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Editorial

A Mercy-Filled Life

If there is one person who immersed herself in the “peripheries” Pope Francis is drawn to, it was Blessed Teresa of Kolkata, writes Cindy Wooden in Catholic News Service. If there was one who showed courage and creativity in bringing God’s mercy to the world, like Pope Francis urges, it was the diminutive founder of the Missionaries of Charity.

For us, the Catholic Church’s Year of Mercy will reach its culmination when Pope Francis canonizes Mother Teresa on Sept. 4, recognizing the holiness of charity, mercy and courage found in a package just 5-feet tall.

“Where Mother pushed the Missionaries of Charity to the edge, to the most difficult places,” said Ken Hackett, U.S. ambassador to the Holy See, who said he visited her houses “all the time, everywhere.”

“They were always way out there, both geographically and with the people who absolutely fell through the cracks,” he said. Mother Teresa opened homes in Ethiopia during the communist military dictatorship, in the most destitute neighborhoods of Haiti’s capital, in Rwanda after the genocide and in Yemen, where four Missionaries of Charity were murdered in March.

“When there was war, when there was fighting, there they were,” Hackett said. “They stayed.”

Mother Teresa demonstrated that living a life committed to mercy took “selflessness and courage,” he said.

Her courage also was demonstrated in her ability to “speak truth to power,” he said. Mother Teresa visited the United States regularly, speaking to Catholic groups, opening homes and meeting with presidents, including Ronald Reagan, George Bush and Bill Clinton. “She was straight out against abortion,” the ambassador said. “From conception to death -- she was the whole thing and didn’t pull any punches.”

Like Pope Francis, he said, Mother Teresa drew energy from personal, one-on-one contact with people and consciously chose to live as simply as the poor she befriended and tended.

But it is not just about “going out,” Valeria Martano, Asia coordinator for the Community of Sant’Egidio said. For both Pope Francis and Mother Teresa, she said, everything starts with prayer.

“What Mother Teresa lived, Pope Francis teaches constantly: compassion in the face of pain and never accepting indifference in the face of suffering,” said Archbishop Matteo Zuppi of Bologna, Italy. For the archbishop, Mother Teresa modeled “a church close to the poor, a church that is mother to the poor and that lives the joy of serving the poor.”

Revelations after her death that she suffered a “dark night of the soul,” decades of feeling abandoned by God, are for Archbishop Zuppi a further sign of her deep immersion in the lives of the poor and forgotten, reports Catholic News Service.

“Her spiritual director would say that thirst is knowing there is water and longing for it,” he said. “She was a woman who made the thirst of Christ on the cross her own. She lived that thirst.”

Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ
Editor



Sensitivity to the Other: The Example of the Samaritan Man

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Who is the other? How can we treat him or her. The parable or example of the Samaritan man is valid even today. A careful examination of the text shows that there are two distinct episodes in **Luke 10:25-37**: (1)

A pronouncement about the double commandment of love; (2) the story of the Good Samaritan. These episodes seem to have existed separately in the Jesus' tradition which Luke received. By introducing the lawyer's question: Who is my neighbour?, Luke makes an attempt to connect the two episodes. But the attempt is not very successful since the parable of the Good Samaritan does not really answer the lawyer's question.

The Story of the Samaritan Man

Though the story of the Good Samaritan is often called a parable, it is better understood as an example (an "exemplum" in Rhetoric). It provides a practical model for a Christian conduct which responds to the radical demands of the Gospel. It also includes the approval or the disapproval of certain modes of behaviour.

Crucial to the understanding of the story are certain significant details:

1. The privileged status of the priest and the Levite in Palestinian Jewish society. Their Levitical heritage associated them intimately with the Temple cult and the heart of Jewish life as worship of Yahweh.
2. Defilement thought to be derived from contact with a dead or an apparently dead body. The priest and the Levite passed by on the other side in order to avoid contamination by contact with a dead body.
3. The attitude of the Palestinian Jews towards the Samaritans is summed up so well by John 4/9: Jews use nothing in common with the Samaritan (non *coutuntur*). Their history made them schismatics in the eyes of the Jews, and relations with them were far from cordial.

The compassion and kindness shown by a schismatic Samaritan to an unfortunate human victim stands out vividly against the heartless, law-inspired insensitivity of two official representatives of the Jewish religion.

These details underlie the story's basic contrast: the compassion and kindness shown by a schismatic Samaritan to an unfortunate human victim stands out vividly against the heartless, law-inspired insensitivity of two official representatives of the Jewish religion. Thus, the point of the story is summed up in the lawyer's reaction, that a 'neighbour' is anyone in need with whom one comes in contact and to whom one can show compassion and kindness, even beyond the bounds of one's own ethnic or religious group.

Sensitivity to the Other

The story of the Good Samaritan raises some questions for us. I shall discuss just three of them:

1. What is the place of law in our life? Or what influence does it exert on our behaviour?

The priest and the Levite in the story were insensitive men because of their fidelity to the laws regarding defilement. But the regulations on defilement from contact with a dead body were also to be found in the Samaritan Pentateuch, but they did not prevent the Samaritan from being sensitive and helpful to a person in need. His compassion and kindness enabled him to transcend such restrictions. His love and concern goes beyond all rules and regulations.

We are disciples and ministers of Jesus who declared that Sabbath is for humankind. Sabbath was indeed the highest religious law of the Jews, but Jesus subordinated it to the welfare of the human person. What would be for us a healthy attitude to law which does not prevent us from being sensitive and helpful to people in need? This question needs an honest answer.

2. Is insensitivity to people in need a vocational hazard of priestly/religious life? Because of the kind of training we have received, because of the style of life we have adopted, do we inevitably tend to be blind and deaf to the cries of people in agony? As priests we are called to be mediators between God and people. We are meant to be signs, sacraments of God's presence and activity in the world. Yet we seem to be quite different from the God of the Exodus who says:

I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey...
(Exodus 3:7-8)

3. Do we tend to be communal in our social concern? Is our approach to the problems and needs of people much too Church-centred?

In the Gospel passage when the lawyer speaks of the commandment to love your neighbour as yourself he is quoting Leviticus 19:18. In the context neighbour means a fellow Israelite. Let me quote the two verses immediately before 19:18:

You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbour: I am the Lord. You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself (Lev 19:16-17).

But the Samaritan who is held up as a model for us does not primarily think of himself as a Samaritan but as a human being. Hence for him the important thing was not that a Jew was in need of help but that a human being was. In this context let me quote the perceptive comment of Pope Benedict XVI (now *Emeritus*):

The parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:25-37) offers two particularly important clarifications. Until that time, the concept of “neighbour” was understood as referring essentially to one’s countrymen and to foreigners who had settled in the land of Israel; in other words, to the closely-knit community of a single country or people. This limit is now abolished. Anyone who needs me, and whom I can help, is my neighbour. The concept of “neighbour” is now universalized, yet it remains concrete. Despite being extended to all humankind, it is not reduced to a generic, abstract and undemanding expression of love, but calls for my own practical commitment here and now (*Deus Caritas Est*, n.15)

Concluding Remarks

We live in a country where the pride of one ethnic or religious group forces another group to develop an equally false and divisive pride of its own; when the selfishness of one group forces

another group to develop a selfishness of its own. It is here that we are called upon to practise the universalism of Christian love. We believe that the object of God's love is the whole world, that Jesus Christ died not just for Christians but for all human beings. This demands that we be sensitive to the problems and needs of everyone, that we be at the service of all. As Vatican II declares: "Christians cannot yearn for anything more ardently than to serve the men and women of the modern world ever more generously and effectively" (GS 93).

It is here that we see the significance of the double commandment of love which in Luke serves as a preface to the story of the Good Samaritan. It is only when we really love people, only when we are genuinely interested in and concerned about their problems and needs that we can truly be sensitive to them. Thus we can be sensitive to the Other in their Otherness. 🌹

It is only when we really love people, only when we are genuinely interested in and concerned about their problems and needs that we can truly be sensitive to them. Thus we can be sensitive to the Other in their Otherness.



The 'Blue Gold' Discourse: One Dimensional?

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Introduction

Water is an essential source of life of all creation. Water precedes all forms of life and upholds all creation (Eliade 1971: 188). Human life begins in the waters of the womb; and their mortal remains ultimately become one with earth and her watery depths. Water is, as the Holy Father Pope Francis says, “indispensable for human life and for supporting terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems”. It is God’s benevolent gift to all creation and therefore, access to clean water is “a basic and universal human right”. (Francis 2015: 28, 30).

The thesis of my paper is: water is perceived as a source of life, as sacred and mysterious, as a commodity, as a common gift to all, and as a basic right. Those who perceive it as a commodity or as an economic good are often blind to other dimensions of water. My paper consists of two parts. The first part explores very briefly the significance of water in different religious traditions, and water as an ambivalent symbol because of its destructive power. The second part deals with the issue of perceiving water as an economic good. The paper ends with a plea to experience water not from the perspective of anthropocentrism but of life-centeredness; not from a market economy but as God’s precious gift to all of creation.

1. Symbolism of Water in Religions

Water is beauty and life. It is a multifaceted resource. It has cultural, spiritual and symbolic dimensions. It is an ambivalent symbol. It has the power to give and nourish life and as well to destroy it. The absolute necessity of water for life, its ability to purify and clean, to build and soften enabled humanity to perceive water as a wide-ranging symbol in religious traditions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, and Folk religions), and cultures. The sacred quality of water is a common thread that runs through all religions. The indigenous religions perceive water as a kin of their web of life.

Folk religions in some parts of South India have shrines adjacent to water bodies like lakes, ponds and rivers dedicated to deities. The deities are believed to be guardian-deities of water bodies or personification of water bodies. Therefore, the shrines for these deities are built on the side of the tank-bunds or lake-bunds.

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The inherent qualities of water as source of life, as life-nourisher and as a purifier have paved the way for its highly symbolic character or sacred status in many religions and beliefs around the world. Water plays a significant role in the religious rituals and ceremonies of all the major religious traditions, and more so in indigenous and folk religions, particularly in the act of purification and signifies symbolically new life experienced by believers of all religious colours and ethnic hues.

Water plays a significant role in the socio-cultural realm of many societies in their customs, life-cycle related celebrations, like in birth, marriage and death rituals and socio-cultural festivals. In the social sphere, water is also used as a means of segregation in exploitative and inhuman structures, like the caste system in India.

Water is an ambivalent symbol because of its power to give life and destroy life. The sight of human suffering due to Tsunami and floods breaks our hearts, makes us dumb and our eyes go dry. Should water be blamed

for its ‘destructive power’? The disturbing global warming has been accompanied by a constant rise in the sea level in the recent decades (Francis 2015: 23). A one-metre rise may displace about 7.1 million people in India, most of them poor (Noorokariyil 2007: 55). A recent scientific study tells: cities like London, New York, Shanghai, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Hamburg and Kolkata will be drowned by the end of this century (*Dailythanthi* 2015).

Water is an ambivalent symbol because of its power to give life and destroy life. The sight of human suffering due to Tsunami and floods breaks our hearts, makes us dumb and our eyes go dry. Should water be blamed for its ‘destructive power’?

2. Water as an Economic Good

In the wake of increasing privatization, the other aspects of water are “largely being dismissed as esoteric and meaningless. In doing so water is being robbed of its multifaceted meanings.... To view water merely as an economic good” in a way undermines “its embeddedness in the everyday social, cultural and symbolic contexts within which people all over the world live their lives” (Mehta 2000: 11).

According to UNDP Report, nearly 15 million people die every year due to lack of water. When there is lack of water, it is the poor women and children who suffer the maximum. As per the UN estimate, around 2.5 billion people on the planet still lack access to safe sanitation and 750 million do not have safe drinking water. Worldwide, more people die from unsafe water annually than from all forms of violence, including war (Gleick 2015).

Poor access to clean drinking water and sanitation, increase in water-related diseases and disasters, cut-throat and highly manipulative competitions for water among different regions and sectors, and the effects of climate change pose daunting challenges to eco-systems and threaten the existence of life on the planet, our common home. The deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet. In reality, “the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest”. Therefore, “we have to realize that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor* (Francis 2015: 48, 49).

Since Rio (1992) and the Dublin Principles (1992), water is increasingly being seen as an economic good. And the market was evoked as a way to solve water scarcity problems. But has it solved the problems? The ‘water as an economic good’ narrative monopolizes the contemporary global market and obscures the cultural, social, symbolic and sacred dimensions of water. Is acceptance of water as an ‘economic good’, as a ‘saleable commodity’, the only way to solve the problems of water shortages or to lead to a more efficient use of the resource? (Mehta 2000: 11, 12).

It was thought that handing over water to Private Corporations was one of the best ways to provide good services to the poor at a suitable price (Petrella 2000: 72). But I am afraid the reality is far from it! Even today, the poor pay much more than the rich

for water. Has privatization of water, the universal gift of God, made it to be very poor-friendly? If the basic aim of turning water into a 'saleable commodity' or 'a blue gold' is to enhance the water security of the poor, then enhancing people's access to water and questions concerning justice emerge as a high priority.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with the following words: "the globalization of water has far reaching implications for questions concerning the rights of people to this life-giving resource and the protection of environmental resources"

(Mehta 2000: 13). The questions concerning equity and justice remain to be answered adequately. For, as Pope Francis says, "Water is the most essential element for

"The globalization of water has far reaching implications for questions concerning the rights of people to this life-giving resource and the protection of environmental resources"

life, and the future of humanity depends on our capacity to guard it and share it" (Francis 2015²).

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[This article is adapted from his speech at the United Nations, Rome.]



