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Contents

Editorial: Jubilee Year of Mercy	2
Announcing the Year of Mercy	5
<i>Pope Francis</i>	
Misericordiae Vultus: The Face of Mercy	10
<i>J Charles Davis</i>	
Compassion as Commitment to Christian Life	14
<i>M Surekha BS</i>	
Need vs Greed	23
<i>PA Chacko SJ</i>	
To See the Best in the Other	29
<i>Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ</i>	
Homily Notes	32
Book Reviews	46



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Editorial

Jubilee Year of Mercy

Pope Francis has launched his yearlong push for a global Catholic church of mercy and forgiveness, starting the Jubilee year focused on the subject by opening the holy door at St. Peter's Basilica and calling for a church "that always puts mercy before judgment."

In a solemn Mass attended by tens of thousands in a chilly St. Peter's Square and marked by an unusually high security presence, on 8th December 2015, the pontiff also praised the work of the Second Vatican Council and said the newly-opened Jubilee "compels us not to neglect the spirit which emerged" from that event.

"This Extraordinary Holy Year is itself a gift of grace," Francis said during the homily at the Mass. "To enter through the Holy Door means to rediscover the deepness of the mercy of the Father who welcomes all and goes out to meet everyone personally."

"How much wrong we do to God and his grace when we affirm that sins are punished by his judgment before putting first that they are forgiven by his mercy!" the pope exhorted.

"It is truly so," he said. "We have to put mercy before judgment, and in every case God's judgment will always be in the light of his mercy."

He added: “Let us abandon all fear and dread, for these do not befit men and women who are loved,” said Francis. “Instead, let us live the joy of encounter with the grace that transforms all.”

A Jubilee year is a special year called by the Catholic church to receive blessing and pardon from God and remission of sins.

While most Jubilees have been focused on calling pilgrims to Rome to receive such pardon, Pope Francis has widely expanded his Jubilee, asking that dioceses throughout the world open their own holy door at a cathedral or other church to expand the practice globally.

Pope Francis’ homily at the Mass and the ceremony itself also paid tribute to the Second Vatican Council, which officially closed its work on Dec. 8, 1965.

May this special Jubilee make us and the whole world peaceful, compassionate and reconciled with others.

Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ
Editor

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- “Situations can change; people can change. Be the first to seek to bring good. Do not grow accustomed to evil, but defeat it with good.” — Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*
 - “To be faithful, to be creative, we need to be able to change. To change! And why must I change? So that I can adapt to the situations in which I must proclaim the Gospel. To stay close to God, we need to know how to set out; we must not be afraid to set out.” — Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*

- "It is not creativity, however pastoral it may be, or meetings or planning that ensures our fruitfulness, even if these are greatly helpful. But what ensures our fruitfulness is our being faithful to Jesus, who says insistently: "Abide in me and I in you" (John 15:4)." — Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*
- "Let each one ask him- or herself today, "Do I increase harmony in my family, in my parish, in my community, or am I a gossip? Am I a cause of division or embarrassment?" And you know the harm that gossiping does to the Church, to the parishes, the communities. Gossip does harm! Gossip wounds. Before Christians open their mouths to gossip, they should bite their tongue! To bite one's tongue: this does us good because the tongue swells and can no longer speak, cannot gossip." — Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*
- "You could say to me, "But the Church is made up of sinners; we see them every day." And this is true: we are a Church of sinners. And we sinners are called to let ourselves be transformed, renewed, sanctified by God." — Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*



Announcing the Year of Mercy

Pope Francis
From Vatican Radio

Pope Francis presided over a penance service in St. Peter's Basilica on Friday, 13th March 2015, during which he announced an extraordinary Jubilee dedicated to Divine Mercy. Below, please find Vatican Radio's English translation of the Holy Father's homily, in which he made the announcement.

This year as last, as we head into of the Fourth Sunday of Lent, we are gathered to celebrate the penitential liturgy. We are united with so many Christians, who, in every part of the world, have accepted the invitation to live this moment as a sign of the goodness of the Lord. The Sacrament of Reconciliation, in fact, allows us with confidence to draw near to the Father, in order to be certain of His pardon. He really is “rich in mercy” and extends His mercy with abundance over those who turn to Him with a sincere heart.

To be here in order to experience His love, however, is first of all the fruit of His grace. As the Apostle Paul reminds us, God never ceases to show the richness of His mercy throughout the ages. The transformation of the heart that leads us to confess our sins is “God's gift”, it is “His work” (cf. Eph 2:8-10). To be touched with tenderness by His hand and shaped by His grace allows us, therefore, to approach the priest without fear for our sins, but with the certainty of being welcomed by him in the name of God, and understood notwithstanding our miseries.

Coming out of the confessional, we will feel God's strength, which restores life and returns the enthusiasm of faith.

The Gospel we have heard (cf. Lk 7:36-50) opens for us a path of hope and comfort. It is good that we should feel that same compassionate gaze of Jesus upon us, as when he perceived the sinful woman in the house of the Pharisee. In this passage two words return before us with great insistence: *love* and *judgment*.

There is the love of the sinful woman, who humbles herself before the Lord; but first there is the merciful love of Jesus for her, which pushes her to approach. Her cry of repentance and joy washes the feet of the Master, and her hair dries them with gratitude; her kisses are pure expression of her affection; and the fragrant ointment poured out with abundance attests how precious He is to her eyes. This woman's every gesture speaks of love and expresses her desire to have an unshakeable certainty in her life: that of being forgiven. And Jesus gives this assurance: welcoming her, He demonstrates God's love for her, just for her! Love and forgiveness are simultaneous: God forgives her much, everything, because "she loved much" (Luke 7:47); and she adores Jesus because she feels that in Him there is mercy and not condemnation. Thanks to Jesus, God casts her many sins away behind Him, He remembers them no more (cf. Is 43:25). For her, a new season now begins; she is reborn in love, to a new life.

This woman has really met the Lord. In silence, she opened her heart to Him; in pain, she

There will be no judgment except that which comes from God, and this is the judgment of mercy

showed repentance for her sins; with her tears, she appealed to the goodness of God for forgiveness. For her, there will be no judgment except that which comes from God, and this is the

judgment of mercy. The protagonist of this meeting is certainly the love that goes beyond justice.

Simon the Pharisee, on the contrary, *cannot find the path of love*. He stands firm upon the threshold of formality. He is not capable of taking the next step to go meet Jesus, who brings him salvation. Simon limited himself to inviting Jesus to dinner, but did not really welcome Him. In his thoughts, he invokes only justice, and in so doing, he errs. *His judgment on the woman distances him from the truth* and does not allow him even to understand who guest is. He stopped at the surface, he was not able to look to the heart. Before Jesus' parable and the question of which a servant would love his master most, the Pharisee answered correctly, "The one, to whom the master forgave most." And Jesus does not fail to make him observe: "Thou hast judged rightly. (Lk 7:43)" Only when the judgment of Simon is turned toward love: then is he in the right.

The call of Jesus pushes each of us never to stop at the surface of things, especially when we are dealing with a person. We are called to look beyond, to focus on the heart to see how much generosity everyone is capable. No one can be excluded from the mercy of God;

everyone knows the way to access it and the Church is *the house that welcomes all and refuses no one*. Its doors remain wide open, so that those who are touched by grace can find the

The call of Jesus pushes each of us never to stop at the surface of things. I have decided to call an *extraordinary Jubilee* that is to have the mercy of God at its center. It shall be a Holy Year of Mercy

certainty of forgiveness. The greater the sin, so much the greater must be the love that the Church expresses toward those who convert.

Dear brothers and sisters, I have often thought about how the Church might make clear its mission of being a witness to mercy. It is journey that begins with a spiritual conversion. For this reason, I have decided to call an *extraordinary Jubilee* that is to have the mercy of God at its center. It shall be a Holy Year of Mercy. We want to live this Year in the light of the Lord's words: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (cf. Lk 6:36)"

This Holy Year will begin on this coming Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and will end on November 20, 2016, the Sunday dedicated to Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe – and living face of the Father's mercy. I entrust the organization of this Jubilee to the Pontifical Council for Promotion of the New Evangelization, that [the dicastery] might animate it as a new stage in the journey of the Church on its mission to bring to every person the Gospel of mercy.

