

NOVENA

IN PREPARATION FOR THE LITURGICAL FEAST OF SAINT JOHN CALABRIA

RETURN TO THE GOSPEL TO BE LIGHT OF HOPE



DAY 1	Return to the Gospel to be light of hope
DAY 2	Going back to the Gospel... <i>the way of practical faith</i>
DAY 3	Going back to the Gospel... <i>the way of mercy</i>
DAY 4	Going back to Gospel... <i>the way of faithfulness</i>
DAY 5	Going back to Gospel... <i>the way of the eucharist</i>
DAY 6	Going back to the Gospel... <i>the way of fraternity</i>
DAY 7	Return to the Gospel ... <i>the way of charity</i>
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DAY 9	Return to the Gospel... <i>the way of "watchful sentinel"</i>
OCTOBER 8	LITURGICAL FEAST OF SAINT JOHN CALABRIA

2021

PRESENTATION

Dear brothers and sisters of the Calabrian family,

We are close to the liturgical feast of Saint John Calabria this coming 8 October.

We offer here a **material to live the novena** and prepare our hearts, to celebrate the feast of our Founder. This proposal was born by the desire expressed by many of you, to be able to celebrate the novena in communion of prayer and reflection with the entire Calabrian family in the world.

- One THEME, to focus our gazes on the one Word that renews us:

RETURN TO THE GOSPEL TO BE A LIGHT OF HOPE

The spiritual proposal and the lifestyle that St. John Calabria proposes us is imbued with the Gospel. The only medicine that can heal the world and generate new people for this new time is the Gospel: *"Either renew ourselves or perish! There is no middle way. And we will renew ourselves if we live the holy Gospel in practice, if we are living Gospels».*

Celebrating the feast of St. John Calabria in the current context means letting oneself be guided by his life proposal to be a light of hope in this world still immersed in many darkness, fears and uncertainties also generated by the pandemic.

In these days of novena we will reflect on the ways that the Divine Providence offers us *to return to the Gospel and shed light of hope today: the way of practical faith, of mercy, of fidelity, of the Eucharist, of fraternity, of charity, of communion, of 'to be "watchful sentinels" ...*

- A daily outline of texts and reflections for the Calabrian family.

Each Delegation / Territory looks for a way to involve the greatest number of people who have the opportunity to participate in the novena: communities, parishes, activities, Calabrian groups, families... You can do it in presence or by broadcasting the celebrations online. It is an opportunity to bear witness to our being a Family, animating and celebrating together, among Brothers, Sisters and Laity.

We ask the responsible of the communication of each reality undertake this responsibility to forward and spread this material with the available means.

- The structure of the novena:

It is divided into four parts, but remains open to everyone's creativity

INTRODUCTION: the theme of each day is introduced by a Calabrian symbol, suggested in the material, which can be visibly represented at the beginning of each celebration.

LISTENING MOMENT: The thematic development is offered through texts from the Word of God, Father Calabria and Pope Francis.

MOMENT OF REFLECTION: For reflection, we propose some ideas that can be developed by those who lead the meditation. They are simply passages that try to put the texts in connection.

MOMENT OF SILENCE AND PRAYER: a time to reflect in silence and let the Word heard enter into dialogue with one's life. This time of deepening can be concluded with the sharing, a prayer, or desires that the Spirit suggests in everyone's heart.

Finally, the celebration can be concluded with the prayer of the Our Father, the intercessory prayer of St. John Calabria and a final song.

- **The fourth day of the novena (Saturday 2 October)** there is a **video celebration recorded in some Calabrian places in Verona**. The video will be available in the four languages of the Congregation (Italian, English, Portuguese and Spanish) and can be downloaded from the YouTube channel of the Opera (www.youtube.com/user/doncalabria1).

The proposal is to recall, on the steps of Saint John Calabria, his experience of faith and the faithful love of God, which, call after call, step by step, made him a great saint. His luminous footsteps are for us today a sure way to walk along the path of holiness.

The video, wants to be a true celebration, to be lived in an atmosphere of prayer and active participation in the moments that are required.

For this reason, we suggest the preparation of the place where the video will be shown, placing the Word of God in the center, a lit candle or lamp, a container with water that recalls the baptismal font, a cross and flowers ...

- Other proposals to prepare for the feast of Fr. Calabria in communion

During the days of the novena, will be available short videos prepared by the Delegations. These videos will be available on the website, Facebook and WhatsApp groups of the Calabrian family. They will show and witness how we can be "*light of evangelical hope*" in the world today.

This initiative will help us to live and grow in communion and prayer as a Calabrian Family, praising God for the good he accomplishes in the Opera and through it in the Church and in the world.

We wish to each one a good journey of prayer and communion. It will lead us to the path of the Gospel.

DAY 1



RETURN TO THE GOSPEL TO BE LIGHT OF HOPE

Symbol: **Reverse of the embroidery** – *“Our life resembles an embroidery, of which we now see just the reverse, one day we will see the right side and then we will glorify the Lord also for the reversed yarns” (St. John Calabria).*

- INTRODUCTION

Guide: Brothers and Sisters, welcome to this first day of the Novena, which leads us to the Celebration for Saint John Calabria. **“Return to the Gospel to be light of hope”** is the general theme of the journey that we begin today. Once again, this year we celebrate our founding Father in the midst of the pandemic that continues to generate uncertainty, fear and death in different parts of our world. It is a storm that lasts a long time and we often feel the consequences in our relations, in social, family and community life. Sometimes discouragement and loneliness become wounds that bleed the heart and life of so many people. We also feel the strong desire for renewal, for the resumption of normal life, for changing those realities that hinder the blossom of our most beautiful humanity.

It is precisely in this historical context marked by fatigue but full of life that we, enlightened by the light of the Gospel and the Calabrian Charism, want to be light of hope and ministers of the consolation of God the Father. Inspired by the beautiful witness of the holy life of our Fr. John Calabria, we want to announce the beautiful news of hope that blossoms from the paternal heart of God. We want to invite people of our time, with whom we share life, pain and hope, to look up and with eyes illuminated by faith and the Gospel contemplate the other **“side of embroidery”**. The **“reverse of embroidery”**, of the pandemic and the human pain, is not the last and definitive word; there is also and above all the forehead of embroidery and history.

“Returning to the Gospel to be a light of hope” becomes a way of life and mission in this stormy time of history. But we are people of Easter and hope. For this reason, we believe that even the reverse of the embroidery hides the newness of God and the New that God the Father is preparing for us and for all humanity. Let us entrust to the Holy Spirit the path we are now beginning and ask for the powerful intercession of Mary, Mother of Hope, to accompany us with her maternal heart so that we can continue to be signs of hope in the contexts where we live our mission as Calabrian family.

Opening song...

LISTENING

Guide: The Word of God is light that warms up the heart and illuminates our journey. We need a Word that has this power of life and light to be a sign of hope in history. With our hearts and ears outstretched to the Word, we hear Jesus speaking to us:

Gospel according to Matthew:

"You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father" (Mt 5:13-16).

Guide: St John Calabria took this word of Jesus seriously. Salt of the earth and light of the world becomes a way of being a *Calabrian disciple*. Keeping alive in us the practical awareness that we are inhabited by the light and flavor of the Gospel is our mission and responsibility. In this perspective, Fr. Calabria offers us a word that becomes the possibility of verification and renewal of our being light of hope in the world. Let us listen with a filial heart to the word of our Father Calabria:

From the writings of Fr. Calabria:

*"Brothers, at once, but really fast, let's put ourselves at work and reform our lives. The past is no longer in our power, the future is uncertain, we cannot rely on it; we have only the present time, but what is this present time? It is a shadow that soon appears and sooner disappears, it is a cloud that passes, it is like the flight of a bird that leaves no trace, it is like the flow of the stream that merge in the river, therefore very short and unique is our time"¹. We know that **there can be no hope of salvation outside of Christ and his gospel: returning to Christ, practicing the gospel with absolute consistency, this is for us and for all the pressing and urgent call for part of God²** . You, little children, are Lighthouse and light of holy Gospel. You, little children, are Lighthouse and light of holy practical Gospel... You are many lighthouses; many lighthouses, for your souls, for our souls"³.*

Guide: But we must also recognize that the beauty of light and our being light in the world sometimes has to deal with pain, fatigue and crosses. To continue to be light even when we are touched by the luminous shadow of the cross is the mission of Christians in this historical time. And this is the prayerful invitation that Pope Francis addresses us. Let's listen:

From the Message of Pope Francis

*Sometimes it happens to go through moments of darkness in personal, family or social life, and fear that there is no way out. We feel frightened in front of great puzzles such as illness, innocent pain or the mystery of death. On the same journey of faith, we often stumble upon the scandal of the cross and the demands of the Gospel, which asks us to spend our lives in service and to lose them in love, instead of keeping it for ourselves and defending it. We need, then, another look, a light that illuminates in depth the mystery of life and helps us to go beyond our schemes and beyond the criteria of this world. ... We are called to experience the encounter with Christ because, enlightened by his light, we can take it and make it shine everywhere. Lighting small lights in people's hearts; **being small lamps of the Gospel that bring a little love and hope: this is the mission of a Christian.**⁴*

- TIME FOR REFLECTION

¹ J. Calabria, Various Homilies*1364 The Time.

