



Asian Journal of Religious Studies

July-August 2016

61/4

Contents

Editorial: Fidelity and Commitment	2
Partnership of Men and Women in the Mission of the Church... ..	5
<i>Kurien Kunnumpuram</i>	
Blessed Are the Merciful	13
<i>+Filipe Neri Ferrão</i>	
God Who Is Rich in Mercy	18
<i>Paulraj Mariapushpam</i>	
An Interview with Fr Prem Kumar SJ.....	30
Homily Notes	36
Book Review	46



FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION ONLY

Asian Journal of Religious Studies (formerly *AUC* or *Apostolic Union for Clergy*) is a pastoral journal for Christian leaders. It is a bimonthly published from the Papal Seminary, Pune 411014. Inspiring and short articles beneficial for Christian leaders are welcome.

Editor: Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ

Circulation: Stephen Jayard

Section Editors:

Pastoral Theology: V M Jose SJ

Christology: Francis Gonsalves SJ

Scripture: Paul Raj

Homiletics: Nishant Irudayadason

Moral Theology: J. Thayil

Counselling: V.Crasta & G. Cordeiro

Indian Religions: Prasad Lankapalli. SJ

Mysticism: George Karuvelil SJ

Administration: Dinesh Braganza

Management: Karunaidass & Patras Kujur

Finance: Alex G SJ

Printed at: Kunal Offset, Pune

Typeset at: Papal Seminary Centenary
Computer Centre



Donations are accepted either by M.O. or D.D. If sent by cheque, please add Rs. 15 as bank commission. Suggested amount: Rs. 100 (in India); \$ 5 (in Asia); \$/Euro 12 (in Europe & America). Cheques and DD in favour of APOSTOLIC UNION

Address all correspondence (incl. DD) to:

The Editor, AUC, Papal Seminary, Pune 411014, India Email:
kurusj@gmail.com

P-ISSN 2249-1503



Editorial

Fidelity and Commitment

Pope Francis has said the “great majority” of Catholic marriages being celebrated today are invalid because couples do not fully realize it is a lifetime commitment, drawing sharp criticism from Church conservatives.

The Pope was speaking at a question-and-answer session with priests, nuns and parish workers on Thursday, June 16, 2016 in a Rome basilica.

“We are living in a provisional culture,” Francis said in response to a man who spoke of “the crisis of marriage” and asked how the church could better prepare young couples.

“Because of this, a great majority of our sacramental marriages are null because they (the couple) say ‘yes, for the rest of my life’ but they don’t know what they are saying because they have a different culture,” Francis said. The Pope said the church needs to better prepare couples for the sacrament

In the Vatican’s transcript issued on Friday morning his words were changed to read “some” instead of “a great majority,” with the approval of the Holy Father. A Vatican spokesman said the Pope’s off-the-cuff remarks are sometimes edited after consulting with him or among aides.

“The crisis of marriage is due to the fact that people don’t know what the sacrament is, the beauty of the sacrament, they don’t know that it is indissoluble, that it is for your entire life,” the Pope said.

“There are girls and boys who have purity and a great love, but they are few,” he said, adding that many young people had a materialistic and superficial approach to their wedding day, such as an obsession with choosing the right gown, the right church and the right restaurant.

He said the Church needed better marriage preparation programs, to foster fidelity and commitment.

Conservatives also chided Francis for saying at the same meeting that priests should not pressure couples who were co-habiting if they were not ready to get married. He said the priests should “let fidelity ripen.”

What the Pope has said about marriage is equally valid for priests and religious who are committed to Jesus and to the people of God. Without long-time commitment and lasting fidelity, love – of God and of the neighbours – cannot bear fruit!

“The crisis of marriage is due to the fact that people don’t know what the sacrament is, the beauty of the sacrament, they don’t know that it is indissoluble, that it is for your entire life.”

Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ
Editor



Partnership of Men and Women in the Mission of the Church

*Kurien Kunnumpuram SJ
Christ Hall, Kozhikode, Kerala 673009*

This article begins with a brief exploration of the mission of the Church. It goes on to investigate the kind of Church that is necessary to effectively and credibly fulfil its mission. By way of conclusion it describes some of the steps we need to take in order to create such a Church.

1. There has been an evolution in our understanding of the Church's mission. For centuries Christians thought that the purpose of the Church's mission was the salvation of souls. This was to be achieved by the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, especially baptism. This was based on the belief that the Church was the only God-appointed means of salvation and that there was no salvation outside the Church.

Gradually it dawned on Christians that God can save human beings without the help of the Church. Hence there developed a new understanding of the mission of the Church. Now the purpose of the Church's mission was to plant the Church in places and among peoples who did not yet believe in Jesus Christ. This was probably based on the growing conviction that the Church was the universal sacrament of salvation, even for those who did not belong to the Church. Hence it was thought necessary to plant the Church in different places and among different peoples in order to make this sacrament of salvation available to all people.

Even this understanding of the mission of the Church changed. It became clear to many Christians that the world, and not the Church, was the object of God's love (see Jn 3: 16). In course of time a kingdom – centred approach to mission developed. And Vatican II accepted this approach. In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church the Council declared that the Church has received from Christ the mission to proclaim and establish the kingdom of God on earth.¹ As George Soares-Prabhu has shown, the kingdom of God is Jesus' vision of a new society characterized by freedom, fellowship and Justice.² Taking into account all that the New Testament says about the kingdom of God, I wish to state that the kingdom of God is a new human society which is consciously rooted in God, which is characterized by equality, freedom, love, justice and peace and which lives in harmony and communion with the cosmos. This society has a three-fold relationship – relationship with God, relationship with the cosmos and relationship among its members.

The Church's mission is to work for the establishment of such a society.

2.1 But only a just, egalitarian and participatory Church can credibly and effectively work for a just and egalitarian society. In fact, the Church is meant to be the sacrament of the kingdom. If the Church is not committed to the values of the kingdom – equality, freedom, justice and participatory decision making – how can it promote a new society?

The early church was just and egalitarian. Jesus gathered together a group of disciples and formed them into an unstructured community without any differentiation of rank or ministry. This was a community characterized by "radical freedom, radical equality, radical sharing and radical service".³ It was this community of disciples which with the coming of the Holy Spirit became the Church of Jesus Christ. That is why Pentecost is considered to be the birthday of the Church.

During the New Testament times the Church was understood as the new People of God. According to St. Paul, it was a fellowship in which all racial, social and sexual differences were eliminated (see Gal 3:26-28). What Paul asserts here is that in the Church there is no place for the oppositions that prevail in the rest of society. Besides, the Christian community does not tolerate “domination and structures of domination which are customary in society. In the community of brothers and sisters, no fathers (or mothers) are permitted. The rule of God does not imply the rule of humans”.⁴ Jesus is absolutely forthright in the rejection of domination (see Mk 10:42-45).

In this egalitarian Church there are varieties of charisms which blossom into diverse ministries. The Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Letters deal with them at some length (see Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:28-30; Eph 4:11-13). Gradually, the ministry of leadership emerges. But it is clearly understood that the leadership ministry, like all other ministries, is for the building up of persons and communities. Paul speaks of the authority “which the Lord gave for building you up and not tearing you down” (2 Cor 10:8; see also 1 Cor 13:10).

The early Christian leaders thought of themselves as ministers of Christ in the service of the people (see 2 Cor 4:5; 1 Cor 9:19). There was no question of their lording it over the community (see 1 Pt 5:1-5; 2 Cor 1:24). Jesus, the servant, was the model for all Christian ministers (see Matt 23:15-27; Mk 10:42-45; Jn 13:13-17). As E. Schillebeeckx has remarked:

According to Paul and the whole of the New Testament, at least within the Christian communities of believers, relationships involving subjection are no longer to prevail. We find this principle throughout the New Testament, and it was also to determine strongly the New Testament view of ministry. This early Christian egalitarian ecclesiology in no way excludes leadership and authority; but in that case, authority must be filled with the Spirit, from which no Christian, man or woman, is excluded, in principle, on the basis of the baptism of the Spirit.⁵

2.2 The early Church was also a participatory community. In the Apostolic times, when the nascent Church faced a serious problem it called together an assembly of the faithful. The twelve apostles served as a kind of “ruling council” which presided over the assembly and facilitated the process of decision-making (see Acts 6 and 15).⁶ When there was some confusion caused by the charismatics in the Church of Corinth, Paul asks not the leaders of the Church (in fact we do not know if there were any leaders at the time in Corinth) but the community to regulate the use of the gifts of the Spirit (See 1 Cor 14:26-32). The practice of participative decision-making continued after the New Testament times. In the third century, St Cyprian declared: “I have made it a rule, ever since the beginning of my episcopate, to make no decision merely on the strength of my own personal opinion without consulting you (the presbyters and the deacons), and without the approbation of the people.”⁷

3.1 However, in course of time several significant developments took place which led to the shaping of a Church which was not at all egalitarian and participatory.

