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Editorial

Pope Francis and the Great Awakening

Is the next spiritual awakening happening among us? Are we really ready for it? James A. Harnish, Protestant pastor, writer and United Methodist preacher, asked this question as he watched and listened to Pope Francis when he made recent visits to Cuba and the United States.

As Harnish watched and listened, he began to wonder if God has called this particular Pope to this particular moment in time to bear witness to religion in a particular way that will awaken us to a way of witness that transcends “the often mean-spirited, contentious, politically-polluted ways of some of the supposedly religious figures who have dominated the news in our time.”

Writing in his personal blog Harnish says that both in his words and his life, Pope Francis demonstrates a way of witness that is:

- Rooted deeply in the past, speaks courageously to the present and points prophetically to the future. Everything about Francis grows out of the long traditions of the Church while connecting with the needs of the present and calling us toward God’s vision of the future.
- Nurtured in and by the Church. Francis is not making this stuff up on his own the way political candidates frame their message to impress the constituency they are trying to win. Everything he says and does is grounded in the faith and social convictions of the Catholic Church.

- Lives into the vision of God’s Kingdom revealed in Jesus Christ, coming on earth as it is in heaven. He shows us what it looks like to take the gospels seriously, particularly the Sermon on the Mount and the parables of Jesus—words that are noticeably absent from some of the politicians who supposedly are the representatives of Christianity in America today.
- Draws people in rather than driving people out. The massive crowds that were drawn to him, make it certain that religion can and should bring people together, rather than drive them out.
- Consistently directed toward the “least of these.” Consistent with his chosen name, Francis consistently challenges those of us who “have” to be personally engaged with the “have-nots.” Some of the most moving moments were the times he took children into his arms the way his Master did.
- Works relentlessly for reconciliation and peace. His message to the United Nations was a prophetic witness of Jesus’ call for his followers to be peace-makers.
- Respects national loyalty without surrendering to it. Pope Francis is the same person in every nation he visits, never allowing any nation’s flag to take priority over the cross.
- Challenges every political party without becoming the possession of any of them. Politicians who attempt to co-opt Francis for their agenda are consistently frustrated by the consistency of his message.
- Maintains the integrity of his own faith tradition while providing space for others. The Interfaith Service at the 911 Memorial was a powerful witness to the common values that are shared by every major religious body in our nation.

The author reaffirms that as a convinced Protestant, there are points at which I would disagree with the Pope. But if God can use him as the harbinger of the next "Great Awakening," we can all join him! At least it's worth praying for, he holds.

Confronted with problems of great magnitude, religions and their leaders can come together to face and solve these problems collectively.

Confronted with problems of great magnitude, religions and their leaders can come together to face and solve these problems collectively. For that we need a great spiritual awakening, which will enable us to visualise the whole humanity as the great family (*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*) and work for our collective betterment. If individual religions and leaders fail, it will be a loss for the whole of humanity. Today we need religion that brings people, including non-religious, together. We need leaders who can consistently befriend even their enemies.

Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ
Editor

This editorial is adapted from an article written for
The Financial Chronicle.



Striking a Poetic Chord with Love of Nature and of the Poor: Reflections on *Laudato Si'*

**Nishant A Irudayadason
Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune**

This encyclical takes its title from the poem of St. Francis of Assisi, “Praised be You, my Lord,” which in the Canticle of the Creatures in which St. Francis evokes the idea of the earth as a sister and a mother. The cry of the abused nature and the cry of the abandoned poor ascend to God. With Patriarch Bartholomew, Pope François qualify harm to the environment as sins. The appropriate response to this awareness is a global ecological conversion (5). Concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society and inner peace are inseparable.

The content of this encyclical built around the concept of integral ecology, as a paradigm that is able to articulate the fundamental relations of the human person with God, with himself or herself, with other human beings and with creation. The plan of the encyclical reflects the method see-judge-act with an additional part on education, spirituality and celebration.

The encyclical begins with an overview of the scientific results available today on environmental issues, “letting them

touch us deeply and provide a concrete foundation for the ethical and spiritual itinerary that follows.” (15) The first chapter includes the latest scientific findings on the environment as a way to listen to the cry of creation: science is the privileged instrument through which we can listen to the cry of the earth. The issues addressed are: pollution, climate change, water, biodiversity loss, social deterioration, global inequalities, and weak reactions to these painful scenarios.

The second chapter is the recovery of the wealth of the Judeo-Christian tradition, drawing on biblical texts, and the theological elaboration of the Christian tradition. The complexity of the ecological crisis requires a multicultural and multidisciplinary dialogue that includes spirituality and religion. “Faith convictions can offer Christians and some other believers as well, ample motivation to care for nature and for the most vulnerable of their brothers and sisters.” (64) Obligations towards nature are part of the Christian faith.

The third chapter provides an analysis of “the roots of the present situation, so as to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes,” (15) in dialogue with philosophy and the humanities. The main purpose of the fourth chapter is to develop a new paradigm, that of an integral ecology. The heart of the proposal of the encyclical is the integral ecology as a new paradigm of justice, ecology “which respects our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings.” (15) There is an inseparable link between environmental issues and social and human issues. Therefore, “it is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems.” (139)

The fifth chapter presents a set of guidelines and actions for a renewal of international politics, national and local decision-making processes in the public and business sector, the

relationship between politics and economics, between religion and science, maintained in a transparent and honest dialogue that gives voice to all stakeholders. From the conviction that any change requires motivation and an educational path, the final chapter proposes insights into modes of education and living out spirituality that would conform to the new paradigm of integral ecology.

Seven Highlights of this Encyclical

1. Ecological crisis and social crisis are one and the same. “We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.” (139)

2 We need to guard ourselves against the messianism of technology and Market. Technology and development have become homogeneous, one-dimensional paradigm. The idea of an infinite or unlimited growth has excited many economists, financiers and technologists but the current economy and technology will not solve all environmental problems. The market does not in itself guarantee integral human development or social inclusion (106-109). A new Education shall be directed “to include a critique of the “myths” of a modernity grounded in a utilitarian mindset (individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated market).” (210)

3. There is a need for an alternate perception of economy. The Pope warns us against the principle of maximization of gain which, in fact, is a conceptual distortion of the economy. In fact there is no economy without politics; economy should be inscribed within politics. Quoting from the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, the Pope reiterates that “the environment is one of those goods that cannot be adequately safeguarded or promoted by market forces.” The present crisis that endangers environment and impoverishes further the poor

of the society is precisely because of the disconnect between politics and economy which consequentially ignores the principle of justice and promotes a mindset of indifference both to nature and to weaker sections of humanity. “The mindset which leaves no room for sincere concern for the environment is the same mindset which lacks concern for the inclusion of the most vulnerable members of society.” (196)

4. There is a need for an agreement on systems of governance for the whole range of so-called “global commons.” The Pope, for example, speaks of the governance of the oceans which calls for a continuous undivided regulatory mechanism. This can be done only by adopting a responsible overall approach by international institutions effectively organized in order to become a true world political authority (174-175).

5. Change of lifestyles is indispensable. The Pope laments that the paradigm of efficiency of technocracy unfortunately leads to a consumerist culture that gives priority to short-term private interests over long-term global interests (189 and 184). He makes an emphatic assertion that “obsession with a consumerist lifestyle, above all when few people are capable of maintaining it, can only lead to violence and mutual destruction.” (203)

7. This encyclical is a practical exercise of collegiality in the Catholic Church, ecumenism and Dialogue. As a sign of collegiality, The Pope makes reference to the statements of 14 Episcopal conferences in addition to the CELAM and the FABC. From the ecumenical point of view again this encyclical is a breakthrough in so far as it is the first encyclical that cites a non-catholic Christian in the person of Patriarch Bartholomew as a source of inspiration for the Church (7-9). The encyclical also underscores the importance of dialogue with people from different walks of life: scientists, philosophers, mystics, theologians and policy makers. It is also interesting to note that the encyclical cites secular minded thinkers of Philosophy and

Theology like Paul Ricœur, Guardini and Scannone. Reference is also made to the Sufi mystic Ali al-Khawwas (233).

