THE WAY OF *the heart*



FROM THE POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK-USA

INTRODUCTION

"The Way of the Heart," a profound spiritual journey offered by the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network—The Apostleship of Prayer. This transformative program beckons us to draw closer to the very heart of Jesus, inviting us to align our own hearts with His. Through this sacred path, we are called to unite ourselves with the mission entrusted to Jesus by the Father.

As devoted friends of Jesus, we are encouraged to forge a deep, unbreakable bond with Him, allowing us to intimately share in His joys and sorrows for our world. "The Way of the Heart" empowers us to stand with Him and face the challenges that confront humanity and the mission of the Church. Each month, the Holy Father articulates these challenges through his intentions, which serve as a guiding light, helping us to understand Christ's mission in our modern age.

This spiritual odyssey known as "The Way of the Heart" equips us with the ability to perceive the world's challenges through the compassionate eyes of Jesus. It mobilizes us each month, under the gentle guidance of the Holy Spirit, to engage in prayer and service. In this way, the program continually transforms us, shaping us into praying-apostles and disciple-missionaries, filled with a mission of boundless compassion for our world.



EXPLORING THE WAY *of the heart*

We are invited to delve deeper into our own hearts and unite them more fully to the heart of Christ.

One way to accomplish this “union of hearts” is a new pathway proposed by the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network (Apostleship of Prayer) called “The Way of the Heart.”

It is a spiritual pathway inspired by two hearts, the human heart and the Heart of Jesus. The Way of the Heart aims to bring those two hearts together so as to respond to the needs of today’s people.

This spiritual pathway of the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network is a school of the heart.

In nine steps this pathway leads us to identify with the mind, heart and concerns of Jesus. Each step speaks of God’s unlimited love for each one of us and for all humanity.

We approach this pathway in prayerful silence and in awe as we let our hearts be led by Jesus. Through the nine steps we are invited to live a personal covenant of love with the Risen Christ, and to offer daily our readiness to collaborate with him in his mission, as his apostles.

In this Way of the Heart we put ourselves at the service of the Church and are sent out to make God’s compassionate love present in the world.



IN THE BEGINNING *there was love*

God chose us in Christ before the world was made.
- Ephesians 1:4 -

When God created the world, he had us in mind. Creation was not merely an exercise in his might and dominance, but principally an act of love.

Saint John Paul II, put it eloquently in his apostolic exhortation Familiaris Consortio.

> God created man in His own image and likeness: calling him to existence through love, He called him at the same time for love. God is love and in Himself He lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in His own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.

Love is inscribed in our very being as our Creator created us in love. This means that the only possible response is to love him in return and to participate in God's ongoing mission of love and mercy.

One of the primary ways we can return that love that God has created us with is to love our neighbor. As Pope Francis wrote in his apostolic exhortation Evangelii Gaudium:

> Loving others is a spiritual force drawing us to union with God; indeed, one who does not love others "walks in the darkness" (1 Jn 2:11), "remains in death" (1 Jn 3:14) and "does not know God" (1 Jn 4:8). Benedict XVI has said that "closing our eyes to our neighbor also blinds us to God", and that love is, in the end, the only light which "can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working". When we live out a spirituality of drawing nearer to others and seeking their welfare, our hearts are opened wide to the Lord's greatest and most beautiful gifts. Whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God.

Loving others is not always an easy task, but it is the first step in the spiritual pathway, the "Way of the Heart." It recognizes the love we have received from God and challenges us to give ourselves to others in imitation of God's love for us.

As we prepare for the holy season of Lent, let us consider the ways we can recognize the unique love God has for each one of us and how we can live that love in our everyday lives.

THE SECRET TO *true happiness*

"God, you are my God, I pine for you; my heart thirsts for you, as a land parched, dreary and waterless."
- Psalm 63:1 -

The second step of the "Way of the Heart," is entitled, "The Human Heart, Restless and Needy." It corresponds to our innate desire for happiness and our constant quest for it in this life.

