



SUPERIOR GENERAL G. GREGORY GAY, C.M.

LENT 2016

A young boy in a red shirt stands in profile on a large pile of rubble, including broken bricks and concrete. Behind him is the skeletal metal frame of a building under construction. The sky is clear and blue. The text 'LENT: A TIME FOR FASTING' is overlaid in the upper right, and 'A STORY' is overlaid in large white letters across the bottom left.

LENT:
A TIME FOR
FASTING

A STORY



**During my visit to
Venezuela...
people spoke
about the country's
social and
economic crisis
and its impact on
everyday life.**

People line up to buy toilet paper
and baby diapers in downtown
Caracas.

REUTERS/Jorge Silva



People have to wait in long lines to buy basic items like bread, milk, rice, beans, soap, toothpaste, paper products, medicine . . .

People line up to buy food at a supermarket in San Cristobal, Venezuela.

REUTERS/Carlos Garcia Rawlins



Waiting for hours, however, provides no guarantee . . . (if they run out of bread, you have to wait until the following week . . .)

Shoppers waiting in line at a government-run Mercal store.



People have to wait in long lines at bus stations, to obtain travel visas, and again they have to wait in even longer lines at airports.



HACIENDO VIDA EL CARISMA DE SAN VICENTE DE PAÚL "HE SIDO ENVIADO A EVANGELIZAR A LOS POBRES"



VIVIENDO A PLENITUD SU VOCACIÓN VICENTINA

At the same time, however, people have spoken about positive effects of this crisis, pointing out the fact that the bonds of solidarity have been strengthened.