Reflections from the Perspective of Social Teaching of the Church


The encyclical *Laudato Si'* of Pope Francis adds a new dimension to the social teaching of the Church. It is not an encyclical on climate change or ecology in the narrow sense. It is a document that needs to be understood by placing it in the series of *Rerum Novarum* (1891 on industrialization and the working misery) of *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931, on the social order and subsidiarity) of *Pacem in Terris* (1963 peace between nations), *Populorum Progressio* (1967, on the development of poor nations), and *Centesimus Annus* (1991, criticism of neo-liberalism and the need for ethics in economic and political matters). *Laudato Si'* takes a critical look on the evolution of globalized societies, the triumphant neo-liberalism and the naive belief in the virtues of the market economy and technological progress.

Laudato Si' is a call to an ecological revolution, a paradigm shift, causing a change in our modes of thought and observation. A paradigm is the set of experiences, beliefs and values that influence how a society perceives reality, reacts and builds the future. This paradigm - the integral ecology - does not compete with scientific or political paradigms. This new paradigm offers a critical outlook of the actualities and calls for an active care for the planet, our home and all who inhabit this home now and the future generations for whom too this planet will be home.

What this new paradigm demands of us is to build new models of development and to define anew the notion of progress. "It is not enough to balance, in the medium term, the protection of nature with financial gain, or the preservation of the environment with progress. Halfway measures simply delay the inevitable disaster. Put simply, it is a matter of redefining our notion of progress. A technological and economic

development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress.” (194) Progress should not be confused with the accumulation of material wealth or GDP growth; the real progress is to increase the quality of life.

The novelty of this encyclical is the synthesis of already known elements placed in a powerful global thinking. Pope Francis calls us to abandon the logic of domination, exploitation and the culture of waste in favor of a new logic of gift, beauty, quality of life and spirituality. He resumed the social teaching his predecessors by establishing a close relationship between the fragility of the planet and the poor who are the first victims of climatic disturbances. Thus the encyclical brings to the fore many important social aspects of human life which include among others, the critique of technology, the criticism of naïve faith in the virtues of the market economy which claims to offer solutions to our collective problems, the invitation to seek other ways of understanding the economy and the progress, the dignity of every human being, the need for sincere and honest debates in which all stakeholders especially the poorest and least represented have a say, responsibility both in domestic and international politics, the connection between policy change and change in lifestyle and the contribution of education and spirituality.

The heart of the encyclical is to present integral ecology as a new paradigm of justice, “ecology which respects our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings” (15). Indeed, “nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live” (139). This is true in different spheres of human life such as economics, politics, culture, and more importantly in every moment of our daily life that is constantly under threat. The encyclical reminds us of the politics of love: “Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity.” (231) 



Bed Time Stories for Spiritual Intelligence

Leemamol Mathew

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My 7 year old Edissa and 4 year old Ameya eagerly wait to listen to the stories at bed time. They take turns to decide the hero's name and age, then my task is to build up a story of their hero. One day, since Edissa wanted a story on Emmanuel, I organized what I had seen on the same day in Church with a crippled boy. He was named as Emmanuel. And I started the story as below:

Long time ago, say, 18 years ago, Emmanuel was born in Meenachil. His parents and relatives were surprised to see his cute innocent face. He was a darling to all. When he reached five months old, he was affected with a severe fever. That was supposed to be the reason behind his inability to walk.

Emmanuel grew up, but he could not walk. When he was three years old, a brother was born to him, and after two years a sister also. As they grew up as children, like any normal children, they played, ran, walked. Emmanuel used to observe them, and he used to feel very sad.

Ameya asked, "He cried???"

Emmanuel used to cry inside, but never showed anybody. His parents were so concerned about him and they realized the emotional conflicts he was undergoing. So his papa told him, “Look Emmanuel, each one has something special to do in our life. It really doesn’t matter if we can walk, see, or hear. You are a special gift from God. God want you to go to school like any other child”.

Edissa asked, “how could he go to the school, without even standing?”

Emmanuel’s papa carried him to the school daily. He loved his son so much that he did not want

“Mamma, Emmanuel must have felt really sad that he can not walk to the school, the way we walk”

anybody else to carry him. They had to walk one kilometre. Since he did not have a car and they were poor, he had to carry him. Emmanuel observed his pappa’s difficulty to carry him to the school, and also observed how other children including his own siblings come to the school by walking.

Edissa asked, “Mamma, Emmanuel must have felt really sad that he can not walk to the school, the way we walk”

While going to the school, Emmanuel’s Pappa explained many things to Emmanuel; they had fun throughout. Eventually, Emmanuel learned that life is fun even without legs, and he too has abilities in him and he could make use of it. Emmanuel was a very good student, who topped the class. Till his 5th standard, his papa carried him to the school. Because of his

scholastic achievement, he was gifted a wheelchair from the school. From then, things were quite easy for Emmanuel. He studied well, went ahead, joined for his higher studies, received many awards for being an outstanding student. Later he joined for engineering, and became a successful engineering student. Currently he is involved in helping out the manufacturer special wheels for people like him.

Emmanuel is so grateful to his parents and God for making him a successful man even while having a disability. He expresses his gratitude by coming to Church.

My children liked this story and they came up with many questions.

What is the significance of such stories? Storytelling and listening is a basic process to develop attachment relationship between children and their parents. The same process is happening in pastoral counselling or pastoral care. Somebody narrates something and other person listens to it. The success of the narrator-listener process directly touches the self worth of a distressed individual.

Narrator-Listener Relationship: The Undergrowth of Spiritual Intelligence

In the context of pastoral care, a pastor is listener of the story and client is story narrator. The pastor is just a facilitator. He helps the client to realize the self and help him to direct his/her thinking. Spiritual intelligence is this self-awareness. Through this process, changes happen to the client. Pastor is not giving wisdom or messages in the form of story. Rather, listener (pastor) creates an environment of the development of spiritual intelligence. In such an environment, the narrator perceives transcendental qualities in the listener.

A trusting relationship is the fundamental component to operate any kind of narrative thinking. For a narrator, the very thought that “somebody has an ear for me”, acts as the driving force behind the organization of life experiences into a unified theme. The enthusiasm my children showed in listening stories from my life laid the foundation for a strong narrator-listener relationship. This bond ensures emotional security of both the narrator and the listener, which in turn result in further personal growth of the both. In such a growth-enhancing relationship, the listener experiences and expresses few fundamental attitudes: unconditional positive regard, empathy and genuineness.

Unconditional Positive Regard

The intensity of narrator-listener relationship depends the way the narrator perceives the workings of these qualities in the listener. The listener’s willingness to listen is an important manifestation of his caring attitude, acceptance and trust. When the listener disposes attributes like patience, warmth and interest, naturally the relationship becomes stronger. In a storytelling

A trusting relationship is the fundamental component to operate any kind of narrative thinking. For a narrator, the very thought that “somebody has an ear for me”, acts as the driving force behind the organization of life experiences into a unified theme.

situation, when the listener expresses the above mentioned qualities, the narrator perceives that he is being accepted without being judgmental. This very feeling creates self-worth in the narrator. His life is being prized as a human being, regardless of

everything, can be a growth-producing experience. The experience of being prized is a step towards knowing the inner self.

Seeking ‘benefits’ must take backseat in storytelling situation. The direct focus on ‘benefit’ leads to correction of views, values of the narrator from the side of listener. Such interventions are perceived by the narrator as conditional, and force the storyteller to contain the self than to express.

Empathy

The questions my children raised during the story telling quite clearly reveal the fact that how much they are in tune with the emotions and feelings of the characters. This is the basic component in a speaker – listener situation. Edissa’s response to Emmanuel’s inability to walk to school, “Mamma, Emmanuel must have felt really sad”, reflects how she could perceive Emmanuel’s feelings. She didn’t withhold her empathic attitude towards the character, but she expressed it. *Empathic listening* is so powerful that it can fill the narrator still with the human experiences. In most of the situations, a person in distress might have lost human experiences. The listener, by expressing empathy assures the speaker that “I see myself in your eyes”.

Listening is extremely active. The full engagement with the narrator makes the listener to speak with eyes, through prodding questions and through whole personality.

Genuineness

The more, the listener is genuine, the more, the speaker will benefit. The listener’s feelings and actions may need to be congruent or consistent with one another. The listener should be aware of when to express, what to express, and how to express, through his body language and words. A posture that leans towards the narrator (rather than leaning back on chair) and appropriate grunts are often very encouraging.

Children exhibit the qualities of genuineness in its most natural way when a story is told to them. They make the characters of the story alive through their genuineness. In the context of nurturing of spiritual intelligence, listener deepens his/her spiritual intelligence through this genuine engagement.

