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## Editorial

### We Are Brothers

Pope Francis washed and kissed the feet of 12 immigrants during Holy Thursday celebrations, hoping to bring together different religions and cultures in a gesture that comes two days after the Brussels attacks stirred anti-Islam attitudes.

“All of us together: Muslims, Hindus, Catholics, Copts, Evangelicals. But all brothers and children of the same God,” the pontiff said at a Mass at a migrant reception center that houses nearly 900 asylum-seekers in Castelnuovo di Porto, north of Rome. “We want to live together in peace.” He named the assault on the Belgium capital an “act of war, of destruction ... by people who do not want to live in peace.”

The highly symbolic Easter ritual of washing the feet commemorates the rite that Jesus practiced with his Apostles before his Crucifixion. Francis’ repeated inclusion of women — as well as non-Catholics — has prompted much debate.

This year, eight men and four women were involved in the foot-washing. Three were Muslim, three were Coptic Christian women from Eritrea and one was Hindu. “We have different cultures and religions, but we are brothers and we want to live in peace,” Francis said before washing and kissing the feet of the migrants, some of whom were moved to tears.

In the Mass at St. Peter’s Basilica, Francis sought to highlight the need for mercy, the theme of the 2016 Jubilee Year he

launched in December. "Mercy restores everything; it restores dignity to each person," he said.

Speaking directly to thousands of priests at the earlier Mass, Francis urged them to stay close to the poor and marginalized.

"As priests we identify with people who are excluded," he said. "We remind ourselves that there are countless masses of people who are poor, uneducated, prisoners, who find themselves in such situations because others oppress them."

Francis warned that priests "are often blind" to those who are suffering, sometimes "because of an excess of complicated theology" or "because of an excessive 'bubbly' spirituality, a 'light' spirituality."

"We feel ourselves also trapped, not so much by insurmountable stone walls or steel enclosures that affect many peoples, but rather by a digital, virtual worldliness that is opened and closed by a simple click," he said. "We are oppressed, not by threats and pressures, like so many poor people, but by the allure of a thousand commercial advertisements which we cannot shrug off."

The papal foot-washing ritual Thursday not only sent a signal of openness to refugees despite the violence, but also to women in the church. May we continue this journey of openness and compassion!

Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ  
Editor

Adapted from *USA Today*. See <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2016/03/24/we-brothers-pope-francis-washes-feet-migrants/82214856/>



## Engaged Spirituality

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### Introduction

Spirituality is a way of life and it has two aspects: World-view and values. Our values are formed by our world-view. In this recollection on the theme of Engaged Spirituality we shall look at the biblical roots to remind ourselves of the Christian World-view which forms our values that calls for our commitment.

According to Janet Parachin, “engaged spirituality is demonstrated by all those persons who find within their faith tradition the resources that nurture their being and enable them to engage in activities that move the world toward peace, justice, greater compassion, and wholeness”<sup>1</sup>

Spirituality within our faith tradition is essentially discipleship to Jesus. If we need to follow Jesus we need to ask two questions: (1) What did Jesus do? (2) What would Jesus do in Our Society? To answer the first question we need to look at the gospels and in order to understand the gospels effectively we need to look at the biblical background. “Bible is a history of

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<sup>1</sup> Janet W. Parachin, *Engaged spirituality: Ten Lives of Contemplation and Action* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 1.

what God has done in the lives of men, for humanity as a whole, in order to fulfill in them the design of grace.”<sup>2</sup>

## 1. The Biblical Background

The Biblical background can be summed up in three central points: (1) The Biblical vision of life, (2) The Biblical Experience of God and (3) The Basic Biblical Attitude

### 1.1 *The Biblical Vision of Life*

The Bible has laws, psalms, prayers, but it is primarily a narrative, a narrative that begins with the creation (Gen 1-2) and ends with the “new heavens and new earth” (Rev. 21:1-4). Creation is seen in the

So the Church is called to be a contrast community, a community structured not by power but by love.

Bible as a movement from chaos or disorder to order, that is a paradise situation. But this situation is disrupted by sin (Gen 3-11) and goes back to disorder. God forms the people of Israel as a contrast community through patriarchs and prophets and enters into a covenant. But Israel fails to keep up the covenant and to live as a contrast community, because of which they are exiled, back to a disorderly situation. They turn away from God as a result of which start oppressing others. God wants to restore the original paradise situation through Jesus who inaugurates God’s Kingdom through the revelation of love. So the Church is called to be a contrast community, a community structured not by power but by love. Thus the Biblical narrative is a story of journey of humankind and cosmos to the fullness of life animated by love.

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<sup>2</sup> Yves Congar, “Christ in the Economy of Salvation and in our Dogmatic Tracts,” in E. Schillebeeckx and B. Willems (ed.), *Who is Jesus of Nazareth?* (Glen Rock: Paulist Press, 1965), 6.

## ***1.2 Biblical Experience of God***

The God experience is articulated in the Bible in two ways: creed and hymns. There are three such creeds in the Bible: Deut 6:20-25, Deut 26:5-9 and Josh 24:6-13

Deut 26:5-9 is the most important creed and the Jewish Passover liturgy begins with this creed. In Ex 5.21 we have a very ancient hymn called the Song of Miriam. In all these texts, the faith of the people is not articulated in formulas but in a narrative form. It is a narrative about the wandering Aramean, a wanderer and how God freed him and his descendents from slavery and oppression. The creed in the Bible is rooted in the historical experience of God liberating the people. This is the foundational experience of the people of Israel: God liberates us from slavery.

This God experience is well articulated in two call narratives of Moses: Ex 3.14 and Ex 6.2-7. Biblical scholars say that they are from two different traditions, Yahwist (J) and Priestly (P) and has two different theologies. Be that as it may, in both the texts the central question is “Who is God?” In Ex 3:14, to the question of Moses about his name, God replies ‘*ehyeh* ‘*asher* ‘*ehyeh* ( *אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה* ) and the word ‘*ehyeh* can be both used for present tense and future tense in Hebrew. This can be translated into 4 ways: (1) I will be who I am (promise), (2) I am who I will be (faithfulness), (3) I am who I am, and (4) I will be who I will be. Scholars think in the biblical context the third or the fourth translation is more apt than the first two. In other episodes in the Bible, when God is asked of his name by Jacob (Gen 32:29) and by Manoah, the father of Samson (Judges 13:17-18), his reply is “Why do you ask my name?” By this counter question God seems to say that we are not supposed to know his name. This must be also the meaning of his reply to Moses. Traditionally knowing someone’s name means having control over that person. Other pagan gods had name like Baal. But the essence of the true God cannot be captured in a name.

The God of the Bible is a free God totally away from the control of human persons.

The Free God is also the Freeing God. This is the theology of Ex 6:2-7. He tells Moses that he is *el shaddai* which is translated as God Almighty. It literally means the Hill God denoting the power of God. He is so powerful that he can liberate his people. The text speaks of liberation from and liberation for – liberation from bondage and liberation for becoming

This hope of Israel takes two forms: messianic hope and apocalyptic hope.

God's people. To be God's people is not only a privilege but also a task; the task is to form a contrast community

### ***1.3 The Basic Biblical Attitude***

The God Experience of the people of Israel leads them to a tension between their religious experience and life experience. The religious experience is the promise of the land (Ex 6). Land for them is the symbol of prosperity, freedom and peace. But the reality was very different. They did not inhabit the land; they were dominated by the Egyptians, then Babylonians and then Romans. So life was full of conflict and tension. So they raised the question, "why are we oppressed?" This question comes frequently in psalms. The biblical answer is that the Israel failed to be a contrast community and hence they did not possess the land. But God of the Bible is a faithful God. Hence they resolved the tension by projecting the promise to the future: "we do not have the land, but one day we will."

This hope of Israel takes two forms: messianic hope and apocalyptic hope. The classical text for the messianic hope is Isa 11:1-9. The content of the messianic hope is that God will raise a son of David who will establish an empire of justice and peace. He will give Israel the land to lead a free life. The messianic hope is this-worldly; it's a political hope. This



messianic hope slowly receded after exile because two significant things happened during exile. Firstly, the family of David was no longer significant. Secondly the people of Israel came in contact with the Persian religion, Zoroastrianism, and were influenced by its theology of conflict between good and evil and the final victory of good over evil in the end-time. This takes on the form of apocalyptic hope. Apocalyptic hope is therefore expressed in symbolic visions of end-time. The vision of the end-time implies the destruction of the oppressors and the liberation of the oppressed (final victory of good over evil).

## **2. The Core Experience of Jesus**

Whatever be the forms of hope, the only biblical symbol that expresses this hope is the Kingdom of God. This was the core experience of Jesus.

