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Editorial

Among the highlights of the latter half of March was a much anticipated visit of the US president, Barack Obama to the Vatican. Mr Obama, who has candidly praised the Pope's compassion, told the Pope it was a "great honour" to meet him. Although the details of the closed door talk between the two leaders are not known, the official communication mentioned that the discussion was based on questions of particular relevance for the Church in the US, such as the exercise of the rights to religious freedom, life and conscientious objection. What perhaps got eclipsed the same day is a special mass for 500 Italian MPs during which the Pope in his inimitable style, warned them to avoid sliding ever downwards into corruption. The hard talk is certainly not just intended for politicians of Italy. Pope Francis has often asked his listeners to shun corruption by saying... we are sinners, true. But we cannot be corrupt. The same heart then beats for the simple and the ordinary while he meets people from the working class, the staff of the steel works company. Addressing the 'entire working world' he speaks of work and human dignity.

Actions certainly speak louder than words! The humility of Pope Francis was once again manifested in a small and yet profound expression of stepping into a confessional as a penitent, to say, "forgive me father for I am a sinner..", right under the gaze of people gathered for confessions, observing the festival of forgiveness. Even the greatest sinner can avail God's mercy. "Please change your lives, repent, stop perpetrating evil", Pope Francis told the mafia which has wreaked havoc in the lives of simple people. Lent is a time for us to reflect, repent and return to God.

Fr. Melwin Pinto, SJ

1. Pope emphasizes mercy in discourse on Sacrament of Reconciliation



Pope Francis on Friday March 28 spoke to participants of a “Course on the Internal Forum,” which deals with the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the ministry of Confessors. In his discourse, Pope Francis spoke about how the annual course helps “the Church and Confessors to better carry out the ministry of mercy, which is so important.” [\(Video\)](#)

He reminded priests that the Holy Spirit is the ‘protagonist’ of the ministry of reconciliation, calling on them to “always be ‘men of the Holy Spirit.’” As such, priests must welcome penitents not with the attitude of a judge, but with “the charity of God, with the love a father who sees the son returning, the shepherd who has found the lost sheep.” For this reason, the Pope said, priests are called to be generous in making themselves available for Confession. “We must never forget,” he said, “that the faithful often have difficulty approaching the Sacrament of Confession.” And so, priests must

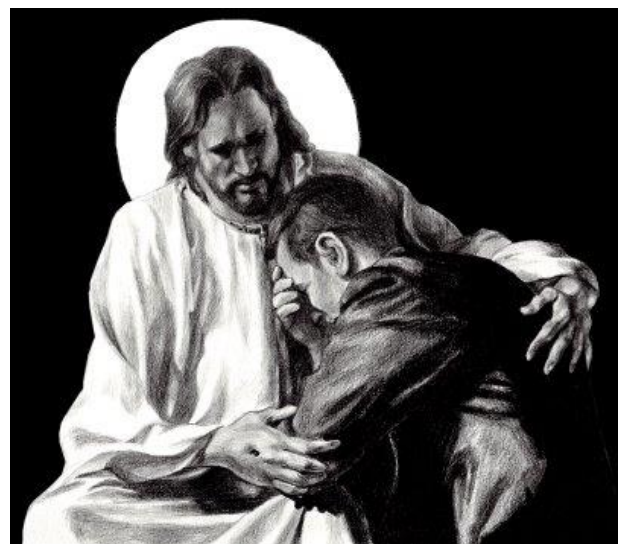
work hard to encourage people to draw near to the Sacrament “of mercy and forgiveness.”

Here, the Holy Father said, priests must avoid both rigorism and laxity. “Confession is not a court of condemnation, but an experience of mercy and forgiveness!” Finally, recognising the difficulties encountered in Confession, Pope Francis encouraged priests to take particular care in the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In particular, he said “it’s good that in every parish, the faithful know when they can find priests” available to hear Confessions.

Below, please find the complete text of Pope Francis’ to participants in the course offered by the Apostolic Penitentiary:

Dear Brothers,

I welcome you on the occasion of the annual Course on the Internal Forum. I thank Cardinal Mauro Piacenza for the words with which he introduced our meeting. For a quarter of a century the Apostolic Penitentiary, aware of the importance of this ministry, has offered, especially to new priests and deacons, the opportunity of this course, in order to contribute to the formation of good confessors. I thank you for this valuable service and I encourage you to take it forward with renewed commitment, building on experience gained and with skilful creativity, to always help the Church and confessors to better carry out the ministry of mercy, which is so important! In this regard, I wish to offer a few thoughts.