According to an article on Aleteia, the most popular course in Yale's prestigious history is on "happiness."

> Psyc 157, Psychology and the Good Life, had about 1,200 students signed up within a week after enrollment period opened. That's almost one-quarter of Yale undergraduates. It has earned the distinction of being the most popular course in Yale's 316-year history.
>
> The course tries to teach students how to lead a happier, more satisfying life. "
>
> Students want to change, to be happier themselves, and to change the culture here on campus," psychology professor Laurie Santos, 42, told the New York Times.

Happiness, it is what our hearts long and crave for, yet we are still struggling to find it. Often we seek many selfish pleasures in life in hopes that they will make us "happy." Unfortunately, we typically search for happiness in created things, thinking that they will provide some sort of comfort in a world full of disappointment.

Pope Francis laments the state of many young people who seek aimlessly these created joys. In an interview with a radio station in Argentina Pope Francis said, “I would ask the young people, ‘are you really happy?’... Do you know what it means to have joy in your heart? ... It makes me very upset when I see a sad young person ... who has aged prematurely, who has already ‘retired’ to ‘wait for life to pass by.’”

He then shared with the audience the “secret” to true happiness, “If you take risks to achieve great things ... doing things for others, working hard to make them happy ... you will know joy and happiness.”

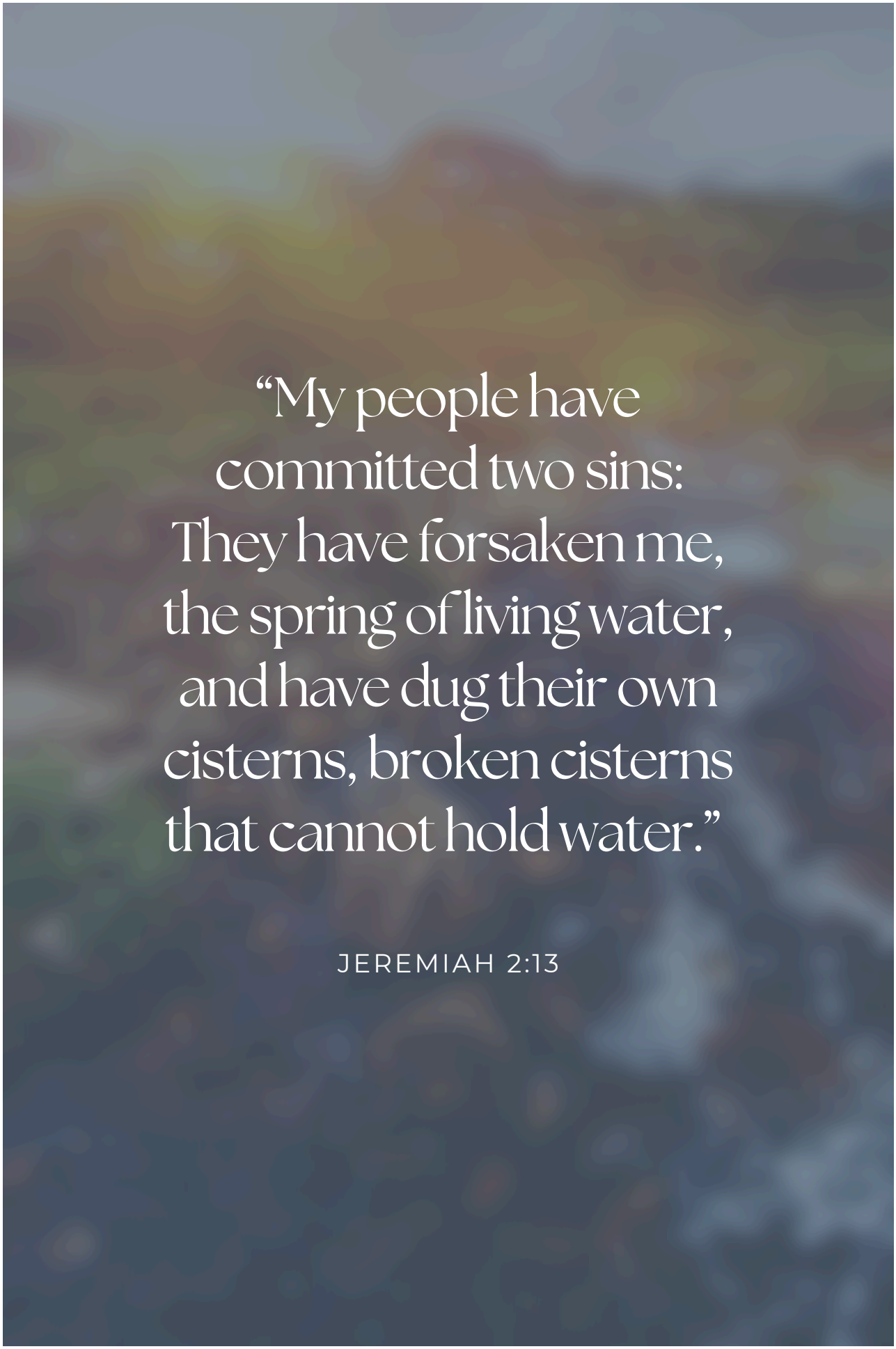
Pope Francis shows us that true happiness consists of living for others and participating in the mission of the heart of Jesus.