Spiritual Intelligence Working from Within

A fundamental difference in the technique of storytelling as a therapy tool in pastoral context is the reversal of role of change-agent. Pastor is not helping for a rational/logical thinking, and change is not coming from rationality (Hegelian emphasis on passion compared to Kantian emphasis on reason). Rather, change comes from within the client through a process of self-awareness. Intervention in the form of advice and messages becomes barriers to the development of spiritual intelligence. Rather, the qualities mentioned above – unconditional positive regard, empathy and genuineness - work to nurture spiritual intelligence through the development of narrator-listener relationship. This becomes more like a therapeutic relationship. The therapist, helps the client to realize his potential to know himself.

When a narrator weaves together the fragmented segments, or in other words the underlying inner self (intertwined with many different selves), an avenue to reflect one's own self opens up. This ability for self-reflection is the ultimate element one listener could develop in the speaker. Due to the ill effects of many things, spiritual intelligence stands the test of the time in the present society. The narrator becomes aware of one's unique potential.

Spiritual intelligence is one's ability to express spiritual virtues in everyday life. Many psychologists, philosophers, theologians and religious leaders have defined it in various ways. However, there is consensus among these scholars on the way spiritual intelligence works from within. Most of them

agree with psychotherapist Francis Vaughan (2002). He says, “Spiritual intelligence (SI) opens the heart, illuminates the mind, and inspires the soul, connecting the individual human psyche to the underlying ground of being”. Thus an individual learn to reflect on one’s inner life.

Back to Story

After the story was told in a night, I had forgotten about it. Many days after that, our family went to the Church for Sunday mass. Unusually, Edissa’s eyes were searching something inside the Church. I quietly asked in her ears as to what she was looking for. She whispered back: “I am looking for Emmanuel and his papa of your story”. In that Sunday night, Edissa was narrator of a new story and I was listener. 🌹

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Be Merciful as Your Heavenly Father Is Mericful

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We are on the eve of an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. In his apostolic letter proclaiming this Jubilee (*Misericordiae Vultus*), Pope Francis invites us all “to gaze more attentively on mercy so that we may become more effective sign of the Father’s action in our lives” (§ 3). The Psalmist prays, “remember, O Lord, your mercy and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old” (Ps 25,6). The New Testament vividly portrays how Jesus by his words and deeds reveals the mercy of God. He is the embodiment of divine mercy and he asks his followers to be merciful as his heavenly father is merciful. There is no doubt that mercy is the sum and substance of Christian faith. The second paragraph of the Pope’s letter beautifully summarizes the characteristics of the Christian understanding of mercy: “It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.”

This article offers a brief reflection on some ‘mercy texts’ from the Bible, especially from the gospels.

The Tender Mercy of Our God

The biblical concept of mercy points in two directions: 1. The pardon accorded to one in the wrong; 2. the kindness shown to one in need. The Hebrew words *hesed* (frequently) and *rah^aamim* (less frequently) are normally used to speak about mercy (Greek *eleos*). They convey both these nuances of pardon and kindness.

The OT recounts numerous stories of God’s forgiving mercy for his people. The episode of the golden calf given in Exod 32-34 represents a good example. What the people of Israel committed at the foot of Mount Sinai was an unpardonable sin (Exod 32-33). When they saw Moses delayed to coming down from the mountain, they asked Aaron to make a golden calf for them. They worshipped it and made sacrifices to it shouting, “this is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt”. Their infidelity infuriated God and he wanted to wipe them all out. But when Moses pleaded with him for the people, he relented and changed his mind. Exod 34,6-7 aptly illustrates the features of God’s mercy: “God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping mercy for thousands who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin” (see Deut 5,10; 2 Chr 30,9; Neh 9,17; Pss 86,5.15; 103,8-13; 145,8; Joel 2,13; Jonah 4,2).

Mercy as kindness/compassion shown to one in need is also a recurring motif in the Bible. Ps 103,13 compares the compassion of God with that of a father for his children: “As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him”. Referring to the tender mercy of God, Isaiah consoles the exiles who were about to return from Babylon, “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne?

Though she may forget, I will not forget you” (Isa 49,15; see Jer 31,20; Hos 11,1-4; Mal 7,11).

The evangelist Luke begins his story of Jesus, the saviour, presenting Mary (Luke 1,50.54) and Zechariah (1,72.78) praising the ‘mercy of God’ shown to Israel and to the whole of humanity. In 1,50 Mary sings; “His mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation.” This verse affirms and acknowledges God’s mercy promised to everyone in general (see Exod 20,6; 34,7; Pss 31,19; 85,9; 103,11.17 etc.). The second reference to God’s mercy in her song (1,54) is more particular: “he has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy.” Her praise

resonates in Ps 98,3: “He has remembered his loving kindness and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God” (see also

The biblical concept of mercy points in two directions: 1. The pardon accorded to one in the wrong; 2. the kindness shown to one in need.

Isa 63,7-9; Mic 7,20 etc.). Now Mary in her *Magnificat* is praising and thanking God for making this promise of mercy a reality in her life, and for choosing her to be the mother of the one who comes to fulfill this divine promise of mercy.

When Elizabeth gave birth to a son in her old age, her neighbours and relatives received that news as a visible expression of God’s mercy towards her (Luke 1,58). Evidently, it was God’s kindness that opened the womb of a barren woman to be a mother. But what his father Zachariah sings in his *Benedictus* is not about the mercy that he and his wife received from God, but about the mercy promised to all Israel through their fathers (Luke 1,72). God fulfils that promise of mercy now by raising up a ‘horn of salvation’ in the house of David (1,69).

Zechariah qualifies the mercy that they are going to experience through the saviour as the ‘tender mercy of God’ (1,78), mercy that flows from his heart (*splagchnon*).¹ Zechariah’s son is blessed because he will be called the prophet of the most high and he will prepare the way of this tender mercy of God, the Lord. While the *Magnificat* accentuates God’s kindness, especially to the lowly and needy, the *Benedictus* praises his forgiving and redemptive mercy.

The evangelists employ the verb *splagchnizomai* (to have compassion/ to be moved with tender mercy) to represent Jesus’ inner feeling on various occasions. When he saw the harassed and helpless people (Matt 9,36; Mark 6,34), when he saw the hungry multitude (Matt 14,14; 15,32; Mark 8,2), when he saw the crying blind men (Matt 20,34), when he saw the leper (Mark 1,41), when he saw the boy tormented by a dumb spirit (Mark 9,22), when he saw the widow who lost her only son (Luke 7,13) Jesus’ heart moved and springs of compassion flowed from it in the form of healing, feeding and giving life!

The ‘Merciful’ High Priest

Jesus is repeatedly portrayed as the high priest in the letter to the Hebrews (17 times), and this designation appears for the first time in 2,17. “Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful (*eleēmōn*) and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people”. Jesus the high priest is mentioned here with two principal qualities: ‘merciful’ and ‘faithful’. The first refers to his relationship with human persons and the second with God. The subsequent verse says that the mercy and faithfulness of Jesus is rooted on his experience of suffering and temptation, as a result he is able to help those who undergo the same experience (see Heb 2,18). The same idea is repeated in Heb 4,15-16: “For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with

confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive **mercy** and find grace to help in time of need.”

People recognized that Jesus could understand their struggles and could empathize with them. That is why those who turned to him for solace and healing asked him to “have mercy” on them (Matt 9,27; 15,22; 17,15; Luke 17,12). The merciful high priest heard their cry for pardon and cry for kindness and he enabled them to experience the infinite mercy of his Father.

I Desire Mercy, Not Sacrifice

Jesus was not only merciful, but he firmly held mercy as the guiding principle of his life and teachings.

Twice in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus cites Hos 6,6: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice”. The first is in

Jesus was not only merciful, but he firmly held mercy as the guiding principle of his life and teachings.

the context of Jesus’ eating with tax collectors and sinners after the call of the tax collector Matthew to be his disciple (9,13). Seeing Jesus, a Jew, in such a situation the Pharisees are scandalized. According to their rules of conduct (*Halakoth*) eating with these people would entail dangers of ceremonial defilement. So they ask the disciples about this undesirable behaviour, “why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus’ response was emphatic> He promptly declares God’s point of view, “those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.” He continues, “Go and learn what this means, I desire mercy, not sacrifice”. They need to learn to treat these people as human persons who deserve God’s mercy and not as objects which would cause ritual defilement. To share God’s mercy with the discarded is more pleasing to God than to remain undefiled so as to be able to offer sacrifice.

