



# Asian Journal of Religious Studies

“The Lord is truly among us.”

May-June 2017

Vol 62/3

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“The Lord is truly with us.”

*Asian Journal for Religious Studies (AJRS)* is a pastoral journal for Christian leaders. It is a bimonthly published from the Papal Seminary, Pune 411014. Inspiring and brief articles beneficial for Christian leaders are welcome.

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Printed at:	Kunal Offset, Pune
Typeset at:	Papal Seminary Centenary Computer Centre
Publisher:	Kuruvilla Pandikattu, Papal Seminary

Subscriptions may be sent either by M.O. or D.D. If sent by cheque, please add Rs. 15 as bank commission. Annual Subscription Rate: Rs. 150 (in India); \$ 5 (in Asia); \$/Euro 12 (in Europe & America)



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P-ISSN 2249-1503

## Editorial

# Giving with Dignity

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Pope Francis has offered a concrete, permanently useful prescription for dealing with those who request alms from us. It's simple: "Give them the money, and don't worry about it."

The pope's advice, from an interview with a Milan magazine published just before the beginning of Lent, is startlingly simple. "It's scripturally sound but may be confusing."

"Living in the city means that at some point in your day, or week, a person seeming (or claiming) to be homeless, or suffering with a disability, will ask you for help," reports *New York Times*.

Speaking to the magazine *Scarp de' Tennis*, which means Tennis Shoes, a monthly for and about the homeless and marginalized, the Pope said that giving something to someone in need is "always right." He added: "In the shoes of the other, we learn to have a great capacity for understanding, for getting to know difficult situations."

He added: "Here in the Vatican there are two parishes, and both are housing Syrian families. Many parishes in Rome have also opened their doors and others, which don't have a house for priests, have offered to pay rent for families in need, for a full year."

But what if someone uses the money for, say, a glass of wine? His answer: If “a glass of wine is the only happiness he has in life, that’s O.K. Instead, ask yourself, what do you do on the sly? What ‘happiness’ do you seek in secret?” Another way to look at it, he said, is to recognize how you are the “luckier” one, with a home, a spouse and children, and then ask why your responsibility to help should be pushed onto someone else.

Then he posed a greater challenge. He said the way of giving is as important as the gift. You should not simply drop a bill into a cup and walk away. You must stop, look the person in the eyes, and touch his or her hands.

The reason is to preserve dignity, to see another person not as a pathology or a social condition, but as a human, with a life whose value is equal to your own. “This message runs through Francis’ preaching and writings, which always seem to turn on the practical and personal, often citing the people he met and served as a parish priest in Argentina,” writes *New York Times* in its editorial page.

May we learn to give without counting the cost for us! May we learn to give and empower the other in his freedom and dignity! We have received freely! We are privileged to give freely!

Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ  
The Editor

## Reflections on “The Gift of Priestly Vocation”

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A recent Roman document titled, “The Gift of Priestly Vocation,” spells out new guidelines for the priestly formation. It was issued by the Congregation for the Clergy on December 8, 2016. It is a thoroughly revised plan for priestly formation which was first issued in 1970 and then revised in 1980. Because of the rapid changes in “historical, socio-cultural and ecclesiastical contexts, the guidelines “needed to be revamped, renewed and restored to the centre,” said Cardinal Beniamino Stella, Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy. He added that “inspiration was drawn from Pope Francis’s teaching and spirituality, especially regarding temptations tied to money, to authoritarian exercise of power, to rigid legalism and to vain glory.” He is of the view that “in the life of the Church innovations are never separate from tradition, but, on the contrary, integrate it and enhance it.” The Cardinal also pointed that the document was greatly influenced by St. Pope John Paul II’s *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, published in 1992, which seeks to promote an “integral formation,” that is, “the ability to unite, in a balanced way, the human as well as the spiritual, intellectual and pastoral dimensions, through a gradual instructional personalised course.”

## **Priestly Vocation**

Among the many vocations which the Holy Spirit calls forth in the People of God, the vocation to the ministerial priesthood calls one to “participate in the hierarchical priesthood of Christ.” As St. Pope John Paul II teaches, it is the mission of the Church “to care for the birth, discernment and fostering of vocations, particularly those to the priesthood. Hence vocation promotion is an important ministry of the Church, especially the local church. Bishops, priests and the laity, particularly parents and teachers, have to cooperate in this activity. Remembering that the Church has asked us to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send labourers into his harvest, the entire people of God should seriously and unceasingly pray for vocations, especially those to the priesthood.

## **Priestly Identity**

In order that the formation imparted in our Major Seminaries may be effective, we need to have a clear idea of the identity of the priesthood. Vatican II reminds us that nature and mission of priests must be understood within the Church, the People of God. The entire People of God participates in the saving work of Christ and are in fact a priestly people. The ministerial priesthood is to be understood as a service to the glory of God and to the brothers and sisters in their baptismal priesthood. In communion with the order of Bishops, priests are inseparably part of the ecclesial community and, at the same time, by the will of Christ and in continuance of the work of the Apostles, have been constituted pastors and leaders in the Church.

As the document points out, “the priest is called to cultivate missionary zeal, exercising his pastoral responsibility with humility as an authoritative leader, teacher of the word and minister of the sacraments, practising his spiritual fatherhood fruitfully.” As Pope Francis clearly states: “Every

authority is exercised in a spirit of service, as ‘*amoris officium*’ (office of love) and unpretentious dedication for the good of the flock.”

