

PRESENTATION OF MISSION ECCE HOMO

1. I want to begin by thanking you for being here this evening. The mere fact that you have accepted the invitation shows that your Christian life matters to you, that there is in you a desire to grow in your friendship with Christ. If you remember, just a few Sundays ago, we heard at Holy Mass of the moment when two men, the youthful John and the sensible Andrew, met the Lord for the first time. To the question: "Where do you live?", Jesus answered them with the "Come and see" that would be for them the beginning of a new life. (Jn 1:38-39).

I also asked you to "come and hear" this evening, although in reality, I have little to do with this story. You are here following a prompting of the Holy Spirit. It is He who has gently drawn you to this Mass, to this church, on this night. He has called you, but now it is up to each of you to give an answer. See Mission *Ecce Homo* as an outstretched hand, a help that the Lord offers to those who wish to set out on this journey.

I want to explain up front the commitments that those of you who wish to get on this boat will assume. The boat will set sail on Sunday, February 14th, and will sail through the sea of Holy Lent until it reaches the port of the Easter Triduum, where we will contemplate the mystery of a God who will give his life for us. The name of this Mission - *Ecce Homo* (Jn 19:5) - indicates the goal of our journey in two ways: Christ is the man from whom we have all been created, and therefore, in Him we see the fulfillment of what it means to be a man. Saint John Paul II liked to repeat that affirmation of the Second Vatican Council that you have heard many times, "*The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light.*" (Gaudium et Spes 22) Christ crucified and glorious is going to teach us to be men, to be sons of God in fullness.

2. What are we going to try to do together in this Mission? We are going to beg for the **grace of a new heart**. This is very important to me because this mission is not about "doing things", but about becoming real. Our commitments will only be the means, the steps that we take toward the destination, opportunities that we will give to the Most Holy Trinity to act in us. But I have to let myself be molded by God. The prophet Isaiah says that we are the clay and God is the potter. (Is 64: 8) We must really be clay in the hands of God. We must let the hands of God shape us, and that is an interior attitude that goes beyond faithfully "doing" the commitments of this Mission. In fact, I can by hypothesis fulfill everything that is asked of me, not fail in a single one of these commitments, and still not change my heart! I can be like the Pharisee who, at the foot of the altar, prided himself on having done well what God asked of him, (Lk 18:9-14) but his was a heart of stone, as Ezekiel's prophecy says. (Ez 36:26)

The parable of the Pharisee and the publican is impressive because it reveals the extent to which we can be "missing the mark" in our Christian life. Our works of piety, our sacrifices, can lead us away from God! I can believe that my life is pleasing to the Lord because of what I do, regardless of how little love I put into my works and into my daily life. Imagine the case of a son who fulfills all the wishes of his father, who obeys all his rules, but does not really love his father. Could that father be happy? "My son obeys me, but he doesn't love me," he might say. Something similar happens with the Lord: obedience is only pleasing to God when it comes from love.

So I warn you from the beginning, beyond the commitments that I am going to share with you now, that what is fundamental is *the heart*, the *change of heart*, and the grace of authentic conversion. You must have the feeling that you are risking your life, that God wants to give you the grace you need, but that you must go forward and do what He asks of you on your part.

3. Precisely because we are seeking the grace of a new heart and precisely because the fundamental thing is the transformation of the heart, the commitments that we are going to make must *give unity to our whole life*. Prayer should influence my life and my life should help me pray better. We cannot separate action and contemplation, body and soul, fulfillment of our obligations and encounter with God. The commitments that we are going to make have been designed precisely to be like a kind of “communicating vessels” where everything is connected, where changes in one area of our life end up influencing other aspects of our existence. We must advance on the path that we are about to begin. We must take real, vital steps toward God and progress in the ways of the Spirit.

4. For this reason, I believe that the image that best describes Mission *Ecce Homo* is that of a **pilgrimage through the desert**. A pilgrimage is a demanding activity: it requires preparation, effort, constant sacrifices, overcoming obstacles, and continuous detachments. The very fact of leaving our home and moving away from the everyday expresses the determination to sacrifice whatever is necessary to reach the goal. So, if you don't want to move from where you are, it's better that you don't even start. If you just want a partial improvement in your life of union with God, this is not for you. If you are thinking of doing things this Lent without letting the Holy Spirit change your life, it would be better if you did not begin this adventure.

5. One last note before explaining the components of this Mission. Today is Tuesday February 2nd. On Thursday, February 4th at 8pm we will post the link to register for this Mission on the parish website. **It is necessary to register through the online form that you will find there** because there must be an interaction between us that is an integral part of this experience. This is not an initiative that can be done individually without the help of other men. In addition, this registration will allow us fluid communication

and will greatly facilitate the fruits of the Mission. Registration in the Mission will be open for 3 days, **until Sunday, February 7th at 8pm**. You have 4 days to think, pray and discern if you want to register.

6. Mission Ecce Homo has **5 elements**:

- sacramental life
- personal prayer life
- ascetic life (exercise of virtues)
- fraternal life
- spiritual accompaniment

Those who wish to join this program of life (Mission) embrace the five elements as part of the journey they wish to undertake this Lent. Within each of the five elements, there are specific commitments that I will try to explain. Let's take them one by one.

