

## The Spirituality for Everyday Life: Impelled by Christ's love (2 Cor 5:14)

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The obedience to Jesus' command for missionary work is not the only motivation for establishing the missionary congregation—The Society of God's Word. The true motivation lies in the motivation of God coming to the earth, revealing himself and saving human beings. The true motivation was the love of God for human beings. The founder Arnold Janssen knew this love and decided to serve the world and he believed that everyone could learn that God loves human beings and God could be praised by all. This project of love inspired many men and women to become consecrated persons and also the lay collaborators to join this project.

To keep the fire going, it is important to be constantly adding logs; to keep the enthusiasm, it is important to be open to constant renewal. After all, Christ's appeal for renewal does not cease to reverberate in today's world. It is not addressed only to those who don't believe in God, but it is also an appeal to all Christians to move from an average life and a formal faith expression to even greater devotion to God. The path of renewal and repentance is a continuous task and they are not the solemn outcome of human work. It is the effort of a miserable heart drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first.<sup>1</sup>

The founding principle of the Society of the Divine Word is based on this call to the path of inner conversion and transformation of thinking in an effort to see the world as God sees it. The 18th General Chapter stipulated three aspects to deepen our fidelity to Christ and to his mission: *the experience of love, discernment, and witnessing to renewal and transformation*. The inner logic of these words keeps us on the path to pursue our Christian vocation: the holiness of life. In the same manner, Pope Francis referred to this call to the Church in his Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, concerning our vocation to holiness in the present world: "The Lord asks everything of us, and in return he offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created. He wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence. The call to holiness is present in various ways from the very first pages of the Bible. We see it expressed in the Lord's words to Abraham: 'Walk before me, and be blameless' (Gen 17:1)" (1).

The final statement of the 18<sup>th</sup> General Chapter calls us to make God our first love. It means to experience in a personal way the love of Trinity of God revealed through Jesus Christ, which transforms us and drives us to be fully engaged in loving service to others.<sup>2</sup> God's love therefore precedes and shapes our missionary identity. This experience of redefining God's love and commitment to service is defined in the motto of St. Arnold Janssen: *May the Holy Trinity God live in our hearts and in the hearts of all people*. It explains the duality of movement: to be rooted in his love and our mission to invite others to participate in this love.

The three words presented in the 18<sup>th</sup> General Chapter—experience, discernment and witnessing, can be seen as the stairs of a spiral staircase. These are the steps through which we can come closer to God,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1428.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Documents of the 18th General Chapter SVD 2018, *In Word and Deed*, 6/2018, no. 22.

neighbors and ourselves. On the following pages, we will look at how we can make our way through the pillars of our spirituality in the light of these three words.

## 1. The Spirituality of the Parental Home

**The experience of love:** If we want to stress that the spiritual life of the parents are of great importance to children, we can look at the example of Arnold Janssen. The spirituality of the congregation founded by him embodies the manuscript of the spiritual heritage of his parental home. His devoted father participated at the Holy Mass on Sunday to honor the Most Holy Trinity as a thanksgiving for the past week. During Monday's masses he prayed to Holy Spirit with the plea for help and blessing. He liked to read the Scriptures, and in the evenings, the family prayed the Prologue of John's Gospel. His mother honored the Eucharist. She often went to holy confession and each week she received Holy Communion. She also honored the month of May's devotion to Mary and prayed for the passion of the Christ for the souls in purgatory. Arnold Janssen grew up in the atmosphere of the secrets of faith and experienced the love of the Trinity of God.

**Discernment:** Arnold's respect for Sacred Heart, the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and the entire Trinity deepened and enriched these treasures of his parents' devotions. Because of the circumstances and the needs of his time, he was constantly contemplating the individual mysteries of faith. He was seeking God's will for him and searched for the ways to deal with the challenges of life.

**Witnessing:** He introduced these devotions as a way of following God for his spiritual sons and daughters. These have become pillars of our spiritual growth. We could say that thanks to Arnold's parents, already thousands of spiritual sons and daughters of Arnold Janssen are deepening their love for God and for missions. Thanks to their intuition and devotions, thousands of others could meet God. The example of Arnold's parents, Gerhard and Anna Katharina, is also an example for our families. It is an inspiration to live a life of faith in families in such a way that the avalanche of God's love can be spread throughout the world.

