

**HOSPITALITE NOTRE DAME DE LOURDES****SERVICE SAINTE BERNADETTE****FORMATION****MODULE -3-****INTRODUCTION**

In the second Formation module we tried to answer the question: what is Christian spirituality? Using as our starting point its own particular characteristics.

And, as far as the sources of spirituality are concerned, we did nothing more than to name them.

In this third module, we will develop three sources of Christian spirituality: the word of God, the sacraments, and prayer. The other two sources, devotion to Mary and the Saints, as well as service to our brothers, are developed transversely across the presentations of all three modules.

First of all the word of God, because our God is a God who speaks. And his word was made flesh in the person of Jésus Christ. Christian life always begins by listening to the word of God and then by putting it into practice.

Then the sacraments. Christianity is the religion of the Incarnation and that presence of Jesus among us continues in the Church. It is she, the Church, that has received the assistance of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Today, the Church bestows the life of God on us in the celebration of the sacraments, which are tangible and effective signs of His grace.

Finally, the third source is prayer, which we will develop from the words spoken by our Lady of Lourdes at the 8<sup>th</sup> apparition : "pray to God for sinners." This isn't a treatise on prayer. Quite simply, we want as *hospitaliers* to place ourselves at the school of Mary, who by her words and her actions, taught Bernadette to move on from "the prayers" that she was in the habit of reciting to "prayer", i.e. a personal relationship with God.

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## I. THE WORD OF GOD

The word of God is the absolutely fundamental source of Christian spirituality because it generates faith. Sources of Christian spirituality, the sacraments, prayer, etc., assume faith and celebrate faith; A faith that is rooted and has its origins in the faithful listening to the word of God.

For the Apostle Paul, faith is born out of the preaching of the Word (Rom.10, 14). For Jesus, the disciple is one who "listens to the word of God and puts it into practice" (Mt.7, 21). In the story of the parable of the sower, the spiritual fruit is in proportion to the reception of the word (Mt.13, 1-23)

Experience tells us what sustains our faith, is listening to the word of God in the best conditions, regardless of the whatever forms the Church offers it to us in : during the celebration of the Eucharist, preaching, catechesis, the celebration of the sacraments, liturgical celebrations, etc. In this regard we will read what the Pope said on the **Spiritual Reading of the Word of God**

"There is one particular way of listening to what the Lord wishes to tell us in his word and of letting ourselves be transformed by the Spirit. It is what we call *lectio divina*. It consists of reading God's word in a moment of prayer and allowing it to enlighten and renew us." (Pope Francis. « The Joy of the Gospel » n° 152).

" In the presence of God, during a recollected reading of the text, it is good to ask, for example: "Lord, what does this text say *to me*? What is it about my life that you want to change by this text? What troubles me about this text? Why am I not interested in this? Or perhaps: What do I find pleasant in this text? What is it about this word that moves me? What attracts me? Why does it attract me?"

"When we make an effort to listen to the Lord, temptations usually arise. One of them is simply to feel troubled or burdened, and to turn away. Another common temptation is to think about what the text means for other people, and so avoid applying it to our own life. It can also happen that we look for excuses to water down the clear meaning of the text. Or we can wonder if God is demanding too much of us, asking for a decision which we are not yet prepared to make. This leads many people to stop taking pleasure in the encounter with God's word; but this would mean forgetting that no one is more patient than God our Father, that no one is more understanding and willing to wait. He always invites us to take a step forward, but does not demand a full response if we are not yet ready. He simply asks that we sincerely look at our life and present ourselves honestly before him, and that we be willing to continue to grow, asking from him what we ourselves cannot as yet achieve." (Pope Francis. « The Joy of the Gospel » n° 153).

The Church, the community of the faithful, is the 'usual place' of the proclamation of the word. A Christian may not always be familiar with everything that is said in the various books of the Bible, but he cannot ignore what is said in the Gospels. In these, we have access to the person of Christ, who is the Word of God. That is why we are invited to make these words our own in an attitude of discipleship. The proclamation of the Gospel and the Eucharist are the strongest experiences of the presence of the Lord in the life of a Christian.