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

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2.3.3 Images of the Merciful Father

Among the images used to describe God in the Bible, two are of utmost importance in the context of a reflection on God's mercy. They are the images of the *Good Shepherd* and of the *Parent*. That the Lord is the Good shepherd is strongly expressed in Ezek 34. After criticizing the other shepherds as selfish the Lord removes them and takes over the duties of a shepherd on himself. V 16 points out that he seeks even the lost ones (cf. Lk 19:10). The same theme is also taken over by Ps 23 and here the accent is very personal. It depicts the Lord who cares for the very ordinary needs of the one who prays and provides him the protection and the loving care in abundance. This image of the Lord as the Good Shepherd is continued in the New Testament and is applied to Jesus as the Good Shepherd (cf. Jn 10) who is different from robbers, thieves and hired men and who gives his life for the sake of the sheep.

The second important image of God is that of a parent. Hos 11:1 demonstrates this effectively by attributing the Exodus event to

the parental care of the Lord. Like a loving parent he has taught Ephraim to walk (v 3) and has bent down to feed him (v 4). The parental care of the Lord is presented here in the context of the anger he has ('roaring like a lion' in v 10) against the people because of their disloyalty (v 2.7.12). There are a number of other passages in the Bible in which we find the Lord himself making a confession of his parenthood. Already in Ex 4:22-23 the Lord has called the people of Israel as his 'first-born' and as his 'son.' Deut 14:1 calls the people directly as 'children of God.' 2 Sam 7:14 presents the Lord as the father of David and David as his son. The Lord is also a father (Deut 32:6; Jer 3:4) and he is addressed as father twice in Is 63:16 and once in Is 64:8. There are also other passages which speak of God as father (cf. Ps 68:6; 103:13). The same God is also spoken of as a mother (cf. Is 42:1-9; 46:3; 49:15; 66:13 and Ps 131:2).

There are a number of other passages in the Bible in which we find the Lord himself making a confession of his parenthood.

2.3.4 The Wrath of the Merciful God

We have already seen in the context of Ex 34:6-7 that the idol worship of the Israelites aroused the anger of God. However, this anger was then transformed into mercy and love. There are also other places in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament where God is seen as one who gets angry, who punishes, who kills and who is also jealous. Now the question is how to reconcile the mercy of God with his wrath and punishment.

Deut 29:28 speaks of the wrath of God in a compressed manner mentioning three terms, namely, anger, fury and great wrath (cf. also Jer 21:5; Jer 32:37). Among the three instances at least in the case of the first two, namely, in Deut 29:28 and Jer 21:5, there is a change of this wrath into mercy. Deut 29:28 occurs in

the context of the covenant and announces a punishment that will come upon those who become unfaithful to the covenant. Thereby this text merely repeats what is already declared in Deut 28, namely, the curses for infidelity to the covenant. But if the people repent and return to the Lord then the wrath of the Lord will be transformed into compassion (cf. Deut 30:3). Similarly, Jer 21:5 announces Exile as a punishment for disloyalty of the people of Israel. Later it is announced (cf. Jer 30-34) that the exile will be brought to an end and the people will return to the land of Israel.

There are also other texts within the Old Testament that show that the Lord abandons his people only partially and temporarily (cf. Is 54:7-8.10; Hos 11.5.8-9). There are a number of other texts in the Old Testament which speak of God's anger which is later transformed into mercy and compassion. The Book of

The anger or the wrath of God is only temporary and they serve as a means of chastisement or as an invitation to return to the Lord.

Judges represents recurring anger of God against the unfaithful Israel but which is changed into merciful act when God institutes Judges who save the people from the hands of their enemies. The same mode of behaviour can also be observed in the Book of Jonah in which God initially intends to punish the people of Nineveh and forces Jonah to go there but later "saw what they [the Ninevites] did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it (3:10)." Mic 7:18-19 is another text which speaks of the mercy of God. All the instances which we have looked at under this section, particularly the three citations we have just made, namely Is 54:7-8.10; Hos 11:8-9 and Mic 7:18-19, make it clear that the anger or the wrath of God is only temporary and they serve as a means of chastisement or as an invitation to return to the Lord.¹

There are also texts in the New Testament which depict the Father of Jesus Christ as a God who is ‘rich in mercy’ (Eph 2:4) and whose mercy is revealed in his sending of his son Jesus to save his people (cf. Lk 1:58; Rom 11:30-32). In Eph 2:3-7 the human situation of sin is signified by the usage of ‘children of wrath’ who ‘were dead through their trespasses.’ This is similar to the situation of ‘universal sin’ of Rom 3:9.23 which is actually supposed to have resulted in the wrath of God (cf. Rom 1:18, 2:5.8; 3:5). But both in Eph 2:5-7 and in Rom 3:21-31 we encounter a God who, instead of punishing the sinners, saves them from the situation of sin.

Sometimes it is misunderstood that God’s mercy is made available only to the chosen people of God, but the Bible has a different story to tell us.

2.3.5 His Mercy Reaches the ‘Outsiders’

Sometimes it is misunderstood that God’s mercy is made available only to the chosen people of God, but the Bible has a different story to tell us. In fact already when the Lord called Abraham he did not promise his blessings only to Abraham and his descendants but the Lord also tells him: “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (cf. Gen 12:3). Thus the election or the calling of Abraham already contains and implies a blessing to all the tribes or the families of the earth.

Secondly we also come across a number of passages in the Bible which present God as one who hears the prayer of outsiders. For example if we take the case of Pharaoh, though he refuses to free the people of Israel from slavery, still when he requests Moses to pray so that the plague that has come upon the Egyptians might disappear, the Lord listens to Moses and removes the plague from the midst of the Egyptians (cf. Ex 8:8.12.25.28; 9:28; 10:17-18). The gathering of the nations

towards the end of the Book of Isaiah (cf. Is 66:18-21) and the universal showering of the spirit of God on all humankind (cf. Joel 3:1-2) show the universal direction of God's mercy.

Thirdly we have the so called *trias*, that is, the widow, the orphan and the stranger who are supposed to be taken care of by the Israelites (cf. Deut 24:17-21). Already Deut 10:18 presents the Lord himself as one who "executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing." Anna Norrbak demonstrates that the duty to care for this *trias* of the Old Testament is not an additional duty but it is part of the covenantal obligation.²

When we move to the New Testament we see the mercy of God demonstrated through the fact that God made Jesus 'to be sin who knew no sin' (cf. 2 Cor 5:21) so that he could reconcile the humans unto himself through Jesus Christ. As Paul explains in Rom 5:6-10, that the people for whom Jesus died were neither good nor righteous but were weak, ungodly, sinners and enemies. Yet God who is the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation (2 Cor 1:3-4), who raises the dead (2 Cor 1:9), who consoles the downcast (2 Cor 7:6-7), who gives sunshine and showers rain seeing the humans' need and not their merit (Mt 5:43-48), who cares for the birds and the wayside flowers (Mt 6:25-34) and who protects a sparrow and the hair (Mt 10:28-31) gave his only Son out of much love for the world (cf. Jn 3:16-17). Thus the final revelation that has been made through Jesus Christ is open to the whole of humanity.

The high point of the inclusive tendency of God's mercy is expressed in the commandment to love even the enemies (cf. Mt 5:44).

3 Mercy and Forgiveness

God's mercy often manifests itself in forgiving the sins of both individuals and the nations as a whole and they are restored to the original relationship (cf. Ps 51:1; Deut 13:17). The story of

the Bible is a story of repeated forgiveness of God whenever the human beings became unfaithful. Starting from the fall after creation in the Book of Genesis through the times of Exodus, wilderness wanderings, judges, monarchy till the final revelation through Jesus Christ, one can notice a pattern of sin-forgiveness. The Lord is always ready to forgive the sins of humanity. A number of texts in the Bible assert that the Lord forgives iniquity, transgression and sin (cf. Ex 34:7; Mic 7:18; Ps 51:3-4; Num 14:19-21). Jesus' preaching on forgiveness and practice of the same is recorded in Lk 7:36-50; 23:34; Jn 8:1-11; Mt 6:12; 18:21-23. The forgiveness of Jesus reaches its highpoint when he prays for the forgiveness of those who killed him. Thus it is clear that forgiveness accompanies God's mercy as one of its constitutive elements.

In the Matthean version of the Lord's Prayer forgiveness of sins forms its core (cf. Mt 6:14-15). Matthew also insists that forgiveness is unlimited (cf. Mt 18:21-22) and makes it a condition for making acceptable offering to God (cf. Mt 5:23-24). The parable of forgiveness (Mt 18:23-35) demonstrates that we have to forgive because we have been forgiven by God (cf. Col 3:13). That God forgives us is taken for granted. If we don't forgive, then there is something wrong and we do not experience God's forgiveness.

In Lk 6:36-37 we read: ³⁶ *Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.* ³⁷ *“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”* This text is very important because it relates mercy

and forgiveness with one another. It also points to the deeper reason as to why we don't forgive. It is because we are condemning and judging.

4 Mercy and Justice

In nos. 20 and 21 of his bull *Misericordiae Vultus* Pope Francis discusses the relationship between God's justice and his mercy as revealed in the Bible. He rightly points out that these two are not two contradictory realities, but two dimensions of a single reality that culminates in the fullness of

Mercy is not opposed to justice but rather expresses God's way of reaching out to the sinner, offering a new chance to convert and believe and thus return to the Lord. In other words, mercy in the Bible should be understood as a kind of non-judgmental justice of God.

love. We have seen above that the term *He'sed* is associated with *mišpāt* which signifies justice (cf. Hos 12:6) and with *cūdāqā* which signifies righteousness (cf. Jer 9:23). The term justice points to that which is rightly due to someone (cf. Ex 23:6; Deut 16:19) and there is no room for partiality here. Sometimes the term justice also refers to doing what is due to the poor and the orphan thereby implying mercy (cf. Deut 10:18; Ps 82:3). There are also texts in the Old Testament where these two terms *mišpāt* and *cūdāqā* occur together (cf. Gen 18:19; Job 37:23; Ps 33:5; 72:1; 89:14; 97:2; Prov 1:3; 2:9; 8:20; 21:3; Is 28:17) and imply mercy.

Superficially seen mercy may appear to be something naïve while justice refers to one's due and nothing more nothing less. However mercy is not opposed to justice but rather expresses God's way of reaching out to the sinner, offering a new chance to convert and believe and thus return to the Lord. In other words, mercy in the Bible should be understood as a kind of

non-judgmental justice of God. In fact God is just and righteous when he keeps his covenantal promise which is nothing other than showing mercy to the successive generations. Thus when God is merciful he only goes beyond justice with his mercy and forgiveness. Yet this does not mean that justice should be devalued or rendered superfluous. God does not deny justice. He rather envelopes it and surpasses it with an even greater event in which we experience love as the foundation of true justice (cf. *Misericordiae Vultus* 21).

That God's mercy and his justice are closely related can be verified from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Particularly in his usage of the term righteousness or justification (Gk: *dikaiosune*) which actually refers to the justice of God. In the context of the Epistle to the Romans this term righteousness refers to the salvation that has been effected through the death and resurrection of Jesus and which needs to be appropriated by faith in the risen Lord (cf. Rom 1:17; 3:21-22.25; 4:6). God's justice is thus expressed through his mercy given to everyone as a grace that flows from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ represented by the cross of Christ through which God has spoken his judgement on the whole of cosmos. And the cross embodies the unconditional love of God and guarantees new life, because ultimately mercy will triumph over judgement (cf. Jas 2:13).

5 Jesus, Incarnate Mercy of the Father

Pope Francis begins his Bull *Misericordiae Vultus* with the following statements: "Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy" and "Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him." Again in no. 8 of the same document he describes how Jesus expressed compassion through concrete actions of love. Samuel Rayan understands Jesus as "a Flesh-Translation of Divine Compassion."³ That Jesus is a concretization of his Father's mercy-compassion is rooted in the fact that he is the *word* of God (cf. Jn 1:1-3) and the *image* of God (cf. Col 1:15) and in his

claimed *identity* with his Father (cf. Jn 7:16-17; 8:28; 10:30; 14:8-11). And the New Testament is replete with instances that evidence the fact that Jesus is the corporal manifestation of the mercy and compassion of the Father. Let us try here to make a list of some of these instances:

The proclamation of the Reign of God as a life-affirming reality and as a good news to the poor in and through the words and deeds of Jesus is yet another instance which depicts the mercy of God.

(i) As we read in Phil 2:6-11, Jesus emptied his divine status and became a slave which is the most vulnerable status of being human and lowered himself to the point of a death on the cross.

(ii) Through this process of self-kenosis Jesus became like his brothers and sisters (cf. Heb 2:17) in every respect so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God.

(iii) Such a solidarity association of Jesus is further explicated in identifying himself with the sinful humanity (cf. Mk 1:4-9.9-13; Lk 7:34; Rom 8:3; 2 Cor 5:21). The table fellowship of Jesus both with the outcasts (cf. Mk 2:15-17) and the boundary breaking behaviour of Jesus who reaches out to Samaritans, women, sinners and tax-collectors (cf. Jn 4; Lk 7:34; 8:1-3; 15:1; Mt 9:10) affirm his solidarity with the marginalised.

(iv) The proclamation of the Reign of God as a life-affirming reality and as a good news to the poor in and through the words and deeds of Jesus is yet another instance which depicts the mercy of God.