An important change was the gradual acceptance of the idea that the clergy had Christ-given power to fulfil certain functions.⁸ Till the twelfth century, the Church had a sacramental, iconological view of ministry. This view was based on the idea that God and the celestial powers were actively involved in the earthly sphere. But gradually a ‘possession-of-power theory’ came to prevail. According to this theory, Christ at the beginning bestowed his power on the apostles who transmitted it to the bishops, who in their turn shared it with the priests and the deacons.

During the 19th century it became quite clear how the idea that priests possessed sacred power aggravated the clergy-laity divide. In a schema on the Church prepared for Vatican I we find this statement:

But the Church of Christ is not a community of equals in which all the faithful have the same rights. It is a society of unequals, not only because among the faithful some are clerics and some are laymen, but particularly because there is in the

Church the power from God whereby to some it is given to sanctify, teach and govern, and to others not.⁹

This draft was probably never discussed at the council. Its only value lies in this that it reveals the theology prevalent at that time.

3.2 A second development was the undue importance given to the hierarchy. As Yves Congar has remarked, in course of time ecclesiology became “hierarchology”, a theological discussion of the hierarchy of the Church.¹⁰ For several centuries Catholic theology tended to look upon the Church as an institution. It held what Avery Dulles calls the institutional model of the Church – “the view that defines the Church primarily in terms of its visible structures, especially the rights and powers of its officers”.¹¹ In the heyday of the Counter-Reformation Robert Bellarmine maintained that the Church is a society “as visible and palpable as the community of the Roman people, or the Kingdom of France, or the Republic of Venice”.¹² For him, the State served as an analogy for the Church. Bellarmine had an enormous influence on the development of ecclesiology down to our own day. On the eve of Vatican II, Abbot B.C. Butler asserted that the Church was an institution, a concrete historical society, having “a constitution, a set of rules, a governing body and a set of actual members who accept this constitution and these rules as binding on them...”¹³

4.1 Because of the existence in it of a hierarchical structure, the Church is not a just, egalitarian and participatory Church. There are more than a billion people in the Church, but just 6000 men (the bishops) make all the major decisions in Church.

Men and women who get socialized in this Church imbibe the values and attitudes embedded in the structures of the Church. They develop a false consciousness. According to the *Gender Policy of the Catholic Church*: “There is also an overt recognition that the participation and commitment of men is required to fundamentally alter the social and economic position of women. Such an approach further recognizes the impact of gender inequality on men in terms of adverse effects on their psyche, behaviour, interpersonal relations, lifestyles and health”.¹⁴ As a

result men come to believe that they have to oppress women in order to be real men.

And women feel that they are second class citizens in the Church and the State. Hence the first step in the liberation and empowerment of women is to transform the false consciousness of women and men.

4.2 There is also need to change the inegalitarian structures of the Church. Power sharing is an important step towards the transformation of these structures. In many ways women are rendered powerless in the Church. They have no say in the making of decisions that affect them. The General Assembly of CBCI acknowledged that “woman is considered in many ways inferior to man.” This was in 1979. In 1992 the General Assembly CBCI held in Pune stated: “With a sense of sorrow we must admit that women feel discriminated against even in the Church.”¹⁵

4.3 But positive steps have been taken by the universal Church and the Church in India to make it possible for men and women to collaborate in the mission of the Church as equal partners. Vatican II has affirmed, in unmistakable terms, the equality of all in the Church: “And if by the will of Christ some are made teachers, dispensers of mysteries and shepherds on behalf of others, yet all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Christ.”¹⁶ What the Council says is this: There are functional differences in the Church, but all are equal in their Christian dignity and their call to fulfil their Christian mission. Vatican II has also condemned every form of discrimination based on sex, race, colour or religion.¹⁷ Besides, the Council has recommended the establishment of Parish Councils and Pastoral Councils to make it possible for lay people to participate in the decision-making process in the Church.

The Church in India is also interested in the Church’s becoming a participatory community. In 1996, the meeting of the General Body of the CBCI stated: “We reiterate our sincere desire to improve and to perfect the movement towards a truly participatory Church where all sections of the People of God

revitalizing their baptismal grace fulfil their vocation and mission. The CBCI will then be a Body that gives witness to unity in mission, achieved with a diversity of roles. In this context we resolve to emphasize the importance of involving all sections of the Church, especially the laity, and reposing greater confidence in them”.¹⁸ The Church in India will have to set up structures and organs of participation, for without them the desire for a participative Church will remain just a pious wish. In the *Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India* (2010) the CBCI has enunciated nine guiding principles in which the Gender Policy is rooted. Two of these principles are relevant to us here. Let me quote them in full:


1. Gender just structures are imperative to facilitate the equality of opportunities and justice for all. This requires the establishment of women inclusive, participatory, accountable, transparent, efficient and sustainable structural mechanisms within the Church and society. Women must be a part of decision making and their contribution within the Church and society must be formally recognized. Women’s skills and needs must be taken into account so as to promote familial, economic, social, political and religious equality.¹⁹

2. Gender equality can only be achieved through equal partnership among and between women and men. Equal partnership goes beyond numbers. It involves women’s equal right to articulate their needs and interests as well as their vision of society and the Church and to shape the decisions that affect their lives.²⁰

If these principles lead to the creation of structures of active participation and a real partnership between men and women, then a new Church and a new society will soon emerge in our country.

Notes

1. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Rome, 1964, n.5.

2. G. Soares-Prabhu, "The Kingdom of God: Jesus' Vision of a New & Society" in F.X. D'Sa (ed.) *Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu*, Vol. 4, pp. 123-251.
3. G. Soares-Prabhu, "Radical Beginnings: The Jesus Community as the Archetype of the Church" in F.X. D'Sa (ed.) *Collected Writings of G. Soares-Prabhu*: Vol. 4, pp. 143-148.
4. G. Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, p.115.
5. E. Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face*, London: SCM Press, 1985, p. 39.
6. See R.E. Brown, *Priest and Bishop*, London: SCM Press, 1971, pp. 58-59.
7. As quoted by Y. Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965, p. 43.
8. See Y. Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1964, p. 62.
9. As quoted by A. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1974, p. 35.
10. See *Ibidem* p. 33
11. A. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, p. 31.
12. As quoted by A. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, p. 31.
13. As quoted by A. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, p. 31.
14. CBCI, *The Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India*, Delhi, 2010, pp. 1-2.
15. *Ibid.* p. 9.
16. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Rome, 1964, n. 32.
17. Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Rome, 1965, n. 9.
18. CBCI, *Evaluation Report: Response of the General Body*, New Delhi, 1996, n. 7.
19. CBCI, *The Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India*, pp. 12-13
20. *Ibid.* p. 13 



Blessed Are the Merciful

+ Filipe Neri Ferrão

Archbishop of Goa and Daman

As we are in the Year of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, proclaimed by our Pope Francis, it is proper and fitting to reflect on the theme “Blessed are the Merciful.”

This theme brings to my mind a touching incident which took place some time between 1979 and 1982. During this period, the Chief of the Naval Staff in India was a Catholic, Admiral Ronald Pereira, and the Prime Minister of our country was Mrs. Indira Gandhi, a powerful woman feared by everyone. Adm. Pereira had been called for a meeting with the Prime Minister. His secretary, Capt. Sen, saw to every detail of the Admiral’s schedule, so that they would reach the PM’s office in time. As their car was speeding through the streets of the Capital, the Admiral noticed a young man staggering on the footpath, with an elderly person on his back. He ordered the driver to stop, got out of the car and asked the youth: “where are you going with this elderly man on your back?” The youngster replied: “I am carrying my father to the hospital. He is seriously ill and I cannot afford a taxi. We are poor.” Adm. Pereira told his secretary: “we’ll take them to the hospital.” Capt. Sen protested, saying: “if you take them to the hospital, you will be late for the appointment with the PM and she will be angry.” The Admiral did not heed his protesting and helped both the father and the son into his car. When they reached the hospital, the Admiral

helped the young man to carry his old and sick father along. The hospital staff and authorities looked dazed when they saw this dashing Admiral in his medal-studded blazing uniform bringing this haggard-looking old man and were wondering who he could possibly be. Once he had kept the old man on the bed, he told the doctors and nurses: “he is my relative; take good care of him. I will come again to inquire about his health.” He then went for his appointment and, expectedly, he was late for about 15 minutes. The Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, did not say a word. Probably she came to know, from her intelligence officials, that the Admiral had gone out of his way to help a poor old sick person on his way to her office. Some time later, Capt. Sen, recalling what his Admiral had done for that poor, old person, wrote: “I learnt on that day an unforgettable lesson in Christian compassion and mercy.”

In the Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis states, right at the start, that “Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s Mercy.”