First of all, the protagonist of the ministry of reconciliation is the Holy Spirit. The forgiveness that the Sacrament confers is the new life sent by the Risen Lord by means of His Spirit: “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are

“forgiven them, and whose sins you retain, are retained” (Jn 20:22-23). Therefore, you are called to always be “men of the Holy Spirit,” witnesses and heralds, joyful and strong, of the resurrection of the Lord. This testimony is read on the face, is heard in the voice of the priest who administers with faith and with “unction” the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He welcomes penitents not with the attitude of a judge, not even with that of a simple man, but with the charity of God, with the love of a father who sees the son returning and goes to meet him, [with the love] of the shepherd who has found the lost sheep. The heart of the priest is a heart that knows how to be moved, not by sentimentality or mere emotion, but to the “tender mercy” [viscere di misericordia] of the Lord! If it is true that tradition points out the dual role of doctor and judge for confessors, we



must never forget that as a doctor he is called to heal and as a judge, to absolve.

The second aspect: if Reconciliation transmits the new life of the Risen Lord and renews baptismal grace, then your task is to give it generously to others. To give this grace. A priest who does not attend to this part of his ministry, both in the amount of time spent and in the spiritual quality, is like a shepherd who does not take care of the sheep that were lost; he is like a father who forgets the lost son and neglects waiting for him. But mercy is the heart of the Gospel! Don't forget this: mercy is the heart of the Gospel! It is the good news that God loves us, that He always loves the sinner, and with this love draws him to Himself and invites him to conversion. We must not forget that the faithful often have difficulty approaching the sacrament, whether for practical reasons, or because of the natural difficulty of confessing one's sins to another person. For this reason it is necessary to work hard on ourselves, on our humanity, never to be an obstacle but always to favour drawing near to mercy and forgiveness. But many times it happens that a person comes and says, “I haven't confessed for many years, I have this problem, I left Confession because I found a priest

and he told me this,” and you see the imprudence, the lack of pastoral love, in what that person says. And they draw away, because of a bad experience in Confession. If there is this attitude of a father, that comes from the goodness of God, this would never happen.

And we must guard against two extremes: rigorism and laxism. Neither is good, because in reality they don't take charge of the person of the penitent. Instead, mercy truly listens with the heart of God and wants to accompany the soul on the path of reconciliation. Confession is not a court of condemnation, but an experience of forgiveness and mercy!

Finally, we all know the difficulties often encountered in Confession. There are many reasons, both historical and spiritual. However, we know that the Lord wanted to give this immense gift to His Church, offering to the baptized the security of the Father's forgiveness. It is this: it is the security of the Father's forgiveness. For this reason, it is very important that in every diocese and in the parish communities, particular care is taken of the celebration of this Sacrament of forgiveness and salvation. It's good that in every parish the faithful know when they can find priests available: when there is fidelity, the fruits are seen. This is particularly true for the churches entrusted to religious Communities, which can ensure a constant presence of confessors.

To the Virgin, Mother of Mercy, we entrust the ministry of priests, and every Christian community, that they might always grow in understanding the value of the Sacrament of Penance. I entrust all of you to our Mother and I bless you from the heart.

2. Pope sets example by going to confession

Leading a penitential service in St. Peter's Basilica, Thursday March 28, evening, Pope Francis surprised everybody by going to a priest for confession during the service. After an examination of conscience, the pope



and 61 priests moved into confessionals or to chairs set up against the walls to offer the sacrament to individual penitents. Before hearing the confession of others, Pope Francis himself went to a priest in a confessional to confess his sins. The penitential service was the start of an initiative called, "24 Hours for the Lord," sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization. Dioceses around the world were asked to have at least one parish open all day and night, starting March 28, so that anyone could go to confession and take part in Eucharistic adoration. [\(video\)](#)

In his homily, the pope said following God's call to conversion is not supposed to happen only during Lent, but is a lifetime commitment. He also spoke about two key characteristics of Christian life: putting on a "new self, created in God's way" and living in and sharing God's love. He pointed out it's not merely in not stealing, but more in sharing what one has with others, especially the needy; not merely in not giving in to anger, rancour and revenge, but rather by being meek, magnanimous and ready to forgive; not merely by avoiding malicious gossip, but by looking mainly for the good side in everyone." Secondly, the Pope said God never tires of looking out for his children, both those lost and those faithful. Jesus, in fact, calls on everyone to imitate this same merciful love and become "credible disciples of Christ in the world," he said.

