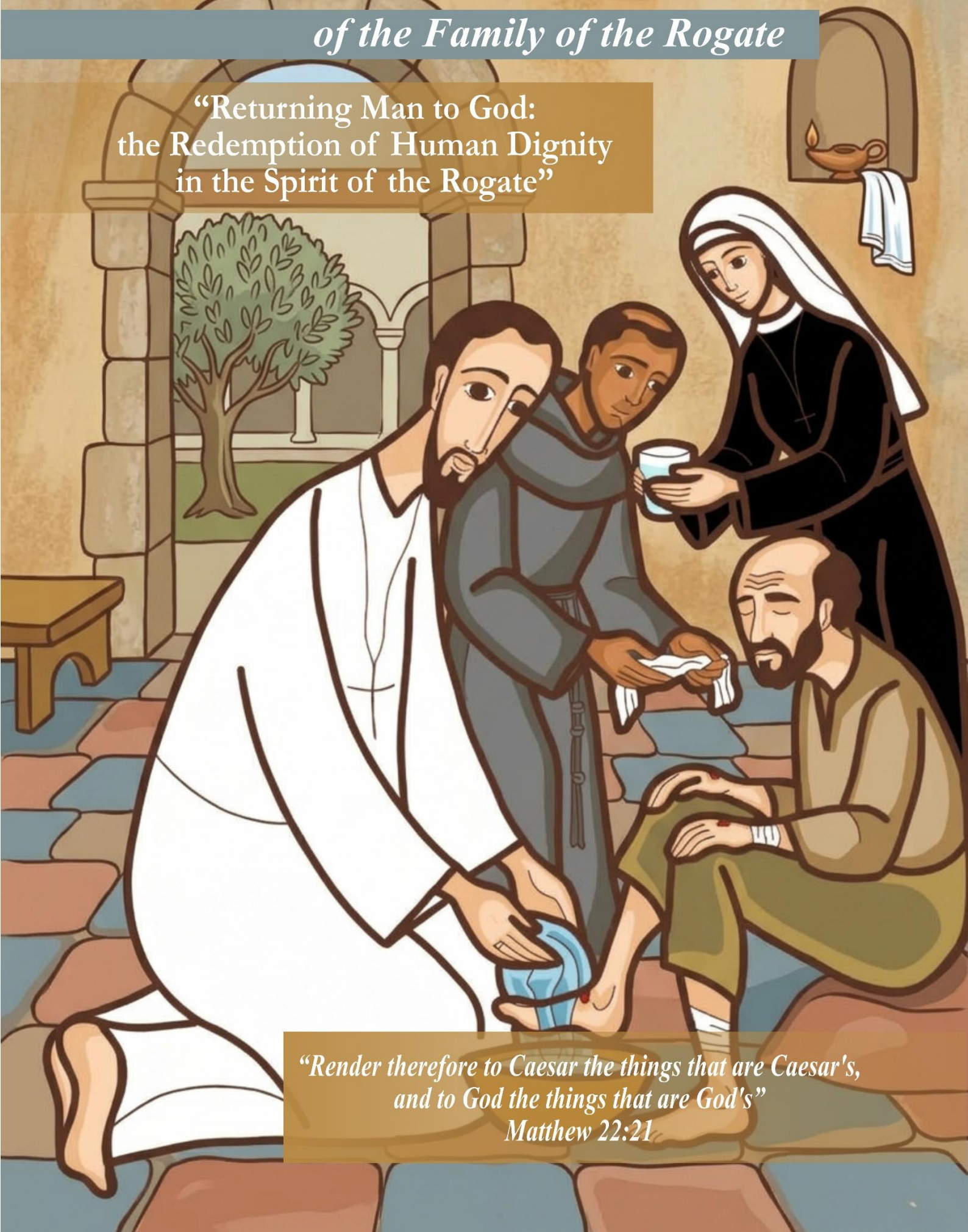


LECTIO DIVINA

of the Family of the Rogate

“Returning Man to God:
the Redemption of Human Dignity
in the Spirit of the Rogate”



*“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's,
and to God the things that are God's”
Matthew 22:21*

Invocation Song to the Holy Spirit

Reading: Matthew 20:1–16a

- a. Welcoming the Word in silence;
- b. Personal Rereading;
- c. Share a word or phrase that strikes you;
- d. Connect this text to other passages in the Bible.
- e. Prayerful refrain (of your choice)

Understanding the meaning of the text.

▪ LECTIO – What does the text say?

Listening to the Literal and Historical-Salvific Sense of the Word

Leader: Gathered around the Table of the Word, let us open our being to welcome the mysterios wisdom of the Master in this episode from Matthew 22:15-21. In the face of the snares and calculations of worldly powers, Jesus brings us back to the essential truth of our existence: to whom do we truly belong? In the light of the Rogationist charism, this Lectio Divina challenges us to go beyond earthly demands and discover that human life bears the image of the Creator. May this prayerful reading heal our inner divisions and kindle in each of us the zealous spirit of those who dedicate body, mind, and ministry entirely to the harvest of the Father.