Jesus quotes Hos 6,6 again in 12,7 to defend his disciples against the attack of the Pharisees. They complain to Jesus against the disciples as they see them plucking grains and eating them (Matt 12,1-2). Jesus justifies the disciples referring to some incidents mentioned in the OT where even people like David and the priests break the law of God when it is necessary (1 Sam 21,3-6); and at the end he adds, “If you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless.” Before condemning others on the basis of laws, one needs to know that what God requires is not legalism but a compassionate understanding of human miseries.

In Matt 23,23, in his third woe to the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus mentions three qualities as the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy and faith. These three are interconnected; one cannot have faith in God ignoring justice and mercy. If one is not just and merciful how can one worship God? The prophet Isaiah gives an apt description of true worship as he speaks about true fasting: “is it not to divide your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh” (Isa 58,7).

Be Merciful as Your Heavenly Father Is Merciful

In Matthew, Jesus’ teaching on love for enemies ends with the maxim, “be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect” (Matt 5,48). What is the perfection of the father that the children are asked to obtain? In 5,45, the father’s unconditional kindness towards everyone – to the evil and the good, to the righteous and the unrighteous – is given as his basic characteristic. From the context we may infer, that it is into this kindness of the Father, his perfection, that the children are asked to grow. The evangelist Luke (6,36) makes it obvious by using the word ‘merciful’ (*oiktirmon*) instead of Matthew’s ‘perfect’ (*teleios*): “be merciful as your heavenly father is merciful”.

Who are the merciful? In the LXX the term ‘merciful’ (*ho eleēmōn*) occurs 28 times and 24 times it is used to speak about God’s mercifulness (Exod 22,26; 34,6; Pss 85,15; 102,8 etc). Some of these texts praise God both as ‘gracious’ (*ho oiktirmōn*) and ‘merciful’ (2 Chr 30,9; Neh 9,17,31; Pss 110,4; 111,4; Joel 2,13). The prophet Jonah’s complaint against God reveals God’s compassionate nature: “O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing” (Jonah 4,2). The New Testament uses both the words *ho eleēmōn* and *ho oiktirmōn* to mention the ‘merciful. Being merciful is a divine characteristic. ‘The merciful’ are the ones who radiate this divine nature through their lives. It is about them Jesus says in the beatitude “blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matt 5,7).

Jesus in Luke, after exhorting the disciples to be merciful as their heavenly Father is merciful, gives two concrete proposals for the children to practise: “And do not judge and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.” (Luke 6,37-38). This teaching clearly indicates how mercy will be shown to the merciful.

Should You Not Have Had Mercy on Your Fellow Servant, as I Had Mercy on You?

God’s uncompromising stance regarding mercy is powerfully demonstrated in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant in Matthew (18,23-35). In this parable (18,23-35), the servant is accused by his master for not forgiving the comparatively

insignificant debt of his fellow worker. Mercy and forgiveness are treated synonymously in this parable. God has shown tremendous mercy towards human beings by forgiving their shortcomings. He demands the same from them: to show mercy towards their fellow human beings by forgiving their weaknesses (see 18,34-35; 6,12.14-15). The master hands that wicked servant over to the jailers (torturers?) until he can pay his entire debt. Concluding the parable Jesus warns, “So also my heavenly Father will do to everyone of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart” (18,35). The relationship between human beings is the criterion for the relationship between God and human beings. If one can’t show mercy to his/her brother/sister one cannot maintain a healthy relationship with God.

The One Who Showed Mercy on Him


Once a lawyer came to Jesus and asked him, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10,25). The evangelist says that the lawyer wanted to test Jesus, that is why he asked such a question. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all with your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and love your neighbour as yourself”, a combination of Deut 6,5 and Lev 19,18. Both the lawyer and Jesus had no doubt about these precepts of the law as the basic condition for inheriting eternal life. But the query of the lawyer did not end there, he wanted to know who his neighbour was; and the evangelist adds that his question was to justify himself. What did he want to justify? Most probably, the lawyer might have held the view that any fellow Israelite would be his neighbour - a view that defined the neighbour based on their religio-ethnic identity. In fact, this was the view that is reflected even in Lev 19,18.² So the lawyer might have been trying to tell Jesus, that he was a man who loved his neighbour. But Jesus challenges his view of his neighbour and his justified conscience telling him the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10,30-37).

Evidently, what made the Samaritan the hero of the story is his **mercy** shown to a person in need. He never bothered whether that wounded man belonged to his ethnic/religious group or not. Perhaps, what prevented the priest and the Levite from helping this injured one, even though he was a Jew, was their concern for ritual purity. Here Jesus does not quote Hosea and say that he desires mercy and not sacrifice, but he makes the lawyer accept that the Samaritan who showed mercy to him was his true neighbour. The dialogue between them ends with Jesus advising the lawyer, “go and do likewise”.

The final words of Jesus to the lawyer are given not only to him, but also to every one who seeks to love God with all one’s heart, with all one’s soul, with all one’s strength and all one’s mind. “Go and do likewise”, these words reveal the secret for inheriting eternal life. Moreover, they spell out the basic requirement for being a follower of Jesus. There are two imperatives (‘go’, ‘do’) and a modifier (‘likewise’) in this demand. We may supply the modifier to both the words separately. So we read, ‘go likewise’ and ‘do likewise’. Yes to be a true believer, to be a true follower of Jesus one has to ‘go like’ the Samaritan. He went beyond all the religious, cultural and ethnic prejudices and preoccupations. When he saw a man in such a situation, concerns about his ritual purity, or thoughts of enmity between Jews and Samaritans did not bother him much, rather he was moved with compassion (*splagchnizomai*) - the same feeling that Jesus experienced when he met people in similar conditions.

The Samaritan did not ask the man any question about his whereabouts or about his profession. But he went to him and bandaged his wounds with oil and wine, the things that he had taken along for his journey. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. Since he put the man on the donkey, he might have walked the whole way to

the inn. But ignoring the fatigue of the journey he nursed the man through the whole night. That was not everything all. On the following day as he had to continue his journey, he entrusted the man to the care of the innkeeper. Even there, he did not ask for the charity of the innkeeper, rather he advanced money for the expenses and promised him that he would come back and pay the rest. Why did the Samaritan do all this? Just because he was moved by compassion. He was merciful just as his heavenly father is merciful!

I would like to conclude this brief reflection on mercy quoting Pope Francis again. “God’s mercy can make even the driest land become a garden, can restore life to dry bones (cf. Ez 37,1-14). ... Let us be renewed by God’s mercy, let us be loved by Jesus, let us enable the power of his love to transform our lives too; and let us become agents of his mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish” (from his first Easter *Urbi et Orbi* message, on March 31, 2013). 

¹ The Greek word used here for ‘tender’ is *splagchnon*. The literal meaning of *splagchnon* is ‘bowels’ which was considered by the Hebrews as the seat of kindness, affection, compassion etc. In English the use of the word ‘heart’ as seat of affection comes closer to it.

² See the injunction in Lev 19,18a that leads to this commandment: “You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the *sons of your people*, but love *your neighbour* as yourself” The phrase “sons of your people” parallels “your neighbour” in the second part.



Befriending the Other: Psychoanalytic Perspectives

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The respect for otherness is diminishing in our country. It appears that hatred and intolerance is driving us into a mode of self destruction even though we proudly say we belong to the twenty first century India. Why are some of us so angry today? We seem to be slipping into chaotic order of the savage era. We appear to be thinking that we are climbing the ladder of progress while in the same breathe we seem to have stepped down the moral slope. We kill to uphold our food habits. We keep our sentiments above our reason. We put the cruelty to animals above to cruelty to humans. The axis of our moral tenor is ruptured and displaced. The exile, oppression and expulsion of the other is deemed necessary to save the purity of the ourselves that is unfortunately thought through the prism of sameness. How are we to come to a self realization of what is ailing our society? The answer is not simple but involved in a web of complexity. But we need to raise this unavoidable and equally disconcerting question. We cannot dodge it.