3. Pope Francis at Mass tells parliamentarians to shun corruption

On Thursday morning, 27 March, Pope Francis celebrated Holy Mass for over 500 Italian parliamentary officials in the Vatican Basilica. Commenting on the day's Readings from the Old Testament and the Gospel, the Pope offered a reflection on a ruling class that had turned away from the people. "The hearts of this ruling class", the



Pope said, "of this small group, in time became so hardened that it was impossible to hear the voice of the Lord. And they slid from sinfulness into corruption. These men took the wrong path. "Yet", he added, "one can avoid slipping from sin into corruption by following the dialectic of freedom where there is room for the Good Lord who loves us, he loves us so much!" The Pope invited members of the Italian Parliament to welcome the Lenten season as a propitious occasion to embark on the road of God. The following is a translation of the Pope's homily, which was delivered in Italian.

"We can describe the Readings which the Church offers us today as a dialogue between God's lamentation and the justifications of men. The Lord God laments. He laments not being listened to over the course of history. It is always the same: "Obey my voice, and I will be your God ... and it will be well with you...". But they did not



obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward instead of forward” (Jer 7:23-24). It is the story of the infidelity of God’s people. God’s lament arises from the fact that the Lord’s work to remove idolatry from the heart of his people and to make them docile to his word was very very hard. But they went along this road for some time, and then they turned back. And thus it went on for centuries and centuries, until the coming of Jesus.

And the same happened with the Lord, with Jesus. Some said: “He is the Son of God, he is a great Prophet!”; others, those of whom the Gospel speaks today, said: “No, he is a sorcerer who heals by the power of Satan”. The people of God were alone, and the ruling class — the teachers of the law, the Sadducees, the Pharisees — was locked in its ideas, in its pastoral approach, in its ideology. And this is the class that did not listen to the word of the Lord and attempted to justify

themselves, by saying what we heard in the Gospel: “This man, Jesus, casts out demons by Beelzebul” (Lk 11:15). It is the same as saying: “He is a soldier of Beelzebul or of Satan or he belongs to Satan’s band”; it is the same. They justify themselves for not having listened to the Lord’s call.

They could not hear it: they were so, so closed, so far from the people, and this is true. Jesus looks upon the people and is moved with compassion, for he sees them as “sheep without shepherds”, as the Gospel says, he goes out to the poor, to the sick, to everyone, to widows, to lepers to heal them. And he speaks a word to them that inspires admiration in the people: “But he speaks as one who has authority!”, he speaks differently from the ruling class, which had distanced itself from the people. And only out of interest in their own affairs: in their group, in the party, in their internal struggles. And the people, they left them there.... They had abandoned the flock. And were these people sinners? Yes. Yes, we are all sinners, all of us. All of us who are here are sinners. But they were more than sinners: the hearts of these people, of this small group, in time became so hardened that it was impossible to hear the voice of the Lord. And they slid from sinfulness into corruption. It is so very difficult for someone who is corrupt to turn back. The sinner, yes, since the Lord is merciful and waits for us all. But one who is corrupt is set in his ways, and these men were corrupt. That is why they justify themselves: because Jesus by his simplicity, by his divine power was an annoyance to them. Step by step, they convinced themselves that they must kill Jesus, and one of them said: “It is better that one man die for the people”.

These men took the wrong path. They resisted the Lord’s loving salvation and thus they slipped from faith, from a theology of faith into a theology of duty: “You have to do this, this and this...”. And Jesus attributed this epithet to them: “Hypocrites! You lay heavy burdens on the backs of the people. And you? You don’t lift a finger to help them! Hypocrites!”. They rejected the Lord’s love, and this refusal set them on a path out of line with the dialectic of freedom which the Lord offered, but with the logic of necessity where there is no room for the Lord. In the dialectic of freedom there is room for the Good Lord who loves us, he loves us so much! Instead, in the logic of necessity there is no room for God: one must do, one must do, one must do.... They became conventional. Men of good manners, but of evil habits. Jesus calls them “whitewashed tombs”. This is the Lord’s sorrow, God’s sorrow, God’s lament.