In the book of Exodus, we hear how God reveals his name to Moses as “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Ex 34: 6-7a). Having shown his mercy in many ways and through various prophets, God finally revealed his compassion to us perfectly through His Son Jesus. Pope Francis in *Misericordiae Vultus* (MV) says: “Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions and his entire person reveals the mercy of God” (MV 1). “Everything in Jesus speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion” (MV 8). In the Beatitudes, Jesus says: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk.10: 25-37), Jesus imparts to us a rich and powerful message on mercy. As we heard, a lawyer approaches Jesus and confronts him with a question: “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus asks him: “What is written in the Law?” He answers: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and love your neighbour as yourself.” And Jesus told him: “You have answered right; do this and you will live.”

We see that Jesus and the lawyer agree that both – the love of God and of the neighbour – are necessary. However, in order to justify himself, the lawyer further asks Jesus: “And who is my neighbour?” In fact, at the time of Jesus, various religious groups in Palestine used to debate these two central questions about the law of Moses: (i) which is the most important commandment of the law and (ii) who is the neighbour whom one must love. Is it my brother, my relative, my friend, any stranger or even my enemy? At that point, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, which we have just heard.

There are three individuals who pass that side and see the victim of the robbers, who had left him terribly wounded and half dead:

A Priest was going down that road; when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. According to the law of Moses, if he had to touch a dead person, he would be rendered impure, unable to offer service in the temple. The first concern of the priest was cultic purity.

The Levite who saw him, did the same; he was afraid the fallen man might be pretending to be injured and that it could all be a plot; “his companions may attack me and I may become their victim,” he said to himself. “I had better avoid unnecessary trouble!” His major concern was his personal safety.

Finally, a Samaritan, who was journeying, came to where the wounded man was, and when he saw him, he had compassion, just as the Father of the Prodigal Son had compassion when he saw his son coming back to him: a compassion that wells up from the depth of one’s being. The Samaritan showed his compassion concretely through his deeds: he went close to the wounded man, bound up his wounds, poured oil and wine on

them, put him on his own beast, brought him to an inn and took care of him; the next day, he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper saying: “Take care of him and, when I return, I will repay you any extra expenses you may have.” His one concern was true charity.

That Samaritan put all that he had -- his time, his energy, his talents, his money, his animal, his oil and wine -- at the service of an unknown stranger. And Jesus asks the lawyer: “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a ‘neighbour’ to the man who fell among the robbers?” He replied: “The one who showed mercy to him.” And Jesus said: “Go and do likewise.” Go and be merciful like him and you will be truly blessed.

At the beginning of the parable, the “neighbour” appeared to be the victim of the robbers. But there is a shift of focus. The final question is about “who proved to be a neighbour” to the wounded man. While others failed, it is the travelling Samaritan who shows himself to be the true “neighbour.” It is, therefore, we who are called to be neighbours to others.

What does this parable teach us? Who is the Good Samaritan?

First and foremost, Jesus, the Son of God, makes himself a Good Samaritan to the entire humanity and to each one of us. We are injured and wounded in so many ways: by our sin, by our selfishness, our fears, our weaknesses, failings and infidelities. We also see that, during his life and ministry, Jesus made himself a Good Samaritan to so many persons, like Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman, the tax-collectors, the lepers, the sick, the poor, the blind, the deaf, the sinners, etc.


Every baptized disciple of Jesus is called to be a Good Samaritan (good neighbour) to others, especially to the needy, the weak, the poor, the fallen, those who offend us and are hostile to us. The great challenge before us, therefore, is to make ourselves “a neighbour” to others, to show mercy and to put all our gifts at their service.

In a special way, we priests, consecrated men and women and seminarians are called to be Good Samaritans in our life, our attitudes, our ministry, by being witnesses of the mercy of Jesus. In fact, Pope Francis, while commissioning the Missionaries of Mercy, exhorted them

“As we enter the confessional, we should always remember that it is Christ who welcomes, it is Christ who listens, it is Christ who forgives, it is Christ who gives peace. We are his ministers and we ourselves are always in need of being forgiven by him.”

to render present in their life, and particularly in their confessional ministry, the motherhood of the Church. He said: “We are called to be the living expressions of the Church that, as Mother, receives anyone who approaches her, knowing that, through her, he is inserted in Christ. As we enter the confessional, we should always remember that it is Christ who welcomes, it is Christ who listens, it is Christ who forgives, it is Christ who gives peace. We are his ministers and we ourselves are always in need of being forgiven by him.”

Let us pray that during this Academic/Formation Year we may all learn to grow in Jesus’ school of mercy and thus prepare ourselves to become shepherds after the mind and heart of Jesus, the compassionate Shepherd of us all. Amen.

Adapted from the Homily at the Inaugural Mass of the new Academic Year at the Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune (06.06.2016). 



God Who Is Rich in Mercy (Eph 2:4): Mercy in the Bible

Paulraj Mariapushpam

Papal Seminary, Pune 411014

We have already entered the second half of the Jubilee Year of Mercy declared by Pope Francis which commenced on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, 08 December, 2015 marking the 50th anniversary of the closing of Vat II, and which will conclude on 20 November, 2016 with the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. This Jubilee Year of Mercy has already initiated a renewed awareness and a reawakening about the nature and the mission of the Church. Since a few months most of the members of the Church are relentlessly deliberating and meditating on 'mercy' and it has become the central theme of many of the seminars, recollections and retreats, essays and books, and gatherings and conventions in the various institutions of the Church. One can already observe a sense of urgency with which all these deliberations are made. A number of the members of the Church are also curious to know what this mercy implies and are prepared to take every effort to register and not to miss out any important news or view that is expressed in ecclesial circles. We know that such a 'hype' about mercy is due to the declaration of the Jubilee Year of Mercy by Pope of Francis. In this essay we wish to reflect on God's mercy as it comes across to us in the Biblical revelation.

1 **The Human Situation**

The problem of contemporary human society in general as much as the society's belief in God is concerned looks to me to be one of 'complacency,' an attitude similar to the 'lukewarm-ness' of people spoken of in Rev 3:15-18. In these verses the Christians of the Church of Laodicea are being criticized for being neither hot nor cold. Their real problem is one of assumed self-sufficiency (v 18)¹ that has made them callous. I personally feel that the situation today is not much different from that of the Laodicean community then. This is evident from the indecisiveness and the ambiguity that rule the roost today. Most of the human beings who are better off go through their daily routine as if there is no need of any change in the order of life. They are indifferent to the great challenges of today such as profit-oriented market, achievement based entrepreneurs, adaptability or conformity promoting education system that stunts every human creativity and anonymity at different walks of life which have reduced the human beings to mere "resourceful animals, which can find enjoyment only in material things."² This complacency is only an external manifestation of the deep-rooted selfishness which is the opposite of love and which promotes un-love. In such a world dominated by complacency, selfishness and un-love, a kind of void or emptiness³ is created with less and less people getting interested in doing service to others and in involving themselves for the sake of others. The external and apparent peace and harmony of today's world order is conceiting, because such a harmony is built on a culture of indifference and unresponsiveness.

Pope Francis seems to have grasped the seriousness of this situation and has appropriately and promptly responded by drawing the attention of everyone to one of the most important aspects of God, namely that he is merciful and by inviting the Church to become a 'mother' and a 'shepherdess.'⁴ The same point is also stressed by the Pope in *Evangelii Gaudium* 114:

“The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel.”⁵ The recent visit of Pope Francis to the migrant camp in the Greek island Lesbos in April this year to highlight the humanitarian crisis is a concretization of this message of mercy the Pope intends to drive home in the hearts of his contemporaries.

The situation of humanitarian crisis on the one hand and a culture of indifference and unresponsiveness on the other makes it very challenging first of all to talk of a God at all and secondly to talk of him as one who is merciful and kind. It looks as if a number of human beings do not just want to engage themselves in any kind of discourse on God, let alone in a discussion on the nature of God as merciful. Still worse is the scandalous behaviour of those who claim to be religious or have opted for a religious life, but who live as if they never believed in God. In such a complacent situation, it is not easy to believe that God exists. Even more difficult is to believe in a God who is gracious and ‘rich in mercy’ (Eph 2:4), who consoles us so that we too can console others (2 Cor 1:3-4) and who alone can establish a new beginning and give us a new hope, courage, strength and lead us to new life (Rev 21:4-5).⁶

2 The Merciful Father

2.1 Mercy and God

Before we turn our attention to enquiring how mercy is related to God let us try and understand the meaning of the term ‘mercy.’⁷ Quoting the *Summa Theologica* (I-II, q. 66, a. 4-6; q. 108, a.1) in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* 37, Pope Francis makes the following assertion: “... as far as external works are concerned, mercy is the greatest of all the virtues.”⁸ This assertion is made in the context of a discussion on the ‘hierarchy’ of virtues in the moral teachings of the

Church. It becomes clear from the context of the Exhortation that mercy is considered to be the same as the ‘works of love’ mentioned by Paul in Gal 5:6.⁹ In this verse ‘love’ is seen as a necessary expression of the ‘faith’ one has in Jesus Christ. By equating mercy with the works of love, Pope Francis is actually qualifying mercy as the ‘Christian’ way of relating to one’s neighbor. Thus, mercy is neither a virtue nor a quality, but the right relationship one has with another.