In the introduction the document makes two important assertions:

1. The journey of priestly formation has four characteristic elements “one, integral, grounded in community and missionary in spirit. Formation must be seen through a unifying lens, which takes into account the four dimensions of formation – human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral.” The entire journey of formation must never be reduced to a single aspect to the detriment of others, but it must always be an integrated journey of the disciple called to the priesthood. The formation of priests has an eminently communitarian character. Vocation to the priesthood is a gift that God gives to the Church and to the world. Such a vocation is discovered and accepted within a community. And formation to the priesthood takes place in the Seminary in the context of an educating community. This community enables the seminarian to become part of the family of the presbyterate, which is primarily at the service a particular community. In order to be effective in their ministry, priest formators “must consider themselves to be a formative community, sharing a common responsibility, with regard ‘to the duties entrusted to each one.’” Finally, formation is clearly missionary in character since its goal is participation in the mission of evangelization entrusted by Christ to the Church. Hence, Seminarians have to become missionary disciples, who are in love with the Master, shepherds with the “smell of the sheep,” who live in their midst to bring the mercy of God to them.

2. Within this single integrated formation, two phases can be identified: the initial and the ongoing. The “initial” formation is divided into various stages: the propaedeutic stage; the study of philosophy or the discipleship stage; the study of theology or the configurative stage, and pastoral stage or that of vocational integration stage.

### **The Propaedeutic Stage**

The propaedeutic stage is a preparatory stage which is thought to be necessary because of the experience of recent decades. It should last no less than one year and no more than two years. Its principal objective is to provide a solid basis for the spiritual life of the candidate and to nurture greater self-awareness for his personal growth. It is a time to become personally convinced of one’s vocation to the priesthood.

### **Study of Philosophy and Theology**

It is quite significant that the formation imparted in the Major Seminaries is conceived in deeply spiritual terms. The first two years during which the seminarian will study philosophy is called the discipleship stage. The disciple is one whom the Lord has called “to stay with him” (See Mk 3:14), to follow him and to become a missionary of the Gospel. Each day he will learn to enter into the secrets of the Kingdom of God. Staying with Jesus becomes a spiritual journey that transforms the life of the seminarian. The dynamic discipleship which lasts for the whole of life and includes all priestly formation pedagogically requires a specific stage when all possible efforts are made to root the seminarian in the *sequela Christi*, listening to his word, keeping it in his heart and putting into practice.

The last four years of formation in the Major Seminary during which the seminarian will do theology is termed



the “configuration” stage. During this stage formation concentrates on the configuration of the seminarian to Christ, Shepherd and Servant, so that united to him he can make a gift of self to others. This configuration demands that the seminarians enter profoundly into the contemplation of the person of Jesus Christ, sent by the Father, as shepherd of the people of God. It will make the relationship with Christ more intimate and personal, and, at the same time, will lead to an awareness and acceptance of his priestly identity. This state calls for a constant responsibility in living the theological and cardinal virtues and the evangelical counsels. It demands docility to the action of God. It also seeks for a gradual recreation of one’s own personal history in the light of pastoral charity, which animates, forms and motivates the life of a priest.

## **The Foundations of Formation**

There is a whole chapter (III) in the document which deals with the foundations of formation. To begin with, there is the person of the seminarian. “On the one hand, he is characterised by talents and gifts that have been moulded by grace; on the other, he is marked by his limits and frailty.” The task of formation is to enable the seminarian to integrate these two aspects of his personality with the help of the Holy Spirit and grow into a balanced person, avoiding fragmentation, superficiality and partiality. The time of priestly formation is a period of testing, maturing and discernment by both the seminarian and his formators.

The seminarian is called to go out of himself and journey in Christ towards the Father and towards others embracing his vocation to the priesthood; he has to work with the Holy Spirit to “achieve a serene and creative interior synthesis between his strengths and weaknesses. The formation process helps

the seminarian to bring all dimensions of his personality to Christ, who will enable him consciously to be free for God and for others. “In fact it is only in the Crucified and Risen Christ that this path of integration finds meaning and completion.” Effective pastoral care of the people demands that the priest have a solid formation and interior maturity. It is not enough for him to have the appearance of a virtuous person, who practises merely external obedience to abstract principle. He is called to act with great inner freedom. He has to internalise, day after day, the spirit of the Gospel and to establish a deep personal friendship with Christ, leading him to imbibe his sentiments and attitudes.

By this intimate relationship with Christ and by their fraternal communion, seminarian will be helped to recognise and correct “spiritual worldliness: obsession with personal appearances, a presumed theological and spiritual certainty, narcissism and authoritarianism, the attempt to dominate others, a merely external and ostentatious preoccupation with the liturgy, vain glory, individualism, the inability to listen to others and every form of careerism.” Instead they have to be formed in simplicity, sobriety, serene dialogue and authenticity. As disciples of the Master, they should learn to live and act with the pastoral charity, that flows from being “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (See 1Cor 4:1).

## **Dimensions of Formation**

There is a certain freshness in the way the document deals with the four dimensions of formation – the human, the spiritual, the intellectual and the pastoral.

To begin with human formation: As the document states: “The divine call engages and involves the ‘concrete’ human person. Formation for the priesthood must necessarily

provide adequate means to allow for maturation in view of an authentic exercise of priestly ministry. To that end, the seminarian is called upon to develop his personality, having Christ, the perfect man, as his model!”

A correct and harmonious spirituality demand as well-structured humanity, since grace builds on nature. It does not cancel nature, but perfects it. Hence it is necessary for the seminarian to acquire such qualities as humility, courage, common sense, magnanimity, right judgement and discretion, tolerance and transparency, love of truth and honesty.

Human formation, which is the foundation of all priestly formation, has to promote the integral growth of the person and allow the integration of all its dimensions – the physical, the psychological, the moral and the aesthetic. It should foster the establishment of a stable personality, characterised by emotional balance, self-control and a well-integrated sexuality. It has to enable the seminarian to arrive gradually at a well-formed conscience. This means that he has become a responsible person able to make right decision gifted with right judgement and able to have an objective perception of persons and events. Such a perspective should lead the seminarian to have a balanced sense of self-respect. It is also important for him to cultivate a sense of beauty.

For an effective human formation, it is necessary that the seminarian is aware of his life history and be ready to share with his formators. This will enable them to plan their personal accompaniment in such a way that it is really helpful to the seminarian.