I am convinced that the whole Church will find in this Jubilee the joy needed to rediscover and make fruitful the mercy of God, with which all of us are called to give consolation to every man and woman of our time. From this moment, we entrust this Holy Year to the Mother of Mercy, that she might turn her gaze upon us and watch over our journey. 🌹

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- "Have the courage to go against the tide of this culture of efficiency, this culture of waste. Encountering and welcoming everyone, [building] solidarity—a word that is being hidden by this culture, as if it were a bad word—solidarity and fraternity: these are what make our society truly human." — Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*



Misericordiae Vultus: **The Face of Mercy**

J. Charles Davis

Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune

Pope Francis reformed the canonical process for the declaration of the nullity of marriage with effect from 8th December 2015 substituting entirely the previous processes in the Code of Canon Law (CIC) and Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO) through two Apostolic Letters *Motu proprio - Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus* and *Mitis et misericors Iesus* respectively . The act of simplifying the process by the Holy Father is a positive sign to reduce the burden of prolonged waiting by many couples. This could also help to reduce the civil divorces among the Catholics with possible reparation or nullity of marriages. This is a concrete form of mercy.

As Pope Francis says, “the mercy of God is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality through which he reveals his love as that of a father or mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child... The Church’s credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love.” And Pope Francis himself is an epitome of mercy in action.

“Aperite mihi Porta Iustitiae, Open to me the gates of justice” – with these words, Pope Francis has opened the Jubilee Door at St. Peter’s Basilica Rome. On the day of the Solemnity of the

Immaculate Conception, 08 December 2015, the Jubilee of Mercy has commenced with the opening of the Holy Jubilee Door and will conclude on 20 November 2016 with the Solemnity of the Christ the King. To the audience of 50,000 people and to the people of the world, the Pope wants to convey a simple message that human beings have precedence over Sabbath. The whole mystery of Christian faith can be thus summed up in a single word “Mercy,” as presented in the Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, titled “Misericordiae Vultus” translated in English “The Face of Mercy.”

Quoting Thomas Aquinas, Pope Francis wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium* (36), “Mercy is the greatest of all the virtues, since all others revolve around it and, more than this, it makes up for their deficiencies.” Vulnerable people are looking forward to compassion, mercy and inclusion in the Church rather than condemnation and exclusion. No one can be excluded from the mercy of God and the Church should be the house that welcomes all and refuses no one. Its doors should remain wide open.

Justice binds
wounds without
curing. Justice
without mercy
will be blind, dry
and non-

“Mercy is the greatest of all the virtues, since all others revolve around it and, more than this, it makes up for their deficiencies.”

relational. But justice with mercy can heal the wounds and lead to permanent peace. When justice and mercy join together forgiveness is automatically born. The more you forgive the more you are capable of showing love. The practice of mercy is an act of love that goes beyond justice. If God were to be only just and not merciful, then everyone would go to hell. But then, God is merciful.

One of the greatest persons on earth who walked the path of mercy is Jesus himself. Mother Mary – a person full of grace – had the privilege to bring that person of mercy into the world. It is naturally logical that a sinless person be born through a sinless person. In his eternal plan, God created her immaculate already at her miraculous conception in the womb of her mother, Saint Anne, free from original sin by virtue of the foreseen merits of her son Jesus Christ. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was officially defined by Pope Pius IX in 1854. Not only her immaculate conception, but her whole life depicts of an exemplary life. Generations after generations are now telling the story of the courageous and obedient woman Mary who cooperated fully in the mission of God. We are in the mission of telling this story to our generations.

On 7 December 2015, while greeting the pilgrims present in St. Peter’s Square, Pope Francis asked in the wake of the Climate Conference in Paris, “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” He added further, “For the good of our common home, for all of us and for the future generations, every effort should be directed toward mitigating the impact of climate change and, at the same time, curbing poverty and enabling human dignity to flourish”. He urged those present to pray that the Holy Spirit “enlighten all those who are called to make such important decisions ..guided ..by the criterion of the greater good of the human family.”

We may similarly ask ourselves, “What kind of tradition and what kind of values and principles do we want to leave to those who come after us?” “For the good of our common home of love, for all of us and for the future generations, every effort should be taken to remove the spirit that divides us and promote the spirit that binds us.”

It is not just about telling a story to others, but sharing the story in our own lives. Let the story of Immaculate Mary take root in us. Let the story of mercy be daily acts of our lives. If Jesus is the face of mercy, we need to become walking faces of mercy. In the world surrounded by sin of murder, rape, abortion, theft, lies, fights and terrorism, we need to become models like Jesus and mediators like Mary to be bearers of good-news to the victims and become bad-news to the wrongdoers, and be merciful to both as our Heavenly Father is merciful. 🌹

If Jesus is the face of mercy,
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- "Be so without being presumptuous, imposing "our truths," but rather be guided by the humble yet joyful certainty of those who have been found, touched, and transformed by the Truth who is Christ, ever to be proclaimed (see Luke 24:13" — Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*
 - "Only a faithful and intense relationship with God makes it possible to get out of our own closedness and proclaim the Gospel with parrhesia. Without prayer our acts are empty and our proclamation has no soul; it is not inspired by the Spirit." — Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*
 - "Today I ask you in the name of Christ and the Church, never tire of being merciful." — Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*



Compassion as Commitment to Christian Life A Theological Response to the Challenge of *Evangelii Gaudium*

M. Surekha BS

Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune

Compassion as a response to pain and suffering is a primordial divine force that can bind us one to another and to the whole of creation. The modern context presented in the *Evangelii Gaudium*¹ becomes a challenge for an ongoing compassionate mission for today's Church grounded in the prophetic but compassionate ministry of Jesus. It is in this context that I find commitment to lead a compassionate life has its source in personal encounter with Jesus, the compassion of God made human. When one is compassionate, one does not decide, but rather surrenders control to another, and is sucked into the situation. One becomes so present to the moment that one is both chosen and choosing.

¹ *Evangelii Gaudium* is the first apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis, published on 24th November, 2013. Here after *EG* will be used to indicate *Evangelii Gaudium*.

1. Etymological Analysis of the Word ‘Compassion’

The word “compassion” has a distinguished ancestry, with French, Latin and Greek connections. In Greek, we trace the usage back to the related word for ‘suffering: *pathos* (πάθος). In Latin, we can see the root word *cum*, meaning ‘with’ and *passio*, or suffering, and *patio*, I suffer. So compassion means ‘to endure [something] with another person’, to put ourselves in somebody else’s shoes, to feel his/her pain as though it were our own, and to enter generously into her/his point of view.² In common usage, compassion is understood to be a sympathetic awareness of another’s distress, with a desire to alleviate it in some way. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, the word first entered written English in the year 1340. It was not until 1561 that it was spelled “compassion.” For a very brief time, the word “compassion” was used as a verb “to compassionate, i.e., to join with in passion.” This verb became obsolete. The principle of compassion that lies at the heart of all religious ethical, and spiritual traditions, impels human beings to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.

Theologically divine compassion is based on God’s covenant with human beings.

2. Biblical Terminology of Compassion

The Scriptural vocabulary of compassion is richly nuanced. The Hebrew word for compassion is ‘*rachemin*’ which refers to the womb of Yahweh to express the deeply moving compassion

²‘Compassion’ derives in part from the Latin *patiri* and the Greek *pathein*, meaning ‘to suffer, undergo or experience’ Cf. Karen Armstrong, *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*, (London: Random House, 2011).

of God.³ There is no word in Greek for compassion. In all the twelve passages in the NT⁴ where ‘to be moved with compassion’ occurs, the verb used to translate compassion in Greek is *splangchnizomai*, which comes from *splangchna* meaning bowels, entrails, the place where our most intimate and passionate emotions are located. So when the gospels speak about Jesus’ being moved with pity’, it meant Jesus’ being moved in his entrails, expressing something very deep flowing from the furthestmost depths of Jesus’ entrails and is not just one low sentiment of pity or sympathy.