(v) The miracles⁴ (cf. Mk 1:21-28.32-34.40-45; 3:1-6) performed by Jesus, his weeping over Jerusalem (Mt 23:37-39; Lk 13:31-35), his welcoming of children (Mk 10:13-16) and his

parables of mercy (of Good Samaritan in Lk 10:29-37 and the other three in Lk 15) are further instances which express the loving kindness of Jesus to those in need.

(vi) Jesus' practice of and preaching on forgiveness (cf. Lk 7:36-50; 23:34; Jn 8:1-11; Mt 6:12; 18:21-23) and his invitation to those who labour and are overburdened (Mt 11:25-30) speak volumes for the compassionate composition of Jesus' personality.

(vii) Jesus incorporated the mercy of the Father for human beings in a special way when he placed the human beings before legalistic understanding and interpretations of the law. The Sabbath controversy stories (cf. Mk 2:23-28; 3:1-6; Lk 13:10-17; Jn 5:1-18; 9:1-34) and the controversies on purity laws demonstrate this (cf. Mk 7:15; Rom 14:14).

(viii) He confronted the religious, social and political establishment of his time with charismatic and prophetic authority and with sovereign freedom. E.g. 'it was said' – 'but I say' (Mt 5:21-48); relativization of the temple (Jn 4:21-23); and de-hierarchisation of society (Mt 23:8-10).

(ix) Finally Jesus' death on the cross demonstrates the compassion of the Father. The cross is not an attempt to appease a God who thirsts for blood. The suffering on the cross actually represents the broken heart of God who makes his own the pain of his earthly family. And the Resurrection is also compassion because through this Jesus redeems the situation of hopelessness by making a breakthrough. It is above all a realization of God-with-us.

6 Conclusion: Be Merciful

If God's nature is mercy, then it follows from this that all those who believe in him and experience this divine mercy are expected to reflect the same in their lives. If Christ is the incarnation of the mercy of God, then the Christians who follow Christ must also become compassionate in all their relationships. Following Christ does not mean simply imitating

Christ which is neither possible nor advisable. Following Christ means creatively responding to the contemporary situation as Jesus would have done if he were to live today. The need of the hour is that Christians move away from their indifference and complacency and attempt to represent and reflect the mercy and compassion of Jesus in their daily life. The power and presence that can transform human suffering is the 'quality of mercy and compassion' which is a challenge to every follower of Christ.

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The Bible, particularly the New Testament which speaks of the divine mercy, also demands the same mercy from believers in many ways. Mt 9:13 quotes Hos 6:6 and prioritizes mercy before sacrifice. The beatitude on mercy in Mt 5:7 is the only one of its kind in which both the condition and the consequence remain the same, namely, mercy. Lk 10:37 instructs every human being to be neighbour like the Good Samaritan. Mercy has also been included as part of Early Christian benediction (cf. 1 Tim 1:2).

Mt 5:48 obliges the disciples of Jesus to be perfect, but Luke demands that the disciples are merciful (cf. Lk 6:36). Mercy will make us good neighbours to our brothers and sisters who are in need. No Christian can close his / her heart to those who are in

need (cf. Mt 25:31-46) and God dwells only in those who do merciful deeds to one's neighbour (1 Jn 3:17-18). ❀

¹ Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary*, 352.

² Cf. Anna Norrbak, *The Fatherless and the Widow in the Deuteronomic Covenant* (Abo Akademi University Press, 2001).

³ Samuel Rayan, "Jesus: a Flesh-Translation of Divine Compassion," in *Jesus: The Relevance of His Person and Message for our Times - Selected Writings of Samuel Rayan* vol. 1, ed. Kurien Kunnumpuram (Bombay: St Pauls, 2011), 79-96.

⁴ The miracles of Jesus are privileged moments of his mercy and compassion. There is a personal care and concern expressed in all his miracles. He calls the woman with haemorrhage 'my daughter' (Mk 5:25-34), expresses his motherly concern by asking the child's parents to give her something to eat (Mk 5:21-24.35-43), touches the blind and the dumb before healing them and does not hesitate to express his emotions (at the raising of widow's son in Lk 7:11-17 and at the raising of Lazarus in Jn 11:28-44).



A Reflection on Relationality A Glimpse at the Future of Humankind

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In the summer of 2015 I was happy to be invited to visit the Papal Seminary in Pune in early January and, while there, to share some thoughts on spirituality and science with second year seminarians in his Philosophy of Science and Cosmology course. I am an evolutionary biologist by vocation and training, an unapologetic Neo-Darwinist, and teach an undergraduate or graduate course in Faith and Science at the University of St. Thomas in Houston Texas, yearly.

My experience in Pune was one of both surprise and joy. Spiritual writers of many faiths, and contemplatives in particular, teach us that the second half of life (I am 60 years sentient) is significantly marked by learning as a process of 'unlearning'. That observation could not have been more the case for me than in a short stay in the Papal Seminary community and in Pune itself.

An American who visits other cities at home and abroad, mostly for academic conferences and symposia, I am regularly exposed to cultures that have learned to place almost exclusively high value on the western ideal of individualism; traditionally known as 'rugged individualism' in the US (I am in no position nor have any desire to act as western or American apologist). My

own science has reinforced the same notion although admittedly very little empirical science is conducted outside of collaboration (*we* very quickly can become *I*). I was however unprepared for and touched by the encounter with the ancient, deep, and complex collage that is modern India. From the celebration of Pongal with seminarians and faculty, to a prayer service with clergy from the Syrian Orthodox church in India, to almost daily walks in the neighborhoods near the seminary I encountered the beautiful simplicity and holiness of daily life - an almost palpable individual second nature that understands the 'how' of living in a present moment despite the hustle of a rapidly modernizing economy.

Loosely quoted, Mahatma Gandhi wrote "...everything that you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it". A paradox? Indeed. But, also a statement about the uniqueness of each person in the vastness of what we increasingly know as a 'relational' universe. As children we are taught that no two snowflakes are alike, and that identical shapes are never produced. Mostly true perhaps, but physical

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measurements reveal that these are water molecules that behave strictly within the parameters of hydrogen bonding and the rules of tetrahedral lattice formation in crystals. None-the-less, those same crystals together paint a landscape of snow that can be breath taking in its awesome grandeur, or reverent in its deep silence. There is a unique identity and being-ness that emerges from the one-ing such small forms.

Anglican theologian and physicist John Polkinghorne writes “the universe is *deeply relational* (emphasis mine) in its character and unified in its structure, because it is the creation of the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”¹. On a next to last evening at the Papal Seminary I stood outside watching the sunset near a statue of the Christ with outstretched arms and bearing the Sacred Heart. Through the trees in front of me wafted the unmistakable sounds of traditional music that Americans like myself

It seems to me that more than in most cultures, India’s people are quick to smile and do so broadly. The young seminarians and their mentors practically wear their happiness. Perhaps some already know much of what many of us on the planet need to unlearn.

identify as Hindu India. At the same time, behind me, I heard the call to prayer intoned from a minaret in a Muslim neighborhood. Taken separately each is engaging enough. But experienced as one, they were a gift from the Holy Spirit in a precious and special few minutes of waning evening sunlight.

It seems to me that more than in most cultures, India’s people are quick to smile and do so broadly. The young seminarians and their mentors practically wear their happiness. Perhaps some already know much of what many of us on the planet need to unlearn. In *Laudato Si* His Holiness Pope Francis speaks of the sacredness of nature, the needs of many, and the power of few:

Our insistence that each human being is an image of God should not make us overlook the fact that each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God’s love, his boundless

affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God.²

India and her varied local cultures can be (and in many ways already are) a grand experiment in relationality and emergence. From its maturity and history, the Indian Church has the opportunity to teach the western world (and quickly emerging national

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economies like Cuba, and in Africa) the necessity of unlearning, the grace of relational solitude, and the value of now-ness. Indeed, India and her people are the future of the Church.

Notes

¹ *The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology*. 2010. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing. 232 pp., Grand Rapids MI, USA.

² *Laudato Si* (84)



Motivation in the Intellectual Formation of the Seminarians

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There are thousands of educational institutions all over the world. These institutions are divided into various types and categories. They are owned and managed by Government, individuals and trusts, religious and non-religious. History shows that modern day seminary educational system came to exist because of the Church. The Church runs many educational institutions, secular and ecclesiastical. The main objective of the ecclesiastical institutions is to equip young men and women to serve the Church. It is a difficult task but a privileged responsibility. These institutions face many challenges. One of the challenges that both students and instructors face in the academic circle is motivation. How can we motivate someone to do something which he/she would not have done otherwise? The instructors on their part want to generate a desire in the students to do well in their studies. The management or administration wants to make sure that motivated staffs are bringing changes in the lives of the students. There are intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence the individuals. This motivation could be integrative or instrumental or both. In any case, one cannot undermine the role of the instructors who play an important role in the

motivation of the students. The article explores how and what they are.

Origin and Development of Priestly Formation

One could trace the beginning of priestly formation in the Gospel when Jesus called the twelve disciples to be with him and to be sent out to preach (Mk.3:14-15). These disciples remained with Jesus and were formed for three years. Later on, the apostle Paul followed the same method of personal accompaniment. For example, Timothy accompanied Paul on his missionary journey and received training from Paul (Acts 16:3). Though there is no evidence of existence of seminary for training priests, very early in the Church, one finds traces of sacerdotal apprenticeship. For example, St. Polycarp who was a disciple of St. John the apostle, writes: “The presbytery must be tender-hearted, merciful toward all, turning back the sheep that has gone astray, visiting the sick, not neglecting the widow or orphan or poor man...” (Hartog, 2013). Here the idea is that one must be a prophet and bear witness to the prophetic aspects in one’s life. The priests must be authentic disciples of the Lord before they are assigned for the ministries.

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The monastic life suggests an important dimension of formation of the clergy. St Augustine, the bishop of Hippo accommodated in the bishop’s house the superiors of various monastic houses and of diocesan bishops. Their living together under one roof opened up the way for clerical training in community. St. Augustine made the experience of community life mandatory to get ordained as a priest. Later on, an in-depth study of philosophy and theology became compulsory to get ordained as priests. Toward the end of the eighth century, the Church insisted that all the priests must have sufficient knowledge to

fulfill professorial duties as priests and those who lacked sufficient knowledge were deprived of the office.

In 1536, Pope Paul III appointed a commission to study the formation of priests in the Church. On the basis of the report, in 1547 during the Council of Trent, the issue of priestly formation was discussed and a few years later the Roman College was opened. Gradually, the initiatives that holy men such as St. Ignatius of Loyola introduced to train his men became the model of seminary formation that we are familiar with today. In the 3rd council of Baltimore (1884) the topic of seminaries were discussed and on the basis of the directives more attention was given to the intellectual formation of seminarians. Further, on the eve of Vatican II, there was a greater need to find a balance between the spiritual and intellectual dimensions of formation. The spiritual tended to be fostered at the expense of the intellectual. While it was necessary for the seminarian to have time to assimilate his formation within the confines of the seminary, the importance of sufficient exposure to the pastoral life which would be the locus of his future ministry was accorded. Even today, the Seminaries are still searching for ways to integrate the academic and pastoral programs in the priestly formation.

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Pope St. John Paul II, through his post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Pastores dabo vobis* (I Will Give You Shepherds) gave a solid dogmatic foundation to the formation and the identity of the priest. He says that the priesthood is founded on the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, the person of Jesus Christ and the mystery of the Church, and the formation flows from

these principal truths of the faith. Our present Holy Father, Pope Francis has sought to renew the formation and life of Priests. Towards this objective, he returns to the fundamental pastoral charity, which springs from a life of prayer, adoration and an openness to the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church. It seems Seminary formation is one of the most challenging responsibilities in the Church today. With ears attuned to the needs of the universal Church and dioceses in Asia, many ecclesiastical institutions strive to make solid progress in this difficult but privileged responsibility of forming future priests and religious. (<http://sck.ca/priestly-formation>)

Taking the challenges into account, the researcher has conducted a scientific study on the seminarians who are in formation to find out their perception on the intellectual formation. The study was limited to Bachelor in Philosophy (BPh) and Bachelor in Theology (BTh). The respondents of the study consisted of six hundred and seven (607) students in formation. The content of the study comprised five dimensions: (1) motivation, (2) interest in lecture, (3) interest in [extra] reading, (4) performance (grades), and (5) integrity in exams/ assignments. However, in this article, the researcher has included only one dimension, ‘motivation’. In order to interpret the dimension of motivation from various perspectives, the researcher analyzed aspects such as goal, value, usefulness, interest, classroom climate, and so on. According to experts, these factors affect the students’ motivation.

Motivation and Engagement

The term motivation is derived from the Latin word ‘*movere*’ which means ‘to move’. So, in this context, to move means to motivate someone to do something which he/she would not have done otherwise. In other words, motivation means generating the desire and developing willingness to do something productive (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001). The students’ motivation shows the direction and magnitude of their

behavior, how hard they will pursue in their studies and how long they will sustain in the activity. Barbara Gross says that one of the biggest challenges the professors in general face in a classroom set up is motivating the students.

According to Gardner and Lambert the orientations to motivation are two types: Integrative and Instrumental. The integrative orientation influences students to have positive disposition and desire to interact with and become valued members of the group. The instrumental orientation influences the students to look for the potential gains, such as attaining an academic degree or getting a better job. Therefore, Anderson et al. (2001) say that in order to increase the students' motivation the instructors must design the learning activities thoughtfully.

There are many internal and external factors or intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence the students' behavior and motivation. The internal factors consist of the students' attitudes, goal, expectation, anxiety, intelligence, learning styles, aptitude, self-confidence, and self-efficacy. The external factors consist of the professors' personality, instructional strategies, learning conditions, relevance, feedback, reward and success, socio-economic status, cultural background, parents' interest, parents' job and education.