SACRAMENTAL LIFE

7. We said that we are looking for a new heart. That new heart is a gift from God. The Catechism says (1432):

“The human heart is heavy and hardened. **God must give man a new heart. Conversion is first of all a work of the grace of God** who makes our hearts return to him: "Restore us to thyself, O LORD, that we may be restored!" God gives us the strength to begin anew.”

For this reason, the first element of the five that make up Mission *Ecce Homo* has to do with sacramental life. It is there where Christ is present to communicate his grace to us. It is also the meeting place with the Mystery of the Church. It is the source from which we drink so as not to die on the way.

The sacramental life contains **three commitments: Eucharist** (which unfolds in participation in Holy Mass and Adoration) **and reception of the sacrament of Penance.**

7.1. **HOLY MASS** - *The commitment is to increase weekly attendance at a Mass by more than is usual for each man.* If I usually come to Mass once a week, I promise to come twice; if I regularly try to go three times, I commit to going four, and so forth. The important thing is not only to increase the frequency of Mass, but to live it as a personal encounter with Christ who is waiting for me. You have to participate by offering yourself with the Lord on the altar, experiencing it for what it really is: the drama of your redemption.

7.2 ADORATION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT – *The commitment is to visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament for at least 30 minutes each week.* Many of you already do it, for others it will be a new practice. Remember, the new heart is above all a gift from God. In Eucharistic adoration, we will ask Christ in the Eucharist to give us that gift.

The Mission will conclude on Holy Thursday evening, when each one will make a Holy Hour before the Blessed Sacrament, in what was called a "vigil of arms". In the Middle Ages on the night before being knighted, the candidate remained in the church praying, offering himself to God in this new life that would begin for him the coming morning. Saint Ignatius of Loyola, for example, made his "vigil of arms" before the Virgin of Montserrat at the beginning of his conversion. On March 21, 1522, he spent the night in the monastery chapel at the feet of his Lady, and as the sun rose, he placed into Mary's hands his ancient soldier's sword. As he left the church, he exchanged his clothes with a poor man and began to dress as a beggar. The rite of the "vigil of arms" expressed recognition of a fundamental change of life, an offering and a new way of life that had to begin in front of the Eucharist. We will do the same.

Throughout the long night before Christ died for our sins, we will wait vigil with Him, at the feet of our Lord and our Mother Mary, offering ourselves to Him as we begin a new life.

7.3. SACRAMENT OF PENANCE - *The commitment is to confess at least twice during the Mission, preferably at the beginning and at the end.* God willing, on Holy Thursday we will have our usual very long confession schedule to close our participation in this Mission: opening a new heart, wanting to leave our past life behind in

the Sacrament of Reconciliation, being humble and confessing our faults before the Lord who is rich in mercy.

The minimum commitment is to confess twice. Obviously, you can also go to confession more frequently. I especially want to draw attention to confession after committing a serious sin. In that case, *the commitment we assume in this Mission is to confess immediately*, not letting serious sin remain entrenched in the heart. If I sin seriously today, I humbly ask for forgiveness and confess the same day or the next.

Therefore, as regards the Sacrament of Penance, *the commitment is to confess immediately after committing a mortal sin, and in the case of not having fallen seriously (venial sin), to do so at least twice during the Mission.*

With these three commitments we cover this first element.

PERSONAL PRAYER LIFE

8. In addition to what we have already indicated in the previous element, each one must commit to giving God space for personal encounter in prayer. I repeat what I said before: we must take care of the quality of our prayer. It is clear, therefore, that when we talk about prayer commitments, *the first commitment of all is to pray well*, putting our hearts into it, feeling that my prayer is a furnace where the fire of the Holy Spirit can change me because I'm being generous with Him.

We are going to establish a prayer life plan during this journey that we are about to begin. In this prayer plan there are **5 commitments: reading of the Word of God at the beginning of the day, short prayers during the day, spiritual reading at the end of the day, the Rosary and fifteen minutes of meditation**. Let's look at them one by one:

8.1. THOUGHTS OR SHORT PRAYERS DURING THE DAY. I attach great importance to this first commitment because its purpose is to extend our personal prayer to the rest of our lives. We will have 4 thoughts or short sentences to ponder throughout our journey: two of those thoughts will be the same throughout the Mission and two will change daily.

The first thought for Mission *Ecce Homo* is made up of a few words taken from Psalm 51: "Create in me a pure heart, Lord" (v. 12). This verse has to become a true *mantra* throughout the Mission: it should be the first thought and the first prayer of our day: "Create in me a pure heart, Lord", and we must repeat it over and over again until it fills all the hours, every moment of the day. We must match it to the beating of our heart, to the rhythm of our breathing, to the blinking of our eyes: "Create in me a pure heart, Lord"; "Create in me a pure

heart." It is more than a thought: it is a prayer, a longing of the heart, a grace that we must implore.

I recall here again the text of Ezekiel's prophecy (36:24-28): "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." (Ez 36:26)

In the psalm, David uses the word "create." In other words, the "new heart" we seek is the fruit of a creation, and only God can create. We know that He will give us that "new heart" when He desires it and we plead for it like beggars. We'll ask for it insistently. We wait for it by walking towards the Lord and preparing to receive it.