On this subject the Holy Father tells us: "all evangelization is founded on the word of God, listened to, meditated, lived, celebrated and witnessed. Holy Scripture is source of evangelisation.

Therefore, we must improve ourselves continuously by listening to the word of God. "

“The Church does not evangelize unless she constantly lets herself be evangelized. It is indispensable that the word of God “be ever more fully at the heart of every ecclesial activity”. God’s word, listened to and celebrated, above all in the Eucharist, nourishes and inwardly strengthens Christians, enabling them to offer an authentic witness to the Gospel in daily life. We have long since moved beyond that old contraposition between word and sacrament. The preaching of the word, living and effective, prepares for the reception of the sacrament, and in the sacrament that word attains its maximum efficacy.” (« The Joy of the Gospel » n° 174).

“Evangelization demands familiarity with God’s word, which calls for dioceses, parishes and Catholic associations to provide for a serious, ongoing study of the Bible, while encouraging its prayerful individual and communal reading. We do not blindly seek God, or wait for him to speak to us first, for “God has already spoken, and there is nothing further that we need to know, which has not been revealed to us”. Let us receive the sublime treasure of the revealed word.” (« The Joy of the Gospel » n° 175).

## II. THE SACRAMENTS

The Catechism of the Catholic Church gives us this definition : “The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions” (no. 1131).

The sacrament is an act of God, because only God can 'deliver his divine life', and that through a visible sign in favour of man and humanity. This is why it must be said that the first sacrament and the most decisive is the person of Jesus, the God made man, i.e. the Incarnation. The definition of the sacrament is totally applicable therefore to the reality of the Incarnation. There is a tangible, visible, sign in the human person of Jesus of Nazareth : “something that we have seen with our eyes, that we have looked at and touched with our hands' says Saint John (1 John 1.1)

The sacraments of the Church are the extension of the Incarnation. They prolong this first sacrament which is Jesus Christ. They are also the prolongation of what God accomplished through his son Jesus through his earthly lifetime. It is in this sense that we can say that the sacraments are 'instituted' by Christ. They refer to the person of Jesus, his life, his words, his actions.

“Christ instituted the sacraments of the new law. There are seven: Baptism, Confirmation (or Chrismation), the Eucharist, Penance, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony. The seven sacraments touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life : they give birth and increase, healing and mission to the Christian's life of faith. There is thus a certain resemblance between the stages of natural life and the stages of the spiritual life” (Catechism of the Catholic Church no.1210).

**Through the sacraments of Christian initiation, baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist, are laid the foundations of the whole Christian life.** Born to a new life through baptism, the faithful are indeed strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation and receive in the Eucharist the bread of eternal life. So, by these sacraments of Christian initiation, they always receive in ever greater abundance the riches of divine life and move forward towards the perfection of charity.

This new life which we carry "in clay pots" (2 Cor. 4, 7), is still "hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3, 3). We are still in our earthly home subjected to suffering, illness and death. This new life of children of God can be weakened and even lost by sin. The Lord Jesus Christ, the physician of our souls and our bodies, He who forgave the sins of the paralysed man and restored his body to health, wanted his Church to continue, in the strength of the Holy Spirit, his work of healing and salvation, even among its own members. **That is the purpose of the two sacraments of healing: the sacrament of penance or Reconciliation and the anointing of the sick.**

**Two other sacraments, Holy Orders and marriage, are ordained for the salvation of others.** They also contribute to the salvation of the people and they do so through the service of others that they do. They confer a special mission in the Church and serve to edification of the people of God. In these sacraments, those who have already been consecrated by Baptism and Confirmation for the common priesthood of all the faithful, can receive special consecration. Those who receive the sacrament of Holy Orders are devoted to be, in the name of Christ," by the grace of God and the word the pastors of the Church "(Lumen Gentium 11). For their part "Christian spouses, to perform the duties of their state with dignity, are strengthened and as consecrated by a special sacrament ' (Lumen Gentium 48).