All of us know that there are many internal and external factors or intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence the students' behavior and motivation. The internal factors consist of the

students' attitudes, goal, expectation, anxiety, intelligence, learning styles, aptitude, self-confidence, and self-efficacy. The external factors consist of the professors' personality, instructional strategies, learning conditions, relevance, feedback, reward and success, socio-economic status, cultural background, parents' interest, parents' job and education (Zhao, 2012).

The instructors could influence the students through motivation stimulus such as modeling, communication of expectations and instruction.

Goal setting plays an exceptional role in stimulating learning motivation. The goals affect the students' behavior, which depend on specificity, proximity, and difficulty. The students' motivation to study depends on their expectation of success in the course and the degree program, and the values they attach to it. Anxiety is the subjective feeling of pressure or stress that one experience in the nervous system and it affects one's performance. Self-confidence refers to one's ability to achieve the expected results. The students grow in self-confidence when they engage in their own learning to achieve the goals and believe about themselves as learners they can and they want. Therefore, the instructors must give the students some control over learning processes to help them develop the confidence and commitment to learning. Self-efficacy refers to students' understanding of their capabilities to complete the course/ the degree program, the choice of the activities they undertake, the aggregate of effort and the diligence displayed. When instructors provide opportunities for students to learn both autonomously and with others and develop their competence, the students get motivated and passionately engage in the

activity. Motivation to study is an aptitude that is developed over a period of time through experiences (Zhao, 2012).

The professors' personality and instructional strategies will undoubtedly affect the students' motivation to study. The instructors could influence the students through motivation stimulus such as modeling, communication of expectations and instruction (Brophy, 1987). Researches show that when the students perceive the professors are approachable, well prepared, and sensitive to the students' needs, the students show commitment. They work harder, try to get more out of the session, and are willing to express their

The students must find out favorable environmental conditions that are conducive to learning. Among all these, the intrinsic and integrative motivation allows students exert more efforts and persist longer in the learning activity. The context in which the students grow and develop also has a significant impact on their learning and motivation

opinion. The relevance refers to how the students sense and perceive the link between their personal goals and needs. Relevance is a prerequisite for sustained motivation and the students might enhance it by analyzing and addressing the needs such as achievement, affiliation and power. Feedback affects the students either positively or negatively depending on the responses, praise or criticism. Studies show that learning conditions influence learning. Therefore, the students must find out favorable environmental conditions that are conducive to learning. Among all these, the intrinsic and integrative motivation allows students exert more efforts and persist longer in the learning activity. The context in which the students grow

and develop also has a significant impact on their learning and motivation (Zhao, 2012).

The expectancy value theory says that the degree of motivation is determined by the students' expected success and the value they attach to the study. Therefore, the instructors must create a milieu that is conducive to learning. In order to create the atmosphere, the instructors must design the courses accordingly and create conducive instructional behaviors. Researches show that students, in general, will respond certainly to a well-organized course. In other words, the role of the professors in the students' motivation is non-negotiable (Davis, 1993).

The Findings

The attitude of the students of BPh and BTh seem to be very high. Among the respondents, more than ninety-four (94.1) percent agree that there is a great value attached to the study of philosophy and theology. Similarly their expectation from the degree is also very good. Nearly ninety-five (94.6) percent of the respondents agree that the courses help them in their future ministry as priests and religious. More than eighty-four (84.2) percent of the respondents agree that they are interested in the courses taught. More than seventy-eight (78.4) percent of the respondents say that the classroom climate is conducive for learning. Only twenty-four (23.7) percent of the respondents consider that, during the time of philosophy and theology, the study is the most important thing. Finally, just twenty-one (21.4) percent of the respondents say that they are not overwhelmed by community and non-academic activities.

The Data Analysis

Nearly twenty-two (21.6) percent of the respondents are either not sure or disagree with the statement that the classroom climate is conducive for learning. Studies conducted over the past thirty years show that quality of classroom environment significantly affect students learning (Dorman, 2002). Our

general understanding of a good classroom climate for study includes good lighting arrangement, enough ventilation, audibility of the lectures, seating arrangement, number of students in the class, emotional involvement, and so on. Research shows that one of the most important features is the physical environment. As soon the students enter the classroom, they will notice the physical environment. The initial positive or negative impression they receive would affect motivation (Ryan, 2013).

Nearly sixty-one (60.6) percent of the respondents say that, during the time of philosophy and theology, the study is only one of the goals and not the most important thing. This

Among the respondents, more than ninety-four (94.1) percent agree that there is a great value attached to the study of philosophy and theology. Similarly their expectation from the degree is also very good. Nearly ninety-five (94.6) percent of the respondents agree that the courses help them in their future ministry as priests and religious.

figure is quite alarming for the professors who are responsible for imparting knowledge and it might even challenge them. The spontaneous question is why the students consider so. What makes them to think so? According to the teachings of the Church, there are four dimensions of priestly formation: (1) spiritual, (2) human, (3) intellectual, (4) pastoral (Pope John, 1992). The study of philosophy and theology comes under the intellectual formation, which is one of the four pillars of formation. In other words, the understanding is that ecclesiastical study is only one of the important aspects of the priestly formation and not the only thing.

More than forty-four (44.3) percent of the respondents say that they are overwhelmed by community and non-academic activities. What are the community and non-academic activities in which the students are involved in that affect their studies? It is clear from the analysis that the seminary formation includes besides intellectual dimension, spiritual, human and pastoral dimensions. Therefore, seminarians in formation will have, as part of their formation, community activities to equip them in their spiritual formation. The community aspect of spiritual formation will be daily liturgies, office of the hour and various types of devotions. In some religious houses these activities are non-negotiable. Besides this, there will be various pastoral activities on a day-to-day basis to equip them pastorally. Above all else, there will be community activities to equip them with human aspect of formation. Therefore, there is a chance for the seminarians to feel uncomfortable with the activities other than studies. In such situations, the formators play an important role in forming and motivating the seminarians.

The Role of the Instructor

One might ask what the instructors must do or can do to increase the students' motivation. Researchers such as Brophy (1987), Cashin (1979), Davis (1993), Forsyth and McMillian (1991), Svinicki (2005) proposes the following strategies.

(1) The instructors must set the tone on the first day of the course in the class through various activities. The activities are: (a) invite the students to express their expectations, (b) clearly articulate the learning objectives of the course, (c) explain how the course is going to help them in future and thus capitalize on the students' interest, (d) encourage the students to share their understanding of the course.

(2) The professors must bring changes in their teaching methods. For example, the instructors must incorporate various academic activities that encourage students' active involvement in the class. As part of the course content, include current issues

that would allow the students interaction and encourage their participation.

(3) Create student friendly learning atmosphere and empower them by giving autonomy. The autonomy aids them develop skills that are needed for self-directed learning. The students' motivation, in general, increases when they have control of their learning outcomes.

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(4) The management needs to ensure that the institutional cultures are conducive for students from diverse backgrounds and feel welcomed and accepted. The students who experience belongingness become engaged and motivated.

(5) The professors must include issues that are relevant. Students display greater zeal and attention in the course when they recognize its application in their daily lives. Enable the students to become active by engaging them beyond strategies, techniques, behaviours, to the level of participation and dialogue.

(6) The instructors must fashion assignments and modes of valuation relatively challenging. They must create educational experiences that are challenging and enriching. Initial success would bring joy and satisfaction on the part of the students. The professors need to create rich learning experiences that might challenge students' ideas and stretch them as far as they can go.

(7) The professors must model the behavior they want the students to display. The instructors being the major source of

stimulation for the course must show enthusiasm. Therefore, be enthusiastic about the subject matter and present the course content in such a way that generates interest in the students. Above all, showing a genuine interest in the students and in teaching retain the students' attention.

(8) Create among the students an environment that enables a healthy competition. Though students in general

Recognize the students' hard work and effort by providing productive and timely feedback. Many students view grades as the key motivation for their academic efforts.

need opportunities to interact with their peers, try to avoid creating an environment that leads to comparison, divisions, derisive dialogue, and so on.

(9) The professors must articulate their expectations clearly and show that the success is at their doorsteps. Students in general will rise to the instructor's expectations if there is congruence at the level of engagement and interaction with the students. Subtle forms of behavior, though unintentional, influence the students' performance.

(10) Recognize the students' hard work and effort by providing productive and timely feedback. Many students view grades as the key motivation for their academic efforts. Therefore, the instructors must return the students' assignments with constructive feedback and thus acknowledge their hard work while encouraging them to strive for more. In doing this, the ultimate aim of the professors must be development and formation of the students (Gedera, Williams, & Wright, 2015; Ryan, 2013).

Conclusion

The Church runs many educational institutions to equip young men to serve the Church and the nation. Though it is a privileged responsibility, the institutions face many challenges. One of the challenges is how to motivate the students to do something which they would not have done otherwise. The instructors on their part want to generate a desire in the students to do well in their studies. The students' motivation depends on intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The factors such as the students' attitudes, goal, expectation, intelligence, aptitude, self-confidence, and self-efficacy affect them intrinsically. Similarly, the external factors such as the instructional strategies, learning conditions, relevance, feedback, reward and success affect their motivation externally. The majority of the students attaches value to the study (philosophy and theology) and agree that the courses would help them in future. A vast majority of the students do not consider the study as the most important one during the degree program (philosophy and theology). Among other factors, community and non-academic activities affect their motivation. 🌹

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The Awesome Power of the Word of God in Human Life

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Introduction

The Vatican Council solemnly acknowledges the power of the word of God in *Dei Verbum*. The word God, which is the power of God is for the salvation of all who believe.¹ It shows its power in an excellent way in the writings of the Scripture.² In Hindu Tradition *Śruthi* is considered as the word of God which is heard by the Sages. The word is the power of the one who communicates it. God is the source of this communication and His word is therefore powerful. The receiver of this communication gets the knowledge in the cognitive level. However, it penetrates deeper in the heart-level and transforms the receiver. The word as a vitalizing energy feeds the receiver and makes him or her grow into divine life. It is like plants receiving the energy from the sun and transforms it into food which helps them grow. Here, the energy of the sun becomes part and parcel of the growth of plants. Like that, God's word becomes part and parcel of the believer and enables him or her to grow and transforms him or her to a new creation. In this article, I limit myself to the Scripture and try to show the different dimensions of the word of God and its transforming power.

1. The Irresistible Power of the Word

The Word of God is so powerful that it can overcome the obstacles and accomplish God's desires and purposes. **God's Word** is full of **power**; it will **not** return to Him **empty**. And God's Word will **accomplish** His desires and purposes: "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."³ Again, the word of God is pictured as fire. *Let the one who has my word speak it faithfully ... "Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"*⁴ Positively, the hammer can drive home a nail. And also, like hammer, the word of God can **break down obstacles**, i.e., overcoming negatives. God's Word has **irresistible** power! It is so quick and can break barriers: "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."⁵

In Psalm 29, we can see the power of the word of God in nature: "The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of

"The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord thunders, the Lord thunders over mighty waters. How powerful is the voice of the Lord! The voice of the Lord tears up the cedars, the Lord shatters the cedars of Lebanon."

glory thunders, the Lord thunders, the Lord thunders over mighty waters. How powerful is the voice of the Lord! The voice of the Lord tears up the cedars, the Lord shatters the cedars of Lebanon."⁶ The word of God can bring about great

results in nature and in human life: “He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild bull. The voice of the Lord breaks forth with flashes of fire. The voice of the Lord makes the wilderness quake; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the Lord makes the oaks to shudder and strips the forests bare.”⁷ In Genesis **“God said, ‘Let there be...’** “ and light; sun, moon, and stars; animals, birds, and fish; and more **came into being** from God’s **spoken word**. The word has the power to create things from nothingness and sustain them in existence. The word of God keeps humans from dying: Jesus says, *“I tell you the truth, if anyone **keeps** my word, he will **never see death**.”*⁸ *Such is the incredible power of the word!* The word is powerful because it is God’s word. The word, simply because it is God’s word, carries with it all the attributes of God Himself. The word of God is living, powerful and sharper than any two edge sword we can make on this earth. The word is pure solid spiritual food that has the supernatural ability to feed our mind, soul and spirit. Nothing else will feed our inner self like the word of God.

Just like our human physical bodies need physical food to be able to survive - so does our mind, soul and spirit.

Just like our human physical bodies need physical food to be able to survive - so does our mind, soul and spirit. The food that we feed our physical bodies will not nourish our mind, soul or spirit. The only thing that can spiritually feed and nourish us on the inside are true solid spiritual truths. And the only true solid spiritual truth that can feed us to cause any kind of true spiritual growth to occur in this life are truths that come direct from God the Father and Jesus Christ. There are no other spiritual truths from any other sources that we can feed off of that will cause any kind of real spiritual growth to occur in human life. The word of God is living, powerful, and real spiritual food for the soul and spirit of every human person who is willing to feed off of it.

2. The Word as Pure Solid Truth

We have seen that the word has its origin from God Himself. If God is perfect and almighty then His word also has the quality of perfection. The word, must be, then powerful and solid which could give us the perfect knowledge and truth. The word is the wisdom of God that is conveyed to humans in spoken and written forms. It makes human beings wise, and thus, partakers of the divine wisdom albeit limitedly. Even discipleship is centered around the word of God. “If you live in my word, you will indeed be my disciples.”⁹ The word of God can liberate humans from the chains of slavery. “*And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall **make you free.***”¹⁰ Then what is truth itself? The answer is given in John 17:17 which tells that God’s word itself is truth.¹¹ If we know the word we will be liberated because word of God is the pure truth. In Proverbs, we read, “Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He reprove you, and you be found a liar.”¹² The purity of the word of God is clearly presented by Psalmist as he puts, “The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.”¹³ Again, we are reminded of the trueness and purity of the word of God, “For the word of the Lord is right, and all His work is done in truth. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.”¹⁴ The relation between truth and word of God is inseparable.

