the “Lord” of creation? How much, consciously or unconsciously, do you see yourself as “in control”? Let the Holy Spirit teach you the proper understanding of the circumstances of your daily life.

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

Friday: “Complete abandonment”

From Father Judge:

“The mystery of [St. Therese’s] holiness has been made known. Her sanctity was hidden. . . . It was the Way of Spiritual Childhood. Benedict XV, in his discourse on the heroicity of the virtues of our beloved Saint, said, ‘Spiritual childhood is the outgrowth of trust in God and complete abandonment to Him.’ St. Hilary says, ‘Children follow father and love mother; they wish no ill, seek no wealth; they are neither haughty nor hateful; they are truthful and believing. We must, therefore, return to the simplicity of the child.’

“Pride, self-sufficiency, or attempting by natural means to reach a supernatural end, or false ideas of self-reliance in peril and temptation, have no place in spiritual childhood. Quite the opposite, spiritual childhood flowers in a lively faith in God, in a consideration of his goodness and love and mercy. It flies to Him in danger and confidently looks to His kind providence for grace ever to do His holy will and avoid all that is displeasing to Him.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 241)

From the Word of God:

“1 If Yahweh does not build a house in vain do its builders toil. If Yahweh does not guard a city in vain does its guard keep watch.2 In vain you get up earlier, and put off going to bed, sweating to make a living, since it is he who provides for his beloved as they sleep.3 Sons are a birthright from Yahweh, children are a reward from him.4 Like arrows in a warrior’s hand are the sons you father when young.5 How blessed is the man who has filled his quiver with them; in dispute with his enemies at the city gate he will not be worsted.” (*Psalms 127:1-5*)

Would you describe yourself as “self-sufficient,” “self-reliant”? Don’t we often see these as positive qualities? In what way? What might be the drawbacks of these qualities of character? Why would Father Judge say that these qualities are incompatible with “spiritual childhood”? Read Psalm 127 for clues to this paradox .

Write down your reflections briefly here:

WEEK II

Weekend Reflection: “Why stand here idle all day?”

*[As lay missionaries, the Holy Father invites us in his encyclical *Christifideles laici* -- The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People -- to take responsibility for our faith. We have to be attentive to the pressing needs of the world today -- the “providence of everyday life” -- to best know how to respond to God's call to mission.]*

“3. The basic meaning of this synod and the most precious fruit desired as a result of it is the lay faithful's hearkening to the call of Christ the Lord to work in His vineyard, to take an active, conscientious and responsible part in the mission of the Church in this great moment in history, made especially dramatic by occurring on the threshold of the third millennium.

A new state of affairs today both in the Church and in social, economic, political and cultural life, calls with a particular urgency for the action of the lay faithful. If lack of commitment is always unacceptable, the present time renders it even more so. It is not permissible for anyone to remain idle. . . . Since the work that awaits everyone in the vineyard of the Lord is so great, there is no place for idleness. . . .

The voice of the Lord clearly resounds in the depths of each of Christ's followers, who through faith and the sacraments of Christian initiation is made like to Jesus Christ, is incorporated as a living member in the Church and has an active part in her mission of salvation. The voice of the Lord also comes to be heard through the historic events of the Church and humanity, as the council reminds us: "The People of God believes that it is led by the Spirit of the Lord, who fills the whole world. Moved by this faith it tries to discern authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the events, the needs and the longings which it shares with other people of our time. For faith throws a new light on all things and makes known the full ideal to which God has called each individual, and thus guides the mind toward solutions which are fully human." [6]

It is necessary, then, to keep a watchful eye on this our world, with its problems and values, its unrest and hopes, its defeats and triumphs: a world whose economic, social, political and cultural affairs pose problems and grave difficulties in light of the description provided by the council in the pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*. [7] This, then, is the vineyard; this is the field in which the faithful are called to fulfill their mission. Jesus wants them, as He wants all His disciples, to be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (cf. Mt 5:13- 14). But what is the actual state of affairs of the "earth" and the "world," for which Christians ought to be "salt" and "light"? The variety of situations and problems that exist in our world is indeed great and rapidly changing. . . .

Secularism and the Need for Religion. 4. How can one not notice the ever-growing existence of religious indifference and atheism in its more varied forms, particularly in its perhaps most widespread form of secularism? Adversely affected by the impressive triumphs of continuing scientific and technological development and above all fascinated by a very old and yet new temptation, namely, that of wishing to become like God (cf. Gen 3:5) through the use of a liberty without bounds, individuals cut the religious roots that are in their hearts; they forget God, or simply retain Him without meaning in their lives, or outrightly reject Him, and begin to adore various "idols" of the contemporary world. . . . Human longing and the need for religion, however, are not able to be totally extinguished. When persons in conscience have the courage to face the more serious questions of human existence--particularly questions related to the purpose of life, to suffering and to dying--they are unable to avoid making their own the words of truth uttered by St. Augustine: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you. . . ." [9]

The Human Person: A Dignity Violated and Exalted 5. We furthermore call to mind the violations to which the human person is subjected. When the individual is not recognized and loved in the person's dignity as the living image of God (cf. Gen 1:26), the human being is exposed to more humiliating and degrading forms of "manipulation" that most assuredly reduce the individual to a slavery to those who are stronger. "Those who are stronger" can take a variety of names: an ideology, economic power, political and inhumane systems, scientific technocracy or the intrusiveness of the mass media. Once again we find ourselves before many persons, our sisters and brothers, whose fundamental rights are being violated But the sacredness of the human person cannot be obliterated no matter how often it is devalued and violated because it has its unshakable foundation in God as Creator and Father. The sacredness of the person always keeps returning again and again. . . .

Conflict and Peace. 6. Finally, we are unable to overlook another phenomenon that is quite evident in present-day humanity: perhaps as never before in history, humanity is daily buffeted by conflict. . . . [which] takes the form of violence, of terrorism and of war. Once again, but with enormously widespread proportions, diverse sectors of humanity today, wishing to show their "omnipotence," renew the futile experience of constructing the "Tower of Babel" (cf. Gen 11:1-9), which spreads confusion, struggle, disintegration and oppression. The human family is thus in itself dramatically convulsed and wounded. On the other hand, totally unsuppressible is that human longing experienced by individuals and whole peoples for the inestimable good of peace in justice.