May be psychoanalysis might open a widow on the condition of our society. Psychoanalysis is discomforting and obscene. When the rules of thinking are not level, a mere unreasonable shout can shut many genuinely insightful voices. But Psychoanalysis can boldly force us to look at ourselves in the mirror and come face to face with our vulnerabilities and broken selves and demonstrate how we risk incivility in the very name of civility. Psychoanalytical critic may become a siren that can derail the innociantization of our death

instinct or false beliefs which thinks that to save ourselves we have to destroy all otherness, silence every dissent or kill every other.

The British member of Indian Psychoanalytic society founded by Girindrasekhar Bose in 1922, Owen A. R. Berkley-Hill applied

The pleasure that one takes in the expulsion of the faeces becomes projected in the attitude of intolerance and expulsion of difference and otherness and the narcissistic love of sameness.

psychoanalysis to us Indians in the early twentieth century, particularly the upper caste Hindus. He uses the obscene concept of anal eroticism of Sigmund Freud to understand the behaviour of the upper caste Indians in his analysis. He seems to point out the love for order, conservatism, miserliness and tendency to tyranny (violence and intolerance) has its foundation in anal eroticism. The pleasure that one takes in the expulsion of the faeces becomes projected in the attitude of intolerance and expulsion of difference and otherness and the narcissistic love of sameness. Berkley-Hill located the cultural pathology and moral depravity reigning in our society in anal eroticism. Perhaps, what Berkley-Hill theorized in the obscene terms of anal eroticism may be discomfiting yet might open horizons to understand rising heat of intolerance in our country. One might see how a casteist worldview of purity/ pollution principle is based in what psychoanalysis describes as anal eroticism in the context of an infant's passage to adulthood. It puts the hard truth on the table that our increasingly intolerant society is fixated in what Freud describes as the anal stage of development of an infant.

Ashish Nandy in more recent times, tells us that Girindraskhar Bose, world first non-western psychoanalyst was preoccupied with the narrative of Sarvilaka, a rich Brahman from ancient Kingdom of Magada. Sarvilaka teaches sacred

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texts in the day (*lokcara* or customary practice) and performs *kulakara* (family practice) in the night. His *kulakara* was to murder and rob the vulnerable travellers in the night. When he tried to introduce his son in the *kulakara*, his son was overcome with shock at the hypocrisy and moral depravity of his father. Sarvilaka dissolves the doubts of his son regarding the morality of *kulacara* with the doctrine of *niskama karma* (action without the desire of its fruit) taught by Gita. Bose raises the question of the correctness of the Sarvilaka's interpretation that justifies his murder and theft. But surprisingly, Bose did not subsume the secret self of Sarvilaka which his son finally owns up in familiar psychoanalytical terms as Id. This may be so because there is a complex structure or reason which brings about a dispassionate action that defies the conventional sense of the controlling id. He seems to read *niskama karma* as repression of guilt that permits us to become agents of moral depravity without taking any responsibility for the same. This means, we can mask our evil intent in what is more sublime and void of all egoistic interest. It appears that the dialogue between self and the imperative of detachment has broken and what we seem to have in our society is a monologue that has narcissism (inordinate self-love) written all over it.

Perhaps, the two pioneers of psychoanalysis in India that we have discussed are opening our horizons to the fact why we have become people who have lost our sleep over several insignificant things like what is being cooked in our neighbours kitchen. We need

to stay calm and cool in our waking hours and work to bring peace and tranquillity in our society. Bose, like several other scholars, interprets the three *gunas* theory as manifestation of our complex personality. The *sattva* is associated with the blissful inner self. The *rajas* deal with external active self while *tamah* deals with the unconscious of the self. The fact that we have let loose *tamah* (the powerful forces of the unconscious) in our social sphere is beyond any doubt. A mere analysis of our collective self (*atmsaksatkari*) will tell us that we are in no way reflecting the highest ideal enshrined in the sacred traditions of our country (*bramasaksatkari*).

This means that our society is restless and is far from *Samadhi* (tranquillity). How can our *sattvic* vegetarian food, yogic meditative practices and pride in a cultural nationalism make us so *tamasic*? Thus, following *Kausitkai Upanisad* we say: if we do not listen to the hate speech but give our ears to the speaker (hate monger) or if we keep our focus away from the deed (Karma) and concentrate it on the doer (*Karmi*), we can clearly see the violent self in our society along with those who drive us into this mode of aggression. This examination of our collective self demonstrates that those who fuel hate, intolerance and violence in our society are the real enemies of our country. To rediscover compassion, non-violence, love and peace, we will have to find a therapy for our anal eroticism and deceptive repression of our guilt under the cover of sublime texts like Gita. Only then can we tame these *tamasic* forces and become friendly with the other, affirming and respecting their differences. Only then can we befriend the other in their otherness. ❀



Homily Notes

November 1, 2015: All Saints Day

I. Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14 II. 1 John 3:1-3 III. Matthew 5:1-12

Praising the Saints

Why is it necessary to celebrate the feast of all saints? All year round we are celebrating feasts of saints: Thomas Aquinas, January 28; Augustine of Hippo, August 28; Theresa of Lisieux, October 1, etc. Why then is it necessary to set apart a day to celebrate the feast of all saints? I can think of two important reasons.

1. Beside the handful of saints whose feast days we celebrate on specific days in the year, there are countless other saints and martyrs, men, women and children united with God in the heavenly glory whom we do not celebrate. Many of these would be our own parents and grand-parents who were heroic women and men of faith. Today we keep their honourable memory. In many ways, therefore, today's feast can be called the feast of the Unknown Saint, in line with the tradition of the Unknown Soldier. We celebrate what the first reading calls **“a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands”** (Rev 7:9).

2. This celebration gives us a peek into our eternal destiny. The saints we celebrate were men and women like us. Where we are now they used to be, and where they are now we hope to be someday. As Christians we know that a person's life story is not limited to what happens to them between the day they are born and the day they die. Our story starts before we are born, at our conception, and goes beyond the day we die, to all eternity. That is why we do not simply forget people after they die. Didn't St Theresa of Lisieux say that she would spend eternity doing good on earth? In our mortal eyes

she is dead and gone. But in the eyes of faith we know that she is alive now more than ever, because she is now fully alive in God. She is now more alive than we are because the life she now enjoys can no longer be diminished by suffering, disease and sin, or death.

Unfortunately, our reaching the fullness of life with the saints does not happen automatically. **“Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven”** (Matthew 7:21). How do we live a life of doing the will of our heavenly Father? The answer is given us in today's gospel, the Beatitudes, where Jesus gives his followers a road map to a happy eternity. All the saints we celebrate today walked the hard and narrow path of the Beatitudes to arrive at heavenly bliss. On the feast of All Saints the church invites us and challenges us to walk the walk, not just to talk the talk, of the saints.

The Beatitudes propose to us a way of life, inviting us to identify with the poor, those who mourn, the meek, and those who hunger and thirst after justice. They challenge us to be compassionate people, to be men and women who are pure in heart, and to become the peacemakers in our dealings with one another, in our families and in the society at large, even when this approach to things exposes us to ridicule and persecution. None of the saints we celebrate today had it as their aim in life to amass wealth, to acquire power or to gain popularity. Rather they looked forward to the eternal reward which God gives to his faithful ones at the end of this short earthly life of illusion.

Today we are invited to walk the path of the saints, the way of the Beatitudes. The way is narrow and hard. We need faith and courage to walk it. The example of the saints and their prayers encourage us and help us on. St Augustine found it hard to live the Beatitudes, but when he read the lives of the saints he said, “What these ordinary women and men have done, why not me?” Why not? Faith assures us all who heed the call of Jesus and live the life of the Beatitudes that at the end of life we shall, together with all the saints, hear the consoling words of the Lord, “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joys of your master” (Matthew 25:21). --**Munachi Ezeogu, cssp** (From internet)

November 8, 2015: XXXII Sunday in Ordinary Times

I. I Kings 17:10-16

II. Hebrews 9:24-28 III. Mark 12:38-44

The Widow's Plight

Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa is very fond of this joke: When the missionaries came to Africa, we had the land and they had the Bible. Then they said, "Let us pray," and asked us to close our eyes. By the time the prayer was over, they now had the land and we had the Bible. And he usually ends the joke by adding, "And I think we got the better deal." In this joke we have a substantiation of Karl Marx's criticism of the Christianity of his day as the "opiate of the people," – that which puts people to sleep while the ground under their feet is taken away from them. In today's gospel Jesus warns his followers against religious leaders who propagate this kind of anaesthetic religiosity. **"Beware of the scribes, who ... devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation"** (Mark 12:38-40). In the second half of the gospel reading, the story of the widow's mite, we see a tragic example of the product of this kind of religiosity. Jesus commends the victim but condemns the victimiser.