An unmistakable sign of the harmonious development of the personality of the seminarian is his mature capacity to relate with men and women of different ages and social conditions. It is important that the formators take into consid-

eration the relationship between the seminarian and women since it affects “the seminarian not only in the sphere of his personal life but also with a view to his future ministry.”

The understanding and familiarity with the feminine are beneficial to the human growth of the seminarian. It is important that a seminarian learns from women and lets himself be influenced by the feminine genius.

Through the human formation, he has received, the seminarian becomes capable of self-determination and living with responsibility through an awareness of his own weaknesses which are always present in his personality. From what has been said about human formation is it quite clear that only a good and mature person can be good priest and an effective pastor.

As the document makes it clear, “the spiritual formation is aimed at nourishing and sustaining communion with God and with our brothers and sisters, in friendship with Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and with an attitude of docility to the Holy Spirit.”

This formation should foster a personal union with Christ which is born and sustained by prolonged and silent prayer. This union will enable the seminarian to be like Christ totally committed to the will of the Father.

Besides, the liturgical year enables the seminarian to absorb its spirituality by interiorising the scriptural texts and liturgical prayers. A seminarian should cultivate a healthy relationship to the Holy Eucharist.

Regular and frequent celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation, for which the seminarian should prepare by a daily examination of conscience, becomes an occasion to recognise with humility his own sins and frailties.

Spiritual direction is a means for the integral growth of the person. The seminarian should be let free to choose his spiritual director from among those who are made available by the Seminary. A high quality of spiritual accompaniment is necessary for the effectiveness of the whole process of formation.

The intellectual formation is aimed at helping the seminarian to acquire real competence in philosophy and theology, along with a more general education which will enable the seminarian to proclaim the Gospel message to people of our day in a manner that is credible. It seeks to help them to enter into dialogue with the contemporary world, and to uphold the truth of faith by the light of reason, thereby revealing its beauty. Candidates for the priesthood must diligently strive to deepen their knowledge of philosophical and theological sciences, with a good introduction to canon law, social science and history. The intellectual formation seeks to give a reason for hope (See 1 Pet 3:15) and to allow Divine Revelation to become known.

Pastoral formation is vitally important. In fact, the entire priestly formation must be permeated by a pastoral spirit. This will enable the seminarian to demonstrate the same compassion, generosity, love for all, especially the poor and zeal for the Kingdom of God, that characterised the ministry of Jesus Christ. The pastoral formation should be such as to help the seminarian to acquire the inner freedom to live the apostolate as service, able to see the work of God in the hearts and lives of the people. Gradually, the seminarian will begin to see himself as a group leader and as a man of communion. He will do so by attentive listening and careful discernment of situations, as well as cooperating with others.

It is noteworthy that, according to this document, pastoral formation is not primarily meant to help the seminarian

to master some pastoral skills. It is aimed at enabling the seminarian to cultivate certain attitudes and to acquire certain values that will make him an effective pastor.

There is a whole chapter (VI) devoted to the agents of formation. From a faith perspective, God, who calls the seminarian to the priesthood, is the primary agent of formation. As the document clearly states, “the principal agent of formation is the most Holy Trinity, who shapes every seminarian according to the plan of the Father, both through the presence of Christ in his word and in the brothers and sisters of the community, and through the many actions of the Holy Spirit. In the formation of a priest, the primacy of the working of the Holy Spirit calls for reciprocal listening and cooperation among all the members of the ecclesial community.”

The members of the diocese play a significant role in the formation of a priest – the bishop, the presbyterate, the formators in the seminary, the professors, the administrative personnel and the family and the parish community. The document adds that the presence of women in the seminarian’s journey of formation has its own formative significance. Their presence helps to instil a recognition of how men and women complement one another. -

By way of conclusion, I wish to make two comments.

1. It is remarkable that the document looks at formation as a journey. By repeatedly referring to the journey of formation, it makes it abundantly clear that formation is not a closed system but a dynamic process.
2. The document shows great respect for the person of the seminarian. It declares that the seminarian is a “necessary and irreplaceable agent of his own formation.”

## **All that is True, All that is Good, All that is Beautiful**

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*“All that is good, all that is true, all that is beautiful brings us to God. Because God is good, God is beautiful, God is the truth.” -Pope Francis*

*“If something is true, it is good and beautiful; if it is beautiful, it is good and true; if it is good, it is true and beautiful.” -Pope Francis*

**W**hen we look at our lives, things are not that bright. Life is hard. Look at the news. In our fallen, sinful world, evil seems to be having the upper hand. When we experience the suffering, it seems the world has gone mad, and it has. Pain, suffering, violence and evil are necessary part of our world.

Still human heart searches for the good, the true and the beautiful. There is a perennial longing for the ideal, which is absolute Truth, Goodness and Beauty.

### **Seeking for Truth**

Truth is being original, authentic and genuine. Nothing we do can ever be opposed to the truth, that is, opposed to

reality which has its being in God. When our senses are in good condition and functioning properly under normal circumstances, and when our reason is functioning honestly and clearly, we can come to know reality and have the ability to make true judgments about it. Through study, reflection, experimentation, argument and discussion, we believe that an object under discussion may manifest itself in its various relations, either directly or indirectly, to the mind.

We believe that by our nature, human beings tend towards the truth. Even though due to our fallen nature we may sometimes seek to ignore or obfuscate the truth, we are nonetheless obliged to honour and bear witness to it in its fullness. We are bound to adhere to the truth once we come to know it and direct our whole life in accordance with the demands of truth. As such humans seek truth directly or indirectly all the time.

## **Open to Goodness**

Goodness, which is related to the truth of every being, is understood as the perfection of being. A thing is good to the degree that it enacts and perfects those powers, activities, and capacities appropriate to its nature and purpose. We know what a good pair of scissors, a good eyesight, a good person, and a good life imply. We have to know a thing's purpose, nature, or form to engage in an authentic discussion of "The Good." This takes us further to what is a good law, a good government, a good father, or a good man. Such questions may grow richer, deeper and more complex. In all cases we are open to goodness that comes from all sides.