The second thought / brief prayer is the so-called "Jesus Prayer": "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner." Many of you know the story of the Russian Pilgrim: a Russian man who sought continuous prayer, following the mandate of Saint Paul to "Pray without ceasing." (1 Thes 5:17)

This man wanted to reach the state where he could always be in a state of prayer, immersed in his dealings with God. Finally, this pilgrim met a *staretz*, a monk who taught him the "Jesus Prayer". "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Like water on stone, this constant repetition of Jesus' prayer softens the heart to the grace of conversion.

In Eastern Catholic or Orthodox spirituality, this is a prayer that is prayed with our whole being, body and soul. An attempt is made to match the breath so that the body unites with the spirit in prayer. The first part, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God," is said while taking inspiration, and the second part, "Have mercy on me, a sinner", while the air is exhaled.

These two very short prayers, "Create in me a pure heart, Lord" and "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner", must be **the two tracks on which the train of our daily life runs**. We must assimilate them until they penetrate us deeply, until they become the flesh of our flesh and the life of our life. They will help us to live in continuous recollection, in a humble attitude, in the desire to convert the heart. These prayers will elevate our life, they will supernaturalize it. They will lead us to give ourselves to God in the silence of the heart. They will move us to a greater depth of spiritual life. As I have said before, they must become our *mantra*, so that they will purify our hearts and occupy the place that we sometimes give to so many vain thoughts.

8.2. READING OF THE WORD OF GOD - Very early every day in the Flocknote group, we will post the readings of the Holy Mass of that day so that you can find them in your email as soon as you wake up. As soon as possible, after you wake up, I will ask you to read the readings of the day and write down a phrase or a word - only one - from those readings in the notebook that I will talk about later. **This commitment can easily be accomplished in a few minutes. Write the verse that impressed you the most and stick with it to return to throughout the day.** Let the Word of God accompany you at work, in family life, in your day-to-day activities. Let that Word challenge you, touch you, transform you.

That will be the third thought that you are going to try to carry with you throughout the day. Every day, obviously, it will change, and I trust that you will also change as you receive new words from the Lord.

8.3. READING OF THE BOOK *THE WAY*, BY SAN JOSÉ MARÍA ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER. I know that many of you know this work, written by the founder of *Opus Dei*. It is really an impressive book with a special force. It is made up of 46 short chapters and each chapter deals with a different topic of Christian and Catholic spirituality. I am very fond of this book for various personal reasons.

Allow me to share a story. The first edition of *Camino*, which has been translated into more than 40 languages and has hundreds of editions around the world, was published in 1934. Where? In my city. In my little Cuenca. You didn't know that, did you? Why did Saint José María publish it in Cuenca? Because he needed the approval of the ecclesiastical authority and the bishop of Cuenca was a relative of Saint José María, specifically his great-uncle. The bishop of Cuenca was named Cruz Laplana y Laguna, and he gave his life for Christ during the religious persecution in Spain in 1936. This bishop of Cuenca is now Blessed Cruz Laplana, for his courage, his fidelity to the faith and his love for his enemies. He died blessing and forgiving his executioners. That was probably the bloodiest persecution against the Church in history. In just six months, from July to December 1936, 13 bishops, more than 4,100 priests (one in seven priests in the whole country), more than 2,300 monks and almost 300 nuns were killed. The number of lay people who died from *odium fidei* (hatred of the faith) was even higher. Do you know that there is no known case of anyone who renounced his faith at the moment of ultimate testimony? Many of these men were uneducated, but they were men through and through.

But, back to the book, *The Way - Camino*. There is something special about that book. Each chapter is made up of independent phrases that relate to the topic of each chapter. It is a book that St. Jose Maria wrote for university students, specifically for men. The style is

masculine, strong, firm, direct and, at the same time, intimate and close. These are the words of its prologue, written by St. Jose Maria:

“Read these counsels slowly. Pause to meditate their meaning. They are things that I whisper in your ear, as a friend, as a brother, as a father. We shall speak intimately; and God will be listening to us. I am going to tell you nothing new. I shall only stir your memory so that some thought may arise and strike you: and so your life will improve and you will set out along the way of prayer and of Love. And in the end you will become a soul of worth”.

What will our commitment here be? Every day, at the end of the day, you will also receive through your email and Flocknote a chapter of *The Way – Camino*, beginning February 14th with the first chapter and ending on Holy Thursday with the last. **The commitment will consist of ending the day by reading that chapter and taking from the phrases, only one, the one that “strikes you”, as Saint José María says in the prologue.** That will be the fourth thought that you will write down in your notebook and that you will make the effort to consider when you turn off the light and until you fall asleep and the next day until you receive the next chapter of the book via email.

Reading each chapter takes between 10 and 15 minutes, reading slowly. If you won't be able to read the entire chapter one day, at least grab one of the sentences, write it down, and use it to meditate on when your eyes are closed and to continue reflecting on until the next day.

8.4. FIFTEEN MINUTES OF MEDITATION - *The next prayer commitment is to reserve 15 minutes of mental prayer each day.* I am aware that perhaps for some of you, this seems like a mountain. 15 minutes in silence! And yet meditation is essential for holiness. The sooner you get used to it, the better for you and yours.