### ***2.1 Kingdom of God: Fulfillment of Hope***

In Mk 1:14-15 we read, “The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come; Repent and believe in the good news.” This is the hermeneutical key with which Mark has to be read. This text has two parts: statements and commands. The two statements are synonymous, so also the two commands. Kingdom of God refers to the final definitive liberation not through an outpouring force but through the revelation of love. Jesus sees love as the only force through which human persons can be liberated. The word “repent” should not be understood in the Greek sense of *metanoia*, saying sorry for our sins, but in the Hebrew sense of *shuwb* [pronounced as ‘shoove’] (שׁוּב) returning to God. Returning to God is a positive personal action involving the whole person; it means “God loves you, just accept it.” This is the central proclamation of Jesus the basis of which is his God experience.

### ***2.2 Jesus’ Experience of God as Unconditional Love***

In all his prayers, Jesus addressed God as Abba, which is an endearing way of calling father like ‘daddy’ in modern times. In the Hebrew Bible, God is described as father but never

addressed as daddy. Jesus radicalized the experience of God as liberator into God as love. The *abba* experience of Jesus is well presented in the parable of the prodigal son. However Jesus has clearly understood during his prayer at Gethsemane that God's love does not mean receiving what is pleasant but what is good. In this sense God's refusal to grant us what we ask is also expression of his love. God's love is both caring and challenging that empowers us to reach the fulfillment of our life. It is analogous to the nurturing parent in the transactional analysis as opposed to the critical parent whose love is conditional and the indulgent parent who gives unconditional approval.

### **3. Dimensions of Engaged Spirituality**

It becomes clear for us that an engaged spirituality based on biblical tradition rests on two pillars: Freedom and Love

#### **3.1 Freedom**

The foundation of the engaged spirituality for a Christian is the *abba* experience, that is, the experience of God's love. The experience of God's love leads us to freedom. This freedom is both from compulsions from within and inhibitions caused by external factors. St. Paul in his letter to Romans (Rom 7:15) speaks of his compulsions from within: "I do not understand my own actions for I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." His words "I do the very thing I hate" refer to compulsions from within. There can be many compulsions for us – to possess more than what we need, a typical expression of the consumerist society, to achieve, to enjoy various kinds of pleasures. When these compulsions bind us we are no longer free. Paul also says "I do not do what I want." This refers to inhibitions, which is just the opposite of compulsions. This is often because of fear of rejection: "what will others say?" We want the approval of others because of our insecurity resulting in fear. Jesus was powerless – no wealth, no political support, no theological training, no priestly approval – but was totally

fearless. He confronted without fear every established institution of his time. He confronted theological establishments (Mk 2:1-36 healing the paralytic man through forgiveness, Mk 12-13-37 paying tax to Caesar), religious establishments (Mk 11:15 cleansing of the Temple) and political establishments (Lk 13:31-33 refusing to move out of Jerusalem as was ordered by Herod). Nor did he have any compulsion to possess or to achieve, instead he had come to serve and lay down his life for others (Mk 10: 45).

Jesus was also free from the external pressures of his time: Law and cult. Law and cult are meaningful and necessary but if we place them above God and his love, then we end up being legalistic and ritualistic. Jesus' attitude to Law is illustrated in the issue of Sabbath. Originally Sabbath was meant to be a day of rest for slaves. What was liberative gradually became oppressive. Jesus wants to restore the original liberative dimension of Sabbath and hence heals the man with withered hand, a blind man, a paralytic on the day of Sabbath. Jesus violates the institutionalized law responsible to give us a principle: "Sabbath is for human person and human person is not for Sabbath." Every human institution, however sacred it may be, has to be subordinated to God's people. Jesus' attitude to ritual is well brought out in the context of Pharisees accusing Jesus of eating food without washing hands. The background to this is the principle of purity and pollution or the dichotomy between sacred and profane. The most sacred place is the holy of holies, in the Holy Temple in the holy city of Jerusalem in the holy land of the Jews. What lies outside of this holy land is profane, and the Samaritans and gentile living outside of the holy land are impure. A Jew would have come in contact with the impure people, who make him polluted and to make himself clean he needs to do a ritual cleansing of his hands before his meal. Jesus challenges this through his symbolic gesture and instead suggests holiness comes from within and is determined by heart. It means what sanctifies is love and what unsanctifies is unlove.

Freedom finds its fulfillment in commitment. This is illustrated for us in Mk 5:1-20, in the episode of the healing of the Gerasene demoniac. Jesus encounters the possessed power. From verses 1 to 5, Mark gives a long description of the demoniac which is both symbolic and theological. The image of the possessed man is one of unrestrained force. Was the man free because he could do anything without restraint? In a way he was free but his freedom was one of animals, not of humans for human freedom involves commitment. After getting healed, the man is back to social convention and ties himself to Jesus. He is physically unrestrained to follow Jesus, socially unrestrained to get back to the society and linguistically unrestrained to proclaim God. Now he enjoys human freedom. He commits himself to Jesus in freedom. Saint Paul says “Though I am free, I have made myself slave for all.” A free person becomes slave through love and commitment. Christian life is to be a “*free slave*.”

### 3.2 Love

The great love commandment of Jesus is “Love God and love your neighbor.” Luke makes this explicit in the parable of the Good Samaritan. For a Rabbi, the great commandment is “Love God” (Deut 6:4-9). This is called Sh'ma Yisrael (שְׁמָא יִשְׂרָאֵל) and the Jews recite it three times a day. For Jesus the great commandment is “Love God” (Deut 6:4-9) and “love your neighbor” (Lev 19: 13). The biblical scholars tell us that the ‘and’ is not additive but explanatory; the first is explained in terms of the second. It means that we can love God only by loving our neighbor. We respond to God’s love by loving our neighbor. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that, “to receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest, his brethren” (no. 1397). In his encyclical “*Deus Caritas est*,” Pope Benedict states as follows: “Only my readiness to encounter my neighbor and to show him love makes me sensitive to God as well. Only if I serve my neighbor can my eyes be opened to what God does

for me and how much he loves me.” For a Jew, neighbor is basically a fellow-Jew. In the book of Leviticus it gets extended to a stranger and a refugee who becomes part of Jews. A gentile for them is never a neighbor. For Jews, neighbor is anyone in need (Lk 10:29-39) including an enemy (Lk 6:35). [In parenthesis as good Christians we need to love Modi]. This is not really utopian. This is what love really means. Love is not a reaction but an action. In other words I love you not because you are loveable but because I am capable of loving.

In Greek there are four words for love: *eros* (sexual love), *philia* (friendship), *koinonia* (fellowship) and *agape* (the love of God for human person and of human person for God). In Greek literature, the word *agape* is hardly used but in the New Testament this word appears in abundance. *Agape* is a divine attitude. It originates from God’s love. *Agape* is not possible if we do not experience God’s love; it is only because we experience God’s love, we can experience others as brothers and sisters.

Experiencing others as brothers and sisters has two dimensions: acceptance and concern. Acceptance in the New Testament is given in the exhortation to forgive. Forgiveness means accepting the offenders, loving people who have hurt us. The text that follows immediately the Lord’s Prayer in the Gospel according to Mathew reads thus: “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Mt 6:14-15). It does not mean God’s love depends on our forgiveness and thus it is conditional. It means that if I do not forgive others, then I do not accept God’s forgiveness. Again we are told not to judge (Lk 6:37-39). It does not mean we should not judge situations.

In fact we need to condemn inhuman situations of slavery, human trafficking, sexual abuse on women, child labor, and such evils, but we should not judge people. The two-fold reason for not judging people is again found in the New Testament: (1)

because no one sees the heart (I Sam 16:7), and (2) we are all sinners (Jn 8:1-11 the woman caught in adultery).

The second dimension of *agape* is concern. Concern is not a matter of feeling but a matter of doing. It is always doing good. Jesus says, “love your enemies and *do good to them*” (Lk 6:35). This is the best definition of love in the New Testament. *Love is effectively responding to the needs of the people* as did the Good Samaritan. Needs of people are very diverse like material needs, psychological needs and spiritual needs. This would call for a deep commitment to people.

Experiencing others as brothers and sisters has two dimensions: acceptance and concern.

## Conclusion

We realize that the roots of engaged spirituality are found in seminal form already in the Hebrew Bible that announced God’s special love for the poor and called God’s people to a covenant of love and justice. This is radicalized in the life and words of Jesus Christ, who came “to bring glad tidings to the poor . . . liberty to captives . . . recovery of sight to the blind” (Lk 4:18-19), and who identified himself with “the least of these,” the hungry and the stranger (cf. Mt 25:45).

We believe in the triune God whose very nature is communal and social. God reveals himself to us as one who is not alone, but rather as one who is relational, one who is Trinity. Therefore, we who are made in God’s image share this communal, social nature. We are called to reach out and to build relationships of love and justice.