Hence, theologically divine compassion is based on God’s covenant with human beings. A theology of compassion is a theology of empowerment and liberation that fully recognizes human dignity. The call to solidarity and the rooting of this solidarity in God’s own self in Trinity is intimately bound up with compassion and with what God has done for people through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The “compassion of God,” writes Rabbi Dresner, “points the ‘way’ for man and woman , for when a man or woman act compassionately, he/she is walking in the ‘way’ of the Lord. That is the meaning of *imitatio Dei*.⁵ (Deut 11:22). Compassion is the very nature of God and this is revealed through Jesus Christ in whom is manifested God’s nature of suffering with humanity as the compassionate One.

3. Jesus: The Embodiment of God’s Compassion

In Jesus, God’s compassion became visible and tangible to us. Jesus not only said, “Be compassionate as your Father is

³ Henry J M Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, Douglas A. Morrison, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*. (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 19. Indeed, compassion is such a deep, central, and powerful emotion in Jesus that it can only be described as a movement of the womb of God. There, all the divine tenderness and gentleness lie hidden.

⁴ Mt 9:36; 15:32; 14:14; 15:32; 18: 27; 20:34; Mark 1:40-41; 6:34, 8:2; Lk 7:13; 10:33; 15:20.

⁵Samuel H Dresner, *Prayer, Humility, and Compassion* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1957), 193.

compassionate,” but he also was the concrete embodiment of this divine compassion in our world. By entering into our world and becoming one of us, Jesus accepted humankind’s weakness and revealed to us God’s ineffable love. “Jesus identifies Himself with the poor and the oppressed, in order to show them an active and effective concern”.⁶ Jesus’ response to all those who came to him with their suffering-the hungry, the blind, the widows, the public sinners, and those afflicted by leprosy- was to reveal the divine compassion that led God to enter our humanity. The mystery of the Incarnation empowers us and teaches us the virtues that generate life and compassionate love. God in Jesus becomes a ‘servant God’ who washes the feet of his disciples; He identifies Himself with every human suffering and completes His self-gifting love by dying on the cross. Even from the cross, He forgives those who crucified Him. In this way, we see in Jesus the fullness of God’s compassion.⁷

Thus, the biblical words translated as “compassion” could be summarized under three basic truths: a) that compassion springs from the heart of God. Without God’s intervention, the world would not know compassion.

“Jesus identifies Himself with the poor and the oppressed, in order to show them an active and effective concern”

b) Compassion manifests itself in God’s *steadfast love* and in the incarnation of Jesus Christ and in his suffering together with us and for our salvation, and c) that compassion is to be the hallmark of God’s people. The call to solidarity and the rooting of this solidarity in

⁶ George M Soares-Prabhu, “Jesus and the Poor,” in *Collected Writings of George M. Soares - Prabhu*, Vol. 4. ed. Francis X. D’Sa (Pune: JDV Theological Series, 2001), 176.

⁷ Cf. Joseph Prasad Pinto, OFM Cap, *Journey To Wholeness: Reflections for Life in Abundance* (Bombay: St. Pauls, 2006), 186.

God's own self in Trinity and in the person of Jesus can do great things for the Kingdom of God.

4. Situating the Context: The Crisis of Communal Commitment

Taking a few cues from the responses to *Evangelii Gaudium* from persons in different walks of life, we find that it is no surprise that the Catholic Church faces monumental challenges in today's milieu. Focusing on the contemporary issues presented in the *Evangelii Gaudium* this section describes the various problem issues under four significant headings: a) The great divide of our time b) Estrangement from others c) Spread of a throwaway Culture d) An era devoid of God-consciousness. In that case, what should be our response to the reality that is presented before us? Does the plight of the poor and the marginalized, touch us deeply, causing us in some way to feel their pain within ourselves? The central challenge of the contemporary world is how to turn communal commitment into solidarity with others, solidarity with the margins.

5. Compassion: A Theological Praxis of Christian life

The ultimate foundation of Christian's commitment to liberation can be found in the Trinity understood as mystery of communion among distinct persons. The Son was sent into the world in order to divinize human beings; moreover, the goal of the Trinity is to draw every human being to itself so that everyone may participate in its inner life. Therefore, compassion is a profound biblical word with a clear theological identity. Compassion is a ministry which for the Christian is entirely and uniquely rooted in Jesus Christ. As disciples with our identity hidden in Jesus, our compassion is a participation in his compassion. Compassion is the overflow of our life in Christ. Relationship with Jesus Christ is the necessary condition that

makes compassion possible for us. Growth in compassion is the fruit of our life in Christ.⁸

However, mission needs contemplation that can sustain the fervour and zeal of a Christian till the end. Pope Francis insists that evangelizers need “an interior space which can give a Christian meaning to commitment and activity”⁹ Our cultural milieu poses challenges to the reform the Pope envisions. Is compassion, which is a part of what it means to be a Christian, possible for us? The current task is to interpret this demand of the new *kairos* in the light of the biblical and theological tradition and provide a conceptually coherent, systematic mediation between the context of globalization and the demand of its inherited faith.

5.1 Contemplation of the Divine

One of the main challenges that the Church is facing today is to instill God- consciousness. God is more to be experienced than to be intellectually known. Through contemplation we truly become whom we contemplate and whom we are all meant to be. For, whether we realize it or not, it is in God's love, and in our loving response in prayer and service, that we live and move and have our being.

Pope Francis insists that evangelizers need “an interior space which can give a Christian meaning to commitment and activity

⁸ Andrew Purves, *The Search For Compassion: Spirituality and Ministry*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 56-57.

⁹ *Evangelii Gaudium* # 262.

5.2 Image of God and Compassion

Christian theology ponders over the meaning of human life in reference to God. The image of God has an irreducibly social expression within humanity.¹⁰ It is a ‘relational’ image, reflected in the relationship between man and woman, in the primordial social bond that is the foundation of all other forms of social life. Only within an interpersonal community can the triune likeness be properly realised. If humans are made in the image of the Triune God, all that of the Trinity is also to be affirmed of the human person. We are to see the Trinity, in the words of Raimundo Panikkar, as “the ultimate paradigm of personal relationship.”¹¹

John Macmurray rightly points out that, since mutuality is constitutive of the personal, it follows that ‘I’ need ‘you’ in order to be

Our preferential option for the poor derives from the biblical understanding of the *anawim*, the vulnerable ones who have only Yahweh for their protector.

myself. “The authentic human is not egocentric but exocentric.”¹² To be a person after the image of God is therefore to be a person-in-relationship.

5.3 Universal openness and Preferential Option

Our preferential option for the poor derives from the biblical understanding of the *anawim*, the vulnerable ones who have

¹⁰ The Yahwist and Priestly accounts of creation in the Bible affirm that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God: “Let us make human in our image, after our likeness” (Gen 1:26).

¹¹ Raimundo Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (New York/London 1973), xii-xiii. The understanding of Trinity and one’s religious experience influence each other bringing about a better understanding of the human relationship.

¹² John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (reprint, London: Humanity Books, 1998), 69. Macmurray does not connect the relational character of the human person with the doctrine of the Trinity.

only Yahweh for their protector. Christian faith is in Jesus, who became poor, and was always close to the poor. Here the Gospel is basic, and in the Gospel the Ministry of Jesus is basic, and the basic thrust of this ministry is to the poor, the 'anawim.' The ministry of Jesus excludes no one, but the authenticating sign of this is that the Good news is preached to the poor. Therefore, the universality of the Gospel is always the necessary condition for a preferential option for the poor, which in turn is the authenticating sign of the good news for all. Empowering the powerless is meant to make for an equitable distribution of power in our society. In the ultimate analysis the option we make for the poor must always reach out to the Kingdom and integrate its values into our strategies and struggles for the liberation of the oppressed.¹³ Moreover, "the kingdom of God is meant for all humankind, all people are called to become members of it"¹⁴

In our option for the periphery we encounter the human face of God. "In taking the side of the periphery we are privileged to honour the dignity of the periphery, the poor, the marginalised and the exploited, and to recognise the presence and the operation of the life-giving Spirit of God."¹⁵ Through "this we bring healing into the lives of the people of the margins and in the process we ourselves become healed".¹⁶

6. Conclusion

A Christian is embedded in Christ through baptism, empowered to fight for Christ through confirmation, and called upon to act in the world sharing the royal, prophetic and priestly

¹³ Heredia, "A Church that is Poor and for the Poor".