The Holy Father writes that it is necessary "to keep a watchful eye on this our world, with its problems and values, its unrest and hopes, its defeats and triumphs." He then mentions certain issues that he is aware of. As you "keep a watchful eye" on your daily world -- "the providence of your everyday life" -- what are the problems and values, the unrest and hopes, the defeats and triumphs you see there? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to see all this more clearly. Make a list, and then ask the Spirit to show you what God is calling you to do in these circumstances.

▶ Write down your reflections briefly here:

WEEK II

Monday: Wasting God's Grace or not?

From Father Judge:

“By the grace of God, I am what I am; and his grace in me hath not been void’ (*1 Corinthians 15:10*). Now I wonder what your impressions are of that Epistle . . . What effect have those words had upon you? I know this. I know that you have received graces above other [men and] women . . . I know that some of you have received extraordinary graces. Now I wonder, are those graces becoming void, inoperative, no use?

“I do not wish to be your judge in this matter. I pass no judgment at all for I wish to be your advocate before God. Therefore, if you are chastened, if you are corrected, if you are admonished, it is that I may be your advocate later on and not your judge. . . . I know of these graces . . . that you have . . . You must ask yourselves whether you are making these graces void or not.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 247)

From the Word of God:

“**3** The tradition I handed on to you in the first place, a tradition which I had myself received, was that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures;**4** and that he was buried; and that on the third day, he was raised to life, in accordance with the scriptures;**5** and that he appeared to Cephas; and later to the Twelve;**6** and next he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still with us, though some have fallen asleep;**7** then he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles.**8** Last of all he appeared to me too, as though I was a child born abnormally.**9** For I am the least of the apostles and am not really fit to be called an apostle, because I had been persecuting the Church of God;**10** but what I am now, I am through the grace of God, and the grace which was given to me has not been wasted. Indeed, I have worked harder than all the others—not I, but the grace of God which is with me.**11** Anyway, whether it was they or I, this is what we preach and what you believed.” (*1 Corinthians 15:3-11*)

“The grace which has been given to me has not been wasted.” Can you say that about yourself? What are the graces that are given to you in your daily life? Try to name several “daily” graces that are yours: opportunities that present themselves to you. How do you deal with these graces? Are they “wasted” or are they put to good use for the glory of God and the service of others? Be as specific and personal with these questions as you can be.

Write down your reflections briefly here:

Tuesday: “The daily battle”

From Father Judge:

“How much have you heard about the work of personal sanctification and what does it all mean to you? How happy you should be when you have been told that the Will of God for you is the highest expressed Will of God. God has made manifest His Will to His creatures . . . but that is a varied Will. He does not exact as much from some as from others. But the Will of God for you, my dear children, exacts the highest tribute that a creature can pay its God.

“How little do we thank the good God for His graces! How little do we appreciate them. Sometimes we do feel that battle going on, that struggle within us between our higher and our lower nature, hours of good and hours of evil -- the struggle between the spirit and the flesh. Sometimes these graces exasperate us. We haven’t the conscience, the bravery to explain these graces. And sometimes we feel there is no grace at all within us. Then there comes the restrained griding of conscience. Then comes the beating back of the higher powers. There are moments when pride rises in magnificent revolt, when our outraged feelings become dominant. . . . We are in temptation and are being proved at that moment. These moments show us the necessity of watching and praying always. These moments prove to us the existence of grace within us. If we did not have that grace, it would not be difficult to do the wrong thing. If we had gotten used to doing the wrong thing, conscience would have been dead. . . .”
(Missionary Cenacle Meditations, p. 247)

From the Word of God:

“³²They came to a plot of land called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, ‘Stay here while I pray.’³³Then he took Peter and James and John with him.³⁴And he began to feel terror and anguish. And he said to them, ‘My soul is sorrowful to the point of death. Wait here, and stay awake.’³⁵And going on a little further he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, this hour might pass him by.³⁶‘Abba, Father!’ he said, ‘For you everything is possible. Take this cup away from me. But let it be as you, not I, would have it.’³⁷He came back and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, ‘Simon, are you asleep? Had you not the strength to stay awake one hour?’³⁸Stay awake and pray not to be put to the test. The spirit is willing enough, but human nature is weak.’³⁹Again he went away and prayed, saying the same words.⁴⁰And once more he came back and found them sleeping, their eyes were so heavy; and they could find no answer for him.⁴¹He came back a third time and said to them, ‘You can sleep on now and have your rest. It is all over. The hour has come. Now the Son of man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners.’⁴²Get up! Let us go! My betrayer is not far away.’ *(Mark 14:32-42)*

What are the most difficult battles in the providence of your daily life? The battles with self, with others, with the spirit of evil, with injustices? What is the nature of these battles: who are the participants and how do they usually turn out? As you go about waging these battles, whose power are you most relying on? What are your principal weapons in these battles? When have you been conscious of grace working in you to do battle for you? How do you respond to those graces: with gratitude or indifference?

Write down your reflections briefly here:

Wednesday: Daily listening

From Father Judge:

“By the grace of God, I am what I am: and his grace in me hath not been void’ (*I Corinthians 15:10*). You read that Epistle That Epistle must have appealed to you with a very personal meaning. When you see that word ‘Epistle,’ just open your heart a little bit more because there may be a personal message to you. Of course, St. Paul spoke of himself and of the other Apostles, but there is an implied meaning which you may appropriate, because the great grace they had so perfectly, and what concerns them, in some manner concerns you also

“He tells us . . . that by the grace of God he was what he was. By the grace of God; and then he says, ‘that grace in me hath not been void.’ He did not lose it. He cooperated with that grace. Now it seems to me, my dear children, this is the message for us today Let us assume that Epistle is just for me, just for you.