Catholic social teaching is based on and inseparable from our understanding of human life and human dignity. Every human being is created in the image of God and redeemed by Jesus Christ, and therefore is invaluable and worthy of respect as a member of the human family. Every person, from the moment

of conception to natural death, has inherent dignity and a right to life consistent with that dignity. Human dignity comes from God, not from any human quality or accomplishment and therefore as true Christians we are called to be committed to the nurturing of human life

This commitment does not spring forth from mere social analysis or desire to do social work. This commitment to effectuate a social transformation and to contribute towards a creation of a just society is impelled by our spirituality of discipleship, that is, to appropriate the life of Jesus to make it our own. In our own creative ways we need to reply the second question which I raised in the very beginning: “What would Jesus do in our society?” It is left to each one of us to address this question to continue our commitment. 🌱

In the Bible, God presents himself as a teacher. “I myself taught Ephraim to walk, I myself took them by the arm,” it says. A believer is obliged to raise his children. Every man and every woman has a right to educate their children in their religious values. When a government deprives children of this formation, it can lead to cases like Nazism, when children were indoctrinated with values which were alien to the ones held by their parents. Totalitarianism tends to take over education to feather its own nest... ~ Pope Francis



## **Religious Fundamentalism: Our Response**

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### **Challenge of the Secular World**

To understand the modern phenomenon of fundamentalism, it is not sufficient simply to explain the origin of the term. We must go back further and examine the origin and nature of the modern secular world, to which fundamentalists are so violently opposed.

Humankind is currently caught up in the most radical cultural change which has ever taken place. Human culture, of course, has always been undergoing slow evolutionary change. In the past 200 years, however, cultural change has suddenly accelerated. It is now overturning beliefs and institutions which, in some cases, have lasted for millennia, and which are judged by some to be absolutely essential or fundamental to the meaning of people's lives and the welfare of society. In particular, within the three monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, modernity appears to be threatening the very foundation of all truth and meaning, namely the being and authority of God. Religious fundamentalists condemn the modern secular world as humanistic and godless. Those who believe the change to be fundamentally evil are resisting it to the point of waging war against it. Convinced that they must remain loyal to the fundamentals of the past, they condemn secular humanism as the work of the devil.



The theistic foundations of Christianity were challenged by the leading thinkers of the Enlightenment of 18<sup>th</sup> century. Theism, or belief in a personal God, was replaced by deism, or belief in an impersonal First Cause. Dependence on divine revelation was replaced by human endeavour and discovery. It is hardly surprising that not only fundamentalists but also even some fairly traditional thinkers and theologians look back to the Enlightenment with grave concern. Yet to the Enlightenment we owe many features of modern culture which most of us now take for granted and would not dream of surrendering – the freedom to think for ourselves, the freedom to ask questions and to hold up cherished

The Enlightenment was a very liberating period. It replaced the divine right of kings with democratic self-rule. It gave rise eventually to many new freedoms.

beliefs to critical examination, the freedom to express our opinions and doubts, the assertion of human rights, the acknowledgement of human equality, etc. Thus the Enlightenment was a very liberating period. It replaced the divine right of kings with democratic self-rule. It gave rise eventually to many new freedoms – the emancipation of slaves, the emancipation of colonies from imperial control, the emancipation of women from male domination and, more recently, the freedom of homosexuals to openly declare their sexual orientation.

### **Catholic Reaction**

The ideas generated by the Enlightenment were so innovative that they were not readily acceptable to church authorities. Those who embraced the new thinking from the Enlightenment often found themselves forced out of the church establishment. Pope Pius IX in his *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) condemned the new freedom of thought then emerging. This was followed in

1869 by the calling of the ecumenical council now known as Vatican I. Among other things it made the infallibility of the papacy a mandatory dogma. This move attempted to protect Catholicism from modern thought by building a protective wall of authority around it. The Vatican had long forbidden the faithful to read books thought to be injurious to their spiritual health, by placing them on the Index. The impact of modernity did not show itself again in Catholicism until Pope John XXIII called Vatican II, when Catholicism took a sudden but cautious leap into the modern world with its policy of updating by reading the signs of the times.

### **Christian Fundamentalism and Literalism**

Christian fundamentalism has sometimes been equated with biblical literalism. In other words, fundamentalists are said to take the Bible literally. Indeed, they themselves often speak of being committed to the literal inerrancy of Bible. But literalism is not a very satisfactory term. It is clear that, when the Bible refers to God as Father and Jesus as shepherd, the words are intended to be taken metaphorically and not literally. Fundamentalists have no problem with metaphorical language in that regard.

It is true that up to the 19th century the six days of creation in the biblical myth of origins were taken literally as 24-hour periods. But when the immense age of the earth became clearly evident on geological grounds, most fundamentalists tried to defend the “truth” of the biblical story by interpreting the six days as six geological ages, thousands or even millions of years in length. Thus, in order to defend the Bible as true in everything it says, fundamentalists keep shifting between literal and non-literal interpretations. Their purpose in doing so is to defend the fundamentalist dogma that the Bible, being the Word of God, is truly inerrant.

So fundamentalists are not consistently biblical literalists. They are literalists only when and where it suits them to be so. They

are usually literalists when it concerns the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of Jesus as an historical event and the existence of eternal punishment in hell. But when Jesus says it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God they go to great lengths to interpret this in such a way that they do not themselves have to “sell all that they have and give to the poor”, as Jesus directed the rich young ruler who wanted to follow him.

The claim of fundamentalists to be the true guardians of their particular faith must be strongly rejected. In fact, fundamentalism is fast becoming one of true religion’s chief enemies. In condemning secular humanism, fundamentalism is actually opposing the legitimate evolution of the very faith it sets out to defend. It is sadly ironic that fundamentalism, which sees itself as the guardian and preserver of Christianity, now constitutes one of Christianity’s chief obstacles to its natural and logical development.

### **Muslim Fundamentalism**

In order to understand the rise of Muslim fundamentalism we must go as far back as the 18th century, when Muhammad al-Wahhab founded the Wahhabi movement in Arabia. He advocated a strict return to the original teachings of Islam as found in the Qur’an and Hadith (authoritative traditions of Muhammad). This move was very much like that of the first Christian fundamentalists with their slogan of “Back to the Bible”. Wahhabism could be described as the first manifestation of Muslim fundamentalism.

Islam lends itself to fundamentalism even more than Christianity does, for the strength of fundamentalism lies, as we have seen, in its appeal to Holy Scripture. Islam possessed Holy Scripture from the beginning. As the words of the Qur’an continued to be uttered by Muhammad during his lifetime, they were accepted by Muslims as coming directly from God. Whereas it is the figure of Christ which is central to Christianity, it is the Qur’an, not Muhammad, which is central to Islam.

There are several aspects of the Wahhabi movement for Islamic reform, and they set the pattern for the later types of Muslim fundamentalism. Main aspects are Politics, force and jihad.

- It was politically active from the beginning. This is because in Islam there has never been the division between religion and politics. Islam is primarily concerned with the ordering of society, and only secondly with the spirituality of the individual. So for the Muslim, religion and politics are virtually one and the same.
- It had no qualms about using force to attain its goal. Wahhabism soon gathered sufficient military power not only to capture Mecca and Medina, but to take over the whole of Arabia and move into Iraq, where it captured and partially destroyed the mosque in Karbala, so sacred to the Shi'ites.
- It revived the practice of jihad. Though often incorrectly translated in the West as "holy war", jihad literally means "struggle". It can refer to the internal struggle which may take place in a Muslim in trying to be wholeheartedly obedient to Allah. But it can also mean the external struggle, not only to defend the boundaries of Islamic society but also to extend them to include unbelievers. It was always the ultimate aim of Islam to incorporate all nations into the brotherhood of Islamic society.

So the Wahhabis are to be seen as the forerunners of today's Muslim fundamentalists. Indeed a direct link can be traced from the Wahhabis to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, and from it to such groups of Muslim fundamentalists as Hamas, the Islamic Jihad and Al Qaeda.

### **Comparison**

Just as Christian fundamentalists seek to restore the secular West to its original form of Christendom, so Muslim

fundamentalists are motivated by the goal of restoring the Islamic world to its pristine purity. Both groups see the modern secular world as a materialist, consumer-driven society which has lost whatever spirituality it had in the past. One of the chief differences between the two fundamentalisms is that Christian fundamentalism is fighting against something which has its seeds within Christianity, whereas Muslim fundamentalism has set itself the task of eliminating all the evil influences which have come from the outside. Muslim fundamentalists began their fight against their fellow-Muslims, who in their view had succumbed to the West. But more recently this has brought them into conflict with the West itself.

### **Hindu Fundamentalism**

One of the leading Hindu intellectuals that greatly impacted the rise of Hindu movements, specifically during the British occupation was V.D. Savarkar (1883-1966). His most influential work was the fundamental *Hindutva* (Hinduness), which he wrote while he was imprisoned by the British. *Hindutva* is a manifesto for religious nationalism. Savarkar makes India Hindus' Holy-land. Although he accepts the presence of certain religions, such as Buddhism and Jainism in India, other religions such as Islam and Christianity are seen as foreign elements and do not belong in the subcontinent. Savarkar became the president of the *Hindu Mahasabha*. It was founded in 1915 in order to bring together the diverse local Hindu movements. It believed that in order for India to one day become a free Hindu state it would have to support and encourage Hindu brotherhood between different castes, including the untouchables.