**Through baptism,** God makes us be born to new life in Christ. He frees us from sin and makes us members of the Church. During the celebration, after listening to the word of God, the future baptized (or their parents if they are children) and the Assembly are invited to profess the faith of the Church in which the person will be baptized. Then, the priest (or deacon) pours water on the person, saying: "I baptize you in the name of the father, and of the son and of the Holy Spirit." Then the newly baptized is anointed with chrism, oil consecrated by the Bishop, which means the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then he is given a white garment, sign of new life, and a lighted candle Jesus Christ is our light, our guide. Baptism is celebrated by a priest or a deacon, and can be received at any age..

By baptism God makes us Christian. With Confirmation, God enriches us with special strength of the Holy Spirit to be witnesses of Christ and active members of the Church. This is why the celebration of this sacrament is presided over by the Bishop (or his representative), the head of all Christians in a diocese. After listening to the word of God, those to be confirmed answer when their name is called by saying: "Here I am". Then, the Bishop will call the Holy Spirit on them through a special prayer. Finally, they will again receive the anointing of the holy chrism (as in baptism) with this sentence: "Be marked by the Holy Spirit, the gift of God." Confirmation is usually received in adolescence but also in adulthood.

The sacrament of the Eucharist is also called "Mass" or "Communion." The word "Eucharist", which in Greek means "to thank", recalls the last meal of Jesus with his disciples before his death on the cross. Jesus took bread and wine, he thanked God his father and said to his disciples: "take this all of you and eat it : this is my body given for you..., ' and drink this all of you, this is my blood poured out for you." Then he added: "do this in memory of me." So this meal signifies the life given to us by Jesus on the cross, his sacrifice of love. That is why the bread consecrated during the course of the mass (on which the priest places his hands while repeating Christ's words) is also called Eucharist, because it is the most visible sign of Jesus who is God the father and puts on men sharing. It is also called "Host" (which means "the one who gives himself in sacrifice") or even "Bread of life".

Indeed, the risen Jesus constantly continues to give his life: in every Eucharist, he gives himself to us in the consecrated bread and wine, which thus becomes the real Presence of Christ, "body of Christ" and "blood of Christ". By receiving Jesus Christ in "communion", we are united to Him. In the other sacraments, we receive a gift from God ; in the Eucharist, we receive the Son of God, Jesus Christ, himself. This is why it is said they "the Eucharist is the source and Summit of the Christian life. A Christian can receive communion at every mass, but if he knows that he has committed serious sins that go in the opposite direction of communion with God and men, it is necessary for him to ask a priest, some time before mass, for the sacrament of Reconciliation.

The sacrament of Holy Orders, this term comes from the latin "ordinatio" which means "I put in order," i.e. organizing the distribution of responsibilities. Indeed, Jesus Christ, "Good Shepherd", entrusted men with the responsibility of acting on his behalf to call and gather his people (the Church) to teach the Word of God, celebrate the sacraments, and send them on a mission. This is the role of bishops, priests and deacons..

Through their Episcopal ordination, Bishops (chosen among the priests), like the Apostles, receive the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders: they are the successors of the Apostles and usually receive the responsibility of being pastor from a local Church (i.e. of the portion of the people of God, which constitutes a diocese). The bishops have a threefold mission: to teach, to sanctify and to govern the people of God.

The Bishop receives from God collaborators and they too are ordained for a mission : priests and deacons.

Unable to be present in all the communities in his diocese, the Bishop surrounds himself with collaborators, **priests**. Through ordination, the Bishop authenticates the call heard by some to become priests. By the laying on of hands at ordination, he asks the Holy Spirit to consecrate them so that they might also receive the mission to be the sign of Christ Pastor among men, by celebrating the Eucharist, forgiving sins, teaching and guiding the community entrusted to them. In the West, the Church calls only men who are willing to live in celibacy, out of love of Christ and of people.