So many things could be said about meditation, but here I will just mention a few general ideas. Last week, in one of the Gospels, we heard these words: "With many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it. Without parables he did not speak to them, but to his own disciples he explained everything in private." (Mk 4:33-34) Meditation is allowing Jesus to explain his word and teaching to us in private. When we are at Mass, we receive the Word of God, but then we have to meditate on that word slowly, as the first of the Psalms also says: "Blessed is the man for whom (...) the law of the LORD is his joy; and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted near streams of water, that yields its fruit in season; its leaves never wither." (Ps 1:1-3)

If we want this journey to be profitable, we have to be silent and meditate. Personally, I don't think it's that difficult. I began to learn to meditate when I was about 13 years old. This is how Father Antonio taught me. Believe me, if you get used to it little by little, it will end up being the best moment of your day. As Saint Teresa of Jesus defines it, "mental prayer, in my view, is nothing but friendly intercourse, and frequent solitary converse, with Him Who we know loves us." (Life, Ch 8, 5)

If reading the Word of God is the first thing in your day and the reading of *The Way - Camino* the last, these 15 minutes of meditation can be done when it best suits you, according to your schedule and your opportunities. You may want to combine meditation and spiritual reading at the end of the day, and spend 30 minutes in

intimacy with the Lord there. Maybe you can take a break from your work. Maybe part of your time in the Adoration Chapel, if you have a Holy Hour with the Lord. However it best it suits you.

What would be the content of your meditation? The first thing is always to acknowledge the presence of God. He is there, with you, to speak to you, to love you, to listen to you. Afterwards, you can use one of the two short prayers that we have said before ("Create in me a pure heart, Lord." or "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."), repeating them slowly, and then You can take that verse of Scripture that you wrote down in the morning or the thought from the book, *The Way*, that you read the night before and on which you have been reflecting in the silence of your heart. Little by little and with practice, we will learn —because the Holy Spirit will teach us— how to meditate.

8.5. ROSARY - *The last commitment of this second element (personal prayer life) is the recitation of the holy Rosary. For those who do not pray the Rosary daily, the commitment will be to start with a daily mystery the first week, and gradually add a mystery each week, so that the second week we now pray two daily mysteries; the third, three daily mysteries, up to five daily.* There is no rush and we can go little by little. What is important is that when we pray these mysteries of the Rosary, we are giving all our attention to our Mother. It is not worth praying this mystery while driving, or when we are shopping, or while helping at home. If we are going to talk to our Mother, let us put everything aside and give her all of our attention and love. I think she deserves it, don't you?

The Virgin Mary should be the Queen of our hearts, especially for us men, because She protects the virtue of purity that we struggle so hard to live. Now, we do not love Mary primarily for what She does for us, but for who She is. They say that once Saint Stanislaus of Kotska was asked: "Do you love Mary very much?" and he spontaneously replied: "How could I not love Her if She is my Mother?" If the only fruit of Mission *Ecce Homo* in the end is love for Mary on the part of all of us, and the commitment to pray the rosary daily, all our efforts will have been worth it.

This ends this second element of personal prayer. Let me summarize:

- As soon as you wake up, the plea: "Create in me a new heart, Lord."

- Immediately following is the reading of the Word of God for that day and the annotation in your notebook of a verse of Scripture.

- During the day, continually bring to your mind and heart the two short prayers ("Create in me a new heart, Lord" and "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner") and the verse from the Word of God that we have written down.

- At some point in your day, when you can, pray the Mystery of the Rosary and do 15 minutes of meditation, adding to the three previous thoughts, the one on The Way that you read the night before.

- At the end of the day, spiritual reading of a chapter of the book, *The Way* by de St. José María, writing just one of the phrases you read to meditate on while you fall asleep and the next day.

This is how, in such a simple way, we can elevate and supernaturalize the whole day. It will be like continuously breathing the aroma of God, living in God, walking in God, existing in God.

ASCETIC LIFE (EXERCISE OF VIRTUES)

9. The third element of Mission *Ecce Homo* is the denial of ourselves (self-denial). I will not say much about this part today because it will be, God willing, what we will talk about on Ash Wednesday, at the beginning of our Lenten journey.

The grace of God calls us to bear fruits of holiness and holiness consists in conformity with the Will of God. *Fiat Voluntas Tua*. On our part, this requires that Christ be the only Lord of our lives and we must deny ourselves in that which distances us from Him. Mother Teresa of Calcutta expressed it well with these words, "The more we empty ourselves, the more room we give God to fill us."

The sacramental life and the life of prayer are good only if they lead us to authentic Christian self-denial. A holy Jesuit priest, Father Mendizábal, used to say that sometimes one comes out of prayer more prideful and less humble, more affirmed in his own ideas and with little willingness to allow himself to be led. Using the excuse that God has manifested his Will to him in prayer, sometimes he does not even allow himself to be advised by others. Good prayer should lead us to greater humility, to a greater mistrust of ourselves, not the other way around!

It is said that at the Council of Trent there was a priest known for his great holiness. Some Jesuits were talking about him and one of them made this comment: "that priest is so holy because he is a man of prayer." Saint Ignatius heard his words and corrected the Jesuit saying, "That priest will be holy if he is a man of self-denial." Saint Ignatius' response is worth more than many books on the spiritual life.

It is self-denial that defines the degree of union with God. We will see on Ash Wednesday what this self-denial consists of.

In this element of ascetic life, there are two commitments: the particular examination of conscience and the life of sacrifice.