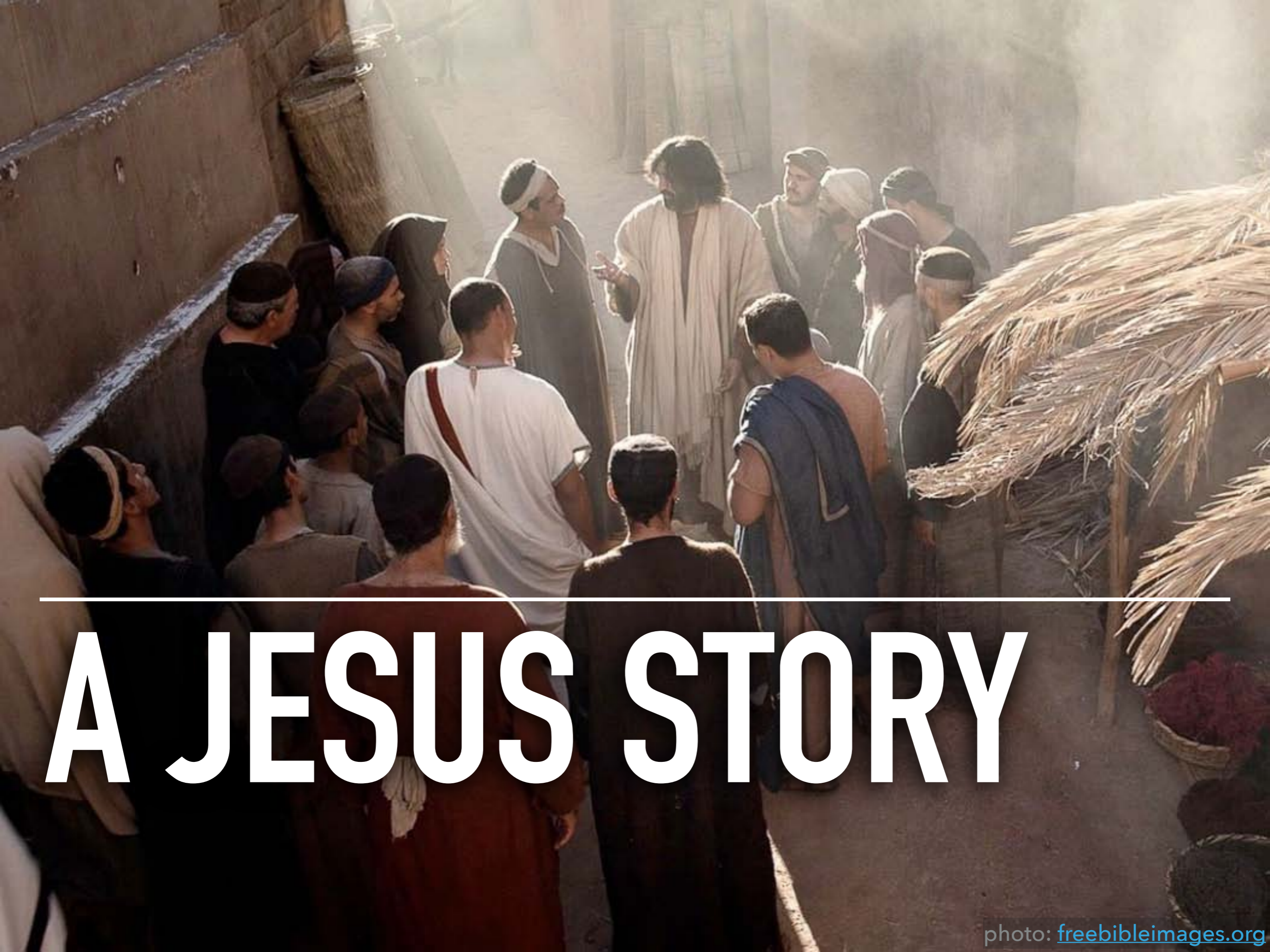
photos: YouTube/Samuel Manrique Díaz



One of our confreres stated that the present situation has led them to adopt a simpler lifestyle and has brought the community closer to the reality of the poor.



This situation can be viewed as a movement from the cross to the resurrection (from the crisis, to solidarity with those who are poor).



A JESUS STORY



**Jesus mingled
among the people
who formed the
long lines of
outcasts, waiting
and hoping to
participate as
active members
of society.**



Jesus fed the multitudes and not only was no one turned away, but baskets and baskets of leftovers were gathered up (Mark 6:34-44).



Jesus extended unconditional forgiveness to sinners, seventy times seven (Matthew 18:22) and exhorted his followers to be as compassionate toward their brothers and sisters as God was compassionate toward them (Luke 6:36).



Christ of the Breadlines (detail) by Fritz Eichenberg EICHENBERG

As a result of the Incarnation, Jesus today can be found in all those long lines that are found in countless cities throughout the world, long lines of men and women who cry out every hour of every day, demanding to be included as equal members of society.



And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us (John 1:14).

God, all loving, all merciful, all compassionate, never abandoned humankind.

In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son (Hebrews 1:1-2).



A NEW STORY

men



Yes, Lent is a time for fasting, but during this Year of Mercy our fasting must take on a new form... personal and community conversion... our fasting should mean that we can never be accused of passivity, indulgence or culpable complicity regarding the intolerable situations of injustice and the political regimes which prolong them (Evangelii Gaudium, #194).

photo: Daughters of Charity IPS



Our fasting must penetrate our very being, must pain us to the very depths so that we can hear and understand anew the cries of our brothers and sisters. Then, as we listen to those cries, “let us run to serve them as if we were running to a fire.” (St. Vincent CCD:XI:25)



But let us remember that as we establish relationships with those on the peripheries, we have to sympathize with them in order to suffer with them . . . we have to . . . make them [our hearts] sensitive to the sufferings and the miseries of our neighbor, and ask God to give us the true spirit of mercy, which is the characteristic spirit of God (St. Vincent CCD XI:308).

photo: Vincentian Lay Missionaries USA



May our fast during this Lenten season give us, members of the Vincentian Family, a new heart, a heart of flesh, a heart that enables us to establish ever stronger bonds with our lords and masters, with the countless men and women who are forgotten and abandoned throughout the world.

photo: Vincentian Lay Missionaries USA



May our Lenten fast reflect that same movement that our brothers and sisters in Venezuela experience, a movement from the cross (our own situation of crisis) to the resurrection (solidarity and greater identification with the situation of those who are poor).