Saint Augustine famously put it this way, “You have made us for Yourself [O Lord], and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”

Physical things may provide a few moments of happiness, but at the core of our being we recognize the emptiness that is there. It is an emptiness that only one person can fill and that person is Jesus Christ. Once we realize that, our hearts will no longer be restless, but unified with the heart of Christ.

Then and only then will we experience true “happiness.”

THE TRUE SECRET
to happiness


“My people have
committed two sins:
They have forsaken me,
the spring of living water,
and have dug their own
cisterns, broken cisterns
that cannot hold water.”
JEREMIAH 2:13

LIVING IN A *broken world*

The third step of the "Way of the Heart" is entitled, "In a broken world" and considers the fallen state of creation and our role in repairing what was lost.

God created the world and saw that it was "good." However, death and sin entered the world when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's word, doubting his love for them. By their action of disobedience, the world that God created "good" would now become "broken," tainted by that Original Sin.

We can see the brokenness all around us. As our documents guiding the recreation of the PWPN point out, "Life and love are often suffocated by violence and selfishness. The weak and vulnerable are crushed by the boots of the powerful. Natural resources are depleted. There is too much sadness and loneliness."

However, there is good news.

Even though we sometimes walk away from the Lord and his plan for us, he is constantly asking us to return to him. There is a pathway that we can walk to return to the arms of our loving and merciful Father. For the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network, it is a pathway of the heart, recognizing the many injustices in the world and responding, in whatever way that we can, to help repair the damage.

This is our mission and the mission of the Church here on earth. We must pray and work together so that God's love can shine through us and in us. God can shatter our darkness, repair what is broken, but we must cooperate with him and his mission. We are his instruments and it is our duty to let him work through us.

Let us stop for a moment and consider ways we can help conquer the brokenness in the world with God's love and mercy.



THE FATHER SENDS *his son to save*

"The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost"
- Luke 19:10 -

The fourth step of the "Way of the Heart" is entitled, "The Father sends his Son to save" and considers how God did not abandon broken humanity, but came to save and redeem us.

Even though the world was "broken" through Adam and Eve's disobedience, God did not abandon us. Shortly after that Original Sin God promised a future redeemer, explaining how the "seed" of the woman would crush the head of the serpent once and for all (see Genesis 3).