² J. Calabria, Apostolato Infermi (Letters) *6273 March 1953

³ J. Calabria, 1951 To the Poor Servants in the Retreat on his 50° priestly anniversary

⁴ Pope Francis, Angelus , Sunday Feb 28, 2021

(For reflection we propose some ideas that can be developed by those who propose meditation. They are simply passages that try to connect the texts just listened)

- The **Embroidery Reverse Symbol** can be an expression of our life and the historical context we are living in. Fr. Calabria uses it precisely in this perspective: *“Our life is like an embroidery of which we now see the reverse, one day we will see the right side and then we will also glorify the Lord of the threads that now seems out of place, rest assured”*. Sometimes it seems that everything is wrong in our life and in the reality where we live. When we focus on the reverse, we find it hard to believe that there is a right side. Going beyond the view of the reverse of embroidery gives us new perspectives and makes us discover many times unexpected things;

- **The light of the Gospel** offers that gaze that overcomes the reverse and makes one perceive the presence of beauty and new life. When we illuminate the reverse of the embroidery with the light of the Gospel then we see the right side and the beautiful that had always been there, but that we did not see.



(At this time, you can light a lamp that illuminates the Gospel and hold the embroidery and show it from the straight side).



Whenever we let ourselves be guided by the light of the Gospel, we can see sense and beauty where it seemed there is none;

- That is why **returning to Christ and his Gospel**, as **St John Calabria** teaches and insists, becomes for us urgent and fundamental to be a light of hope in the world, which seems increasingly overturned and confused. And in this return to Christ, we cannot forget that the way forward is precisely that of the cross, a sign of a love that is given totally and to the end. **Pope Francis** inspires us **to experience Jesus** in order to be small lamps of the Gospel, of hope.

- TIME OF SILENCE AND PRAYER

Guide: We are invited to live a brief moment of silence to continue listening to the word and the invitations aroused from this reflection. After the moment of silence, we can share in a prayerful way what was born in our heart. *(Leave at least 5 minutes of prayerful silence)*

Guide: It is the moment of our response to the Word that we have heard. We can express what was born in the heart through a brief prayerful sharing, prayer of praise and thanksgiving. What the Spirit suggests to us... *(Leave a few minutes of time to encourage the participation of more people. After some prayers we can sing ...)*

- Our Father...

- Fr. Calabria's prayer of intercession

O God, our Father, we praise you for your Providence, with which you govern the universe and our life.

We thank you for the gift of evangelical holiness you have granted your servant St. John Calabria.

On his example, desirous only of the coming of your Kingdom, we abandon to you all our worries.

Grant your Spirit to make our hearts simple and available to your will.

Enable us to love our brothers and sisters; above all, the poorest and abandoned,

that one day, together with them, we may reach the unending joy, where You await us

with your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through the intercession of St. John Calabria, grant us the grace that we now ask you with confidence...

- final song.

DAY 2



GOING BACK TO THE GOSPEL.... THE WAY OF PRACTICAL FAITH

Symbol: Tree with branches where birds can lay and nest. A tree in these conditions represents the practical faith or a faith that becomes acceptance, protection and care for the fragile and needy life.

INTRODUCTION

Guide: Brothers and sisters we are gathering for the second day of our novena that will lead us to the feast of Saint John Calabria. Today's theme is "**Returning to the Gospel... the way of practical faith**". Returning to the Gospel means living a new movement towards a person, Jesus Christ. The Gospel is first and foremost a concrete person, incarnate and inserted into history. Believing in Jesus Christ and returning to Him demands our faith to be practical, concrete; concrete faith means faith that operates, that embraces the situations of life and history and transforms them. The renewal of life through the return to the Gospel, to the Word made flesh in our midst, makes us follow the path of concrete, tangible faith.

Saint John Calabria saw practical faith as the medicine to heal the world that moves away from God, and to return to the Gospel: "*Let's live the life of faith; in a world that is ever more distant from God, let us kindle in ourselves this flame that also enlightens others the way; but let ours be a practical faith*". In Fr. Calabria's spiritual intuition, the practical, active faith is that authentic, not mediocre faith; a faith that concretely marks our actions, thoughts and feelings. But there is another aspect of practical faith: it brings goodness and influences the context where we live.

The symbol of the **Tree with branches where birds can lay and nest represents this practical faith**. Jesus often compared faith to a mustard seed that develops, grows and becomes a welcoming tree. In this sense, practical faith becomes a home and safe haven for all those who feel the burden of their fragility and need care and protection. Returning to the Gospel by following the path of practical faith spurs us to live faith as an embrace and protection for the people we meet on our journey. In this moment of prayer let us ask the Lord for the gift of practical and coherent faith, of authentic faith and without mediocrity, of the faith seed that becomes a strong and welcoming tree.

- **Opening song...**

- LISTENING

Guide: The Gospel is a Person; it is Jesus Christ among us. Listening to the Gospel means listening to Jesus who speaks to us, enlightens us. At this moment we open our hearts to receive that Word which is the seed of light and life; that Word which speaks to us of seeds, of smallness and wonderful growth. Let's listen:

From the Gospel according to Matthew:

"The kingdom of heaven can be compared to a mustard seed, which a man takes and sows in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds but, once grown, it is larger than the other legumes and becomes a tree, so much so that the birds of the sky come and nest among its branches" (Mt 13:31-32).

Guide: Saint John Calabria offers us a wonderful interpretation of this Gospel passage and also an original application to our life. Let's hear what Fr. Calabria says:

From the Homilies of Saint John Calabria:

"The mustard seed, even if it is the smallest of the seeds, then grown as it is, surpasses all the other weeds, and in a short time becomes a tree of such greatness, that the birds go to live in its branches. Image of our faith ... Beloved, let us then cling to this tree of life, let us practice charity, let us take into account the small things: this is the fruit we must derive from this morning's Holy Gospel. Beloved, let us profess our faith with the heart, with acts"⁵.

Guide: Practical faith always remains a simple, true and sincere faith. This density and consistency offer the person inhabited by this faith an extraordinary courage and strength to face the storms of life. We hear the words of Pope Francis who presents us with a profile of practical faith:

From the Meditations of Pope Francis:

"If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree: "Uproot yourself and plant yourself in the sea," and it would obey you" (v. 6). The mustard seed is very small, but Jesus says that it is enough to have a faith so small, but true, sincere, to do things humanly impossible, unthinkable. And it's true! We all know simple, humble people, but with a strong faith, who really move mountains! Let us think, for example, of certain mothers and fathers who face very heavy situations; or of certain sick people, even very serious ones, who transmit serenity to those who visit them. These people, precisely because of their faith, do not boast of what they do, indeed, as Jesus asks in the Gospel, they say: «We are useless servants. We did what we had to do» (Lk 17:10). How many people among us have this strong, humble faith, and it does so much good! "⁶

TIME FOR REFLECTION

(For reflection we propose some ideas that can be developed by those who propose meditation. They are simply passages that try to connect the texts just listened)

- We begin our reflection by contemplating **the tree with branches** that becomes a place where birds prepare their nest and home. This tree has its origins in the smallness of a seed or a small plant. But finding the good conditions, it manages to develop and grow; it is a beautiful symbol speaking of the move that the seed of faith inspires us to make: like a mustard seed that grows up. But in its greatness, it becomes a welcoming space of small and needy life and of every form of life. Practical faith is like a tree with welcoming branches and for this reason practical faith has the fragrance and beauty, of the Gospel and of authentic life.
- To this **tree of practical faith**, we are called to tighten our lives, as St John Calabria teaches us. By embracing this tree, the image of practical faith, we express our desire to assume faith as the operative criterion of our discernment and our living. And this produces in us another fruit

⁵ J. Calabria, Sunday Gospel* 3874 Nov 18, 1911

⁶ Pope Francis, Angelus Oct 6, 2013

linked to practical faith: *it frees us from the traps of that kind of faith that does not touch the concreteness of life*. For Fr. Calabria to return to the Gospel is to return to a person, to a personal and living relationship with Jesus Christ. **Jesus is for us this tree of practical faith** to which to connect our life.