## Contemplating the Beautiful

Beauty can evoke wonder and delight, which are the foundation of a life of wisdom and inquiry. Beauty involves apprehending unity, harmony, proportion, wholeness, and radiance. It often manifests itself in simplicity and purity, especially in mathematics and science. Often beauty has a type of pre-rational (striking) force upon the soul, for instance when one witnesses a spectacular sunset or the face of one's beloved. Beauty can be understood as a type of inner radiance or shine coming from a thing that is well-ordered to its state of being or is true to its nature or form. Beauty pleases not only the eye or ear, but also the intellect in a celebration of the integrity of our body and soul. It can be seen as a sign of God's goodness, benevolence and graciousness, of His presence and His transcendence in the world. It can serve as re-enchantment with the cosmos and all reality and assist in journeying to a rich and deep contemplative beholding of the real.

## Concluding Remarks

In the traditional philosophy, truth, goodness or beauty are called "transcendentals" since they transcend (or go beyond) every individual objects and are universally applied. Although associated in particular with Platonism the ideas may have an earlier origin, appearing for example in the *Bhagavad Gita* to describe "words which are good and beautiful and true." (Bhagavad Gita Ch.17, v.15).

Since God created everything and found them good (Gen 1), it is natural that humans can trace goodness in everything. In this way they can reach God. So John Henry Newman can say: "All that is good, all that is true, all that is beautiful, all that is beneficent, be it great or small, be it perfect or

fragmentary, natural as well as supernatural, moral as well as material, comes from God.”

Thus Christian life gives us the ability to discern the good, the true and the beautiful, even in the ugly, painful and the tragic experiences we encounter. Christian life enables us to trace out the good, true and beautiful even in the evil. In this sense, for a believing Christian, even the experience of evil, indirectly can lead to the absolute goodness, God.

Thus we can resonate with St. Paul, who said it beautifully: “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things” (Philip 4:8).

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# **The Awesome Power of the Word of God in Human Life**

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**T**he Vatican Council solemnly acknowledges the power of the Word of God in *Dei Verbum*. The word God, which is the power of God is for the salvation of all who believe.<sup>1</sup> It shows its power in a most excellent way in the writings of the Scripture.<sup>2</sup> In Hindu Tradition *Śruthi* is considered as the Word of God which is heard by the Sages. The word is the power of the one who communicates it. God is the source of this communication and His word is therefore powerful. The receiver of this communication gets the knowledge in the cognitive level. However, it penetrates deeper in the heart-level and transforms the receiver. The word as a vitalizing energy feeds the receiver and makes him or her grow into divine life. It is like plants receiving the energy from the sun and transforms it into food which helps them grow. Here, the energy of the sun becomes part and parcel of the growth of plants. Like that, God's Word becomes part and parcel of the believer and enables him or her to grow and transforms him or her to a new creation. In this article, I limit myself to the Scripture and try to show the different dimensions of the Word of God and its transforming power.

## 1. The Irresistible Power of the Word

The Word of God is so powerful that it can overcome the obstacles and accomplish God's desires and purposes. **God's Word** is full of **power**; it will **not** return to Him **empty**. And God's Word will **accomplish** His desires and purposes: "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."<sup>3</sup> Again, the Word of God is pictured as fire. *Let the one who has my word speak it faithfully ... "Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"*<sup>4</sup> Positively, the hammer can drive home a nail. And also, like hammer, the Word of God can break down obstacles, i.e., overcoming negatives. God's Word has irresistible power! It is so quick and can break barriers: "For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."<sup>5</sup> In Psalm 29, we can see the power of the Word of God in nature: "The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord thunders, the Lord thunders over mighty waters. How powerful is the voice of the Lord! The voice of the Lord tears up the cedars, the Lord shatters the cedars of Lebanon."<sup>6</sup> The Word of God can bring about great results in nature and in human life: "He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild bull. The voice of the Lord breaks forth with flashes of fire. The voice of the Lord makes the wilderness quake; the Lord shakes the wilderness of *Kadesh*. The voice of the Lord makes the oaks to shudder and strips the forests bare."<sup>7</sup> In Genesis "*God said, 'Let there be...'*" "and light; sun, moon, and stars; animals, birds, and fish; and more came into being from God's spoken word. The word has the power to create things from nothingness and

sustain them in existence. The Word of God keeps humans from dying: Jesus says, *“I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”*<sup>8</sup> *Such is the incredible power of the word!* The word is powerful because it is God’s Word. The word, simply because it is God’s Word, carries with it all the attributes of God Himself. The Word of God is living, powerful and sharper than any two edge sword we can make on this earth. The word is pure solid spiritual food that has the supernatural ability to feed our mind, soul and spirit. Nothing else will feed our inner self like the word of God.

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

## **2. The Word as Pure Solid Truth**

We have seen that the word has its origin from God Himself. If God is perfect and almighty, then His word also has the quality of perfection. The word, must be, then powerful and solid which could give us the perfect knowledge and truth. The word is the wisdom of God that is conveyed to humans in spoken and written forms. It makes human beings wise, and thus, partakers of the divine wisdom although limitedly. Even discipleship is centered around the Word

of God. "If you live in my word, you will indeed be my disciples." <sup>9</sup> The Word of God can liberate humans from the chains of slavery. *"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall **make you free.**"* <sup>10</sup> Then what is truth itself? The answer is given in John 17:17 which tells that God's Word itself is truth. <sup>11</sup> If we know the word we will be liberated because Word of God is the pure truth. In Proverbs, we read, "Every Word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He reprove you, and you be found a liar." <sup>12</sup> The purity of the Word of God is clearly presented by Psalmist as he puts, "The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." <sup>13</sup> Again, we are reminded of the trueness and purity of the word of God, "For the word of the Lord is right, and all His work is done in truth. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." <sup>14</sup> The relation between truth and Word of God is inseparable.