After that pivotal moment in human history God went forth on a mission to save humanity by enlisting the help of the humans he created, involving them in the plan of their own salvation. God even went so far as to become one of us in the person of Jesus to save us from our sins, freely sacrificing himself on the cross. He led the way, showing us how we are to pick up our own crosses and follow after him.

Furthermore, to leave a lasting example of God's love for humanity Jesus called himself the "Good Shepherd," who "lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Jesus explained to his apostles exactly how much the "Good Shepherd" desires the salvation of all the sheep in his sheepfold.

> If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. (Matthew 18:12-14)

This example of the “Good Shepherd” shows to us that God desires to take us back to him and repair our brokenness. He does not want us to wallow in our squalor, but to rise up, renewed and full of grace. In fact, he is not only the “Good Shepherd,” but also the “Great Physician” who heals us and brings us back to spiritual health.

As we continue on our Lenten journey, let us meditate on the love God has for us and consider how he wants to heal us and our infirmities.

THE FATHER SENDS
his son to save

JESUS CALLS US *his friends*

"And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."
- Matthew 28:20 -

The fifth step of the "Way of the Heart" is entitled, "He calls us his friends."

Before ascending into Heaven Jesus boldly proclaimed, "I am with you always." God did not want to leave us alone on earth, but to call us to a deeper friendship, to walk side-by-side with us forever.

This is the type of relationship that Jesus desires, as he explained to his apostles before his crucifixion.

> No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. (John 15:15)

One of the most visible signs of this call to a deeper love is the sacrament of the Eucharist. It is the realization of Jesus' promise to be with us "always" and the red candle burning next to the tabernacle in every Catholic Church (called a sanctuary lamp) reminds us that he is there, hoping that we will notice him and accept his offer of friendship.

By accepting that offer and walking with Jesus we begin the process of learning the cares of Jesus' heart and making them our own. We see the world with his eyes, recognizing the many challenges facing humanity and offering ourselves to him each day, pledging that we will do our part to help relieve the plight of our fellow brothers and sisters.

Just as St. John placed his head on Jesus' heart, so we too must do the same and listen to what Jesus has to say and where his heart is broken. By doing so we can look at the world with his eyes and recognize what our role is in relieving the great suffering in today's world.

Let us pray this month that we may walk with Jesus in friendship, seeing the world as he sees it and doing what we can in prayer and in deed to make the world a better place. There are many challenges facing this world, but by uniting our heart to Jesus' heart, we can understand the true path to peace and joy.

JESUS CALLS US
his friends

JESUS WANTS TO DWELL *in our hearts*

"And we will come to him and make our dwelling with him."
- John 14:23 -

The sixth step of the "Way of the Heart" is entitled, "Christ abides in us."

The documents guiding the recreation of the PWPN give a simple description of this step in our spiritual pathway, "Out of his unlimited love for us, God desires to inhabit our hearts. Jesus left this surprising promise to his disciples before his death. He wants to dwell in each one of us."

Jesus also explained this desire of his through many parables, especially in the parable of the vine and the branches.

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing … As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. (John 15:5,9)"

Another way he has reveled this to humanity is through various revelations of his Sacred Heart. When speaking to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, Jesus said, "My Divine Heart is so inflamed with love … being unable any longer to contain within Itself the flames of Its burning Charity, It needs to spread them abroad."

St. Margaret Mary then records, "After this He asked me for my heart, which I begged Him to take. He did so and placed it in His own Adorable Heart where He showed it to me as a little atom which was being consumed in this great furnace, and withdrawing it thence as a burning flame in the form of a heart, He restored it to the place whence He had taken it."

Jesus loves us dearly with an infinite love and wants us to be truly happy in this world and the next. It may not always be easy, conforming our heart to that of Jesus', but it is what leads us to a joy that will last forever.

Additionally, Jesus wants the flames of his “burning charity” to be spread throughout all the earth and this he has chosen to do through us, his instruments. Inflamed by his love, we can then go out and share his love with others, especially the most vulnerable of society.