- But Pope Francis reminded us that this faith, small as a mustard seed and growing, gives the person a strength that *"moves mountains"*. The believer becomes an incredible person with the ability to influence many to follow the path of practical faith to return to the Gospel. In this perspective, for us of the Calabrian family, it is not only Jesus who is the tree of practical faith but also **St John Calabria**, who embodies practical faith, **it is for us a tree with branches where they can lay and nest the birds** of our time, in the different contexts of the life and mission of the Opera.

TIME OF SILENCE AND PRAYER

Guide: We are invited to live a brief moment of silence to continue listening to the word and the provocations born out of meditation. After the moment of silence, we can share in a prayerful way what was born in our heart. *(Leave at least 5 minutes of prayerful silence)*

Guide: It is the moment of our response to the Word that we have heard. We can express that which was born in the heart through a brief prayerful sharing, prayer of praise and thanksgiving. What the Spirit suggests to us... *(Leave a few minutes of time to encourage the participation of more people. After some prayers we can sing...)*

- Our Father...

- Fr. Calabria's prayer of intercession

O God, our Father, we praise you for your Providence, with which you govern the universe and our life.

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On his example, desirous only of the coming of your Kingdom, we abandon to you all our worries.

Grant your Spirit to make our hearts simple and available to your will.

Enable us to love our brothers and sisters; above all, the poorest and abandoned,

that one day, together with them, we may reach the unending joy, where You await us

with your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through the intercession of St. John Calabria, grant us the grace that we now ask you with confidence...

- final song.

DAY 3

GOING BACK TO THE GOSPEL... THE WAY OF MERCY



Symbol: Hands repairing a broken vase. This is the power of the loving mercy of God the Father: recompose the fragments of our lives, clothe us with beauty and originality.

- INTRODUCTION

Brothers and sisters welcome to this prayer meeting! Today the theme that will guide our prayer and reflection is "**Return to the Gospel... the way of mercy**". Certainly, this is one of the ways that most profoundly touches our lives because mercy is the way God the Father reacts to our experience of fragility, infidelity and sin. **The hands that repair a broken vase** is a beautiful image to express the transforming and healing power of mercy.

In this prayer we will be helped by the art of Kintsugi, which literally means "to repair with gold". It is a Japanese practice that consists of using gold or liquid silver or lacquer with gold powder for the repair of ceramic objects (usually pottery), using the precious metal to weld the fragments together. The technique allows to obtain precious objects both from the economic point of view (because of the presence of precious metals) and from the artistic one: each repaired ceramic has a different weave of unique and unrepeatable golden lines because of the randomness with which the ceramic can shatter.

Jesus reveals us a God who is a specialist in the art of repairing life with "the gold of mercy". Yes, we can always start again because every encounter with mercy and the Merciful makes our life an original work, with the precious traits of the wounds healed by love. Nothing of our life is thrown away when entrusted to the hands of mercy. Returning to the gospel by following the path of mercy makes our life more beautiful and more precious. In this prayer let us ask the Holy Spirit for the grace to allow us to be reshaped by mercy, to let God the Father exercise in our lives the art of Kintsugi, the art of his mercy that repairs every life making it even more precious.

- *Opening song...*

- LISTENING

Guide: Jesus Christ is the face of the mercy of God the Father. With his life, gestures and words he makes us touch with our hands the beauty and power of new life that comes into our lives when we let ourselves be embraced by mercy. It is never too much to remember that we receive mercy to be merciful. Let us listen to the Word of Jesus...

From the Gospel according to Matthew:

"Then Peter came to him and said, "Lord, if my brother trespasses against me, how often shall I forgive him? Up to seven times". And Jesus said to him, "I do not tell you until seven times, but until seventy times seven. For this reason, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. He had begun to settle the score, when he was presented with a man who owed him ten thousand talents. Then the servant, prostrate on the ground, begged him saying: "Have patience with me and I will give you back everything". The master took pity on that servant, let him go, and forgave him the debt. As soon as he came out, the servant found one of his companions, who owed him a hundred denarii. He took him by the neck and suffocated

him, saying: "Give back what you owe!". His companion, prostrate on the ground, prayed to him saying: "Have patience with me and I will give you back". But he would not, and went and cast him into prison, until he had paid the debt. Seeing what was going on, his companions were very sorry and went to tell their master all that had happened. Then the master called the man and said to him, "Wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you prayed to me. Didn't you have to have mercy on your partner, just as I had mercy on you?". Indignant, the master gave him into the hands of the torturers, until he had returned all his due. Even so will my heavenly Father do with you if you do not forgive your brothers and sisters from your hearts" (Mt 18:21-35).

Guide: Forgiven to forgive is a wonderful synthesis of our life program. To help us live this experience in depth, **St John Calabria** imagines that mercy has arms that love to embrace our whole life. Let's hear this beautiful insight from our founder...

From the writings of Saint John Calabria

*"Let us go to our God, to our good Father, and we will find true peace, true contentment; enthusiasm, no matter how many sins you have committed, do not be discouraged; **the goodness and mercy of God is great and has great arms to receive all.**"⁷*

"The mercy of God is always greater than our malice, because this mercy is infinite: the price of the Blood of Jesus Christ is always greater than the debt that we can have with God because the first is infinite while our debt is not"⁸.

The world considers forgiveness as weakness and foolishness. But we Christians look to the Cross, where the Man - God died forgiving, and in the Cross we find a new wisdom and a new strength. To love one another, to do good, to avoid bringing evil, to forgive evil: these are the four manifestations of a true and solid charity of Christ. Let us forgive from the heart: sincere forgiveness is a source of calm and serenity, a magnet that attracts God's blessings⁹.

Guide: Forgiveness is like the air we breathe. A fantastic intuition of Pope Francis to highlight another aspect of God's mercy: it makes us free and happy. Without mercy life becomes impossible. Let's listen...

From the meditations of Pope Francis

*"God's mercy is our deliverance and our happiness. **We live of mercy** and we cannot afford to be without mercy: **it is the air to breathe.** We are too poor to set the conditions, we need to forgive, because we need to be forgiven "¹⁰*

"These words contain a decisive truth. We cannot expect God's forgiveness for us unless we in turn grant forgiveness to our neighbor. It is a condition: think in the end, to God's forgiveness, and stop hating; throw away the resentment, that annoying fly that comes back and returns. If we do not strive to forgive and love, we will not be forgiven and loved either "¹¹.

*We are called to foster a culture of mercy, based on the rediscovery of the encounter with others: a culture in which no one looks at the other with indifference or turns his gaze when he sees the suffering of his brothers and sisters. **The works of mercy are "artisanal":** none of them is the same as the other; **our hands can shape them in a thousand ways**, and even if it is only God who inspires and unique the "matter" of which they are made, that is, mercy itself, each one acquires a different form¹².*

⁷ J. Calabria, Various Homilies * 4332 Mercy

⁸ J. Calabria, Instruction *3863 Feb 19, 1913

⁹ J. Calabria, Thoughts and exhortation *8884- undated

¹⁰ Pope Francis, General Audience, March 18, 2020

¹¹ Pope Francis, Angelus Sep 13, 2020

¹² Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter Misericordia et misera n.20

TIME FOR REFLECTION

(For reflection we propose some ideas that can be developed by those who propose meditation. They are simply passages that try to connect the texts just listened)

- In our life we touch with our own hands our fragility, limit and sin. We too, like St Paul, sometimes find ourselves doing the evil we do not want. The experience of sin, of infidelity to the faithful love of God the Father causes a great shattering in our hearts and relationships. **Sometimes we feel like a broken vessel, made in "a thousand pieces"** that seems impossible to dream of the possibility of a new beginning and a sincere return to the Lord. But it is precisely in this feeling that everything is finished and that the infinite has abandoned us, that the father's mercy is inserted to realize a wonderful, unprecedented and precious work: the reconstruction of our fragmented life.
- **The arms of mercy**, to use an image of Fr. Calabria, arrive right at the point where we fell and made into many pieces. For so many of us the return to the gospel, to Jesus Christ began right after a great failure, sin or existential tragedy. When everything had collapsed and nothing seemed to have a meaning and taste, hope and life, when we were in the middle of the great storm, we saw love win and offer us his powerful, tender and merciful hand. The way of mercy, with its signs of forgiveness and tenderness, of hope and trust, leads us to the embrace of God the Father. This is the great light that guides us on the way of mercy: this way has the shape of an embrace where you can breathe so many kisses and you find the most beautiful dress, kept in the heart of the Father.
- But this "*cascade of tenderness and mercy*" must become a great river and bathe, without drowning or suffocating, our brothers and sisters, companions in the way of mercy and the return to the Gospel. As Jesus reminded us in the parable: *we cannot expect God's forgiveness for us unless we in turn grant forgiveness to our neighbor.*

TIME OF SILENCE AND PRAYER

Guide: We are invited to live a brief moment of silence to continue listening to the word and the provocations born out of meditation. After the moment of silence, we can share in a prayerful way what was born in our heart. *(Leave at least 5 minutes of prayerful silence)*

Guide: It is the moment of our response to the Word that we have heard. We can express that which was born in the heart through a brief prayerful sharing, prayer of praise and thanksgiving. What the Spirit suggests to us... *(Leave a few minutes of time to encourage the participation of more people. After some prayers we can sing ...)*

- Our Father...