### 3. The Sanctifying Power of the Word

In the preceding paragraphs we have seen that God's Word is pure solid truth. If so, it has the ability to cleanse and sanctify us. The symbol of fire also points to this direction. The fire has a cleansing capacity. It can remove the stains and impurities and thereby can cleanse gold. Like that, the Word of God can eliminate the blemishes of humans and can make him/her clean from the stains of sins and shortcomings. That is why the Psalmist claims without doubt the powerful protection of the word against sin: "I have hidden your **word in my heart** that I might **not sin** against you." <sup>15</sup> The Word of God in our hearts is a powerful **antidote to sin**. It directs and guides a person in his/her life as **lamp to his/her feet and light for his/her path**. <sup>16</sup> As the word of the Lord unfolds, light is shed and it illumines and sanctifies

the simple-hearted.<sup>17</sup> The word has the capacity to provide joy to the one who imbibes it with great enthusiasm. “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart ...”<sup>18</sup> The one who treads in the path of God will be filled with the sweetness of the word. The Psalmist beautifully expresses this aspect as he puts, “How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”<sup>19</sup> The word helps a person think, speak and do good and gives effulgence and sweetness to his/her life. As our physical bodies need bread, our spiritual self requires the food of the word in order to live and sustain in life. Jesus in his reply to Satan underscores this as he says, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”<sup>20</sup> God’s Word with its sanctifying and soothing effect bestows comfort and relief for the one who receives it: “This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life.”<sup>21</sup> The Word of God itself becomes life for the receiver which saves him from death: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life”<sup>22</sup>

Further, we can see the nourishing character of the Word of God which enables a person to grow in fullness and vitality: “... as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”<sup>23</sup> It cleanses one’s path of life: “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your Word.”<sup>24</sup> In Proverbs we find the importance of the word which gives life and vigour to the body and soul: “My son, give attention to My Words; incline your ear to My sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; for they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh.”<sup>25</sup>

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

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

The same notion is re-emphasized by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians: **“... that He(Jesus) might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.”**<sup>28</sup>

#### **4. The Word of God: The Work of the Holy Spirit**

The Holy spirit helps a person grow in wisdom of the word of God. The Lord Jesus gives us his Spirit who teaches us all things and guides us into truth. The true knowledge of God and wisdom come from the Holy Spirit who opens up the meaning of the word of God. There are several good biblical verses telling us that the Word of God can impart true knowledge and true wisdom to us: **“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My Name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I have said to you.”**<sup>29</sup> Again, the work of the spirit of God is evident in the Gospel of John: **“However, when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth ...”**<sup>30</sup> St. Paul reiterates the same point in another way by saying that the believer accepts the word not as that of human but as that of divine which comes from the Spirit of God: **“For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”**<sup>31</sup> St. Paul wishes that that the church in Colossus may progress in wisdom through the word of Christ: **“Let the**



word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another.”<sup>32</sup>

The Holy spirit can effectively work in a believer through the Word of God and transform him or her to a spiritual person. The personal relationship we establish with God, and the knowledge that we gain about God through the working of the Holy Spirit are what will dramatically transform the quality of one’s life down here on this earth. The written and spoken word draws its power from its union with the Holy Spirit, who is always operative through it. The Word of God and the Spirit of God are inseparable. When the word is preached the Spirit is always operative. The Spirit and the word are not only integrated themselves, but they act and work in harmony. Their action is one action and inseparable, the Spirit working as the efficient agent of the operation and the word as the instrument or means of the operation of the Spirit. Spirit and word work together in accomplishing the one result of transformation and salvation. The renewal and transformation of the life of the believer is through the power of the Word of God by the operation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>33</sup> It’s the word and the Spirit working together in a believer’s life that will get God to start working full force in his or her life to change him or her into the kind of person. God really wants the person to become in Him. The Word of God, in other words, makes the life of the believer to be absorbed in the divine life which in turn enables him or her to enter into salvific experience.<sup>34</sup>

## **5. The Emmaus Experience**

The awesome power of the Word of God is highlighted in the Emmaus’ experience in Luke’s Gospel. Here, we see the *Christocentric* dimension of the Word of God. The Word of God which is Christ Himself enlightens and illumines the disciples’ hearts.<sup>35</sup> The Word of God gives them hope and

courage to believe in God. The presence of Jesus – the Word of God Himself – with the disciples all through their journey to Emmaus is a clear proof that God is Emmanuel. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”<sup>36</sup> This Johannine *Sutra* finds its full expression in the disciples’ journey. The Word of God accompanies them, clears their doubts and supports them on their way. Like that, the presence of the Word of God in believer’s life supports him or her to understand the mystery of God and accompanies him or her in the journey of life. The Word of God could burn the hearts of the disciples in such a way that their life was enlightened to see God in a different way. It made them totally illumined and transformed. The same Emmaus experience must take place in the heart of every believer as he or she walks through the path of life. This is an evolution from the *informative realm to the transformative realm*. It is an *evolution from the outer seeing to the inner seeing*. It is a *journey from the periphery to the centre*. It is a *pilgrimage from the surface-level to the depth-level*. The Word of God opens one’s inner eyes to see God as He is, without any veil. This inner experience really changes the person in such a way that he or she perceives God in a totally different way than ever before. The believer’s inner eyes are illumined in such a way that he or she perceives God, world and the fellow beings in an entirely different manner and begins to see the unique and integral relation between him or her and God. The same transformation could be seen in the life of St. Paul after his personal encounter with Jesus in Damascus. His life got completely transformed and he became a true disciple of Jesus.

Another important dimension we have to take into notice is that the Word of God always demands a genuine and active response from the part of the receiver. In the Scripture we can see a good number of examples to substantiate this idea.