**Deacons**, are Christians who, by the laying on of hands at the time of ordination by the Bishop, receive the mission to be the sign of Christ Servant among men. In the pastoral organization of the Church, they have a special task entrusted by the Bishop, most often in connection with the social action of the Church. All priests begin by being deacons for a few months. But there are also permanent deacons, who for the most part, are married and have an additional occupation.

Through the sacrament of marriage, Christ represents the love he has in his body which is the Church, and gives spouses the grace to love this same love, so that it radiates and source of life. The sacrament of marriage seals the lawful union of two persons of different sex. Through it, both spouses are committed for life to God and the Church. The commitment is based on four pillars :-

- **engaging** freely, voluntarily, without coercion of any kind, in the mutual gift of each to the other.
- **committing** to remain faithful to each other, because in love, each relies on the other to live.
- **committing** for life, without any restriction in time : marriage is indissoluble. "What God has joined together no man shall separate " said Jesus.
- **committing** to welcome any children born of the union and, as soon as possible, to baptize and

educate them as Christians.

During the celebration of the marriage, after listening to the word of God, the spouses will give their mutual consent, will receive the blessing of their union, by the Holy Spirit, then they will exchange blessed wedding rings, outward sign of their union.

**Through the Anointing of the Sick**, Christ the liberator heals or eases physical infirmity and strengthens the faith of the sick, giving the sign that he has come to heal humanity. This Sacrament is intended to confer a special grace on the Christian experiencing the difficulties inherent in the status of serious illness or old age. It is a sign of the tenderness of God for the person who suffers. In the celebration of this sacrament, we ask Christ:-

- **for comfort**, peace and the courage to bear in a Christian manner, the sufferings of illness or old age.
- **to forgive** sin, in cases where the sick person has not been able to receive the Sacrament of Penance.
- **to restore** health.
- **to prepare** for the passage to eternal life, when death seems imminent.

If a patient who has been anointed is restored to health he or she may receive the sacrament again in the event of a new critical illness, it can again receive this sacrament. During the same illness, this sacrament can be reiterated if the illness worsens.

**The sacrament of forgiveness (Reconciliation or Confession).** Man is made for life. A life of communion with God and with humans. And for this God gave us some rules for life, one expression of which are the ten commandments found in the Old Testament. Jesus summarized them all into one big command: "you shall love the Lord your God and your neighbour as yourself."

But sometimes we refuse to live in love and truth, justice and peace. It is this refusal is what we call "sin". And Sin is a prison that prevents us from living in fullness, as God wishes for us. Jesus came to free from sin those who want to get out of this spiral of death.

It is for that reason that He came to earth. Is this forgiveness and release that are celebrated in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. By identifying and recognising our attitudes to death, we ask God to free us to enter into a dynamic of new life, just as at the moment of our baptism.

We must distinguish between the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation and psychological support. The psychologist searches with his patient to find the source of his discomfort, most often through introspective delving into his past. He does not judge the moral reach of the evil of which the patient complains. It helps him understand the origins of his psychological situation so that he can take better control of it.

The priest, meanwhile, receives a person who has identified his sin, the evil of which he is objectively admits to be guilty and of which he repents. Having listened to the word of God and prayed to discern how his life could have fallen into sin, the sinner is invited to confess all of his sins. Then the priest spends some time in dialogue with him to encourage him to change his life and take the steps to do so.

He will then give him a "penance", a gesture to accomplish that will testify to the conversion brought by the penitent. Finally, he will place a hand on him, giving him absolution, words of

reconciliation with God and with the Church: "I forgive you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".

### **III. PRAYER**

Prayer is our relationship with God. To pray to the Lord, is to be with him. But for many people, prayer just means asking God for something. Now, the Good Lord knows that perfectly well. That is why, in the prayer we call the Our Father, Jesus teaches us to ask God for the things our Father wants to give us, what we need, what will be good for us.