L1: The Matthean account takes place at the climax of the controversies in Jerusalem, just after the parables of judgment pronounced in the Temple. The Pharisees withdraw and hold a council (συμβούλιον ἔλαβον / symboulion elabon) with a deliberate objective: to catch Jesus in some word (παγιδεύσωσιν ἐν λόγῳ / pagideusōsin en logō). The plot reveals an unusual and hypocritical alliance between the disciples of the Pharisees (zealous for the Law and opposed to foreign domination) and the Herodians, supporters of Herod's dynasty and collaborators with the Roman order. The flattery with which they address the Lord, calling Him a truthful Master who does not regard the appearance of people (πρόσωπον ἀνθρώπων / prosōpon anthrōpōn), aims to disarm Him before laying the deadly snare.

L2: The trap manifests itself in an apparently inescapable question: "Is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar or not?" (ἔξεστιν δοῦναι κῆνσον Καίσαρι ἢ οὐ / exestin dounai kēnsōn Kaisari ē ou). The tribute in question (kēnsos) was the annual personal tax (tributum capitis) collected directly by Rome from the inhabitants of Judea, demanded in imperial silver coin. If Jesus had answered affirmatively, He would have betrayed the religious and national sentiment of the people, appearing complicit in the pagan oppression that usurped the sovereignty of Yahweh; if He had answered negatively, He would have been promptly denounced to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate as a seditious and political rebel.

L3: Knowing the malice of His adversaries (γνοὺς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὴν πονηρίαν αὐτῶν / gnous de ho Iēsous tēn ponērian autōn), Jesus openly exposes them by calling them hypocrites (ὑποκριταί / hypokritai). He then asks them to show Him the coin for the tribute (τὸ νόμισμα τοῦ κήνσου / to nomisma tou kēnsou), and they present Him with a Roman denarius. The mere fact that His accusers carry that coin into the sacred enclosure of the Temple reveals their inconsistency: they already used and benefited from the commercial circulation of Roman currency, which bore the image of Emperor Tiberius and the inscription proclaiming him divine and high priest, a fact abominable in the eyes of strict Jewish faith.

L4: When asking whose image (εἰκόνα / eikōn) and inscription (ἐπιγραφή / epigraphē) it is, Jesus receives the obvious answer: "Caesar's." Then follows the famous maxim: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Ἀπόδοτε οὖν τὰ Καίσαρος Καίσαρι καὶ τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ τῷ Θεῷ / Apodote oun ta Kaisaros Kaisari kai ta tou Theou tō Theō). The verb used, apodote, does not simply mean "to give," but "to return," "to render what belongs by right." Jesus is not proposing a

division of territories into equal parts between the State and God. If the silver coin belongs to Caesar because it bears his image, then human beings belong entirely to God, having been created in His image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26). Caesar has a right to his metal, but only God has a right to life, the heart, and the absolute worship of man.

MEDITATIO – WHAT DOES THE WORD TELL US? Pastoral and Rogationist Foundation

Pastoral and Rogationist Foundations

Leader: This pericope tears us away from the illusions and false dichotomies that often paralyze our pastoral service. In our daily practice, we often feel torn between the pressures of the present world—bureaucracies, the quest for visible success, institutional demands—and fidelity to the Gospel. Jesus's call to "render to God what is God's" resonates as a fervent appeal for the integrity of life. We cannot offer God merely the leftovers of our time or crumbs of devotion while we give the "Caesars" of this world our best energies, our talents, and the deepest affections of our souls.

L1: The Rogationist charism finds in this passage a fundamental criterion for the discernment and care of vocations. Saint Hannibal Maria Di Francia understood that the worker of the harvest is fruitful only when he wholly commits himself to the Lord of the vineyard. To pray for vocations means to ask God for men and women whose souls are not minted from the coins of vanity, secular ambition, or ecclesiastical careerism, but are indelibly marked by the living image of Christ crucified and risen. To pray the Rogate is to plead for selfless pastors and apostles who can testify that every person, no matter how poor and tormented, is inviolable property of God.

L2: When we contemplate the faces disfigured by misery, abandonment, and lack of purpose—the weary crowds that moved the compassion of Jesus—we realize that our Rogationist action is a sacred redemption. The world seeks to imprint on human beings the brands of consumption, exploitation, and discard; the mission of the evangelical worker consists of returning these lives to God. To work for the harvest, to promote vocational prayer, and to welcome the little ones is to actively proclaim that no earthly authority has the right to enslave those who bear within them the breath of the Most High.

CANTO DI MEDITAZIONE A SCELTA

In the silence of prayer, let us allow the Word to question the concrete priorities of our personal and communal lives:

What are we returning to God? In the rhythm of our days and apostolic activities, what real space are we reserving for prayer and intimacy with the Lord? Have we returned to God what belongs to Him by right, or are we allowing ourselves to be entirely absorbed by the "Caesars" of routines, social networks, and worldly obligations?