In the book of Genesis, we read that God spoke to Noah and commanded him to build an ark so that he could save his life together with his family and other creatures. Noah responded to God's Word and was saved.<sup>37</sup> Again, God called Abraham and ordered him to go to Canaan and Abraham responded to God's Word instantly. And he was blessed by God.<sup>38</sup> Later he was told to sacrifice his only son Isaac and he obeyed the Lord God and he found favour with God.<sup>39</sup> Further, Prophet Samuel also responded positively to the call of God by replying "Speak Lord, your servant is listening."<sup>40</sup> We can see this chain of positive responses to the Word of God in the life of all the prophets. When we come to New Testament, again we see the continuation of this response from different persons. Mother Mary responded positively to the Word of God and she became the mother of God. Also, we see that the Apostles and other people who encountered Jesus responded actively and positively to the Word of God and they got cured and transformed. The Word of God can do wonders and miracles in believer's life as we read in the scripture.

## **6. The Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us**

This great Johannine concept of "becoming" takes place or reenacts in every Holy Eucharist. We not only hear the Word of God but it comes to our life in the form of the body of Jesus. No other great symbol could be used other than the symbol of flesh. The Eucharist where the Word of God, Jesus Himself, becomes the part and parcel of the life of the believer is the most exotic event. This is what makes a Christian entirely different from other people. Through the symbolism of food the Word of God becomes one with the believer and he or she experiences the presence of God in his or her body. Jesus' body becomes the real food for the believer and His blood that quenches the thirst<sup>41</sup> runs through

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

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

## Conclusion

In the preceding paragraphs, I have been trying to show the power of the Word of God and its transforming effect on the believer. The Word of God which is the pure solid truth can cleanse the believer and can sanctify him/her. It nourishes the believer internally and supports him/her in the long journey of life. It protects the believer from iniquities and safeguards him or her from deviating from the right direction. Isaiah expresses this guiding dimension of the Word of God rightly, as he says, **“Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will listen to these words behind you, ‘This is the way, walk in it.’”**<sup>43</sup> The believer feels himself/herself this accompaniment of the Word of God all through this earthly journey. This protecting and guarding dimension of the Word of God is beautifully expressed in the Scripture

by Psalmist. In Psalm 23, we read that the Lord God is the shepherd<sup>44</sup> and He leads the believer in the right path. Even if the believer walks through the valley of the shadows of death, he or she fears no harm because God is accompanying and protecting all through the way. The believer finds his/her solace in the word of God. God becomes the host who prepares a banquet<sup>45</sup> for the believer which symbolizes the Eucharistic banquet which quenches the hunger and thirst and transforms the believer to a new creation. Through the Word of God came into existence the first creation. By the same Word of God comes into being the second creation-the new creation which is transformed in God.

## Notes

1 Cf. Rom. 1:16.

2 Cf. *Dei Verbum* 5:17.

3 Isaiah 55:11.

4 Jeremiah 23:28-29.

5 Hebrews 4:12.

6 Psalm 29:3-5.

7 Psalm 29:6-9.

8 John 8:51.

9 John 8:31.

10 John 8:32.

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

12 Proverbs 30:5.

13 Psalm 12:6.

14 Psalm 33:4.

15 Psalm 119:11.

16 Psalm 119:105.

17 Cf. Psalm 119:130.

18 Jeremiah 15:16.

19 Psalm 119:103.

20 Matthew 4:4.

- 21 Psalm 119:50.
- 22 John 6:63.
- 23 1 Peter 2:2.
- 24 Psalm 119:9.
- 25 Proverbs 4:20.
- 26 John 17:17.
- 27 John 15:3.
- 28 Ephesians 5:26.
- 29 John 14:26.
- 30 John 16:13.
- 31 1 Thessalonians 2:13.
- 32 Colossians 3:16.
- 33 Cf. Psalm 119:156.
- 34 Cf. James 1:21: "... and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." The same idea is expressed in one of the Sedro-prayers of the Eucharistic Liturgy of the Malankara Catholic Church: Lord God, in this awesome moment when your power hovers in this bread and the wine transforms into your blood, make my life absorbed into your divine life." Cf. *Order of the Eucharistic Liturgy of the Malankara Catholic Church, Sedro-Prayer* no.6.
- 35 Cf. Luke 24:32
- 36 John 1:14.
- 37 Cf. Genesis 6.
- 38 Cf. Genesis 12.
- 39 Cf. Genesis 22.
- 40 1 Sam 3: 9.
- 41 Cf. John 7:37-38.
- 42 Cf. Luke 1; Luke 24; Acts 9.
- 43 Isaiah 30:21.
- 44 In the New Testament, Jesus as the good shepherd who protects his flock from all dangers.
- 45 Psalm 23:5.

# The Confessions of a Spokesperson

Paul Thelakat

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In this brief article I wish to share the agony and ecstasy that was mine as the spokesperson of the Syro-Malabar Church for the last 15 years. On a day in 2000, Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil, the major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Synod of bishops, called me to his room and said, “You are elected by the Synod to be its spokesperson. Tell always the truth, but not necessarily all the truth.” He also told me to tell the truth without dwelling on the facts. I was further told (a) not to issue a press release on every failure in the church, because, as in a home, there many of the short comings and failures of the Church that are to be swept under the carpet, and (b) when asked about something happening within the church, I have to be truthful, taking care to stick to the truth *of the fact* without going to the details.

## 1. Truth and Language

Truth is not a fact, if we go by its Thomistic definition *adaquatio rei cum intellectu*” (correspondence of fact with thought) or “Supremacy of fact over thought ” as A.N. Whitehead would define it. Humans dwell measuring facts, things and others. As far as the church is concerned, Christ is the measure of everything. Truth has human value addition. I prefer Heidegger’s description of truth: “Language is the house of the truth of Being.” Truth has to be unconcealed or revealed in language. The temple of truth is language. But,

unfortunately, my language in the media was not one of dialogue or polyphony involving multiple tongues.