## 2. Let the Heart of Jesus Live

**Experience:** St. Arnold Janssen learned about respect for the Sacred Heart, which was spread through the revelation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to Margaret Mary Alacoque.

**Discernment:** His respect for the Heart of Jesus necessarily had to pass a strong test of reason, since he was a mathematician with strong rational reasoning and due to his German thoroughness. It was in the heart of Jesus that Arnold found the answer to the question that had long occupied his mind: What about the unbelievers and people of other faiths? Through the revelation of the Sacred Heart, he understood that the Heart of Jesus is great and that in his heart there is plenty of space for every person of the earth. So, if Jesus cares about people and even though they are in the most remote parts of the world, why not do everything to introduce them to Jesus' love?

**Witnessing:** Arnold thus found a way to respond to the necessity of respecting the Sacred Heart. He put himself in its service. During his life, he sent hundreds of missionaries to missions to spread the love of God's heart. We pray the prayer: *May the heart of Jesus live in the hearts of all people.* This could be the answer to my question—what can the respect of the Sacred Heart tell us today? In this prayer, we pray for ourselves and for all the people to act as Jesus, who carries in his heart all the people—his friends as well as his enemies. If Jesus' heart lives in our hearts, we should love everyone, without exception. As Jesus has space in his heart for everyone, so shall we.

### 3. The Trinity Lives in Us

**The experience of love:** Father Arnold once wrote: “God doesn’t reside in us as a ghost in a grave but lives in us.” He enjoyed the adoration of Holy Trinity in the heavenly, the Eucharistic and the mystical thrones (in the hearts of people). He could understand the intimate relationship of the Trinity with human beings through a biblical portrayal of living - God is living in us and we are living in God: “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them (Jn 14:23).”

**Discernment:** The scope of missionary work should consist of preparing this throne in the hearts of people. The reward of missionaries is to see the hearts of those people who live in grace. They can see a stunning picture: the heart is surrounded by and filled with the light and is in the center of the Trinity. We can understand the great value of missionary work through meditation on the fact that the same God, who is the highest and whom we receive in the Eucharist, wants to find his throne even in the hearts of people. Missionary work is not based solely on prayer but even more importantly on contact with others.

Personal contact with people was also Jesus’ priority. We would find him at friends in Bethany, or at a party at Matthew’s house, or in the house of Zacchaeus. He started his public life at the wedding in Cana, and he also made a good start at a visit to the Pharisee Simon. During one hot afternoon, he spent time with a Samaritan, and he accepted a visit of Nicodemus at night. He went not only to Peter’s boat but he also often stayed in his house. And I don’t have to mention the multitudes who longed to spend time with him almost every day.

**Witnessing:** Relationships are reasonable. We can grow and mature through them. We learn who we are and with whom we are connected. They help us analogically to recognize who God is. They teach us about faithfulness and responsibility. They create space for encounter with Christ. They give us the opportunity to grow in unselfish and unconditional love and to see others through Christ’s eyes, as well as to live in freedom as children of God under the caring surveillance of God. Such an attitude has far-reaching consequences, because a homeless person could see the value of his life not through small coins but through the time spent with him together during lunch. It’s not a sticker on the car but the driving method that shows that the driver is Christian. Not just the cross in the artist’s portrait, but the relationship with employees and customers which reveals that he/she and his/her house serve the Lord. The life in an environment where I feel safe will not raise questions about my relationship to Jesus, but the willingness to come out of my own comfort zone and security will.

It is almost impossible not to get dirty in the world of relationships and many encounters. However, the reward comes when we start the relationships as Jesus did. Ultimately, it is a step that God himself made to send his son to relate with us. Relationships were apparently not just pastoral work. They are, in the first place, a manifestation of genuine interest and deep love.

### 4. Missionary Angels

**Experience of love:** God’s love is attentive and sympathetic. He gives himself totally. We learn in Sacred Scripture, as well as through the Eucharist, that God gives himself completely. We know that God is love, that God is caring and does everything good for the benefit of all persons; we also know about the forgiveness of sins, unlimited forgiveness, ever ready to open his arms and welcome us, and about our home in heaven and eternal life. We know it through God’s servants and servants of the Gospel, who in all times devote their lives to proclamation of these truths. Through them we can see God’s grace towards us.