In the Bible ‘mercy’ is normally considered to be one of the divine attributes. Like every other divine attribute this is said to describe one of God’s qualities as revealed by himself.¹⁰ However mercy is something more than a mere attribute; it expresses the inner being or the nature of God. We shall expand more on this later in this essay when we study Ex 34:6.

Sometimes ‘mercy’ of God is also understood negatively as ‘not expressing wrath or anger’ which is what the human beings actually deserve. It means that though the human beings deserve only wrath and punishment due to their infidelity and disobedience, still God deals with them ‘mercifully’ by withholding his anger or wrath. Though it is true that it is the mercy of God which prevents him from punishing human beings, still it is not merely a negative force. Much more, the mercy of God expresses positively the inner nature of God which relentlessly seeks to ‘save’ humanity by forgiving, accepting and receiving.

2.2 Biblical Terminology Clarified

As said earlier (cf. ref. no. 7) here we are concerned about the concept of mercy and not merely about the term mercy. When we look for the biblical terminology for this concept of mercy we come across more than one Hebrew and Greek word which can be translated as ‘mercy.’ Again the Hebrew or the Greek word which is translated as ‘mercy’ can also be rendered by

other English words. This problematic becomes clear when we proceed analyzing the terminology for mercy in the Bible.

2.2.1 In the Old Testament

There are a number of terms that are used in the Old Testament which can be translated as ‘mercy.’ The most frequent among them is **He^osed** which is translated by various terms like loving-kindness, mercy, love, loyalty and faithfulness¹¹ and implies some kind of mutuality and dependency in marriage (cf. Gen 20:13) or in friendship (cf. 1 Sam 20:8.14-15). Further, the one who exercises **He^osed**, that is, the one who practices mercy or love or faithfulness, is not obliged to do so, but does it out of generosity (cf. Gen 19:19; 24:12; 40:14). The LXX translates this term by *eleos* and the Latine *Vulgata* by *misericordia*.¹²

The other most important Hebrew word that refers to mercy is **raHûm** or its plural **raû-mîm** which is not easy to translate. However this term is related to **re^oHem** which refers to womb or the maternal bosom and implies umbilical relationships between parents, children and siblings (cf. 1 Kg 3:26; Am 1:11). Womb or belly indicates genuine emotional state and is often best rendered by mercy or pity which is exhibited toward those who have suffered misfortune or those who, like children, are helpless.¹³ It is tenderness that translates itself into action on the occasion of a tragic event (Ps 106:45) or pardon of offence (Deut 9:9).¹⁴ Thus this term refers to compassion and deeply felt love for those who undergo undeserved suffering. It expresses the ‘instinctive attachment of one being for another.’

In the texts of the Old Testament where this term **raHûm** or its cognates occur, Yahweh is compared with parents who show mercy (cf. Ps 103:1:3 “*As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him*”). In this passage and passages like Is 63:7 and Jer 31:20 which affirm that the Lord has shown his gracious deeds

according to his mercy and according to the abundance of his steadfast love, this term **raHûm** occurs alone or along with **He^osed** and is associated with it. These two are also supposed to be exhibited by the Israelites in their relationships to each other (cf. Zech 7:9: *Thus says the LORD of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another;*) and the Psalmist appeals to these attributes of God while praying for forgiveness (cf. Ps 25:6: *Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old*).

Most frequently the term **He^osed** is related to the covenant (Ex 20:6; 34:6) and serves as the reason as to why the Lord remains faithful to the covenant. Here God's exercise of **He^osed** appears to be conditioned by the fidelity of Israel to his commandments but at the same time it should be noted that it is this **He^osed** of Yahweh to which the people of Israel appeal to receive forgiveness. Sometimes **He^osed** also marks the movement of the will of Yahweh which initiates and sustains the history of Israel (Is 54:10: *For the mountains may go away and the hills may totter, but my faithful love will never leave you, my covenant of peace will never totter, says Yahweh who takes pity on you*. Cf. Is 55:3; 63:7; Jer 31:3; 33:11; Mic 7:20; Ps 85:8; 90:14; 100:5; 106:1). All these passages demonstrate that the entire dealing of Yahweh with Israel is based on **He^osed**. (The covenantal context of Ex 34:6 has also the term **Hannûn** which refers to 'grace' or 'favour' and implies a gift, cf. Gen 39:4).

The term **He^osed** is associated with a few other Hebrew words. It is associated with **émet** which signifies solidity, steadfastness, loyalty and when both these terms are joined they signify 'dependability.' Sometimes this term is also associated with **mišPäṭ** which signifies justice (cf. Hos 12:6) and other times with **cüdüqâ** which signifies righteousness (cf. Jer 9:23). **He^osed** is further associated with **y^ešû`ä** and **šälôm** which signify salvation and peace (cf. Ps 13:6; 85:10; Jer 16:5).

In spite of the different terms used for mercy in the Old Testament all of them oscillate between mercy and love which would also include other meanings of pity, compassion, tenderness, clemency and goodness. In the Old Testament mercy has to be understood as “meeting of two streams of thought, compassion and fidelity.”¹⁵

2.2.2 In the New Testament

In the Gospels the Greek root that is commonly translated into English by mercy is *elee*¹⁶ and its cognate terms *eleos* and *eleein*. In the canticles of Luke (cf. Lk 1:50.54.58.72.78) this term mercy refers to the covenantal faithfulness of the Lord.¹⁷ In Lk 1:78 the word *eleos* occurs along with another word for mercy, namely, *splanchna* which actually refers to bowels and expresses the idea of feelings. The verbal form of *splanchna* is *splanchnizomai* which means to be moved in one’s bowels / womb / inward parts (cf. Mt 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Mk 1:41; 6:34; 8:2; Lk 7:13). This word actually refers to the compassion of Jesus for the helpless and caressed people, especially in the compassionate activities of Jesus such as giving sight to the blind, cleansing the leper, teaching the ignorant, feeding the hungry and raising the dead (cf. Mt 20:34; 15:32; Mk 8:2; Lk 7:13). The third term *oiktirmos* which is also translated as mercy is rare in the New Testament (cf. Phil 2:1; Lk 6:36; Col 3:12; Rom 12:1; 2 Cor 1:3; Heb 10:28; Jas 5:11).

Thus both the Old and the New Testaments have a number of words which could be translated in English by words which refer to the concept of mercy. As we can already guess, mercy in the Bible is intimately related to the way God deals with the human beings and it remains the real reason as to why God creates and saves the whole of cosmos including humanity. And in this sense it is also related to the grace and the love of God. In the succeeding section we shall change our focus from terminology to the different illustrations¹⁸ of God the Father as the merciful one.

2.3 Merciful God, the Father

2.3.1 Merciful Liberator

Throughout the Old Testament we see the people of Israel appealing to God's mercy. The foundation to all these appeals seems to be the Exodus experience. We read in Ex 2:23c-25: *"Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. ²⁴ God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ²⁵ God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them."* It is interesting to note that the people do not necessarily cry to the Lord, that is, the Lord is not at all the addressee to the cry of the people of Israel in Ex 2:23. The text only says that the Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. And then the text continues saying that 'their cry rose up to God.' Thus the cry was not directed towards God, still God hears this cry for help and reacts positively to liberate them in Ex 2:24-25.¹⁹ Even in the call narrative of Moses the thrust is on the 'seeing' of Yahweh. It is he who 'sees' and 'hears' the cry of the people (cf. Ex 3:7). This seeing of Yahweh is not limited only to the chosen people of Israel. Already in Gen 16:13 we come across the 'seeing' concern of Yahweh, when Tamar names the Lord who spoke to her in her distress as 'El-roi,' that is, God who 'sees.'

Thus, the mercy shown by God to the people of Israel at the time of Exodus is so great that it naturally bursts out into a song of praise in Ex 15:1-21 which expresses the faith of Israel in the form of a cultic hymn and in Deut 6:20-23 (cf. Deut 26:5-9; Josh 24:2-13) which also expresses the same faith of Israel in the form of a creedal formula. Both Ex 15 and Deut 6 proclaim Yahweh as the liberator God who liberates the people of Israel out of his own 'mercy.'