- Fr. Calabria's prayer of intercession

O God, our Father, we praise you for your Providence, with which you govern the universe and our life.

We thank you for the gift of evangelical holiness you have granted your servant St. John Calabria.

On his example, desirous only of the coming of your Kingdom, we abandon to you all our worries.

Grant your Spirit to make our hearts simple and available to your will.

Enable us to love our brothers and sisters; above all, the poorest and abandoned,

that one day, together with them, we may reach the unending joy, where You await us

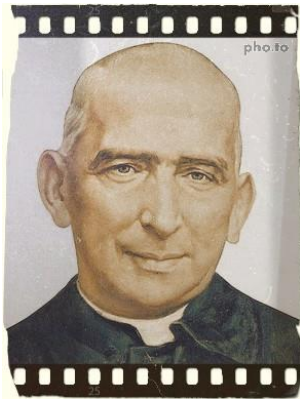
with your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through the intercession of St. John Calabria, grant us the grace that we now ask you with confidence...

- final song.

DAY 4

GOING BACK TO GOSPEL... THE WAY OF FAITHFULNESS



Download from the YouTube channel of the Opera
(www.youtube.com/user/doncalabria1).

(We are invited this day to follow a video celebration from the different parts of the place where lived St. John Calabria. For this celebration, it is important to prepare some elements that will help us to live a full participation.

To put at the center or in front a table with white cloths. Bible, recipient of water, flowers, cross, candle... During the celebration we will use it.)

Nice celebration to all.



- Fr. Calabria's prayer of intercession

O God, our Father, we praise you for your Providence, with which you govern the universe and our life.

We thank you for the gift of evangelical holiness you have granted your servant St. John Calabria.

On his example, desirous only of the coming of your Kingdom, we abandon to you all our worries.

Grant your Spirit to make our hearts simple and available to your will.

Enable us to love our brothers and sisters; above all, the poorest and abandoned,

that one day, together with them, we may reach the unending joy, where You await us

with your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through the intercession of St. John Calabria, grant us the grace that we now ask you with confidence....

DAY 5

GOING BACK TO GOSPEL... THE WAY OF THE EUCHARIST



Symbol: Treasure Chest (Treasure) - The treasure chest becomes precious according to the quality of the treasure that inhabits it. The treasure chest of our heart is the place where the best and most of treasures dwells: the Eucharist.

(Note: we suggest Eucharistic adoration on this day of the novena, using this trace)

INTRODUCTION

Brothers and sisters, we are all welcome to this moment of prayer in preparation for the feast of St John Calabria. Today is a special day because we are invited to contemplate the face of God the Father in the Beloved Son Jesus, the Bread of Life for our lives. **Returning to the Gospel by following the path of the Eucharist** makes us touch and enjoy the precious treasure that illuminates and nourishes our life as disciples. In everyday language we use the word treasure to describe a precious reality, of great value; but we also use it to describe a person who is special in our life. The Eucharist is our treasure because it is a very precious gift and food for our lives; but also, because it is Jesus Christ who lives among us, within us, and Jesus is the special person with whom we have a beautiful and enriching relationship.

The treasure of the Eucharist must occupy the first place in the Church and in our personal life. And this becomes even more fascinating because this treasure has chosen to dwell in our hearts. We are the House of the Eucharist. **Our heart is the treasure chest** within which the Gospel, made flesh and become the Bread of Life for our lives, gently dwells. How beautiful and enlightening it is to know and feel inhabited by a living treasure that grows within us.

Aware of this loving presence, we too can rejoice **together with St John Calabria** and shout to the world with joy the message that changes life: *"Our God is with us, he is in our midst... To sanctify us, to gladden us, to make us live of ourselves. What a mystery of joy, what a mystery of love! God among us, God lives with us, God lives within us!"*. Let us turn our trusting and affectionate gaze to the Eucharist; let us turn our welcoming and grateful love to Jesus Christ. The Eucharist is the Gospel that takes the form of the Bread to nourish our hearts and make our lives become a Eucharistic life. Let us welcome the precious treasure of our life in our midst: the *Eucharistic Jesus*.

- *Opening song*

- LISTENING

Guide: The Eucharist is a treasure that speaks inviting us to be people of compassion and attentive to those who feel *"like sheep without a shepherd"*. But the Eucharist also invites us to become Eucharistic persons: give yourselves to eat. Let us listen to the Word of Jesus, treasure among us.

From the Gospel according to Mark:

"And he went down from the ship, and saw a great multitude, and had compassion on them; for they were like sheep which have no shepherd, and he began to teach them many things. Having become late, his disciples approached him and said: "The place is deserted and it is now late; send them away, so that, going through the countryside and the surrounding villages, they can buy food". But he answered them, "Give them to eat yourselves". They said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred pieces of bread and give them to eat?". But he said to them, "How many

loaves do you have? Go and see". They inquired and said, "Five, and two fishes". And he commanded them to sit all of them, in groups, on the green grass. And they sat down, in groups of a hundred and fifty. And he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and blessed, and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to distribute to them: and he divided the two fishes among them all. They all ate to the full, and took away of the pieces of bread twelve full baskets, and all that remained of the fish. Those who ate the loaves were five thousand men" (Mk 6:34-40).

Guide: "You yourselves give them food" is a program of life that St John Calabria lived and shared with us so that we too can give our lives the configuration of the treasure of the Eucharist. Let's hear his words...

From the Writings of Saint John Calabria:

*Where our treasure is, there will also be our heart, it is written, and **our treasure must be the Eucharistic Jesus**. Not from the environment, not from human protections, not from the esteem of men will come the help and strength for us, for our holy ministry, but from Jesus Sacramented. In the doubts, in the uncertainties, in the great needs for our souls and for the sacred ministry, we go to the S. Tabernacle, we think that there is really, really, substantially our God.¹³ From this Sacrament Jesus speaks to us, first of all, of his love for us, because he tells us to what extent **he wished to forge with us affectionate bonds**, not content only to live in our company, but wanting to give himself entirely to us, in food and refreshing drinks for our souls¹⁴.*

*Communion? It means intimate union of God with man, of man with God. **We must look to the poor, to the suffering, with the same spirit of faith with which we look at the Eucharist, and serve the Lord in them with all the zeal of our charity**¹⁵.*

Guide: These words of St John Calabria find echo in the words of Pope Francis who invites us to broaden our hearts, to be a welcoming space of the Lord who becomes small, who becomes a piece of broken bread.