**Discernment:** Father Arnold used to say: “Announcing the Good News is the first and the greatest act of love to your neighbor.” He was inspired by the words of the prophet Isaiah and therefore he knelt

down and kissed the feet of missionaries leaving to missions. “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” (Is 52:7). We may meet strangers, but in Christ we meet them all as brothers and sisters. Those who receive the invitation of God to become the messengers of his glad tidings Arnold called “angels”, because being an angel means being an agent or messenger of God, a person of exemplary conduct or virtue.

**Witnessing:** This reflection provokes prayer for the following graces:

- To have the Father’s arms in which there is a place for his prodigal son, even though he had been straying;
- To possess the knees of the merciful Samaritan who is willing to kneel down to the misery of this world;
- To wear the sandals of the Good Shepherd who is willing to walk far;
- To hear the beats of a generous heart, to be a sower that does not look where he/she will sow;
- To know the joy of angels who rejoice when a sinner who is repenting comes back;
- To become a stronger person who takes the greater burden of the crowd on his shoulders according to the example of Christ who is offering his yoke.

We will not receive these blessings in a supernatural or unseen manner. They will come along with opportunities in which we will be able to gradually acquire them so much that they will become a permanent part of our everyday life. It is a strenuous exercise and an effort to be more and more linked to Christ, in which we will understand that love costs something, that forgiveness hurts, and that one gesture of mercy can be greatly demanding. Then, we understand (even if only in hints) what God experiences in his relation to us. Then, we can understand that the offered forgiveness provides a renewal of broken trust and friendship which we have given up. We can understand that the act of mercy is the decision to say YES to the unselfish attitude of love, even though it can be betrayed again.

## **5. Practical Spirituality – Prophetic Dialogue**

**Experience of love:** In the missionary service, we leave our own comfort and security and come to others. Thus, we live the experience of Christ—when we are dying together with Christ we reach the fullness of life. Through contact with others we don’t only represent Christ (Gal 2:20) but it is also a way for us to meet Christ. We call our “working method” the prophetic dialogue that we have with those of no faith or with those who don’t have their community where they could live their faith; with those that are poor and live on the edge of society; and with people of different cultures, religious traditions and secular ideologies. Every meeting is a merciful moment that could serve not only as a moment of encounter with God but also as an opportunity to grow.

**Discernment:** When we meet people who have different religions, we need to leave our skeptical, closed, and arrogant attitude and we have to become trusting, hospitable, humble, willing to cooperate, and to be respectful. When we work with the poor and marginalized, we need to leave our selfish and indifferent attitude and to show solidarity and compassion. When we meet those that seek God, we can deepen our own faith. When we work with people from different cultures, we need to overcome our prejudices, ethnocentrism, and fear and to become open and enthusiastic. Our services become our contemplation and our sanctification.

**Witnessing:** If we want to be the protagonists of true prophetic dialogue, we have to be true followers of Jesus Christ. It is not enough to be a fan. There is a great difference between a follower and a fan. Fans are those that have no problems to acknowledge Jesus’ teaching and wisdom, saying that they are unique. They can have long discussions about him. They wear a cross on their necks and stickers on their cars. They don’t like fake Christians but the Bible is laid on a visible place in their

houses. They care more about dusting it than about meditating on the texts. They know exactly how to name and condemn the failures of the Church and if they have the opportunity, they can also praise the Church's achievements. However, they don't invest enough effort to improve the Church. They make small contributions, invest almost nothing, but they like to benefit from the membership in Jesus' Fanclub. At the time of persecution, they deny their faith and in the time of hardship, they cannot find the strength to endure. They give little thanks in their prayers, they almost don't worship, but they are asking to receive a lot.

