

## **"At the foot of the Cross"**

For weeks now, since I was moved by the Holy Spirit on Week 37 (January 16, 2017), I began offering a red, hard covered notebook as a place for us to consolidate our prayer list so that we can regularly share each other's prayer efforts as we go through regular life.

I actually was nervous about even proposing the idea because it seemed unconventional and I was worried that the idea might be rejected and perhaps that would make me look foolish. Yes, I'm sure you can see how self-focused those worries were and how my preoccupation with myself reduced the likelihood of me following through with what I had been moved to do. What a shame that would have been ... and how sorrowfully selfish!

Fortunately, my decision was to risk bruising my ego and now it's become a weekly tradition. Perhaps now the questions may be why we use that red book and why it's on the steps. Perhaps it feels quite comfortable to you but in case you're wondering:

## **Why that red book?**

In the earlier pages of that red book, I had been keeping a journal of faith. I used it to record what I was feeling and thinking in terms of my love for the Lord (especially the Lord alive in you all) and the ways my life was evolving. The journal stalled after some months and I was reading through it and praying for inspiration to keep it up. At the same time, an email came from a Cenacle member, asking for prayerful support to help a loved one who was ill. My mind went then to another Cenacle member who I knew had been absent because of a serious family health problem that had been worsening lately. I started to wonder what crosses the rest of you are carrying and how I might help you all. It was then that I felt inspired to offer that very book to you, my brothers and sisters, as a place to consolidate a list of all of the souls who we are actively praying for - for whatever reason - so that we can all share and carry that cross and thereby strengthen our petition and lighten the spiritual load.

## **Why does it go on the steps?**

There were several motivations for why I felt drawn to put it where it goes these days:

**1) As a sign of offering:** We offer our faith and our solidarity in the form of that shared notebook as an offering to Our Lord where we weekly place the parish's collection and other offerings like flowers and funds and even exhibits like the nativity scene in advent. Our notebook is an offering of prayers for others.

**2) To join our suffering to His:** In the eternal now which we enter with every Sacrament of the Eucharist, we are reminded that Jesus invites us to bear witness to his suffering and sacrifice over and over again. Where else should we bring our sufferings and those of the people we know and love but to the feet of the man who so publicly suffered for our sake? He knows the pain of physical torment and emotional abandon. He knows the ache of all who suffer so we bring all suffering back to His so that he can lead us through the darkness and so that the mutual acts of sacrifice can forever weld our weak but hopeful resolve to his permanent and loving strength.

**3) Calling upon the intercession of the Virgin Mary:** If we think of the history of Our Lord's crucifixion, we are reminded that Mary never left the foot of the cross. Even during the experience of her son's murder and death, arguably the darkest hour and greatest test of

her faith, Mary did not flee the painful ordeal to spare herself or to seek refuge. In so doing, she not only testified of the unfailing strength of her belief but she gave Jesus the opportunity to unite her to Saint John when He asked them to love one another as a mother and child. In that act, Jesus reminded us that family is not just a question of biology; family is a question of an active choice to love and share. So, too, can we ask to be included in that communion with Mary for her to love us and beg her to intercede for us and for all that burdens our hearts. Further, we can choose to unite with one another and deliberately act in ways that support and strengthen each other and our shared faith.

**4) As an open symbol:** There is no password, no hidden location, no security for you to remember if you decide you need to add a name to the Cenacle prayer list. Indeed, even 'strangers' and visitors can write whatever they like into our little red book of petition. In that way, our prayer arms are always held wide open and welcome the weak and weary, regardless of their background or story or need. Just come to the fount; come to the river; come to the source.

**5) As a site and act of humility:** You may have noticed, that when one approaches the little book, one has to kneel or sit or otherwise lower themselves to get down to the level of the book in order to comfortably write in it. In this act, we are also humbled and lowered before the cross, before the relic of the Saint which is built into our parish's altar, and before the image of the Last Supper which is carved into the altar. In addition to lowering ourselves, we also have lowered our worries to a position inferior to the Will of Our Lord, who, with His love and mercy can conquer all that worries us.

**6) To bring us closer to the image of Discipleship:** As we know, a cenacle is a special group of people who gather to learn, share and deepen their relationship with the Lord. Our cenacle is certainly special and, although there are far more than 12 of us, I feel a connection with the concept of the Last Supper every Monday when we gather to first take Eucharist and then to open our hearts and minds to God and to one another. I urge you to gaze on the image before or after you've written your petitions. Look at the faces of our Forefathers who walked with Jesus and who collectively witnessed the beauty and awe from two thousand years ago. Be bold and look for yourself in those faces for I dare to say that we are all there in some form or another.

Brothers and sisters, I look forward to the time when we will have filled the book with our petitions. When that time comes and all of the pages are full of the messages from our hearts, we will find a way to gather outdoors and safely burn the notebook, thereby sending our prayers to heaven as smoke. We will make that part of a special celebration.

May our mutual choice to love one another as we are called to love give you hope and joy and feelings of unconditional affection and support. Jesus, we trust in You!

From my heart to yours,

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