¹⁴ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Encyclical on "Christ the Redeemer", 7 December, 1990 (Bombay : Pauline Publications, 1994), 14

¹⁵ Mohan Doss, *Led By the Spirit: Mission, Spirituality and Formation* (DWS/ISPCK, 2008), 149.

¹⁶ Jacob Kavunkal, "The Eucharist and Mission," *Jnana Deepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies* 8, no.2 (July 2005): 85.

role of Christ, and so, like Christ, to be compassionate to fellow humans, loving each and every one around him/her and indeed all humanity whose fundamental identity is enshrined in Jesus the perfect *Imago Dei*. From a Catholic theological perspective, all persons possess an intrinsic dignity and incalculable worth. Therefore compassionate care for people is part of the broader duty of keeping God's commandments. Compassion is part of what it means to be a Christian. In other words, compassion is one of the features of being "in Christ". 🌹

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- "Evangelizing, proclaiming Jesus, gives us joy. In contrast, egoism makes us bitter, sad, and depresses us. Evangelizing uplifts us." — Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*
 - "Being with" Christ does not mean isolating ourselves from others. Rather, it is a "being with" in order to go forth and encounter others." — Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*
 - "Blessed Teresa of Calcutta. She said: "We must be very proud of our vocation because it gives us the opportunity to serve Christ in the poor." — Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*
 - "Jesus is the Good Shepherd; he is our true treasure. Please, let us not erase Jesus from our lives! Let us ground our hearts ever more in him (see Luke" — Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*



Need versus Greed

P. A. Chacko SJ

Jisu Jaher, Dumka, Jharkhand

In today's world where human greed is dominating the lives of nations and people, arms race, nuclear proliferation, chemical weapons, armed invasion, man-made environmental pollution, electronic spy net work, cut-throat competition and the like are the order of the day. That is where the tribal world is an altogether different one standing out against the ideology of greed.

That is how I have understood the down to earth reality of the tribals in north India, particularly Jharkhand. After having lived and worked with them for the last four decades I salute them for keeping up their age old primitive forms of fellow feeling and humane values.

The philosophy of our drawing room is: 'Owner's pride is neighbour's envy.'

I have learnt that greed is not in the dictionary of tribal ethos. Today we, in the non-tribal world, go into overdrive to cater to our greed in terms of accumulation, cut-throat competition and one-upmanship. The philosophy of our drawing room is: 'Owner's pride is neighbour's envy.' That is what is dinned into us as an eternal truth by media magnates, pest-like sales men and sales women, ad agencies and even loan agencies. Such mesmerizing formula forces us to live in a

make-belief world. The more we have, the better! If my neighbour has a luxury model car, why should I not have a super model to make him envious of my status?

The tribals do not conduct their lives in such ways. To them need is a value whereas greed is not. Greed is anathema to them. For example, living close to nature and enjoying nature's material resources which they basically need, they gratefully take from nature what resources they actually need to cater to their basic necessities. Not for their greed. Mr. Peter Paul Hembrom, a Munda tribal and herbal specialist, once narrated to me the following: 'Among us tribal people, there are many value oriented customs teaching us that greed is an alien and sinister force in our world view. Our actions should be driven by the thought of common needs and preserving nature. One such custom is when one goes to the forest to collect things for his or family's needs. If he has to uproot a medicinal plant, he has to do it in one breath and with a single jerk. That means, by that action, some roots will necessarily remain back in the earth, helping to regenerate the plant again for future needs. Or, in another instance, when one has to collect some bark of a tree for medicine for a patient, one should take a deep breath, wield the knife on the tree trunk in upward direction in such a way that one shaves off a piece of bark quickly. What he will get will be considered enough for the patient for the time being.' Dr. Hembrom went on to say: 'The wisdom behind such practices is that we should not wield our greed in collecting and accumulating things and resources to such an extent that we overexploit natural resources. Rather, we should help nature regenerate for its own sake and for future generations. We do not live only for ourselves. We live in a community. We are bound to respect others' needs. We are duty-bound to preserve things for future generations.'

Such a philosophy goes against the capitalist grain of thinking and acting. '*Me, myself and mine*' philosophy does not revolve around tribal lives. Rather, the tribal *Weltanschauung* or world

view is centred on communitarian living and communitarian fellow feeling. It is no exaggeration to say that tribal people live and function in the way primitive communism was practised by the early Christian community.

Land, water and forest are three essential things that have sustained the tribals for long and they consider these as their life line. These resources have been held in common for generations. There is the community sanction that these things cannot be alienated, polluted, disfigured, distorted or destroyed. Happily, the British-initiated land-related tenancy laws support this custom. Land cannot be alienated by sale, purchase or barter. Only certain exceptions are allowed for public purpose or for use within the members of the community. Hence, a life-giving resource like land in a tribal community has no commodity value. In the village the land area is demarcated and held under common ownership. A family

Our actions should be driven by the thought of common needs and preserving nature.

is allowed to cultivate what is needed for its upkeep. If more is needed, due to increase in family membership, unutilized common land will be given by village consensus. The family or an individual in the family cannot alienate the land in their possession. Possession may be individual but ownership is community-centred. Even if village land is to be given for needs of the government or for purposes of development, the process of getting the approval of the village community has to be adhered to. If one family finds it difficult to cultivate its land, the village community decides in its common gathering in what way such needy person has to be helped.

Just as land is held in common, their lives also are governed by common customs and rituals. All ceremonies from birth to death

are functions conducted as community events and participated by every member of the community. Expenses for such events are also shared by the village community. Even dates of all such events are fixed in community meetings. For example, the date for even the naming ceremony for a new member of a family is approved in the village council. A newborn child is accepted as a village citizen.

In the tribal world, with this sense of fellow feeling and *agape*, there is no room for orphans to remain uncared for. If a child is bereaved on the death of both parents, the child will need to be taken care of by the nearest relatives or by the village community. Sometimes, unfortunately, outside charitable organisations walk in where angels fear to tread by opening orphanages and promising to render help for orphans from tribal families. Such outlandish inroads weaken value oriented tribal customs. Charity pushers need to understand that charity has a limit and that they should not cross the 'line of control'.

Crime and punishment also come within this area of community life. Even an individual's unruly behaviour is an offence to the community as a whole. The village community takes responsibility in sorting out such matter within the community and rendering punishment through community legal process. The *finale* of the process will be a fine and community reconciliation by sharing a leaf-cupful of country liquor as a sign of fellowship and reintegration of the repentant/pardoned sinner into the community. (This process does not take away the State's criminal or civil legal procedure if such a process is needed for more serious offences.)

Even religious rituals are a matter of the community. So are festivals and rituals. Among the Paharia (Malto) hill tribal community in Jharkhand I noticed a particularly encouraging custom. The community decides the time when annual harvest is to be started. Prior to the harvest, not even a grain is removed from the field by any one either by stealing or by personal harvesting. No one can put a grain into one's mouth before the

common harvest is initiated and common festival completed. Once the harvest is completed by all the families, a community ritual of offering the newly cooked food to ancestors is done. Thereafter every family cooks its own food and the common village celebration begins through dancing and rejoicing. Apart from this communitarian aspect, one practical advantage is that such a custom prevents anyone from stealing another's crop. If, by chance, one does steal or goes against the custom, he or she has to answer it in the community gathering and get punished and reconciled.

All such humane and value-oriented customs are not common to a modern world which is governed by individualism, accumulation,

avarice, lack of respect for nature and fellow humans and no thought of future generations. If tribal areas have so far been

Tribals harmonious blend with nature and nature's forces has so far helped nature's own sustenance and regeneration.

preserved from the pollution of air, land and water, it is precisely because tribals have taken care of these elements with love and respect. Their harmonious blend with nature and nature's forces has so far helped nature's own sustenance and regeneration. Nature is respected, loved and worshipped by the tribals. But let us not call them pantheists. Rather, their reverence for nature goes so deep that they feel that it is because of nature around them that they survive and have survived for centuries. Destroy this nature, exploit natural resources of tribal belts for alien use, you destroy the tribals. Today, in the name of so-called development, mineral and other natural resources are excavated and exploited. In the process tribal people are dispossessed of their home base and displaced into an alien world where they get lost.