9.1. PARTICULAR EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE. We all know what the examination of conscience is. Every time we go to confession, we must do it and a good Christian should not go to sleep without reviewing his day, thanking God for the blessings received and asking forgiveness for the sins committed.

The examination of conscience can be of two types: the general, when we review our life as a whole, or particular, when we look at a specific part of it. The particular examination, therefore, does not try to correct all our defects, but only one of them. It is about paying special attention to a specific area of our life, to a predominant sin, to the number one enemy of our life of union with God. The book *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas of Kempis has this phrase: "If we were to uproot only one vice each year, we should soon become perfect." (Bk 1, Ch. 11, 5).

Imagine if it were like this! Every year, one less vice, totally removed from our lives. Out, gone. In a short time, we would be on the heights of holiness. Perhaps that is why Saint Ignatius of Loyola attached so much importance to the daily examen. He proposed it in his *Spiritual Exercises* and he himself practiced it several times every day. It is said that he never dispensed the members of the Society of Jesus from it: he might dispense meditation, even Holy Mass when there was some very serious reason, but a Jesuit could never omit his daily examination of conscience.

A commitment of Mission *Ecce Homo* is that we all, once a day, do a particular examination of conscience, based on a specific aspect of our Christian life, which we will write down daily in our

notebook and which we will report to our spiritual guides, which I will talk about later.

We will look more at how this particular examination of conscience is done in order to make it more useful to us. For now, I want to put forward the following: this examination of conscience has to hurt us. I think many times we are left alone in the middle of the examen, seeing where we have failed and asking God for forgiveness. In order for it to be effective, one has to propose the reparation of his fault and requires the recognition that sins have a cost. We will see how this works later.

9.2 SACRIFICES - The subject of sacrifices always comes to mind as Lent approaches. We know that we will have days of fasting and abstinence ahead of us, and we remember that Christ our Lord fasted in the desert for 40 days. In the lives of the saints, we also find great exercises of self-denial and this encourages us to imitate the generosity that leads to madness, a madness that is wisdom in the eyes of God.

In Mission *Ecce Homo* this element will be present as well, although I am going to hold this card close to my chest for the time being. On Ash Wednesday we will dedicate the entire presentation to this particular element. I urge you to be there then.

FRATERNAL LIFE

10. Each one of us undertakes Mission *Ecce Homo*, personally, before God, but we do not do it individually. It is a common exercise that unites men in our community. Brotherhood is a great help for our spiritual life, as well as a great remedy against our selfishness, because being in the boat with other brothers strengthens us and protects us from evils such as inconstancy, abandonment or discouragement. Knowing that we are not alone on the battlefield encourages us to continue the battle.

The book of Ecclesiastes contains these words that are to be meditated on slowly:

“If the one falls, the other will help the fallen one. But woe to the solitary person! If that one should fall, there is no other to help. So also, if two sleep together, they keep each other warm. How can one alone keep warm? Where one alone may be overcome, two together can resist. A three-ply cord is not easily broken.” (Ec 4:10-12)

In Mission *Ecce Homo*, we want to create meeting spaces that allow for future development of relationships between the men of our community. That is something that will depend on each individual - everyone is free to choose their own friends. The things that we do in common are intended to create in all of us a sense of community, to be part of a group of men united in the same ideal: the encounter with Christ and the search for a new heart.

It is clear that the current restrictions due to COVID do not allow us to develop this aspect as much as we would like, but I do believe that there are simple commitments that can unite us in a supernatural brotherhood.

Within this element of fraternal life, there are 3 commitments for all: participation in this Holy Mass on Wednesday evenings; the 33-day Consecration to St. Joseph for all the members of the Mission and the Lenten Triduum talks with Father Sebastian Walshe addressed particularly to the men who are participating in the Mission.

Let's say something about each of these three commitments.

10.1 PARTICIPATION IN THE HOLY MASS ON WEDNESDAY EVENING - The commitment will be to come to Holy Mass on Wednesdays at 6:15 in the evening, preferably physically present, but if necessary, via the Internet, beginning with Mass on Ash Wednesday.

This Holy Mass will be our weekly "meeting point". Here we will come to see each other and to listen to the reflections that I will share with you.

What am I going to talk about? I thought for a long time about how to organize the reflections. We are going to look at the Our Father, dedicating each Wednesday to one of the prayer requests that the Lord taught us. I will try to give you guidance not only for this Mission, but for your spiritual life from now on. They will be reflections aimed at you as men, which you can later meditate on in your heart and personal prayer. For this reason, I ask you to bring your journals or notebooks to these Masses, so that you write, not everything I say, but what touches you, catches your attention, or what you think you can use later in your personal meditation.

This Mass is not just for men: everyone is invited to participate. However, my words will be directed to the men who are participating in Mission *Ecce Homo*. Note that they will be long reflections, so you

have to come with the right mindset. If anyone is in a hurry – well, it's better not to come to this Mass.

If less than 50 men join Mission *Ecce Homo*, we will have the presentations here in the Church, just after Holy Mass. Currently the Diocese only allows gatherings of more than 50 people if it is within the Holy Mass. In the event that there are more than 50 men registered, what we will do will be what we have done today: the Mass will be without a homily, I will give the presentation at the end and we will conclude with the final blessing of the Holy Mass.