The word of God can liberate humans from the chains of slavery. “*And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall **make you free.***”

3. The Sanctifying Power of the Word

In the preceding paragraphs we have seen that God’s word is pure solid truth. If so, it has the ability to cleanse and sanctify us. The symbol of fire also points to this direction. The fire has a

cleansing capacity. It can remove the stains and impurities and thereby can cleanse gold. Like that, the word of God can eliminate the blemishes of humans and can make him/her clean from the stains of sins and shortcomings. That is why the Psalmist claims without doubt the powerful protection of the word against sin: *“I have hidden your **word in my heart** that I might **not sin** against you.”*¹⁵ The Word of God in our hearts is a powerful **antidote to sin**. It directs and guides a person in his/her life as lamp to his/her feet and light for his/her path.¹⁶ As the word of the Lord unfolds, light is shed and it illumines and sanctifies the simple-hearted.¹⁷ The word has the capacity to provide joy to the one who imbibes it with great enthusiasm. “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart ...”¹⁸

The one who treads in the path of God will be filled with the sweetness of the word. The Psalmist beautifully expresses this aspect as he puts, “How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”¹⁹ The word helps a person think, speak and do good and gives effulgence and sweetness to his/her life. As our physical bodies need bread, our spiritual self requires the food of the word in order to live and sustain in life. Jesus in his reply to Satan underscores this as he says, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”²⁰ God’s word with its sanctifying and soothing effect bestows comfort and relief for the one who receives it: “This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life.”²¹ The word of God itself becomes life for the receiver which saves him from death: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life”²²

Further, we can see the nourishing character of the word of God which enables a person to grow in fullness and vitality: “... as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”²³ It cleanses one’s path of life: “How can a young

man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.”²⁴ In Proverbs we find the importance of the word which gives life and vigour to the body and soul: “My son, give attention to My words; incline your ear to My sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; for they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh.”²⁵

The sanctifying power of the word is stressed by St. John in his Gospel: “**Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.**”

²⁶ St. John reiterates this point when he says, “**You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.**”²⁷

The same notion is re-emphasized by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians: ” ... that

He(Jesus) might **sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word**, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be **holy and without blemish.**”²⁸

4. The Word of God – the Work of the Holy Spirit

“My son, give attention to My words; incline your ear to My sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; for they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh.”

The Holy spirit helps a person grow in wisdom of the word of God. The Lord Jesus gives us his Spirit who teaches us all things and guides us into truth. The true knowledge of God and wisdom come from the Holy Spirit who opens up the meaning of the word of God. There are several good biblical verses telling us that the word of God can impart true knowledge and true wisdom to us: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My Name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I have said to you.”²⁹

Again, the work of the spirit of God is evident in the Gospel of John: “However, when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth ...”³⁰ St. Paul reiterates the same point in another way by saying that the believer accepts the word not as that of human but as that of divine which comes from the Spirit of God: “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”³¹ St. Paul wishes that that the church in Colossus may progress in wisdom through the word of Christ: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another”³²

The Holy spirit can effectively work in a believer through the word of God and transform him or her to a spiritual person. The personal relationship we establish with God, and the knowledge that we gain about God through the working of the Holy Spirit are what will dramatically transform the quality of one's life down here on this earth. The written and spoken word draws its power from its union with the Holy Spirit, who is always operative through it. The word of God and

The Spirit and the word are not only integrated themselves, but they act and work in harmony. Their action is one action and inseparable, the Spirit working as the efficient agent of the operation and the word as the instrument or means of the operation of the Spirit. Spirit and word work together in accomplishing the one result of transformation and salvation.

the Spirit of God are inseparable. When the word is preached the Spirit is always operative. The Spirit and the word are not only integrated themselves, but they act and work in harmony. Their action is one action and inseparable, the Spirit working as the efficient agent of the operation and the word as the instrument or means of the operation of the Spirit. Spirit and word work together in accomplishing the one result of transformation and salvation. The renewal and transformation of the life of the believer is through the power of the word of God by the operation of the Holy Spirit.³³ It's the word and the Spirit working together in a believer's life that will get God to start working full force in his or her life to change him or her into the kind of person. God really wants the person to become in Him. The word of God, in other words makes the life of the believer to be absorbed in the divine life which in turn enables him or her to enter into salvific experience.³⁴

5. The Emmaus Experience

The awesome power of the word of God is highlighted in the Emmaus' experience in Luke's Gospel. Here, we see the *Christocentric* dimension of the word of God. The word of God which is Christ Himself enlightens and illumines the disciples' hearts.³⁵ The word of God gives them hope and courage to believe in God. The presence of Jesus-the word of God Himself with the disciples all through their journey to Emmaus is a clear proof that God is Emmanuel. "The word became flesh and dwelt among us."³⁶ This Johannine Sutra finds its full expression in the disciples' journey. The word of God accompanies them, clears their doubts and supports them on their way. Like that, the presence of the word of God in believer's life supports him or her to understand the mystery of God and accompanies him or her in the journey of life. The word of God could burn the hearts of the disciples in such a way that their life was enlightened to see God in a different way. It made them totally illumined and transformed. The same Emmaus experience must take place in the heart of every believer as he or she walks through the path of life. This is an evolution from the

informative realm to the transformative realm. It is an evolution from the outer seeing to the inner seeing. It is a journey from the periphery to the centre. It is a pilgrimage from the surface-level to the depth-level. The word of God opens one's inner eyes to see God as He is, without any veil. This inner experience really changes the person in such a way that he or she perceives God in a totally different way than ever before. The believer's inner eyes are illumined in such a way that he or she perceives God, world and the fellow beings in an entirely different manner and begins to see the unique and integral relation between him or her and God. The same transformation could be seen in the life of St. Paul after his personal encounter with Jesus in Damascus. His life got completely transformed and he became a true disciple of Jesus.

Another important dimension we have to take into notice is that the word of God always demands a genuine and active response from the part of the receiver. In the Scripture we can see a good number of examples to substantiate this idea. In the book of Genesis, we read that God spoke to Noah and commanded him to build an ark so that he could save his life together with his family

Another important dimension we have to take into notice is that the word of God always demands a genuine and active response from the part of the receiver.

and other creatures. Noah responded to God's word and was saved.³⁷ Again, God called Abraham and ordered him to go to Canaan and Abraham responded to God's word instantly. And he was blessed by God.³⁸ Later he was told to sacrifice his only son Isaac and he obeyed the Lord God and he found favour with God.³⁹ Further, Prophet Samuel also responded positively to the call of God by replying "Speak Lord, your servant is listening."⁴⁰ We can see this chain of positive responses to the word of God in the life of all the prophets. When we come to

New Testament, again we see the continuation of this response from different persons. Mother Mary responded positively to the word of God and she became the mother of God. Also, we see that the Apostles and other people who encountered Jesus responded actively and positively to the word of God and they got cured and transformed. The word of God can do wonders and miracles in believer's life as we read in the scripture.

6. The Word became Flesh and Dwelt among us

This great Johannine concept of “becoming” takes place or reenacts in every Holy Eucharist. We not only hear the word of God but it comes to our life in the form of the body of Jesus. No other great symbol could be used other than the symbol of flesh. The Eucharist where the word of God, Jesus Himself, becomes the part and parcel of the life of the believer is the most exotic event. This is what makes a Christian entirely different from other people. Through the symbolism of food the word of God becomes one with the believer and he or she experiences the presence of God in his or her body. Jesus' body becomes the real food for the believer and His blood that

The invisible God becomes visible and becomes an inseparable colleague in the journey of the believer as God Himself accompanied the disciples on the way to Emmaus. The same God accompanies us, supports and encourages us on our life-path to Emmaus.

quenches the thirst⁴¹ runs through the believer's veins. The invisible God becomes visible and becomes an inseparable colleague in the journey of the believer as God Himself accompanied the disciples on the way to Emmaus. The same

God accompanies us, supports and encourages us on our life-path to Emmaus.

The word of God received in the heart level, which transforms the believer generates action. The one who gets transformed by the word of God cannot sit idle but proclaims his or her God-experience. This action-oriented response could be seen in the life of Mary, who went to help her relative Elizabeth and of the Emmaus-disciples who immediately returned to Jerusalem to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus and of Saul who got converted to St. Paul, the Apostle.⁴² By participating in liturgical celebrations and holy Sacraments the believer also becomes partaker of the God-experience which initiates him or her to proclaim the God-experience and share the internal joy and peace with his or her fellow beings.

Conclusion

In the preceding paragraphs, I have been trying to show the power of the word of God and its transforming effect on the believer. The word of God which is the pure solid truth can cleanse the believer and can sanctify him or her. It nourishes the believer internally and supports him or her in the long journey of life. It protects the believer from iniquities and safeguards him or her from

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deviating from the right direction. Isaiah expresses this guiding dimension of the word of God rightly, as he says, **“Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will listen to these words behind you, ‘This is the way, walk in it.’”**⁴³ The believer feels himself or herself this accompaniment of the word

of God all through this earthly journey. This protecting and guarding dimension of the word of God is beautifully expressed in the Scripture by Psalmist. In Psalm 23, we read that the Lord God is the shepherd⁴⁴ and He leads the believer in the right path. Even if the believer walks through the valley of the shadows of death, he or she fears no harm because God is accompanying and protecting all through the way. The believer finds his or her solace in the word of God. God becomes the host who prepares a banquet⁴⁵ for the believer which symbolizes the Eucharistic banquet which quenches the hunger and thirst and transforms the believer to a new creation. Through the word of God came into existence the first creation. By the same word of God comes into being the second creation-the new creation which is transformed in God. 🌹

Notes

¹ Cf. Rom. 1:16.

² Cf. *Dei Verbum* 5:17.

³ Isaiah 55:11.

⁴ Jeremiah 23:28-29.

⁵ Hebrews 4:12.

⁶ Psalm 29:3-5.

⁷ Psalm 29:6-9.

⁸ John 8:51.

⁹ John 8:31.

¹⁰ John 8:32.

¹¹ "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."

¹² Proverbs 30:5.

¹³ Psalm 12:6.

¹⁴ Psalm 33:4.

¹⁵ Psalm 119:11.

¹⁶ Psalm 119:105.

¹⁷ Cf. Psalm 119:130.

¹⁸ Jeremiah 15:16.

¹⁹ Psalm 119:103.

²⁰ Matthew 4:4.

²¹ Psalm 119:50.

²² John 6:63.

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- ²³ 1 Peter 2:2.
²⁴ Psalm 119:9.
²⁵ Proverbs 4:20.
²⁶ John 17:17.
²⁷ John 15:3.
²⁸ Ephesians 5:26.
²⁹ John 14:26.
³⁰ John 16:13.
³¹ 1 Thessalonians 2:13.
³² Colossians 3:16.
³³ Cf. Psalm 119:156.
³⁴ Cf. James 1:21: “... and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” The same idea is expressed in one of the Sedro-prayers of the Eucharistic Liturgy of the Malankara Catholic Church: Lord God, in this awesome moment when your power hovers in this bread and the wine transforms into your blood, make my life absorbed into your divine life.” Cf. Order of the Eucharistic Liturgy of the Malankara Catholic Church, Sedro-prayer no.6.
³⁵ Cf. Luke 24:32
³⁶ John 1:14.
³⁷ Cf. Genesis 6.
³⁸ Cf. Genesis 12.
³⁹ Cf. Genesis 22.
⁴⁰ I Sam 3: 9.
⁴¹ Cf. John 7:37-38.
⁴² Cf. Luke 1; Luke 24; Acts 9.
⁴³ Isaiah 30:21.
⁴⁴ In the New Testament, Jesus as the good shepherd who protects his flock from all dangers.
⁴⁵ Psalm 23:5.



The India of Our Dreams

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The speech “I have a dream,” that Martin Luther King Jr delivered on August 28, 1963, defining moment in the American Civil Rights movement, laying out his dream for a racially reconciled nation.

On May 6, 2016, Pope Francis delivered his own “I have a dream” address, in this case dedicated to Europe, calling the continent to undergo a “memory transfusion” to avoid the mistakes of the past and to pursue a future based on “economic justice, openness to newcomers, respect for life in all its stages, and dialogue with everyone.”

“I dream of a Europe that is young, still capable of being a mother: a mother who has life because she respects life and offers hope for life,” Francis said, as he was accepting the prestigious Charlemagne Prize, given yearly to persons who have contributed to European unity.

The pope added that “with hope and without vain nostalgia, like a son who rediscovers in Mother Europe his roots of life and faith,” he dreams of a new “European humanism,” involving “a constant work of humanization” and calls for “memory, courage, [and] a sound and humane utopian vision.”

His dream for Europe, the pontiff added, is of a continent that cares for children, one that helps the poor and newcomers “seeking acceptance because they have lost everything and need shelter.”

“I dream of a Europe that is young, still capable of being a mother: a mother who has life because she respects life and offers hope for life.” –Pope Francis

He further dreams of a Europe where being a migrant is “not a crime, but a summons to greater commitment on behalf of the dignity of every human being.”

His dream for Europe also includes fostering a love for honesty, beauty and simple life among the young. “I dream of a Europe that promotes and protects the rights of everyone, without neglecting its duties towards all.”