In 1925, the *Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangha* (RSS) was established under the leadership of K. Hedgewar, a former member of the *Hindu Mahasabha*. It was incepted as a voluntary organisation with the aim to create a Hindu cultural pride and brotherhood. It adopted a much more militant stand than that of the *Hindu Mahasabha*. It spread across all of India giving its members Hindu nationalistic education and

paramilitary training. The organisation wanted to take the emphasis off of spiritual strength alone and incorporate the necessity of physical strength. Another organisation that has come to be very influential is the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad*(VHP). It was founded in 1964 by some of the leaders of the RSS. Yet another party that emerged as a result of the RSS, that has become part of the mainstream political life of India is the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP), which emerged in 1980 out of the Janata coalition. It is one of India's largest political parties and it espouses Hindu nationalism according to the writings of Savarkar in *Hindutva*. Hindu fundamentalists have used extreme and violent means to achieve their goals. Such was the case with the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, by a crowd of nearly one million activists of the VHP, that led to violent clashes between Hindus and Muslims that left thousands dead and injured.

### **Fundamentalism Divides People**

The internationalism of the coming global society calls for flexibility of thought and practice, for empathy with those who differ, for compromise in a spirit of goodwill; it requires mutual co-operation for the common good. Since fundamentalism encourages people to become blindly loyal to specific fundamentals, whether it is a Holy Book or the overcoming of a perceived injustice, all forms of fundamentalism are socially and globally divisive. Thus fundamentalism is socially and internationally dangerous and a threat to peace.

### **How Do We Respond?**

It is a grave error of judgment to assume that terrorism can be stamped out by war. Neither can terrorism be eliminated simply by planning to kill or imprison all terrorists. The state-ordered assassination of terrorists simply aggravates still further the hostility, hatred and sense of injustice, which were the original causes for the rise of terrorism. For every one killed, five more may appear somewhere else. Terrorism is the symptom of a

deep malaise, a malaise which lies behind the current responses to terrorism as much as behind terrorism itself. Therefore, we must find out the motivating cause behind terrorism and deal with that.

We can see that the current wave of terrorism around the globe is the product of fundamentalism. we encounter the face of Islamic fundamentalism in the terrorist acts of suicide bombers who are determined to kill and destroy. The Islamic world encountered the face of Christian fundamentalism and terrorism in the person of George Bush, the American President, who was ready to wage war against any nation that stands in the way of America's economic interests.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, here are the chief features of religious fundamentalism:

Fundamentalism rejects the human freedoms which have opened up in the aftermath of the western Enlightenment, and is committed to combat secular humanism and all other aspects of the modern world which it regards as harmful to the spiritual condition of humankind.

Fundamentalism asserts that humans must submit to the authority of the Divine Being, whose divinely revealed truths and absolute commands they believe to have been permanently revealed – in the Torah for the Jew, in the Bible for the Christian, in the Vedas for the Hindu and in the Qur'an for the Muslim.

Fundamentalism consequently leads people to think in terms of black and white. Everything is either true or false, good or bad; there are few shades of grey, little uncertainty, and no area for debate and dialogue.

Fundamentalism is distrustful of human reason. It does not enter into open dialogue but dogmatically proclaims. It is wary of democracy, the assertion of human rights and the equality of the

sexes. It favours strong, male, charismatic leadership, both in religion and in society.

Fundamentalism seeks to exercise control by establishing theocratic societies which conform to the (divinely revealed) absolutes. Hence Israel must be a Jewish state, Iran must be an Islamic state, India must be a Hindu State and America must be a Christian state.

Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Islam each have a cultural history of which its adherents can be justifiably proud. Fundamentalists in each tradition do their cultural heritage a great injustice by making it look like a rigid, intolerant sect. Christian fundamentalism is preventing Christianity from playing a positive and creative role in shaping the modern global society. Similarly, Muslim fundamentalism is distorting the face of Islam and giving the impression to the rest of the world that Islam, far from being the religion of peace, brotherhood and compassion which it can be, is simply a seedbed for violence and terrorism. Fundamentalism, whether Christian, Hindu or Muslim, distorts and does irreparable harm to the very religious tradition it claims to be defending.

It has to be remembered that the fundamentalist organizations are not the majority of any specific religion. Their interpretations of the *fundamentals* of their religion may be so distorted that to really associate it with that religion as a whole would be detrimental. For it seems that rather than a religion creating these fundamentalists, it is the fundamentalist mentalities of powerful individuals that use religion as a tool to achieve their goals. 🙏





## O Cross of Christ!

Pope Francis

*Rome*

**O** Cross of Christ, symbol of divine love and of human injustice, icon of the supreme sacrifice for love and of boundless selfishness even unto madness, instrument of death and the way of resurrection, sign of obedience and emblem of betrayal, the gallows of persecution and the banner of victory.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you raised up in our sisters and brothers killed, burned alive, throats slit and decapitated by barbarous blades amid cowardly silence.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in the faces of children, of women and people, worn out and fearful, who flee from war and violence and who often only find death and many Pilates who wash their hands.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in those filled with knowledge and not with the spirit, scholars of death and not of life, who instead of teaching mercy and life, threaten with punishment and death, and who condemn the just.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in unfaithful ministers who, instead of stripping themselves of their own vain ambitions, divest even the innocent of their dignity.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in the hardened hearts of those who easily judge others, with hearts ready to condemn even to the point of stoning, without ever recognizing their own sins and faults.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in expressions of fundamentalism and in terrorist acts committed by followers of some religions which profane the name of God and which use the holy name to justify their unprecedented violence.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in those who wish to remove you from public places and exclude you from public life, in the name of a pagan laicism or that equality you yourself taught us.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in the powerful and in arms dealers who feed the cauldron of war with the innocent blood of our brothers and sisters, and feed their children with bread drenched in blood.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in traitors who, for thirty pieces of silver, would consign anyone to death.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in thieves and corrupt officials who, instead of safeguarding the common good and morals, sell themselves in the despicable market-place of immorality.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in the foolish who build warehouses to store up treasures that perish, leaving Lazarus to die of hunger at their doorsteps.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in the destroyers of our “*common home*”, who by their selfishness ruin the future of coming generations.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in the elderly who have been abandoned by their families, in the disabled and in children starving and cast-off by our egotistical and hypocritical society.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas which have become insatiable cemeteries, reflections of our indifferent and anesthetized conscience.

O Cross of Christ, image of love without end and way of the Resurrection, today too we see you in noble and upright persons who do good without seeking praise or admiration from others.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in ministers who are faithful and humble, who illuminate the darkness of our lives like candles that burn freely in order to brighten the lives of the least among us.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in the faces of consecrated women and men – good Samaritans – who have left everything to bind up, in evangelical silence, the wounds of poverty and injustice.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in the merciful who have found in mercy the greatest expression of justice and faith.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in simple men and women who live their faith joyfully day in and day out, in filial observance of your commandments.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in the contrite, who in the depths of the misery of their sins, are able to cry out: Lord, remember me in your kingdom!

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in the blessed and the saints who know how to cross the dark night of faith without ever losing trust in you and without claiming to understand your mysterious silence.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in families that live their vocation of married life in fidelity and fruitfulness.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in volunteers who generously assist those in need and the downtrodden.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in those persecuted for their faith who, amid their suffering, continue to offer an authentic witness to Jesus and the Gospel.

O Cross of Christ, today too we see you in those who dream, those with the heart of a child, who work to make the world a better place, ever more human and just.

In you, Holy Cross, we see God who loves even to the end, and we see the hatred of those who want to dominate, that hatred which blinds the minds and hearts of those who prefer darkness to light.

O Cross of Christ, Arc of Noah that saved humanity from the flood of sin, save us from evil and from the Evil One. O Throne of David and seal of the divine and eternal Covenant, awaken us from the seduction of vanity! O cry of love, inspire in us a desire for God, for goodness and for light.

O Cross of Christ, teach us that the rising of the sun is more powerful than the darkness of night. O Cross of Christ, teach us that the apparent victory of evil vanishes before the empty tomb and before the certainty of the Resurrection and the love of God which nothing can defeat, obscure or weaken. Amen! 🌹

Way Of The Cross At The Colosseum:  
***Address of His Holiness Pope Francis***

*Palatine Hill*  
*Good Friday, 25 March 2016*

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## The Call of Gerald Manley Hopkins as Priest-Poet

Dasappan V. V.