From the meditations of Pope Francis:

*"God makes himself small like a piece of bread and precisely for this reason a big heart is needed to be able to recognize, adore and welcome him. The presence of God is so humble, hidden, sometimes invisible, that it needs a prepared, alert and welcoming heart to be recognized. **The heart must be enlarged**. It is necessary to go out of the small room of our ego and enter into the great space of wonder and adoration. The Church must also be a large room. Not a small and closed circle, but a community with open arms, welcoming to all. The Eucharist wants to feed those who are tired and hungry along the way, let's not forget it! Jesus breaks the Bread. It is the Eucharistic gesture par excellence... To celebrate and live the Eucharist, we too are called to live this love. You cannot break the Sunday Bread if your heart is closed to the brothers. You cannot eat this Bread if you do not give bread to the hungry. You cannot share this Bread if you do not share the sufferings of those in need. Let us open our hearts in love, so that we may be the spacious and hospitable room where everyone can enter to meet the Lord. Let us break our lives in compassion and solidarity, so that the world may see through us the greatness of God's love¹⁶".*

¹³ J. Calabria, Colletive Letter* Letter XVI Dec 8, 1936

¹⁴ J. Calabria, Apostolato Infermi 9Letters) *6260 June 1951

¹⁵ J. CALABRIA, Catholica Action. * 9715 Verona, Dec 8, 1948

¹⁶ Pope Francis, Holily Corpus Domini June 6, 2021

TIME FOR REFLECTION

(Per la riflessione proponiamo qualche spunto che può essere sviluppato da chi propone la meditazione. Sono semplicemente passaggi che cercano di mettere a dialogo i testi appena ascoltati)

- This reflection, rather than made of words, is fundamental that it be built with the contemplative gaze and silence of the heart. Returning to the Gospel by following the path of the Eucharist awakens in us at least three existential attitudes: **Astonishment, Gratitude and Involvement.** **Astonishment** before the treasure of the Eucharist is certainly the first reaction of our heart and of our whole life. Just thinking about it makes us feel the joy that makes the heart dance, like that of Mary, the whole Eucharist Mother. How creative love is! Always ready to invent a thousand ways to penetrate our hearts and dwell in our lives. It is the amazement that makes the knees bend and the act of Adoration.
- The second attitude is **Gratitude. The Eucharist is the school of gratefulness.** In every celebration we are called to join in the thanksgiving that Jesus addresses to the Father for all his benefits and, above all, for his boundless love. The Lord's Supper, then, urges us to live our whole life in a spirit of thanksgiving, recognizing that everything comes from God to open our hearts to the acceptance of His gifts. Whoever thanks, recognizes he is loved. The Eucharist is the love of God the Father who in his Son gives us the true Bread, that came down from heaven. **He wants to make affectionate bonds with us.** And all is grace; and all is free; and all invites to gratitude.
- But the Eucharist is also a treasure that demands **the involvement** of our entire life. Being inhabited by the broken Bread and contemplating its sacramental presence before us invites us to become broken bread for our brothers and sisters. Amazement and gratitude touch and involve all the fibers of our being and our acting. **To be involved** in the treasure of the Eucharist means to live compassion and solidarity; **it means to be spacious and hospitable where everyone can enter and meet the Lord.**

TIME OF SILENCE AND PRAYER

Guide: We are invited to live a brief moment of silence to continue listening to the word and the provocations born out of meditation. After the moment of silence, we can share in a prayerful way what was born in our heart. *(Leave at least 5 minutes of prayerful silence)*

Guide: It is the moment of our response to the Word that we have heard. We can express that which was born in the heart through a brief prayerful sharing, prayer of praise and thanksgiving. What the Spirit suggests to us... *(Leave a few minutes of time to encourage the participation of more people. After some prayers we can sing...)*

- Our Father...

- Fr. Calabria's prayer of intercession

O God, our Father, we praise you for your Providence, with which you govern the universe and our life.

We thank you for the gift of evangelical holiness you have granted your servant St. John Calabria.

On his example, desirous only of the coming of your Kingdom, we abandon to you all our worries.

Grant your Spirit to make our hearts simple and available to your will.

Enable us to love our brothers and sisters; above all, the poorest and abandoned,

that one day, together with them, we may reach the unending joy, where You await us

with your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through the intercession of St. John Calabria, grant us the grace that we now ask you with confidence...

- final song.

Day 6



GOING BACK TO THE GOSPEL... THE WAY OF FRATERNITY

Symbol: Communicating Vessels. The principle of communicating vessels reminds us that the good done by one brings goodness to the whole family... is a common heritage. Saint John Calabria applies it to the Opera and to our responsibility for the good.

- INTRODUCTION

Brothers and sisters welcome to this meeting of prayer. We are now on **the sixth day of preparation for the feast of St John Calabria**. Today the theme that guides our prayer is **Returning to the Gospel... the way of fraternity**. The encounter with the Gospel, with Jesus Christ and his proposal for life, is always a personal encounter. But the experience of the consequences of this meeting is not only personal but also community. Our fraternity is the fruit of a personal encounter with Christ. And our fraternity is nourished by the Word and the Bread that Christ is and offers us. Walking the path of fraternity to return to the Gospel reminds us that we are all brothers and sisters and we have a responsibility to others and their way of following Jesus.

To express this common and reciprocal responsibility, Saint John Calabria used the image of **communicating vessels**. The principle is very simple: *precisely because the vessels are interconnected, by the law of gravity every liquid that is placed in one of the vessels reaches all the vessels*. Instead of vases we can put our personal and community life. Personal experience directly affects the life of my group. When a brother or sister lives well his Christian and Calabrian life this brings goodness and benefit to the whole Calabrian family, thanks to the **spirituality of communicating vessels**.

But the opposite is also possible: when one lives the Christian and Calabrian life in a mediocre way this damages the beauty and disfigures the face of the Calabrian family. How many graces we can make circulate among ourselves; and how much responsibility we have on the personal and community experience of charism and faith.

The best way to express the spirituality of the communicating vessels is through persevering, fruitful and creative fraternity. We are all brothers and sisters, and to the extent that we remain united to the source of fraternal love, the climate and the contents that circulate within the communicating vessels, of our relations, make us a fraternal, believing and incredible community. Yes, today it is not enough to be a believer; the world desires incredible people and communities, because they embody the gospel of brotherhood.

Opening song...

LISTENING

Guide: The community of Bethany formed by Jesus, Martha, Lazarus and Mary is a fine example of what it means to be communicating vessels and fraternity on the way. Let's listen:

From the Gospel according to John:

"Six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom he had raised from the dead. And there they made him a supper: Martha served, and Lazarus was one of the diners. And Mary took three hundred grams of the very precious perfume of

spikenard, and sprinkled the feet of Jesus thereon, and wiped them with her hair; and the whole house was filled with the aroma of that incense. Then Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, who was about to betray him, said: «Why did they not sell this perfume for three hundred denarii and give themselves to the poor? ». He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and because he kept the box, he took what they put in it. Then said Jesus: Let her alone, that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For you have the poor always with you, but you do not always have me" (Jn 12:1-8).

Guide: The fraternity of Bethany is a fruit cultivated in mutual care and offering of gifts; each one makes available the best he has: *Jesus offers his loving presence, Martha served, Mary offers the scent and Lazarus friendship.* Fraternity is a way of life and of relationships. Saint John Calabria reminds us that brotherhood has the flavor of affection, friendship and memorial. Let's listen:

From the Writings of Saint John Calabria:

"My beloved Fr. Enrico,

How good Providence is! It made me here to find your letter, which I kissed because it was written by my dearest among dear friends. Deo gratias. How I remember you! The more time is passing and more I remember you, my dear Fr. Enrico; and I remember all the old things of when I was in my unforgettable Santo Stefano. I know you remember me too, and this is a great comfort for me...¹⁷ "

"Beloved

Fr.

Enrico,

At last the beloved and longed-for day has dawned, in which I am given to utter all my joy, even the joy of the whole house, and to tell you how much I love you in the Lord, beloved friend, and how grateful I am for all the spiritual good that you have done and continue to do in this House of God. I greet you dearly, and see that you are my dearest and beloved friend who loves you so much in the Lord"¹⁸.

Guide: How beautiful it is to hear these words of our father Calabria. Fraternity is built with gestures and attitudes that bring to light the best humanity that lives there. Even Pope Francis in continuity with Fr. Calabria, paints a brotherhood with *human and divine flavor*; an artisanal brotherhood and in tune with the fatherhood of God. Let us hear the Pope's words:

From the meditations of Pope Francis:

"Thank you all for betting on brotherhood, because today brotherhood is the new frontier of humanity. Either we are brothers or we destroy each other. Today there is no time for indifference. We cannot wash our hands, with distance, with lack of care, with disinterest. Either we are brothers - allow me -, or everything collapses. It is the frontier. The frontier on which we must build; it is the challenge of our century; it is the challenge of our times. Brotherhood means extended hand; brotherhood means respect. Brotherhood means listening with an open heart. Brotherhood means firmness in one's convictions. Because there is no true brotherhood if one negotiates one's convictions. We are brothers, born of the same Father. With different cultures, traditions, but all brothers. And in respect of our different cultures and traditions, of our different nationalities, we must build this brotherhood. Not by negotiating it. It is the moment of listening. It is the moment of sincere acceptance. It is the moment of certainty that a world without brothers is a world of enemies"¹⁹.