“Come, let us adore the Lord for he loves us”. “Return to me with all your heart” — he says to us — “for I am merciful and compassionate”. Those who justify themselves understand neither his mercy nor his compassion; whereas the people who so loved Jesus needed mercy and compassion and went to ask it of the Lord.

Along this Lenten journey, it will benefit us all to think about the Lord's invitation to love, and about this dialectic of freedom where there is love, and for all of us to ask ourselves: But, am I on this path? Or am I in danger of justifying myself and taking another road? A conjectural road, since it holds no promise. And let us beseech the Lord to grant us the grace to always take the road of salvation, to open ourselves to the salvation that comes only from God, from faith and not from what the "doctors of duty" suggest, who had lost their faith, and were ruling the people with this pastoral theology of duty. Let us ask this grace: Lord, grant me the grace to open myself to your salvation. This is the purpose of Lent. God loves us all: he loves us all! To make the effort to open ourselves: this is all he asks of us. "Open the door to me. I will do the rest". Let us allow him to enter into us, to caress us and to grant us salvation. So be it.

4. Pope Francis receives US President Barack Obama

Pope Francis received the President of the United States, Barack Obama on March 27 in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican. [\(Video 1\)](#)



President Obama arrived at the meeting through the Hall of St. Ambrose - a bright, high-ceilinged rectangular room decorated with allegories of Felicity, Prudence and the Virtues, Rest and Security. He was preceded by a column of the Gentlemen of His Holiness, and accompanied by the Prefect of the Papal Household, Archbishop Georg Ganswein, who walked at his side. Pope Francis made his way briskly from the library to the Sala dei troni - the Hall of Thrones - to greet the President.

A handshake and a brief exchange of pleasantries, and the Pope and the President were in the library of the Apostolic Palace, sitting across from one another at the Holy Father's desk. "It's a great honor," said the President to the Pope, "I'm a great admirer - thank you so much for receiving me." President Obama went on to say, "[I bring] greetings from my family," adding, "the last time I came to meet your predecessor I was able to bring my wife and children." [\(Video 2\)](#)



Then, the room was cleared of journalists, and the Pope and the President, assisted by their interpreters - Msgr. Mark Miles of the Vatican's Secretariat of State, and Alessandra Bonatti of the US State Dept. - spoke privately for nearly an hour: fifty-two minutes, to be precise. The private meeting concluded and the members of the official White House delegation were presented to Pope Francis, among whom were the Secretary of State, John Kerry, US Ambassador to the Holy See, Kenneth Hackett, National Security Adviser Susan Rice, and White House Press Secretary Jay Carney. After the Holy Father greeted the delegation members, the Pope and the President exchanged gifts.

5. Itinerary of Pope's visit to the Holy Land announced

The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem and Head of the Roman Catholic Church in the Holy Land, Fuad Twal, has announced a detailed itinerary of the Ecumenical and Pastoral visit of Pope Francis to The Holy Land in the last week of May. This was announced at the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem's old city, on March 27. ([Video](#))

His programme beginning May 24, includes a formal courtesy visit to the King and Queen of Jordan, a Mass at the International Stadium in Amman and a visit to the Baptism Site at Bethany. The highlight however would be his meeting with the refugees and young people with disabilities in the Latin Church in Bethany beyond the Jordan.



The following day at Bethlehem, he will meet the president of the state of Palestine, and later will preside over a Holy Mass in the Manger Square in Bethlehem, with a lunch with Palestinian families. This will be followed by a visit to children of refugee camps. In Jerusalem on Mount Scopus, he will have a private meeting with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople in the Apostolic Delegation in Jerusalem, and an ecumenical meeting on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the meeting in Jerusalem between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras, in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre. On the May 26, Pope Francis is slated to visit the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, and later two Chief Rabbis in the center Heichal Shlomo, near the Jerusalem Great Synagogue. He will then visit the

President of the State of Israel at the presidential palace in Jerusalem.

The itinerary also includes a private visit to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople in the building in front of the Orthodox Church of Viri Galileai on the Mount of Olives. This will be followed by a meeting with priests, religious and seminarians in the church of Gethsemane near the Garden of Olives and a Mass with the faithful of the Holy Land.