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In spite of my great interest in Gerard Manley Hopkins, the Father of Modern English poetry, I have been asking in the silence of my heart a pertinent question: Hopkins being yet another poet of Western culture, apart from the fact that he is a Jesuit, how does he strike a chord with me in my Indian culture which is almost in sharp contrast to the culture in which Hopkins lived and wrote. It was then that I happened to come across Hopkins's own words quoted in A Devasaham's book that show the Jesuit poet's love of Indian culture and people. While studying philosophy at Stonyhurst, on 22 March 1872, Hopkins wrote to his friend William Garrett who was then working in Bengal in the Indian Educational Service: "I have a yearning towards Hindoos and mentioning 'Brahmapootra' feels enchanted by the very sound of the word – 'refreshing billowy majestic name! the next best thing to bathing in it'. He goes on to affirm: '... the Vedas and Hindoo philosophy are what I should hugely like to go in for'" (Devasahayam 13).

Being a great scholar, when Hopkins indirectly expressed his yearning to bathe in Brahmaputra, he certainly knew what he was talking about. He perhaps did know that Brahmaputra flowed through the Himalayas and that at a later stage it met the River Ganga. It also means that he knew the religious or cultural significance of these rivers for the people of India. From Hopkins's own words it is only reasonable to assume that

he read about and knew well the rich Indian culture. Had he lived longer, he would, perhaps, have visited India, learnt more about this ancient culture, and even wrote poetry in Indian languages like other Indian Jesuit poets Constantius Joseph Beschi, popularly known as *Veeramamunivar* in Tamil, Johannes Ernestus Hnaxleden, known as *Arnos Padiri* in Malayalam and Thomas Stephens in Konkani who is called the Father of Christian Literature in India. His unabated love for the people of India is clear from the following lines of his poem on a Jesuit missionary in India which he wrote in Latin: “*Sed miserere tuis tam multis millibus Indis,/ iam miserere tuis, Quamque rogare alium prosperant peccantque salute/ da Deus interea.* (But be merciful to your multitudes of Indians,/ now be merciful to yours,/ And that another ask for the prospering and sinning/ salvation, grant, God, meanwhile). With my new understanding of Hopkins, reading his works became a more enriching experience from an intercultural perspective.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, the eldest among the nine children of pious High Church Anglican parents, Manley Hopkins and Catherine, joined the Society of Jesus founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola. If Hopkins’ turning point in life was his conversion from Anglican faith to Catholicism, the pivot in Ignatius’ life was his conversion from a soldier of highly worldly desires to a devoted servant of Christ, poor and humble. Ignatius, a knight from Loyola Castle, Navarre in Spain, having realized the futility and meaninglessness of worldly glory, sets out as a pilgrim seeking deeper meaning in life, discerning the will of God, envisioning a newer world! The gracious God was propitious to the pilgrim, blessing him bounteously. Thus was born the band of Jesuits, the companions of Jesus. The spirit of Ignatius continues its pilgrimage, marching beyond time and space, delving into diverse cultures across the globe, enlivening and infusing in people of every kind the spirit of discernment and the spirit of generosity to live for others. Inspired by the Jesuit ideals and Ignatian spirituality, Hopkins joined the Jesuit

Novitiate of English Province at Manresa House, Roehampton in September 1868.

When Hopkins joined the British Province of the Jesuit Order, more than five decades had passed since its restoration. The Society of Jesus, which remained suppressed all over the world by Pope Clement XIV's bull *Dominus ac Redemptor* in 1773, was officially restored in 1814 by Pope Pius VII through the bull *Sollicitudo omnium*. But still there were serious objections and hesitations from the part of the Bishops and governments in most parts of the world, especially in England, to hand over the institutions back to the Jesuits which were established by them before the suppression. It was in the 1850s that the Jesuits succeeded in getting back most of their prestigious institutions across the world. With this the name and fame of the Jesuits suddenly began to spread far and wide. A renewed spirit marked the restored Jesuit Order and people everywhere, particularly the intellectual class, began to look up to the Jesuits for their spiritual and educational formation. As a result a steep rise in the number of young men joining the English Jesuit Province breaking all past history was evident. The present archivist and historian to the English Province, Francis Edwards says, "In 1867 the juniors were distributed between Belgium and Stonyhurst to make more room for novices who now stood at about twenty-four. A year later, they had grown to forty, an unprecedented number for the Province. . . Unusual in most other ways was Gerard Manley Hopkins, admitted in 1868" (Edwards 191).

This brief reflection on the Jesuit poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, is made at a time when there is a similar kind of renewed spirit for the Jesuits all over the world. For the first time in history a Jesuit Pope – Francis I – leads the Catholic Church who makes a great impact in the world in Christian leadership by following Christ poor and humble. And surprisingly enough the Jesuit Pope has taken for himself a name after the name of St. Francis of Assisi. It is interesting to note that Hopkins felt tremendous excitement and joy when he found confirmation of his idea of

inscape in the writings of Duns Scotus, a thirteenth century Franciscan philosopher and theologian. Just as Pope Francis finds in Francis Assisi the greatest model of Christian discipleship, so too in Scotus, the Jesuit poet finds a pointer to the lost harmony of town and country, of spirit and sense, of mind and matter: “He ... who of all men most sways my spirits to peace” (“Duns Scotus’s Oxford”). Hopkins’ appreciation of the theological positions of this Franciscan was not only a brave act but also a risky one, for it was a time when Scotism and Thomism, as theological systems, were meant to be almost deadly rivals for orthodox Christian thought. It was a time when the Church believed that everything that Thomas Aquinas said was the whole truth and the only truth and that any thought that did not fully agree with Thomas Aquinas was unacceptable for the Church. Hopkins failed in his theology examination partly because of his appreciation for this disciple of Francis Assisi.

Looking closely into the life of Hopkins after his conversion to Catholicism in October 1866, it is evident that he was fully living *The Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola. Every effort was made on his part to be totally faithful to the letter and spirit of this guide book. This book was so important in his life that he even wrote a commentary on it. To a large extent everything concerning Hopkins the Jesuit, including his creative writings, was centred on *The Spiritual Exercises*. A month Long Retreat based on *The Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius which Hopkins made, first in the novitiate and later during his tertianship, changed his view so radically that the body of his verse is nothing but a commentary on those exercises. “Thou heardst me truer than tongue confess / Thy terror, O Christ, O God; / Thou knowest the walls, alter and hour and night: / The swoon of a heart that the sweep and the hurl of thee trod” (“The Wreck of the Deutschland”). It was this profound religious experience which enabled him to make the fusion of faith and love of nature, though there was considerable continuity between the way Hopkins reacted to nature in his Oxford days and the way he responded after he left. The major and crucial



exception is the absence from his Oxford prose and poetry of any vital connection between his faith and his love of natural beauty. Hopkins's originality as a poet is closely related to his Ignatian vision of world and art. He believed that the beauty of the world honours God simply by existing. He strongly felt that the inscapes in nature were manifestations of God's presence in the world. This priest-poet felt great delight in the observation of nature since it was singing the glory of God. Thus it is obvious that the Society of Jesus was central in enabling him to make the fusion of aesthetic beauty and Catholic faith which is at the core of the poetry he wrote.

Professor K. Ayyappa Paniker, who is regarded as an icon of modernist culture and thinking in the field of literary criticism, holds that it is impossible to overstress the importance of *the Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius in the study of Hopkins. Paniker goes to the extent of viewing Hopkins' poems as spiritual exercises in the Ignatian sense as several of them conform to the structural sequence of prayer, preludes, points and colloquy, 'the Wreck of the Deutschland' providing the most comprehensive specimen of an Ignatian exercise. The critic further says, "Hopkins's major poems are all spiritual exercises on the pattern set by St. Ignatius. They illustrate the methods and processes by which the speaker-protagonist achieves freedom from the self and starts the quest for truth and ends up with a fuller understanding of God's ways and the relishing of His infinite mercy" (Paniker 2). Hopkins is a poet by nature. However Ignatius' meditative method of seeing with the eyes of the imagination is the most profound influence on Hopkins' poetry. The total configuration of many of Hopkins' poems has such correspondence with the structure of the Ignatian meditation that it can hardly be denied that Ignatian methods and meditative patterns became the fiber and fabric of his poetry.

Contradictions co-exist in human life. One often wonders at the inevitable paradoxes in the life and works of this Jesuit poet. Hopkins who, as a schoolboy, was awarded the Poetry Prize at

Highgate and the Governor's Golf Medal for Latin verse, and later became the star of Balliol College, Oxford, who graduated with a double First in Classical 'Greats', failed in his theology examination. After 14 years of training in the Society of Jesus when he took the Final Vows he was denied the status in the Jesuit Order as Professed Coadjutor, but rather was relegated to the status as Spiritual Coadjutor. Hopkins' biographer and Jesuit, Martin comments:

It was the first public indication since leaving St. Beuno's of the change in Hopkins's status that had come about as a result of having done poorly in his examinations there. Unlike the Professed, he could never hold a major office in the Society, nor would he be able to participate in general congregations or take the special vow of obedience to the Pope (Martin 344).