“When you listen, that is the voice of the Holy Spirit, the voice of Jesus speaking. It is for me, first of all. Of all creatures in the world, I am the one; I am the one that Heaven has spoke to this morning.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 245)

From the Word of God:

“⁴Lord Yahweh has given me a disciple’s tongue, for me to know how to give a word of comfort to the weary. Morning by morning he makes my ear alert to listen like a disciple.⁵Lord Yahweh has opened my ear and I have not resisted, I have not turned away.⁶I have offered my back to those who struck me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; I have not turned my face away from insult and spitting.⁷Lord Yahweh comes to my help, this is why insult has not touched me, this is why I have set my face like flint and know that I shall not be put to shame.⁸He who grants me saving justice is near! Who will bring a case against me? Let us appear in court together! Who has a case against me? Let him approach me!⁹Look, Lord Yahweh is coming to my help! Who dares condemn me? Look at them, all falling apart like moth-eaten clothes!¹⁰Which of you fears Yahweh and listens to his servant’s voice? Which of you walks in darkness and sees no light? Let him trust in the name of Yahweh and lean on his God!¹¹Look, all you who light a fire and arm yourselves with firebrands, walk by the light of your fire and the firebrands you have kindled! This is what you will get from me: you will lie down in torment!” (*Isaiah 50:4-11*)

To really “hear the Word of the Lord” as we go about our daily lives, we need to learn to listen. This “listening” is the first quality of a disciple and an apostle. How do you listen? Are you, in general, a good listener? How are you at “listening” in prayer? Do you take at least 20 minutes each day to be with God, to open your heart to God and listen to God’s Word penetrate your mind and heart? If so, as the Holy Spirit to show you how you can better listen. If not, set a specific time each day -- preferably earlier in the day -- when you can “listen” to God in prayer. It’s the only way you will recognize God as God comes to you in the circumstances and events of your daily life.

Write down your reflections briefly here:

Thursday: “Half-hearted”

From Father Judge:

“As that voice penetrates my ears, into my conscience, the thought comes to me: What about the grace that I have received? Can I say with St. Paul that this grace has not been void? I am, by the grace of God, what I am, but ‘the grace of God has not been void.’ Can I say that? I hesitate to say that; I dare not say it. With confusion and shame I must admit I cannot say it, ‘It has not been void.’ I wish I could say that. I think there is plenty of room for regret that there has not been a complete and perfect cooperation with that grace. Thank God that there is an abundance of remorse, an abundance of good will to make the grace full.’

“I am giving you my own personal impressions. I recognize that God has given me, in some ways, graces above others and this is my own personal accounting; that if He did give me such graces, they were not for my own self-aggrandizement, but for the greater good of souls. If I have only been half-hearted with those graces, there is a lack of response. The Church will receive less, souls will receive less, God will receive less. Now I thank the Holy Spirit that I am a little bothered about this thing. I am disturbed about it . . .

“It would be a dreadful thing if I went to bed tonight and had not made that word personal. . . . I certainly do thank God for the graces He gave me, and I thank the Holy Spirit that I am not going to bed tonight indifferent. I thank God that that Epistle has made me penitent and that there is a determination to make more use of this grace.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p 245)

From the Word of God:

“¹⁴Write to the angel of the church in Laodicea and say, “Here is the message of the Amen, the trustworthy, the true witness, the Principle of God’s creation:¹⁵I know about your activities: how you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were one or the other,¹⁶but since you are neither hot nor cold, but only lukewarm, I will spit you out of my mouth.¹⁷You say to yourself: I am rich, I have made a fortune and have everything I want, never realizing that you are wretchedly and pitifully poor, and blind and naked too.¹⁸I warn you, buy from me the gold that has been tested in the fire to make you truly rich, and white robes to clothe you and hide your shameful nakedness, and ointment to put on your eyes to enable you to see.¹⁹I reprove and train those whom I love: so repent in real earnest.²⁰Look, I am standing at the door, knocking. If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in to share a meal at that person’s side.²¹Anyone who proves victorious I will allow to share my throne, just as I have myself overcome and have taken my seat with my Father on his throne.²²Let anyone who can hear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” (*Revelation 3:14-22*)

As we go about our missionary work in the providence of our daily lives, we can become easily indifferent or somewhat lazy. We can go through the motions, but our deepest heart just isn’t in it anymore. This is a moment of grace: to call upon the Lord and have God take from us this “ho-hum” attitude toward God’s grace and blessing active in our lives. How would you describe your own attitudes toward Jesus and His mission? Blase? Zealous? Half-hearted? Whole-hearted? Imagine Jesus speaking to you this evening as He spoke to the Church at Laodicea. What would He say?

▶ Write down your reflections briefly here:

Friday: A Virgin maid of Israel

From Father Judge:

“The promise [of a Redeemer] became the treasured, precious hope of God’s people, solacing them in their sorrows, a guiding star in their wanderings . . . Among others who prayed was a virgin maid of Israel named Mary. That her Redeemer might come had been the intense prayer of her life, and of all the earth’s . . . prayerfully uplifted hearts. Of all prayers that reached the throne of God, none was so noticed . . . none preferred more and so speedily heard as Mary’s.

“It was her prayer in a particular way that moved God to realize His promise of a Redeemer. To her . . . one of the greatest spirits of the heavenly host was sent with a message, with the word that had been the coveted wish of every Jewish maiden . . . She, of all the daughters of Israel, was the favored one . . .

“Her part was to be essential . . . Hesitation followed the angel’s greeting . . . Without placing herself against the will of God, but for enlightenment, she asked, ‘How shall this be done, because I know not man?’ (*Luke 1:34*). The Archangel’s response, ‘No word shall be impossible with God’ (*Luke 1:34*) made known to her that by God’s power and His Holy Will, she would have the privilege of maternity with the glory of virginity. Adoringly and thankfully, then, bowing her head she answered, ‘Be it done to me according to they word’ (*Luke 1:38*). ‘And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us’ (*John 1:14*).” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 219)

From the Word of God:

¹⁰Yahweh spoke to Ahaz again and said:¹¹Ask Yahweh your God for a sign, either in the depths of Sheol or in the heights above.¹²But Ahaz said, ‘I will not ask. I will not put Yahweh to the test.’¹³He then said: Listen now, House of David: are you not satisfied with trying human patience that you should try my God’s patience too?¹⁴The Lord will give you a sign in any case: It is this: the young woman is with child and will give birth to a son whom she will call Immanuel.” (*Isaiah 7:10-12*)

As Mary went about the daily tasks of her life, the archangel Gabriel suddenly came to her. Through her openness to his visitation and her “yes” to his request, God became flesh among us -- “Emmanuel”! How open are you to God’s daily visitations in your life? Do you recognize them when they come? What is your response to those visitations: yes, no, maybe or just don’t care? Pray the Hail Mary. Ask Mary to help you to be open to God’s Word as it comes to you on a daily basis in the providence of your daily life.