Participating in this Mass is important to us, for several reasons. One is that a communion is created that is also the fruit of the sacramental grace of the Eucharist. Although we have to maintain the social distancing that the Diocese requires, the simple fact of seeing other men from my parish come here creates a bond of affection with them that is supernatural. I remember reading something similar in a book called *The Man Who Got Even With God*. It is the biography of an American Trappist monk, John Hanning, who lived at Gethsemane Abbey in Kentucky in the late 19th century. Trappist monks spend most of their lives in silence. They rarely speak and when they do, it is usually with their superior or their novice master. However, a communion is created between them that is born of living, praying and suffering together. They love each other dearly in the Lord even though no words are exchanged when they pray together or when they are working together or when they walk through the cloisters of their monasteries.

Regardless of whether I speak with the other men attending Holy Mass who are participating in the Mission or not, the simple fact of being together at Mass, knowing that they are walking the same path with me, creates a supernatural affection that gives us encouragement,

which lifts us up if we have had a bad day, which helps us to move forward. The mere presence at this Holy Mass is a way of saying to our companions, "I am with you in this. We are walking together till the end." When the current situation is behind us and we can reconnect as before, maybe one of you will approach another brother and say: "I remember you, you participated with me in Mission *Ecce Homo* in 2021." Believe me when I say that your presence encourages others more than you can imagine.

This desire to create a bond between us is what will lead me not to publish my meditations on the Internet. My words are not intended to be read later in private, but to be received in union with our brothers. If someone cannot physically come to Holy Mass on one Wednesday, he will have to follow it live from his home through the internet and make that effort to "join the other brothers", at the same time that they are here with the Lord in the Eucharist.

There is another, deeper reason for coming here on Wednesdays. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, St. Thomas Aquinas, when he comes to the account of the risen Jesus appearing to the Apostle Thomas, asks why Jesus did not appear to him privately after his resurrection. The Evangelist John emphasizes the fact that the Lord went in search of his disciple while he was in the company of the other 10 apostles. The answer that the Angelic Doctor gives is very beautiful: because Christ lets himself be seen in the community of his disciples, not in isolation. That applies to the Church as a whole, but I think it has an application for us in Mission *Ecce Homo*. The profound reason for coming to Mass on Wednesdays is that it is precisely here, where the Lord manifests himself. Precisely here because where two or more meet in his name, there he is in their midst (Mt 18:20). In some way it can be said that my attendance brings the presence of Christ to my other brothers and vice versa, the fidelity of my brothers to this Mass

brings the presence of Christ to me, as happened to the Apostle Thomas in the Upper Room.

So I encourage you to come to give other men the gift not only of yourself, but of your Lord Jesus. I know that it is not easy for you. I know that the devil will put even more obstacles in your path to prevent you from coming. I know that listening to me speak English for so long is a great penance, but even if you did not receive anything from my words, your effort to be here will be very beautiful in the eyes of God, very meritorious for you, and very fruitful for your family and loved ones.

10.2. 33 DAY CONSECRATION TO SAINT JOSEPH - *The commitment here is to make the Consecration to Saint Joseph, from Monday, February 15th until the Feast of Saint Joseph, on Friday, March 19th.*

As you know, the Holy Father has dedicated this year to Saint Joseph. In addition to being a very powerful intercessor, Saint Joseph is also the best model - along with Jesus - of what it means to be a man according to the Heart of God. We learn to be men, especially in contact with other men in whom we see an ideal already realized. What is still future for us, we see already present in other men like us, especially in the saints. They are the proof that the Gospel can be lived with fidelity, that there are virtuous men with lives pleasing to God. On this spiritual path, Mission *Ecce Homo*, the best traveling companion is Saint Joseph, patron of the Mission, a model for all of us (especially for the heads of the family) and a guide throughout this pilgrimage that we are about to do.

For all those who can join, the preparation for the Consecration to Saint Joseph will be done via the Internet every day at 5 pm. On

Flocknote we'll send you the information as to how to join these meetings virtually. We will follow Father Calloway's book, which we will distribute to those who do not yet have it. In this "virtual meeting", we will pray the first part of the daily consecration. Sometimes Father Calloway asks that some of the appendices found at the back of the book also be read, and on these days, we will do that individually. Therefore, we are talking about 10 minutes a day and, again, I encourage you to try to join at that time to make the consecration with the other brothers of the Mission. Obviously, if one day we cannot join the group, each of us can do it personally at home when they have the opportunity. As I will spend a few days at the consecration in English and other days at the consecration in Spanish, some days you will see me and others you will not.

The last day of the Consecration is Friday, March 19th. That day, we will meet and have a special event to make the consecration together. I wanted to have this event at the Saint Joseph Chapel in Yarnell, but we have been told that it is now closed due to COVID. We have several ideas for that day, but no decision has been made yet. We will communicate with you through Flocknote when we know more, but I will notify you in advance so that you can try to reserve that day in the afternoon to complete the Consecration all together.

The idea is that first you will consecrate yourself to Saint Joseph as the heads of your families or communities, and later, toward the end of the year, you are the ones who will lead the Consecration of your families to the Holy Patriarch. That is, first the head of the family is consecrated and he guides the other members of his household.

10.3 A LENTEN TRIDUUM WITH FATHER SEBASTIAN WALSHE - *The commitment here will consist of participating in a*

Lenten Triduum with Father Sebastian Walshe, on February 22nd, 23rd and 24th, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.