As we draw closer to Easter, let us consider the great love God has for us and how that love is meant to transform our lives, loving others with the same love that Jesus has for us.

> “I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!” (Luke 12:49)

JESUS WANTS TO DWELLL
in our hearts



WE OFFER OUR *lives and hearts*

"Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. You have given all to me, to you O Lord I return it. All is yours, dispose of it wholly, according to your will. Give me your love and your grace, for this is sufficient for me."

- Saint Ignatius, Spiritual Exercises 234 -

The seventh step of the "Way of the Heart" is entitled, "We offer our lives along with him" and focuses on our Daily Offering, giving to God our whole selves in response to the love he pours out to us.

As we draw closer to God in our relationship with him, there grows within the depths of our hearts a desire to offer our lives as a sacrifice for others, in imitation of Jesus' sacrifice for us. We recognize the love Jesus had for us and so we want to love others in a similar way.

The documents guiding the recreation of the PWPN further explain this step.

> We come closer to the world's suffering as we are put with Jesus, and we will strive to respond as he did. We tell the Father our readiness to collaborate with his Son through a prayer of self offering. We are at the same time humbly praying to the Holy Spirit that we may cease to obstruct his work in us. Through the Eucharist we are inspired and nourished in a special way, for there we find the perfect offering of Christ to the Father and a model for our own life-offering.

This Daily Offering of our lives with Jesus is not easy and we often have to fight back many selfish tendencies within us. Often this means getting outside of our "comfort zone" and encountering others outside of our own small group of friends and family.

Pope Francis reminded us of this central truth during his very first General Audience in 2013.

> God came out of himself to come among us, he pitched his tent among us to bring to us his mercy that saves and gives hope. Nor must we be satisfied with staying in the pen of the 99 sheep if we want to follow him and to remain with him; we too must 'go out' with him to seek the lost sheep, the one that has strayed the furthest. Be sure to remember: coming out of ourselves, just as Jesus, just as God came out of himself in Jesus and Jesus came out of himself for all of us. Someone might say to me: 'but Father, I don't have time.' 'I have so many things to do,' 'it's difficult.' 'what can I do with my feebleness and my sins, with so many things?'

Certainly our own weaknesses can sometimes intimidate us and we think that we could never offer our lives with Jesus.

WE OFFER OUR
lives and hearts

However, the good news is that we are never alone in this endeavor, Christ is always with us by our side, encouraging us to press on. One could say that sometimes it appears that Jesus is Simon of Cyrene in our lives, carrying part of the burden so that we can progress further than we possibly imagined.

Let us always turn to God for strength to get out of our “comfort zone” and offer our lives as a living sacrifice, praying and serving those in need.

WE OFFER OUR
lives and hearts


“He has sent me to bring
glad tidings to the lowly,
to heal the
brokenhearted.”
ISAIAH 61:1



THE MISSION JESUS *gives to each of us*

The eighth step of the "Way of the Heart" is entitled, "A mission of compassion," and focuses on how this entire spirituality of the "Way of the Heart" propels us outward to encounter the world and the most vulnerable of society.

Jesus daily invites us into his mission of compassion towards the world and this can be a difficult task. What this means is that we must look at everyone with the eyes of Jesus and see them as he sees them.

The documents guiding the recreation of the PWPN further explain this step.

> We are invited to make our own the Father's loving gaze upon humanity and to act with the Heart of Jesus Christ. We are sent out to the margins of human life in different ways, together with his Son. We are sent to the places where men and women are suffering injustice, to help heal and support the brokenhearted.

Unfortunately, often our eyes can be clouded by prejudices, racism or a revulsion to any person who is different from us. These sinful tendencies are temptations propagated by the world and we must pray daily never to fall prey to them. The Gospel message of love and compassion was never meant to be limited to a certain class of individuals. God came to save all who were lost, regardless of what social status they may have.