Last week we read about the scribe who asked Jesus about the first of the commandments. In the end Jesus gave him his word of encouragement and commendation: **"You are not far from the kingdom of God"** (v.34). Soon after that, in today's reading, Jesus warns his followers against the scribes who were going to receive a great condemnation. What is the crucial difference between the Good Scribe who was commended last week and the generality of scribes who are condemned this week. The Good Scribe earned Jesus' approval when he agreed with Jesus that practical love of God and neighbour **"is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices"** (v.33). In other words, the generality of the scribes believed in "Temple before people" but the Good Scribe, by listening to Jesus, was able to arrive at the Gospel position of "people before Temple." This is the position of those on the way to the kingdom of God. The needs of flesh-and-blood women and men come before the need to maintain the sacrificial routine of the Temple.

Traditionally we have read the widow's mite story as a story about boundless generosity and self-sacrifice. But we should first read it in the context in which Mark wrote it, as a tragic evidence of the religious exploitation for which Jesus condemned the Temple religious establishment. Before reading the story as a model to encourage generosity to organised religion we need to read it first as a condemnation of the use of religion to

exploit simple, suffering and powerless humanity. Jesus is teaching in the Temple. He has just condemned the unscrupulous scribes who devour widows' property under the pretext of religious fervour. Then he looks over and sees this widow putting **"everything she had, her whole living"** into the treasury and he points to her and says, "See what I mean?" The scribes never literally robbed widows' houses. But by their teaching they exploited widows by persuading them in their privation to give up even the very little they had.

It's like what happened at the World's Fair in San Francisco in 1939. One of the attractions was a pile of money said to total \$1,000,000. For 25 cents, visitors were allowed to touch the money. Poor people spent their last quarter to have a momentary brush with affluence. But did that make them any richer? No, only 25 cents poorer? False ideas nourishing false hopes can rob the poor even of the little they have.

Jesus commends the exploited widow. Why? Does Jesus approve of the process that has reduced her to the state of indigence? No. Jesus praises her for her sincere and total trust in God, not for the sorry fact that the religious establishment was taking advantage of it. In the final analysis, in the kingdom of God, between the victimiser and the victimised, it is always the victimised who gets the better deal, as Desmond Tutu rightly remarked.

In the male-dominated society of New Testament Palestine, the widow would symbolise all who have no voice, no means and no power. Who would such people be today? Do we as individuals and as a church reach out to such people to help them improve their lot. Or do we only tell them to pray harder and everything would be all right, knowing quite well that it takes more than prayer to revive their fortunes? Is Christianity a powerless gospel that opiates the people and maintains the status quo or is it the good news that liberates and transforms personal and social life? -- **Munachi Ezeogu, cssp** (From internet)

November 15, 2015: XXIII Sunday in Ordinary Times

I. Daniel 12:1-3 II. Hebrews 10:11-14,18 III. Mark 13:24-32

The Good News of the Last Days

But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. (Mark 13:24-25)

In the month of July, 1999, Pope John Paul II shocked the Christian world when he made these statements in his Wednesday audience: “Heaven, or the happiness in which we will find ourselves, is neither an abstraction nor a physical place in the clouds, but a personal relation [with God]. ... This final condition can be anticipated in a certain sense now on earth.... Moreover, the pictures of Hell given to us in Sacred Scripture must be correctly interpreted. They express the total frustration and emptiness of a life without God. More than a place, Hell is the state of the one who freely and finally removes himself from God, the source of life and joy.”

Why did the Pope deem it necessary to offer this kind of clarification at this time? I think that the Pope was responding to two popular but erroneous ways of looking at biblical texts that have to do with the End Times, namely, rationalism and literalism. We shall illustrate by looking at today’s gospel reading on the End Times from the rationalistic and literalistic points of view, and then we shall point out what the passage can say to us when we read it as the Good News that it is supposed to be.

A rationalistic approach will read this passage as the mistaken belief of early Christians that the End Times were just around the corner. But it was a mistake, pure and simple, and that is all we can learn from it. Their associated beliefs that heaven was a physical place in the clouds, and that from there Christ would come back, that stars would fall from the sky, even though we now know that one star is indeed bigger than planet earth, and the belief that earth was a four-cornered flat surface, have all been proven to be wrong by advances in modern science. Conclusion: this is an outdated text that has no value to us, and heaven is nothing but a figment of their primitive imaginations.

A literal reading, on the other hand, would treat our passage as a factual prediction of future events that will mark the End Times. If the Bible says heaven is somewhere in the clouds, then heaven is somewhere in the clouds. Maybe the clouds in question are so high above that our astronauts who have been to the moon have not seen it and cannot see it even with their powerful telescopes. As regards Jesus’ saying to his hearers: **“Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place”** (Mark 13:30), literalists quickly abandon literalism and argue that the evangelist who wrote these things certainly misunderstood what Jesus said, since Jesus could not be wrong. Some of them go on and make concrete plans about meeting Jesus in the clouds, like the unfortunate members of the Heaven’s Gate cult who had carefully packed their cabin luggage for their heavenward flight in a comet. Or like the Korean woman who aborted her

unborn baby because, how could she rapture with all the extra weight of the pregnancy?

Rejecting both rationalism and literalism, the Pope pointed out to us a third way, namely, to recognise these texts as graphic depictions of a gospel message that is always relevant to people of every age and culture. Read in this way, we can pick out these important messages that the text has for us and for people of every generation. Firstly, this world is passing away. Life in this world is like an overvalued high-tech stock that is bound to crash sooner or later. So why should anyone have all their assets in this one stock? It is, therefore, an invitation for us to invest wisely, to invest in things out of this world, to invest in the stock of the kingdom of God.

Secondly, God, the Righteous One will come some day, i.e. the Last Day, to right all the wrongs of this world. Because the world as we know it is a world where often enough the just suffer and evil people prosper. Good people may indeed sleep better at night, but bad people seem to enjoy the waking hours more. If that is all there is to life, then why would anybody want to be good and upright rather than bad and smart? The Good News of the End Times assures us that in the final analysis, evil will catch up with the evildoer, and justice will again be just. This will be in the kingdom of God for which this life is only a preparation. As we say the Lord's Prayer today, let us mean it when we say "Thy kingdom come." -- **Munachi Ezeogu, cssp** (From internet)

November 22, 2015: The Solemnity Christ King

I. Daniel 7:13-14

II. Revelation 1:5-8

III. John 18:33-37

Acknowledging Christ as King

Christians in Nigeria and some other West African countries celebrate Christ the King Sunday with a big, festive parade through the main streets of their cities. This may sound unfamiliar to Christians in other parts of the world, but a public manifestation of faith may not be far from what Pope Pius XI had in mind when, in 1925, he established the feast of Christ the King. The feast is a proclamation of the Christian belief that the reign of Christ should be felt not only in the private lives of Christians but also in the public domain.

The feast was originally celebrated on the last Sunday in October. This meant that only Roman Catholics and Anglo Catholics could celebrate it because Lutherans and most other Protestant churches celebrated Reformation Sunday on the same day. Vatican Council II did well to shift

the feast to the last Sunday of the liturgical year because now most Christians, Catholics and Protestants together, can celebrate it. In this way the whole Church bears common witness to Christ whom we proclaim as king of our lives and of our world.

One reason why the feast was initially celebrated on the last Sunday of October was, perhaps, to associate it with the feast of All Saints on November 1. For, who are the saints if not those generous men, women and children who bore courageous witness to Christ in their lives, private as well as public? One such saint who has been in the news lately is St Thomas More, recently proclaimed patron saint of politicians. Thomas More was a brilliant lawyer and diplomat in 16th century England. His patriotism and loyalty to the throne attracted the attention of King Henry VIII who made him Lord Chancellor of England, the first layperson to be entrusted with such an honourable responsibility. What Henry VIII did not know was that loyal as More was to him, his first loyalty was to Christ the only true king.