Write down your reflections briefly here:

WEEK III

Weekend Reflection: “To proclaim Christ!”

[John Paul II urges us to consider the role of all faithful as sharing in the prophetic, priestly, and royal mission of Jesus in this section from Christifideles laici.]

“14 . . . A new aspect to the grace and dignity coming from baptism is here introduced: the lay faithful participate, for their part, in the threefold mission of Christ as priest, prophet and king. This aspect has never been forgotten in the living tradition of the Church, as exemplified in the explanation which St. Augustine offers for Psalm 26: "David was anointed king. In those days only a king and a priest were anointed. These two persons prefigured the one and only priest and king who was to come, Christ (the name "Christ" means 'anointed'). Not only has our head been anointed but we, His body, have also been anointed.... Therefore anointing comes to mean all Christians, even though in Old Testament times it belonged only to two persons. Clearly we are the Body of Christ because we are all 'anointed' and in Him are 'Christs,' that is, 'anointed ones,' as well as Christ himself, 'the anointed one.' In a certain way, then, it thus appears that with the head and body the whole Christ is formed." [19]

In the wake of the Second Vatican Council, [20] at the beginning of my pastoral ministry, my aim was to emphasize forcefully the priestly, prophetic and kingly dignity of the entire People of God in the following words: "He who was born of the Virgin Mary, the carpenter's son--as He was thought to be--Son of the living God (confessed by Peter), has come to make us 'a kingdom of priests.' The Second Vatican Council has reminded us of the mystery of Christ--priest, prophet-teacher, king--continues in the Church. Everyone, the whole People of God, shares in this threefold mission. . . ." [21] Here, in summary form, are the essential elements of this teaching.

The lay faithful are sharers in the priestly mission, for which Jesus offered himself on the cross and continues to be offered in the celebration of the Eucharist for the glory of God and the salvation of humanity. Incorporated in Jesus Christ, the baptized are united to Him and to His sacrifice in the offering they make of themselves and their daily activities (cf. Rom 12:1, 2). Speaking of the lay faithful the council says: "For their work, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily labor, their mental and physical relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life if patiently borne--all of these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Pt 2:5). During the celebration of the Eucharist, these sacrifices are most lovingly offered to the Father along with the Lord's body. Thus as worshipers whose every deed is holy, the lay faithful consecrate the world itself to God." [23]

Through their participation in the prophetic mission of Christ, "who proclaimed the kingdom

of His Father by the testimony of His life and by the power of His word,"[24] the lay faithful are given the ability and responsibility to accept the Gospel in faith and to proclaim it in word and deed, without hesitating to courageously identify and denounce evil. United to Christ, the "great prophet" (Lk 7:16), and in the Spirit made "witnesses" of the risen Christ, the lay faithful are made sharers in the appreciation of the Church's supernatural faith, that "cannot err in matters of belief,"[25] and sharers as well in the grace of the word (cf. Acts 2:17-18; Rv 19:10). They are also called to allow the newness and the power of the Gospel to shine out everyday in their family and social life as well as to express patiently and courageously in the contradictions of the present age their hope of future glory even "through the framework of their secular life." [26]

Because the lay faithful belong to Christ, Lord and King of the universe, they share in His kingly mission and are called by Him to spread that kingdom in history. They exercise their kingship as Christians, above all in the spiritual combat in which they seek to overcome in themselves the kingdom of sin (cf. Rom 6:12), and then to make a gift of themselves so as to serve, in justice and in charity, Jesus who is himself present in all His brothers and sisters, above all in the very least (cf. Mt 25:40).

But in particular, the lay faithful are called to restore to creation all its original value. In ordering creation to the authentic well-being of humanity in an activity governed by the life of grace, the lay faithful share in the exercise of the power with which the risen Christ draws all things to himself and subjects them along with himself to the Father, so that God might be everything to everyone (cf. 1 Cor 15:28; Jn 12:32).

The participation of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ as priest, prophet and king finds its source in the anointing of Baptism, its further development in Confirmation, and its realization and dynamic sustenance in the holy Eucharist. It is a participation given to each member of the lay faithful individually, inasmuch as each is one of the many who form the one Body of the Lord: In fact, Jesus showers His gifts upon the Church, which is His Body and His spouse. In such a way, individuals are sharers in the threefold mission of Christ, as St. Peter clearly teaches when he defines the baptized as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Pt 2:9). Precisely because it derives from Church communion, the sharing of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ requires that it be lived and realized in communion and for the increase of communion itself. St. Augustine writes: "As we call everyone 'Christians,' in virtue of a mystical anointing, so we call everyone 'priests' because all are members of only one priesthood." [27]

Using the above criteria, make a list of the ways in your daily life that share in the "priestly, prophetic, and kingly" mission of Jesus. Be as specific and personal as possible.

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

WEEK III

Monday: “Certain necessary truths”

From Father Judge:

“There are certain necessary truths we must believe. You have been taught these; namely, that there is one God; that there are three Divine Persons in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; that the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity became man, suffered, shed His Blood and died to redeem us. He instituted a Church, one Church. He instituted the Sacraments.

“Notable among these is the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, the Holy Eucharist. We must believe there is another world, another existence, either of great and eternal happiness, or of great and eternal misery; in other words, there is a heaven to gain and a hell to avoid.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 235)

From the Word of God:

“The angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, ‘Set out at noon and go along the road that leads from Jerusalem down to Gaza, the desert road.’²⁷ So he set off on his journey. Now an Ethiopian had been on pilgrimage to Jerusalem; he was a eunuch and an officer at the court of the kandake, or queen, of Ethiopia; he was her chief treasurer.²⁸ He was now on his way home; and as he sat in his chariot he was reading the prophet Isaiah.²⁹ The Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go up and join that chariot.’³⁰ When Philip ran up, he heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’³¹ He replied, ‘How could I, unless I have someone to guide me?’ So he urged Philip to get in and sit by his side.³² Now the passage of scripture he was reading was this: Like a lamb led to the slaughter-house, like a sheep dumb in front of its shearers, he never opens his mouth.³³ In his humiliation fair judgement was denied him. Who will ever talk about his descendants, since his life on earth has been cut short?³⁴ The eunuch addressed Philip and said, ‘Tell me, is the prophet referring to himself or someone else?’³⁵ Starting, therefore, with this text of scripture Philip proceeded to explain the good news of Jesus to him.³⁶ Further along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, ‘Look,³⁷ here is some water; is there anything to prevent my being baptised?’³⁸ He ordered the chariot to stop, then Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water and he baptised him.” (*Acts 8:26-38*)

How did you learn the “necessary truths” of your faith? Who taught you? Whom has God invited you to teach the “necessary truths” of faith? With whom have you shared your faith in the last six months? This is a personal sharing in the prophetic, teaching mission of Jesus.