It is our duty as Christians to “heal the brokenhearted” and this often entails going to the “peripheries” of society. Pope Francis never ceases to emphasize the need to do this difficult action. In 2016 he spoke to the Jesuits and reminded them of this mission from the heart of Saint Ignatius.

> To walk together — free and obedient — moving toward the margins of society where no one else reaches, “under the gaze of Jesus and looking to the horizon which is the ever greater glory of God, who ceaselessly surprises us.” As Saint Ignatius reminds us, a Jesuit is called “to think and to live in any part of the world where there is a greater need of service to God and assistance for souls” [Con., 304]. The fact is that “the Society must feel at home anyplace in the world.”

Yet, this mission to go to the “margins of society” is not something reserved for Jesuits, but is the fundamental mission of all Christians. Indeed, Pope Francis even signed a joint declaration with the Archbishop of Canterbury affirming this call of the Gospel.

> We are united in the conviction that ‘the ends of the earth’ today, is not only a geographical term, but a summons to take the saving message of the Gospel particularly to those on the margins and the peripheries of our societies.

Above all things we are challenged to view other people as God sees them. We must not let any “filter” come over our eyes as we encounter our fellow brothers and sisters in the world and instead trade our eyes for the Eyes of Christ. With his Eyes, we can truly see people for who they really are and extend treat them with the utmost compassion that they deserve.

Let us go forward every day aware of our mission of compassion, even going out to the margins of society to bring Christ’s love.

THE MISSION JESUS
gives to each of us

APOSTLES SENT FROM *the heart of the Father*

"All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren."

- Acts 1:14 -

The ninth and final step of the "Way of the Heart" is entitled, "A world-wide network of prayer and service attentive to the needs of humanity," and focuses on how this heart-centered spirituality is fostered in a global community united in prayer and action underneath the guidance of the Pope.

The Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network (Apostleship of Prayer) is a service that seeks to distribute the Pope's monthly prayer intentions to the whole world. These intentions are seen as actual challenges for humanity and for the Church, as they express the Holy Father's concerns in today's world. It is our goal that these intentions orient our action and our prayer during a specific month.

The documents guiding the recreation of the PWPN further explain this step.

This network is formed by those who make themselves available to collaborate in Christ's mission through the daily offering of their lives, in any place or situation they may be. The call to the mission is the fire that makes us apostles sent from the heart of the Father to the heart of the world.

This global network of prayer has was founded on December 3, 1844, on the feast of St. Francis Xavier, by Jesuit priest Father Gautrelet. He said to young students who wanted to be sent as missionaries into the world, "Be missionaries already through your prayer, by the offering of your daily life. Your mission is here and now, in your studies and the little things of every day. In fulfilling it through being open to the will of God, you are already apostles who are helping the entire Church."

During the past several years we have been undergoing a time of recreation, striving to put Christ at the center of our lives and live with him an intimate friendship. This will propel us to be apostles invited to collaborate with him, available to his mission of compassion on behalf of our brothers and sisters.

Pope Francis has renewed his call to all people, asking everyone to join him in this great adventure, becoming more and more attentive the needs of those around us. He expressed this invitation in an Angelus message on January 8, 2017.

> I would also like to invite you to join in the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network, which spreads, also through social networks, the prayer intentions I propose for the Church each month. In this way, the Apostleship of Prayer moves forward and communion grows.

The Holy Father wants us to be aware of our brothers and sisters suffering around the world and to pray for them, while also thinking of new ways to alleviate their suffering through our actions.

May we renew our own zeal this month for the Pope's monthly intentions and see ourselves as missionaries in our everyday lives.

THE WAY OF *the heart*

To discover additional valuable resources that can nourish your faith, we encourage you to explore the website of the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network at popesprayerusa.net

We're thrilled to offer you this complimentary Way of the Heart devotional, and we'd be delighted if you could extend the invitation to your friends, family, and fellow parishioners. We invite you to encourage them to visit popesprayerusa.net and sign up to pray with the Holy Father. Your support means the world to us!