Instead of envisioning and executing a sustainable form of development, the arm-chair strategists of development agenda connive with industrialists and multinationals to invade tribal belts and displace tribal people and dismantle their lives.

A strategy for sustainable development should make the land holders partners in development. This should be done by allotting to them a fair share of the profits of the end product of the raw materials extracted from the land which is acquired through due process. If that does not take place, we the so-called ‘elite’ shall be fooling ourselves and destroying the lives of simple-minded and innocent tribal people.

A strategy for sustainable development should make the land holders partners in development.

Let us remind ourselves what Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of India said: ‘Our mother earth has enough for all, but not enough for the greed of a few.’ 🌿

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- “Do you allow yourselves to be gazed upon by the Lord? But how do you do this? You look at the tabernacle and you let yourselves be looked at . . . it is simple! “It is a bit boring; I fall asleep.” Fall asleep then, sleep! He is still looking at you. But know for sure that he is looking at you!” — Pope Francis, The Church of Mercy



To See the Best in the Other

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When two people initially develop a loving relationship, the bond seems almost total. But all too often, the love melts away, leaving behind an ugly puddle of contempt. Why do we end up in a situation, where in spite of searching, we are unable to find a single good quality in the person we once loved?

Love ripens when we identify commonalities, but it rots when we only see the differences, writes Shubha Vilas, Spiritual seeker and a motivational speaker, in *The Huffington Post*. When two people love each other, they admire each other — almost as god — and consider the other to be infallible. When the focus is purely on the good, the vision is always divine and the experience of the relationship is heavenly. This glimpse of divinity in the other person, however, is fleeting. It can only be sustained within a limited time span and within the boundary of a limited medley of events.

As life progresses and taxing events unfold, the person's response mechanisms manifest in the form of less

Love ripens when we identify commonalities, but it rots when we only see the differences

desirable qualities. When such qualities surface, it almost seems that the person has been replaced by his or her diabolical doppelganger. These detestable behaviour patterns then lead to doubt. And doubt is a seed, that eventually grows into a tree of separation.

High expectations are products of the imagination. The mind fools us into expecting perfection in every sphere. But relationships that are expectation-oriented fail. On the other hand, relationships that are discernment-oriented last. Discernment or the ability to judge helps us evaluate people, based on realities and not imagination. Most people want to deal with successes and not failures. Similarly, most people want to deal with the strengths and not the weaknesses of others; their stabilities and not their idiosyncrasies; their good and not bad natures. “Everyone expects a perfect masterpiece in others, while they themselves are happy to be deformed relics.”

Vilas refers to Ramayana, we find that Rama and Lakshmana had diametrically opposite personalities and yet, were the closest of associates. Rama not

When you look for good qualities, you find people resembling gold mines, with invisible nuggets of gold enclosed in massive amounts of dirt.

only knew the sweet side of Lakshmana, but was also fully aware of his angry and violent side. With genuine care, Rama not only appreciated his good side, but assisted him to deal with his bad side. Rather than rejecting a person due to his bad side, the need is to provide empathic assistance in dealing with his shortcomings.

With those, whom we love over relatively longer periods of time, it is important to remember that people seldom change, but our perceptions base on our steady expectations. When you look for a perfect god, you meet with imperfection and, naturally, disappointment follows. When you look for a mortal, you meet with someone struggling to overcome imperfections. Shubha Vilas further adds: “When you look for good qualities, you find people resembling gold mines, with invisible nuggets of gold enclosed in massive amounts of dirt. It's worth shovelling away heaps of dirt to uncover one piece of gold. Appreciation of others' good qualities is not just lip service, but a meditation.”

Thus, discovering the best and the worst in the other — and in oneself — is the prelude to love. After having discovered the best,

we need to emphasise the best and revere the other for it. From this point of strength, without denying the worst in them and us, we can reach out to the other tenderly. Such a bond of love lasts, because it is based on the best and the worst in our hearts

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- "To start anew from Christ means being close to him, being close to Jesus. Jesus stresses the importance of this with the disciples at the Last Supper, as he prepares to give us his own greatest gift of love, his sacrifice on the cross. Jesus uses the image of the vine and the branches and says, Abide in my love, remain attached to me, as the branch is attached to the vine. If we are joined to him, then we are able to bear fruit." — Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*
 - "To evangelize, therefore, it is necessary to open ourselves once again to the horizon of God's Spirit, without being afraid of what he asks us or of where he leads us." — Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*
 - "Spreading the Gospel means that we are the first to proclaim and live the reconciliation, forgiveness, peace, unity, and love that the Holy Spirit gives us." — Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*



Homily Notes

Jan 10, 2016: Baptism of the Lord

I: Is 40: 1-5. 9-11 II: Ti 2: 11-14; 3: 4-7 III: Lk 3: 15-16. 21-22

Renewing Our Baptismal Commitment

In Nigeria the baptism of a child is usually followed by a happy reception where children are sure to eat one thing, rice. As a result, the baptism dress is sometimes referred to as your rice dress. Thinking of baptism easily makes people think of rice. And sometimes when you are talking of the rites of baptism, all they hear is the rice of baptism. Though the connection between baptism and rice is altogether accidental, one can utilise it as a memory aid for the meaning of baptism.

What does baptism mean? The meaning of baptism can be found in the four letters of the word **RICE**. “R” stands for **Rebirth**. In baptism we are born again by water and the Holy Spirit. We are cleansed from original sin and become sons and daughters of God in a special way. “I” stands for **Initiation**. At baptism we are initiated or admitted into full membership in the church, the community of the children of God in the world. “C” is for **Consecration**. In baptism we consecrate and dedicate ourselves to seek and to spread the kingdom of God. We commit ourselves to be servants of God, to do God’s will and serve God with our whole lives. And “E” is for **Empowerment**. At baptism the Holy Spirit comes into our lives and empowers us, equips us, gives us the moral strength to say no to evil and to live as God’s children that we have become.

These four effects of baptism can be divided into two categories, the passive effects (what we receive from God and the people of God), namely, rebirth, initiation, and empowerment; and the active effect (what we give to God and the people of God), namely, our commitment and dedication to a cause, to spread the kingdom of God. One problem people have with today's gospel is to understand why Jesus needed to be baptized. An understanding of the "rice" of baptism as we have tried to explain can help.

Looking at the baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan, we find that Jesus did not need a **rebirth** since he was from all eternity the only begotten child of God. He had no original sin to be cleansed from. Did Jesus need **initiation**? Yes. Being human, Jesus needed to associate and to identify with the community of men and women who were dedicated to promoting the cause of the kingdom of God. When it comes to serving God, no one is an island. We need to interact with other children of God. We need the community of faith just as Jesus did. We need the church. What about **empowerment**? The Holy Spirit, the power of the Most High, who descended on Jesus at his baptism strengthened and empowered him. It was at his baptism that "**God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; [and] he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil**" (Acts 10:37-38). And **consecration**? Baptism for Jesus was a moment of self-consecration, a moment of self-dedication. For him it was a commitment to do whatever was necessary to promote the cause of the kingdom of God on earth.

We read that soon after Jesus' baptism, John was arrested and the Kingdom of God movement needed a new leadership. When Jesus heard it he went up and took on the task, in this way implementing the commitment he made at his baptism to promote the kingdom of God. We can see that for Jesus baptism was not just a question of what he could receive but very much a question of what he could contribute to the cause of the kingdom of God on earth. John F. Kennedy's saying, "Ask not what your country can do for you, rather ask what you can do for your country" can also be applied to our relationship with God and the Church.