When Jesus invites us to service, he is not interested in our membership in the Fanclub. He calls us to follow him. True followers are very different from fans. Jesus is for them not only wise teacher but mainly God and Lord. Therefore, they kneel in front of him and adjust their acts according to his teaching. They not only know a lot but they have relationship with him. They like to give testimony through wearing a cross or figure of a saint, but they value more the transparency of life and the coherence between their acts and their preaching. Their Bible doesn't have to be dusted as dust doesn't have time to fall on it. They rejoice in the achievements of the Church and are saddened by her failures. Through their acts they try to improve her credit and they repent for weak members of the Church. They try to build God's kingdom. They are leaving their comfort zone and take their responsibility. They don't seek the minimum of love but it's maximum. In the time of persecution, they seek to endure and in the time of hardship, they pray for the mercy to see what good it will bring them. In their prayers, they thank a lot, worship God and ask for others and themselves. They are on Jesus' side even in moments when they are in the minority and are prepared to testify in the light of hope that lives in them. They try to be active and they want to be not only the members of God's kingdom but also commit themselves to build it.

A disciple who decides to walk God's paths in the light of God's word changes his life. He lives a fulfilled life. He undergoes a radical change of thinking. He is serving fulltime and because of his relationship with others, the entire community supports him. He gives everything to God's hands to receive back everything multiplied by a hundred fold. The life of the disciple of Jesus is a life of testimony, a life of sacrifice, and a life of announcing and he continuously is involved in forgiveness, healing, casting out evils, doing miracles, and loving without conditions, and reaches out to all without boundaries. Thus, his life gains the essence of prophecy.

## **6. The Spirit that Makes People the Saints**

**The experience of love:** Arnold himself considered the impulse and the mercy to worship the Holy Spirit the greatest mercy of his life. The Holy Spirit is the last from the Holy Trinity to be revealed but the first in the wakening of our faith. Mary would never become the Mother of God's Son without the Holy Spirit. Without Holy Spirit, a priest would not be able to say the prayer over the gifts of bread and wine and the Eucharist would never happen. Only thanks to the Spirit, we can say "Jesus is the Lord", the Spirit reveals the entire truth to us. The Spirit defends us and rejoices with us. The Spirit gives us words when we must defend the hope that is in us. In baptism, the Spirit makes us God's children and brings the Holy Trinity to our lives. The Spirit teaches us to pray. The Spirit comes in the moments when we are weak and prays eternally for us with prayers of inexpressible sighs. Through holy restlessness, the Spirit calls us to serve and give testimony. Without the Spirit, there would be no inspiration to do good and great works that change the life of people and the history of the world. The Spirit gives us the necessary gifts that are needed for general good and personal sanctification. The Spirit mediates and grants mercy from the life of sacraments and enables us to understand the Scriptures in the same spirit as it was written. This silent Guest of our souls lives in us and considers us to be God's temple. Thanks to the Spirit we can experience an intimate relationship with God, we can understand our own value and adore the holy, sacred Eucharist—Jesus himself.

**Discernment:** Let's try to imagine a life of faith without this. We would find out that without the Holy Spirit we become spineless or lifeless. Therefore, Arnold Janssen asked Jesus for mercy to know the

love of the Spirit and to live and die for Jesus. In 1887, Arnold Janssen consecrated his life to the Holy Spirit. The inner attitude was much more important than external acts. Only this attitude gives the worship a sweet scent in the eyes of God. Arnold Janssen prepared himself for his adventure of mission and the Holy Spirit led him through paths that not even the craziest of human fantasies could imagine. Obedience to the inspirations of Holy Spirit became his shortcut to a life of holiness.

**Witnessing:** In 1888, St. Arnold Janssen, in the attachment of his magazine enthusiastically encouraged readers to dedicate themselves together with their families to the Holy Spirit as he did. He did it though a short interview between a priest and a believer:

Believer asked: ‘To which saint do we have to consecrate the chapel?’

Priest replied: ‘Consecrate it not to some saint but to God – the Holy Spirit who makes people the Saints. He is much greater and worthier of praise than all the Saints, and he is infinitely more powerful and loving than they are’.

This was the priest’s advice. I write this to you, dear readers; take this as an example for yourself and for your family and everything that you are, and consecrate yourselves to the Holy Spirit as his possession.

## **Conclusion**

The spirituality of St. Arnold Janssen is a spirituality of everyday life. The goal of our spiritual journey through the steps mentioned above is not to be like Saint Arnold Janssen, but to imitate Jesus Christ more closely. This would enable us to join Saint Paul in saying: “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20).