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

Tuesday: “Your purpose in this life”

From Father Judge:

“. . . you are pilgrims in this world. Your purpose in this life is to know, love and serve God, and to be happy with Him forever in the next life. These, understand, are supreme, essential truths. You know them because you have been taught Christian Doctrine, you have been fed with it, slothed with it, nursed with it. You know . . . these saving truths for you have been very much favored.

“You know likewise . . . that there are thousands and tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands of your . . . brothers and sisters who do not know these necessary and saving truths, or they know them very obscurely; and unless you help there will be no one to feed . . . them with Christian Doctrine. In other words, they will live and die without knowledge of the truth which Jesus Christ ceame into this world to teach, the only truth through which men can save their souls.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 235)

From the Word of God:

“¹⁴I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep. ¹⁶And there are other sheep I have that are not of this fold, and I must lead these too. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be only one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷The Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own free will, and as I have power to lay it down, so I have power to take it up again; and this is the command I have received from my Father.” (*John 10:14-18*)

Do you know what your “purpose in life” truly is? Is the main goal of your life to “know, love, and serve God in this life” and be with God forever in “the next life”? As you go about the taks of your daily life, do you have clarity about this? Or are you confused? Like the Good Shepherd, can you speak convincingly to others about life’s purpose? Can you lead them along the right path? Do you? If so, in what way? If not, why?

Write down your reflections briefly here:

Wednesday: “My brother’s keeper”

From Father Judge:

“We hear frequently of a terrible disaster, many lives are lost. This scourge may have been an earthquake . . . a hurricane, or indeed any catastrophe. The whole world is shocked; aid is rushed from every quarter to [the] stricken. What do such misfortunes amount to in comparison to the misery and torments of the thousands upon thousands . . . who, unless helped by you, will live and die without a knowledge or love of God and be lost for all eternity? Do you realize that unless something is done at once, a generation and the children of that generation and their children will be lost to God, lost to Jesus Christ, lost to His religion, lost to heaven and will be lost, indeed, for all eternity?

“That you may realize this appalling situation, lest you be indifferent to it, we have been sent . . . to fasten this obligation on your conscience. You cannot . . . be indifferent. Unless these multitudes are helped by you, they will live without a knowledge or love of God and be lost for all eternity. You may answer: ‘What is that to me? I am trying to save my own soul. Am I my brother’s keeper?’ You certainly are and, as far as you can help your brother or sister to save their souls and refuse to do it, God will certainly hold you accountable for that soul should it be lost

“Oh what story is that of the misspent hours of our lives! Those fruitless hours . . . wasted in diversion or worse. What a terrible thing it is to lead a life fruitless in good works!” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 235)

From the Word of God:

“The man had intercourse with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain. ‘I have acquired a man with the help of Yahweh,’ she said.²She gave birth to a second child, Abel, the brother of Cain. Now Abel became a shepherd and kept flocks, while Cain tilled the soil.³Time passed and Cain brought some of the produce of the soil as an offering for Yahweh,⁴while Abel for his part brought the first-born of his flock and some of their fat as well. Yahweh looked with favour on Abel and his offering.⁵But he did not look with favour on Cain and his offering, and Cain was very angry and downcast.⁶Yahweh asked Cain, ‘Why are you angry and downcast?’⁷If you are doing right, surely you ought to hold your head high! But if you are not doing right, Sin is crouching at the door hungry to get you. You can still master him.’⁸Cain said to his brother Abel, ‘Let us go out’; and while they were in the open country, Cain set on his brother Abel and killed him.⁹Yahweh asked Cain, ‘Where is your brother Abel?’ ‘I do not know,’ he replied. ‘Am I my brother’s guardian?’¹⁰‘What have you done?’ Yahweh asked. ‘Listen! Your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground.’” (*Genesis 4:1-10*)

Do you feel like you are called to be your “brother’s -- or sister’s -- keeper” or “guardian”? In what ways? Or is your rule to look after your own affairs, and let everyone else handle their own business? Is that attitude compatible with a genuine sharing in the priestly and prophetic role of Jesus? As we go about our daily lives, what sort of responsibility does our Baptism give us toward others?

▶ Write down your reflections briefly here:

Thursday: “Be renewed”

From Father Judge:

“Let all begin [this week] generously by promising themselves and our dear Lord to do something [more] for Him . . . Be renewed in those holy and generous impulses for good, be renewed in your love for souls so that the words of the Gospel may be realized in you: ‘They, going out, spread his fame abroad in all that country’ (*Matthew 9:31*) Be renewed in your apostolic courage and zeal to fight the demons of irreligion, indifference, and vice. Tear their unfortunate victims from them, bringing them to the confessional.

“To do this is a divine work, and you must become [men and] women of prayer -- after the Heart of our Divine Savior: men and women of prayer, great faith, and of frequent reception of the Sacraments. If you have fallen away [somewhat] from the great grace that the Holy Spirit has given you, humble yourself, asking pardon, and begin anew
. . . .

“St. Paul exhorts, ‘Whilst we have time, let us work good to all men, but especially to those who are of the household of the faith’ (*Galatians 6:10*). Take the message of the great apostle home to yourselves, and remember: if you are faithful, souls are to be saved through you and if, because of sloth or any other unworthy reason, you do not cooperate with this grace, I am afraid that good will be left undone and that souls will be lost whom God’s Providence has given in the keeping of your charity.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 197)

From the Word of God:

“He entered Jericho and was going through the town²and suddenly a man whose name was Zacchaeus made his appearance; he was one of the senior tax collectors and a wealthy man.³He kept trying to see which Jesus was, but he was too short and could not see him for the crowd;⁴so he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus who was to pass that way.⁵When Jesus reached the spot he looked up and spoke to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down. Hurry, because I am to stay at your house today.’⁶And he hurried down and welcomed him joyfully.⁷They all complained when they saw what was happening. ‘He has gone to stay at a sinner’s house,’ they said.⁸But Zacchaeus stood his ground and said to the Lord, ‘Look, sir, I am going to give half my property to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody I will pay him back four times the amount.’⁹And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham;¹⁰for the Son of man has come to seek out and save what was lost.’” (*Luke 19:1-10*)

Who are some of the people -- like Zachaeus -- that God’s Providence has brought into your life? Have you tried to ignore them because they were disreputable, “on the outs,” unattractive? Or, like Jesus, did you seek to become their friend, actually visit them at their home, sit down and eat with them? This was characteristic of Jesus’ mission and ministry: can it be any less yours?