What are we doing, each one of us, to promote the kingdom of God? Are we ready to consecrate and dedicate ourselves wholly to the service of the kingdom of God just as Jesus did? If not, what are we doing to support those who have consecrated themselves to doing this work in the name of us all? Let us today with Jesus renew our baptismal commitment to bear witness to the Good News of the kingdom of God in word and in deed. - **Munachi E. Ezeogu, cssp** (Internet)

January 17, 2016: II Sunday in Ordinary Time

I: Isaiah 62:1-5; II: I Corinthians 12:4-11; III: John 2:1-11

This Sunday we begin the liturgical season of Ordinary Time. This Sunday is often called “Cana Sunday”. In today's gospel, we hear of the marriage feast at Cana. Mary, the mother of Jesus was invited, as well as Jesus himself and his disciples. As the wedding feast went on, the wine ran out. Mary went out of her way to intercede with Jesus and Jesus performed what John tells us was his very first miracle.

A more fascinating question arising from today's Gospel is: did Mary know all those thirty years she lived with Jesus that she was living with a wonder-worker and yet never she ask him to multiply her bread, turn the water on the dining table into wine, to meet her everyday needs? How come she never asked Jesus to use his miraculous power to help her out but she was quick to ask him to use it and help others?

In the case of Jesus, he knew that he has this power to perform miracles. After his forty days fast in the desert, he was hungry and the devil suggested him to turn some stones into bread and eat, but he did not do it. Yet he went out and multiplied bread for crowds of his followers. What are they telling us, Mary and Jesus, through their actions? God tells us that His gifts to individuals are not meant primarily for our benefits but for the service of others in the community.

In the second reading, St Paul enumerates the many different gifts of the Holy Spirit to different persons and adds that “to each person is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good,” (1 Corinthians 12:6) not for personal profit. Thus Jesus and Mary use their gifts that are for the service for others not for him/herself.

God calls each one of us to use the gifts in service to others for the building up of the Church. When we try to serve others and give away our gifts, the Lord will lavish on us even more abundantly. Then, today

is a good day to ask ourselves: What are the gifts has God given to me? How do I use them: Do I use them for my own glorification or building up God's community? Let us pray to know our gifts and to use them in joy for others. Pray for the grace to be attentive to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. If we seek to serve, we shall be amazed at our joy!-
Gnanam J.

Janurary 24: 2016: III Sunday in Ordinary Time

I: Neh 8: 2-4a. 5-6. 8-10 II: 1 Cor 12: 12-30 III: Lk 1: 1-4; 4: 14-21

Longing for Total Salvation

One day in an introductory Bible class one of the participants asked: "Why are there four Gospels rather than one?" Certainly things would look a lot easier if there was only one Gospel. Everything we read in that one Gospel would then be the gospel truth, pure and simple. Now that we have four Gospels that often differ significantly from one another, things can be quite confusing. When you come to think of it, however, you begin to realise that things would be a lot worse if we had only one Gospel. If we had only one Gospel we would think that there is only one way of understanding Jesus and how he relates to us. But now that we have four different Gospels, each of them telling a significantly different story of Jesus and his mission, it becomes easier for us to see that no story of Jesus can exhaust the whole truth of what Jesus is. As limited human beings we can only tell part of the story of God.

This remind us of the story of the six blind men who set out to discover what the elephant is. The first blind man feels the elephant's side and says the elephant is like a wall. The second blind man feels the elephant's tusk and says it is like a spear. The third feels the trunk and says it is like a snake. The fourth feels the elephant's knee and says the elephant is like a tree. The fifth feels the ear and says it is like a fan. And the sixth blind man feels the elephant's tail and concludes that the elephant is like a rope. You could imagine the bitter disagreement that would ensue among them if they got together to discuss the nature of the elephant. Every one of them would insist that he is right and the others wrong. But the truth of the matter is: yes, he is right, but then so also are all the others. Each

of them has a valid experience of the elephant but no one of them possesses the full knowledge of the total reality of the elephant. Even when you put all the six images of the elephant together it still does not capture the full mosaic of the elephant.

After Vatican II the church's reading of the Gospels on Sunday was revised into a three-year cycle: year A for the gospel of Matthew, year B for Mark, and year C for Luke. The gospel of John is read on certain Sundays interspersed within the three years, such as the Sundays of the Easter season. We are now in year C, the year of Luke. The question we shall be asking ourselves this year is, What aspect of the mystery of Christ does Luke highlight, as distinct from the focus of the other Gospels? A certain scholar has outlined in one word the aspect of Christ that each of the Gospels highlights. Matthew highlights the Christ of **majesty** (who heals by word of mouth alone, never touches people, never hungry, never angry, etc.), Mark highlights the Christ of **might** (who proves he is the Messiah by his acts of power and authority over natural and demonic forces), Luke highlights the Christ of **mercy** (who reaches out to the poor, the outcasts, foreigners and women) and John highlights the Christ of **mystery** (who was with the Father from all eternity and who has come into the world to reveal this hidden mystery, the truth that leads to life).

Today we begin reading the Gospel of Luke. In his opening preface (1:1-4) Luke tells us why he wrote the gospel. It was to explain to Theophilus, probably a Roman official, what Christianity was all about. Have you ever tried to explain to someone what Christianity is all about? Many people think that Christianity is all about sin and judgment, heaven and hell; and that God is a heavenly policeman who is constantly monitoring our movements, writing down all our sins in His book and waiting to throw us into hellfire as soon as He catches up with us. Luke sees it all differently. For him Christianity has more to do with God's love and mercy than with punishment.

That is why, in telling Theophilus about the Christian faith, Luke finds the incident in the synagogue in Nazareth very useful. In this incident found only in Luke's Gospel, Jesus makes a solemn declaration of his mission in the world. We can call it the Jesus Manifesto. People who initiate a revolution usually start off with a declaration of their manifesto. Karl Mark started by publishing the Communist Manifesto.

Martin Luther started off with the publication of the 95 theses in Wittenberg. Jesus has come to start a revolution of mercy and love in the world. And here in today's Gospel reading he publishes the Christian manifesto:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. (4:18-19)

In these few words we see in a nutshell how Jesus, in Luke, understands his mission in the world. What is Jesus' work? It is **"to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."** In Matthew Jesus speaks of **"the poor in spirit"** but in Luke he speaks simply of **"the poor."** Jesus in Luke is concerned not only with the spiritual aspects of human life but also with the material and social aspects. Here we see the love and mercy of Jesus reaching out to all in need. Like the master, so the followers. We who bear the name of Christ -- Christians -- ought to live according to Christ's manifesto. It is our mission as individuals and as a community to bring Good News to the poor in our society. Today's gospel challenges us to stretch out our hands in practical solidarity with those who are visibly disadvantaged around us. Before we save people's souls that we cannot see, we must first endeavour to save their bodies, their health, their housing and their jobs that we can see. - **Munachi E. Ezeogu, cssp** (Internet)

January 31, 2016: IV Sunday in Ordinary Time

I: Jer 1: 4-5. 17-19 II: 1 Cor 12: 31 – 13: 13 III: Lk 4: 21-30

Seeing the Good in Our Neighbour

Mercury is an element which is not soluble in any other element other than gold. Love is not like this, though many see it as a separate entity or virtue. No virtue in that case can be seen in itself without any relation to any other virtue. This is emphasized in today's readings. Love is greater than any virtue. Love is like the thread that connects all the beads of the

virtues. St. Paul tells the community that perceives the gifts of the Holy Spirit as a great gift that, love is much more than any of these charisms. Gift is given by anyone as a sign of love. Very often we find ourselves valuing gifts more than the love behind the gift. Thus, no charism however great it may be, is to be valued than love. Love is greater than hope and faith. How can this be? During Jesus's earthly life, his disciples loved him, had hope in him that he would liberate them from foreign rule and had faith that He is the Messiah. Once, Jesus was arrested, we see that their hope and faith on Jesus had fallen apart which made them to abandon him in the most crucial moment. But their love for him had not dried up. This can be clearly perceived when we see the character of Peter who was following Jesus at a distance. But Judas had lost even his love on Christ the result of which caused him to take his life. In the Gospel of today, we see that the people were amazed at the *Gracious* words that came from his mouth. Unless one has love overflowing, one cannot be gracious. The reaction of the people teaches us that we must not take for granted, the persons who are familiar to us, much less, judge them. To what extent are we able to see the good in a person whom daily encounter? - **Bhanu Yeswanth**

February 7, 2016: V Sunday in Ordinary Time
I: Is 6:1-2a, 3-8; II: 1 Cor 15:1-11; III: Lk 5:1-11

Called to Proclaim

The readings of today reminds us of our Christian calling to proclaim the good news of salvation. This call is not veiled by any discriminating factor. Everyone is called to be heralds and proclaimers of the good news of salvation! The second reading of today reminds us of the privilege that we have received, the word of God, the good news of salvation. This is not to be kept hidden. Paul, a person who was mercilessly slaying the followers of Christ himself became a great icon of all discipleship and the greatest missionary of all times with the first encounter on the road to Damascus.