¹⁷ J. Calabria, letter to Monsignor Bovo Enrico*9565 Costozza Jan 30, 1940

¹⁸ J. CALABRIA, letter to Monsg Bovo ENRICO * 299 Verona, Oct 26-1928

¹⁹ POPE FRANCIS, Speech for the I world day of world human brotherhood . Feb 4, 2021

MOMENT OF REFLECTION

(For reflection we propose some ideas that can be developed by those who propose meditation. They are simply passages that try to connect the texts just listened)

- *Returning to the Gospel, to the Person of Jesus Christ, following the path of fraternity* is an invitation to put at the centre of our Christian and Calabrian life the fundamental relationships: with the Lord, with our brothers and sisters and with creation. When we use the symbol of the communicating vessels to reflect on fraternity, we realize that there is a co-responsibility in the construction of believing and credible fraternity. The way of fraternity as a way of returning to the Gospel is an effective proclamation that brotherhood is the most beautiful face that the Gospel can produce in history.
- **The fraternity of Bethany with its perfume and eloquent gestures, fills our journey while building and living fraternity. Even Fr. Calabria, in the words we have heard, let all his affection and fraternal friendship with Fr. Enrico shine through. Even the letter is seen with an affectionate gaze: "a letter perfumed by the charity of your holy prayers; from the bottom of my heart, I thank you for it".** And always in his fraternal communication with Don Enrico we find another gesture of affection and fraternity but deep: **"How good is Providence! It made me here to find your letter, which I kissed because it was written by my closest friend"**. *Perfume and kiss: a profound synthesis of authentic fraternity.*
- But this fraternal affection, precisely because it tastes like the gospel, does not remain closed in on itself. Authentic fraternity is open and involves others in building the new world, the kingdom of God in history. Pope Francis insists so much on the **need to invest on brotherhood**. Today the great challenge is to save oneself together as brothers or to destroy oneself together as enemies. Fraternity will make us live as brothers and sisters saved by the love of God the Father who in his Son and our brother Jesus gave us life in fullness. Life that overcomes all selfishness, individualism and indifference.

MOMENT OF SILENCE AND PRAYER

Guide: We are invited to live a brief moment of silence to continue listening to the word and the provocations born out of meditation. After the moment of silence, we can share in a prayerful way what was born in our heart *(Leave at least 5 minutes of prayerful silence)*

Guide: It is the moment of our response to the Word that we have heard. We can express that which was born in the heart through a brief prayerful sharing, prayer of praise and thanksgiving. What the Spirit suggests to us... *(Leave a few minutes of time to encourage the participation of more people. After some prayers we can sing...)*

- Our Father...

- Fr. Calabria's prayer of intercession

O God, our Father, we praise you for your Providence, with which you govern the universe and our life.

We thank you for the gift of evangelical holiness you have granted your servant St. John Calabria.

On his example, desirous only of the coming of your Kingdom, we abandon to you all our worries.

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Enable us to love our brothers and sisters; above all, the poorest and abandoned,

that one day, together with them, we may reach the unending joy, where You await us

with your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through the intercession of St. John Calabria, grant us the grace that we now ask you with confidence...

- final song.

SEVENTH DAY

RETURN TO THE GOSPEL THE WAY OF CHARITY



Symbol: Precious stones. *"If there is a precious stone covered with dust or even mud, how quickly it is picked up! With immense care it is cleaned of dust, mud ... Oh, a soul, a soul! It is worth billions and billions! "*

- INTRODUCTION

Sisters and brothers, welcome to this prayer meeting in preparation for the feast of St. John Calabria. On this seventh day our theme is: **Return to the Gospel... the way of charity.** Charity is love that invents a thousand ways to express itself concretely; charity is compassion that guides hands and hearts to carry out those beautiful works that make people more lovely, especially those who are blemished and marginalized. Charity is actual love that is always *"at the feet to wash them"*, to take care, to heal wounds and to help walk in a new, more human and fraternal way.

St. John Calabria often used symbols related to "precious things" to stimulate our charity towards the poor and abandoned. In the spiritual intuition of Fr. Calabria, we have to reach where the most precious treasures and pearls are found and that no one else seeks, for their worth is linked to the logic of the gospel and not of this world. *"However, we must always go where humanly nothing is to be promised, hence to the poorest, to the humble; we must look for such souls; abandoned, rejected, despised, old, sick, sinful mortals; these will be the treasures, the gems of the Opera, the key that opens Heaven to us, and thus Divine Providence will be better revealed"*. **Returning to the Gospel along the path of charity** commits us to embrace treasures and precious stones made of flesh and soul, of wounds and hope.

Charity is the brightest and most concrete fruit that the encounter with the Gospel can produce in our life and mission. Jesus himself is love became flesh and who began to serve the humanity in need and marginalized. We are all invited to the school of tangible love, which becomes charity, as per the example of our father John Calabria. In this prayer we remember and **entrust to the Lord all the pearls and billions that are welcomed in the houses of the Opera.** We thank the Lord because this value enriches our life both in personal and community level. And we ask for the grace of conversion of our hearts and our hands and feet towards the poor and marginalized of our time.

- Entrance Hymn ...

- LISTENING MOMENT

Leader: The encounter with the Gospel gives us a new look and makes us see everything in a different way. The ability to see the poor as precious pearls and billions is a gift from the Lord. Often the accumulation of the riches of this world makes us blind and indifferent to the wounded and suffering people who find themselves at the doorsteps of our life and our homes. Let's listen to the parable of the *blind* rich man and the poor Lazarus.

A reading from the gospel according to Luke:

"There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores. When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw

Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he cried out, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.' Abraham replied, 'My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented. Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.' He said, 'Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.' But Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.' He said, 'Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' Then Abraham said, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.' (Lk.16:19-31)

Guide: St. John Calabria has always had a particular sensitivity towards the poor and the suffering. His hails from a poor family, but with great compassion and solidarity. This sensitivity has been strengthened by the encounter with the Gospel and he thus proposes it to the entire Opera as a lifestyle and mission. Let's listen to his words:

From the writings of St. John Calabria:

"Let us love the living image of Jesus, we love our neighbour. The whole of the Holy Gospel can be summed up in this word: love of neighbour ... When we exercise an act of charity, when we approach that poor man who suffers, when we are at the bed of that sick person, who has so much pain, when we console an afflicted one, when we give the kiss of forgiveness, we can say that we love Jesus..."²⁰

"I recommend you a lot the charity! Let it reign sovereign in your hearts! Let our charity be supernatural, universal. Charity loves everyone without any distinction, but it particularly loves the poorest, the most abandoned, the old, the sick, and the sinners. These are the gems our Opera has to look for and it has to become rich of. Remember the brotherly charity above all: help each other, pity each other. Do not let anybody to criticize and to murmur. Where there is charity; there is God; his grace and his spirit. To look for the Kingdom of God means to make efforts so that charity can always reign and in everybody."²¹

Guide: Pope Francis too insists on the need to take a new look to see people who are considered invisible by the throwaway society. Let's listen him:

From the meditations of Pope Francis:

"Charity is the mercy that seeks out the weakest, that goes to the most difficult frontiers to free people from the slavery that oppress them and make them protagonists of their lives ... It is nice to widen the paths of charity, always keeping the gaze at the least in every time. To widen the gaze, yes, but starting from the eyes of the poor in front of me. There you learn. If we are not able to look the poor in the eyes, to look them in the eye, to touch them with a hug, with the hand, we will do nothing. It is with their eyes that we need to look at reality, because looking at the eyes of the poor we look at reality in a different way from what comes into our mentality. History is not looked at from the perspective of the winners, who make it appear beautiful and perfect, but from the perspective of the poor, because it is the perception of Jesus. greet, inviting us to change. And when our heart, our conscience, looking at the poor, the poor, do not worry, stop ..., we should stop: something is not working..."²²

²⁰ G. CALABRIA, PREDICAZIONI VARIE * 5638 LA CARITA' (Exhortation to the sisters, during adoration moment.)