6. Pope to Italian Steel Workers: work is essential for human dignity

Pope Francis has reaffirmed that employment is essential to society, families, and individuals and for the dignity of the human person, at a Vatican audience Thursday, March 20, for staff and families of the Italian Steel Works



company at Terni, "Acciaierie di Terni" celebrating its 130th anniversary. Pope Francis said his thoughts were directed not only to their company and others in the region, but to "the entire working world." ([Video](#))

In the current economic climate and the difficulties facing the work environment, the Pope said, "it is necessary to reaffirm that employment is an essential reality for society, for families and for individuals. Work, in fact, directly regards the person, his/her life, freedom and happiness. The primary value of employment is the good of the human person," because, the Pope explained, it 'realizes a person', intellectually by making

demands on his or her attitudes and creative and manual abilities.

Employment, then, should not be considered simply as a means for obtaining profit, he continued, “but above all a purpose that affects man and his dignity. And if there is no work, this dignity is wounded! Anyone who is unemployed or underemployed risks, in fact, being placed on the margins of society, becoming a victim of social exclusion. Many times it happens that people out of work - I think especially of the many unemployed young people today - slip into chronic discouragement or worse, apathy.”

Speaking of the grave unemployment problems affecting various European countries, Pope Francis said, this “is the consequence of an economic system that is no longer able to create jobs, because it places in its centre an idol which is called money!” The Pope called on society’s political, social and economic spheres “to promote a different approach, based on justice and solidarity, to ensure everyone has the opportunity to perform work with dignity.”

Work is an essential need, he emphasized, which “should be available to everyone.” Creativity and solidarity are needed to confront periods of “severe hardship and unemployment,” he said, describing as “courageous” those “creative entrepreneurs and artisans” who “look to the future with confidence and hope.” But he also called on all members of society to act in solidarity with those in need by “giving up something” and adopting “a more sober lifestyle.”



In concluding, the Pope entreated the working world to “never stop hoping for a better future” and to not be “trapped in the vortex of pessimism!” This difficult and burdensome period of economic turmoil can be overcome, the Pope stressed, if “everyone does their part” by placing the dignity of the human person at the centre.

7. Pope Francis' Address at Prayer Vigil for Mafia Victims

Pope Francis gathered to pray with the families whose loved ones were killed by mafia violence and entreated mafia members to convert and change their lives. The Pope made this appeal on Friday evening at St Gregory VII Church in Rome at a prayer vigil, organized by the Libera Foundation. [\(Video\)](#)



Pope Francis listened quietly, his head hung low, his hands clasped in prayer, as the 842 names of victims of mafia violence, including 80 children, were read one by one. During the moving and prayerful vigil, the Pope expressed his empathy, sympathy and solidarity with 700 people present, whose loved ones were killed by the mafia. He

lauded them for their witness, their courage to share their suffering with others and their hope that corruption will be overcome.

And then stern words to the men and women currently involved in the mafia: “And I feel that I cannot conclude without saying a word to... the protagonists who are absent today -- the men and women Mafiosi. “Please change your lives, repent, stop perpetrating evil,” he said to applause. “And we pray for you. I ask this on my knees. It is for your good,” he entreated. “This life that you live now will not give us pleasure; it will not give us joy. It will not give you happiness. The power and money that you have now from many dirty dealings, from many mafia crimes – blood money, power gained with blood – you cannot bring them with you to the next life,” the Pope continued.

“Repent. You still have time so as not to end up in hell. And that is what is waiting for you if you continue on this path,” he said. “You have a father and a mother. Think of them. Cry a little and repent.” He concluded his remarks, leading the assembly in a Hail Mary, followed by the Lord’s Prayer.

The prayer vigil came one day ahead of the 19th Day of Memory and Commitment in remembrance of the innocent victims of organized crime. On Saturday, hundreds are expected to march in Latina, a city south of Rome, and then participate in workshop on how civil society can better organize to bring an end to corruption.



8. Pope Francis on parish visit: "Listen to Jesus!"

Pope Francis made a visit on Sunday, March 16, afternoon to a provincial parish dedicated to Our Lady of Oration. Santa Maria dell’Orazione is in the Setteville neighbourhood east of Rome, outside the city and about a third of the way to Tivoli. Founded juridically in 1989, the parish church was dedicated and inaugurated in 2002.