The thirst for the word of God is found everywhere. The very fact that there are tensions and turmoil that happen around us are signs of the absence of the word of God. We are called to sow the word in such places so that the kingdom of God may be made manifests. The Gospel brings to us the beautiful encounter between Jesus and Peter. Peter

immediately recognized the power of the word. There was no second thought about following Jesus. He experienced immediate transformation at the first invitation. The same thing happened in the life of Paul.

As Christians, we need to ask ourselves whether the word of God have brought about any change in us and in the lives of the people around us. When we look at the world of today, the movement of the people is taking a reverse turn. The thirst for God is changed to thirst for power, name and fame. Are we victims of it? Are we contributing our shares in the establishment of the kingdom of God? **Vekupa Rhakho George**

February 14, 2016: I Sunday of Lent
I: Dt 26: 4-10 II: Rom 10: 8-13 III: Lk 4: 1-13
The Precious Faithfulness

In the heat of the President Bill Clinton and Miss Monica Lewinsky affair the head of a women's support group spoke on CNN. This is what she said, in essence: "Monica Lewinsky has done nothing wrong. In the world of corporate establishments and in the White House bureaucracy, women who want to advance must use everything at their disposal: power, connections and sex. If that is what she has done, we see absolutely nothing wrong with that." The name of the game is: use what you have to get what you want. I am sure you have heard that before. Many people indeed take it as their philosophy of life. In our Gospel reading today, however, Jesus shows us that the principle of using whatever you have to get whatever you want is not always right. In fact, when that principle is applied without putting God first, it becomes a philosophy of the world, the devil's own philosophy, a philosophy that should be rejected even as Jesus did.

Our Gospel today is on the Temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Three temptations are recounted: to change stone into bread, to fall down and worship the devil, and to jump down from the pinnacle of the Temple. In each of these three temptations what the devil is saying to Jesus is, "Come on, use what you have to get what you want." And in each case

Jesus overcomes the temptation by replying, "No, we can only use godly means to satisfy our God-given needs or to pursue our goals in life."

In the first temptation, Jesus had fasted for forty days in the wilderness and at the end of it he was very hungry. The devil puts an idea into his head: **"If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread"** (Luke 4:3). Notice that the first thing the devil does is sow a doubt in his mind: **"if you are the Son of God."** "Are you really sure God is with you?" The same thing happened in the garden of Eden. The first thing the Tempter said to Eve was, **"Did God really say you should not eat of any fruit of the garden"** (Genesis 3:1). Temptation always begins with a doubting thought. Did God really say this or is it one of those Sunday school fairy tales? Jesus overcame the temptations by refusing to entertain such doubts and by standing on the word of God.

Note, secondly, that people are tempted only with what they need or want. After his fasting Jesus needed to eat. So the devil tempted him with food. It is not a sin for Jesus to eat after fasting. The sin may lie in how the food is obtained. Should he follow the normal way of obtaining bread or should he take the shortcut suggested by the devil to obtain instant bread? Jesus refuses to take the devil's shortcut. The means we employ to satisfy our needs must be in accordance with the word of God. Feeding on God's word is ultimately more important than feeding on bread. **"It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone'"** (v. 4).

In the second temptation the devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and promises to give him authority over them if only Jesus would worship him. Remember that Jesus was about to begin his public life and was looking for a way to get the whole world to know him and accept his message. Again the devil tempts him to use what he has (his heart, his soul) to get what he wants (the loyalty of the whole world). Again Jesus says no. The end does not justify the means. **"It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him'"** (v. 8).

In the third temptation the devil asks Jesus to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple as a way to prove that he was the Son of God. Remember that the people were asking Jesus for a sign to prove that he was the Messiah. Jesus wanted to convince them that he was the one. But how do you do it! The devil suggested this sensational sky jump without a parachute. Again, use what you have to get what you want. Use your

supernatural power to get the people to recognize you and believe in you as the Son of God, the Messiah. And again Jesus says no. The God of Jesus Christ is not a God of the sensational but a God who works through the ordinary, everyday things of life. **"Do not put the Lord your God to the test"** (v. 12).

So you see, unlike those friends of Monica who believe you can trade off everything you have to obtain what you want, Jesus shows us that we should never trade off our faith in God or our moral principles to obtain anything in this world, because faithfulness to God is more precious than anything in this world. - **Munachi E. Ezeogu, cssp** (Internet)

February 21, 2016: II Sunday of Lent

I: Gen 15:5-12,17-18; II: Philip 3;17-4:1; III: Luke 9:28b-36.

The One Love that does not Change

I once heard an angry man expressing his desire for revenge in this 'religious' way: "If God is just, you are going to suffer for this!" Just as God is understood to be superior to us in love and mercy, so too, His justice is thought of as the most implacable.

That is not the God revealed in the Bible. The Holy Scriptures repeatedly reveal the face of a God who comes to meet us out of tender compassion. The Lord is no distant ruler, but a covenant God. What does that mean?

In this first reading we read of the covenant (or agreement) that God makes with Abraham and his future descendants. This covenant is different from human contracts on two scores: 1. The initiative is all God's. 2. Even when the human partners are unfaithful, God is faithful. God cannot be untrue to His own kindness; in fact, the word 'justice' in the Bible refers not to any vengeful settling of accounts but to this comforting truth: God's loving kindness cannot change.

No wonder St. Teresa of Lisieux would say, "The reason for my confidence is God's justice. Being just, He is bound to remember that I am weak". This infinitely tender God, for reasons best known to him, comes forward repeatedly to save, to heal, to console. This fidelity will accompany us all through this short earthly journey, and transform us beyond our wildest imaginings after our death. When Paul reassures his

Christians and asks them to remain faithful (today's second reading), He is not talking of holding on to a theory or a legal system. He speaks of responding to an ever present love.

This love became visible and tangible in Jesus of Nazareth. Its true nature remained hidden from human view most of the time, but on occasions its inexpressible divine form burst through the veil of Jesus' humanity. At the transfiguration, the apostles are dazzled by the glimpse of Christ's deeper reality: "This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to Him".

Jesus is the best and the most definite demonstration of love by the covenant God who never goes back on his fidelity. Whatever the treachery from the human side, God remains faithful to us, because He cannot be untrue to his own nature. We are grounded unshakably on love, not because of what we have done, or not done, but because God is God. For our good fortune, there is one love that will never change and in which there is no fear of rejection. **-Vikas Jason Mathias**

Feb 28, 2016: III Sunday of Lent

I: Ex 3; 1-8a, 13-15; II: 1 Cor 10:1-6, 10-12; III: Lk 13:1-9

Called to Be Faithful

Christian vocation is nothing but a call to be faithful. The readings of today are reminders for us to be faithful. God abhors the lukewarm attitude. We have very classic example of this kind of people in the Exodus story. The people of Israel in spite of God's intervention into their misery kept on doubting and complaining. They kept questioning God for the little inconveniences. As a result, some of them could not reach the Promised Land.

We as Christians who are specially called, are reminded not to repeat the errors of the people in the wilderness. God who created us knows what is best. God does not make any mistake. Everything that happens is for our good. The inconveniences and the hardships we encounter in our day-to-day lives are part of the divine plan. We need to cooperate because life is not a bed of roses. There are thorns and thistles in the journey of life. Blessed are those who see the silver linings beyond the clouds of adversity. The Gospel of today is rather quite harsh and leaves no room for third option. Instead it is quite blunt; repent or perish!