You already know Father Walshe, who has been with us many times, most recently in November of last year. Father Walshe is always a huge source of blessings for Saint Anne, and this time, he will lead 3 talks for the men who are participating in Mission *Ecce Homo*. I am very sure that you are going to enjoy them very much and that they will be of great benefit to you. That week, the Lenten Triduum will replace Mass with me on Wednesday.

Personally, I am happy to think that with Father Walshe, you will at least have a good speaker during the Mission!

In summary, within this element of fraternal life, we have included the following commitments:

- Mass on Wednesday evening with a presentation at the end of Mass, commenting on the Lord's Prayer and applying it to your life as men.
- 33 day Consecration to Saint Joseph every day at 5pm online, ending with the act of Consecration on Friday, March 19th all together in a place yet to be determined.
- Lenten Triduum talk with Father Walshe, the evenings of the 22nd, 23rd and 24th here in St. Anne.

SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT

11. Personally, I attach to this fifth and last element a decisive importance for the fruit of the Mission. I also believe that it is one of the most distinctive features of Mission *Ecce Homo* and I encourage you to take advantage of this unique opportunity, seeing it as an enormous grace for the consolidation of the work that the Holy Spirit wants to do in you.

Everything previously said would somehow be incomplete if we did not have some way of evaluating the path we are taking. Therefore, a good use of the two commitments that we are going to include in this section can help you start a Christian life that will continue long after the conclusion of Mission *Ecce Homo*.

The two commitments that are included in this last element are: a spiritual diary and spiritual accompaniment appointments. Let's take the one at a time.

11.1 SPIRITUAL JOURNAL - I want to show you this. This is one of the two notebooks that I took with me on my 3-month pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It accompanied me every step of the way. It was with me in the Red Sea, in the desert, in Palestine, in the solitude of ruined cities, in the mountains, in the rain and in the sun. Every day, I would spend a few minutes to outline what had happened in my outer world, and also in my inner world. Here I have written down names of people, places, distances, meals, experiences, inner promptings, shed tears, frustrations, everything is synthesized here.

I must say that it was difficult for me to be faithful to this daily encounter because sometimes, at the end of the day, tired and knowing that I had to wake up early and continue walking, I did not feel like writing at all. Well, I can honestly tell you that you do not know the

thanks I have given God for giving me the idea and the strength to take these notes. Every year I read them again and I realize that I would have forgotten most of these experiences and graces I had I not written them down as they happened. This diary is my memory and it is also an invaluable help, even today, in seeking a greater union with God.

I know that men, in general, don't like to write, but you have to make a minimum effort every day because you will see that having a diary will make a big difference in your experience of Mission *Ecce Homo*. I would encourage you to get a real diary or a small notebook that you could put in your pocket and that you could have with you constantly. I know that many of us use phones or tablets to write, but it is not the same as having pencil and paper that I carry with me specifically for the time of the Mission. It is also a kind of external symbol of my commitment. If the meditation book that we are going to use is called *The Way*, we could call this diary, *My Inner Journey*, because it is the witness of progress and setbacks, lights and shadows, of my inner pilgrimage.

Do not panic because it is not that we should spend hours every day writing - a couple of minutes would be enough. The minimum to write in that spiritual journal each day is the following:

- The four phrases we have already spoken about "Lord, create in me a pure heart"; "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner"; the verse that we have highlighted from the readings of the Holy Mass of that day and the phrase from the book "*The Way*" that we will write down every night.
- In addition to these four sentences, you should also note what refers to your particular examination of conscience, and we will tell you what to write, but it is very brief.

That is all. From there, each one of you add what you want. It could be what you are experiencing, suggestions or ideas that you hear in the presentations, what you want to share in the appointment of spiritual accompaniment, if you are in consolation or in aridity, if the Lord gives you a special grace, your hopes, prayers that you wish to add on your own, and so forth.

This journal should be your companion, your memory, your witness every step of the way. It is also a way to hold yourself accountable, and, believe me, as time passes, it will help you even more in the future than it can help you during the days of the Mission.

11.2 SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT APPOINTMENTS - As an integral part of Mission *Ecce Homo*, we are going to ask you to have a spiritual guide with whom you will talk and evaluate the path you are taking. You will meet him virtually every week for 15-20 minutes until the Mission ends.

The spiritual guide is very important, for several reasons:

- His fundamental mission is to help you discern the Will of God in your lives and what the Lord manifests to you throughout the Mission.
- It is also his task to encourage you, especially in the most difficult moments, to continue forward.
- He is also the one that will help you adapt all the commitments that we have been seeing here, to the particular situation of each one of you. There is progress in the assimilation of these commitments that depends on where each of you is. Perhaps one of you should progress little by little until you are able to reach 100% of the requirements. Let me give an example: he will help you to see when you are ready to start with a new weekly Mass,

or when you are ready to perform the 30-minute weekly adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, or when to add, if necessary, one more sacrifice to your ascetic life.

- In a special way, he will guide you in regard to the particular examination of conscience, how to do it, how you are doing it, and to what extent it is helping you to progress in your Christian life.
- He is the one who will help you, in a particular way, when it comes to assuming the sacrifices that the Holy Spirit asks of you on this journey. We will talk about this on Ash Wednesday.
- He is the human representative to whom each one will give an account of how the week has gone, of fidelity to commitments and, especially, of fidelity to the commitments of interior life.
- He will clarify your doubts and guide you in everything you want to share with him in your weekly meeting.
- The spiritual guide is not your confessor, and you do not have to tell him your sins. Neither can he ask you about them nor does he have any interest in knowing them. His scope of action is strictly that of the Mission and its commitments, in addition to what you want to share with him.