2.3.2 Mercy is His Name (Nature)

God does not only show mercy, but he is mercy. Above all we find it in Ex 34:6 which occurs in the context of the breaching of the covenant by the people of Israel by worshipping the golden calf (Ex 32:1-6) which arouses the anger of Yahweh (Ex 32:7-11). After the people commit this sin of worshipping the golden calf, Moses attempts more than once to ‘negotiate’ with God on behalf of the people (Ex 32:30-33:6; 33:12-34:3) because he could speak to God as a friend (cf. Ex 33:7-11). Our text occurs as part of the preparation for the renewal of the covenant which is described in Ex 34:10-28). This is a special text because it contains almost all the Hebrew terms which point to the mercy of God and seems to reveal the inner nature or the being of Yahweh. It is also of great importance to note that this text is spoken by Yahweh himself even after the people have sinned against him.

Ex 34:6-7: ⁶*The LORD passed before him (Moses), and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God **merciful / compassionate and gracious / friendly, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.*** ⁷*keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.*

Here the Lord himself calls his name, not just once but twice²⁰ which indicates that the situation here is crucial and essential for the continuation of the relationship between God and the people. And this is succeeded by five adjectives (merciful, gracious, slow to anger, kind and faithful) and two activities (keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation and forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin) which express the essence of God.²¹ That this text also

includes the idea of a punishing God (the second half of v 7) indicates that the human beings still remain accountable to the sins committed. With the fact that the Lord will allow the consequences of sin to follow the sinner unto the fourth generation, this text only demonstrates the seriousness of sin. However, the Lord's

The Lord's mercy continues unto the thousandth generation not just unto the fourth one as in the case of punishment. Thus, what prevails ultimately is not the anger of God but his mercy.

mercy continues unto the thousandth generation not just unto the fourth one as in the case of punishment. Thus, what prevails ultimately is not the anger of God but his mercy. Especially at this crucial point which marks a turning point in the life of the people of Israel when they have committed a grave sin the Lord shows himself as merciful and forgives their iniquity and renews the covenant he had made with them. There are a number of texts in the Old Testament that pick up the theme of God's mercy found in Ex 34:6 and repeat it at least partially (cf. Ps 85:10; 86:5; 130:3-4; Jer 16:5).

That God is merciful is attested not only by the story of Exodus, but both before and after Exodus we have a number of incidents which present God as merciful. We read in Gen 3:21 that the Lord God made garments of skin for the man and for his wife

and clothed them. Even Cain who was guilty of fratricide is shown mercy by God through the assurance of protection (cf. Gen 4:15). And after the great flood continuation of existence is guaranteed both for the human beings and for the cosmos (cf. Gen 8:23; 9:1-6).

N.B.: The second part of this essay will be continued in the next issue.

-
- ¹ That the people of Laodicea were economically well-off is clear from the description of its wealth we find in Ford J. Massyngberde, *Revelation* (Anchor Bible 38; Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), 418-420.
- ² Cardinal Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life* (Paulist Press: New Jersey, 2014), 22.
- ³ Jürgen Habermas calls such a void as ‘resignation’ or ‘defeatism’ which is found even among those who are supposed to be philosophical and reflective. Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *Glauben und Wissen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2001), 27-28.
- ⁴ In an interview to *America* on 30th September 2013, pope Francis said, “I dream of a Church that is a mother and shepherdess. The Church’s ministers must be merciful, take responsibility for the people and accompany them like the good Samaritan, who washes, cleans and raises up his neighbour. This is pure Gospel.” He said it stressing on the Church’s “ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful.”
- ⁵ Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel* (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2013), 92.
- ⁶ Cardinal Walter Kasper, *Mercy*, 24.
- ⁷ In this essay ‘mercy’ is considered to be a concept and this concept can be expressed by more than one English word like compassion, sympathy or loving kindness etc.
- ⁸ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 36.
- ⁹ This verse Gal 5:6 expresses, in my opinion, Paul’s most complete understanding of religion, namely as ‘faith working through love.’

-
- ¹⁰ The term ‘attribute’ can be misleading as it implies a quality or characteristic assigned to God by human beings. In fact the divine attributes that we find in the Bible are a matter of what God reveals himself to be and not mere humanly assigned characteristics. Cf. Colin Gunton, *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003), 9.
- ¹¹ Anthony J. Saldarini, “Mercy,” *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary* ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 674.
- ¹² John L. McKenzie, S.J., *Dictionary of the Bible* (Bangalore: ATC, 1976), 565.
- ¹³ McKenzie, *Dictionary*, 566.
- ¹⁴ Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (London: Burns & Oates, 1988), 351.
- ¹⁵ Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary*, 351.
- ¹⁶ D. J. Williams, “Mercy,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* eds. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, I. Howard Marshall (Illinois: IVP, 1992), 541.
- ¹⁷ Williams, “Mercy,” 542.
- ¹⁸ In the different stories of the Old Testament which demonstrate God as the merciful one, the terms which refer to mercy may not occur at all. Yet we could still speak of the mercy of the Lord, because the context and the content of these stories refer directly to one or the other merciful act of God.
- ¹⁹ Cf. Georg Fischer and Knut Backhaus, *Beten* (Die Neue Echter Bibel Themen 14; Würzburg: Echter, 2009), 15.
- ²⁰ Such calling of the name twice is found only in the case of Abraham in Gen 22:11-13, of Jacob in Gen 46:1-4, of Moses in Ex 3:1-10, of Samuel in 1 Sam 3:1-10, of Martha in Lk 10:38-42, of Simon in Lk 22:31-32 and Saul in Acts 9:4. Ps 22 also addresses God as: ‘my God, my God.’
- ²¹ Cf. Georg Fischer, Dominik Markl, *Das Buch Exodus* (Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar Altes Testament; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2009), 356-357.



An Interview with Fr Prem Kumar SJ

Indian Jesuit Fr Alexis Prem Kumar SJ, 47, has been released by the Taliban after eight months in captivity in February 2015. Fr Prem had worked for three years as Afghanistan country director for Jesuit Refugee Service in Herat province when he was abducted by gunmen in June 2, 2014. An interview with him, when he visited Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune.

AJRS: Can you please share something about your experience of captivity in Afghanistan?

I was there in Afghanistan since 2011; was kidnapped on 2nd June 2014 and released on 22nd February 2015. I was in captivity for 8 months and 20 days. It was really an unexpected event. I was almost speechless when they kidnapped me. They gave me some hope about my release on the evening of the first day in captivity but it never happened. I stayed at 9 different locations. Just as any human being, I too didn't like the captivity. I would not like anybody to undergo this captivity. Each and every moment, I wanted to be free. After a month, one morning when I was weeping on thinking of my fate that I had chains both in my hands and legs most of the time of the day,

the guard asked me why I was weeping and I mentioned him about my longing for the release. He told that I would be released in 4 days. That night, I had a strange dream in which I saw the number 256, which became a consoling factor later. There was the festival of Ramadan and the feast of St. Ignatius in the month of July. I was hoping for my release during those times, which didn't happen. All through my captivity, I was doing the Spiritual Exercises. The expectation and eagerness of my release got subsided over a period of time and I surrendered myself to God. Another interesting aspect was that they gave me a radio and I used to listen to Vatican Radio on it.

The incidents that took place in June, August, October and January helped me live the life of captivity in hope. At the end of June, they told me that there was a talk between the 'Taliban' of India and the Taliban of Afghanistan to release me. In August, on the 100th day of captivity, I heard from the Vatican Tamil Radio program, Ms. Sushma Swaraj, the external affairs Minister saying that I was safe in Afghanistan. In October, two higher officials of the Taliban took my video interview to start the negotiations with JRS or whoever was interested in my release. In the middle of January, they informed that the negotiation was going on well and I would be free in three weeks. As soon as they talked about my possible release, the number 256 suddenly popped before my mind; February 12th, 2015 was the 256th day of my captivity, which was the 2nd death anniversary of my mother. I used to ask my mother for her intercession as she was in heaven. Then I was sure of my release on that day. But it took 10 more days. When I was doing my spiritual exercises, I used to do the colloquy (dialogue) with Mother Mary. She used to tell me to talk to my mother. Thus the captivity was also a time of a long interaction with my mother. Though my life in captivity was a physical and psychological struggle but it was a spiritually consoling experience.

AJRS: Can you elaborate on some of your consoling and challenging encounters?

I would rephrase it as one consoling person and a challenging person. I had a cook named Obeida, who used to come and sit with me after his work and shout and yell at me. I was scared of him. When I was shifted to the 5th location, another person named Ahajan came. It was a miracle and the most consoling experience. He was a God sent man, who showed compassion. He trimmed my moustaches, gave warm clothes during winter and treated the boils on my leg with various local things. He even gave me saline. He was gentle with everybody. He was the personification of goodness. Even I imagined (and I told) him that if freedom returned to Afghanistan, I would be happy to work with him for the people.

