

*Our Dear Retreat*²⁰¹²

Gift for the Church

1. Gather Us In

As we begin ...

Let us begin, with a few minutes of quiet listening ... to nothing at all ... to the sounds around us ... to our own heartbeats ...

Call to Prayer

Leader: With hope and love we live each moment faithful to God's call and promise.

All: It is in Christ Jesus that we are claimed as God's own. Ephesians 1.11

Leader The gospels tell us one of the first acts of Jesus was to gather companions for his journey. They walked with Jesus. They enjoyed his trust and affection. But one of the consistent features of the followers was chronic dullness. He endured their dullness. He dealt with them honestly and exactingly. Their record was not good. They complained, quarreled, misunderstood, deserted and denied.

The good news is that in the face of the Risen Lord they found the compassion of God and committed this memory to the Church.

(From *Jesus, A Gospel Portrait* by Donald Senior)



"Procession" ©2007 by John August Swanson
Limited Edition Serigraph, 36" by 24"
www.JohnAugustSwanson.com

Let us not resist...for we are ourselves the only obstacles to the overflowing of His Divine Love.

(CC Epiphany 1857)

All: We are God's work of art created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live it. Ephesians 2.10

Music: of your own choosing

Reflection

Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as a branch can not bear fruit apart from the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. John 15:4

We, in our communities of faith, are a procession of stories, stories both unique and shared, stories connected to those who have gone before us and those who will come after us. We gather in celebration of and respect for each person's story and in expectation and awe of the story we are becoming together.

www.JohnAugustSwanson.com

"the people who believe in Jesus"

For me, the Church is the people who believe in Jesus, practicing their faith through the sacraments. Our Church must adapt herself to the reality of today without forgetting tradition. Many are looking for something more than the Church is offering them, they look for answers to the ills that afflict them such as loneliness, their interior emptiness, their thirst for social justice, their yearning to feel themselves more loved by God, to grow in their faith in Christ. To participate in the Church is to participate in Christ's love, knowing that the Church has suffered from different ills; Christ loves the Church and suffers with her. It is important to continue with the Church when we feel betrayed, it is precisely then that we can measure our faith, knowing that our Church has virtues but also defects. To want to continue with the Church is to continue with Jesus.

by Luz del Alba De la Cruz, Associate, Dominican Republic

Reflection and conversation

Consider how God might be coming to you through this prayer and conversation —

What has captured your interest during this time?

What ideas or images stay with you?

What moves you to pray?

What next step will you take to deepen this experience ?

Closing Prayer

As we bring our time together to a close, let us pray:

All: Glory be to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory be to God from all generations in the church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen.

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2. Naming Our Gift

As we begin ...

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Leader: For Cornelia, walking with God was done in daily life.

"Let us all be diligent in giving proofs of love this year, and as you step through the muddy streets, love God with your feet and when your hands toil, love Him with your hands, and when you teach the children love Him with the little ones, and may you be blessed in your actions and in your members with an abundance of Divine love, and purified and prepared in this world, as far as possible to acquire an eternity of love."
(CC Epiphany 1854)



Cornelia would have us "walk with God in the shadow of the Holy Spirit."

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(CC Epiphany 1857)

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Music: of your own choosing

Reflection

I call you friend because I have told you everything that I have heard from my Father. John 15:15b

First of all, the stories remind us at the outset that the notion of vocation in its most fundamental meaning is not defined by any specific role or function but something far greater, something written on a vast canvas, a pure gift, with God as its author and life as its subject. In speaking of the notion of God's call to us, we have to realize at the outset we are putting our hands on the pulse of Christian life itself and, indeed, on the life of the human family before God.

from *Biblical Foundations for the Christian Vocation* by Donald Senior, CP

[In thinking about how I would like to see Cornelia's charism in the future] I would say that it seems to me that the chapter enactments from last year call us in two ways. Firstly to learn more about the God we are called to follow and emulate, by reflecting more deeply on this God who is revealed in the people we meet and the world we live in and to root this reflection in our understanding of the incarnation. They call us to be particularly attentive to our role within the church and the world as prophetic voices, calling others to listen to the voice of God...

from *No Single Story* by Emma Nolan, SHCJ England

The gift of the SHCJ is to embrace and share the nurturing love of God present and active in us and in all that God creates.

Does this reflect your understanding of our charism?

How do you articulate the gift of our charism in a short phrase or sentence?

Reflection and conversation

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3. *Sharing Our Gift*

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Leader The most urgent responsibility of the messenger of the Kingdom was to reveal in word and work the compassion and mercy of God. The poor receive particular attention in the Kingdom because of who God is. God's mercy and compassion for the defenseless assures them benefits. They are singled out because God is merciful. Social position, high or low is no guarantee of salvation; only a genuine response to the gospel is. (From *Jesus, A Gospel Portrait* by Donald Senior)



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Reflection

Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.

Mark 16: 15

Our life is hid with Christ in God. As we enter more and more deeply into this relationship, God's power at work in us can touch the hearts of those we meet. They will be led to know the Father's mercy and his boundless love through the mystery of Christ among us. For this is our mission: to help others to believe that God lives and acts in them and in our world and to rejoice in the divine presence."

SHCJ Constitutions 4

"A child of God with rights & duties in the Church"

Twenty-five years ago, my life took a different turn. I got to know some religious from the United States who came to live near me and work in my chapel, Our Lady of the Mill. Patiently and little by little they taught me a different way of life from the one I was living. O my God, how my personal life and my spiritual life changed. I began to realize that I too was included in the wonderful plan they presented. I saw how these Sisters lovingly supported me and made me understand that I am a child of God with rights and duties in the Church. I learned to express my thoughts and feelings, my hopes and my anxieties without fear. I learned to love myself as well as others. Now I'm an associate of this congregation and I can say that it has changed my life. And I know the founder, Cornelia Connelly, a woman like myself who loved Jesus, and the Virgin amidst all the joys and sufferings that life presents.

by Magdalena Muñoz, Associate, Chile

Cornelia fed this desire for holiness especially through her Epiphany letters. In these she kept before the Society not only the ideal of holiness in the vowed life but also the means by which each one could prove the sincerity of her desires.

*Cornelia did "run with ardour" impelled by a great desire to communicate God's loving mercy made visible in the Holy Child. She kindled a fire but hardly stopped to warm herself so eager was she to "increase the love, the devotion for and imitation of the ...virtues of our most sweet Jesus". Her greatest accomplishment, after the founding of her religious family, was that of "vividly unfolding in the course of [her] education the beauty of the morality, charity and truth of the one, Apostolic, Holy, Roman Catholic Church" ...She did this "as far as possible" from her conversion to her death with all her heart, all her mind and all her strength and in the joy and dynamism of her Incarnate Lord (D4; CCl:27).
from *Informatio*, p. 206, 211*

Reflection and conversation

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For additional materials, see SHCJ 26th General Chapter: *A Collection of Exercises & Resources*.