²¹ G. CALABRIA, LETT. TO MY BELOVED BROTHERS. * LETTERA XXXIII 8, December 1943

²² PAPA FRANCESCO, Caritas italiana - 26 giugno 2021

- MOMENT OF REFLECTION

(Per la riflessione proponiamo qualche spunto che può essere sviluppato da chi propone la meditazione. Sono semplicemente passaggi che cercano di mettere a dialogo i testi appena ascoltati)

- **The way of charity is one of the most credible and concrete ways of applying the Gospel in the concreteness of life.** In this process of conversion and return to the gospel we must face our attachments and our passion for the accumulation of material things. And it is precisely the excess of comfort and well-being that make us closed in on ourselves and indifferent to the "poor Lazarus" living at the door of our life. Jesus reminds us that authentic charity, tangible love, begins in the home and around our home. *Is there any "Lazarus" whom I find tough to see in my life?*
- **St. John Calabria has been defined as the "champion of evangelical charity".** *In him the gospel and gestures were the same thing, he became a living gospel. From Fr. Calabria we learn that our way of seeing others, the poor and the marginalized, reveals how much of the gospel we carry in our hearts. Charity is made of facts and not of "a thousand theories and chatter". We have the opportunity to encounter the beauty and light of the Gospel through the encounter with the pearls and billions whom the Lord brings to our life and invites us to bring our life closer to them. Charity is the wisest and brightest investment that we can live to become rich in humanity, by names, faces and many transformed life stories.*
- But this involves experiencing an exodus, an exit and decentralization from ourselves and from our comfort zones. Going to the poor, the precious stones made of flesh, blood and tears, blossom in us the best humanity that abides in us. The exercise of charity forms and shapes a new humanity, a new way of being in the world.

- SILENCE AND PRAYER TIME

Guide: We are invited to experience a short moment of silence to continue listening to the word and the provocations born of reflection. After the time of silence, we can share in a prayerful way to share what was born in our heart. *(Leave about 5 minutes of praying in silence)*

Guide: This moment is for our response to the Word we have listened. We can express what was born in our hearts by a short prayerful sharing, a prayer of praise, one of thanksgiving. What the Spirit suggests to us ... *(Leave a few minutes to encourage the participation of more people. After a few prayers you can sing some refrain ...)*

- Our Father...

- Fr. Calabria's prayer of intercession

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Grant your Spirit to make our hearts simple and available to your will.

Enable us to love our brothers and sisters; above all, the poorest and abandoned,

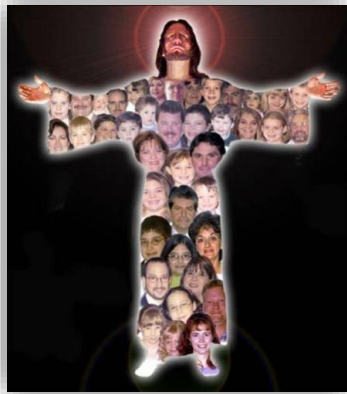
that one day, together with them, we may reach the unending joy, where You await us

with your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through the intercession of St. John Calabria, grant us the grace that we now ask you with confidence....

- final song.

EIGHT DAY



RETURN TO THE GOSPEL... THE WAY OF COMMUNION

Symbol:

Variety of limbs which, jointly, form the human body. "The Opera of the Poor Servants, like all the other Opera, is like a body. When a limb falls sick, everyone resents. Brothers, whichever limb is, the entire body suffers. Besides being sick in itself, that causes the harm to the Opera itself, and then the Opera can no longer function". (Don Calabria)

- INTRODUCTION

Guide: Brothers and sisters welcome to the eighth day of the novena. The theme of our reflection today is **Returning to the Gospel... the way of Communion**. This way reminds us that the Gospel, the encounter with Jesus Christ makes us people of communion; without communion there is no Christian life and the world does not believe in our announcement. We live in a time where we are called by the Gospel and by history to rebuild that "WE" made up of fraternal relationships and spiritual harmony that nourishes the communion and solidarity between all the members of the human family.

To express this communion, the symbol we use is that of the **diversity of the members who together form the human body**. Being the body of Christ in history, becoming one in him requires the awareness of interdependent belonging. In the symbol of the body, each member feels that it belongs to the other member, which needs the other limbs to form a human body. The symbol of the body reminds us that no member is self-sufficient and alone does not have the ability to be a body: the whole lives and expresses itself precisely because it is made up of diversity and unity.

The Christian community, the Calabrian Opera cannot be a monolith, square, cold, heavy. Its reality is alive, mobile, creative and growing. The way of communion moulds in us that unity and synergy, a gift from above and the power of the Spirit that touches every member of the body. Without the communion of members, the body does not exist and cannot function. But when one member of the body suffers the whole body feels this suffering. The same idea can be applied to the Church and the Opera: together and in harmony we are the body of Christ; while separated we are not protected and we have no gospel identity. In this prayer we ask for the grace to grow in concrete communion and harmony between the various members who make up the Body of Christ and who make up the Body of the Opera.

Entrance Hymn...

- MOMENT OF LISTENING

Guide: Inserted into the culture of his time, Saint Paul was one of the first Christian authors to use the metaphor of the body to speak of the Christian community and the beauty of its diversity. We listen:

From Paul's Letter to the Corinthians:

"As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or

free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. Now the body is not a single part, but many. If they were all one part, where would the body be? ... so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it. ... Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts. But I shall show you a still more excellent way.” (1 Cor 12:12-14.19.25.27.31).

Guide: St. John Calabria speaks of the Opera using the metaphor of the human body. He highlights our responsibility to maintain the health of the body. We feel.

From the writings of San Giovanni Calabria:

The Opera is like the human body. *When in the body there is some member that hurts, that causes pain, the whole body is affected, but not so much that it cannot act, live, work, move. But if some vital part is damaged in the body, if one is ill, for example. to the lungs, to the heart, then the whole body is sick and the body cannot live without lungs, without heart ...*

You must therefore be perfectly healthy, so that the House can always and everywhere carry out the will of the Lord. But you must all be holy because, if even one does not correspond to the immense graces of the Lord, it would always be a great obstacle to the plans of the Lord. And woe to him who takes so much responsibility! So be good, be holy and the Lord will bless this Work, which is destined to do so much good in the world.²³

Guide: In Pope Francis's reflection, has highlighted the function and mission of the Holy Spirit for the unity and life of the Body of Christ, which is the Church. We listen:

From the meditations of Pope Francis:

St Paul says that just as the limbs of the human body, although diverse and many, form one body, so have we been baptized by one Spirit into one body (cf. 1 Cor 12:12-13). Consequently, in the Church there is variety and a diversity of roles and functions; there is no flat uniformity, but a wealth of gifts that the Holy Spirit distributes. Yet, there is communion and unity: each one relates to the other and comes together to form a single living body, deeply tied to Christ. Let us remember this well: being part of the Church means being united to Christ and receiving from him the divine life that makes us live as Christians; it means staying united Body and limb, in order to live, must be united! Unity is superior to conflict, always! Conflicts, if not properly resolved, divide us from each other, separate us from God. Conflict can help us to grow, but it can also divide us. Let us not go down the path of division, of fighting among ourselves! All united, all united in our differences, but united, always: this is the way of Jesus. Unity is superior to conflict. Unity is a grace for which we must ask the Lord that he may liberate us from the temptation of division, of conflict between us, of selfishness, of gossip. How much evil gossip does, how much evil! Never gossip about others, never! So much damage to the Church comes from division among Christians, from biases, from narrow interests.²⁴

- MOMENT OF REFLECTION

(Per la riflessione proponiamo qualche spunto che può essere sviluppato da chi propone la meditazione. Sono semplicemente passaggi che cercano di mettere a dialogo i testi appena ascoltati)

- **Returning to the Gospel along the way of communion** makes us discover the fundamental gift of our baptism. Communion is a gift from above but which flourishes from the baptismal font. St. Paul writing to the Corinthians helps us to taste the beauty of communion that comes from the diversity embraced by Christ. We are many members but together we form one body and in this body each one has a function for the good of all.

²³ G. CALABRIA, PENSIERI MASSIME * 4147.

²⁴ PAPA FRANCESCO, Udienza generale, Mercoledì 19 giugno 2013.

- **St. John Calabria**, enlightened by the Pauline intuition, uses the image of the body to speak of the Opera and of our belonging to it. Fr. Calabria enriches the reflection by inviting everyone to share responsibility to keep the body in perfect health. The health of the body, which is the Opera, is fundamental for it to carry out the mission that God the Father entrusts us. But the health of the body of the Opera depends on the health of the members as we are. In the body of the Opera we have a double mission: to maintain communion and to maintain health. And all to better live the mission entrusted: to witness the world that God is Father.

- **Pope Francis** reminds us that in this united body made up of several members there is the possibility of conflict and the risk of division. The richness of the gifts distributed by the Holy Spirit helps us to maintain unity and to manage possible conflicts in a healthy and fraternal way. But it is always important to remember that the fruit of unity is a gift to always ask of the Lord. Communion is a gift that comes from above but is kept here below, in the soil of our relationships and in the openness to the grace that the Lord pours into our hearts.