The challenging person was Bismillah. He wouldn't allow me to call him by name as he thought I would pollute his name. One day, I touched his water can and he threw the water away. He treated me like an untouchable. He was my guard for a majority of time during captivity from September. When he went for holidays, it was like heaven even in captivity. He wouldn't give me enough time even to go to the toilet, made me work and wash his clothes. I later understood his character, he was a servant in the Taliban and he wanted to be a master over me. Once I realized it, I was completely at ease with him. He was the only one who could understand my language. When I listened to Vatican Radio, I heard a talk of Fr Arul Selvan SJ (my novice master), who spoke about the Jesus prayer. I started using the prayer (Jesus, my savior) when he was torturing me and this gave me peace and finally we became quite good friends. Thus, Jesus prayer helped me to make the most challenging person also my friend.

AJRS: How did your mission as a priest evolve during this challenging time?

In the morning I used to do the Spiritual Exercises. I could manage to do the Spiritual Exercises 3 times. In the afternoon, I used to say Holy Mass without bread and wine, but it was very enriching and a meaningful experience. I used the scriptural reflections which I heard in the morning on the Vatican radio for my mass and I used to give sermons too. Two passages struck me a lot; first was the healing of the paralytic man and the second was the annunciation. It gave me tremendous hope. In the beginning I was thinking I was suffering more than Jesus. I felt I was alone in my suffering unlike some people being present in the suffering of Jesus. Later I realized my mistake or my wrong reasoning. After sometime only my suffering was the focus and I used to pray for my own release. I felt that this was also wrong. Then finally I realized that my freedom is linked with the freedom of the suffering humanity. Then I used to pray for the suffering humanity including myself. I thank God that there were enough days in my captivity for this realization. Ultimately a priest is meant for the people; that realization helped to surrender everything to God and not to be worried too much about myself.

AJRS: How has this experience strengthened your ministry?

When I worked hard in Afghanistan, nobody knew me. Now I became a well known person [laughs]. I am happy that so many prayed for me as I was a Jesuit working in JRS. Now I have got a new life, and I have to be more responsible. Though some told me to come back to the Madurai Province, I realized working with JRS is a response of my greater responsibility. I am grateful. I work presently as the assistant director of JRS South Asia. Though it is not good to go back to Afghanistan now, I would be happy to say at least a good bye to my students and staff who prayed for me and struggled for me. Now I work in Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu; it is a very tough situation. The Tamils in Sri Lanka and the Sri Lankan refugees in India look for a

bright future; they don't have a right political answer to their more than half a century struggle. They are treated as secondary citizens. I am happy to be a part of their struggle.

AJRS: Can you please elaborate the works of Jesuits and collaborators in Afghanistan?

After I was kidnapped, Jesuits stopped all the activities to put the pressure. But we realized after a month that children were suffering. So we again began the activities. We didn't stop any of the activities including the school from where I was kidnapped (though with some changes). We work in four provinces of Afghanistan. We teach English and computer in all four provinces, run a school at Sohadat, a returnee township and help a local NGO to run a school for the Hazara community who are backward and yet show a lot of interest in Education in Herat province, conduct capacity building program at the Blind School in Kabul province and organize Konkur (eligibility test for university) programs in Bamyan and Daikundi provinces. I like to mention two important programs of JRS Afghanistan.

First is about Training Leaders for Tomorrow (TLT) program. We had a 2 year English program from 2009 to 2011 for 60 girls to capacitate and empower them. As we left after 2 years (as project was over), local staff took it up and they taught them free of cost for a few months. Then we supported them, and gave them a 2nd level of education including personality development, leadership, media awareness etc in 2011. Another interesting component of this program was 'Each one teach some'. From 45 students who participated in the 2nd level program, we selected 22 as our staff and now we have a program called 'Training Leaders for Tomorrow' by them since 2012 and the motto is 'Each one teach Twenty'. Continuous commitment and constant involvement provides greater yields.

Another important work is JCHEMA (Jesuit Common Higher Education at Margins). It happens all over the JRS world, where higher education opportunities are given to the people at

margins. They get diploma degrees. We want to create linkages with more Indian colleges and universities so that they can have more opportunities for online and onsite education. We do many other programs depending on the need of the hour.

AJRS: Your message on the year of mercy!

For this I take the triple mission of JRS. In today's context, mercy is an important aspect. For refugees, loss of kith and kin during war gives formidable pain and so they need **accompaniment**. Today the church has plenty of human and financial resources. When we do lots of **services**, we should ask whether our services are reaching the poor and are we in touch with them. We have got plenty of skills; we should use them for networking and **advocacy** and to challenge the policy makers. I don't think all need to be in the field with the poor but all need to be for the poor even if they hold key positions; some need to be there at the top level to change the government to become pro poor. In today's war economy, church should advocate to end wars so that refugees won't be born. So I plead to all of you to take this triple mission of JRS seriously, i.e. **Accompaniment, Service and Advocacy**. According to me, it would make the year of Mercy much more meaningful for all of us.

By Br Arun CST, on behalf of *AJRS*



Homily Notes

July 3, 2016: XIV Week of Ordinary Sunday
Is 66:10-14c; Gal 6:14-18; Lk 10:1-12;17-20

Peace to this House

This passage of sending the seventy - describes a wider mission than the first mission of the twelve. Seventy two is a symbolic number. In the book of Numbers, seventy two elders were chosen to help Moses in the wilderness Num 11; 16-17; 24-25). It was the number of the Sanhedrin, the supreme council of the Jews. And thirdly, it was held to be the number of nations in the world. Luke was the man with the universalist view and it may well be that he was thinking of the day when every nation in the world would know and love his Lord.

The one and the only mission of the Seventy two was to proclaim the Kingdom of God, i.e. peace and love. All the religions have tried to establish peace in the world from the time immemorial. It is said that human history can be traced back to 3400 years and about 3166 years, the humans had been engaged in war and the remaining 234 years, occupied in preparation to the war. There was never a so called year of peace. The war was very common at the time of Jesus as well. Therefore Jesus emphasizes that the chosen ones must go to the whole world proclaiming peace to each and every human being. In order to make this ministry a successful one. He gives some guidelines in today's gospel. They are as following.

The preacher must not be cluttered up with the material things – It is easy to get entangled with the material things of this life and to lose the sight of the mission for which one is sent.

The preacher should concentrate on his task – He must not spend time in greeting others. It is not an instruction to discourtesy rather it means that the

man of God must not turn aside or linger on the lesser things while the greater things call him/her.

The preacher must not be in the work for what he can get out of it – He is to eat what is put before him and must not move house to house seeking better and more comfortable quarters.

The preacher should not be proud of his abilities – This was the very reason why the arch-angel was thrown out of heaven – the presence of God. It will always remain true that a man's greatest glory is not what he has done but what God has done for him.

Jesus further instructs them that whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house". God is the source of peace and therefore only God can grant us the true peace. Thus says the Lord, "I will extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees" (Is 66:12). St. Paul prays for the Galatians, "As for those who will follow this rule – peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israeli of God" (Gal 6:16).

-Dn. Vikas Jason Mathias

July 10, 2016: XV Sunday of Ordinary Time

Deut 30:10-14 Col 1:15-20 Luk 10:25-37

Neighbours Without Borders

Catherine Booth, co-founder with her husband William Booth of the Salvation Army, was an electrifying preacher. Wherever she went, crowds of people went to hear her message of hope: princes and nobles, beggars and homeless people. One night, after preaching in a certain city, a certain well-placed lady invited Mrs. Booth to dinner. The lady's words of welcome as she arrived were: "My dear Mrs. Booth, that meeting was dreadful." "What do you mean, dear?" asked Mrs. Booth. "Oh, when you were speaking, I was looking at those people opposite to me. Their faces were so terrible, many of them. I don't think I shall sleep tonight!" "Why, dear, don't you know them?" Mrs. Booth asked. "Certainly not!" the hostess replied. "Well, that is interesting," Mrs. Booth said. "I did not bring them with me from London; they are your neighbours!"

The Golden Rule, "**Love your neighbour as yourself**" (Luke 10:27) which we hear in today's gospel is not just a Christian thing. Every conceivable religion and culture in the world has the Golden Rule in one form or another. Here is a sampling:

Judaism: "What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow man. That is the law: all the rest is commentary."

Islam: "No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself."

Hinduism: "This is the sum of duty: do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you."

Buddhism: "Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful."

Confucianism: "Do not unto others what you would not have them do unto you."

If the Golden Rule was so well-known in ancient cultures why then did Jesus spend so much time teaching it as if it was a new thing? It is because Jesus taught a completely new understanding of the commandment. The Golden Rule is understood differently in different religions and cultures. And the key to its understanding lies in the question that the lawyer asks Jesus in today's gospel, "**Who is my neighbour?**" (v. 29). Who is my neighbour that I have an obligation to love?