When Henry VIII, therefore, decided to divorce his wife Catherine of Aragon, marry Anne Boleyn, and make himself head of the Church of England, More thought this was not right. Rather than approve what he believed to be against the divine will, he resigned from his prestigious and wealthy position as Lord Chancellor and lived a life of poverty. Because he would not give his support to the king, More was arrested, convicted of treason, imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1534 and beheaded in July of the following year. On his way to public execution, More encouraged the people to remain steadfast in the faith. His last recorded words were: "I die the king's good servant, but God's first." For More, it was not simply enough to confess Christ privately in the safety of one's heart and one's family; one must also confess him in one's business and professional life as well as in the laws and policies that govern society.

This does not mean that the kingship of Christ is necessarily a threat to the kingdoms of the world. This was the thinking of Pontius Pilate when he was interrogating Jesus to ascertain whether Jesus was a king. Jesus' answer was that, yes, he was indeed a king, but not the sort of king he had in mind. **"My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here"** (John 18:36). Wherein lies the difference between the kingship of Christ and that of Pilate and other kings of this world? We can name three: (1) Other kingdoms have territorial boundaries but the kingship of Christ is universal. Christ is king without borders. (2) Other kingdoms come and go, but the kingship of

Christ is eternal. (3) Other kingdoms are sustained by military power, but the kingship of Christ is sustained by the power of truth. Citizens of Christ's kingdom must, therefore, stand by the truth even when it is hurting and embarrassing to do so.

When we speak about the kingdom of God in this way, some people ask: what then becomes of patriotism and national loyalty? Patriotism and national loyalty certainly have their place in the Christian life, but loyalty to God comes first. In the name of patriotism and national loyalty some Christians have surrendered their consciences to the state. If the state says it is lawful, then it is all right to do it. A good example is abortion. Or, if the state says it is illegal, then it is wrong to do it. An example is helping an "illegal" immigrant. Today's celebration challenges us to do better than that: to look more critically at the laws and policies governing public life and examine them against the light of the law of Christ. As Christians we should be loyal citizens of our countries, but loyal citizens of God's kingdom first. -**Munachi Ezeogu, cssp** (From internet)

November 29, 2015: I Sunday of Advent

I. Jeremiah 33:14-16 II. 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2 III. Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

Is Jesus Christ Still Coming Again?

A certain man, Herbert Washington by name, was so taken up by the nearness of Christ's second coming and rapture that he became a pain in the neck to his coworkers. So his coworkers hatched a plan to pay him back in his own coins. One day, when Herbert went to the washroom, they lay their work clothes on their chairs and hid in the supply room. When Herbert came back from the washroom, he thought the rapture had taken place. The Muslim janitor, who was part of the joke, pretended to have witnessed everyone disappear and ran around the office feigning panic. Herbert fell to the ground clutching his heart and screaming, "I knew you'd forget me, Jesus! What did I do wrong?" He was taken to a local hospital where he was diagnosed of heart attack. He recovered after undergoing bypass surgery. "We didn't mean to scare him to death," said one of his coworkers. "He's just always talking about it, so today we decided to turn the tables on him."

Like Herbert, the Thessalonians to whom Paul wrote were obsessed with the nearness of the second coming of Christ. In his second letter to them, Paul reprimands the Thessalonians for giving up work and living in idleness (2 Thess 3:6-15). Apparently some of them thought that the Lord's coming was so near that there was no point in providing for the future. Such excesses on

the part of believers give non-believers the impression that the second coming of Christ is a fear factor fabricated by Christian preachers to scare people into accepting the faith. Paul's opponents in Thessalonika were making such claims.

Written about the year 50-51 AD, Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians is believed to be the oldest book of the New Testament. Paul had preached in Thessalonika where he established the church. He then moved on to Corinth. There he heard that the young church in Thessalonika was under persecution. So he sent Timothy to go and find out what is happening. When Timothy came back to Paul with his report on the crisis of faith among the believers in Thessalonika, that was when Paul decided to write them this letter (1 Thess 3:5-6).

The enemies of the church in Thessalonika were saying that Paul's teaching that Jesus would come back to take his followers with him was Paul's own fabrication. To support their case they pointed out that some of the first Christians who thought that Jesus was coming back to take them with him were already dead. In other words, they were deluded in their belief. Paul's response is that their death does not mean that they will suffer any disadvantage when Christ comes. At Christ's coming the dead will rise from the dead and, together with the living, they will meet the Lord in mid-air (1 Thess 4:13-18).

If it was problematic for Christians of Paul's time to believe in the second coming of Christ because some of them were dead, it is even more problematic for today's Christians. Many centuries have passed since Paul's time and yet we have not seen Jesus coming in the clouds. Paul himself who believed he would be one of those still living when the Lord comes (1Thess 4:17) is long dead. Besides the notion of the Lord's coming in the clouds was based on a flat earth theory such that as he descended every eye would see him. Such a scenario is more problematic today given what we now know that the earth is spherical. No wonder, then, many Christians today do not take the belief in the second coming of Christ seriously. As a consequence many throw away the baby with the bath water.

Yet the basic faith of the church on the second coming of Christ is that "he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead." Any thing more specific than that with regard to how and when he will come is not an essential part of the faith and can often prove to be counterproductive. The best way to prepare for the second coming of Christ is not to engage in speculations of how and when and where it will be but, as Paul says, to **"increase and abound in love for one another and for all"** so that we

“may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints” (1 Thess 3:12-13). --Munachi Ezeogu, cssp
(From internet)

December 6, 2015: II Sunday of Advent

I. Baruch 5:1-9; II. Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11; III. Luke 3:1-6

Kingdom of God Here and Now

The readings of today invite us to reflect on the faithfulness of God in thick and thin. But if that cord of faithfulness is broken, God gives us the trial period which is very clearly seen in the first reading of today. The stiff-necked Israelites were taken as captives to Babylon because of their unfaithfulness. However, God intervened through Prophet Baruch with hope for the future when the people repented of their iniquities.

God listens to our petitions despite our many falls, when we turn to him with humble hearts. Humility touches the heart of God. This is what happened in the lives of the Israelites who kept falling but God never turned away. He always waits with eager longing for their return. This is affirmed in the second reading today where Paul addresses the Philippians that the good work God began will definitely come to fruition, provided they love one another.

The Gospel of today continues to show the faithfulness and compassion of God through the proclamation of John the Baptist. John the Baptist identified himself as the voice which Isaiah prophesied many years back. This voice is a call to repentance. The audience to whom he preached were busy in their own world. The law of the society superseded the law of God. And as a result, compassion was ousted and literal following was imposed. The people of the time were blinded by the cares of the passing world. Today, we are called to prepare the way by the cleansing of the interior and not the exterior. We need to bulldoze aside all that hinders us from loving and caring for the needy world of today. We are called to be prophets in our own ways in removing the walls that separates and build bridges of the kingdom in the here and now.

--Vekupa Rhakho George

Dec 13, 2015: III Sunday of Advent

I. Zephaniah 3;14-18a, II. Philippians 4;4-7, III. Luke-3;10-18

God Is with Us

The gospel of the day, invites us to reflect on the basic elements of a genuine conversion. Conversion means “metanoia”, change of heart or attitude. A true conversion begins from listening to the word of God. It is very explicitly seen in the opening sentence of today's gospel. The crowd who listened the word of god, preached by John the Baptist, came to him to ask “what must we do then”. He clearly states that, listening to be fruitful, should lead to action or doing. It is apt here to recall the words of Jesus himself. Jesus says “blessed are those who hear the word of god and obey it”(LK.11:27) John exhorts the people to do the deeds based on justice to spread the fragrance of the gospel in their day to day life situations. Every Christian is called to bear the witness to the gospel in every moment of his/her life. That is why it is said that “church is a missionary by nature”.

Once a person starts to live his /her life in accordance with the gospel, he /she will become aware himself /herself more objectively and this awareness makes a person humble. Humility does not mean the low self-esteem but it is the objective understanding regarding oneself .A true humility enables a person to be honest to oneself and to others. The gospel passage presents John the Baptist as a man of honesty and humility. He did not hesitate to speak out the truth though it declines his status what he had among the people .He boldly, proclaims that one who comes after him is more powerful than him and he is worthy to untie strap of his sandals . Anyone with less honesty and personal integrity would grab avidly the golden opportunity to boost ones ego.

Christmas is the feast of self-denial. Jesus sacrificed his ego by saying” amen” to the will of the Father. Yes we are preparing for great feast of the nativity, let us make a conscious effort to mould our life according to the will of the Father, by listening to the word of god more attentively and putting our soul and mind together to implement the gospel values in our everyday life. Consequently we are capable of making a crib in our heart to welcome the babe of Bethlehem, thus we experience a real Christmas, the Emmanuel experience “the God is with us” in our life.