- MOMENT OF SILENCE AND PRAYER

Guide: We are invited to experience a short moment of silence to continue listening to the word and the provocations born of reflection. After the time of silence, we can share in a prayerful way to share what was born in our heart. *(Leave about 5 minutes of praying in silence)*

Guide: This moment is for our response to the Word we have listened. We can express what was born in our hearts by a short prayerful sharing, a prayer of praise, one of thanksgiving. What the Spirit suggests to us ... *(Leave a few minutes to encourage the participation of more people. After a few prayers you can sing some refrain ...)*

- Our Father...

- Fr. Calabria's prayer of intercession

O God, our Father, we praise you for your Providence, with which you govern the universe and our life.

We thank you for the gift of evangelical holiness you have granted your servant St. John Calabria.

On his example, desirous only of the coming of your Kingdom, we abandon to you all our worries.

Grant your Spirit to make our hearts simple and available to your will.

Enable us to love our brothers and sisters; above all, the poorest and abandoned,

that one day, together with them, we may reach the unending joy, where You await us with your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through the intercession of St. John Calabria, grant us the grace that we now ask you with confidence...

- final song.

NINTH DAY

RETURN TO THE GOSPEL... THE WAY OF "WATCHFUL SENTINEL"



Symbol: *Ancient Lamp. In the ancient world, the sentries kept watch in the night and had a lamp fed with oil as their watch companions. Watchful sentry and lamp lit in the night form a beautiful metaphor to talk about hope.*

(NOTE: We suggest for those who want and can do this last day of the novena a more prolonged moment of "PRAYER VIGIL" ...)

- INTRODUCTION

Guide: Brothers and sisters we have reached the last day of our journey in preparation for the feast of St. John Calabria. Now there is only one night that separates us from the day made by the Lord: a day of joy, celebration and exultation for the gift of the evangelical holiness of our Father John Calabria. During this novena we have meditated, prayed and renewed in ourselves the desire to continue following the path traced by our Father and to place our feet in the footprints he left before us. We have accepted the invitation **to return to the Gospel by following some paths** that awaken in us some fundamental attitudes, according to the Calabrian spirituality.

Today the theme that helps us to pray and to enter the climate of the feast now near is to return to the Gospel ... the way of the **"watchful sentinel"**. The Gospel awakens us up and keeps us alert, even in the night we are living and going through as humankind and the Church of the Lord. The **"watchful sentinel"** is an expression used by St. John Calabria to remind all of us that it is not sufficient not to sleep but is vital to have our eyes lit by the light of the Word while waiting for the new day. The **"watchful sentinel"** is his people's security and the proclamation of the new day.

The **"burning lamp"** becomes a symbol of the **"watchful sentinel"**, who lives his mission abided by hope. Returning to the Gospel along the way of the watchful sentry means letting oneself be kindled by the light of the Word and the fire of the Holy Spirit; it means letting oneself be guided by the light that is Jesus Christ in order to pass through the nights of events and the storms of life with trust and hope. The **"watchful sentinel"** experiences the expectation inhabited by the certainty that God's newness sprouts as the night moves towards the dawn of the new day. "Sentinel, how much of the night remains?" (Is 21, 11). Let's find out together, through our prayer and vigil ...

Entrance Hymn.

- MOMENT OF LISTENING

Guide: Keep awake is the main mission of the sentry. And the Word of God often uses this verb to speak of our attitude in waiting for the Lord, the master of our life. We are sentinels waiting not only for a new day, but above all for the Lord of Life.

From the gospel according to Luke:

"Gird your loins and light your lamps and be like servants who await their master's return from a wedding, ready to open immediately when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival. Amen, I say to you, he will gird himself, have them recline at table, and proceed to wait on them. And should he come in the second or third watch and find them prepared in this way, blessed are those servants. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour when the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come." Then Peter said, "Lord, is this parable meant for us or for everyone?" And the Lord replied, "Who, then, is the faithful and prudent steward whom the master will put in charge of his servants to distribute (the) food allowance at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master on arrival finds doing so. Truly, I say to you, he will put him in charge of all his property. (Lk 12:35-44)

Guide: St. John Calabria often used the image of the sentinel to speak of the mission of the Casante, of those who belong to the Opera: to be a vigilant and faithful sentinel of the good Lord.

From the writings of St. John Calabria:

... **Always be a faithful sentinel of the good Lord**, so that the terrible enemy does not enter, and if we are faithful to our holy Rules, and the interior life, especially for us religious.

... **You always be a watchful sentinel**; always be of good spirit, have great faith and I recommend that everyone take care of the interior life with great faith, observing the holy rules.

... **Be vigilant and faithful sentinel** so that sin never passes into God's garden. The Lord will be with us, if we are with Him, Satan trembles. May Jesus always finds us ready.

Guide: But for us Christians, the sentinel has an Easter flavour because Christ conquered death and the night, with his resurrection. We are sentinels touched and shaped by the new light of the Living Christ in our midst. Let's listen ...

From the reflections of Pope Francis:

"At times the dark of night seems to penetrate the soul; at times we think: "there is nothing more to be done", and the heart no longer finds the strength to love.... But it is precisely in the darkness that Christ lights the fire of God's love: a flash breaks through the darkness and announces a new start, something begins in the deepest darkness. We know that the night is "most night like" just before the dawn. In that very darkness Christ conquers and rekindles the fire of love. The stone of sorrow is rolled away leaving room for hope. Behold the great mystery of Easter! On this holy night the Church gives us the light of the Risen One, that in us there will not be the regret of the one who says: "if only...", but the hope of the one who opens himself to a present filled with future: Christ has conquered death, and we are with Him. Our life does not end at the stone of the sepulchre, our life goes beyond with hope in Christ who is Risen from that very tomb. As Christians we are called to be sentinels of the dawn, who can discern the signs of the Risen One, as did the women and the disciples who ran to the tomb at dawn on the first day of the week. (General audience on Wednesday, April 1, 2015)

- MOMENT OF REFLECTION

((For reflection we propose some ideas that can be developed by those who propose the meditation. They are passages that try to put the texts just listened into dialogue)

- **Our question:** Sentinel, how far remains in the night? " (Is 21:11). We find in the word of God the answer and also concrete indications for living as a watchman. Jesus reminds us that keeping vigil is not a question of how long more, but it is a constant attitude: "**Be ready, with your clothes tight around your hips and**

the lamps lit" (Lk 12:35). The watchful sentry is always in an attitude of service, "*dress tight to the hips*", and with the "*lamp lit*". These are elements that speaks of total availability to live in expectation of the Lord. The word of Jesus stands out that we are not sentinels with a definite duty time; we are full time sentinels and always in tune with the one who is the reason for our vigil and expectation. To avoid the sweet temptation of sleep, Jesus' parable indicates taking care of brothers and sisters to keep awake. What to do while we wait for the love of our life? To be vigilant in the certainty that love will come and to serve those who are loved by the love that I am expecting.

- **For St. John Calabria**, the sentinel must have some characteristics, which are also attitudes in living. **Watchful and faithful sentinel** in guarding the garden of God which is the Opera. In this mission the sentinel must be aware of sin, which roars like a lion and tries to ruin everything. God's garden, which is the Opera, bothers the devil. **The faithful sentinel of the good God** is always ready to defend the Opera and to announce the fidelity of God who, as Father, takes care of and takes care of our life through Divine providence. The vigilant and faithful sentries of the good Lord are we who have received the grace of belonging to this mystical fortress that is the Opera. How much grace and how much responsibility!

- But where can we find the strength to live as a watchful and faithful sentinel? Pope Francis in his meditation on it has suggested us not only "**where**" but "**who**" **nourishes our vocation to keep vigil**. It is in the Passover of Jesus, in his mystery of death and resurrection we encounter that New Paschal energy which gives us a new configuration in living as a watchful and faithful sentinel. The sentinel knows that prayer and silent service are his winning weapons, the sentry seeks new forms of hospitality, fraternity, solidarity. The sentinel dreams of a new world that is no longer what it was before, but it is a world that is also built starting from the frailty experienced, from the nights that is being experienced. We are sentinels and announce that morning will certainly come after the night. Indeed, it has already happened! Because Jesus is that morning that comes after the night, whatever night.

- MOMENT OF SILENCE AND PRAYER

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Grant your Spirit to make our hearts simple and available to your will.

Enable us to love our brothers and sisters; above all, the poorest and abandoned,

that one day, together with them, we may reach the unending joy, where You await us

with your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through the intercession of St. John Calabria, grant us the grace that we now ask you with confidence...

- final song.