Among the Jews of Jesus' time there were those who understood "neighbour" in a very limited way. The Essenes of Qumran, for example, required new members to swear to love the sons of light and hate the sons of darkness. For them, your neighbour is the one who shares the same religious persuasion as yourself. Other groups, such as the Zealots, would understand neighbour to include only those who shared the same nationality and ethnicity with them. The average Jew would not regard the Samaritan as a neighbour. They are outsiders and the circle of neighbourly love does not include them. Jesus came into a world of "we" and "them," "we" being the circle of those recognised as neighbours, and "them" being the rest of the world regarded as hostile strangers and enemies of the people.

The new thing in Jesus' teaching of neighbourly love is his insistence that all humanity is one big neighbourhood. Thus he broke down the walls of division and the borders of prejudice and suspicion that humans have erected between "us" and "them." To bring home this point he tells the story of the Good Samaritan. This man regarded as Enemy Number One by the Jewish establishment simply because he is Samaritan, is the one who finally proves himself to be neighbour to the Jewish man in need. Thus to the question "Who is my neighbour" Jesus' answer is: Anyone and everyone without exception.

The lady who invited Mrs Booth to dinner understood her "neighbour" to be limited only to those on her social and economic level. Mrs Booth reminded her that her "neighbour" should include the nobodies of society. Like this lady, we all need to be reminded that the Christian understanding of "neighbour" admits of no borders. Today is the day to identity and tear down all the borders we have erected between those who belong to us (and are, therefore, deserving of our love and concern) and those who don't (those others who can go to hell). Sometimes these walls of division are religious in nature, as in the case of religious intolerance, or in the mutual distrust and hatred between those who call themselves "conservatives" and those who call themselves "liberals." Other times they are ethnic and racial, as in the bad blood between Blacks and Whites in places like apartheid South Africa or between Serbs and ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. They could also be social and economic, as in the divide between suburban neighbourhoods and the inner-city. The gospel today challenges us all to dismantles these walls. This way we work with Jesus to realize his dream of the world as a neighbourhood without borders. --**Munachi E. Ezeogu, cssp**

July 17, 2016: XVI Sunday of Ordinary Time

Gen 18: 1-10, Col 1: 24-28, Lk 10: 38-42

Communitarian and Catholic

One of the hallmarks of being a Christian is our attitude towards hospitality. In the scenario of India, we are well-known for our institutions that provide health care, education and social service. If we begin to enumerate the works done in this field, the list will be endless. The question posed in today's liturgy of the Word is: What is true hospitality?

It is undoubted that Abraham was a generous host in Gen 18:1-10, where he prepares a sumptuous feast for the three guests that arrived at the entrance of his tent. Sarah must have been a gracious host too. But the point to be noted is that the three strangers understood the pain that was lying dormant in the hearts of this old and childless couple. As they prophesy, it strikingly reveals to us: Who was more hospitable?

St. Paul reminds us that understanding the pain of others and working towards it has a price to be paid. In Col 1:24-28, St. Paul expresses his willingness to go that extra mile for Christ and participate in the suffering of Christ by accepting his own pains and suffering. St. Paul does not want Christ's message to be a mere Neo-Judaism, but pushes the boundaries away and realises that the true potential of Christ's message is for all people.

The Word of God is for all people, irrespective of skills, status or dispositions.

As we shift our focus towards the Gospel Lk 10:38-42, Jesus is headed towards Jerusalem, the epicentre of his mission. He might have had to fight a great battle in his mind as he pondered on the imminent suffering and the brutality that would have to undergo in order to redeem humanity. As a human, he might have yearned for the rock of strength and comfort as he enters the house of Martha and Mary at Bethany. While Martha was cooking and fussing about the sumptuous meal she was about to present, Jesus wanted the warmth of understanding, someone who could listen and empathise with his emotional turmoil. Mary was there, being present as a support and assurance to go on. There is no doubt that Jesus loved both contrasting temperaments of activity and quietness, but the question for you is once again: Who was more hospitable?

In life, we too make huge efforts to show our kindness. Sadly, we try to show our kindness and empathy the way we want and not the way it is needed according to the situation. It is high time that we reassess our idea of hospitality and understanding. Do our charitable works spread the message of Christ to the people who really need him? Does our charity and service allow the poor to be empowered or do we continue helping them to remain poor and needy? Is our service to the society a mere calendar of events or does it really cater to the needs of the society? Do we make distinctions while we cater to the needs of the people whom we serve? Do we really understand the pain of the people whom we serve?

The best form of hospitality is to understand the pain of one's heart. A nuclear bomb can be heard millions of miles away and its effects are seen for centuries, but the heart of a person in pain and suffering doesn't make any sound neither are the effects glaringly seen. We, as followers of Christ, are called to see beyond the masks of the people and perceive the reality of the people whom we serve. We are called to be there with our presence being a testimony that we are communitarian, whole, universal and Catholic.

-Dn. Romel D. Saldana

July 31, 2016: XVIII Sunday in Ordinary Time
Eccl 1:2; 2:21-23, Col 3: 1-5, 9-11, Luke 12:13-21

Focus on the Eternal Values

Everything that we see in and around us will someday come to an end even as the beautiful thought in Buddhism goes; This Too Will Pass Away. There is an end to all that exist including human relationships. The world we live in is an uncertain world where we cannot anticipate a second of what comes next. There is uselessness in the storage of possessions while depriving the other of their basic wants. The first reading of today speaks of vanity of vanity because everything will pass away! We never know who would benefit from our hard work. In the process of being a workaholic, we miss even to live our lives.

Hoarding is one of the greatest sins in the world of today. There are people building their fortune at the cost of the other, not knowing who would possess them after they are dead and gone. Paul in his letter to the Colossians encouraged them saying that our focus should be on Christ. If Christ is our focus, we should look on the things that are above; the eternal values. Earthly possessions take us away from the domain of God. They take the place of God.

The gospel of today speaks to us about the uncertainty of our lives. So, there is no point in storing up for the unknown. It is best to share what we have with our neighbours because tomorrow is not in our control. The readings of today exhorts us with the message of sharing. Let us not postpone the good things that we can do for the other because tomorrow may not be ours

-Dn Vekupa Rhakho George

August 7, 2016: XIX Sunday in Ordinary Time
Wis 11:6-9; Heb 11: 1-2, 8:19; Lk 12: 32-48

Being the Good Waiter

The Gospel passage of the day teaches us the three characteristics of a good waiter and the blessedness of it. I doubt that there is anything I dislike more than waiting. It may be that you can identify with me in my annoyance with waiting, especially when it is prolonged awaiting someone's arrival. Husbands sometimes come to church in a mental "miff" because they have sat in the car, waiting for wife and/or family to get out to the car. Wives can

get upset waiting for their husband to get home from work, especially if they have dinner in the oven getting extra crispy or on the table getting cold.

Jesus calls upon His disciples to wait, for although He will return to the earth, to rule over it as Messiah, it may be a considerable period of time before this happens. Our text implies that there will be a wait. History confirms this, for the church has been waiting nearly 2,000 years for His return.

The entire 12th chapter of Luke focuses on stewardship. The opening verses explain the disciple's stewardship of the gospel. The disciple must make good use of the gospel by boldly living and proclaiming it. Followed by the stewardship of possessions. Our preoccupation must not be with material things, but with true "life." We need not worry about our life, but we should use things to minister needs of human beings and Jesus asks us to store up treasures in heaven. It is possible only if implement the will of God in every moment of our life. He also instructs the disciples to be good stewards of the time. If we are required to wait, then you and I had better learn how to do it right. In our text, Jesus teaches us "the way to wait" for His return. In verses 35 and 36 Jesus spells out three elements involved in waiting, three descriptions of the readiness for and expectation of His return which we should have at all times. Finally in Verses 37 and 38 he promises of the blessedness of those who wait as He has said in the Gospel. Verses 39 and 40 contain words of warning, for some do not wait in readiness for His return.

"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him.

"There are three distinct characteristics of the "good waiter" as described by our Lord:

- (1) Preparation—"be dressed ready ..."
- (2) Maintenance—"keep your lamps burning"
- (3) Expectation—"[and be] like men waiting for their master"

The preparation of the waiter consists of a readiness for action. In the imagery of our Lord it has to do with one's clothing. Literally, one is to be ready by "having their loins girded. One could hardly work with a flowing robe in the way, so it would be tucked in. In our culture we might say, "having your sleeves rolled up."

Second, the “good waiter” is to “keep his lamp burning.” They did not have street lights in those days, nor did they have a porch light to keep on, so that the master could easily find and enter his door. The good servant would listen for the sound of his master’s return and would have his light already lit, so that he could illuminate and thereby facilitate his way. So, too, with the disciple who awaits the Lord’s return. One’s waiting should be spent making all the preparations needed, so that the Lord’s return is not surprise, and so that we can be a part of the return.

Third, the “good waiter” is to be like a devoted servant, who eagerly awaits his master’s return, as if he were coming from a wedding banquet.” If we are good waiters Jesus will serve us at his dining table.