Write down your reflections briefly here:

Friday: The “love of Christ overwhelms us”

From Father Judge:

“Think of the glorious reward awaiting you, . . . God’s benediction on everything you do. ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, waht things God hath prepared for them that love Him’ (*1 Corinthians 2:9*). It would take an eternity to narrate . . . what God has in store for those who do good, but there is one very definite thing that should rejoice you much. St. James says, ‘He who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his way, shall save his soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins’ (*James 5:20*).

“On the contrary, it might be a very serious misery to neglect an opportunity of doing good, for the same apostle, St. James, declares, ‘To him therefore who knoweth to do good and doth it not, to him it is sin’ (*James 4:17*). ‘I say then, walk in the spirit’ (*Galatians 6:9*). May the Holy Spirit comfort you all and give you the grace to conquer, and ever to cry out as did the Apostle, ‘The charity of Christ presseth us’ (*2 Corinthians 5: 14*). May it drive us on to love, to serve, to do good.”(*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 197)

From the Word of God:

“¹¹And so it is with the fear of the Lord always in mind that we try to win people over. But God sees us for what we are, and I hope your consciences do too.¹²Again we are saying this not to commend ourselves to you, but simply to give you the opportunity to take pride in us, so that you may have an answer for those who take pride in appearances and not inner reality.¹³If we have been unreasonable, it was for God; if reasonable, for you.¹⁴For the love of Christ overwhelms us when we consider that if one man died for all, then all have died;¹⁵his purpose in dying for all humanity was that those who live should live not any more for themselves, but for him who died and was raised to life.¹⁶From now onwards, then, we will not consider anyone by human standards: even if we were once familiar with Christ according to human standards, we do not know him in that way any longer.¹⁷So for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation: the old order is gone and a new being is there to see.¹⁸It is all God’s work; he reconciled us to himself through Christ and he gave us the ministry of reconciliation.¹⁹I mean, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not holding anyone’s faults against them, but entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were urging you through us, and in the name of Christ we appeal to you to be reconciled to God.” (*2 Corinthians 5:11-20*)

Take a while just to look at Jesus on the Cross. Look at Him there. Consider why He is there: for you individually, personally. Your name is written on His Heart and in His Mind. Everything He did, His very reason for being one with us was to bring us home to the heart of the Father. No cost was too great, even that of His life. Ask yourself: what am I willing to give Him in return? What gift does He ask of me? Does the “love of Christ overwhelm” you?

✎ Write down your reflections briefly here:

WEEK IV

Weekend Reflection: “The greatest need of saints”

[In Christifideles laici, Pope John Paul continues to teach about the need for a holiness that fits the life of the lay person. Many times our models of holiness have been priests or religious who have a different way of following the Lord. Here the Holy Father tries to emphasize a “secular” way of holiness for the lay person..]

“ . . . The [Second Vatican] council, in describing the lay faithful's situation in the secular world, points to it above all as the place in which they receive their call from God: "There they are called by God." [33] This "place" is treated and presented in dynamic terms: the lay faithful "live in the world, that is, in every one of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very fabric of their existence is woven." [34] They are persons who live an ordinary life in the world: they study, they work, they form relationships as friends, professionals, members of society, cultures, etc. However, the council considers their condition not simply an external and environmental framework, but as a reality destined to find in Jesus Christ the fullness of its meaning. [35] Indeed it leads to the affirmation that "the Word made flesh willed to share in human fellowship.... He sanctified those human ties, especially family ones, from which social relationships arise, willingly submitting himself to the laws of His country. He chose to lead the life of an ordinary craftsman of His own time and place." [36]

The "world" thus becomes the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfill their Christian vocation, because the world itself is destined to glorify God the Father in Christ. The council is able then to indicate the proper and special sense of the divine vocation which is directed to the lay faithful. They are not called to abandon the position that they have in the world. Baptism does not take them from the world at all, as the apostle Paul points out: "So, brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God" (1 Cor 7:24). On the contrary, he entrusts a vocation to them that properly concerns their situation in the world. The lay faithful, in fact, "are called by God so that they, led by the spirit of the Gospel, may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially in this way of life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity they manifest Christ to others." [37] Thus for the lay faithful, to be present and active in the world is not only an anthropological and sociological reality, but in a specific way a theological and ecclesiological reality as well. In fact, in their situation in the world God manifests His plan and communicates to them their particular vocation of "seeking the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God." [38]

Precisely with this in mind, the Synod father said: "The secular character of the lay faithful is not therefore to be defined only in a sociological sense, but most especially in a theological sense. The term secular must be understood in light of the act of God the Creator and Redeemer, who has handed over the world to women and men, so that they may participate in the work of creation, free creation from the influence of sin, and sanctify themselves in marriage or the

celebrate life, in a family, in a profession, and in the various activities of society." [39] The lay faithful's position in the Church, then, comes to be fundamentally defined by their newness in Christian life and distinguished by their secular character. [40]

The images taken from the Gospel of salt, light and leaven, although indiscriminately applicable to all Jesus' disciples, are specifically applied to the lay faithful. They are particularly meaningful images because they speak not only of the deep involvement and the full participation of the lay faithful in the affairs of the earth, the world, and the human community, but also and above all they tell of the radical newness and unique character of an involvement and participation which has as its purpose the spreading of the Gospel that brings salvation.

16. We come to a full sense of the dignity of the lay faithful if we consider the prime and fundamental vocation that the Father assigns to each of them in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit: the vocation to holiness, that is, the perfection of charity. Holiness is the greatest testimony to the dignity conferred on a disciple of Christ. . . .