I am aware that Michael Bahktin and George Lucacs argued that truth is a human construct involving poly-lingual dialogue as opposed to the mono-logical. As far as I know, neither the church nor the secular world represented in channel discussions expect a dialogical discourse where the anchor and the panelists are marching towards the truth. What really happens there is, each presenting his or her point of view or position and defending it. What we hear in channel discussions is what Heidegger calls “language speaks as the peals of stillness”, meaning that language is speaking in different voices. In short, a channel discussion is a Tower of Babel where God descends to destroy the tyranny of monologue, creating polyphony.

I follow the methodology of discourse, depending on the media which generally are of three categories. 1. The letter press, where written response is the safest 2. The Radio, where voice is the medium and language plays the lead role. 3. The TV or the visual medium, where body becomes the language; language is of course the extension of the body.

Now let us consider questions put to you by journalists. First of all, you need to put the question in the right perspective and context with regard to its implications in the Church, in politics, in communal co-existence etc. As a journalist, you are not supposed to know everything. But you must know people who know, experts whom you can call and consult. Then think and make up your mind on the stand of the church, discuss the stand you have taken with a church leader, preferably a bishop. Articulate the stand in clear language. If you cannot convince yourself, you cannot convince others. The truth you want to reveal is a linguistic



act; truth takes the shape of language. What you are going to say is the truth from the point of the Church. You take a stand and defend your truth accordingly in the medium. The rest is your argumentation, where I am watchful about not falling into the fallacy of *ad hominem* argumentation, which is often used by shallow politicians and communalists by attacking people and not their ideas.

## **2. The Truth of the Scandals**

We, Catholics, are very disturbed by scandals; but Christ was indeed a scandal to the Jews and folly to the gentiles. Remember Christ has said: “Scandals are necessary, but woe to the man who gives it” (Mt. 18:7). What happens within the church are very often public sins or open value denials of scandalous nature and failures in sex life, misappropriation and mismanagement of money and property, nuns leaving of convents, priests and religious marrying or indulging in paedophilia, decisions of church leaders which backfire, court cases involving bishops, priests and religious. These are for us bad news; we wish to live in a world bereft of bad news. That is not possible on this earth, but, perhaps, in the Kingdom of Heaven. We are in this world of death and decay. As long we are here, there will be failures, because there will be people who aspire to high values and lofty lives. Failures are simply signs of super human attempts to accomplishments and adventures. We are a church where men and women seek after transcendental and spiritual values and motivations. Failures are bound to happen. That is why we are also a confessing church. A priest eloping with a nun is hot news, and I hope that it always remains hot news. It will cease to be so only when majority of priests and nuns become unfaithful and nobody bothers about it. A failure tells the general public that the values we aspire are difficult and we are not practicing celibacy or virginity with potions

or substitutes. Moreover, we confess our failures every day. Even the Bible is replete with bad events of sin and crimes, and still we call it Good News! Don't we? Even the suicide of Judas is reported as Good News; what is the Good News in a suicide or in the scandal of nun or priest committing adultery in public? Kindly see the 21 chapter of St. John where the apostasy of Peter is reported as a great lesson on the *leap of faith* by the contrite Peter. On a subject of public scandal, this is what I said to the crowded media: "I am sorry, brothers and sisters, as a Catholic it humiliates me and the church, it is painful but it is true. All that I can say is this: Without prayer and self-discipline this will happen to me, to you and to my sister and you sisters and brothers. But I do not condemn the fallen one, for God's grace is still open for her to return to God." I am here as spokesperson of the confessing church.

### **3. Death of the Author**

I am a person dead by 66 years, but I am 'prevented from dying by death itself' as Mauris Blanchot puts it. I am speaking on my Instants of death. When I am in a channel discussion, I am in the dock - in the box of the defendant who is facing a firing squad - which are two as far as I am concerned, the panellists and the anchor who represent the secular public, but there is a third unseen but real firing squad, which is the Church members who want to see and hear how I defend the Church. The spokesperson has to defend the Church of Christ, which is not an institution competing with other institutions in the world.

Why am I there in the dock? Was Paul Ricour right when he says, "nothing more fragile to wound than an existence that is at the mercy of a belief." I am there simply because I

represent a group of men and women who claim to hold on to high values and virtues.

I stand there as a person representing the Church, I defend the faith and the morals of the Church. Therefore, my ego as well as my individual self has no voice there; I am not speaking in my personal capacity.

In fact, I was in agony on two accounts: 1. My face happens to represent the church, which problems have rendered unattractive. I often wondered why they did not find a little more handsome person whose appearance could be more appealing. I wasted tons of Cuticura powder, especially on my face, I broke many mirrors. Finally I took comfort thinking that my face is truly representative of today's Syro-Malabar Church!

2. Once I was called to the Asianet channel for a recorded discussion, which was telecast more than once. Celibacy came up as one of the points in the discussion. One young man raised his hands and said, "Celibacy is impossible and those who claim to practice it are crooks." I was called to respond, in a humorous way I said, "The brother who raises the question thinks it is impossible to practise celibacy. Because it could be true about him, he claims that I and all others like me are crooks. Whatever argument I may make here to counter him will only prove his point that I am a crook. So I keep quiet and request him to see the lives of those him he called crooks." This is a typical example of certain predicaments which beg for answers and reduce you to a witness. When I speak as a spokesperson, I am always aware that I am standing in the witness box, defenceless against worldly dialectics, and so allow silence to speak of the truth that exists in one's flesh and blood. St. Augustine, in his *Confessions*, spoke of *facere veritatem* (make your

truth). These are instances of death of your ego and the self. I am a spokesperson of Christ whose tragic dimension of life cannot be erased and denied to defend the church, which, if done will be a betrayal.