Francis ended his address saying that he dreams “of a Europe of which it will not be said that its commitment to human rights was its last utopia.”

“What has happened to you, Europe, the home of poets, philosophers, artists, musicians, and men and women of letters?” he asked. “What has happened to you, Europe, the mother of peoples and nations, the mother of great men and women who upheld, and even sacrificed their lives for, the dignity of their brothers and sisters?”

Francis also listed three “capacities” with which Europe would be able to create a “new European humanism,” that would lead to his dreamed version of Europe: The capacity to integrate, the capacity for dialogue and the capacity to generate.

An integrated version of the European people, he said, would rediscover its soul, “born of the encounter of civilizations and peoples.” The second capacity Europe should have, according to Francis, is that of dialogue, saying that peace would only be

lasting in the measure
“that we arm our
children with the
weapons of dialogue,
that we teach them to
fight the good fight of
encounter and
negotiation.”

Lastly, the capacity to
generate, with
dialogue and
openness to others,
since “no one can
remain a mere
onlooker or
bystander” in
building an integrated
and reconciled
society.

Similar to the dream
for Europe, can we
share a dream for all

Can Indians, with their
natural diversity, show the
world the beauty and
depth of living together as
brothers and sisters? Can
we collectively foster
India’s capacity to
integrate, the capacity for
dialogue and the capacity
to generate. Can we
expect visionaries and
leaders who will unify our
country and make it a
place of peace, prosperity
and hospitality for all, as
the freedom fighters
dreamt?

the Indians, where we can draw from our inner wisdom and
create a society that is egalitarian, free and respectful of each
other? Can we draw from our spiritual depth and create a
society of equals? Can Indians, with their natural diversity,
show the world the beauty and depth of living together as
brothers and sisters? Can we collectively foster India’s capacity
to integrate, the capacity for dialogue and the capacity to
generate. Can we expect visionaries and leaders who will unify
our country and make it a place of peace, prosperity and
hospitality for all, as the freedom fighters dreamt? 🌱

(Modified from an article in *The Financial Chronicle*.)



Homily Notes

Sept. 04, 2016: XXIII Sunday in Ordinary Times

Wis. 9:13-18b/ Philm. 9-10, 12-17/ Lk. 14: 25-33

He will Walk With Us

Today's Gospel passage is a clear exposition of what Christian discipleship is all about. Jesus is making it clear that his discipleship is not of worldly power and glory, rather is an invitation for a loyalty which would sacrifice the dearest things in life.

Perhaps, we must not take his words literally. When Jesus tells us to hate our nearest and dearest, it means that no love in life can be compared with the love we must bear to him. Jesus needs full commitment and fullest love oriented towards him. Jesus wants real disciples; not who follow him distantly. It is one of the supreme handicaps of the church that in it there are so many distant followers of Jesus and so few real disciples. Jesus is making it clear that His church doesn't need quantity today; but needs quality priests. He doesn't need half-hearted followers.

Hence, to be a real disciple it is obligatory to count the cost of following Christ. Our God is not a cheap God, rather He is expensive. Discipleship is a serious business. If we tell Jesus that we want to take up our cross and follow Him as His disciples, then He wants us to know exactly what we are getting into. He wants no false expectancy, no illusions, no bargains. He wants to use us as stones for building His church, soldiers for battling His enemies, and salt for bettering His world; *and He is looking for quality.*

In every sphere of life we are called upon to count the cost. Even in marriage a man and woman have to sacrifice lot of their personal interests for the other. A man and woman must count the cost for a life-long commitment. Hence, it is so with the Christian way also. But if a man or woman is daunted by the high demands of Christ let us remember that we are not left alone to fulfil the demands of Christin Discipleship. He who called us to the steep road will walk with us in every step, strengthening and guiding. The choice is ours, but the Lord does not leave us alone if we choose to follow him.

Arun Abraham CST

Sept. 11, 2016: XXIV Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ex. 32:7-11, 13-14, I Tim. 1:12-17, Lk. 15:1-32

Idle or Ideal Way of Life

The first reading of today displays the impatience of Israel which led them to move away from God. They refused Yahweh and made a god to go before them in the wilderness. Wilderness here symbolizes the tough times in our life. “Crises contain exceptional opportunities,” says Robin Sharma in his book “The Leader Who Had No Title.” The tough times allow us to grow psychologically and spiritually. In this corporate era, we all are moving towards the idolatry of comfort. We are in search of comforts like wealth, luxurious living and so on.

Are we not deviating from the very meaning of our life? Are we not giving importance to the idols of money and wealth? You cannot serve God and wealth (Matt 6:24) says the Lord and the next verse adds that we should not be worried about food or cloth because life is more than these things. These idols make our life idle. The ideal way of life is to spread love. Jesus gave us a new commandment to love one another as he loved us (Jn. 13:34). This love is witnessed only through relating with other.

In today’s gospel, we have to note that the three parables are not simply stating the same thing. However, there is a difference. The sheep went lost through its own foolishness. It did not think of anything. Many of us fall into sinful living because we did not think in time. The coin was lost

not because of its own fault. Most of us are led wrongly through the tempting voices of the world. The son deliberately went lost through the act of turning back on his father. It clearly states that the love of God can defeat the foolishness of man, the tempting voices and even deliberate act of sinning. We are also cautioned of not to be like the elder brother whose obedience to his father had been merely duty rather than of loving service. He portrays a kind of self-righteous Pharisee who would rather see a sinner destroyed than being saved.

Jesus invites us through the parables to lead an ideal way of life by loving others even if they stood against us. He tells us to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us. We have to show our concern towards others. Raymon Panikkar in his Cosmotheandric vision speaks of the relationship (love) with God, human and nature. The three lost things in the parables are sheep (plants and animals), drachma (earth) and son (human beings) which explain the loss of love with God. The passage also indicates the quality of the forgiving God who is waiting and watching us to return to Him. God gave us the freedom to choose our own way of life. The more freedom we enjoy, the greater the responsibility we bear, toward others as well as ourselves. There is a Universal Paradox which all has to accept which goes like this: You are free to choose but you are not free from the consequence of your choice. I also affirm this by saying that we are free to choose idle or ideal way of life; however we are not free from the consequences of our choice.

Joseph Stalin R.

Sept. 18, 2016: XXV Sunday in Ordinary Time

Amos 8: 4-7, Tim 2:1-8, Lk. 2: 1-8

Jesus Christ our Karma

Once on a construction site, the manager from the 3rd floor wanted to convey an urgent message to one of his employees, who was working with the sow-machine at that time. The manager called for him several times but the man didn't respond to him, being too engrossed in his work. So the manager threw a ten rupee note at him which fell right before him. The man picked up the note and got busy with his work

without looking up. Then manager threw a hundred rupee note and the man did the same. Again the manager, so frustrated, threw a thousand rupee note, thinking now he might look up but the man picked up the note and got in to his work again. Lastly the manager picked up a small piece of stone and threw at him and the stone hit him right on his head and now he looked up and saw his manager.

All of us realise that God too gives us the opportunities and equips us with required necessities to do right acts and live our lives fruitfully under His providence. But many times we get too much engrossed with our worldly engagements that we become unmindful of God. And then, God sends prophets and right leaders to convey His message and when we still do not look at him, God, like the stone in the story, may throw some chastisements or hardships to gain our attention so that we may rectify our Karma.

Similarly in today's first reading, God is sending Amos a Shepherd and dresser of Sycamore fig trees, from Tekoa, Judah, during the reign of King Jeroboam II of Israel (793-753 B.C.) and King Uzziah (Azariah) of Judah (792-740 B.C.), to be his prophet to his people and announce his judgement on Israel for her unfaithfulness and rebellion against His authority. Amos pronounces their damnation and doom unless they turn away from immoralities and mend their karma as per the will of God. Karma (sanskrit- Karm) means action, work or deed. In Indian theology it also refers to the spiritual principle of cause and effect, where intent and actions of an individual (cause) influence the future of the individual (effect). Good intent and good deed contribute to good karma and future happiness while bad intent and bad deed contribute to bad karma and future suffering. 'Karma' is also our potential for spiritual and personal growth. We can transmute the raw material of karma into wisdom, understanding and virtue.

The second reading instructs us to prayer, especially for the people in authority who tend to neglect their true Karma and remain unconcerned towards the poor and needy. It is the right call for everybody to do the right things so that, all may live with peace, devotion and propriety. Because, as a person sows, so himself/herself reaps. The fruit is of the same quality as the action. We have to be accountable and responsible for every act we do. In today's gospel, Jesus wants us to inculcate this fundamental logic very profoundly. As the steward mismanages his

master's money and consequently is punished for his misdeed, so also we, if we fail to take a lesson from this parable. Though the shrewdness of the steward is applauded but that is only a chance not the way.

Hence, we have to be true followers of Christ. Only through Jesus we have the salvation. For he says, "I'm the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me (Jn 14:6)". Let us not replace Jesus Christ, our saviour, with temporary achievements and allurements of the world. Let us be the Light to illuminate the world, a hand to help the needy and a tree to give fruits and shade to all. Amen.

Ranjeet Joseph

Sept. 25, 2016: XXVI Sunday in Ordinary Times

Amos 6: 1A, 4-7/ 1 Tim 6: 11-16/ Luke 16: 19-31

The Sin of Indifference

Today the mother church invited us to ponder over the theme, which is the sin of indifference. The gospel passage is very familiar to us, which is the story of rich man and Lazarus. The Lazarus is a poor man. He is physically weak, socially degraded, he is living a shameful situation, and he is economically in a pathetic condition. On the other hand, there is a Rich man, who has no name. He is living a luxurious life. He is materially happy man. But the important thing is that both are in the same place that is in the Richman's house. The Lazarus is lying at the gate of rich man's house. The second phase of this story tells about a spatial displacement of both Richman and Lazarus. At this phase the rich man is in hell, where he is being tormented, and the Lazarus is now with Abraham in heaven. And also, between these two places there is a great chasm. What is the reason behind this separation? Bible never says the rich man did any evil acts, rather he is well appreciated for his love for his own brothers, so that he can say to Abraham for sending Lazarus to his own brothers, that Lazarus may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment. Then, what happened to this rich man? The reason is the sin of indifference. In his earthly life he was indifferent to the condition of poor Lazarus.

This indifference leads to luxurious life. This is what prophet Amos Criticizing in today's first reading, that "alas for those who lie on beds of Ivory, alas for those who drink from the bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils." This sin of indifference is what the present pope Francis always condemning. According to the catechism of the Catholic Church, there are four types of sins. Sin by thoughts, words, and deeds and by omission. The sin by omission means avoiding the chance of doing good things. The rich man failed in this dimension of morality. He neglected doing good things or service to Lazarus who was lying in front of his eyes. The rich man was indifferent to the tragic situation of the poor Lazarus. Dear friends don't be indifferent to others' suffering, be open to the situations and see what can be done and confront those situations and transform it.

Joseph Pallattil

Oct.2, 2016: XXVII Sunday in Ordinary Times

Hab. 1:2-3; 2:2-4, 2 Tim-1:6-8, 13-14, Lk. 17:5-10

Always Have Sound Faith in God, Your Cry Will Be Heard

Once in a village, people had been waiting for the rains to cultivate their fields but they didn't have even a drizzle. One day all the villagers planned to visit Swami, who was living in the same village to pray for rains. Swami told the villagers to come the following evening for special Yagna. All people went as Swami told but one person took umbrella and went for the prayer. After some time there was a heavy down pour, all people got wet including Swami except the one who had umbrella. Dear friends in Christ, this small story tells us how we keep faith in God and in His deeds. Among many, only one person had really believed in the words of Swami that God will hear their prayers.

In today's readings we observe how prophet Habakkuk is complaining to God for his help. And in the second reading Paul tells Timothy to keep faith in Jesus. But today's gospel describes the lack of faith of disciples in him and asking to increase their faith. Faith provides us goals and hopes which reach far beyond our human abilities. We are called to achieve these things by working hard with all the gifts and talents God has entrusted to us. We are invited to cooperate actively with what God's

spirit wants to accomplish in and through us. Yet it is not at all easy, and many are the times we are hounded with questions and doubts. However, the just person lives by faith.

Paul reminds Timothy of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that he had received when he was ordained. He must stir into flames or not idle those gifts in the midst of all difficulties and oppositions. Paul told him that such things should never dampen his fervour. The Holy Spirit is a spirit of courage that strengthens him or her to grow in faith. The apostles too sensed the great difficulties Christian vocations entailed. When they perceived the gigantic nature of their task, they cried out to the Lord, “Lord increase our faith”, and it was never easy to be a loyal follower of Christ. It never will be. Yet those who follow him are in the right road. They have to fight the good fight and then be humble enough to say, “We are unworthy servants, we have only done what was our duty”. “How long shall I cry and you will not hear?” is the anguished tormented cry of the righteous from Abel. Centuries later the same cry was echoed from the cross where Jesus the just man burst out in an anguished sense of abandonment. “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” the cry of Abel the psalmist and Jesus reverberates through the length and breadth of planet earth. Life for the righteous never was and will never be easy. The righteous man has to have a firm faith.

Dear friends, in Jesus Christ today let us think, “Has my faith made me generous and active in the service of God and God’s people? And am I afraid of and ashamed to witness to Christ among the people I live with? Am I living in the right faith that God has given me?”

Kanna Sagar Thomas Thambi

Oct 09, 2016; XXVIII Sunday in Ordinary Times

2Kgs 5:14-17; 2Tim 2:8-13; Lk 17:11-19

Faith brings Salvation

In today’s gospel we see Jesus, on his journey to Jerusalem healing the ten lepers. This parable depicts a lesson about faith and it reminds us that faith is sometimes found in unlikely places. These ten men afflicted with

leprosy cry out to Jesus for his mercy. Jesus having struck with pity and compassion heals all the ten. However, only one is described as glorifying God and returning to thank Jesus. The one who returns is a Samaritan, a foreigner. All the ten lepers were given the same gift of healing, but in his gratitude to God for this gift, the Samaritan found salvation in returning to thank Jesus.

In the first reading of today we see, Naaman is being cleansed from his leprosy. It is only because of his faith that he is being cleansed. He went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, as Elisha had ordered. And in return as gratitude he chooses to serve the God of Israel.

The readings of today are very much applicable in our day to day life. Today, we may not suffer from our physical diseases like leprosy but we do suffer from our spiritual diseases one way or the other. We suffer from selfishness, jealousy, hatred and ego-centredness but Jesus is always beside us to cleanse us from these sufferings, every time we call out to Him in faith. Indeed we are loved and blessed with the gift of faith. “For God so loved the world that He gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16).

We are also endowed with many gifts and talents, we have many achievements and successes but forget to regard that all these are from God. We often become like the other nine lepers. We forget to return to the one for whom all things are possible. Therefore it is necessary for every Christian to reflect upon his or her life, whether he or she is grateful to the Lord for all His graces and blessings. Each Christian is called to live by faith, and if we have true faith in the Lord, surely it will bring us salvation. Those who remain faithful to Christ will share in His glory.

Derhasat Narzary

Oct. 16, 2016: XXIX Sunday in Ordinary Times

Ex.17: 8-13/ 2Tim.3:14-4:2/ Lk.18:1-8

Our Needs and Theirs

Today’s liturgy invites us to deepen our prayer life. Today’s readings are mainly about prayer and particularly about perseverance and constancy

in prayer. By introducing the parable of the unjust judge and the persistent widow in today's gospel, Jesus emphasizes the necessity of praying unceasingly and not losing heart. Jesus presents the widow in today's gospel as a model of trust and persistence with which his disciples are to pray. In the first reading Moses is presented as making tireless intercessions for his people while Joshua leads them in the fight against the Amalek. Both Moses and the widow teach us how we should pray. In the second reading St. Paul instructs Timothy to persevere in his ministry of preaching the Word of God in all situations with patience.

The Word of God teaches us that just as our parents want what is best for us and will give us what we ask for, God, our heavenly Father, too hears and answers our requests. We are living in an instant world and so when we ask for something, we want God to say yes to our requests instantly. Through this significant parable of the widow and the unjust judge Jesus conveys a striking message to all of us that we should always pray and should never give up. Prayer was central in the life of Jesus Christ and be supposed to be central in our lives too.

For most of us, prayer means asking God for something when we are in need. We conveniently overlook the more important aspects of prayer that are adoration, praise and thanksgiving. How many of us remember to say, "Thank You, Lord, for giving me another day," when we get up in the morning? How many of us express our gratitude for our well-being, our professions, our food and our further daily necessities? As long as our earthly life runs along smoothly, we tend to forget God. When adversity strikes, however, we suddenly remember that there is a God and we want Him to come to our support instantly. God, however, judges fairly. He gives to each according to one's merit. If we have forgotten God through our years of prosperity, how can we expect him to take notice of us in the times of adversity? So my dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ! Let us seek God first in our prayers of praise and thanks, and place others' needs on an equal footing with our own. In this way, we can always grow in our prayer life.

J. Rino

Oct. 23, 2016: XXX Sunday in Ordinary Times

Sir. 35:12-14, 16-18/ 2 Tim. 4:6-8, 16-18/ Lk. 18:9-14

Striving to fulfill Christ's mission

Every Mission Sunday is a reminder of Christ's mission entrusted to the Church. The Church is commissioned to 'go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything... (Mt. 28:19-20) that Christ has commanded. Christ's mandate to go out should emerge from the experience of the Risen Lord. The verbal proclamation should emanate from the inner life, from **witnessing**. We are called to give witness by letting our light shine in the world. In other words, every Christian is a missionary by virtue of his life in Christ. Jesus commands us to be the salt and the light of the world. Living out the gospel and giving witness through our life is, in fact, a broader understanding of mission. The Church has the task of carrying out Christ's mission in the world. Yet the present scenario of globalization and many other factors compel us to introspect our involvement and commitment to this mission.

Today, we see rampant violence, abject poverty, neglect of the suffering, consumeristic attitude, religious fundamentalism etc. in our societies, the countries and the world at large. All these should not hamper our mission; rather move us all to act generously and prudently. These should inspire us to imitate the Apostles and saints, the great missionaries, as St. Paul exhorts us to do. However, these may at times affect our spiritual life if we are not careful.

Jesus, in today's gospel, presents two totally opposing attitudes. Our attitude reveals our spirituality. One attitude that we see in the gospel is that of self-righteousness and pride. Such an attitude makes a person hate the other especially the marginalized. The Church has the primary mission of reaching out to **the marginalized**. But if the Church adopts the aforementioned attitude, how could it fulfill its mission? The other kind of attitude is of humility and self-effacement. Such kind is non-judgemental and ever ready to acknowledge one's faults and mistakes. This makes us accessible to others especially to those who are looked down upon in the world. We can flourish in our spiritual life only in

humility, not in pride. In carrying out the mission, what we need is to humble ourselves so that the world will learn a lesson from us.

Denu Sangma

Oct. 30, 2016: XXXI Sunday in Ordinary Times

Wis. 11: 22-12:2/ 2 Thes. 1: 11-2:2/ Lk. 19: 1-10

The God Who Comes to Our House

“He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smouldering wick” (Mt.12:20). There is only one religion which can claim a God who comes to his people and bring them salvation. When all other religions go in seeking gods, our God comes to us. It can be a contradiction to the so called definition of God but actually this immanence of the transcendent completes the real understanding or meaning of God. That is God is beyond our understanding and God’s mercy is beyond the horizons.

The readings of the day all show the God who approaches each and every one without any exclusion. He does not consider the lowliness or the worthiness. We often think God as blind by seeing the growth and wellbeing of criminals, corrupted politicians etc. we even ask why God nurture them, why God do not punish them. There we see the difference of the love of God and the love of man. God loves everything and hate nothing. So we may think that God loves sin. Absolutely not the sin, but the sinner, to make him repent and lead him to salvation. When we go through the salvation history we can see three elements, sin, punishments and mercy.

This does not mean that we can be passive in our ways. Because our God is the One who takes hundred steps towards us when we take one step towards Him. We see Zaccheus in the gospel of Luke. When Zaccheus only wishes to see Jesus, Jesus calls him and goes to his house. When we ask for a flower God gives a spring and we also have to remember that salvation is not something which we gain ourselves. Second Vatican says that grace of God is necessary to receive salvation.

So, our duty is to take a step towards Him, or invite him into our lives and He will come and bring us to salvation, because He loves all and hates none.

Jijo

Nov. 6, 2016: XXXII Sunday in Ordinary Times

2 Mac 7:1-2, 9-114; 2 Th 2:16-3:5, Lk 20:27-38

The Power of Resurrection

One of the most important characteristics of Sadducees is that they do not believe in resurrection. Since their thinking looks like in the line of materialistic way Jesus' teaching on resurrection was contradictory for them. So they approached Jesus to clarify their doubts on this matter. Their argument literally stands only in the realm of reason and intellect. Therefore, Jesus tries to correct their way of thinking and affirms the reality of resurrection. Here we need to ask a question to ourselves when we read and reflect on this passage how is it relevant for me today? For a Christian, belief in the resurrection is the most important aspect of Christine life. The reason behind this emphasis is only because of the resurrection of Jesus, our master whom we follow. Resurrection is the most essential factor which makes Jesus different for all other religious leaders and revolutionaries. For all of them, the lives ended with death whereas Jesus was risen from death and still He lives with us. Therefore, this gospel passage invites us to transcend from the level of reason to faith and understand the meaning of resurrection. We don't try to confine God to our understanding. As Pope Francis says "Our God is God of surprises" so we cannot comprehend HIS ways. Therefore, let us bow our lives before all HIS surprises.

In this passage, Jesus tells "now HE is God not of the dead, but of the living, for to him all of them are alive". Our God is the one who lived in history, lives and guides each moment of our lives. The most important aspect of incarnation is to reveal the

world who God is. When we think in this line Jesus tries to present God as a person for each Christian. It is an opportunity to reflect upon the concept of God which I hold in my life. How much am I experiencing the personal presence of God in each step of my life? Our God is not the one who sits in the heaven, instead one who is always with me in my happy and sad moments of life. As Abraham, Isaac and Jacob experienced, this gospel passage radically invites us to experience presence of the living God in my life. So let us pray God that grant the grace to walk with His personal presence throughout our lives and to deepen our faith in the reality of resurrection.

Ebin CST

Nov 13, 2016: XXXIII Sunday in Ordinary Times

Mal 4:1-2

2 Thess 3:7-12

Lk 21:5-19

God of Surprises

Pope Francis visited the Central African Republic last November where the violence between Christians and Muslims has claimed thousands of lives. But the danger didn't stop Pope from preaching at a mosque in a besieged community there proclaiming, "God is Peace and he Brings us Hope." He also visited a refugee camp where he blessed the displaced children. Pope Francis strongly believes that "faith is an encounter with Jesus, and we must do what Jesus does: encounter others, no matter where they are."

In the first reading Prophet Malachi (**Malachi 3:19-20a**) speaks of the Sun of Justice who will rise with his healing touch. The meaning of the name Malachi is "My Messenger." Thus the prophet speaks of the message of hope for his people. In the Second reading St. Paul (**II Thes 3:7-12**) urges the people to make him as model to imitate. He wants the people to be disciplined in their lives.

In the Gospel the author instill in us a hope and Jesus assures us that we will not be perished. What we have to do is to stand firm and hold fast to what we believe. Luke (**Luke 21:5-19**) brings us the message of hope through today's passage like Pope Francis. The Jews were completely attached to the temple of Jerusalem. For them temple and land gave them identity. Once they are lost, the identity is lost. The temple was utterly destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD, this event had disoriented them. They even felt that it was the end of the world. Luke uses this imagery to focus on the end times, in his eschatological discourse. This is the chief message that there will be distrust, disharmony, destruction, trouble, violence and even persecution, not only from outside but from your own also. But Jesus actually instills in us hope; he assures us that we will not be perished. He exhorts us to stand firm and believe that he is with us, even though it may seem that all is lost.

First we stand firm, trying our best to live the life, God has given us in the present and not worrying about the future. God's kingdom is at hand, whether we are scrubbing pots or writing reports, driving carpools or hauling trash. We stand firm by being faithful to what we have been called to do, making the most of God's presence in the midst of our daily activities.

Are you anxious about unresolved relationships? Worried that you aren't ready to meet Jesus? Each day offers the chance to draw closer to him, to mend broken relationships and to care for his people. If you are trying to do this each day your fears about the Lord's coming will slowly dissolve. You will grow in confidence that you are living each day to its fullest. You will be more peaceful.

Secondly we hold fast. We know the lord. God is our everlasting, almighty and faithful father. So we hold fast to that truth in the face of anxiety and trials. When you have "shaky" moments in your lives remember the words and assurance of Jesus. "You will be hated universally on account of my name, but not a hair of your head will be lost. Your perseverance will win you your lives."

So dear friends, Our Lord is the Lord who keeps his promise. Because he kept his promise to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and finally he fulfilled his promise through his only son, by sending him to save us from the clutches of sin. He knows us personally and he never abandons us. Thus we shall put our full confidence and trust in him who shows us the way, truth and gives us life in abundance.

Shinoj Joseph SVD

Nov. 20, 2016: Christ the King

2 Sam 5:1-3 Col 1:12-20 Lk 23:35-43

Reigning with Christ the King

A boy was not doing too well in public school. So his parents got him into a Catholic school to see if he would improve. Immediately the boy stopped watching TV and playing computer games and spent all his time in studies. At the end of the year he was the best student in class. His baffled parents asked him what happened. “The first day I went to school,” he explained, “and saw that man hanging up on the cross, I knew you couldn’t fool around here.”

The sight of the crucified Christ might have spurred our young man to success, but the crucifixion, humanly speaking, depicts failure. It signals a brutal and disappointing end to the life and work of Jesus. When Jesus cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46) his God did not take him down from the cross. When he cried, “Eli, Eli,” and the bystanders waited to see if Elijah was coming to save him, nothing happened. One of the thieves crucified with him even challenged him, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” (Luke 23:39) and he was still hanging there. By every observable, measurable, human standard, the crucifixion was a disappointing end for Jesus whom we acclaim today to be our King.

But Jesus has said that his kingdom is not of this world. By this he means to say not simply that his kingdom is not localized in this world but that the ways and standards of his kingdom are not the ways and standards of the world around us. One of the first people to appreciate this mystery is the repentant thief on the cross about whom we read in today's gospel. Choking with the pains of crucifixion and imminent death, he turns and says to Jesus, his fellow convict hanging on the next cross, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). Unlike the third convict who asks to be delivered from the cross, this holy criminal knows that success in God's kingdom is measured by a different set of standards. He knows that to get into the kingdom of Christ one has to be saved not from the cross but on the cross.

How often we, followers of the Crucified, make the mistake of the unrepentant thief, of seeking to vindicate ourselves by a show of power, wealth or connection!

A certain knight dragged himself back to the king's court after a narrow escape from a wearisome campaign. The king ran out to meet him. "What is wrong, Sir Erasmus?" asked the king. "My Lord, the king," answered the knight, "I have been out fighting your enemies to death." "Which enemies?" asked the king. "Your enemies on the western border," replied the knight. "But," countered the king, "I have no enemies on the western border." "Well," replied the disillusioned knight, "now you do." In his zeal for the king, the knight has been going about sowing seeds of enmity and discord in the kingdom whose peace and harmony he was supposed to safeguard.

Aren't we often, like this knight, so different from our King? As soldiers of Christ when shall we learn to fight with the same weapons used by our Master? What weapons did Jesus use to wage the spiritual war of the kingdom of God? He used the weapons of

Truth and Love. The truth of the word of God is a sharp sword against all the forces of the enemies of the kingdom. Salome, the mother of James and John wanted to add her financial power to propagate Jesus' teaching. Jesus turned it down. The people wanted to make Jesus king and so to prop up the power of his words with the power of royalty. Jesus ran away from them. The sword of the word of God, wielded with love and meekness as Jesus did is all that we need to spread the kingdom of Christ on earth.

As we celebrate the kingship of Christ today, Jesus invites us as he did 2000 years ago: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart" (Matthew 11:29). Today is the day to ask ourselves how far we have responded, as individuals and as a community, to this invitation to cultivate the mind of Christ in our dealings with one another, especially in our dealings with those we perceive to be different from us. This is the way to show in our daily lives that Jesus Christ is indeed our king: by cultivating and living out in our lives the gentle and humble mind of Christ. And so, let us conclude with a prayer: Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make our hearts like unto thine.

Munachi E. Ezeogu, cssp (Internet)

Nov. 27, 2016: I Sunday of Advent

Is. 2: 1-5/ Rom. 13: 11-14a/ Mt. 24: 37-44

Be Prepared!

Today, as we are entering into the season of Advent, Holy Catholic Church is welcoming each and every children of her to prepare oneself to welcome the incarnate word once again into the manglers of our hearts. Gospel of Mathew beautifully creates an apocalyptic atmosphere to grasp the complete meaning of readiness which was of prime concern for the society of his time. As the gospel of Mathew was written to the people with Jewish background, the community of Mathew had the expectation of the world coming to the end and that day is not too distant

future, God would suddenly and dramatically establish divine rule over human affairs. The Jewish and Christian literatures have beautiful variety of ideas about what this day might involve. So are we prepared for it?

The problem of the second coming of the son of man is of utmost importance. It is because, we don't have a proper knowledge of the arrival of the son of man. The time could be anytime; it can be now, tomorrow or some years ahead. But in such a context what we can do or what our duty ought to be is to be ready and watchful beforehand itself. The evangelist uses apt pictures to describe this ideology very well. He brings in the idea of flood during the time of Noah from the Old Testament, where bad consequence was inflicted on those who were not prepared. He goes to extent of comparing the coming of son of man as to that of a thief who never drops in to a house by prior informing. The two women preparing meal and the two men in the fields highlight the suddenness of the coming and the separation it will be bring.

Jesus through this imageries is cautioning everyone to take proper measure for all the warnings that come across in our life. It is not just of the natural calamities that Jesus is speaking, but also of the awareness of the spiritual warnings we receive in our life. We Christians all over the globe are called to live for what we believe. Even unto the point of death we are called to be docile to the beliefs rooted in our hearts. No one knows when our throats will be slit for the sake of the kingdom of heaven or when we will be brutally tortured for the Christ we believe. Though little harsh, the gospel reading of today carries a clear warning: *Be Prepared!* If we are still in slumber, let's wake and prepare our drooping spirit in all the ways we can to have an encounter with Christ our Lord. Amen

Jerine

Dec. 4, 2016: II Sunday of Advent

Is. 11: 1- 10, Rom. 15: 4-9, Mt. 3: 1- 12

Am I the Message?

Prophet Isaiah comforted the Israelites that with the appearance of the long awaited King and the real Judge, they will be delivered justice which they owe. The Judge, upon whom rest the spirit of the Lord shall judge and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth (Mt, 5:5).” Having obtained justice, prophet continued to console the exiled Israelites that there shall be endless peace. God’s creation is filled with His expression of life and joy. Cosmic power is being revived. The whole Cosmos is in perfect harmony. The covenantal relationship restored whereby the Israelites becomes Yahweh’s people and He, their God.

John the Baptist, the Forerunner of Jesus Christ appeared on the desert and proclaimed about the advent of the Christ, “the Prince of Peace” (Isa, 9: 6-7). He proclaimed that every receptive heart received the message of the Kingdom of Justice, truth and love. He voiced the people to prepare a way, a straight paths. He called for the conversion of heart (Mt, 15: 18-19).

In a world today, where the sense of virtues are slowly and gradually disillusioned by the heavy apparent throbbing advertisements, our reality of life is greatly challenged. There is in every individual the bi-polar pull which goes on to affect the greater lives in the society. The society with its structures and divisions, expectations and restrictions creates certain atmosphere which shape the lifestyle of the person. The wide gap between those affluent and the powerful on one hand and the poor and the marginalized on the other makes one to ask the old and the same question, “**Why this?**” Are we living in a just and a peaceful society where equity is shown to those in real need?

The dignity of a person is almost gone in a society where God is objectified and used as when one is in need. As **Pope Francis** states that it is no longer the person (God’s image and likeness) who commands, but money, money, cash commands. God the Father gave us task for

protecting the earth not for money but for our peaceful living. Nevertheless, men and women are sacrificed and stripped of from their dignity to the idols of profits and consumption. The rich continues to prosper and the poor are deprived in the same society.

Can we be that voice shouting in our own little ways to awaken the sleeping consciences and lukewarm and corrupted spirits? The message of God's **LOVE** must be made heard in a distracted minds, disturbed soul and superficial world of ours today. It is the name, the face and the mercy of God that unites all creation. Can we be that message? **I AM THE MESSAGE.**

May the Lord grant us the grace of perseverance and comfort as we await the word becoming flesh and living among us, "**Emmanuel.**"

C. Peingam Augustine

Dec. 11, 2016: III Sunday of Advent

Is. 35:1-6, 10; Jam. 5:7-10; Mt. 11: 2- 11

Changing our Thinking

The common theme in the above readings is one of joy & encouragement, and the need for patience. The prophet Isaiah encourages the exiled Jews to believe that God is going to save them and transform them. In James the Apostle encourages the early Christians to be patient "*because the coming of the Lord is at hand.*" Finally, in the Gospel, Jesus cast away the popular expectations about the Messiah and simply to accept His healing and preaching ministry as the fulfilling of the messianic prophecy of Isaiah.

John's doubts in the gospel can have two possible explanations: 1) John knew who that Jesus was and he wanted his disciples to follow Jesus as their new master presuming that once they met Jesus they would see the Messiah and become his followers. 2) John began to doubt Jesus' identity as the promised Messiah.

Jesus' quoting from Isaiah clearly speaks of the deaf hearing & blind seeing: (Is.29:18), lame leaping (Is.35:6), dead becoming alive

(Is.26:19), good news for the oppressed (Is.61:1), etc. These were signs of the Messiah's coming.

Therefore, Firstly, this entire episode helps us understand how the experience of a faith crisis can play a role in our spiritual and emotional development. If John the Baptist, who had direct encounter with Jesus the Messiah, can doubt and revise his faith, then so can we. If disillusionment is a necessary precondition for a more resilient faith, then we too must be open to its possibilities.

Secondly, we rejoice at the thought that Jesus is going to be reborn in our lives as Love, Mercy, Forgiveness and spirit of Humble and Sacrificial service during this Christmas season. During this season, let us joyfully share God's bountiful grace, Forgiveness, and **Mercy** with others. This is what Jesus commanded John's disciples and to us today: *Go and tell others what you hear and see.*

Finally, let us reflect whether the gospel reports create *metánoia* (a change of thinking about God, ourselves, and the world) in us during Advent?

Sunny Thomas

Dec. 18, 2016: IV Sunday of Advent

Is. 7:10-14, Rom. 1:1-7, Mt. 1:18-24

Christ our Goal & Focus

In the saintly imageries and pictures we use in our churches of saints like Mary, St. Joseph, St. Anthony etc. are always depicted with their fingers pointing towards Jesus. We venerate them and strive to live a life as they lived, in line with true values of Christ.

In the scripture too, angels, prophets and apostles pointed towards one thing and that is Christ. In the first reading we have prophet Isaiah who prophesized about the coming of the Messiah

In the letter to the Romans we have the servant of Jesus Christ, an apostle, St. Paul. He was always talking about Christ; his epistles are filled with Christ; Christ in his ministry and message, was everything.

In the gospel too, Angel of the Lord conveyed the coming of Christ to Joseph in a dream.

All those people who received the prophesy were upright, humble and genuine repentants. King Ahaz's humility is expressed when he is told by the Lord to ask for a sign, he says "...I will not ask, I will not put the Lord to the test". St Paul, once a persecutor is now a servant of Christ. And we have Joseph and Mary, the obedient, lowly and humble servants of God.

We Christians are called to be angels, prophets, apostles, disciples, saints and servants of Lord Jesus Christ. We are called to preach Christ through our words and deeds. We are summoned to be messengers of Christ, to deliver his good news to the poor and humble of hearts. We are called to be prophets, to spread peace, justice and challenge the evil structures in the society. Last but not the least we are called to repent, change our lives and become humble, obedient servants of Christ so that like the psalmist we can stand before the Lord, in his holy place with clean hands and pure hearts and prepare for his glorious coming.

Heston Ferrão

Dec. 25, 2016: The Nativity of the Lord

Is 52:7-10, Heb 1:1-6, Jn. 1:1-18

God Is Truly with Us

Christmas is a time we celebrate the birth of our Lord, the mystery of the incarnation of the Almighty God as a little baby in the hands of a Mary of Nazareth. The meaning of Immanuel is 'God is with us'. Thus the incarnation of the Lord brings God to the people, the closest that could be possible. We see in many religions that God takes the form of a human being-for a particular cause. But the impact that this man called Jesus made, no one else can replicate. Its simply because, in spite of being God himself, he made himself like us in every way except sin. This is the greatest consolation that the humanity can have, that it is not alone in its journey of this world.

The first reading of today, tells us that God has shown mercy on Jerusalem and at last the time for its salvation has come, implicitly through the birth of Jesus himself. The wait of the people of God for

their Saviour as God promised has at last been fulfilled. As St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Hebrews today that God has spoken to us directly through his Son Jesus. It is in Jesus that the culmination of God's plan of salvation lies. That is what John tells us in the Gospel reading of today. The word has become flesh and lived among us. God gave the law through Moses but grace and truth has come through Jesus.

When we celebrate the birthday of someone, it is their presence in our life that brings us closer to them when we celebrate their birthday. Christmas is not the birthday of Jesus but the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Our new clothes, our candles, our cakes, our cribs, our Christmas cards, all of these make sense if and only if Jesus is there in our lives. Otherwise Jesus becomes a concept that comes and goes along with every Christmas that we celebrate. May this Christmas bring us more closer to ourselves, our neighbours and God. After all, our Immanuel is with us.

Bhanu Yeswanth Kumar



Book Review

Nishant Irudayadason (ed.), *Musings and Meanings: Hermeneutical Ripples...*, Christian Wrold Imprints, New Dlhi and Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, Rs 350 (pb) or 795 (hb) 212+x, ISBN: 978-93-5148-164-5.

As the art of understanding, hermeneutics has become significant in understanding texts, action and even human behaviour, in the last century. It has moved away from legal or biblical interpretation of texts to a holistic interpretation of human action and life itself.

This edited work is the outcome of the international conference held in honour of two eminent scholars and priests, Richard De Smet and Jean de Marneffe of the Faculty of Philosophy, at Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune held in January 2014. The conference focussed extensively on the art of understanding from both the Eastern and the Western perspectives. All the scholarly essays critically engage with contemporary theories of cross-cultural understanding and the discourse on the stranger. This work, therefore, is an “attempt to formulate a cross-cultural interpretation that incorporates the ambivalence of boundaries, the enabling dimension of essentialism and acknowledges the role that fore-meanings and fore-structures have on cross-cultural understanding.”

The fourteen articles contain some gems like “Navigating cross-hermeneutics currents: A subaltern perspective,” and “Hermeneutics of the genius of the absurd,” among others. It is a good and fruitful reading for both philosophers of religion, scripture scholars and theologians. **KP**

Job Kozhamthadam (ed.). *Science, Mysticism and East-West Dialogue*, ISPCK, Delhi, IISR, Delhi, 2016. Pp. 278+xiv Rs 375. ISBN: 978-81-8465-547-6.

Some of us still believe that science and religion are opposed to each other. They think that science and mysticism do not and cannot mix, since they belong to two very different worlds. In the light of recent developments, particularly in the sciences, the fourteen original papers by international scholars from the East and the West argue that this perception can no longer be sustained.

They hold that it is becoming more and more evident today that the reach of the human mind extends far beyond what can be captured either by the senses or narrow, rigid logic and rationality. Below and beyond the wall of science, there exists a serene, real world of intuition and insight, which is a rich mine of knowledge and wisdom.

Recent studies further indicate that mystics of all times and places have had special access to this world. Today the consensus is emerging that both scientists and mystics share the common mission of being seekers of truth and that their findings are complementary rather than contradictory. This volume also points out that this constructive blending of science and mysticism can serve as an effective catalyst for a meaningful and enriching East-West dialogue.

This book is highly recommended to all those who are seriously interested in either science or religion or both. **KP**