We need to rise up from the heap of our sins and turn to the Lord who calls us, waits for us patiently and eagerly for our return. The baptismal promises that we made, the creed that we profess will make sense only if we are faithful, otherwise, we will be condemned like the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' time. -**Vekupa Rhakho George**

March 6, 2015: IV Sunday of Lent

I: Jos 5: 9a. 10-12 II: 2 Cor 5: 17-21 III: Lk 15: 1-3.11-32

The Father's Way

What is the difference between a crisp \$20 bill and a soiled and rumpled \$20 bill? A preacher showed his congregation a crisp \$20 bill and asked who wants it. All hands went up. Then he crumpled it in his palms and asked who still wanted it. Again all hands went up. Lastly he threw it on the ground, marched on it and repeated his question. Still the hands went up. Then he explained to them that the difference between a new, crisp \$20 bill and a rumpled and soiled \$20 in our eyes is the difference between a good person and a bad person in the sight of God. Both are equally acceptable. Basically both stand equal before God "**since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**" (Romans 3:23). Henri Nouwen says it differently: "We are all handicapped; some are more visibly handicapped than others."

Today's gospel is the family story of a man and his two sons. At the beginning of the story we see that the younger son is the bad boy and the elder son the good boy. But by the end of the story we see that both of them in different ways prove themselves to be obstacles to the family unity and harmony which the father desired more than anything.

The problem begins with the younger son. Without waiting for his father to die he asks for his share of the inheritance. Then he abandons his duties and responsibilities in the family estate and goes abroad to live a life of fun. His reckless lifestyle drains his fortunes and he finds himself reduced to abject poverty and misery. That a Jewish prince like him should condescend to feeding pigs, which Jews regard as unclean animals, shows the depths of degradation in which he finds himself. A life of sins quickly enough leads people to a situation where they lose all

sense of shame and decency. But no matter how far sinners stray from the father's house, the loving heart of the father always follows them, gently whispering in their hearts, "Come home! Come home!" Our wild, fun-loving sinful younger man has one thing going for him: he is not too proud to go back and say, "I have erred; I am sorry." And this is precisely what he decides to do.

How his heart would be pounding as he approaches his father's house, not knowing whether his father would take him back or not! **"But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him"** (Luke 15:20). The young man begins to read his prepared confession but his father is so overjoyed he does not listen.

But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe -- the best one -- and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate (v 22-24).

At this point the story shows us the flaws of the good elder brother. Instead of rejoicing that his brother who was presumed lost has come back, he is angered by the fact that their father has received him back with a celebration. In anger he distances himself from his own family and from the party. As he leaves he mutters to himself, "This is unfair. This is unfair" -- a word that is often used to justify anger, intolerance, self-righteousness and violence. In so doing the "good" elder brother brings disunity to the father's house and sorrow to himself. The sins of those who are not good enough (younger brother) as well as the sins of those who are too good (elder brother) are equally obstacles in the realisation of unity and harmony in the father's house.

We are all sinners. Whether your sins are more visible like those of the younger son or more hidden like those of the elder son, the message for us today is that we all need to repent and return to the father's house. The younger son needs to turn back from his frivolous lifestyle and return to the father's house and be a responsible and obedient son. The elder son needs to turn back from anger and resentment and learn to share the house with the apparently undeserving younger brother.

After teaching her Sunday school kids about the Parable of the Prodigal Son, a teacher asked them: "Now tell me: Who suffered the most in the story?" A child raised her hand and answered, "the fatted cow." Absolutely! Next to the fatted calf comes the elder son who remained outside while the party went on inside. He did not even taste the fatted calf that he had helped to raise. All because he stuck to his own ideas of fairness and justice and failed to see that the father's ways are not our ways. Thank God! - **Munachi E. Ezeogu, cssp** (Internet)

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- "But, careful! Jesus does not say, Go off and do things on your own. No! That is not what he is saying. Jesus says, Go, for I am with you! This is what is so beautiful for us; it is what guides us. If we go out to bring his Gospel with love, with a true apostolic spirit, with parrhesia, he walks with us, he goes ahead of us, and he gets there first. As we say in Spanish, *nos primerea*. By now you know what I mean by this. It is the same thing that the Bible tells us. In the Bible, the Lord says: I am like the flower of the almond. Why? Because that is the first flower to blossom in the spring. He is always the first! This is fundamental for us: God is always ahead of us! When we think about going far away, to an extreme outskirts, we may be a bit afraid, but in fact God is already there. Jesus is waiting for us in the hearts of our brothers and sisters, in their wounded bodies, in their hardships, in their lack of faith." — Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*



Book Reviews

M. D. Joseph. *Thrown into the World: An Existentialist Approach to Life*, EBH Publishers, Guwahati, 2016, pp. 352+xxii, Hardbound, price 1450. ISBN: 978-93-83252-55-8

Existentialism is an elusive notion, escaping all definitions. It is surrounded by a certain amount of confusion and ambiguity since it includes widely disparate philosophies. It is not a system of philosophy, rather a way of philosophizing. This book is an attempt to elucidate the profound notion of existentialism and make it available to ordinary readers. This volume makes us aware of our existence as our essential human nature. It deals with issues like human freedom and facticity in the world of humans.

The book carries a foreword from Honorable (late) Janaki Ballv Patnaid, Governor of Assam who says “the author has been very consistent and precise in bringing out to light human essence in its centrality and totality.”

His Excellency Salvatore Pennacchio, Apostolic Nuncio released the book on 24th November at the diamond jubilee celebrations of Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune and gave the first copy to His Eminence Cardinal Oswald Gracias of Bombay,

The author of the book Fr Jose MD (Mannukulangara) is a priest of the Archdiocese of Guwahati, Assam and is a scholar who has graduated from Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune.

The book is a worthwhile contribution to research libraries and for all serious students of philosophy, who want to update themselves with the latest trends in philosophy. **Kuruville Pandikattu SJ**

Francis Gonsalves, SJ. *Feet Rooted, Hearts Radiant, Minds Raised: Living Sacraments in India*, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand, 2015 pp. 314. ISBN: 978-81-927387-0-3.

As the title suggests, this book is basically on sacraments made relevant for our contemporary situation in India. It aims at evolving an Indian view of sacraments, which also applies to other contexts. Specifically, it unearths the treasures of an Indian way of viewing reality and understanding the sacraments, so as to suggest ways and means to live the sacraments more meaningfully and effectively. It book suggest three integral, inseparable dimensions of sacramentality. Indian contextual sacramental theology must necessarily be rooted in Indian soil (context), enlightened by Scripture interpreted in Indian idiom (word-text) and heart-warmingly celebrative of the stirring rhythms of Indian life (spirit).

The book has eight chapters. The first one begins with our quest for sacramentality. Then the symbols and sacraments for life are elaborately studied. Then the next chapter deals with sacraments as communitarian symbolic acts. From this background the author goes on to study different sacraments: "Eat, this is my Body," (Eucharist), "Flow, Rivers of Living waters" (Baptism and Confirmation), "I Desire Mercy, not Sacrifice," (Reconciliation and Anointing), "No Greater Love than This," (Marriage and Holy Orders). Finally the author reflects on the cosmic sacramental ("That They May Have Life.")

This book is a welcome addition to every library on philosophy and theology. It is highly recommended for theology students. -**Shabin V**

- "Newness often makes us fearful, including the newness God brings us, the newness God asks of us. We are like the apostles in the Gospel: often we would prefer to hold on to our own security, to stand in front of a tomb, to think about someone who has died, someone who ultimately lives on only as a memory, like the great historical figures from the past. We are afraid of God's surprises." — Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*
- "Brothers and sisters, let us not be closed to the newness that God wants to bring into our lives! Are we often weary, disheartened, and sad? Do we feel weighed down by our sins? Do we think that we won't be able to cope? Let us not close our hearts, let us not lose confidence, let us never give up." — Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*
- "Let us remain with Christ—abiding in Christ—and let us always try to be one with him. Let us follow him; let us imitate him in his movement of love, in his going forth to meet humanity. Let us go forth and open doors. Let us have the audacity to mark out new paths for proclaiming the Gospel." — Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*

The Editorial Board of AJRS wishes all its Readers a **Happy Christmas** and **Fruitful New Year, 2016**. We wish **Papal Seminary** on its diamond jubilee in Pune.