"I heard a sound like a gust of wind", this is how Bernadette described the beginning of the apparitions, the beginning of the events that are at the base of what is Lourdes today. As on the day of Pentecost for the Apostles, the Holy Spirit was given to Bernadette so she could contemplate, internalize, participate in and witness to the mystery of salvation for all mankind.

In this process Mary, the mother of God, would become for this girl a veritable teacher of spiritual life. By her presence, her words and her actions, she would introduce Bernadette, little by little, into contemplation of the mystery of her Son, the Redeemer of the world.

The secret of this "school of learning with Mary" lies firstly in the mutual acceptance that these two women, Mary and Bernadette, showed to each other. In welcoming Mary, Bernadette welcomes Christ: "Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? (Lk.1, 42). In welcoming Bernadette Mary welcomes Christ: "Insofar as you did this to the least of these brothers of mine you did it to me" (Mt 25,40). The seal of this alliance, this meeting and this friendship, will be the sign of the cross. "The sign of the cross is somehow the synthesis of our faith." (Pope Benedict XVI).

The other secret of this "Way of Mary" would be the praying of the Rosary, because that would be kind of support throughout their meeting. First of all a teaching support, because all the prayers known by Bernadette are contained in this traditional devotion of the Church. And then, a spiritual support, because it is also through this simple and accessible prayer that Christians can contemplate the conduct of the mysteries of the life of Christ. Indeed, what Mary confided and shared with Bernadette, was her own experience as a disciple of Christ, her own experience of the Christian life.

On this subject Saint John Paul tells us : "The memories of Jesus, impressed upon her heart, were always with her, leading her to reflect on the various moments of her life at her Son's side. In a way those memories were to be the "rosary" which she recited uninterruptedly throughout her earthly life." (John Paul II, Apostolic Letter « Rosarium Virginis Mariae » n° 11 : 2002).

In this way Mary, mistress of spiritual life and Bernadette, child of Mary, daughter of the Father and disciple of Christ, inaugurated and opened the door to this beautiful 'school of prayer' which has been given to us to Lourdes for more than 150 years. By the recitation of the Rosary, today as yesterday, millions of pilgrims, either in the sanctuary itself or elsewhere, thanks to different means of communication, continue to learn about and take their share in the unfathomable riches of the mystery of Christ.

### **Praying for sinners.**

During the first apparitions, the theme of prayer was not explicitly mentioned, but it was a recurrent theme in practice, in relation to the Rosary. Mary said nothing to Bernadette about prayer, but day after day she joined Bernadette in prayer. Indeed, as soon as she arrived at the Grotto, Bernadette knelt down, made the sign of the cross and immediately started to recite the rosary. It was during that simple meditation that the Lady appeared to Bernadette, joining her at the heart of her prayer. Thus, silently, with her own rosary between her fingers, the Lady associated herself mysteriously with the prayer of Bernadette.

On the day of the eighth apparition, for the first time, the Lady gave Bernadette a precise instruction : "pray to God for sinners." This request must be important because the Lady would go on to repeat it in four consecutive apparitions, several times during each one. It is true that these words were never pronounced in isolation, but always in conjunction with two other requests: "Go, drink from the spring and wash yourself there" and "penance, penance, penance"

Bernadette immediately welcomed this instruction, applying it to herself not only at that time but through to the end of her days. Indeed, it would appear that the last words she herself would utter before passing away would be "Pray for me, a poor sinner".

### **The meaning of praying for sinners.**

"Pray to God for sinners": two of those words carry considerable weight, as they refer to two realities which cannot be ignored – prayer and sin.

In the Holy Scriptures, sin is still considered in its double aspect in connection with man and with God. These two aspects have a common point, that of rupture : the breakdown of relations between man and God and between man and his fellow man.

Initially, the sinful man is one who commits deeds which cut him off from God and his brothers. On a second level we can talk about the man who is wounded by sin. He is presented as an imperfect being, a fallen nature. Indeed, we all carry our wounds, we are all to a greater or a lesser extent aware of them, more or less responsible for them, but we transmit them to others in one way or another, sometimes even unwittingly. St. Paul acknowledges this when he says "Instead of doing the good things I want to do I carry out the sinful things I do not want" (Rm.7, 19).