It is ever more urgent that today all Christians take up again the way of Gospel renewal, welcoming in a spirit of generosity the invitation expressed by the apostle Peter "to be holy in all conduct" (1 Pt 1:15). . . . "Since the Church in Christ is a mystery, she ought to be considered the sign and instrument of holiness.... Men and women saints have always been the source and origin of renewal in the most difficult circumstances in the Church's history. Today we have the greatest need of saints, whom we must assiduously beg God to raise up" [42]

17. The vocation of the lay faithful to holiness implies that life according to the Spirit expresses itself in a particular way in their involvement in temporal affairs and in their participation in earthly activities. Once again the Apostle admonishes us: "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col 3:17). Applying the apostle's words to the lay faithful, the council categorically affirms: "Neither family concerns nor other secular affairs should be excluded from their religious program of life." [45] Likewise the synod fathers have said: "The unity of life of the lay faithful is of the greatest importance: indeed they must be sanctified in everyday professional and social life. Therefore, to respond to their vocation, the lay faithful must see their daily activities as an occasion to join themselves to God, fulfill His will, serve other people and lead them to communion with God in Christ." [46]

Is God calling you to be one of those "saints" of which the world has so much need? According to the Pope, what makes a person -- a lay person living in the world -- a "saint," truly holy? Is it different than that required of a Sister, a Brother, or a priest? If so, in what way? With this in mind, who is the "holiest" lay person you know? Why would you consider them "holy"?

p Write down your reflections briefly here:

WEEK IV

Monday: “His providential care”

From Father Judge:

“One of the most consoling and illuminating doctrines of our Holy Religion is the truth of God’s providence overshadowing us. It is at once a compensation and an indisputable pledge of our faith . . . We are neither the puny victims of some fatalistic power nor the cast-off subjects of an indifferent and loveless Lord. We are the creatures of an infinitely good and wise and powerful Being. He is our Father in heaven, and His Will is that in all our needs we will have recourse to Him. His providential care is ever at our service. He makes but one condition: that in all things we ‘seek . . . first the kingdom of god and His justice’ (*Matthew 6:33*).

“To doubt God’s promise of providential care, to give in to empty and groundless fears of future evils is sinful and offensive to His fatherly love. ‘The just cried, and the Lord heard them and delivered them out of all their troubles’ (*Matthew 6:33*).” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 128)

From the Word of God:

²⁵“That is why I am telling you not to worry about your life and what you are to eat, nor about your body and what you are to wear. Surely life is more than food, and the body more than clothing!²⁶Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they are?²⁷Can any of you, however much you worry, add one single cubit to your span of life?²⁸And why worry about clothing? Think of the flowers growing in the fields; they never have to work or spin,²⁹ yet I assure you that not even Solomon in all his royal robes was clothed like one of these.³⁰Now if that is how God clothes the wild flowers growing in the field which are there today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, will he not much more look after you, you who have so little faith?³¹So do not worry; do not say, “What are we to eat? What are we to drink? What are we to wear?”³²It is the gentiles who set their hearts on all these things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all.³³Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on God’s saving justice, and all these other things will be given you as well.³⁴So do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (*Matthew 6:25-34*)

What are the things that make you feel anxious, nervous, or afraid? Do you find yourself getting easily upset? If so, why? If you find yourself generally feeling at peace, what is the cause of that peace? When problems present themselves, how do you deal with them? How much does God consciously play a part in your attempting to resolve the difficult situations of your life? Do you ultimately see God as someone who is trustworthy and dependable . . . or not to be fully trusted? Why?

▶ Write down your reflections briefly here:

Tuesday: “Sorrow”

From Father Judge:

“God does not ask of us to desire suffering or evils, but when they come, He commands submission to His Will which permits afflictions. It is even His Will that we do all that we can do to avoid them, but to practice submission if He sees fit to allow them to happen. The riches of our Faith, then, are found in this: that sufferings and sorrows which God sends us are for our good and salvation. This is why the doctrine of Divine Providence is one of the most consoling truths of Revelation, for it tells us that, excepting sin, nothing will ever happen outside of God’s Holy Will.

“In the course of events, the sad and calamitous word [sorrow] must reach us. If it be personal, then there must be the quick, generous act of resignation, with the heart prayer: ‘Thy Will be done!’ If the sorrow be of others, there must be a prayer for those in distress or suffering, for we know that God permits these harassing events for some good reason known to Himself . . . that He makes use of untoward things to discipline man’s will, to make him wise, and to detach his spirit from those things which endanger his eternal destiny. . . .” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 128)

From the Word of God:

“⁵Have you forgotten that encouraging text in which you are addressed as sons? My son, do not scorn correction from the Lord, do not resent his training,⁶for the Lord trains those he loves, and chastises every son he accepts.⁷Perseverance is part of your training; God is treating you as his sons. Has there ever been any son whose father did not train him?⁸If you were not getting this training, as all of you are, then you would be not sons but bastards.⁹Besides, we have all had our human fathers who punished us, and we respected them for it; all the more readily ought we to submit to the Father of spirits, and so earn life.¹⁰Our human fathers were training us for a short life and according to their own lights; but he does it all for our own good, so that we may share his own holiness.¹¹Of course, any discipline is at the time a matter for grief, not joy; but later, in those who have undergone it, it bears fruit in peace and uprightness.¹²So steady all weary hands and trembling knees ¹³and make your crooked paths straight; then the injured limb will not be maimed, it will get better instead.” (*Hebrews 12:5-13*)

There is no simple explanation for suffering and evil. The one thing of which we are sure as missionaries is that sorrow and evil will come into our lives and into the lives of those we are called to serve. How do we respond? What do we think, say, do? There is no one “right” answer. The Letter to the Hebrews suggests one possible reason today. The main ingredient in our response must be trust and confidence that, despite all signs to the contrary, God has not abandoned us. Take this occasion to reaffirm your absolute trust in God’s never-failing, provident care no matter what circumstance or event might come into our lives.

▶ Write down your reflections briefly here:

Wednesday: “A great joy . . . trials”

From Father Judge:

“It is a wholesome practice to show God that while we may not know the particular lesson He has in mind, nevertheless we are disposed to know what lesson and with His holy grace we wish to put that lesson into practice.