Pope Francis celebrated the Sunday afternoon liturgy, and delivered the homily. The Holy Father focused on the importance of listening, of being attuned and attentive to the Word of God. “What are the duties of a Christian?” he asked. “Perhaps,” he added, “you will tell me: to go to Mass on Sundays; to fast and abstain during Holy Week – do these things,” said Pope Francis, “but the first duty of a

Christian is to listen to the Word of God, to listen to Jesus, because He speaks to us and He saves us with His Word – and with His word, He also makes our faith stronger, more robust: Listen to Jesus!” he said.

The schedule of the visit also included: greetings with the faithful gathered in the square before the church; a visit with the sick and disabled persons of the parish; a meeting with children making their first communion and young people making their confirmation; an encounter with the communities of the Neocatechumenal Way that

are present in the parish; another with families that have baptized children in the past year; confessions ahead of Mass, and a brief exchange with the family members of the priests serving the parish afterward.

The theme of attunement and attentiveness was one the Holy Father had also addressed earlier in the day, at the Sunday Angelus with the faithful gathered in St Peter’s Square. Speaking ahead of the traditional prayer of Marian devotion, the Holy Father focused on the Gospel reading of the day, which tells the story of the Transfiguration.

Three were the principal elements that Pope Francis identified in his reflection: the importance of being attentive to and focused on God’s Word; and the twofold movement of ascent and descent that characterizes the Gospel episode (Mt. 17:1-9), in which the Lord takes Peter, James and John to the top of Mt Tabor, reveals Himself in His glorified form, and returns down the mountain with them, with grave warnings to the disciples who accompanied Him not to speak of what they had seen.



“The mountain is the site of the encounter intimate closeness with God and with Him - the place of prayer, in which to stand in the presence of the Lord,” said Pope Francis. “We, the disciples of Jesus,” he continued, “are called to be people who listen to His voice and take seriously his words.” He added, “To listen to Jesus , we must follow Him.” The Holy Father went on to say, “We need to go to [a place of] remove, to climb the mountain [and go to] a place of silence, to find ourselves and better perceive the voice of the Lord.” We cannot stay there, however. “The encounter with God in prayer again pushes us to ‘come down from the mountain’ and back down into the plain,” he said, “where we meet many brothers and sisters weighed down by fatigue, injustice, and both material and spiritual poverty.” Pope Francis said that we are called to carry the fruits of the experience we have with God to our troubled brothers and sisters, sharing with them the treasures of grace received.

He concluded with an invitation: returning to the theme of attunement and attentiveness to God’s word, the Holy Father asked all the faithful to begin keeping a little book of the gospels with them and to read short passages from it throughout the day. “Don’t forget,” he said, “this week, listen to Jesus – and then, next week, you’ll tell me whether you’ve kept that little edition of the Gospels with you, in your pocket or your bag, in order to read a little bit every day.”

9. Pope institutes commission for protecting minors

Pope Francis has instituted the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, issuing the names of eight members tasked with structuring the future form of the commission. “Pope Francis has made clear that the



Church must hold the protection of minors amongst her highest priorities. Today, to carry forward this initiative, the Holy Father announces the names of several highly qualified persons who are committed to this issue,” said Fr. Lombardi, the director of the Holy See’s press office, on Saturday, March 22. [\(Video\)](#)

A statement from the Vatican press office noted that the members’ “principal role will be to prepare the Statutes of the Commission, which will define its tasks and competencies. Other members will be added to the Commission in the future, chosen from various geographical areas of the world.” The eight initial members are comprised of four women and four men, including Cardinal Sean O’Malley of Boston. Several are university professors and experts in psychology, law, and aiding those victimized by sexual abuse.

Fr. Lombardi noted that these eight will be “participating in the deliberations concerning the Commission’s final structure; describing the scope of its responsibilities; and developing the names of additional candidates, especially from other continents and countries, who can offer service to the Commission.” He also stressed Pope Francis’ desire to carry forward the work begun by his predecessors, John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

“Continuing the work undertaken by his predecessors, and having heard the advice of a number of Cardinals, other members of the College of Bishops, and experts in the field, and having duly deliberated, Pope Francis now is forming a Commission for the safeguarding of minors,” explained Fr. Lombardi. He went on to highlight the commission’s “multi-pronged approach to promoting youth protection” which will be done in light of “looking to the future without forgetting the past.”