-Naijo Chittilappilly

August 14, 2016: XIX Sunday in Ordinary Time
I Jer 38:1-2,4-6,8-10 II Heb 12:1-4 III Luk 12:49-53

Holy War according to Jesus

The new millennium has witnessed and continues to witness much violence. Hardly any day passes that we do not hear the sad news of violent aggression and brutality unleashed against innocent people somewhere around the world. To make matters worse, perpetrators of these acts of violence often try to justify these atrocities by claiming that they are fighting a holy war in God’s name. Think of the crusades, the Middle East, Ireland, Bosnia, and the Taliban. Today’s readings are indeed a call to war, not a war against other people but a war against sin, against evil, against the devil.

Let us listen to these words of Jesus:

Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. (Luke 12:51-53)

Scholars tell us that Jesus is speaking here not about the purpose of his coming but about the inevitable consequence of his coming. Jesus came to reveal the true sons and daughters of God who listen to his word, and the children of this world who are opposed to his teaching. This divides all men and women into two camps, the camp of the godly and the camp of the ungodly. There is perpetual conflict, a state of war, between these two

groups as one group strives to raise the world up to God and the other to pull it down to hell. These two groups do not exist in two different parts of the world. Rather they live side by side in the same neighbourhood, they live together under the same roof, and in fact the forces of good and evil often exist together in the same person. The holy war to which Christ calls us, therefore, is not a war against people of certain nationalities or cultures, creeds or ideologies, but a war in which we first have to identify the forces for evil in our own persons and in the persons of those who are dear to us (father, son, mother, daughter, mother-in-law, daughter-in-law) and then declare an uncompromising war against these forces.

What are some of these evil forces that we are asked to war against? Well, why don't we start with the Seven Deadly Sins: Pride (superiority complex), Covetousness (greed, seeking material prosperity at the expense of one's soul), Lust (sexual abuse of minors, pornography, treating women as objects of pleasure), Anger (animosity, bitterness, hate), Gluttony (unnecessary eating and drinking), Envy (self hate, rivalry), Sloth (seeking success without working for it). To these we can add the mother of all evils, injustice. If we declare war against these then we are fighting a holy war.

If we are at war then we should be prepared for some roughness. The enemy is also fighting against us and we may have to suffer some harm or hardship. Jeremiah in the first reading was fighting a holy war against the false prophets who prophesied only what the king and his officials wanted to hear. But Jeremiah stuck to the truth. And where did he end up? In a well of mud. But God sent a foreigner, an Ethiopian to come and save him. God never abandons His people. Jesus, our leader in God's holy war did not escape the suffering and death on the cross. But on the third day God raised him to life victorious. God never abandons his people. He will not abandon us if we fight His holy war — the war against evil in ourselves and in the world.

With this thought that God never abandons his own, the author of Hebrews encourages us in the second reading to not grow weary or lose heart. We shall close with his words of advice:

Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. (Hebrews 12:3-4)

--Munachi E. Ezeogu, cssp

August 21, 2016: XXI Sunday in Ordinary Time
Is 66:18-21/ Heb 12:5-7, 11-13/ Lk 13:22-30

Strive to Enter through the Narrow Door

The Gospel today speaks in terms of predestination, of those who will ultimately be saved. Jesus is steadily making his way to Jerusalem passing through many towns and villages. It seems that at this time he is on the east side of the Jordan, on his way to Jericho and Jerusalem.

Jesus is approached by a man who wants to know if only a few will be saved. One has the feeling that he expects the answer to be 'Yes' and that he regards himself as being among the chosen ones.

Jesus does not answer the question directly but he implies that those who are saved are not necessarily those who regard themselves as God's chosen ones but rather those who walk a certain path in life. That path, of course, is precisely what he is proposing through his own life and teaching. It is a narrow door, he says, which many will not be able to enter.

Jesus warns that we can be excluded if we do not *strive to enter through the narrow door*. What did Jesus mean by this expression? The door which Jesus had in mind was himself. *I am the gate; whoever enters by me, will be saved* (John 10:9). Through the cross Jesus opens the way for us to enter into his kingdom. But we must follow Jesus in the way of the cross. The word *strive* can also be translated *agony*. To enter the kingdom of God one must struggle against the forces of temptation and whatever would hinder us from doing the will of God.

The irony of Jesus' image is that entering through the *narrow gate* denotes a steady obedience to the Lord Jesus - overcoming all opposition and rejecting every temptation. The good news is that we do not struggle alone. God is with us and his grace is sufficient! Through the gift of his body the church and through the support of brothers and sisters in Christ, the Lord gives us all the help we need to grow in holiness and overcome sin in our personal lives. As we *strive side by side for the faith of the gospel* (Phil. 1:27) Jesus assures us of complete victory! Do you trust in God's grace and help, especially in times of testing and temptation? **-Gnanam J.**

August 28, 2016: XXII Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29, Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24a, Luke 14:1,7-14

Called to a Life of Humility

Christianity is a way of life that calls each one to lead a life of simplicity and in utter communion with God. Go opposes the proud and uplifts the
AJRS 61/4 July-August 2016

downtrodden. In Luke 1:52, we find that God brought down the powerful from their thrones and raised up the lowly. The first reading of today invites us to a life of humility. By being so, we invite the favour of God in our lives. Self-sufficient people do not feel the need for God and God has no place in them. The author of the letter to the Hebrews said that we have indeed come to a place of God's dwelling, Zion and not in some terrifying place. How is that possible? It is through our baptism that we are made children of God and become part of the kingdom. To be children of this loving God, humility is the criterion.

The gospel of today runs with the same theme of humility. Seeing the Pharisees who lusted for power, position and recognition, Jesus tells a parable. God is not a blind God. He knows when to reward whom and how. There is no need to look for honour and recognition. These are earthly values which does not last. Besides, it opposes the values of the kingdom that Jesus preached. God knows the best time is for each person. Accordingly, he rewards! The gospel also brings in another aspect of reaching out to the people who possibly cannot afford to repay us. This is of course one of the hardest things to practice because we live in a world of give and take. Jesus tells us very clearly that repaying is God's responsibility. In fact, in our ordinary experience, if we have carefully paid attention, we must have come across people who have come forward to lend us a helping hand in most unexpected situations. This is God! **–Dn Vekupa Rhakho George**



Book Review

John Mialil SJ, *Wonders in Nature*, Media House, Delhi, 2008, ISBN: 81-7495-329-9, pp152. Rs. 100.

The purpose of this book is to generate genuine wonder in the minds of the readers, regarding life in general and the wonderful way all living beings – plants, animals and humans – function as if there is built in computer within, to attain twin purposes, namely, preservation of self and perpetuation of the species. The reason for making such an effort is on account of the settled account of some of the contemporary thinkers to exclude God completely from the functioning of the universe. The book shows that science on its own cannot explain the origin and progress of the universe or life.

Thus the book shows that nature and science does indicate God. The universe is still a mystery to us, both to the believer and non-believer, to the learned and unlettered alike. If we look around seriously and persistently, above us and beneath us we see multitudinous abyss of space with myriads of creatures, big and small. The smallest cell that defies the keenest human sight, the highest mountain peak, the tiniest water molecule, all pay homage to the Sovereign Being. Nature is a fact, a reality that needs an explanation.

In this book Fr Mialil speaks of the ‘wonders of nature’ with specific examples. There are thousands of miracles taking place in this universe, many as yet undreamt by humans. The pages in this book will suffice us to raise our minds and hearts with folded hands to pay homage to its Ordainer, based on natural science. We are sure the book will inspire the reader to be firmly rooted on the ground of reality and open to the transcendent and mysterious Divine.

S. Ignacimuthu SJ. *Environmental Spirituality*. St Pauls, Mumbai, 2010 ISBN: 978-93-5015-001-6 pp. 128, Rs 80.

Protection of environment has become a necessity for the very survival of human beings. Instead of being the stewards of God's creation, we humans are fast becoming its destroyers in our relentless and unbridled race for technological advancement. Nature is sending alarming signals of protest through drastic climate change, global warming, tsunami-like natural calamities and so on.

Environmental Spirituality is timely clarion call to rediscover our roots, our interconnectedness and our interdependence in the cosmos. It energizes our faith, enkindles our spirituality, challenges our conscience, elicits our thinking, encourages our response and enhances our commitments to work for the protection of environment. In short, here is a book that invites us to experience the divine in and through environment.

After a historical survey (Environment: Past, Present and Future) the author talks of environmental from various religious perspectives. The next chapter deal with environment and the Bible, followed by environment and the Church. This is followed by the author's invitation to sense "God's presence in the environment." Then the author leads us to reflect on environment and our mission. He affirms that environment is really God's expression. The final chapter suggests ways to live in harmony with environment, asking us to go beyond materialism and inviting us to be committed to environmental protection.

After *Laudato Si'* this book has become an even more challenge to all religious believers and especially Christians.