The image imprinted in the worker of the harvest: Looking at the call of the Rogate, what are the most evident signs that our pastoral community bears within it the "image of Christ" and not the "coins of the world" (characterized by the pursuit of power, rivalry, and self-sufficiency)?

The redemption of the forgotten: In what practical way can our pastoral action help the most fragile and marginalized members of our community rediscover their dignity as sons and daughters made in the image of God?

SHARING THE WORD

Leader: *Keeping the Word we have heard in our hearts, let us share what the Lord has awakened in each of us, to build each other up as one Rogationist family called to serve His harvest.*

A moment of open sharing follows.

ORATIO – WHAT DO WE SAY TO GOD? RESPONDING TO THE WORD THAT HAS VISITED US

LEADER: TOUCHED BY THE SOVEREIGN CLARITY OF YOUR WORD, WE COME BEFORE YOU, LORD OF LIFE AND ABSOLUTE MASTER OF THE HARVEST, WITH A HEART REPENTANT OF ITS IDOLATRIES AND YEARNING FOR TOTAL CONSECRATION. LET US PRAY TOGETHER:

ALL: SOVEREIGN GOD, OUR CREATOR AND REDEEMER, YOU HAVE IMPRINTED YOUR HOLY IMAGE DEEP WITHIN OUR SOULS, AND DO NOT ALLOW ANY POWER OF THIS WORLD TO MAKE US SLAVES.

FORGIVE US WHEN WE BOW BEFORE THE FALSE COINS OF HUMAN GLORY, AND NEGLECT THE BLESSED INHERITANCE WE HAVE RECEIVED FROM YOU.

TEACH US TO RETURN, WITH UNRESTRAINED GRATITUDE, THE TOTALITY OF OUR LIVES, OUR GIFTS, AND OUR MINISTRY.

GRANT US THE HOLY FREEDOM OF CHILDREN WHO DO NOT FEAR THE POWERFUL OF THE EARTH, AND KEEP OUR GAZE SOLELY FIXED ON YOUR DIVINE WILL.

HEAR WITH KINDNESS THE CRY OF OUR FILIAL ROGATE: SEND WORKERS FREE FROM ALL ATTACHMENTS AND IDOLATRIES FOR YOUR HARVEST.

RAISE UP NOBLE AND COURAGEOUS SOULS, WHO WILL SPEND THEIR EXISTENCE IMPRINTING YOUR LOVE IN WOUNDED HEARTS.

MAY YOUR KINGDOM FLOURISH IN OUR COMMUNITIES, AND MAY OUR ENTIRE LIVES BE A CONTINUOUS OFFERING OF LOVE AND FIDELITY, TODAY AND FOR ALL ETERNITY. AMEN.

VOCATIONAL SONG OF CHOICE

CONTEMPLATIO – WHAT DOES THE WORD DO IN US? Adoring silence; welcoming the mystery. Background music may be played during this moment.

Leader: In the silence of inner adoration, let us quiet the external voices to allow God's sovereignty to reorder our entire being:

Contemplate the penetrating gaze of Jesus: let the Master fix His eyes upon your soul, dissolving all your double intentions, petty calculations, and hypocrisies. Embrace His liberating truth that brings peace to the heart.

Contemplate the coin and your very being: mentally observe the money with the fleeting image of the emperor, and then contemplate your own story imprinted with the eternal seal of the Trinity through Baptism. Deeply savor the indescribable joy of belonging to God.

Contemplate the field of the redeemed harvest: visualize the poor, the children, and the youth as they are returned to the arms of the Heavenly Father through persevering prayer and the generous gift of the Rogate workers. Rest in this certainty of salvation.

ACTIO – HOW DOES THE WORD PUSH US TO LIFE? The Word becomes action; the Gospel becomes choice.

Leader: In order for the announced Gospel to become flesh in our Rogationist life, we entrust ourselves to the Holy Spirit, ready to return to God what belongs to Him and to make ourselves workers of His harvest.

Each person becomes aware of the fruits of the Lectio.

CONCLUSION OF THE LECTIO DIVINA

Leader: As we conclude this blessed pause at the feet of the Master, let us depart with renewed certainty that we are God's exclusive possession and humble collaborators in His field. May the Word we have received dispel the ambiguities of our journey and sustain the missionary vigor of our pastoral Rogate. Let us now lift our hands to Her who fully lived the total gift of herself to the Most High.

All: O Mary, Immaculate Virgin and Mother of the Rogate, who never divided Your heart with the illusions of this world but wholly dedicated Yourself to the salvific plan of the Father, we entrust to You our consecration. You are the purest mirror in which the image of God has shone without shadow of sin or division. Teach us to give to God what belongs to God, consecrating our lives, families, and pastoral activities to the service of Your Divine Son. Look upon the vast harvest of the Lord, where many men and women live forgetful of their divine sonship; intercede with the Heart of Jesus that He may send zealous and holy workers, who can lovingly and compassionately restore the dignity of every creature, for the eternal glory of the Father. Amen.

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