However we have no reason to think that Hopkins ever regretted becoming a Catholic and a Jesuit priest. Robert Bridges did attack Hopkins' decision to become a Catholic and a Jesuit. But Hopkins reproached him, asking if he doubted his sincerity. On the other hand Hopkins always cherished his great dream of converting Bridges to Catholicism. And in spite of the horrible depression Hopkins was going through at Dublin, he is said to have uttered "I am so happy, I am so happy" as his final words before he breathed his last.

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## Homily Notes

May 1, 2016: V Sunday of Easter

Acts 14:1-2, 22-29 Rev 21:10-14, 22-23 Jn 14:23-29

### Loving an Absent Jesus

In Africa young girls who consecrate themselves to God as nuns dress up as brides for a wedding and sing love songs to Jesus. A few years after such a religious ceremony, a young nun who had been having a rough time in her mission assignment comes back to the convent and asks the Mother Superior: “Mother, is it really true that we are spouses of Christ.” “Yes, it is true, my daughter,” replied the Mother Superior, “Why do you ask?” “Well,” stammered the young nun, “Since I was professed five years ago, I haven’t actually felt anything!”

Our poor nun may not have felt anything, yet she remains on the right track in understanding the relationship between Jesus and his devotees in terms of an intimate love relationship. When Jesus speaks in today’s gospel of **“those who love me”** he is referring to his followers. For Jesus “those who love me” is another way of saying “my disciples” or “those who believe in me” or simply “Christians.” The relationship between the Christian and Christ is essentially a love relationship. That is why Jesus said in John 15:15 **“I do not call you servants any longer ... I call you friends.”** Yet many of us feel more comfortable serving Jesus as boss rather than relating to him as a friend. There is a limit to what a boss can demand from you. There is no such limit when it comes to friendship and intimacy.

One thing we know about love is that lovers want to be with each other. But Jesus is not physically present. We cannot physically see him or touch him. This is the dilemma we see in the problem of the young nun. How can you love an absent Jesus? This is what today’s gospel is all about. In the gospel Jesus prepares his disciples, those who love him, for his departure from this world and shows them how they can keep love and intimacy alive even in

his physical absence. “ **Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them**” (John 14:23).

If you love Jesus (1) Keep his word. Follow his teachings. (2) This will activate God’s special love for you, and (3) Jesus and his Father will come and live permanently with you. In this way the vacuum left by the physical absence of Jesus will be filled spiritually by the divine presence which is as real or even more real than the physical presence. Our part in this whole process is to focus on keeping the word of Christ.

But how do we make sure we know the implication and meaning of the word of Christ in the ever changing and ever more complex realities of modern life? How can we be sure what Jesus would do and how he would act in the present concrete situations of our daily lives? Again Jesus foresaw this difficulty and provided for it. “**The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you**” (John 14:26). But what about the situation in the world today where a thousand Christians all “filled with the Holy Spirit” come up with a thousand different answers to the same question? Does the Holy Spirit contradict Himself? Here it is important to note that the “you” to whom these promises are made is plural, meaning, primarily, the community of believers, the church. Of course the Holy Spirit is with us individually, but the Holy Spirit is given primarily to the church and, through the church, to us as individuals when we become members of the church.

This is what we see in the 1<sup>st</sup> reading where disagreements among Christians are resolved through dialogue and community discernment and not through each one consulting the Holy Spirit privately. In the end they come out with a resolution which begins “**it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.**” (Acts 15:28). The word of Christ continues to live and resound in the word of the Holy Spirit speaking through the church. The days between the Ascension of Christ and Pentecost are special days of prayer for all Christians as they were for the first disciples of Jesus. This year let us pray especially for the gift of church unity, so that together we all can discern what the Spirit is saying to the church in the modern world and so bear united witness to the life-giving word of Christ. --**Munachi E. Ezeogu, cssp**

May 8, 2016: Ascension of Our Lord

Acts 1:1-11      Heb 9:24-28; 10:19-23    Luke 24:46-53

### **The Eternal Priest Enters the Sanctuary**

In his book *Written in Blood*, Robert Coleman tells the story of a little girl, Mary, who was ill and needed a blood transfusion. Her little brother, Johnny, had suffered from the same disease and had recovered two years earlier. Since her best chance of recovery was a transfusion from someone who had recovered from the disease, her little brother was identified as the ideal donor. “Would you give your blood to Mary?” the doctor asked. Johnny hesitated. He began to tremble. Then he smiled and said, “Sure, for my sister.” Soon the two kids were wheeled into the hospital room. Neither of them spoke, but when their eyes met, Johnny grinned. As the nurse inserted the needle into his arm, Johnny’s smile faded. Johnny watched his blood flow through the tube. When the ordeal was over, Johnny’s shaky voice broke the silence. “Doctor, when do I die?” It was only then that the doctor realize why Johnny had hesitated, why he trembled before he agreed to donate his blood. He thought giving his blood to his sister meant giving up his life. When he agreed to give the blood, Johnny had agreed to die so that his sister would live. Fortunately, Johnny did not have to die to save his sister.

Blood was a crucial commodity in the temple worship in Jerusalem. Much of the work of the priests involved slaughtering animals and shedding their blood to make atonement for sin, and sprinkling the people with blood to cleanse them from guilt. The reason for this was because, as the author of *Hebrews* explains, **“Under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins** (Hebrews 9:22). The most important institution in the covenant relationship of the Jewish people with God was not the king who ruled in God’s name, or the prophet who spoke the word of God, but the priest who offered the blood sacrifice that took away the sins of the people and restored them to God’s favour. In the people’s dealings with God, the priest was the number one mediator, since **“Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins** (Hebrews 5:1).”

Jesus did not identify himself as a priest or describe the role of his disciples as that of priesthood. The earliest Christians still worshiped in the temple and benefitted from the ministry of temple priests. When the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70 and the people had no more sacrifice, Jewish Christians began to understand that the sacrifice of animals in the temple was no longer

necessary because Jesus has made once-and-for-all the only sacrifice of blood that pleased God. By the time *Hebrews* was written, Jewish Christians had come to see Jesus as the priest *par excellence*. Compared to the priesthood of Jesus, the priesthood of the temple was only a shadow.

The ascension of Christ into heaven where he sits at God's right hand making intercession for God's people is compared to the temple priest going up the steps into the sanctuary (the holy place) to offer sacrifice. But the sacrifice of Christ is infinitely superior. Today's 2<sup>nd</sup> reading shows us three ways in which Christ's sacrifice is superior to that of the temple priest. Firstly, unlike the case of the temple priesthood, **"Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf"**(9:24). Secondly, the temple sacrifice was limited in its effect, hence it was offered constantly year after year. Christ's sacrifice was once and for all time (verses 25- 26). Finally, the temple priest offered the blood of lambs, but Christ has offered **"the sacrifice of himself"**(verse 26). The blood of the Son of God is infinitely more powerful than the blood of animals to take away our sins and cleanse us in such a way that we appear unblemished in God's sight.

As today we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord, let us not mourn the disappearance of Christ. Let us rather celebrate his going up into the eternal holy place, God's very presence, to make atonement for us. **"And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful"**(10:21-23).  
--Munachi E. Ezeogu, cssp

May 15, 2016: The Pentecost

Acts 2:1-11    Rom 8:1-17    Joh 14:15-16,23-26

### **Enkindle in Us the Fire of Your Love**

One bright Sunday morning like today, Benson's mother hurries into her son's bedroom and wakes him up. "Benson, it's Sunday. Time to get up! Time to get up and go to church! Get up!" Benson mumbles from under the covers, "I don't want to go." "What do you mean you don't want to go?" says the mother. "That's silly. Now get up and get dressed and go to church!" Benson goes, "No, I don't want to go and I'll give you two reasons why I don't want to go." He sits up on the bed and continues, "First, I don't like them and second, they don't like me." His mother replies, "Now, that's

just plain nonsense. You've got to go to church and I'll give you two reasons why you must. First, you're now forty years old and, second, you're the pastor!"

This sleepy Benson could as well be any of the apostles whom Jesus had commissioned to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria and to the ends of the earth. But as soon as Jesus leaves them, what do they do? They retire to their upper rooms and hide themselves. They were afraid of the Jews. Like Benson they knew that the people did not like them, they knew that their message was different from the popular message of the time, and they just felt like wrapping themselves up in bed and not having to get up and face the hostile society. We too are often like that, going to church quietly, receiving Jesus in our hearts quietly, and going home again quietly to say our morning and evening prayers quietly. But what about the charge that Jesus left for you and me to be his witnesses and to share the Good News of God's love with all humankind? No. People do not like to be reminded of God. I am afraid they are going to tell me off if I speak to them about God. I am afraid they will not listen to me. I am afraid they will call me a freak out of touch with reality. They don't like us and we don't like them. And so, like Benson, we give up on our God-given duty and go on enjoying our comfortable silence, our comfortable sleep.