--Naijo Chittilappilly

December 20, 2015: IV Sunday of Advent

I. Micah 5: 1-4, II. Heb 10: 5-10, III. Luke 1:39-45

The Embrace of Love

Mary wastes no time in rushing to Elizabeth's assistance. Knowing that she will give birth to the Messiah doesn't keep Mary from serving others. On the contrary, her first response is to aid her cousin. What a great example she is for us, who can be easily distracted by our own needs and our own glory. Mary, by setting out for Judah, shows what the presence of Christ in us should do: enkindle charity. How does my charity show itself in my actions, especially as Christmas approaches?

The atmosphere pervading the Gospel scene can be described with a single word: joy! From the moment of the angel's message, Mary is filled with this joy. It impels her to journey "in haste" to serve her cousin Elizabeth and share with her a joy Mary cannot contain within herself. It radiates from Mary's person and causes the infant John the Baptist to leap for joy in his mother's womb. What is the cause of Mary's joy? It is the presence within her womb, through the Holy Spirit's action, of the One who is to come. It is the presence of the One for whom sorrowing mankind has been longing since Adam's fall; the one whom the prophets have promised; the One for whom every heart has been made; the long-awaited Messiah, Our Redeemer, Christ the Lord.

Elizabeth's humility opens her soul to receive the Holy Spirit, who overwhelms her with the experience of Mary's joy. Should we not also be amazed that Christ wishes to come to us anew as a helpless child this Christmas, silently pleading for even a furtive glance from the eyes of our poor heart? Will we deny him that embrace of love for which he has surrendered everything?

Lord, let me imitate your Mother by "carrying" you in my words and deeds each day. Let me be a light to those around me. --Tinto Kodiyan

December 25, 2015: Holy Christmas

I. Isaiah 52:7-10; II. Hebrew 1:1-6; III. John 1:1-18

The Kenosis of Christmas

Christmas comes every year but the question that I would like to pose is why should we celebrate this occasion and continue to remain untouched by

the deep mysteries embedded in it? The most important thing according to me is very clearly indicated in the second reading of today. In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets. But in the last days God spoke to us through his only son, who came and lived like anyone of us.

This same Christ who came and dwelt among us is the same Christ who lived from all eternity before the heavens and the earth were made. The Gospel affirms that nothing came into being without his knowledge. He brings in the message of peace for the broken world which needs healing. The demand is simple but rather hard to follow; *empty yourself and follow me!* Unless there is *Kenosis*, there can be no place for Christ in our hearts.

Christmas brings to us the message of humility because this God who came into the world to live among us, chose to be poor in order to proclaim the love of God through this unexplainable mystery. The message that Christ brings is for all because God wishes all humans to be safe. Christ came not for the Jews alone but for the whole world. The logos that created everything came and dwelt amongst us. This logos was too simple to be identified by anyone, therefore a man came sent by God. He came to bear witness to that light so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light but he was the pointer to the light. Anyone who listens to this is not born of human will, desire and stock but of God himself. --**Vekupa Rhakho George**

December 27, 2015: The Holy Family

I. 1 Samuel 1:11, 20-22, 24-28 II. 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24 III. Luke 2:41-52

The Promises of God

Do you recognize the indwelling presence of the Lord Jesus in your life? Blessed are you if you see and recognize the Lord with the “eyes of faith”. To be chosen by God is an awesome privilege and responsibility. Mary received both a crown of joy and a cross of sorrow. Her joy was not diminished by her sorrow because it was fueled by her faith, hope, and trust in God and his promises. Jesus promised his disciples that “no one will take your joy from you” (John 16:22).

Today we celebrate the solemn memorial of the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. A family begins with the birth of a child. Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem is what began the Holy Family. In today’s Gospel, with Mary and Joseph to guide him, the Son of God grew and was educated. “He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them.” It is a model for every family: love, care, education, obedience.

Mary and Joseph were attentive to Jesus' every step. But no parent is perfect — there are times when the child can slip away. Here we see them racing back to Jerusalem in search of Jesus, as well as their delight at finding him once again. Mary and Joseph experienced the same emotions every parent does while raising a child: moments of anxiety and joy.

Every child needs the authority and direction of parents. The everyday obedience of Jesus to Joseph and Mary both announced and anticipated the obedience of Holy Thursday: 'Not my will. . .' The obedience of Christ in the daily routine of his hidden life was already inaugurating his work of restoring what the disobedience of Adam had destroyed."

Lord, help me to keep my mind on the things above. Remind me today that you dwell in my heart. Let me radiate your presence today in my own family. Let them see your goodness reflected in my words and actions. --C. V. Seban

January 3, 2016: The Feast of Epiphany

I. Isaiah 60:1-6 II. Ephesians 3:2-3,5-6 III. Matthew 2:1-12

Becoming a Star for Others

Epiphany means manifestation. God manifests Himself to non-Jews. The feast tells us that God is not restricted to any particular religion and all those who seek him with a sincere heart are sure to find him. The feast of Epiphany brings home the following four messages strongly in our lives.

a. Search for Christ – We need to search for the right things in the right place (Lk 15:8). The three wise men journeyed to find the newborn King. They searched for Him and found Him. We cannot go to Bethlehem or Jerusalem in search of Jesus. We must search for Christ in our neighbors, in the Word of God and in the sacraments. Our earnest search will keep us united to the Lord and that will enable us to bear fruits in abundance in our lives.

b. Worship Christ – The three wise men offered gold, myrrh and frankincense to the newborn King of the Jews. They bowed down before him and worshiped him. We too are called to worship, to offer our entire being to him. Our surrender should be total and whole-hearted. Only then our offering becomes complete (Lk 21:3). God did not accept the offering of Cain because his heart was not in it. We too must offer wholeheartedly to God that which holds us back in coming closer to Him.

c. Redirect Life – The wise men chose a different route to return to their

homes (Mt 2:12). We must also choose a better way of life, abstaining from proud and impure thoughts, evil habits and selfish behavior. We are called to give new direction to our lives. We must put away the worldly attitudes, values and goals which we might have thus far held dear and we will take on those of Christ, proclaiming by word and deed that Jesus is the Savior of the World.

d. Become a Star for Others – On this feast of Epiphany, we are called to become stars, leading people in the right path. Just as the star led wise men to Jesus, we too are invited to lead others to Jesus. In this context the life of St. Andrew is very exemplary. Whenever his name is mentioned in the gospel we hear him bringing someone to Jesus. He introduces Simon Peter to Jesus, takes the Greek to Jesus, spots the boy who is having bread and fish and takes *him* to Jesus. The Word of God challenges us to share the light of Christ we have received with others who still grope in darkness. We are called to remove the darkness of the evil around us by radiating Jesus' love by selfless service, unconditional forgiveness and compassionate care.
--**Vikas Jason Mathias**

The Alumni of Papal Seminary and Jnana-Deepa Vidaypeeth are invited for an Internaional Conferece on “Befriending the Othere” on the occasion of sixty years of their existence in Pune, on November 24-28, 2015. Please mark these dates on your calendar.

For details, please visit: www.papalseminary.in

(Due to lack of space,
the regular Book Review Section is regretfully omitted in this issue)

The Editorial Board of AJRS wishes all its Readers a **Happy Christmas** and joyful New Year, 2016.

We also wish **Papal Seminary** on its diamond jubilee in Pune. See the special emblem on the back cover.

Suggestions are welcome to the changes introduced in AJRS. We hope to make more changes from the new year onwards.

Christmas is forever, not for just one day,
for loving, sharing, giving, are not to put away
like bells and lights and tinsel, in some box upon a shelf.
The good you do for others is good you do yourself...
~Norman Wesley Brooks

Happy, happy Christmas, that can win us back to the delusions of
our childish days; that can recall to the old man the pleasures of his
youth; that can transport the sailor and the traveller, thousands of
miles away, back to his own fire-side and his quiet home! ~Charles
Dickens

Instead of being a time of unusual behavior, Christmas is perhaps
the only time in the year when people can obey their natural
impulses and express their true sentiments without feeling self-
conscious and, perhaps, foolish. Christmas, in short, is about the
only chance a man has to be himself. ~Francis C. Farley