Through the concrete actions that we do which are of a sinful nature and through the injuries that we all carry deep inside ourselves, we understand that there is a solidarity of humanity as far as evil and sin are concerned. It is already a Christian attitude to be aware of this solidarity. However the Lord in his Gospel reveals that, if this reality exists, another reality altogether must exist also. It is the life of God in us, in other words charity. The Apostle says : "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rm.5, 5). Concerning charity, we are in communion, there is no longer a breach between men and God or their fellow men.

The role of prayer, as expressed by Saint Paul, is to bring out that spirit that brings us together, which makes us one body and which is given so that we may all live as brothers – and brothers of Christ who is living in us and, with him, sons of the same Father.



The discovery of this bond of love between us, by means of prayer, is an experience which can always be repeated. It is for this that the Lord, when he speaks of prayer, says very few words about it but always insists on perseverance in prayer (Lk 18: 1-18).

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Why? Because this discovery lasts a lifetime, and for as long as time itself. This is another thing that Saint Paul and all the spiritual masters speak about : life according to the Spirit of God.

Bernadette well understood the meaning of this request of the Holy Virgin. She understood that she was a creature wounded by sin, but at the same time she understood that she was a creature recreated by the grace of God.

This spiritual battle between sin and grace, which takes place in the centre of our hearts, is a eternal one, occupying our every moment. Indeed, we must constantly adjust what we are to what we are called to be. We need to constantly change between the behaviour that is dictated to us by the world and the behaviour of a disciple of Christ.

It is through prayer that Bernadette made this change, which St. Paul refers to as changing from an old man to a new man or an old self to a new self. She would express it in very simple words but oh, how profound : "the first movement does not belong to us : but the second one, Yes. A beautiful illustration of the words of the apostle Paul : in that same place where sin abounded, grace was in was in greater abundance (Jerusalem Bible : "However great the number of sins committed, grace was even greater" Rm 5, 20).

Bernadette suffered from her own nature: "I can be boiling", i.e. capable of extremely vivid, spontaneous reactions, at the expense of charity, of brotherly love, of justice for others. Her spiritual director would tell us: "she had to admit to her impulsive, strong-willed nature, her bad-tempered actions, her and over-sensitivity.

"On some occasions, she could let slip particular opinions and, doubtless believing herself to be right, obstinately hang on to those ideas in her mind. But soon her conscience would be alarmed and she would ask forgiveness from the community" .

But whenever she caught herself *in flagrante*, guilty of a thought which was not in conformity with the Gospel she would turn to Christ in prayer, reconsider her thought, reformulate her words, corrected her action.

Throughout her life Bernadette had to start again with Christ what she herself had done badly. This was not an occasional attitude but rather a way of living on a daily basis.

How many times, in the life of a married couple or within the family in the relationship between parents and children, or between friends, do cracks appear, misunderstandings arise, bitterness surface? But also how many times, after praying, do we become aware that these attitudes are sterile, lead to nothing and cause pain and hurt and one is called to live another type of solidarity, that which is of the order of love?

That is why we invited, following the example of Bernadette, to pray first for ourselves, we who are the first sinners. That is also what made this pilgrim of an Eastern Christian church repeat untiringly: "Lord Jesus Christ, son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

We are also invited to pray for all the situations that we humans cause and have to take responsibility for - wars, terrorism, violence, injustice, racism, poverty, abuse.

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But we must go still further in praying for sinners and have the courage to pray for our enemies, for those who don't like us, for those who do us harm, for those who slander us, despise and humiliate us, so that these situations can be overturned and become means of passage so that communion can be restored.

**"Prayer touches our flesh at its most sensitive point, it touches our heart. It is not God who changes it is us who change, through obedience and as we abandon ourselves in prayer."  
(Pope Francis)**

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