Fortunately, Pastor Benson has a guide, his mother, who wakes him and persuades him to go out and preach. This is the kind of work that the Holy Spirit does in the hearts of believers. When fear of trouble tends to freeze our faith into silent submission to despair, the Holy Spirit warms us up and empowers us to go out there and make a difference. The Holy Spirit reminds us, as Benson's mother reminded him, that we have a mission. Our mission is to tell everybody the Good News that God is their Father, that God is the Father of us all, that in spite of all the visible difference of language and culture and social status, we are all one family and should therefore live as brothers and sisters. Our mission is to break the barriers between "us" and "them," between male and female, between Jew and Gentile, between rich and poor, between Black and White, between First World and Third World, and to bring all humankind to speak the one universal language of brotherly/sisterly love. This is possible only through the working of the Holy Spirit.

One reason his mother gave Benson why he should wake up from his sleep is that he is now forty years old. He is now of age. Christianity is now 2000 years old in the world. Yet even in the so-called Christian civilizations, the universal brotherhood of all humankind in God through Christ has not been

understood. “What can I do?” you may say, “I am only a single individual. What difference can I make?” Maybe we can learn something from the story of the black squirrel and the owl.

A black squirrel once asked a wise old owl what was the weight of a single snowflake. “Why, nothing more than nothing,” the owl answered. The squirrel then went on to tell the owl about a time when he was resting on a branch of a maple tree, counting each snowflake that came to rest on the branch until he reached the number 1,973,864. Then with the settling of the very next flake -- crack! The branch suddenly snapped, throwing the squirrel and the snow to the ground. “That was surely a whole lot of nothing,” said the squirrel.

You daily personal efforts to spread the reign of love and justice may be as lightweight as snowflakes. But by heaping our snowflakes together we shall eventually be able to break the heavy branch of sin, evil and injustice growing in our world today. **“Come Holy Spirit and fill the heart of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love.”**  
--Munachi E. Ezeogu, cssp

May 22, 2016: Most Holy Trinity Sunday

Prov 8:22-31; Rom 5:1-5; Jn 16:12-15

### **What is it like to be Triune God?**

Trinity is not a myth but it is a mystery. A myth is unreal but conceivable. A mystery is real but incomprehensible. Today is the feast of the Most Holy Trinity, a mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations but was made manifest by Christ. He spoke of God as his Father saying, “All that Father has belongs to me.” (Jn 16:15); he often called himself “the Son of God”, and he spoke of the third divine person as “the Spirit of truth” (Jn 16:13). Like all mysteries, Trinity is also a mind-boggling puzzle. To some it is an annoying riddle. But we need not be surprised at this, for it is about the all-powerful God who made the stars and the planets. It is about a God whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.

Whatever may be the depth of our understanding of the Trinity, it will still remain a mystery. Hence instead of worrying ourselves about “how can one God be three persons?” it is better to ask a more useful question, which could be this: “what is it like to be God?” to think of it, it is like asking someone from Australia, “What is it like to be an Australian?” The answer is obvious. You will never know what it is like to be an Australian unless you live as they live and learn to see their country from the inside, and see it as



they see it. You would have to fall in love with Australia before you could know what it is like to be an Australian. So it is with God. To know what it is like to be God, we must get closer to God and start living a life of intimacy with him. And to live such a life of intimacy with God is not impossible for Christians, because our God already dwells in every believer. As St Paul says, "The love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). God is closer to us than we can imagine. As fish inhabits the sea and birds the air, we live in the atmosphere of the Triune God. Hence, we need not search for him beyond the stars.

By living close to the Trinity who dwells within us, we cannot only have some idea about what it is like to be God, but also we will start living like God. This will be so because God as Trinity is like three candles but one light; and anyone who comes near the light cannot but be lit up. If we start living like the Triune God, we will find our life changing for the better. For example, since God as Trinity lives a group life, we too will shed our isolated existence. Since God as Trinity lives a community life, so too will we care for each other and stop saying, "I will attend to myself and God and then mind my own business." In other words, those who are close to the Trinity will start living their lives in the right way. Today so many people claim that they know the way to live, but unfortunately each claim conflicts with the other. For instance, the film and television industries have their gospel, the gambling strips of modern cities have theirs. The print industry and political heavy weights have their own version. In spite of all these confusing messages as to how to live, it is those who live like the Triune God who have learnt the right way.

**--Dn. Vikas Jason**

May 29, 2016: Corpus Christi

Genesis 14:18-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Luke 9:11b-17

### **Body and Blood of Christ**

The gospel of today brings to us the very familiar passage about the multiplication of bread and fish. This miracle is found in the synoptic gospels and also John. Jesus broke the five loaves and two fish to feed the hungry because he had compassion for them. We are all called to break ourselves of our selfishness, ego-centredness and give our lives for the need of the world of today. Christ broke himself for the world. We are called to do the same. His blood was shed for our sanctification and redemption, replacing the old ways of sacrificing. Blood signifies life. Through the shedding of his blood, he paid the price for our shortcomings. We are called

to give life to the lifeless, perhaps to those in our vicinity in need of human compassion.

Jesus asks us to remember him through this commemoration. He left us a perfect sacrifice to be continued until we shall see him face-to-face one day. The Eucharist is the highest form of Christian worship. It unites people of all races and culture. Unity is the sign of the working of the spirit because the spirit unites. Paul in the second reading affirms that the communion that we share in the breaking of the bread is a true sign of communion which is to be continued until the Lord comes. The symbol of bread and wine is also powerfully portrayed in the first reading of today when Mechizedek, the priest and king offered prayers to God through the bread and wine for the welfare of Abram. In the Gospel, Jesus offered himself up to the Father through this memorial sacrifice. Every time we come for the celebration of the Eucharist, we are called to remember the Paschal Mystery.

**--Deacon Vekupa Rhakho George**

June 5, 2016: X Sunday of Ordinary Time

1 Kgs 17: 17-24, Gal 1: 11-19 and Lk 7: 11-17

### **You Are Under Arrest**

We live in a world, where chaos and hatred have become the order of the day. The moment we turn on the television or try to have a glance at the newspaper, it shouts back at us with news of someone being cut down, raped, abused, tortured, kidnapped and even traumatised. Sadly, these terrible things do not remain in the newspapers. They happen in real life too. If anyone has never been involved in pain and suffering in one's life, then they might be the luckiest ones alive. Every human being is drawn up into one form of anguish or another, either being victimised or being the victimiser, either being the one who is hurt or the one who hurts. But today, we have a special and interesting message for all of us in this heartless world. Think of someone who could arrest you for all the pain and suffering you have caused in your life. This arrest is not a normal handcuff on your wrists, but someone who grips your heart and your whole self.

Today's first reading and Gospel are mirror reflections. The first reading shows how Elijah revives the widow's only son from the clutches of death. She is the same widow from Zarephath who shared the last morsel of flour and last drop of oil to Elijah. The point here is, in spite of not being from Israel, she never blames God for the misfortune of death, unlike most of the Jewish people portrayed in the Gospels. She is in anguish because her past sins are remembered at a crucial time in life where she has no one else to depend

upon for her existence. As Elijah stretches out three times over the boy, it makes her realise that God can restore life and most importantly, that he is a man of God. It is an experience where both the widow is arrested by God to realise about the power of life and Elijah is arrested by God to have a more solid belief in him.

The second reading from the letter to the Galatians is a classic example of how Paul who was hell-bent on devastating the new Christ movement, making a 360 degree turn to be madly convinced about spreading the name of Christ, even to the point of death. This too, is Paul being arrested by God, to turn himself from being a victimiser to being a victim for Christ and his people.

The Gospel is more precisely an echo of 2 Kings 4:18-37 where Prophet Elisha raises up the Shunnamite widow's son. Moving away from the technical details the Gospel brings out the strongest portrayal of emotions, emotions which we too can relate in our lives. The painful emotion of sorrow has been conveyed by the evangelist not by the description of the funeral procession at the gates of the city, but by stating that it was the widow's only son who had died. One can try to imagine the pain of someone close to you leaving one's earthly abode forever. The evangelist even brings out the emotions of Jesus towards this incident. Never ever has anyone mentioned a strong emotion in the life of Jesus as he being moved 'from the depths of his heart.' It was a time in the history of Judaism where Stoicism and apathy was considered to be a noble virtue. It was a time when a person who went beyond the limitations of emotions was considered to be someone great.

Our God does not hide his humanness. Our God understands the pain and suffering which we undergo. The mystery of incarnation has opened ourselves to God just as God had been opened to ourselves. Jesus moved by this feeling for the small family reaches out and touches the funeral mat of the young man. Jesus reaches out to restore life into the lifeless, to bring back the joy of being alive. Jesus arrests the young man and brings him back to life. Even the people there acknowledge that he is the Son of God.

It is extremely difficult to rely on God in times of our sorrow, pain and afflictions which have been unjustly laden upon us. It becomes hard to shield the flickering flame of faith from the winds of anguish and disturbance. It is in this situation, where we must ask God to give us the grace to stay strong amidst the storms of emotional and physical sufferings. God will surely arrest us and give us a direction for our life. Jesus is always there to arrest you in your sorrows, pain, and anguish, in order to bring you

back to the fullness of life. In order to be arrested by God today, there is no need to put your hands up. All you have to do is open your heart and lift it up to Him, be strong in your faith and let God be the one responsible to being you back to the fullness of life.