LENT:

**A TIME FOR
PRAYER**

A STORY



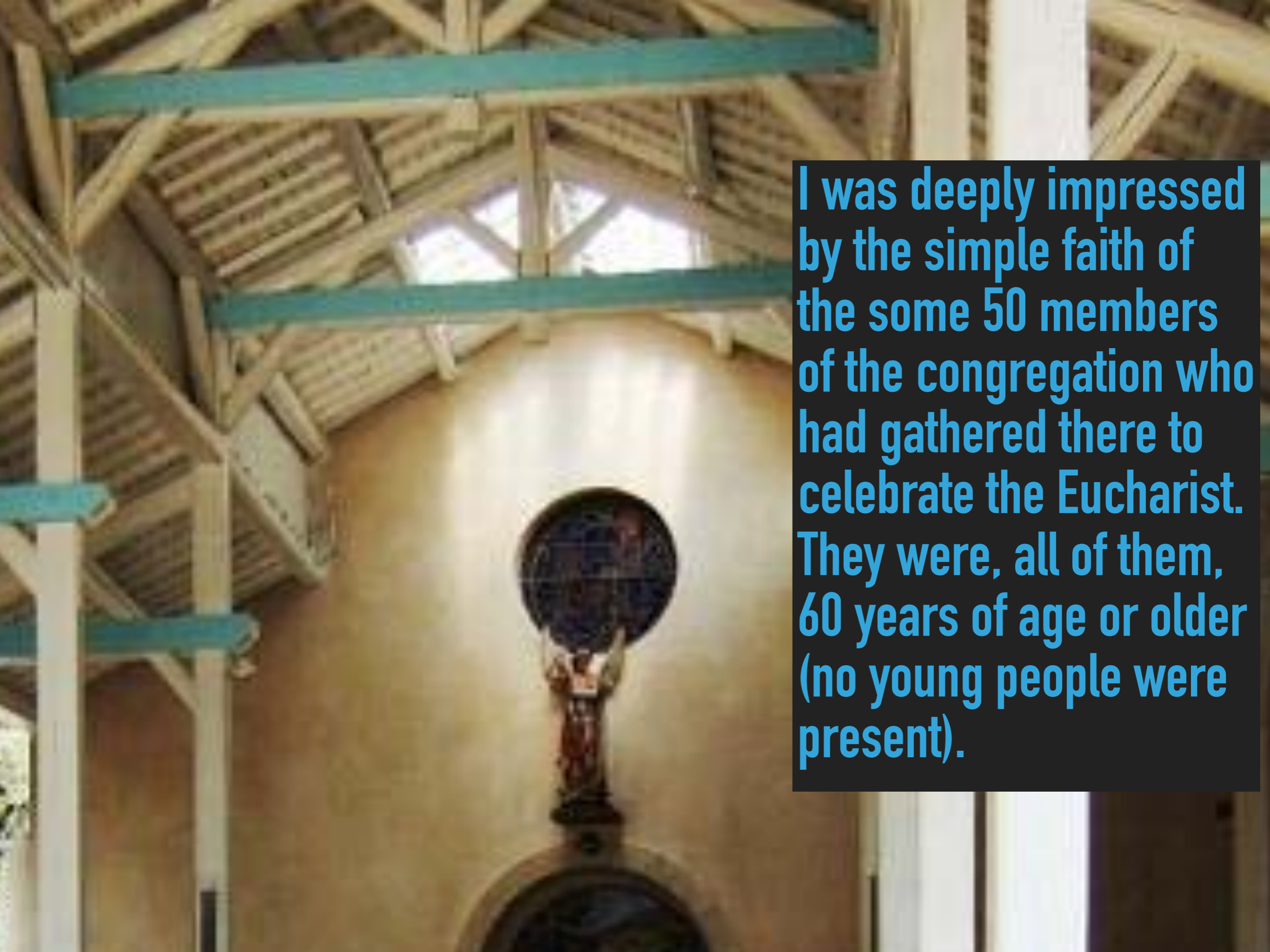
NOTRE DAME DE PRIME COMBE
CONGREGATION DE LA MISSION SANCTUAIRE
CENTRE HOSPITALIER SPECIALISE "LE MAS CARENON" SERVICES DE PRIME COMBE