“We wish, in other words, to be right with God, that it may please Him to accept our protestations of resignation to His holy will and fidelity to His divine ordinances, so that it may please Divine Providence. May it not be found necessary to visit us with those sorrows that are apportioned to the obdurate in order that they may correct their ways. Do not the Holy Scriptures tell us that many tribulations we enter the kingdom of God? Does not the Holy Spirit Himself reveal why these evils are sent? ‘Fill their faces with shame; and they shall seek thy name, O Lord’ (*Psalm 82:17*)”

From the Word of God:

“²My brothers, consider it a great joy when trials of many kinds come upon you,³for you well know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance, and⁴perseverance must complete its work so that you will become fully developed, complete, not deficient in any way. . . . ¹²Blessed is anyone who perseveres when trials come. Such a person is of proven worth and will win the prize of life, the crown that the Lord has promised to those who love him.¹³Never, when you are being put to the test, say, ‘God is tempting me’; God cannot be tempted by evil, and he does not put anybody to the test. ¹⁴Everyone is put to the test by being attracted and seduced by that person’s own wrong desire.¹⁵Then the desire conceives and gives birth to sin, and when sin reaches full growth, it gives birth to death.” (*James 1:2, 12-15*)

One of the sure realities of the apostolic life is that you will deal with people who are suffering and hurting. Never try to “explain” to another person the reason for their suffering or sorrow. This puts you in the position of those who tried to give Job the reason for all his losses -- and they were all wrong! Rather be present to the person in his or her need. Help them to understand and experience through your love that God has not abandoned them; they are not alone! Think of someone in particular who is passing through a difficult trial right now. How have you dealt with that person? How might you deal with that person as a missionary and apostle in a more effective way? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you God’s divine help and guidance on this.

Write down your reflections briefly here:

Thursday: “He is in the boat”

From Father Judge:

“Remember, the Lord is with us, He is in the boat. There may be a financial tempest about, any kind of a tempest, but always remember that Jesus is with us. Have the confidence and courage, then, that first of all will save us from the reproach, ‘O ye of little faith’ (*Matthew 8:26*), secondly, that will bring upon us His joy and blessing and praise -- ‘I have not found so great faith, not even in Israel’ (*Luke 7:9*).

“There is one advantage of necessity, there is one joy to be found in biting need. There is a consolation even when the darkest clouds overshadow. It is this: we have an opportunity of registering a supreme act of trust and confidence in a Being supremely and infinitely good and loving. It is not so much that we do a thing or get a thing or have a thing or have any prayer answered but that we show an invincible faith and courage in Jesus Christ.

“Supposing we can get a faith and trust like that! What a soothing to one’s conscience to be able to say I have not failed in faith or trust in God. Again, supposing we can develop such a faith and confidence throughout the Missionary Cenacle world -- think what shock-troops the Missionary Cenacle would furnish to the Church! It seems to me that, living in these troublesome times, when there is so much fear in the hearts of churchmen, statesmen and men of affairs, when any forecast of the future shows it will be a time that shall demand picked men [and women] -- if the logic of present events is trouble and distress to state and church, to our holy religion and to our country, then God has in training at present men and women of faith and courage.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 65)

From the Word of God:

“³⁵With the coming of evening that same day, he said to them, ‘Let us cross over to the other side.’³⁶And leaving the crowd behind they took him, just as he was, in the boat; and there were other boats with him.³⁷Then it began to blow a great gale and the waves were breaking into the boat so that it was almost swamped.³⁸But he was in the stern, his head on the cushion, asleep.³⁹They woke him and said to him, ‘Master, do you not care? We are lost!’ And he woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Quiet now! Be calm!’ And the wind dropped, and there followed a great calm.⁴⁰Then he said to them, ‘Why are you so frightened? Have you still no faith?’⁴¹They were overcome with awe and said to one another, ‘Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him.’” (*Mark 4:35-41*)

Think of an instance when your faith carried you through a difficult circumstance. Think of another incident where you were weak and doubting in faith. How were the two experiences different? Why would people of immense faith and trust in God’s Providence be like “shock troops” for the Church? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you an “invincible faith and courage in Jesus Christ.”

✎ Write down your reflections briefly here:

Friday: “Founded . . . in faith and trust”

From Father Judge:

“If . . . a current jamming and pressure of events furnish us opportunity to qualify for such high graces we should feel a present joy in what to many men [and women] might mean fear, anxiety, and even despondency. Should your present work furnish you those difficulties that would develop in you such faith and confidence, you are a picked man and should be ready to speak at any time your Te Deum.

“If this discovers you to be present under stress and in difficulty, and if the above principles be true, let me extend to you my felicitations. Your need discovers to me indeed a fortunate and God-blessed man [or woman]. Occasionally say this to any tremors occasioned by worldly wisdom, ‘Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth’ (*Psalms 123:8*).

“May you be founded more and more in the faith and trust in a God Whose loving providence takes note of the burnt blade of grass in the field and the passing of the animal in the bush and the fluttering of the smallest resident of the land.” (*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, p. 65)

From the Word of God:

“²²Then he said to his disciples, ‘That is why I am telling you not to worry about your life and what you are to eat, nor about your body and how you are to clothe it.’²³For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.²⁴Think of the ravens. They do not sow or reap; they have no storehouses and no barns; yet God feeds them. And how much more you are worth than the birds!²⁵Can any of you, however much you worry, add a single cubit to your span of life?²⁶If a very small thing is beyond your powers, why worry about the rest?²⁷Think how the flowers grow; they never have to spin or weave; yet, I assure you, not even Solomon in all his royal robes was clothed like one of them.²⁸Now if that is how God clothes a flower which is growing wild today and is thrown into the furnace tomorrow, how much more will he look after you, who have so little faith!²⁹But you must not set your hearts on things to eat and things to drink; nor must you worry.³⁰It is the gentiles of this world who set their hearts on all these things. Your Father well knows you need them.³¹No; set your hearts on his kingdom, and these other things will be given you as well.³²‘There is no need to be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom.’” (*Luke 12:22-32*)

Just sit and relax for a few minutes. Notice what is around you: your own breathing, the noises, the smells, the feel of the air against your skin. Be aware of any people who may be near you, the sound of their voices, their appearance. Look at any animals or birds in the vicinity. God loves and cares for each of them . . . and for you! Be aware and give thanks. The same provident God that has brought you to this day will care for your every need tomorrow and that of all creation. Be at peace . . . and know that God is truly God!

▶ Write down your reflections briefly here: