**Asian Journal of Religious Studies**

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# Asian Journal of Religious Studies

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# Editorial

## The Papal Message

In the 476 years since its founding, the Society of Jesus has convened only 35 general congregations. The 36th General Congregation was convened in Rome on October 2, 2016. A general congregation is always summoned on the death or resignation of the head of the Society — the Superior General — to choose his successor, or when the General decides action is needed on serious matters that he cannot or does not want to decide alone.

One of the historical moments of the General Congregation took place on October 24, 2016, when the Pope walked into the General Congregation and addressed the gathering. The Pope entered naturally like a Jesuit father among others. But his white cassock marked a visible difference. But that added to the perception that there is a deep bond between the Jesuits and and Church.

A historic event: this was the encounter of General Congregation of the Jesuits with Pope Francis. The first to be aware of this event was precisely Father General Arturo Sosa who asked the Jesuits to prepare themselves spiritually for this encounter. It has never happened that there was a Jesuit Pontiff at a General Congregation of the Jesuits. His discourse then assumes for the Society a truly strong, special value. But, even before his discourse, the very presence of the Pope itself was extremely

important. The audience in the Hall of the Congregation itself which lasted for hours of free and spontaneous encounter in an open and relaxed atmosphere was symbolic of a new Church.

Much more than the historical significance of a Jesuit Pope addressing the Jesuit General Congregation, the challenge that the Pope's address poses, not only to the Jesuits but to the whole Church is truly significant. So we decided to dedicate this issue of AJRS to reflect on his message and to understand it better. So we have requested some Jesuit scholars from all over the world to reflect on the themes the Pope has dealt with in his address. Thus this issue of AJRS is dedicated to understanding the vision and expectation of Pope for the Jesuits in particular and the whole Church in general.

Much more than the historical significance of a Jesuit Pope addressing the Jesuit General Congregation, the challenge that the Pope's address poses, not only to the Jesuits but to the whole Church is truly significant.

We wish the readers a fruitful and blessed New Year, 2017.

The Editor

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# Pope Francis' Address to the Jesuits

*Pope Francis*
Vatican

*[The following is the address of Pope Francis to the Members of the General Congregation on October 24, 2016]*

Dear Brothers and Friends in the Lord,

While praying over what I would like to say, I remembered with particular affection the words of Paul VI to us as we came to the end of the 32nd General Congregation: "This is the way, this is the way, Brothers and Sons. Forward, *in nomine Domini*. Let us walk together, free, obedient, united to each other in the love of Christ, for the greater glory of God."[1]

Also, St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI have encouraged us to "lead a life worthy of the vocation to which we have been called"[2][Eph 4:1] "and following the path of mission" in full fidelity to your original charism in the ecclesial and social context that characterises this beginning of the millennium. As my predecessors have often told, the Church needs you, counts on you and continues to turn to you with confidence, particularly to reach the geographical and spiritual places where others do not reach, or find it difficult to reach."[3] Walking together – free and obedient – going to the peripheries where others do not reach, "under Jesus' gaze and looking to the horizon which is the ever greater glory of God, who ceaselessly

surprises us."[4] The Jesuit is called as Ignatius says "our vocation is to travel through the world and to live in any part of it where there is hope of greater service to God and of help of souls" [Con, 304]. That is, as Nadal used to say "for the Society the whole world is our home."[5]

Ignatius wrote to Borgia regarding a criticism of the Jesuits who were called "angels" (Oviedo and Onfroy). Some critics used to say that the Society was not well instituted, that it had to be instituted more in spirit. "The Spirit which is guiding these critics" – Ignatius used to say – "does not know the state of things of the Society which are *in the making*, other than what is necessary (and substantial)."[6] I very much appreciate Ignatius's way of seeing things which are coming into being, removing oneself from the constraints of the concrete. It takes the Society from all that paralyses it, freeing it from frivolities.

What is "necessary and substantial" is the Formula of the Institute, which we should keep before our eyes every day, keeping our eyes on God our Lord. "The nature of this Institute which is his pathway to God." This is how it was for the first companions and they foresaw that this is how it would be "for those who would follow us in this pathway." So both poverty and obedience or the fact of not being obliged to sing the office in choir, are neither demands nor privileges, but aids to mobility and thus being available in the Society: "to run in the path of Christ our Lord" [Con 582]. In virtue of the vow of obedience to the Pope we have a "surer direction from the Holy Spirit" [Formula of the Institute 3]. In the Formula, we have this Ignatian intuition. Its centrality is

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what makes the Constitutions stress that we always keep in mind "places, times and persons" so that all rules are aids – *tantum quantum* – for concrete things.

For Ignatius, being on the road is not only coming and going, but it translates into something qualitative: It is drawing profit, and progress, is going forward, to do something for others. This is how the two Formulas of the Institute, approved by Paul III [1540] and Julius III [1550] express it, when they focus the work of the Society on the faith – and its defence and propagation – and on the life and teaching of persons. So Ignatius and the first companions used the expression "to draw greater fruit" (*aprovechamiento*) [*ad profectum,*[7] cf. Phil. 1:12 and 25] which is the practical criterion of discernment proper to our spirituality.

Drawing profit is not individualistic, but it is for the common good: "The end of this Society is to devote itself with God's grace not only to the salvation and perfection of the members own souls, but also with that same grace to labour strenuously in giving aid toward the salvation and perfection of the souls of their neighbours" [General Examen, I, 2]. If at all the balance of Ignatius' heart was inclined towards something, that was towards helping our neighbours, so much so that he used to get angry if somebody was to tell him that the reason that someone remained in the Society was "in order to save his own soul. Ignatius did not want men, who although being good, were not zealous for the service of their neighbour" (Aicardo I punto 10 p. 41).

We are to draw profit from everything. The Formula of Ignatius expresses a tension: "not only… but also…" and this conceptual framework combining tensions – the salvation and perfection of one's own soul, and the salvation and perfection of one's neighbour's – from the higher realm of Grace – is proper to the Society of Jesus. The harmonization of this and of all the other tensions (contemplation and action, faith and justice, charism and institution, community and mission…) is

not expressed in abstract formulations but is achieved in the course of time through what Faber called "our way of proceeding"[8]. Journeying and progressing in the following of the Lord, the Society moves towards harmonizing the tensions brought about by the diversity of the men whom it brings together and of the missions it receives.

Drawing profit is not elitist. In the Formula, Ignatius proceeds to describe the means for seeking the greater and more universal good which are truly sacerdotal. However, we observe that the works of mercy are taken for granted. The Formula says "without these being an obstacle" to mercy!!! Works of mercy – caring for the sick in hospitals, begging for alms, sharing, teaching catechism to children, the patient suffering of insults… are the daily bread of Ignatius and his first companions. They took care that none of these became obstacles!

The *magis* is the fire, the fervour in action, awakening those who have become dormant. Our saints have always incarnated this fervour. It used to be said of St. Alberto Hurtado that he was a thorn in the flesh of the dormant Church.

Drawing profit in the final analysis is "that which they sought the most." This is the *magis*, this more, which moves Ignatius to start accompanying people and helping them reflect on the various experiences of their lives with regard to faith, justice, mercy and charity. The *magis* is the fire, the fervour in action, awakening those who have become dormant. Our saints have always incarnated this fervour. It used to be said of St. Alberto Hurtado that he was a thorn in the flesh of the dormant Church. This militates against that temptation which Paul VI called *spiritus vertiginis* and de Lubac called "spiritual worldliness." This temptation is

not primarily moral, but spiritual, and distracts us from the essential: that we be fruitful persons, to let our footsteps leave marks in history, especially in the lives of the very least in our society. "The Society is zealous"[9] as Nadal used to say. To revive the zeal for mission for the greater good of persons in their life and doctrine, I would like to make more concrete these reflections in three points: given that the Society's way of proceeding for the greater good is accomplished through joy, the cross and through the Church our Mother. We need to look at how we move forward by overcoming the impediments which the enemy of our human nature tries to put in our way when we are in the service of God and seeking the greater good.

## 1.- To Ask Insistently for Consolation

We can always take a step forward asking insistently for consolation. In the two Apostolic Exhortations and in *Laudato Si*, I consistently underlined the importance of joy. In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius invites us to contemplate "the office of consolation," which is the work of the Risen Christ Himself [Sp. Ex. 224]. This is the true work of the Society: to console the faithful people of God and to help them through discernment so that the enemy of human nature does not rob us of our joy: the joy of evangelising, the joy of the family, the joy of the Church, the joy of creation…. Let the enemy of our human nature not rob us of our joy, neither by despair before the magnitude of the evils of the world, and the misunderstandings between those who want to do good, nor let him replace it with foolish joys that are always at hand in all human enterprises.

This "service of joy and spiritual consolation" roots us in prayer. This consists in animating ourselves and animating others "to ask insistently for God's consolation." Ignatius formulated this in a negative way in the sixth rule of the first week when he said "It is very profitable to make rigorous changes in ourselves against desolation" by insisting more on prayer [Sp. Ex. 319] It is beneficial because one is "worth little

in time of desolation." [Sp. Ex. 324] To practice and teach this prayer of petition and supplication for consolation is the principal service we render to joy. If somebody does not consider himself worthy (something which is very common in practice), he should at least remain persistent in prayer for consolation for love of the message, because joy is constitutive of the Gospel message; he should therefore also ask for it for love of others, for his family and for the world. One cannot give a good piece of news with a sad face. Joy is not only decorative, it is also a clear indicator of grace, it shows that love is active, working and present. For this reason, in an age of instant gratification and unabated consumption, the search for joy should not be confused with the search for "a spiritual effect," when our existential identity is more concerned with long lasting effects: Ignatius opens the eyes and wakes us up to the discernment of Spirits to discover the difference between long-lasting joys and transient joys. (Autobiography 8) Time is the key to recognising the action of the Spirit.

"Progress" in the spiritual life is brought about in consolation. It is to go from "good to better," it is also "every increase in hope, faith and charity and every interior joy."

In the Exercises, "progress" in the spiritual life is brought about in consolation. It is to go from "good to better," it is also "every increase in hope, faith and charity and every interior joy." (Sp. Ex. 316) This service to joy was what led the first companions to decide not to disperse, but to institute the Society and celebrate spontaneously their companionship, which was characterised by joy and which made them pray together, go on missions together and then to reunite again, in imitation of the life of the Lord and his apostles. This joy of the explicit announcing of the Gospel – through preaching, faith and the practice of justice and mercy – is that which leads the Society to go to the peripheries.

The Jesuit is a servant of the joy of the Gospel, both when he is working as an artisan, conversing and giving the spiritual exercises to a single person, helping him or her to encounter "this interior forum whence comes the power of the Spirit, which guide, free and renew him" [10] and when he is working with structures, organising works of formation, of mercy, or of reflection which are institutional expansions of those turning points where the individual will is broken down and the Spirit enters to act. As M. de Certeau rightly said: The Spiritual Exercises are the apostolic method *par excellence*" which made possible the "a return to the heart, the beginning of docility to the Spirit which awakens and propels the exercitant to personal fidelity to God"[11].

## 2.- Letting Ourselves Be Moved by Our Lord Placed on the Cross

We can always take a step forward in letting ourselves be moved by the Lord crucified, by him in person, by him present in so many of our brothers and sisters who are suffering – the great majority of humankind! Father Arrupe used to say that wherever there is pain, the Society is there.

The Jubilee of Mercy is an appropriate time to reflect about the works of mercy. I have deliberately used the plural, because mercy is not an abstract word, but a lifestyle that places concrete gestures before the word. These gestures touch the flesh of the neighbour and become institutionalised in works of mercy. For those who do the Exercises this grace by which Jesus commands us to resemble the Father (cf. Lk 6:36), begins with this colloquy of mercy which is the expansion of the colloquy with the Lord placed on the cross for my sins. The entire second exercise is a colloquy full of sentiments of shame, confusion, pain and grateful tears, seeing who I am – making myself less – and who God is – making Him more – "who has given me life till now" – who Jesus is, hanging on the cross for me (Exx. 61 and preceding). The way Ignatius lives and formulates his experience of mercy is of great personal and

apostolic benefit, and requires an acute and sustained experience of discernment. Our father said to Borgia: "I am personally convinced regarding myself that both before and after I am totally an obstacle. Because of this I feel increased spiritual happiness and joy in the Lord in as much as I cannot attribute to myself even a semblance of good."[12] So Ignatius lives from the pure mercy of God even in the smallest details of his life and of his person. And he used to feel that, the greater an obstacle he might pose, the more Lord treated him with goodness: "Such was the mercy of the Lord, and such was the abundance of his tenderness and the sweetness of his grace with him, that the more he wished to be punished in this way, so much more benign was the Lord, and the more generously he lavished his treasures from his infinite freedom. With that, he said that he believed that there is no person in the world in whom these two things coincided as much as in him: how much he failed God, and received all and many continuous graces from his hand." [13]

Ignatius, describing his experience of mercy in these comparative terms – the more he failed the Lord, the more the Lord reached out in giving him his grace – released the life-giving power of mercy.

Ignatius, describing his experience of mercy in these comparative terms – the more he failed the Lord, the more the Lord reached out in giving him his grace – released the life-giving power of mercy which we, many times, dilute with our abstract formulations and legalistic conditions. The Lord who looks at us with mercy and chooses us, sends us out to bring with all its effectiveness, that same mercy to the poorest, to sinners, to those discarded people, and those crucified in the present world, who suffer injustice and violence. Only if we experience this healing power first-hand in our own wounds, as people and as a body, will we lose the fear of allowing ourselves be moved by the immense suffering

of our brothers and sisters, and will we hasten to walk patiently with our people, learning from them the best way of helping and serving them. (cf. GC 32, d.4 n.50)

### 3.- Doing Good Led by the Good Spirit, Thinking with the Church

We can always take a step forward in doing good in the Good Spirit, *sentire cum ecclesia*, as Ignatius says. The way we do things in using discernment is also proper to the Society. Faber used to formulate it asking for the grace that "everything good would be realised, thought or organised, be done through the good spirit and not through the bad."[14] This grace of discernment, it's not enough to think, do or organise the good, but do it of the good spirit, is what roots us in the Church, in which the Spirit works and distributes the diverse charisms for the common good. Faber used to say that, in many things, those who wanted to reform the Church were right, but that God did not want to correct it through their means.

It is proper of the Society to do things thinking with the Church. Doing this without losing peace and with joy, in the context of the sins we see, in us as well as in others, and in the structures that we have created, involves carrying the cross, experiencing poverty and humiliations, where Ignatius encourages us to choose between bearing them patiently or desiring them.[15] Where the contradiction was very clear, Ignatius used to advise to recollect oneself, before talking or acting, in order to work in the Good Spirit. We do not read the rules for thinking with the Church as precise instructions about controversial points (some rules could be out of date), but examples where Ignatius was inviting in his times to "act against" the anti-ecclesial spirit, inclining ourselves totally and decisively towards our Mother, the Church, not in order to justify a debatable position, but to open space so that the spirit could act in its own time.

Service of the good spirit and of discernment makes us men of the Church – not clericalists, but ecclesiastics – men "for

others," with nothing of our own which cuts us off from others, but rather everything that is ours placed in common and for service.

We neither walk alone nor comfortably, but we walk with "a heart that does not rest, that does not close in on itself but beats to the rhythm of a journey undertaken together with all the people faithful to God."[16] We walk becoming all things to all people, with the goal of helping others.

This self-emptying makes the Society have and always able to have more the face, the accent and the lifestyle of all peoples, of every culture, inserting ourselves in all of them, in the very heart of every people, to become the church, there with every people, inculturating the gospel and evangelising every culture.

This self-emptying makes the Society have and always able to have more the face, the accent and the lifestyle of all peoples, of every culture, inserting ourselves in all of them, in the very heart of every people, to become the church, there with every people, inculturating the gospel and evangelising every culture.

In a filial colloquy, or as a servant to his Mistress, we beg *Our Lady of la Strada* to intercede for us before the "Father of mercies and God of all consolation" (2 Cor 1:3), to constantly place us with her Son, with Jesus who carries, and invites us to carry the cross of the world with Him. We entrust to Her "our way of proceeding" that it should be ecclesial, inculturated, poor, attentive, free from all worldly ambition. We beg Our Mother to direct and accompany every Jesuit along with that part of the people faithful to God whom he has been sent, along these paths of consolation, of compassion and discernment.

[1] PAUL VI, *Discorso in occasione della 32ª Congregazione Generale della Compagnia di Gesù*. 3 December 1974. ["Così, così, fratelli e figli. Avanti, in Nomine Domini. Camminiamo insieme, liberi, obbedienti, uniti nell'amore di Cristo, per la maggior gloria di Dio". (Quoted in Italian at the original Spanish version. N. of the T.)]

[2] JOHN PAUL II, *Discourse to the participants at the 33rd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*. 2

September 1983.

[3] BENEDICT XVI, *Discourse to the participants at the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*. 21 February 2008.

[4] FRANCIS, *Homily at the Church of the Gesù*. 3 January 2014.

[5] MNadal V 364-365

[6] IGNACIO DE LOYOLA, *Carta 51, A Francisco de Borja*, julio de 1549, 17 N. 9. Cfr. M. A. FIORITO y A. SWINNEN, "La Fórmula del Instituto de la Compañía de Jesús (introducción y versión castellana)", *Stromata*, July-December 1977-nº 3/4, 259-260.

[7] "*Ad profectum animarum in vita et doctrina Christiana*" in Monumenta Ignatiana, Constitutiones T. I (MHSI), Roma, 1934, 26 y 376; cfr. *Constituzioni della Compagnia di Gesù annotate dalla CG 34 e Norme complementari*, Roma, ADP, 1995, 32-33.

[8] Cf. MF. 50, 69, 111, 114, etc.

[9] Cf. MNadal V, 310.

[10] PIERRE FAVRE, *Mémorial*, Paris, Desclée, 1959 ; cf. Introduction de M. de CERTAU, p. 74.

[11] Ibid., p. 76.

[12] IGNACIO DE LOYOLA, *Carta 26 a Francisco de Borja*, fines de 1545.

[13] P. RIBADENEIRA, *Vida di S. Ignazio di Loiola*, Roma, La Civiltà Cattolica, 1863, 336. [Tanta era la misericordia del Signore, e tanta la copia della soavità e dolcezza della grazia sua con esso lui, che quanto egli più desiderava d'essere in questo modo gastigato, tanto più benigno era Iddio e con abbondanza maggiore spargeva sopra di lui i tesori della sua infinita liberalità. Laonde diceva, che egli credeva no vi essere nel mondo uomo, in cui queste due cose insieme, tanto come in lui, concorressero; la prima mancare tanto a Dio e l'altra il ricevere tante e così continue grazie dalla sua mano (Quoted in Italian at the original Spanish version N. of the T.)]

[14] PIERRE FAVRE, *Mémorial* quoted. Nº 51.

[15] Cfr. IGNACIO DE LOYOLA, *Directorio Autógrafo* 23.

[16] FRANCIS, *Homily at the Church of the Gesù*, 3 January 2014.

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# Finding God in All Things and All Things in God

*Errol Fernandes SJ*
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The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola is regarded as an all time classic by many. It has been responsible for the transformation not only of Jesuits, but of so many who had the privilege to 'make' or 'do' the Exercises.

In its simplest form, the Exercises are divided into four 'weeks', where a week is not a period of seven days, but a set of meditations dedicated to particular themes. Thus in the 'first week' of the Exercises, the focus is on Sin and Repentance. Repentance here is interpreted as the unconditional love of God which fills the heart of the exercitant or retreatant and allows him/her to look at things in a new way. This experience of the magnanimous and unfathomable love of God leads the exercitant in the 'second week' to cease focussing on self and to gaze instead on Christ the Lord and King. The Mission of Christ who came to do the will of the Father no matter what the consequences ends with his Passion

The Spiriutal Exercises has been responsible for the transformation not only of Jesuits, but of so many who had the privilege to 'make' or 'do' the Exercises.

and Death, which is the focus in the 'third week'. However, death is not the end of the story. The 'fourth week' is devoted to the Resurrection of Christ and his constant and continued presence in the world. In order to become aware of this, the final meditation proposed by Ignatius in the Exercises is titled "The Contemplatio" or "The Contemplation to obtain Love".

The first line of the poem "God's grandeur" by the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins reads, "The earth is charged with the grandeur of God". In the first four lines of the poem he laments that humans have not been able to see and feel God's presence in creation. It seems to me that this poem was influenced by "The Contemplatio".

The movement is from gratitude to love and finally to union with God and all of creation.

'The Contemplatio' is a mediation that consists of four parts. The first of these is gratitude to God for all that God gives, the second is to see how God dwells in everyone and everything and in me, the third is to see how God continues to labour in things, persons and me preserving and sustaining and the fourth is to see how God becomes present in the gifts that God gives.

There is a gradation in the four parts of the Contemplatio where the end of the first becomes the means to the second and so on, till finally the exercitant is able to see and find God in all things and all things in God. The movement is from gratitude to love and finally to union with God and all of creation.

In the first of the four points above, God wants to hold nothing back and God's gifts range from creation (Gen 1:1-2:4a) to redemption (Rev 21:1-5a). We encounter here a God who wants to give everything. Since, however, God gives freely and without reserve the only proper response to this giving, the only

just response is not only to receive, but also to give in return. This is why at the end of this part we realise that each one of us is a 'trustee' and must behave as trustees caring for and concerned about God's creation. Selfishness goes out of the window and is replaced instead with selflessness, giving and sharing.

Thus in the second point, one moves to the ability to see and find God in all things, persons and events who are also an integral part of God's creation. This means that everything is sacred. As the Jesuit palaeontologist, philosopher and theologian Teilhard de Chardin put it so beautifully, "there is no reality that is only profane for those who know how to look". It means therefore, that we avoid 'clear' distinctions that we sometimes make of the sacred and the secular and the holy and the unholy. It means that we look at the world and people as Christ would have looked, as when he saw in the tax collector Matthew a potential disciple (Mt 9:9) and in the woman whom everyone else regarded as a sinner, one who loved much (Lk 7:47). Our response then, to God's creation must be awe and reverence much like the Psalmist who is able to see and experience God's presence in the whole of creation (Ps.8).

Since God loves the world and all in it unconditionally, God does not leave the world to its own design, but constantly 'labours' in the world.

Since God loves the world and all in it unconditionally, God does not leave the world to its own design, but constantly 'labours' in the world. This is evident in the fact that though we have so often abused rather than used God's creation, God continues to send messengers, prophets and heralds to lead us back to God (Heb 1:1-4). The 'labour' of God reached its zenith in the sending of the Son. By doing so not only did God grace

our humanity, but also showed us our true selves, namely that we are divine because of Jesus.

This realization is the final point of the Contemplatio – we become one with God who is "Father of all, who is above all, and through all and in all.' (Eph 4:6). Here we go beyond the gift to the giver of all gifts and offer everything back to him with the words, 'Take Lord and receive... all we have and possess. Give us only your love and your grace and that is enough'.

The meditation on the Contemplatio is thus a meditation on God, creation and self. It is not only a meditation on finding God in all things, but also on letting God find us. It begins with an awareness of our creatureliness and moves to an awareness of our divinity. It also makes us aware that the divine dwells in all of creation and we can find the divine if we know how to look.

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# Called to Be a Missionary of God's Mercy

*Stephen Chow SJ*
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A fervent Catholic friend of mine, Sally, has been suffering from a variety of illnesses for years. She was hoping to have a child with her husband but that was not possible due to her poor health. At one point she was struggling with disappointment and doubts in God. As a survivor of a somewhat serious health threat, I encouraged her to consider her mission might not be in maternity. She could be invited by God to testify for God's merciful providence through her ill health. This, of course, does not mean that God is responsible for her ill health. Rather, how much God has supported her and was with her through all her illnesses. How her life is richer with meanings because of all the challenges. With that interior understanding, she became free to testify for God's merciful providence and the meaning of her suffering.

The First Week of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius puts the retreatants in contemplation on their own sinfulness. The main objective is to help them experience how much God has loved them, though serious sinners they are. Being enflamed with the love of God, they are set free to respond to God's invitation ever so generously, bringing reconciliation and the joy of the Gospel to the world. Jesuits see themselves as sinners, yet called to be companions of Jesus as Ignatius and his first

companions did. Being called to be a companion of our Lord is a grace not deserved by anyone, who are sinners to begin with, but a pure loving invitation of God.

A definition of mercy is the feeling that motivates compassion. And compassion is about feeling for the suffering of others and a desire to do something to alleviate their pain.

As fellow Christians, we are all called to be followers and companions of Christ. We are sinners, yet loved! Once you and I have this affective understanding of what is meant by 'sinner yet loved,' who am I to judge the other sinners then? Who am I to distinguish myself from them, to make myself better or holier than them? What right do I have to despise or condemn anyone out right and mercilessly? It is so tempting to make our religion into a 'right or wrong' differentiating machine, or to see reality in duality. Is this what God or Christianity about? Our experience of mercy moves us to see God as God is. Mercy defines who we are as Christians, children of God who is Love. God, who is dynamic, ever involving and laboring for us. Hence, Christian faith is essentially the merciful love of God concretely manifested in the incarnation and paschal mystery of the Son of God.

How to understand mercy? Is it the same as compassion? A definition of mercy is the feeling that motivates compassion. And compassion is about feeling for the suffering of others and a desire to do something to alleviate their pain. One cannot, therefore, feeling bad for someone but staying put in one's affective state. *"So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead."* (James 2:17) Faith, mercy and compassion are intertwined. Faith without mercy is just a form without real content. Mercy without compassion is just self-serving

sympathetic feeling. Action is the end result of the faith-mercy-compassion composite. And this action is mission.

> "[Mercy] was the resumption of a journey of encountering people where they live: in their cities and homes, in their workplaces. Wherever there are people, the Church is called to reach out to them and to bring the joy of the Gospel."

Many Christians are of the opinion that 'mission' is a grand action, going to somewhere far away to evangelize. Hence, we have missionary. But mission really does not have to be so narrowly defined. The original meaning of 'mission' or '*missionem*' (*missio*) is 'to be sent.' Pope Francis said in his homily for the inauguration of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, *"[it] was the resumption of a journey of encountering people where they live: in their cities and homes, in their workplaces. Wherever there are people, the Church is called to reach out to them and to bring the joy of the Gospel."* The Church is not just the institutional or hierarchical Church but also the People of God, i.e., you and me. Pope Francis was referring to a Church impelled by the Holy Spirit *"to emerge from the shoals which for years had kept her self-enclosed so as to set out once again, with enthusiasm, on her missionary journey."* Yes it is once again, you and me.

If my friend Sally refused to see her ill-health as a form of preparation for herself to become missionary of God's love, but ruminated in her self-pitying and resentful state instead, she would not be a person so filled with life and joy as she is now. Her energetic and joyful presence radiates hope to the suffering ones as she encounters them.

Compassion is not, necessarily, removing the pain and suffering for others. Rather, it is about being with others, giving them hope that God has not left them to face their own battle. It is

also about helping them create some positive meaning for their suffering. But I need to first allow God to touch my inner wounds with God's merciful gaze. I do not need to deny or repress my pain but acknowledge it with an audacious faith in this merciful and compassionate God. Moreover, I do not need to be compassionate out of duty, Christian guilt or intellectual persuasion either. I want to reach out to people with mercy because I myself have experienced the compassion of God in my umpteen weaknesses and failings. Since God accepts me as I am, always and unconditionally, who am I to condemn others, including my annoying opponents or enjoy seeing them in their sufferings?

Since God accepts me as I am, always and unconditionally, who am I to condemn others, including my annoying opponents or enjoy seeing them in their sufferings?

This is not to say that we have no need to differentiate between good and evil; it is essential for living morally. However, encouraged by Pope Francis, I am working on incorporating mercy and compassion fundamentals of my lifestyle, but not without emotional and spiritual struggles. I pray that through my mission of mercy, others will experience the compassion of God in their misery, and joy can once again be a sustaining reality in their lives.

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# Doing Good Led by the Good Spirit, Thinking with the Church

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Pope Francis's discourse to the members of the General Congregation (GC) 36 has two broad sections. The first introductory section draws our attention to the original inspiration of St. Ignatius and his first companions, in other words, to the charismatic sources of the Institute of the Society of Jesus. Pope Francis identifies "drawing greater fruit" as the practical criterion of discernment of Ignatius and his first companions in order to "help souls" (*ayudar a las almas, Autob* 45). Ignatius understood himself as a pilgrim, and wanted the Society to be the same. Jerome Nadal, one of the early companions of Ignatius used to say that "for the Society the whole world is our home" (M Nadal V 364-365). A pilgrim is one who keeps moving forward. In the second section of his discourse, Pope Francis defines three ways of keeping the Ignatian legacy alive by "moving forward … in the service of God and seeking greater good". We move ahead by, *i)* Asking insistently for consolation, *ii)* Letting ourselves be moved by our Lord placed on the cross and *iii)* Doing good led by the good spirit, thinking with the Church. In this article we will try understand the last of the three ways of moving forward.

This third subtitle makes the reference to two sets of rules or guidelines given in the book of the *Spiritual Exercises*: i) *Rules to aid us toward perceiving and then understanding, at least to some extent, the various motions which are caused in the soul; the good motions that they may be received, and the bad that*

*they may be rejected* (*SpEx* [313-327]). ii) *To have the genuine attitude which we ought to maintain in the Church Militant, we should observe the following rules* (*SpEx* [352-370]). The first set of rules are better known as "Rules of the Discernment of Spirits" and the second set as "Rules for Thinking with the Church" or *Sentire cum ecclesia* as designated in the official Vulgate text of the *Exercises* by Andrea Frusio.

The Pope speaks of doing good led by the Good Spirit. This implies that one could do good led by the Bad Spirit. To understand this dynamism, one needs to understand what Ignatius means by Discernment of Spirits. The title of the Rules for Discernment concisely explains what discernment is. There are two types of movements operative in the human heart. One type caused by the Good Spirit or the Spirit of God and the other by the Bad Spirit or the spirit of the Evil One. The Good Spirit causes spiritual consolation in the human heart, i.e., joy and increase of theological virtues of faith, hope and love. This genuine consolation leads the person to do good. The Ignatian guidelines explain to us that when a person advances in spiritual life, the Evil One tries subtle strategies by taking the guise of Good Spirit in order to lead the person away from God. The Evil Spirit produces in the human heart effects that are similar to the ones produced by the Good Spirit. We call it false consolation. The person here may be led to do good, but this good is only apparent good, for the ultimate intention of the Evil One is not good.

A couple of examples will help us understand this better. Let us take a novice who follows the time-table to perfection, spends long hours in the chapel etc. These acts are good in themselves. But, the question to be asked here is, what moves her to these good actions? If she is seeking self-aggrandisement and to impress her novice mistress, she is being moved by the Evil Spirit who has produced false consolation in her. Thus she is doing good led by the Evil Spirit. Or take for example a politician who, before the elections does a lot of good work in his constituency. What is moving him to do the good work? Is

it genuine wellbeing of the people or desire for power? He could be doing the good work merely for acquiring power. That would be doing the good led by the Evil Spirit.

"It's not enough to think, do or organise the good , but do it of the Good Spirit", says the Pope. One has to pause to ask oneself before acting, "which spirit is guiding me?" Pope Francis refers to Peter Faber saying that, "in many things, those who wanted to reform the Church were right, but that God did not want to correct it through their means". Faber was writing that from his experience of working with the Protestants in Germany. He realised that, though the ideals for which the Protestants were fighting were good in themselves, the means they took to achieve them were not inspired by the Good Spirit. The Good Spirit unites. The Evil Spirit divides. The Rules for Thinking with the Church had the concern of preserving the unity of the Church. The Protestants broke away from the Church because they lacked obedience to the authority of the Church. And why should one obey the dictates of the Church? In the thirteenth Rule Ignatius gives his rationale, "we believe that between Christ our Lord, the Bridegroom, and the Church, his Spouse, there is the one same Spirit who governs and guides us for the salvation of our souls" (*SpEx* [365]). In his time Ignatius "acted against" anti-ecclesial spirit and today the Pope is inviting us to do the same. At the same time he adds a word of caution. He calls us not be clericalists but to be ecclesiastics, i.e., to be women and men of discernment who do good inspired by the Good Spirit.

We live in a world full of conflicts and contexts of sin abound. The pope invites us to be men and women of the Church in this context without losing peace and joy. How can one be equanimous in the present context of India where the Indian Church faces persecution? Pope Francis says, "Where the contradiction was very clear, Ignatius used to advise to recollect oneself, before talking or acting, in order to work in the Good Spirit". This brings to my mind the bewilderment of Arjuna in the Kurukṣtra. Kṛṣṇa's advice to him according to Gīta 2: 47 is

of *niṣkāmakarma* - disinterested action. We may not agree with the *dharma* (will of God in a broad sense) determined by birth, but once one has discerned the will of God he or she must act without desiring the fruit of the action, which depends entirely on God. The consequence of disinterested action could well be carrying the cross as the Pope remarks, but interiorising the attitude of *niṣkāmakarma* could become a source of equanimity.

The *Kenosis* of God made incarnation possible. Similarly, our own self-emptying will make us servants, ready to be sent - *apostles*, in the midst of peoples and cultures and help them "become the Church".

Towards the end of this reflection Pope Francis links the spirit of discernment with the inculturation of the gospel and becoming all things to all people. That is because discernment implies listening (to the Spirit) and listening implies self-emptying. One who is full of oneself does not know how to listen. One needs to set aside one's prejudices (Cf. *SpEx* [353]), both good and bad, in order to listen effectively. God's project of inculturation was incarnation. The *Kenosis* of God made incarnation possible. Similarly, our own self-emptying will make us servants, ready to be sent - *apostles*, in the midst of peoples and cultures and help them "become the Church".

An audience with the Pope is a traditional practice during the GCs. The delegates used to go to meet the Pope. This time, the Pope himself came to meet the delegates, which created history. The delegates were, in fact, expecting a mission that the Pope would assign to them. But the Pope did not tell us Jesuits what we should *do* but rather told us *to* be men of discernment!

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# Discernment and Discipleship

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Pope Francis, addressing the Polish Jesuits in Crakow, said: "Today the Church needs to grow in discernment, in the ability to discern. And priests, above all, really need it for their ministry. This is why we need to teach it to seminarians and priests in formation: they are the ones usually entrusted with the confidences of the conscience of the faithful. Spiritual direction is not solely a priestly charism, but also lay, it is true. But, I repeat, you must teach this above all to priests, helping them in the light of the Exercises in the dynamic of pastoral discernment, which respects the law but knows how to go beyond. .. We need to truly understand this: in life not all is black on white or white on black. No! The shades of grey prevail in life. We must teach them to discern in this grey area." Following this invitation of our Pope Francis, we shall consider here the spiritual journey of Peter the Apostle in his following of Jesus of Nazareth: the process of discerning spirit.

**Discernment** comes from the Spanish word "discernir" or Latin "discernere" meaning : to know, judge, comprehend, discern, separate, distinguish, or discriminate. The word discernment in the Spiritual Exercises indicates an action involving activities not only of the mind but also of the heart. To discern the Spirit I must live within my life. I must be really present to myself here and now. And at the still-point of my

self-hood, in the ambience of my God-awareness, my God-desire, I choose and respond, continuing to notice the congruence of my choice with my God-desire, and my growing freedom to live as I live out the consequences. Discernment requires bringing my present life situation to where God touches me.

Following Ignatius's guidelines we can find three steps of the learning process: *(1) How we trace the consolation and desolation in our feelings and how we get in touch with them, (2) How we understand these feelings and the thoughts of projects linked with them, and (3) How we perceive what they mean and where they tend, that is, their dynamic relationship to the end.* Pierre Jacobs called the three steps as a holistic approach of discernment : (1) FEEL, (2) WHAT DOES IT MEAN AND WHERE DOES IT LEAD? and (3) TAKE A STANCE : FOLLOW IT OR REJECT IT**.**

**The discipleship of Peter**: Lk 5,**1** ff describes the event of Jesus calling Peter at the Lake of Gennaesaret (Galilee). Peter, astonished at the catch of fish, falls down, saying :"Leave me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.". And Jesus, knowing very well what goes on in Peter's heart, tells him "Do not be afraid. You will catch people from now on.". This journey of Peter following Jesus continues till the end of his life. Here we shall accompany Peter as he grows from being a disciple to becoming an apostle. The initiative is always from the Lord Jesus ( Lk 6,12-13 and Mk 3,13). Jesus, after spending the whole night in prayer on the mountain, comes down to the plains and calls his disciples one by one, naming them and appoints them apostles.: "he calls those whom he wanted to be with him [disciples] and to be sent out on mission" [apostles]. This choice of the Twelve is at the beginning of his public ministry and this is the starting of the formation of these Twelve in becoming disciples. The living out of this discipleship was not just for one moment but it is a life-long journey, a pilgrimage of discipleship, a process of becoming disciples.

In the Indian tradition a disciple [*sishya*] sits at the feet of a *guru* and learns. And the *sishya* learns from the *guru* the art of leading oneself "from the false self to the true self, from darkness to light and from death to immortality". In Mk 8, 27-33 Mark narrates how Peter is unaware of the presence of the two kinds of forces/movements/thoughts: one coming from the Father and the other from Satan and how Jesus opens the eyes of Peter to the reality of such movements. And Jesus would have shared his own personal experience with his disciples, and in particular with Peter as he has to "confirm others in faith later", by narrating to them his own experience of the "Temptations in the Desert" : Lk 4, 1- 13.

It is very inspiring to us who want to be the disciples of Jesus to be aware of the slow and steady growth of Peter in the spirit of discernment. In Jn 13, 2-15 when Jesus comes to Peter we see how he reacts first and how Jesus opens his "blind eyes" (Jn 13, 6-10). In the narrative of Jesus' agony at the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus is struggling against the temptation to give up his mission offered to him by his Abba and Peter is sleeping:"Simon, are you sleeping?...The spirit indeed is eager but human nature is weak."(Mk 14,37-38).

The impulsive character of Peter again is revealed at the moment when Jesus was arrested at the Garden of Olives: Jn 18,10-11: "Put your sword into its sheath; Should I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?". The denial of Peter and his repentance at the compassionate glance of Jesus is a very good example of Peter's 'blindness' because of his love for his Master on the one hand and his fear of losing his life on the other. And the merciful glance of Jesus brought out tears of repentance in Peter (Lk 22, 54-62). And after the resurrection of Jesus, the Risen Lord appearing to the Seven at the Lake of Tiberias and after the breakfast prepared and offered by Jesus to them, he invites Peter to that great grace of discernment: Jn 21, 15-19: " Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" and Peter's humble reply:"Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.". Here Jesus the Risen Lord foretells the cost Peter

will have to pay for following Jesus as his close disciple. And after the coming of the Holy Spirit, one could notice the marvelous change in Peter: his awareness of himself and his boldness to proclaim that the Jesus of Nazareth the Risen Lord to the large crowd (AA 2,14ff) and before the Council of Jewish leaders (AA 4,8-14).

Only after the coming of the Holy Spirit will these first disciples of Jesus be able to realize the grace of discernment. So much so that Peter in his First letter chapter 5, 8-9 will warn: "Be sober and alert because your enemy the devil prowls about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour". "Stand your ground firm in your faith, knowing that our brothers and sisters, scattered throughout the world, are confronting similar persecutions". In persecution too Peter sees the work of the devil, who does his best to discourage those who hope in Christ. It is a proven fact that when we get ready to make some commitment in the service of Christ, many unexpected obstacles arise.

Besides, there is the need for the grace of "discovering what is more pleasing to the Lord, given the option for two equally seemed good inspirations". Take for example Lk 10, 38-42, where Jesus is at the house of Martha and Mary. When Martha complains to Jesus about her sister Mary, Jesus tells her that Mary has chosen the better part. In other words, at this moment what Jesus would need was just the presence of Martha and Mary - not the food. On other occasions Jesus would have needed food but at this moment what he needs is just rest. Martha was invited to seek that which would be more pleasing to her Master and Friend. Discernment enables a person to find out that which is "more conducive to fulfill what God desires" ,i.e. the goal of one's existence and consequently to grow in one's spirit of discipleship [SE 21].

Basing himself on such experiences of Peter, Ignatius, in his Spiritual Exercises, invites the exercitant/retreatant to dispose himself/herself for the grace of "not being deaf to the call of

Christ the King but ready and diligent to accomplish his most holy will" in the King Exercise/ Kingdom Meditation [SE 91-98]. This is the starting point of becoming a disciple of Christ: to be with Him (*mecum*). The exercitant is taken up with the call of Christ the King and wants to follow Him at all costs. Like Peter the exercitant is invited to become aware of the implication of becoming a disciple of Christ. His/her generous love is to be discerned properly. It could be a blind love as it was in the case of Ignatius of Loyola at his castle: "the soul was still blind but had a great desire to serve the Lord" [Autobiography 19]. Therefore Ignatius offers the Meditation on Two Standards [SE 136 – 147] so that the eyes of the retreatant be opened; in other words, she/he may become a discerning person: being able to sift the different spirits which are acting in one's life. In other words, there are in each one of us different movements of thoughts, feelings, images, desires, etc. which take me either towards Christ or away from Christ. Ignatius provides a meditation of Two Standards in which he is asking the retreatant to dispose her/himself for the 'grace-healed-eyes': " to ask for insight into the deceits of the evil leader, and for help to guard myself against them; and further, for insight into the genuine life which the supreme and truthful commander sets forth, and grace to imitate him" [SE 139] . Thus the exercitant comes to greater awareness of the different motivations which enable her/him to follow Christ our Lord.

**Triple Areas of the life of a disciple of Christ:** First, *discernment in daily life*: every Christian is called to be a discerning person; his/her life-style becomes a way of discernment. Ignatius offers the method of *Consciousness Examen prayer* for one's deepening of discerning life.

Secondly, *discernment in one's prayer life* enables her/him to discern the experiences of spiritual consolation / desolation during her / his prayer life. Doing "*Review"*- discerning the movements of the spirits within oneself - at the end of every prayer period helps one to grow in her/his prayer life.

Thirdly, *discernment is made use of for 'decision making'*: to discern what God desires in one's life regarding matters of greater importance. Ignatius, in his spiritual Exercises, provides "Rules for Discernment of Spirits" [SE 313 – 3327 and 328 – 336] and these guidelines provide helps for making the "Election of one's way of living out the discipleship of Christ".

It is the task of the Society to console the faithful and to help with discernment so that the enemy of human nature does not rob us of joy: the joy of evangelizing,

**Conclusion**: Thus, what our present Pope Francis desires that those who want to be true and authentic disciples of Christ should be enabled to grow in the spirit of discernment: "It is the task of the Society to console the faithful and to help with discernment so that the enemy of human nature does not rob us of joy: the joy of evangelizing, the joy of the family, the joy of the Church, the joy of creation. That it does not rob from us, neither in discouragement when faced with the greatness of the ills of the world and the misunderstandings between those who presume to do good, nor fill us with fatuous joys that are always to hand in any shop. This 'service of joy and spiritual consolation' is rooted in prayer. It consists of encouraging us and encouraging all to insistently ask for God's consolation."

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# Prayer According to Ignatius of Loyola

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Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius which were composed by him by the grace of God and with the help of the Holy Spirit will give us various principles and methods of prayer. To understand the way St. Ignatius prayed one need to read his Spiritual Journal and Autobiography. Besides it will be also good to read the letters of St. Ignatius addressed to different persons (we are told that he wrote more than ten thousand letters) for different occasions and persons of different walks of life. In this article I shall restrict myself for the basic instructions given by St. Ignatius about prayer.

A. **Love of God and His goodness:** In Ignatian prayer one need to cultivate an awareness of Gods love for self, for the world and ones dependence on God. In one of his letters to one of the religious he suggested to focus on the love of God and his mercy and not to worry so much of one's weakness. After he founded the Society of Jesus to his nephew he wrote" I have no confidence in my own strength to carry this burden successfully, but I have every hope in the infinite power and goodness of God." Love of God and His mercy is fundamental in prayer for St.Ignatius.
B. **Prayer is an Exercise:** For St. Ignatius prayer has different meanings. In the Spiritual Exercises (SE) he

mentions "By the term Spiritual exercises we mean every method of examination of conscience, meditation, contemplation, vocal or mental prayer, and other spiritual activities, which will be mentioned later. For just as taking a walk, traveling on foot, and running are physical exercises, so is the name of SE given to any means of preparing and disposing our soul to rid itself of all its disordered affections and then after their removal, of seeking and finding God's will in the ordering of our life for the salvation of our soul." **(SE.1)**

C. **Service and the praise of the Divine Majesty:** St. Ignatius, knowing fully well the fickleness of human heart at the start of the every prayer has placed small but very effective prayer and for me it is the summary of the SE. "The preparatory prayer is to ask God our Lord for the grace that all my intentions, actions and operations may be ordered purely to the service and praise of the Divine Majesty" (SE 46). After founding the Society of Jesus he writes to his nephew "Regarding our affairs here, you will be glad to know that we have seriously determined in our Lord, after weighing the matter again and again , that it will be advisable and even necessary to lay a firm foundation and take deep root if we are going to build for the future." (Letter to his nephew Bertram).

D. **"Ask and you will receive":** One of the important prayer methods he is using and recommending is that of prayer of intercession. Therefore at every prayer after the starting of prayer he will state "The second prelude is to ask God our Lord for what I want and desire. What I ask for should be in accordance with the subject matter" (SE 48). To receive graces which are very important he will suggest to make prayer petitions to three persons (SE.62, 63)**.** The **first petition to our Lady** that she may obtain for me the grace from her son which and it is concluded by reciting the Hail Mary. The **second petition** is made **to Jesus** asking him to

obtain the graces for me from the Father and it is concluded by reciting the prayer 'Soul of Christ'. The **third petition** is made **to the Father** that he may grant me the graces I am asking for and concluded by reciting the Our Father.

**E. "Finding more readily what one desires" Transformative preparation for prayer: St.**Ignatius given two principles to have a lasting impact and focus in prayer: "Upon going to bed at night, just before I fall asleep, I will think for the length of a Hail May about the hour when I should arise, and for what purpose; and I will briefly sum up the exercise I am to make" (SE 73).

"Upon awakening, while keeping out any other thoughts, I will immediately turn my attention to what I will contemplate in the first exercise….I will strive to feel shame….using many examples ….etc (SE 74)**.** In the first principle, the person is focused totally through the whole night even in his sleep about the prayer and the grace what he is seeking for. In the second principle the affective memory is channelized towards what one is searching so desperately. These principles are used very much by people who take up different professions in the secular world and find resounding success.

**F. "Examen of Consciousness":** another transformative exercise St.Ignatius proposes is that of Examen of Consciousness (SE 43). It was so important for him that he seems to have said one may get up during prayer for some emergencies but not during the Examen. In this exercise, at the end of the day the person looks at oneself and confronts oneself whether one lived for God or for oneself. A few years back a research team from Oxford University did an experiment with the new recruits of WIPRO one of the IT giants of India placed in Bangalore. The new recruits were divided into two groups. The group one was given a few questions to evaluate their work performance at the end

of each day. After 3 months it was discovered the work performance of the group which evaluated itself at each day performed 22.8% better than the group which did not evaluate its work performance at the end of each day. Continuous and consistent focus on one's goal and activity indeed brings about splendid results both in secular and religious world.

**G. Role of Mother Mary:** St. Ignatius gives important role to Mother Mary in most of his prayer exercises. In his Spiritual Journal we see how desperate he was when he failed to give proper attention to Mother Mary. After he receives her visitation he concludes with much gratitude in these words " I could not but feel and see her, as the one who was cause and channel of such a grace which I felt in spirit" (Spiritual Journal 31).

One may not find Spiritual Exercises useful for oneself but in the process of doing the Spiritual Exercises one may find them useful for others.

**Conclusion**

In this article I have touched upon some of the basic principles of Ignatian prayer. Nothing substitutes from doing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius at least once. One may not find them useful for oneself but in the process one may find them useful for others. It will be good to have a guide under whom one may go through the experience of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.

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# Emphasising the Process While Making Decisions

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We, priests and religious, always feel at the depth of our being that our call has a divine origin which constantly invites us to serve God's people by fixing our gaze on Him who has called us. As we fix our eyes on him, we need to listen to him. What does he want us to do here and now? What does his people want from us? God who has taken initiative in calling us wants us to continue his mission with the marginalized and the oppressed. If we want to carry forward God's mission here on earth, we need to appropriate the injunction of Pope Francis that we need a Church that goes to the peripheries [EG 20]. This should be a wake-up call for us who have often got stuck in the world of complacency and mediocrity in our ministries. Therefore, we have to sincerely pause and examine about our commitment to the peripheries? Are we marching towards the peripheries or are we still busy in establishing our kingdoms in the center?

Today when we ask people about our works, often they speak in glorious terms about our institutions like universities, colleges, hospitals, social action centers, retreat centers, formation houses etc. There is a feeling that through our institutions we have *occupied enormous spaces* at times even at the cost of the poor who may not have even a piece of land to

build a decent house. It appears easier for us to occupy spaces anywhere in the name of mission due to our institutions, due to our contacts with the influential people who could come to our rescue to overcome any obstacles. Once a lay person bitterly commented saying that the mission of the religious is to buy lands *(occupying spaces)*, to put up structures, to start institutions in the name of mission and then to make money. It may be an exaggerated comment. But there is a ray of truth that is bitter for us to accept. Behind this word 'mission' at times what we look for is monetary gain. In other words, these establishments become merely profit making enterprises by compromising with our options and priorities. Unfortunately, they become anti-kingdom witness. As St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta used to say "We are called to do God's work. But often we end up in doing our own work".

Church is not an NGO. "For the Church, the option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one" (EG 198). Our dioceses and religious congregations are not working for profit. We are ambassadors of Christ. We are men and women sent by God to carry forward his mission. Therefore, it is good to ask what criteria we employ while occupying spaces, while starting our mission? Often the decisions are made in haste without going through a proper process of discernment, without prayer and reflection. When there is no proper process, it means we have failed to discern what God and his people want us to do. The question is are we focusing only on the *end product of occupying spaces* but also on *the process (Discernment)*?

Before beginning any mission or institution, what is required of us today is to create a space within for God and for others. Creating space means listening to God and to our target groups. While we listen, we can pose following questions to ourselves:

**Who am I? Who are we?** As individuals and as a group we have to become constantly aware of our identity: Each individual is a child of God and as a group, we are children of

God. This question addresses our identity. We are neither social workers nor teachers nor volunteers but primarily we are children of God and we are related to God. Therefore, we need to listen to him.

**Why are we here?** This question touches upon the purpose of our existence. The "WHY" of our life. We are here on earth to love and serve God and his people. As children of God, our purpose is to glorify God through our service to people. We do not live for our glory, for our success, for name and fame.

**What do people want?** Since we want to serve the people, we need to listen to people whom we want to serve. What are their needs? What do they expect from us? There may be some who will be opposing our entry, we need to pay attention to them as well and discern such voices of dissent. It is also important to whom we are listening: the people who are in the center, i.e. the powerful and the privileged or those who are in the periphery.

**Through what apostolate do we want to serve?** After listening to the people and to their needs, we have to present the collected data and information to the superiors of communities or council members of our congregation or Diocese. We need to reflect together upon what apostolate would address their needs and concerns. The needs of the locality should be the focus. Our congregation or diocese may be known for education or primary health care or social work but that may not be the need of the locality. The apostolate that we choose is a means to serve people. If we start a particular apostolate, we need to note down the advantages and disadvantages of that ministry. We have to also study about the major beneficiaries of our service: the rich or the poor. Each one prepares the pros and cons of the apostolate.

Then we share the advantages and disadvantages with other members. After weighing the advantages and disadvantages individually, let each member make a tentative decision. It need not be shared with others. It could be for one member

educational apostolate, for another social work and the third member may feel that we need not begin any ministry in the locality.

**What is your inner disposition?** Am I inwardly free? Am I stuck with the ministry that I like? Are there any prejudices about the place, work, people etc.? Here we need interior freedom. What God wants is primary and not what I want.

**What does the Lord say?** Now we, each one individually, bring our tentative decision before the Lord. We pray over our choice. Let us listen to God and see what he says. Let us check our interior movements like consolation, desolation, peace, disturbance, confusion and explore these feelings because the Lord speaks to us through the interior movements. The members can share with others along with the tentative decision, the feelings that they have gone through. This is done in an atmosphere of prayer. After listening to others, let each one see what goes on within oneself? Do I want to change my tentative decision? Am I comfortable and peaceful with it? We need to look for the confirmation from the Lord. After listening to others and to your interior movements share your feelings and tentative decision with others.

Then as a group, either we can vote, or the Major superior or the Bishop after listening to all, can take the decision about the apostolate. The decision need not be taken immediately.

When we go through a process of discernment, we listen to people, we listen to our companions and we allow the Lord to speak to us. In other words, we create a space for God and for others before occupying external spaces. Here the primary focus is on what God desires of us. We see what people need than what we need. It also helps us to find out whether the ministry we start takes us to the periphery, whether it will be a counter-cultural witness. Therefore, today there is a greater need to go through a process of discernment as a group while making major decisions about our mission.

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# Sent to the Frontiers

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In his recent encounter with the delegates of the 36th General Congregation of the Jesuits, Pope Francis reiterated the hopes his predecessors had placed in the Society, when he told his Jesuit companions: "the Church needs you, counts on you and continues to turn to you with confidence, particularly to reach the geographical and spiritual places where others do not reach, or find it difficult to reach."

Where exactly may these places be, "where others do not reach"? Where are these frontier mission areas which are difficult to reach? It is clear from the Pope's words that these frontiers are not merely geographical but also spiritual. In fact, these frontiers involve three primary aspects of human life: the intellectual, affective and spiritual. I will focus on three such frontiers where Jesuits have been present, continue to be present, and need to be present: the frontiers of the mind, the heart and the spirit.

Frontiers of the mind: Jesuits have been on the frontiers of intellectual investigation, discovery and innovation from the inception of the Society. There have been numerous Jesuit mathematicians, astronomers and scientists in different fields much before the suppression of the Society in 1773. After the Restoration in 1814, Jesuits have attempted to re-establish their primary apostolic priorities, and now run some of the best institutions of higher education and research in the Catholic

world. Jesuits have also been at the forefront of ecclesiastical sciences right from the time of the Council of Trent. In recent times, Karl Rahner in Theology and Bernard Lonergan in Philosophy stand out as two examples of Jesuits who have been pioneers in their respective fields. In India too, there are numerous Jesuit theologians who have inspired the Church to ground its religious experience and public proclamation in the local context, and sensitive to local needs.

Jesuits have been challenging both the Church and the world to take the peripheries of humankind into consideration, and not just the centres of power, wealth and knowledge. This represents a necessary presence at the "frontiers of the heart," in which humans are invited to transcend narrow horizons in order to encounter others.

Frontiers of the heart: With the "option for the poor" stemming from Vatican II and then GC 32 (the 32nd General Congregation of the Jesuits), Jesuits have been challenging both the Church and the world to take the peripheries of humankind into consideration, and not just the centres of power, wealth and knowledge. This represents a necessary presence at the "frontiers of the heart," in which humans are invited to transcend narrow horizons in order to encounter others—especially the economic and politically vulnerable—in empathetic and socially productive ways. The Pope reminded the Jesuits at the GC not only to study and work at the centre—places which are economically and politically powerful—but also to have contact with the peripheries of our societies, and to be present and contribute apostolically at the borders of these peripheries. Among these many peripheries is the world of nature, from which we have been alienated on account of a narrow and misapplied rationalistic and scientific spirit.

Frontiers of the spirit: Another frontier at which Jesuits have manifested their presence is the "frontier of the spirit." In his dialogue with the Jesuits at GC 36, Pope Francis points out to the examples of Matteo Ricci and Roberto de Nobili as persons who were able to recognize the worth and value of indigenous customs, and attempted to incorporate them within the Christian worldview and sacramental experience. In recent times, Jesuits have placed the Vatican II call for interreligious dialogue at the heart of their mission, attempting to develop and articulate interreligious and intercultural wisdom as a necessary ground for wholesome and collective human development.

These three frontiers are not discrete or separate, but in fact intertwined with one another. For example, we need intellectual acumen to challenge the presuppositions of our prevailing economic order—which has caused a widening gap between the rich and the poor—so that at the social level the poor do not need to continue to suffer. We need to employ a wise social analysis to explore the connections between globalization and religious terror. We need to recognize that economic and political forces are often the main reasons for interreligious suspicion and disharmony. Another example of the interrelationship of these three frontiers is the misperception of Laudato Si' as a "green encyclical" rather than something larger. In his dialogue with the Jesuits, the Pope points out instead that this encyclical is not only about environmental concern, but is in fact more deeply a social encyclical, indicating how the common good and especially the lives of the poor have been adversely affected by environmental negligence. In other words, the Pope is challenging the Jesuits to have an integrated sense of mission. Whatever work one is engaged in—whether intellectual, psychological, social or spiritual—it is imperative to see how a particular apostolate is mutually related to other dimensions of apostolic life.

Perhaps the best contribution of the Society of Jesus to the Church and to the world is living out our vocation of being "frontier men," charting new pathways in unfamiliar territories,

While responding to questions after his address to the Jesuits at the GC, the Holy Father emphasized the apostolic disposition of prophetic boldness: "today, more than ever, we need courage and prophetic audacity. We need a *parresia* for today, the prophetic audacity of having no fear." This prophetic audacity needs to be based on and coupled with ongoing discernment, so that what results is apostolic action that is wise, prudent and effective. The Pope challenged the Jesuits present to resist the temptation of cultivating a "restorationist" mentality, in which both Jesuits and others would want the Society to "go back to the glorious past" and go about as if the world around us has not changed over the years.

Perhaps the best contribution of the Society of Jesus to the Church and to the world is living out our vocation of being "frontier men," charting new pathways in unfamiliar territories, so that people who follow may find newer and more relevant ways of relating with a world that is constantly in flux. This was the vocation of Ignatius and the early Jesuits who also lived in volatile times, in the wake of the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation, and the breaking down of a traditional mentality in favour of a new scientific temper that was soon to possess Europe by way of the Enlightenment. The Holy Father is inviting and challenging Jesuits to be true to their fundamental vocation, motivated by a spirit of prophetic audacity, apostolic boldness, and ongoing creativity. Beneath all of these dispositions and drives is the instrument of methodical and careful spiritual discernment, which by itself is another significant contribution of the Jesuits to the Church and to the larger world.

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# Consolation, Compassion and the Church: Challenges of the Pope

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Listening to the address of Pope Francis at the General Congregation was a very moving experience for all the 220 delegates of the General Congregation. It was truly a historic moment! A moment of change in our personal lives and collective understanding of ourselves as Jesuits.

One of the best summaries and reflections of the Pope's address, with which I fully resonate, is given by Antonio Spadaro, a participant of the General Congregation and the editor of the prestigious Italian Journal *La Civiltà* Cattolica, which has published a long and now most famous interview of the Pope. The following section is adapted from an article written by him and translated by Reyanna Rice.

**The Society of Jesus: A "Blurred" Portrait**

The Pope began his talk to the General Congregation by painting a blurred portrait of the Society of Jesus, as opposed to a "still shot". He described the Society of Jesus in terms of multifaceted framework and in motion. The Society itself—he said—is "in progress", in becoming. This makes it flexible, freely elastic. He framed it in terms of journey of free and obedient people, reports Spadaro.

The Society cannot look at reality from a balcony, study it, analyze it and, still more condemn it. We must get out of it, walk down and stay at the crossroads of history, at the social front lines. And when we really walk we get down on the street. It is here that we experience the "confrontation between the deepest desires of the human person and the perennial message of the Gospel", as Pope Paul VI said. In this walking and encounter, reflection, contemplation and action go hand in hand if we do not want to be ideological.

**The Way: Not Fixed Objectives but Mobile Horizons**

It is not enough to walk. We must ask: Where must you go? In his discourse to the Congregation, Pope Francis implicitly warned us about holding too many clear and distinct objectives as in business planning. The horizon that orients the journey of the Society of Jesus is the Glory of God who is always greater, that we can ever imagine. In other words, the Society of Jesus is called to walk into a horizon that changes continually and enlarges. Thus the portrait of the Society painted by the Pope is then dynamic, "incomplete" in itself and "open".

So the Jesuits are called not to "reach objectives" like in a shooting gallery, but to walk on, in the spirit of the Gospel, accompanying the processes in which human beings are involved, keeping in mind the horizon as the greater glory of God. They must recognise the horizons as horizons as accompanying our very journey and not as conquering spaces. In other words, we are called to walk with the Lord Jesus. We are challenged to accompany him and to go where he goes. And at times we may not even know where he is going. We discover it by our actual walking, being ready to change direction, moves and methods with him, something which I personally experienced during the days together at the General Congregation.

Only if the Society walks with Jesus towards this ever widening horizon is it able to understand itself. Thus the Society of Jesus

is mobile. This is why a Jesuit feels at home anywhere in the world. Thus he does not become rigid functionaries. He does not become entangled with himself and his plans. He does not revolve around his own plans and ambitions in a never-ending maze. Accompanied by the Spirit he moves on and he discovers himself on the way, together with the fellow pilgrims.

**The Only "Priority": Discernment**

This walking however is a journey which is neither comfortable nor solitary. It is not a journey to find oneself, not even for one's own personal salvation, the Pope reminds us. He tells us that to walk in Ignatius' words means first of all "to labour strenuously in giving aid toward the salvation and perfection of the souls of their neighbours". Therefore, the Pope doesn't entrust to the Society objectives or preferences. He does not provide us with specific lists of works to be carried out or objectives to reach or territories to "conquer".

Rather he simply says that the Society "is where it needs to be". Precisely therein lies the prophetic and diplomatic audacity that the Pope has wished the Jesuits.

The Pope implies that the content of the mission is the fruit of a continuous discernment and always in a process of development. The center of the Society's Mission remains the "Formula of the Institute": the rest belongs to history, to becoming, to the circumstances. Thus the Society lives and must live tensions, it is restless, notes Spadaro.

In this way Pope Francis wants to touch the vibrating heart, the hot and powerful core of the Society's charism, the "Formula" exactly: he removes the layers that protect it and he shows the Jesuits the essentials to remember. The Pope urges them to return to the heart, or rather of a "fire". So he recalled one of first Jesuits, Fr. Jeronimo Nadal, who said: "The Society is zealous", that is, fervently boiling from within with the fire of love.

**Our Strength: The Ways of Proceeding**

Though the Pope does not provide us with any specific projects, he does provide us with three "ways of proceeding"

for the mission that he summarizes in three words: "consolation", "compassion" and "feeling with the Church", through discernment.

The expression used by Francis is remarkable: He says that "we can take a step forward". It is not the invitation to take the "long jump", but to take a step at a time, one after the other. There is a progress to which we are always called, and that is to do with humility and decision. Here's the three ways:

**Consolation**: The Pope notes that we live in a wounded world and the Jesuit is also a wounded man. In fact, the world is often moved by fear and reacts lending an ear to the desolations and fears. Only if we experience the restoring strength of consolation in the heart of our wounds—both as people and as the Society—can we wake ourselves up from our torpor, walking with and helping others, according to the Pope. Then we must ask for consolation "insistently". The Pope is emphatic that the usual state of the Jesuit must be one of consolation. This is the experience Francis invites us experience: to let ourselves be consoled by God and to live our ministry as a minister of consolation bringing into the world reconciliation, justice, mercy. Here we are called to be open to God's grace. The Pope add: "the nearest human attitude to God's grace is humor".

**Compassion**: The Pope asks us to let ourselves be moved by the crucified Lord. Standing at the foot of the cross, we are to feel ourselves loved by him. This is the experience that leads us to be sensitive to the pain of humanity, to experience compassion. "Where there is pain, there the Society is" said Father Arrupe, our former Superior General of the Society of Jesus. Only if we experience the healing strength of the compassion of Jesus crucified can we be healed and heal others. This pushes us to commitment for justice and to be with the poor and for their part, notes Spadaro.

**Discernment or "Feeling" with the Church:** The Pope asks us discern and to "feel with the Church", our Mother. He notes

that there are many ways to reform the Church, but some of these ways are anti-ecclesial, fruit of the "bad spirit". Instead, Francis says that it is not enough to reform the Church because it may be an ideological operation and therefore "clerical". We need to do it with the "good spirit", through fruit of discernment, in an "ecclesial" manner. The Jesuit must live within the Church in its concrete history, and not in their own utopias and our desires, reports Spadaro. And at times that may involve carrying our cross and experiencing humiliation, he warns. We also need to listen to all the criticisms, even those that are malicious, in a spirit of discernment. We must never close doors to others and their criticism. This is not to justify questionable positions, but to leave the space open to listen to what the Spirit is doing or telling us. The Jesuit acts within the Church trusting the action of the Spirit within it.

**Companions in a Common Journey**

At the end of this discourse, Francis turns to Mary, "Our Lady of the Street". The Society is not only a group of men with the same ideals, but a group of friends who are on the street with Mary and Jesus, one step at a time. With blurred portraits, blurred horizons and always listening to the Spirit, when we are journeying together That will give us genuine consolation and the capacity to the compassionate and to be truly and humbling feeling with the Church.

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# Homily Notes

***January. 01, 2017: BVM, Mother of God***

Num 6: 22-27; Gal 4: 4-7; Lk 2: 16-21

**Hope for Humanity**

The Christians follow the Gregorian calendar, which came into force during the time of Pope Gregory XIII and gradually gained acceptance in several countries across the world as it created a balance between seasons and calendar. What then would be a befitting way of celebrating our New Year, if not in honour of Blessed Virgin, who is the beginning of the beginning of the Incarnation of the Lord? No human being can speak of his beginning without referring to his Mother. So too, would the Incarnation of the Lord be incomplete if we do not acknowledge the role of his Mother in his life and mission. It was in 1969 after the revision of the liturgical year and calendar that this day was celebrated as the Octave of the Nativity of the Lord, the day our Lord was named and the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God.

The first reading of the day depicts Moses speaking the Words of the blessings of the Lord to Aaron and his sons. It gives hope to the present generation that the Lord is going to bless them in all that they more and accompany them in all their activities. It is with this positive stroke that we begin the New Year with the affirmation of the blessings of the Lord. The second reading contains one of the Faith proclamations that we daily make when we recite The Apostles 'Creed. St. Paul is reaffirming us that we are not the slaves but the children of God, echoing the words of Jesus himself in Jn 15:15. The Gospel reading of today shows that the first recipients of the Good News of the Messiah are the simple shepherds. Yet another example of the radical nature of our God,

who belongs more to the simple and humble than the proud. The radicality of the God, who was born in a stable, lived simple, died simple and appeared first to a sinner woman after his Resurrection. Luke clearly states that Mary treasured all these in her heart. It is an undeniable truth that Mary is the Mother of God not so much because she bore him in her womb, but because she bore Him in her heart even bearing Him in her womb. She is the Mother of God, because she was the first disciple of Jesus. The challenges that the Gospel poses is these: How do we treat women, our mothers, our sisters, our wives, our daughters and those of others? What is that we treasure in our heart? What is the significance of Incarnation of Jesus in our lives? How can we live the virtues of Mary in our lives? Let us examine ourselves on the first day of this year !

**--Bhanu**

***January 8, 2017: The Epiphany of the Lord***

Isaiah 60:1-6 Ephesians 3:2-3,5-6 Matthew 2:1-12

**Which Way to Jesus?**

On a cold harmattan morning three palm fruit farmers were warming themselves by the fireside. Soon two of them were engaged in a heated debate comparing their religions to decide which one was the true religion. Okoro, the oldest among them, sat quietly listening to the debate. Suddenly the two turned to him and asked, "Decide for us, Okoro. Which religions is the right one?" Okoro rubbed his white beards and said thoughtfully, "Well, you know there are three ways to get from here to the oil mill. You can go right over the hill. That is shorter but it is a steep climb. You can go around the hill on the right side. That is not too far, but the road is rough and full of potholes. Or you can go around the hill on the left side. That is the longest way, but it is also the easiest." He paused and then added, "But you know, when you get there, the mill man doesn't ask you how you came. All he asks is, 'Man, how good is your fruit?'"

In the stories of Jesus' birth, two special groups of people came to visit the new-born babe: the shepherds and the magi. The church has no special feast to commemorate the visit of the shepherds but we have this special feast of Epiphany today to celebrate the visit of the magi. Why is that? It is because the visit of the magi is an eye-opener. The shepherds learnt of the birth of Jesus through a

direct revelation from angels appearing in the midnight sky. This is direct and supernatural revelation. Many of us have no problem with that. The magi, on the other hand, learnt of the birth of Jesus by observing a star. The star did not say anything to them. They had to interpret this natural sign of the star to know what it meant and where it led. If we remember that the magi or the three wise men were nature worshippers, people who divined God's will by reading the movements of the stars and other heavenly bodies, then we can see how the visit of the magi challenges some of our popular beliefs.

Like the palm fruit farmers, religious people of all persuasions tend to think that their religious tradition is the only way to God. This is what some of us hear when we hear such words of Jesus as: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). We hastily conclude that the way of God equals the way of our religious tradition. Yet the word of God cautions us against such a narrow interpretation. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8). That is why we are fascinated with the story of the visit of the magi. It is a unique story that opens our eyes to the fact that God is not limited to any one religious tradition.

Notice how people of different religious traditions came to know that the Son of God was born. The shepherds who were regarded as unclean and could not take part in Temple worship without undergoing purification came to know through a direct vision of angels. The magi knew through a reading of the stars. And King Herod's scribes came to know through searching the scriptures. Visions, stars, scriptures -- different ways of arriving at the same truth. Of course this does not mean that any religious tradition is just as good as the other. Notice how Matthew indicates that when the guiding star got to Jerusalem its light failed and the magi had to consult the scriptures to direct them to Bethlehem. Over and above the natural light of the star the magi still needed the supernatural light of scripture to finally get to Jesus.

Yet the crucial question in the story remains: Who actually got to find Jesus? Herod and his scribes who had the scriptures failed to find Jesus but the magi who followed the natural light of the stars

were able to find him. Why? Because the Jewish authorities, even though they possessed the shining truth of revealed scriptures, did not follow it. They did not walk in the light of the scriptures. The magi, on the other hand, who enjoyed only a star light followed its guidance. It is not the possession of the truth that matters, it is how prepared we are to walk in the light of the truth that we possess. It is better to have the dim light of the stars and follow it than to have the bright light of the Holy Scriptures and neglect it.

As Christian we believe that our religion possesses the fullness of truth. But what does that benefit us if we do not walk in the truth? Nature worshippers or non-believers who are sincerely committed to following the dim light of natural reason may arrive at Jesus before Christians who have the exalted truths revealed by God but who do not walk the walk of faith. This is the challenging truth we celebrate today in the story of the pagan wise men who seek and find the Lord.

***January 15: II Ordinary Sunday***

Is 49:3, 5-6 1 Cor 1:1-3 John 1:29-34

**The Greatness of John the Baptist**

A kite was consumed by envy of the eagle. "How come he can fly so high? Everyone admires him and no one admires me." One day the kite sees a hunter and calls out to him to shoot the eagle. The hunter replies that he would need to add some feathers to his arrow for it to reach the eagle. The kite pulled one of his best feathers and gave it to the hunter. That was not enough to reach the eagle. So the kite pulled another and then another and yet the arrow was not quite able to reach the eagle. Before long all the kite's best feathers were gone and he was no longer able to fly. The hunter simply turned round and shot the kite as his catch for the day. The moral of the story: envy and jealousy consume the person who harbours them before the person for whom they are harboured.

There is a difference between envy and jealousy. Envy is dissatisfaction with what belongs to us and coveting what belongs to another. We can envy people for their looks, their possessions or their relationships, wishing we could take their place. Jealousy, on the other hand, is the fear that what is ours may be lost to another. Both envy and jealousy rob people of their inner peace as

they devise ways to eliminate the person they perceive as standing in the way to their personal fulfilment.

Looking at the way things are in our world today, it would seem that envy and jealousy are normal human traits. But the example of John the Baptist shows us that true personal fulfilment and greatness lies not in how we may compare with others but in how faithful we are to our God-given roles in life.

How many people like to hear that the person who succeeded them is doing better than they did? Nobody. Here John is a rare example. John started the Kingdom of God movement. Jesus succeeded him as leader of the movement after Herod imprisoned John and had him executed. Yet whenever John speaks of Jesus he speaks of Jesus as better than him. He describes Jesus as the bridegroom and himself as only his best man (John 3:29). Notice how he introduces Jesus to his own disciples in today's gospel:

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me" (John 1:29-30).

As a result of this endorsement, two of his disciples left him and followed Jesus (verse 37). These were the first disciples of Jesus according to John's Gospel. John summarised his whole attitude to Jesus in one statement: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Why is John so content and satisfied with playing the second fiddle rather than vying with Jesus for the limelight? It is because he knows exactly the reason for him being in the world. He knows why he came into this life: "I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel" (John 1:30). Because he knows why he is here, John can tell when he has done his bit. He can tell when it is time to hand the baton to another. Why did you come into the world? What is God's plan for your life? If you do not have a personal answer to this question, chances are that you will spend your life chasing after everything and nothing, in a rat-race of envy and jealousy with those you perceive as better than you. Instead of living and working in harmony and cooperation

with others, people who do not know the reason for their being are often driven by rivalry and competition.

But look at the flowers in the field. Some are shrubs and some are herbs, some are red and some are white, some are yellow and some are blue; yet all of them are beautiful. The poinsettia, the daffodil, the rose, all are beautiful because they have their different purposes. As we come to the long period of Sundays in ordinary time marked by the liturgical colour green, let us have John the Baptist before us as a great example of what it means to be ordinary. Fact is, there is much greatness in being ordinary. Even though John felt he was not worthy to untie Jesus' sandals, Jesus did turn round to say of him, "Among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist" (Mat11:11).

**Munachi Ezeogu, cssp** (Internet)

***January 22, 2017: III Ordinary Sunday of the Year***

Is. 8: 23-9: 3; I Cor. 1: 10-13, 17; Matt 4:12-22

**Be Rooted in Faith**

The evangelist in today's periscope presents Jesus and his teachings as the fulfilment and continuation of Jewish culture. He quotes and brings a number of instances from the Old Testament and prophets to affirm the credibility of Christ, the Messiah.

After being filled with spirit, Jesus retired to the desert and fasted for 40 days in preparation for his ministry. The imprisonment of john the Baptist coincided with the ending of Jesus forty days of fasting. It must have been a sign from the father to Jesus for the proclamation of the kingdom. If Jesus had started his ministry before john completed his task, then it would have led to a complete mess. So every incident in the passage goes well with the prophecy of Isaiah.

Jesus left Nazareth (Mt 4:13) because he was rejected there as he proclaimed that the words of Isaiah was fulfilled in him (Luke 4:21). They tried to stone him but he escaped them and moved to Capernaum in territory of ancient tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali2323.

When we look into the history of Capernaum, it seems that God had prepared it for his son's ministry. Even though invaded many times, it was re-populated with the influx of people from around the world; world's leading roads passed through its borders; so the entire atmosphere was open to new ideas. It was a perfect space for spreading the word of God. It has been written that he became light to all the people there.

He sanctified them with God's word; to repent and prepare for the kingdom of God. The word 'light' has got particular as well as wide significance in referring to the Messiah. He became 'light' to all those in need of love, care, affection, freedom, inner peace, harmony, those affected with spiritual illness or blindness, for those people in the peripheries and all those who were tortured. His deeds were really the affirmation of his words and credibility.

Even after twenty centuries, Christ is expecting us to be the light in the lives of people around us. When our words and actions have grown enough to wipe the tears of others and to understand them; we too become light in darkness for them. Jesus was able to bring the dawn and daylight to the minds of those around him. They saw and experienced the joy and freedom as children of God. So friends, let us take effort, so that our light may shine before others that by seeing us, let them remember God. Be rooted in this faith; be credible enough. --**Jerine Joyson**

### *January 29: IV Ordinary Sunday*

Zeph 2:3; 3:12-13 1 Cor 1:26-31 Mat 5:1-12

### Road Map to Happiness

"Happiness is that which all [men] seek." So says the great philosopher Aristotle. Aristotle also observes that everything people do twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, is what they believe will bring them happiness in one form or another. But the problem is that what people think will bring them happiness does not in fact always bring them true and lasting happiness. Think of the drunkard who believes that happiness is found in the beer bottle. One bottle too much and he is driving home, runs the red light, hits a car and wakes up the following morning in a hospital

with plaster and stiches all over his body. Then it begins to dawn on him that the happiness promised by alcohol may be too short-lived. Or take the man who frequents the casino to deal excitement. By the end of the month he finds that his account is in the red and that he can no longer pay his house rent. Creditors go after him until he loses his house and his car. Then it dawns on him that the happiness promised by the casino is fake. So Aristotle says that the ethical person is the person who knows and does what can truly bring them not just excitement or pleasure but true and lasting happiness.

Another word for true and lasting happiness is "blessedness" or "beatitude." In today's gospel, Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount shows that he really wants his followers to have true and lasting happiness, the happiness that the world and everything in it cannot give. This state of blessedness is what Jesus calls being in the "kingdom of God/heaven". The eight beatitudes we have in today's gospel constitute a road map for anyone who seeks to attain this happiness of the kingdom.

Why does Jesus deem it necessary to establish these guideposts to the kingdom right from the very first teaching that he gives to the disciples? It is because of the importance of this teaching. Everybody seeks happiness. But often we look for it in the wrong places. Ask people around you what makes people happy and compare the answers you get with the answers Jesus gives. The world has its own idea of happiness. If a committee were set up to draw up the beatitudes, we would most probably end up with a list very different from that which Jesus gives us today.

Where Jesus says "Blessed are the poor in spirit" they would say "Blessed are the rich."

Where Jesus says "Blessed are those who mourn" they would say "Blessed are those having fun."

Where Jesus says "Blessed are the meek" they would say "Blessed are the smart."

Where Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" they would say "Blessed are those who wine and dine."

Where Jesus says, "Blessed are the merciful" they would say "Blessed are the powerful."

Where Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart" they would say "Blessed are the slim in body."

Where Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers" they would say "Blessed are the news makers."

And where Jesus says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake" they would say "Blessed are those who can afford the best lawyers."

We see that the values prescribed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount are in fact counter-cultural. We cannot accept these teachings of Jesus and at the same time accept all the values of the society in which we live. Of course, Jesus does not demand that we abandon the word. But he does demand that we put God first in our lives because only God can guarantee the true happiness and peace that our hearts long for. Nothing in the world can give this peace, and nothing in the world can take it away.

The Eight Beatitudes do not describe eight different people such that we need to ask which of the eight suits us personally. No, they are eight different snapshots taken from different angles of the same godly person. The question for us today, therefore, is this: "Do we live our lives following the values of the world as a way of attaining happiness or do we live by the teachings of Jesus. If you live by the teachings of Jesus, then rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. --**Munachi Ezeogu, cssp** (Internet)

***February. 5, 2017: V Ordinary Sunday of the Year***

Is. 58: 7-10; 1 Cor. 2: 1-5; Mt. 5: 13-16

**Be Salt and Light in the World**

Today's Gospel (Mt.5:13-16), calls us to be Salt and Light in the world. In the ancient biblical world salt was an essential and precious commodity because of its multiple usages. It added flavour and delicacy to the food. It severed as an important preservative and also made people to thirst for something more. Jesus wanted his disciples to give flavour and delicacy to the

world, which was growing insipid and corrupt, through their living examples and preaching, and make it more thirst for God's providence and love.

In the Old Testament, we read the 'Covenant of Salt' in Num. 18:19. It meant a permanent relationship. Eating salt with someone meant to be bound in loyalty. This is what the evangelist Mark refers to when he writes, "Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another (Mk. 9:50)." In our present scenario, where religious fundamentalism, communalism, terrorism, regionalism, consumerism and corrupt politics have taken a upper hand and consequently people feel brokenness, helplessness, depression, pain and anguish. Jesus, our master and saviour, calls us, His followers and disciples, to be the salt of the earth, to add delicacy to the humanity and preserve it from degradation, by dedicating our lives in establishing unity, love and solidarity among people beyond all the barriers. It's a paramount need of the hour because once we (the world) lose our saltiness (Human Qualities); we will be definitely perished or be trampled under the feet of evil forces. In this scenario, we, the Christians and all the people at large, are also called to be the light like that of the Christ himself, which emancipates believers from the physical slavery of the worldliness, and redeems them from the bondages of immoralities and sinfulness. We, the members of Christ's body (1Cor. 12: 27), and the sharers in His divine nature (2 Pet 1:4), are called today to be the light of the world, firstly by letting aside our own works of darkness, to illuminate the world by becoming the channels of love, peace, unity, solidarity and forgiveness, so that seeing our good works people may give glory to God, Our Creator.

In the Old Testament, Ex. 13:21, we see God loved His helpless and vulnerable people (Israelites), and led them in His own Light as the pillars of Fire (Light), so that they may know his love and care; and practice them through life, bringing light in others lives. Similarly, Jesus Christ, the Light of the World (----), came to lead the Humanity from darkness to light, from despair to hope, from death to life and slavery to freedom. Same responsibility Jesus Christ, is bestowing on us all today through the gospel. Therefore today's Second reading (Isaiah 58: 7-10) tell us that there is no point in empty ritualistic fasting and observations until you love and help people, especially poor and marginalized, homeless and

naked, and needy people around. Only then your light shall break forth like dawn and when you call God, your Father, He will answer your prayers. Yes, dear Friends, The Light of Christ in us must shine to give hope to the depressed, love to the unloved, peace to the disturbed, healing to the sick, clothe to the naked, shelter to the homeless and consolation to the broken. This is the par-excellent way to be the Salt of the Earth and Light of the World, Christ wants us to be. This way must challenge us to become worthy to let His incarnated self, Jesus Christ, be born in our hearts so that enlightened by his light, we may bring the light of Christ to the earth and restore its delicacy by becoming the Salt. And in this, as the Second Reading says, "Spirit will guide you and God will empower you." It is very explicable through the lives of St. Francis Xavier, St. Teresa of Kolkata, Mahatma Gandhi and many more people who adhere to God's words and lived by them. Thus, let's drive inspiration and motivation from Jesus and His Saints and become the light and salt of the word.

**--Ranjeet Joseph**.

***February. 12, 2017: VI Ordinary Sunday of the Year***

Sir. 15: 15-20; 1 Cor. 2: 6-10; Mt. 5: 17-37

**The Law of Love**

Suppose we buy something in a shop; we owe the shopkeeper the cost of the article. When we have paid the cost we do not owe him anymore. The shopkeeper has no further claim on us at all. But could we ever repay what we owe to our parents. There was a time when we could do nothing for ourselves, when the slightest blow would have killed us and when we would have died if we had just been left to ourselves. Through all that time our parents cared for us.

In today's Gospel Jesus warns us that our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. The only one aim and the only one desire of Pharisees was to satisfy the demands of the law. What Jesus set before us not the law of God, but love of God. When we realise how God has loved us, our only one desire must be to answer to that love, and that is the greatest task in all the world. It presents us with a task that is more binding

than the obligation to any law. It might be possible to satisfy the demands of the law if we strictly observe, but how can we ever repay Jesus' love that he lavished upon us.

There might be a danger in our understanding of God's love. We might think that we can do whatever we want, after all God loves us and everything will be all right at the end. This passage corrects this points of view and tells us that, even if God is love, and even if God forgives, that does not mean that there are no laws and obligations any more. In fact, God loves us is the very fact that keeps us from doing the wrong thing and makes us do right thing. Since, our parents and friends love us is not the license to do whatever we want toward them. Rather we have to think: I love my parents and friends and they too love me; and I must do my very best not to hurt them or disappoint them.

Love is not reason for doing what we like; it is a reason for doing nothing to grieve those who love us. Jesus said that he had not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil the law. This is to say, he came really to bring out the real meaning of the law. Even behind the scribal and oral law there was one great principle which the scribes and Pharisees had imperfectly and mistakenly grasped. The one great principle is that in all things we must seek God's will and that when we know it, we must dedicate our whole life to the obeying of it.

The scribes and Pharisees were right in seeking God's will, and profoundly right in dedicating their lives to obeying it. But, they were wrong in finding that will in their man-made hordes of rules and regulations.

This is the very reason we find why Jesus again broke what the Jews called the law. He did not observe the hand washings that the law laid down; he healed sick people on the Sabbath, although the law forbade such healings; he was in fact condemned and crucified as a law breaker; and yet here Jesus seems to speak of the law with veneration and reverence. It is because he knew the real spirit of the law.

When we look at the ten commandments which are the essence and foundation of all law, we can see that the foundational principles of the ten commandments are reverence for God and respect for our fellow men and for ourselves. It is that reverence and respect

which Jesus came to fulfil. He came to show men in actual life what reverence for God and respect for men is like. Jesus came to show men in life what it means to give to God the reverence which is his due, and to give to men the respect which is their due.

This reverence and respect did not consist in obeying the multitude of petty rules and regulations. It consisted not in sacrifice but in mercy, not in legalism but in love; not in prohibitions which demanded that men should not do things but in commandments which bade them mould their lives on the positive commandments to love. --**James C. J**.

### *February 19, 2017: VII Ordinary Sunday*

Lv 19:1-2, 17-18  1 Cor 3:16-2 Mt 5:38-48

### Being Perfect

Quite a tough gospel and first reading. We like sometimes to get our own back. Happens. I'll get you for that. We know the vengeance of our own country… political and family. Eye for eye… brings no peace but a quiet lull in violence.

Peace is the way

And we know the opposite. People see the enemy walking the street and know that the only way forward is to make peace. Maybe not even forgiveness. Some can find a way forward gradually.

The forgiveness of the gospel is a slow journey. We have the small hurts and have ways of dealing with them. But the big ones are there too of injustice, getting a job over someone with a lie, being abused, family being mocked, bullying. Time heals and prayer helps… can you bring someone to God – to the cross. Pray with someone at the cross; it makes a difference.

Loving Self

A final word about loving the self – we need to allow this. The love of God is the love which helps us love the self. In the normal hurts and grievances of life we can be healing people if we love ourselves. We are people who often hate the self for our addictions, big and small faults and a past that may haunt us.

The love of God is a grace… filling that space open to love and hatred for ourselves in our hearts… the grace of loving self and other.

Be perfect… become like God… holy like God in compassion and in love. This is a wonderful vision for ourselves, our church and our world. The dream of God that all God's children live in love, peace and justice. --**Donal Neary SJ**

***February. 26, 2017: VIII Ordinary Sunday of the Year***

Is 49:14-15; 1 Cor 4:1-5; Mt 6:24-34

**Listening to the Inner Self**

Trust in the Lord! That is the strong message of the readings that we receive today. Never, ever think that God has forgotten us because that is simply impossible. For our part, we are invited to choose God and reject all that is not of God. The Gospel today is very clear that we cannot choose two masters.

We cannot serve both God and ourselves. So often we make false gods to worship: Money, Power, Material Things, and worst of all ourselves. When we make a god out of ourselves we cannot possible have room to serve God our Heavenly Father.

Why would we think that God has forgotten us? Usually because we have encountered some deep suffering in life. For some people, it could that they have never found the right partner and so have never married. For others, it may be that they have never felt loved by God. For another it might be the loss of a deeply loved person. There can be so many reasons to feel that God has abandoned us.

It is not easy to believe that in all that happens to us, God is present seeking to bring good from whatever happens. So many of us question why god allows evil to happen and yet we know that without freedom, we would not be truly human as we are.

Jesus admonishes his followers to put away anxiety and preoccupation with material things and instead to seek first the things of God — his kingdom and righteousness. Anxiety robs the heart of trust in the mercy and goodness of God and in his loving

care for us. God knows our needs even before we ask and he gives generously to those who trust in him.

In the First Letter to the Corinthians today we hear that we should not judge anyone. That is a strong piece of advice. It would be nice to think that we actually live that way. Perhaps at times we do. But once in a while we can be listening to our inner thinking and find that we have negative thoughts about others. There is a real challenge to living in inner peace and never judging another person.

Let us Pray: "Lord, free me from needless worries and help me to put my trust in you. Make my first concern your kingdom and your righteousness. Help me to live each day with trust and gratitude for your providential care for me". Amen. --**Joel R. Fernandes**

### *March 5, 2017: I Sunday of Lent*

Gen 2:7-9, 16-18, 25; 3:1-7 Rom 5:12, 17-19 Mat 4:1-11

### Temptations and Trials

The African lion and the wild cat look so much alike, yet they are different. An ancient African theory explains it this way. The same lioness gives birth to numerous cubs some of which are truly lions at heart and some of which are not. How does the mother lion know which is which? Months after the birth of the cubs, just before they are weaned, the mother lion leaves the den and then, in an unsuspecting moment, she jumps into the den with a thundering roar as if she was an enemy attacking the cubs. Some of the cubs stand up and fight back the presumed enemy while others flee the den with their tails between their legs. The cubs that hold their ground to face the danger prove themselves to be real lions. Those that run away prove to be mere wild cats, false lions. As testing distinguish true lions from the false so also does it prove true Christians from false ones.

Under the old covenant God subjected His people Israel to testing in the desert. They failed that test, which made a new covenant necessary. In today's gospel reading we see Jesus the bearer of the new covenant being subjected to testing again in the desert. He stands his ground and gives the enemy a good fight, thus showing

that he is truly the Son of God. Immediately before the Temptations of Jesus, Matthew has the story of the baptism of Jesus in which a heavenly voice declared of him: "This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). As he leaves the baptismal waters of Jordan to embark on his public ministry as the Anointed Son of God he had to go through the test. No child of God can go without trials, because this is the means to distinguish between a true and a false child of God. As Ben Sirach advises, "My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for testing" (Sirach 2:1).

Somehow we can understand, and are more comfortable with, the idea of testing or trial than with the idea of temptation. The fact, however, is that testing or trial or temptation are one and the same thing. In fact they all translate the same Greek word peirasmos. When we see the situation as coming from God, who would like us to pass the test, we call it a test or trial. And when we see it as coming from the evil one, who would like us to fail, we call it temptation. But both trials and temptations are experienced by us in exactly the same way: as a situation where the principle of evil (the devil) and the principle of good (the Holy Spirit) in us are vying for our allegiance and whichever one we decide for wins and becomes the master of our lives until we can reverse the decision.

Jesus is given three tests. The first one, to turn stones into bread, has to do with how we use our God-given gifts, talents and abilities. The temptation is for us to use our gifts to make a living for ourselves. But Paul tells us that spiritual gift are given to the individual "for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7). Jesus would later on in his ministry multiply bread to feed others. But he would not do it to feed himself. Do we see our talents and abilities, our jobs and professions, as a means to serve others or simply as a means to make a living for ourselves?

In the second test Jesus is tempted to prove that he is God's son by jumping from the pinnacle of the Temple and letting the angels catch him as was promised in the Scripture: "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone" (Psalm 90/91:11). Though Jesus fully believes the word of God, he would not put God to the test. This contrasts

sharply with the case of a college student in Nigeria who claimed that he was born again and to prove it he jumped into the lion's cage in the zoo because the Bible promises that nothing can ever harm God's children. Maybe his soul is in heaven today but his body provided a special lunch for the hungry lions that day.

In the third temptation the devil promises Jesus all the kingdoms of the earth if only Jesus would worship him. Jesus wants the whole world to acknowledge him, of course, but would he achieve that by worshipping a false god? Can we pursue our goals by any means whatsoever? Does the end justify the means? Jesus says no. He remains steadfast and faithful to God, rejecting the short-cuts offered by the devil. In the end he attains an end more glorious than that offered by the devil: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18).

Today, let us realise that as God's children we too are under constant testing. If you do not know it, then try to answer these questions: Will you keep believing in God whether or not you get that one thing that you have always been praying for? Would you still believe that God loves you if you or your loved one contracted a shameful disease that has no cure, and God does not give you healing in spite of all your prayers? Do you sometimes put God to the test and say: "If you do this for me, then I will serve you, but if not, I will have nothing more to do with you." Jesus shows us today that to serve God is to surrender ourselves to Him unconditionally and in all situations. **--Munachi Ezeogu, cssp** (Internet)

***March 12, 2019: II Sunday of Lent***

Genesis 12:1-4 2 Timothy 1:8-10 Mat 17:1-9

**Stop Being Afraid**

There is a mysterious story in 2 Kings that can help us understand what is happening in the transfiguration. Israel is at war with Aram, and Elisha the man of God is using his prophetic powers to reveal the strategic plans of the Aramean army to the Israelites. At first the King of Aram thinks that one of his officers is playing the spy but when he learns the truth he despatches troops to go and

capture Elisha who is residing in Dothan. The Aramean troops move in under cover of darkness and surround the city. In the morning Elisha's servant is the first to discover that they are surrounded and fears for his master's safety. He runs to Elisha and says, "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" The prophet answers, "Don't be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." But who would believe that when the surrounding mountainside is covered with advancing enemy troops? So Elisha prays, "O Lord, open his eyes so he may see." Then the Lord opens the servant's eyes, and he looks and sees the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:8-23). This vision was all that Elisha's disciple needed to reassure him. At the end of the story, not only was the prophet of God safe but the invading army was totally humiliated.

This story can help us understand what is going on in the transfiguration because at this stage in his public ministry Jesus is very much like Elisha, hemmed in on every side by his foes. His disciples, and Peter in particular, feel very much like the servant of Elisha, afraid and anxious for their master's safety. Remember that just before the transfiguration Jesus asked his disciples whom the people and they themselves think he is. When Peter gives the correct answer that he is the Christ, Jesus congratulates him and then proceeds to warn them and prepare them for his unavoidable suffering, death and resurrection. But Peter is so unprepared for this that he protests visibly. He takes Jesus aside and begins to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he says. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus sharply corrects him, telling him that he is seeing things from a purely human point of view (Matthew 16:13-23). Like Elisha's servant, Peter needed a vision from God's point of view, to see that in spite of the death sentence hanging over the head of Jesus, God is still with him, God is still in control of events, God will see to it that in the end he triumphs over his foes as Elisha did. What Peter and his fellow disciples needed was for God to open their eyes and them give them a glimpse of God's abiding presence with their master Jesus. The transfiguration is that experience.

A certain missionary on a study trip to the Holy Land was visiting Jaffa (Joppa) where Peter was residing when he baptized Cornelius

(Acts 10). The breath-taking beauty of this small seaside town was such that it inspired him to come up with this joke:

At the transfiguration Peter offered to build three tents, one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah. Jesus said, "And what about you, Peter?" And Peter replies, "Don't worry about me Lord, I got a better place in Jaffa."

We tend to think that when Peter said, "It is good for us to be here" he was thinking about the beauty of the place. But Peter was probably thinking not of the beauty of the mountain top but its safety for his master. He was preoccupied for the safety of his master just as the servant of Elisha was. But when his eyes were opened at the transfiguration and he saw his master Jesus bathed in the glory of the divine presence his fear evaporated. And Jesus turns to him [them] and says "Get up now, stop being afraid." This is a more exact rendering of the Greek present tense imperative of prohibition.

Every time we gather for the Eucharist we experience a moment of transfiguration where our divine Lord is transfigured before our eyes in the forms of bread and wine. May the reassurance of God's loving presence with us at communion take away all fear and doubt from our hearts and strengthen us to get up and face with courage the challenges and trials, sufferings and, yes, death, that we must pass through before we can share in the divine glory.

--**Munachi Ezeogu, cssp** (Internet)

### *March 19, 2017: III Sunday of Lent*

Exodus 17:3-7 Romans 5:1-2, 5-8 John 4:5-42

### Conversion: How It Works

A thirst could be physical or spiritual. Often it is both, as in the case of the unnamed woman whose meeting with Jesus by Jacob's well gave us today's gospel story. Physically she is thirsty, thirsting for water, and that brings her to the well day after day. But spiritually also she is thirsty, an inner thirst which drives her from one man to another and for which she can find no satisfaction. By the time she meets Jesus she is in her sixth marriage, and yet she

is able to tell Jesus "I have no husband," indicating that she is probably already looking for the seventh.

Numbers are often significant in biblical interpretation. According to the biblical symbolism of numbers, six is a number of imperfection, of lack, of deficiency. The woman in her sixth marriage is, therefore, in a situation of lack and deficiency. Seven, on the other hand, is a number of perfection, completion, finality and sufficiency. Jesus comes to this woman as the seventh man in her life. She opens up to him and finally experiences the satisfaction of all of her soul's desiring, the full assuaging of her spiritual thirst. Isn't this the kind of experience we wish for ourselves and for all in this season of Lent? It might, therefore, be useful for us to look at the mechanism of this profound turnaround in life that we call conversion.

First, someone must be ready to break boundaries. Human society organizes itself by erecting boundaries - national, ethnic, religious, and gender. Jesus shows in today's gospel that in order to reach out to the other and create the necessary conditions for conversion, one must be prepared to challenge these man-made boundaries and break the dividing walls of prejudice. This is exactly what Jesus does to get to this woman.

According to the convention of the times, Jews were not supposed to interact with Samaritans. Walls of prejudice built on the foundations of ethnicity and religion kept them apart. Jesus broke these boundaries when he asked the woman for a drink, as her reaction shows:

"How is it that you, a Jewish man, ask a drink of me, a Samaritan woman?" Jews do nt share things in common with Samaritans" (John 4:9). That was not all. It was also against the moral norms of the day for a man to engage a woman in dialogue in a public place. And yet Jesus engages this woman in the longest dialogue we have in all the four Gospels, an act which even his own disciples saw as morally questionable. Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" (John 4:27)

If Jesus had kept within the bounds of the expected behaviour of his day, there was no way he could have gone beyond a superficial

brush with the woman, which would invariably lead to superficial results. Note also that, unlike many evangelists of our time, Jesus never tries to condemn, threaten, or intimidate the woman. All he tries to do is invite (v. 7), challenge (v. 10) and affirm her (v. 17), patiently trying to enlighten her doubts in no uncertain terms (vv. 24, 26).

Why does Jesus make such a tremendous impact on the woman? Because for the first time in her life she meets a man who really understands her. In her excitement she forgets her water jar and physical thirst (and so also does Jesus) and runs back to the village inviting the villagers to come and see "a man who told me everything I have ever done" - probably the first man to know her so well without rejecting her. Before you know it the convert has become a missionary bringing others to Jesus and to the joyful experience of conversion.

Before we close our refection on the gospel story I would like us to pay attention to the words of those other Samaritan villagers that the woman brings to Jesus. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world." (4:42)

We see that there are two stages in the believing or conversion process: a. believing because of what someone told us about Jesus, and b. believing because we have come personally to know Jesus ourselves. Lent is the period when the Church invites all her children who still believe on the strength of someone else's witnessing to come to Jesus personally and believe, not because someone told us, but because we have known him and experienced his love personally in our own lives.

--**Munachi Ezeogu, cssp** (Internet)

### *March. 26, 2017: IV Sunday of Lent*

1 Sam 16:1, 6-7, 10-13; Eph 5: 8-14; Jn 9: 1-41

### To Be the Light

We are called to be the light and to lighten the un-lightened in every human being's life. God works, it doesn't matter how big

and handsome we are rather how much faith we have in God and how much responsible we are for doing God's work. We see in first reading that God is responding to the human beings and in gospel we see that God does not see as the man sees. The way we think is different from God's thinking. Human beings see the outside structure of others but God sees the innermost hearts of human beings and spiritual structure of them. Spiritual heart is required to rule the people rather than physical. In Gospel too Jesus also sees the spiritual structure of man rather than body. Born blinded man is spiritually not blinded but physically blinded. Jesus has come to lighten the unlightened. Jesus reveals the will of God. He was born blinded to reveal the glory of God. Jesus knew the thoughts of Jews that if any one was born blinded either he or his parents might have sinned. They wanted to test Jesus. Jesus is the Light of the world "when the light of Jesus entered, the sin of darkness exited." Jesus is healing not only physically blinded man but also spiritually blinded.

Even though they have eyes they can't see because their spiritual eyes are closed with laws. They couldn't realize that the son of God has come to the world to heal and to call each one of us to be the bearers of light of Christ. Jesus is the light of the world. We are called to live in the light of God as Christ spread the light of His grace. Now, we are no more in darkness. We are healed through His Spirit. Paul is saying that no longer be in darkness and we are in light to do the works of Light. And in Ephesians Paul says " for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true" (Eph 5:9) and he says that sleepers as well as dead awake and rise because light of Christ is on us and we are not the sons of darkness but sons of Light. Be the light of Christ. **--Songa Mohan Rao**

### *April 2, 2017: V Sunday of Lent*

Ez. 37: 12-14; Rom. 8: 8-11; Jn. 11: 1-45

### The Journey of Faith

Today Mother Church invites us to reflect upon the theme a faith journey with Jesus Christ from death into life. So that church chooses the biblical passage of raising of Lazarus. Jesus' friend Lazarus died then Jesus went his place and gave him life. The point

which the author wants to give to his audience is to proclaim the faith that Jesus is the resurrection and life. In a community in which the ideal of delayed Parousia, the question may be raised, why should I imitate Jesus? Why should I renounce all material prosperities for a particular person Jesus Christ? The answer which the evangelist wants to give to his community is, to have an eternal life. Whole of the Johannine tradition is speaking about the dichotomy between life and death. It is the gospel of a journey from death to life. Death means no faith in Jesus Christ, whereas life means full faith in Jesus Christ. It is said in chapter 3, verse 16; "for God loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

Therefore, believing in Jesus Christ is raising from death to life. St Paul too emphasis the same in a different way. He uses the dichotomy of flesh and spirit. Flesh signifies death and whoever does not believe in Jesus Christ and spirit points to life and whoever believe in Jesus Christ. St Paul exhorts, "we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh- for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." So, my dear friends in Jesus Christ, we are called to have life and to promote life. This mission of life can be carried out only if we have the real faith in Jesus Christ. If we have this faith experience, we will be the light of the world, we will promote life in the world, we will fight against all anti- life movements in the world such as abortion, drug addiction and so on. **--Joseph Thomas**

### *April 09, 2017: Palm Sunday*

Is. 50: 4-7; Phil. 2: 6-11; Mt. 26: 14-27: 66

### Being a Christian

Today we commemorate the solemn entry of Jesus to Jerusalem which is the immediate cause of his death on the cross as per the gospel according to St John. The moment Jesus entered Jerusalem people shouted singing Hosanna which means 'save us'. This was the external expression of inner cry of Jewish people. They were facing religious and political oppression and suppression from

theRoman Empire. They were at the expectation of 'Messiah' who would come to rescue them from the slavery of Roman Empire. The reputationof Jesusspread in and around Jerusalem made them think that Jesus was the messiah. According to the belief of Jewish people the purpose of the coming of Messiah was to establish the political as well as the religious freedom. So they received Jesus to Jerusalem with Hosanna. The first part of the perception of the people regarding Messiah was right that Jesus was the Messiah, the expected one. But the mission of Jesus was understood wrongly by the Jewish people. Jesus came to this world not to establish the earthly kingdom but to establish the kingdom of God which consists of gospel values such as love, peace, justice, equality etc. Before His ascension, Jesus entrusted the mission, establishment of the kingdom of God here on earth, to the church. Today once again mother church reminds us of our prime responsibility of being a Christian to establish the kingdom of God wherever we are. So let us ask ourselves are we establishing kingdom of God here on earth through our words and deeds. The establishment of kingdom of God is only possible if we lead our life based on the Gospel values.

By entering Jerusalem on a donkey Jesus fulfills the prophecy made by prophet Zachariah in chapter 9 verse 9 regarding the coming of the ruler of Israel. On those days if a king goes for war he will go on a horse but at the same time if he goes for establishing peace he will go on a donkey. Jesus the king of heaven and earth enters Jerusalem on a donkey which means Jesus came to establish peace not disharmony or violence. Donkey is the symbolism of peace and humility. Apart from the symbolism the specialty of the donkey on which Jesus entered to Jerusalem is that it carried Jesus to Jerusalem. I believe that the call to Christianity is a call to become a donkey which means to become the messengers of peace and humility and also to become the carrier of Jesus. But on the contrary we see in today's gospel that Judas betrays Jesus for thirty silver coins which is the symbol of his selfishness. Many a time we act as Judas acted. Though we, the Christians are called byJesus to bear witness to Jesus due to our selfishness we bear counter witness to Jesus or betray Jesus. In order to bear witness to Jesus we must be humble and the messengers of peace. If we become humble and peace maker we will bear witness to Jesus thus we will

be successful in fulfilling our prime duty of being a Christian, the establishment of the kingdom of God here on earth.

**--Naijo Chittilappilly**

***Apil.16, 2017: Easter Sunday***

Acts. 10: 34, 37-43; Col. 3: 1-4; Jn. 20: 1-9

**Be Bold Enough to Proclaim the Resurrected Christ**

Dear sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ. A very happy feast day to you all, that our Lord has defeated the death and resurrected. In the first reading we see that the disciples of Jesus Christ proclaiming about the resurrection of his master, Jesus Christ who worked wonders and miracles among different strata of people, hanged on the tree and resurrected on the third day as He said to his disciples during the time of His ministry. In the second reading, St. Paul tells people to have a new life in Christ by focusing on the heavenly things rather than the worldly things that which can perish within the fraction of seconds and he firmly says, die in Christ and rise in Christ.

Coming to the Gospel, Mary Magdalene was one of the women who actively collaborated in His ministry (Luke 8:1-3), along with the Virgin Mary she bravely stayed with Him right up to His final moments (John 19:25), and she saw where His body was laid (Luke 23:55). Now, after the obligatory Sabbath rest, she goes to visit the tomb. The Gospel points out that she went early, when it was still dark it shows her love and veneration that led her to go without delay, to be with our Lord's body. From these details concerning the empty tomb one deduces that Jesus' body must have risen in a heavenly manner, that is, in a way which transcended the Laws of nature. It was not only a matter of the body being reanimated as happened, for example, in the case of Lazarus, who had to be unbound before he could walk (cf. John 11:44). The Apostles begin to grasp the true meaning of Sacred Scripture after the resurrection, particularly once they receive the Holy Spirit, Who fully enlightens their minds to understand the content of the Word of God.

Today through this, Jesus once again reminding us to live in strong faith in believing the works and miracles which He has done in His life. As we are going to continue His mission we too need to stand boldly like Peter and John telling his words and deeds to people. In our present world we see most of the people are flocking behind the worldly things which can give very minimal and temporal happiness forgetting the eternal happiness from our resurrected Jesus Christ. Today it is the time for us to examine ourselves that do we want to be like Mary Magdalene and disciples who came forward and proclaimed about the resurrected Christ? Or do we want to act like the Pharisees and the elders of the society bothering about their power and wealth and trying to kill the truth. But remember the truth always wins and the life ever reigns.

**--Joe Antony Alex**

April 23, 2017: II Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday)

Act. 2:42-47; 1 Pet. 1:3-9; Jn. 20: 19-32

**Seeing and Believing**

From today's readings many lessons could be drawn. However, I would like to dwell basically on three points: life of communion, faith based on Christ's resurrection and faith-seeking doubt.

The early Christians devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles who were convinced of Jesus' resurrection. They lived in a community sharing with all whatever they owned. Living in the community has its own advantages. It instills the sense of belonging, the sense of communion and fellow-feeling among the members. God is experienced profoundly in the community as Jesus himself affirms it when he says: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there." This life of communion was possible because they shared a common faith in the Risen Christ. Similarly, it can be possible in our context when we live in community. One's faith is strengthened in the community as we share our faith-experiences with one another. The faith that we have is imperishable, undefiled and unfading because it is totally based on Christ's resurrection which gives us a new and living hope for our own resurrection.

In the gospel passage, we find the Risen Lord imparting peace to the troubled disciples enclosed in the upper room. Although frightened they were together, depicting the community dimension, except Thomas who did not believe his friends' testimony that they had seen the LORD. The closed door did not prevent the Risen Lord to enter the room for they kept their hearts open. Open hearts enable us to receive the Lord into our lives. One thing is evident in Thomas' attitude that even though he seemed doubtful, yet his was a faith-seeking doubt. He just needed a sensual perception with which the doubter was to be so convinced that he became a worshipper – "My Lord and my God."

There are some who will not believe even when they see, such as Pharaoh; others believe only when they see, such as Thomas in today's Gospel. But, above both these types, the Risen Lord placed those who had not seen and yet believed upon hearing, such as Noah, Abraham and every believer in Christ. **--Denu Sangma**

***Apr. 30, 2017: III Sunday of Easter***

Acts. 2; 14, 22-23; 1 Pet: 1:17-21; Lk. 24: 13-35

**Let Our Eyes Be Opened When We Meet the Truth**

Dear friends in Jesus Christ it is very hard to digest when we lost some of our beloved ones and to be happy and live our normal life. The same incident happened in the gospel of today in the lives of disciples when their master handed over to the leaders for unjust cause and killed.

In the first reading we see the peter addressing the crowd that about the plan of God in the life of Jesus. That his own people will not understand the miracles and good deeds of Christ and they will catch him and crucify on the cross. And in the second reading peter says Jesus has bought us with his own precious blood so that we give glory and have hope on God. In the gospel reading he clearly states that the lack of faith of the disciples, not to recognize Jesus Christ, after all listening form him. The reason why this is so: "Their eyes were prevented from recognizing him." Christ gets to know his disciples by hearing them out. He quickly discovers the reason why they are so dejected and downcast. Their problem it

seems is that they "were hoping" for a different Christ -- a more political and temporal Christ. This is a moment to ask ourselves whether we ever hope for a different Christ, a Christ tailored to our own liking or more in accord with our human ambitions (money, wealth, fame, popularity, etc.).

They were so disturbed when they saw him hanging on the cross that they forgot his teaching, did not look for his resurrection, and failed to keep his promises in mind. Their eyes were obstructed, that they should not recognize him until the breaking of the bread. And thus, in accordance with the state of their minds, which was still ignorant of the truth, that the Christ would die and rise again, their eyes were similarly hindered. It was not that the truth himself was misleading them, but rather that they were themselves unable to perceive the truth. Coming to our daily lives so many times we fail to recognize the truth and close our eyes by telling ourselves that this not my cup of tea but the others. As we are blessed by Jesus Christ, should have the courage to stand boldly to speak the truth. And also our duty is tell the people as Christian following the footsteps of Christ, should live according to his commandments and demolish the evils of the world. We should be ready to open our eyes when some injustice is done immediately and respond, to prevail the truth. How often do we fail to recognize the Lord when he speaks to our hearts and opens his mind to us? The Risen Lord is ever ready to speak his word to us and to give us understanding of his ways. Do you listen attentively to the Word of God and allow his word to change and transform you? Let us reflect on these questions for our life's and ask god grace. Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of my heart to recognize your presence with me and to understand the truth of your saving word. Nourish me with your life-giving word and with the bread of life.

**--Sagar Thomas Kanna**

# Book Received

Carlos De Mellow and Kurien Kunnumpuram, **The Home of Love**, Christian World Imprints, New Delhi, 2016.

Jomin Joseph, **The Last Supper as Sacrum Comvivium**, Blessed Hope Publishing, 2016.

Review of these and other books will be given in the next issue.

The Editorial Team of AJRS wishes all its readers a Merry Christmas and Happy New Yeer. Since next year is the diamond jubilee of AJRS, expect some suprises!