Last month, on the Feast of the Epiphany, I traveled to Notre Dame de Prime-Combe, a shrine that is administered by the confreres from the Province of Toulouse and by a well-prepared lay pastoral team.

photo: [Google Maps street view](#)



At one time as many as 50,000 people would gather together to celebrate the feast. Today, perhaps 300 people come to commemorate the Feast of Our Lady, but each Sunday, whenever possible, a confrere celebrates the Eucharist there.



I was deeply impressed by the simple faith of the some 50 members of the congregation who had gathered there to celebrate the Eucharist. They were, all of them, 60 years of age or older (no young people were present).



Sharing life with this community of faith is a group of Benedictine monks who, since the 1990s, have lived in one of the buildings on the grounds of our property. This group of monks, however, is a very special community. Each member lives with some handicap.

photo: nimes.catholique.fr



Yet, these men lead their lives in a joyful and simple manner and provide the surrounding community with a powerful example of the manner in which work and prayer can be interwoven with one another.



A JESUS STORY



Jesus often withdrew from the crowds and from his disciples in order to spend some time in prayer. He told his followers: pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44) and he himself prayed that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you (John 17:21). We are all familiar with the account of Jesus' anguished prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42).

photo: [freebibleimages.org](https://www.freebibleimages.org)



At the same time Jesus extolled the humble prayer of the tax collector: O God, be merciful to me a sinner, and stated that it was the tax collector who went home justified because those who humble themselves will be exalted (Luke 18:9–14). Jesus also praised the generous offering of the poor widow who went up to Jerusalem to pray (Mark 12:43–44).



Before he departed this world, Jesus left his followers the legacy of a prayer that combines two great desires centered on God, with three cries of petition centered on the urgent basic needs of humanity. Jesus tells the Father the two desires of his heart: hallowed be your name and your kingdom come. That is followed by the three cries of petition: give us bread, forgive our debts, and do not bring us to the time of trial.*

*José Antonio Pagola, *Jesus: An Historical Approximation*, translated: Margaret Wilde, Convivium Press, Miami, 2014, p. 313-316.



As a result of the Incarnation, God understands our needs, understands that we are broken and wounded, and in the person of Jesus all those realities are raised up to the Father!

The Last Supper by Fritz Eichenberg



A NEW STORY



Yes, Lent is a time for prayer, and our prayer . . . must also take on a new form during this Year of Mercy, one that leads to personal and community conversion. Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the word, of sincere conversation with the Lord, our work easily becomes meaningless; we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervor dies out.

Our Lady of Prime-Combe



**Our prayer and fasting
give meaning to our
ministry/ service and
our ministry/ service
gives meaning to our
prayer and fasting.**



My hope is that during these 40 days of Lent we might take time not only to listen to the cries of the poor, not only to serve and minister on behalf of the poor, but to pray with the poor.

photo: YouTube: SVDP Atlanta, Home Visit



...are not all of us like the members of the Benedictine community at Notre Dame de Prime-Combe, that is, are we not in some way broken and in need of healing, in need of the prayers of others? Therefore, like the monks, our “handicaps” should not prevent us from contributing to the building up of our community, the association, the Congregation.

photo: nimes.catholique.fr



Finally, what would it be like to ask people, as Pope Francis continually does, *please pray for me?*

What would it be like to invite the poor into our homes to share with them a time of prayer?

I would encourage you to do this and then during the Easter Season we could share with one another our experience of sharing prayer in such a manner with *our lords and masters.*

photo: Society of St. Vincent de Paul,
Council of Los Angeles



May our prayer and fasting enable us to die with Christ during this Lenten Season of 2016 so that we might rise with Christ on Easter Sunday and sing our song of Alleluia.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

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Superior General

presented by

•famvin