The commission’s approach will include “education regarding the exploitation of children; discipline of offenders; civil and canonical duties and responsibilities; and the development of best practices as they have emerged in society at large.” Although the creation of the commission was announced in December of 2013, it was unknown who would belong to its membership. The announcement named Dr. Catherine Bonnet of France; Mrs. Marie Collins of Ireland; Professor and Baroness Sheila Hollins of the U.K.; Cardinal Sean Patrick O’Malley O.F.M. Cap. of Boston; Professor Claudio Papale of Italy; Professor and former Prime Minister Hanna Suchocka of Poland; Fr. Humberto Miguel Yanez, S.J. of Argentina; and Fr. Hans Zollner, S.J. of Germany.

Fr. Lombardi described the group of five lay persons and three clerics as “called to work expediently” in order to “contribute to the Holy Father’s mission of upholding the sacred responsibility of ensuring the safety of young people.”

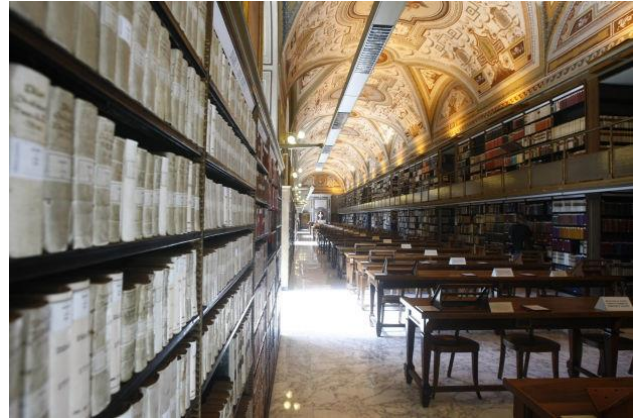
10. Vatican Library and Japanese firm NTT DATA sign accord for digital archiving project



The Vatican Apostolic Library and the Japanese firm NTT DATA on Thursday March 20, signed an agreement that will result in the rapid digitalization of 3,000 valuable historical manuscripts over the next four years. It's the first step in the planned digitalization of all the 82,000 manuscripts preserved in the Library.

The project was announced at a news conference held in the Holy See's Press Office that included interventions by Monsignor Jean

Louis Brugues, Archivist and Librarian of the Holy Roman Church, Monsignor Cesare Pasini, Prefect of the Vatican Apostolic Library and by Toshio Iwamoto, the President and CEO of NTT DATA. After scanning and archiving the digitalized manuscripts, all of them will be released on the Library's website as high-definition image data. The project was described as a new milestone in making available to scholars and the general public the immense treasure of valuable historical manuscripts that the Vatican Apostolic Library is preserving for mankind.



11. Pope says physically impaired are specially called to be witnesses of Jesus

Pope Francis on Saturday March 29, assured those afflicted by physical impairment that God has chosen them to



be His witnesses in helping transform today's culture of exclusion and prejudice into one of encounter and inclusion. He was speaking to some 6000 deaf and blind from all over Italy as well as representatives from Brazil, Argentina, Germany, Spain, US, England and Malta, who were brought together in the Vatican by the Apostolic Movement of the Blind, the Congregation of the Little Mission for Deaf and Dumb and others. Reflecting on the theme, "Witnesses of the Gospel for a Culture of Encounter," the Pope said that before being a witness of the Gospel one has first of all to meet and know Jesus, or rather be touched by Him profoundly.

[\(Video\)](#)



Citing the example of the Samaritan woman in the Gospel, the Pope said, Jesus particularly wanted the marginalized, the excluded and the despised to be His witnesses. Jesus looked out for those afflicted by sickness and disability in order to heal and give them back their dignity. Referring to Sunday's Gospel episode of the man born blind, the Pope said, by healing him Jesus radically rejected as blasphemy, the mindset that the man's blindness was punishment from God. While the leaders of Pharisees were judging the blind as well as Jesus sinners, the healed man defended Jesus and professed his faith in Jesus. Pointing to the opposing cultures of encounter and that of exclusion and prejudice, the Pope said it is because of their fragility and limitations that the sick and disabled can become witnesses of encounter. In fact, only one who recognizes his or her fragility and limitations can build brotherly relations based on solidarity, in the Church and in society, the Pope added.

Special Videos

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Contact Information

Fr. Melwin Pinto, SJ

✉: melpinsj@gmail.com

☎: +39 3665254713