How will this commitment be organized? As follows:

- Starting tomorrow at 8 o'clock, you will find on the parish website the online form to register for Mission *Ecce Homo*.
- In this form there will be a section dedicated to the spiritual guide. It is you who will choose the guide you want, and there will be several options:
 - o One option is to say that you already have a spiritual director outside the parish and that you therefore commit yourself to be accountable to him in relation to the Mission.

- For minors, the spiritual guide will be our Youth Minister, John Caballero, who has a lot of experience with young people and knows how to advise according to what we have presented here tonight.
- For those of legal age who do not have spiritual direction, there will be several options among the deacons of our parish: a member of the clergy of St. Anne, you can choose which one, will be at your disposal during the time of Mission *Ecce Homo* to accompany you weekly in the discernment.
- There is one last option for someone who needs spiritual guidance and has no preference because they would feel comfortable with any of them. In that case, by selecting that option, he would be assigned one by the Mission leadership according to the number of men who have been assigned to each spiritual guide.

I know that in this there is the possibility of cheating, in the sense that one can choose the first option ("I already have a spiritual guide and I don't need one.") even though in reality they don't. Everyone must face his own conscience. In reality, this is a wonderful aid for spiritual growth and having it at your disposal is a wonderful grace. It can make a difference for those who know how to take advantage of it with a supernatural spirit. In addition, as the meetings will be weekly, they should not be very long. They will be a simple contact to see where we are, how we are progressing, and what the Lord wants us to continue doing.

I encourage you not to miss this opportunity!

FINAL REFLECTION

12. Dear brothers, as I said at the beginning, I thank you infinitely for your presence here today. Regardless of your final decision, whether you wish to participate in this Mission or not, the fact that you have come this evening means a lot to me, both personally and for the comfort you have given to the Heart of Jesus.

I have laid all cards on the table, and now you must decide based on what I have shared with you this evening. Do what in good faith what you think the Lord is asking of you.

Mission *Ecce Homo* is going to be my main pastoral occupation until Easter. I have focused all my efforts, my personal schedule, my personal prayer, my energies and my attention to this Mission because I believe that it is what God is asking of me, because I am aware of the importance it has for our community and your families, and because I trust in the fruits that will come from this. What do I mean by fruits?

When I speak of fruits, I am not referring to the number of men who sign up from Thursday at 8 pm until Sunday at 8 pm. Understand well what I am going to say: I do not care about numbers at all. I will work the same if there is one man who signs up for the Mission or if there are 100. I honestly believe that I would put in the same effort even if there were only one person in this Mission.

When I speak of fruits, I mean that a man receives a grace in this Mission that is the seed of a change in himself, in the Church and in the world. There is a story about the cynical philosopher of Ancient Greece, Diogenes. They say he was found walking in broad daylight through the streets of Athens with a lit torch in his hand. Someone asked him, "Diogenes, what are you doing?" The sage replied, "I am looking for a man." Neither

then nor now is it easy to find a man on the face of the earth, let alone a man according to the Heart of Jesus.

At St. Anne, during this Lent, I am Diogenes. I, too, go in search of ONE man and I ask the Lord, through the intercession of Saint Joseph and our Mother Mary, for the grace of a man. A man who is generous with God and gives everything in this Mission. A converted man is a potential spiritual revolution. Sometimes it is even the salvation of a whole family, a whole community, an entire country. Sometimes an entire age is redeemed by one man's response to God's plans.

What will make this Mission fruitful is such a man in the parish. On January 20, 1537, Saint John of Avila preached a sermon in the city of Granada that was attended by hundreds of people. It was a homily centered on this idea: "It was love that drove God to the madness of taking our flesh and living among us."

We do not know about the effects of this preaching on the audience, except for a vagabond who was wounded by grace with the words of Maestro Ávila: a poor man named Juan Ciudad who, on that day, changed his name to John of God. The rest of the attendees took him for mad because Saint John of God began to scream and cry inconsolably, to the point that he was admitted to the Royal Hospital for the Insane. The truth is that yes: that day, Saint John of God went mad with love for God and began the path of his holiness. As you know, he founded what is now known as the Brotherhood of Saint John of God, dedicated to the healing of the poorest of the sick and which today has spread over the five continents. The sermon of Saint John of Avila that morning was fruitful because one man changed his life.

In the summer of 1534, Saint Ignatius of Loyola directed the Spiritual Exercises in Paris to a single man, a young man not yet fully conquered for the cause of Jesus Christ. He was one man. Francis Xavier. A man who, converted to God, would be a giant of holiness, called the "Saint Paul of

Modern Times", the first Catholic missionary in Japan, father of Christian communities that were true to the Faith for centuries even to the supreme witness of the martyrdom. A man who opened the way of salvation to hundreds of thousands of people, all because he allowed himself to be won by Christ.

Hopefully among those who listen to me, there is a man willing not to deny God anything.

Lord, create in me a pure heart.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Saint Joseph, pray for us!