**--Dn.Romal**

June 12, 2016: XI Sunday of the Year

2 Sam 12:7-10, 13

Gal 2:15-16, 19-20

Luk 7:36-8:3

### **The Cookie Thief**

Today's gospel reminds one of the story of the cookie thief. A woman at the airport waiting to catch her flight bought herself a bag of cookies, settled in a chair in the airport lounge and began to read her book. Suddenly she noticed the man beside her helping himself with cookies from the cookie bag between them. Not wanting to make a scene, she read on, ate cookies, and watched the clock. As the daring "cookie thief" kept on eating the cookies she got more irritated and said to herself, "If I wasn't so nice, I'd blacken his eye!" With each cookie she took, he took one too. When only one was left, she wondered what he would do. Then with a smile on his face and a nervous laugh, he took the last cookie and broke it in half. He offered her half, and he ate the other. She snatched it from him and thought, "Oh brother, this guy has some nerve, and he's also so rude, why, he didn't even show any gratitude!" She sighed with relief when her flight was called. She gathered her belongings and headed for the gate, refusing to look at the ungrateful "thief." She boarded the plane and sank in her seat, then reached in her baggage to fetch her book, and what she saw made her gasp with surprise. For there in front of her eyes were her bag of cookies. Then it dawned on her that the cookies they ate in the lounge was the man's and not hers, that the man was not a thief but a friend who tried to share, that she was the rude one, the ungrateful one, the thief.

The cookie thief story reminds us, as we see in today's gospel, that it often happens that the one pointing the accusing finger turns out to be the guilty one, that the complainant sometimes turns out to be the offending party. In the cookie story, the woman believed she was such a wonderful person to put up with the rudeness and ingratitude of the man sitting beside her. In the end she discovered that she was the rude and ungrateful one and the man was wonderfully friendly. In the gospel the Pharisee thinks he is the righteous one who is worthy to be in the company of Jesus and that the woman was the sinful one unworthy to be seen with Jesus. In the end Jesus showed each of them where they really belonged and the woman was seen as the one who was righteous and more deserving of the company of Jesus than the self-righteous Pharisee.

Why do things like this happen? Well, because it is easier to hear the snoring of the other person than it is to hear your own snoring. It is easy to notice the fault of other people while being blind to our own faults. Great men and women of God have been, all without exception, people who are so aware of their own inadequacies that they are hardly surprised at other people's shortcomings. People who delight in criticising others thereby betray their lack of self-awareness. In the end they discover that they themselves are indeed the cookie thieves that they accused others to be.

But what was the mistake of the Pharisee? If the woman was indeed a prostitute where then did he err? After all what he said about the woman was true, wasn't it? Of course the woman was a sinner. Jesus did not say that the woman was not a sinner. Jesus only said that the man was a sinner too, and in fact a worse sinner than the woman.

I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love (Luke 7:44-47).

The problem of the Pharisee was his notion of sin and holiness. For him the woman was an "occasion of sin" to be avoided by godly people. Jesus corrects him: it is not what you avoid that counts, it is what you do. The Pharisee might indeed have avoided occasions of sin, but he did nothing for Jesus in need. The woman, on the other hand, attended to the practical needs of Jesus. Jesus accepts the woman's external show of love as a clear manifestation of inner faith: **"Your faith has saved you; go in peace"** (v.50). This practical engagement is the crucial difference between her and the Pharisee. How do we employ our faith in practical service of the needy?

Today's gospel is good news indeed to all who have been humiliated by the "good people" of this world, humiliated in a supposed concern to maintain the standard of holiness in the household of God. Jesus assures them that they are indeed closer to the heart of God than their accusers have made them to believe. And to those who, like the Pharisee, feel that Jesus is their exclusive birthright, the Good News for them today is simple: Watch it, lest in the end you discover that it is you who are the cookie thief after all.

-- **Munachi E. Ezeogu, cssp**

June 19, 2016: XII Sunday of the Year  
Zech 12:10-11 Gal 3:23-29 Luke 9:18-22

### **The Challenge of Faith**

Among the fables of Aesop is one entitled *The Hunter and the Woodman*. A Hunter was searching for the tracks of a Lion. He asked a man felling oaks in the forest if he had seen any marks of the lion's footsteps or knew where his lair was. "Oh yes," said the Woodman, "I will take you to the Lion himself." The Hunter turned pale from fear and stuttered, "No, thanks. I did not ask that; it is only his track that I am looking for, not the Lion himself." In our dealings with God and with one another we are often like this hunter. We profess that we stand for something but when the full implication of what we profess stares us in the face we draw back.

This is what we see in today's gospel story. Peter, speaking for himself and for the disciples, rightly confesses his faith in Jesus as the long-expected Messiah. When Jesus reveals to him and the disciples the implications of his being the Messiah they begin to draw back. By confessing Jesus as the Messiah the disciples show that they have gone above the level of the "people" who take Jesus to be nothing more than a prophet. Jesus then proceeds to tell them the implications of what they had just said: **"The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."** (Luke 9:22). Now, the disciples are not ready for this. They are looking for the footprints of the lion and Jesus offers to take them face to face with the lion. They begin to withdraw. This withdrawing is more dramatic in the gospel of Matthew where Peter takes Jesus aside and tries to talk him out of the suffering and death he was destined to undergo. But Jesus would shun him and dub him Satan for seeing things from the purely human rather than from God's point of view. Luke's version of the story which we read today focuses on the disciples as a whole and not particularly on Peter. This might explain why it does not include the dialogue and the incident between Jesus and Peter after Peter had made the all-important confession. Rather Luke shows the disciples pulling back from Jesus at his arrest, suffering and death, which shows that they do not understand the implication of the faith they profess in Jesus as the Messiah.

Peter and the disciples are to be commended for the courage to think for themselves. Jesus shows that he expects his followers to think for themselves when he asks them first, **"Who do the crowds say that I am?"** (v. 18), and then the all-important question: **"But who do you say that I am?"** (v. 20). Disciples must inform themselves on what the current

thinking is on any given issue. One can achieve that by reading books, listening to the radio, watching the television and surfing the internet. Over and above that, disciples must then, in light of Christian faith and revelation, make up their minds on the issues. Christians must not allow themselves to internalize the voice of the “people” such that the voice of the “people” becomes the voice of their conscience. This is what Paul is telling us in Romans 12:2 **“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.”** As people of faith Jesus asks us to *know* what “people” around us are thinking, but not necessary to *endorse* what they are thinking. Like the prophets of old, faithfulness to God demands that we follow the voice of God within us, which we call conscience, rather than popular opinion.

Nevertheless, discerning what God is saying to us is only the first part of our challenge as Christians. The second and even more deciding part is following in practical life the implications of what God is saying to us. This is the crucial moment. This is facing up to the lion – the lion that must be confronted before justice and peace can prevail. Anything short of this and we are like the hunter searching for the lion trail and not the lion himself. Such a hunter achieves nothing at the end of the day. Soon we shall all be invited, like the disciples, to proclaim our faith in Christ. Let us promise God that we shall not pull back when the implications and challenges of faith dawn on us in our day-to-day lives. **--Munachi E. Ezeogu, cssp**

June 26, 2016: XIII Sunday of the Year

1 Kgs 19:16b, 19-21; Gal 5:1, 13-18; Luke 9:51-62

### **Called to Love**

Christian call is a call to love the other as oneself. There is nothing greater than to love and give one’s life for the other. Christ is the perfect example of this and we are all called to imitate this perfect love of Christ. The second reading of today exhorts you and me about this great virtue called love.

The call that we received is an uncompromising love. We are asked not to turn back once we set foot to the kingdom mission. This is a forward-looking mission to the eschatological times. Our hope is in the Lord who made heaven and earth and who sent his only son to redeem the world out of love for humanity. Jesus came for a purpose and He was firm at it. Nothing on earth could deviate him from the mission for which He came. He rebuked the apostles for their myopic vision. Despite the fact that Jesus was

continually showing them the values of the kingdom, yet they were sometimes hard-hearted.

All the readings of today asks us to be forward-looking. In the first reading of today, we hear the call of Elisha. He left everything and followed Elijah. The second reading of today exhorts us to be free from the anchors of slavery to sin because we are made free through the one-time sacrifice which Christ underwent for us. Therefore if the Son makes us free, we are free indeed (cf. Jn 8:36)! Christ came and freed us. We are liberated beings set apart for the kingdom mission just as Paul was (cf. Rom 1:1). That Christ who died and rose again is very much alive and active in our midst. We are called to herald this good news to the ends of the world.

**--Deacon Vekupa Rhakho George**

*(Due to scarcity of space Book Review is left out for this issue)*

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