I had to die to myself and become filled with the spirit of the Church –the Holy Spirit. May I quote St Augustine who wrote, “*si fallor sum*” (if I fail or fall I am), which is the ur-form of Cartesian *Cogito*, but has a different meaning. If I fail, I am; but, if I don’t fail, I am not, but Christ’s spirit speaks thorough me.

Much of what I have written is about agonizing instants. But when I spoke of Mother Theresa, Sts Chavara, Euprasia, Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil, those were ecstatic moments of power and glory for the church. But, often the media is interested in exceptions than in the regular life of sanity and sanctity, which happily is very common.

#### **4. Self-Constancy and Self-Criticism**

If the instances of my media intervention were my instants of death, then and only then I have succeeded in my work as a spokesperson. I stay always on the path of deconstruction and examination of conscience, both as an individual and as a Church. On certain occasions I had the confusion of Baudelino of Umberto Eco: “I confuse between what I see with what I wish to see.” The stories that are, are being haunted by the stories that could be. When I studied the stories where Church was accused, I have found innocent and upright men and women of the Church accused and made scapegoats of either of mimetic rivalry by certain vested interests or of the scandal mongering media. I also have found cases where Christians in the Church were betraying Christ to save the Church. The same temptation of the Cardinal in

Ivan Karamazov's short story *The Grand Inquisitor* in Dostoevsky's *Karamazov Brothers*. I quote as Slavoj Zizek the Slovenian, who studied the reasons of the fall of communism, gave his book this title *For they know not what they do*. The only reason he finds for the fall of communism is what G.K. Chesterton has told us years back when he studied detective stories: "morality is the most dark and daring of conspiracies." With profuse caveats I may dare to say that the fall of communism or the fall of Christianity are two sides of the same coin.

*(Adapted from the Talk delivered at Papal Athenaeum, JDV, Pune, on 16-2-2017.)*

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*(Continued from p. 48)*

We can lose our jobs, families, houses, money, health and even life itself. But often we forget one thing that whatever trouble or crisis affects us there is a God who understands our situations better than we ourselves. Our heavenly Father knows exactly what is happening to us. The next time when fear catch holds of our lives, let us not forget to remember that being faithful to Christ in this life is much more important than the fear of rejection and loss. Also let us take a moment to recall some of the great promises of our God. Let us also remind ourselves that God cares for us and we are His dearest children! **-J Rino**

## SOME TALK THE TALK, BUT MAY STUMBLE WALKING THE TALK

A man was being tailgated by a stressed-out woman on a busy boulevard. Suddenly, the light turned yellow, just in front of him. He did the right thing, stopping at the crosswalk, even though he could have beaten the red light by accelerating through the intersection.

The tailgating woman hit the roof, and the horn, screaming in frustration as she missed her chance to get through the intersection with him. As she was still in mid-rant, she heard a tap on her window and looked up into the face of a very serious police officer.

The officer ordered her to exit her car with her hands up. He took her to the police station where she was searched, fingerprinted, photographed, and placed in a cell.

After a couple of hours, a policeman approached the cell and opened the door. She was escorted back to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting with her personal effects.

He said, "I'm very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, flipping the guy off in front of you, and cussing a blue streak at him. I noticed the 'What Would Jesus Do' bumper sticker, the 'Follow Me to Sunday School' bumper sticker and the chrome-plated fish emblem on the trunk. Naturally, I assumed you had stolen the car."

Author Unknown

## Homily Notes

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May 07, 2017: Fourth Sunday of Easter

I Acts. 2:14a.36-41; II 1 Pet. 2: 20b-25; III Jn. 10: 1-10

### **Jesus the Shepherd and Guardian of our Souls**

As we continue our Easter journey, on this fourth Sunday, we are presented with the most committed and never compromising shepherd and guardian of our souls, who even sacrificed His life for the salvation of the sheep. We have this theme of shepherding and calling throughout today's readings, In the first reading Acts 2: 38, Peter exhorts those in Jerusalem: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is made to you and to your children and for all those are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." In the second reading, 1 Peter 2:20-25, Peter writes that Christ has laid down an example for his followers in order for them to cease being led astray and return to "the shepherd and the guardian of your souls." In the gospel reading, in the parable of good shepherd, Jesus is presented as our shepherd who leads, protects and guides us to the safest pastures of life.

Gospel presents Jesus as the shepherd who gathers his sheep by calling them personally. The sheep know his voice and follow him (10:4). This is the first way we can know if we are his sheep. We hear the voice of Jesus and we follow him. In John chapter 9 the blind man heard the voice of Jesus, followed what Jesus said to do, and he was healed. The Pharisees and Jewish leaders are not listening to the voice of Jesus and they are not following him. Therefore, they are still in their sins. Do we know the voice of

Jesus? Do you know his teachings? Do you read his words? Do you do exactly what he says? Do you follow him wherever he goes?

Jesus calls his sheep by name. Jesus knows your name. Jesus knows who you are. A mother was once asked by a census-taker how many children she had. She replied, 'Well, there's Geo and Tom and Martha and...' 'Never mind the names,' the man interrupted, 'Just give me the numbers'. The mother angrily replied, 'They don't have numbers, they all have names!' This might be a funny story, but in our modern world this is so true. We are often reduced to numbers and statistics, by the government and commercial world (Adhar Number, Election Card No, Insurance No, Health Card No, ATM and Pan No. etc.) All our identities are reduced into mere numbers. But Jesus Christ knows each and every one of us by our names, just like a shepherd knows each and every one of the sheep in his flock. Personal names and identities are important to God, especially his own. Do we really need any more than this? Jesus knows you and is calling you by name to follow him. He knows YOU! That's exciting!

So in today's Eucharistic celebration let us reflect on whom are you listening to? What are you listening to? True disciples only listen to the voice of Jesus. True disciples only follow Jesus. True disciples receive salvation, safety, and satisfaction. They have abundant life. **-Ciril Vallomkunnel**

May 14 2017: V Sunday of Easter  
I Acts 6: 1-7; II 1Peter 2: 4-9; III Jn 14:1-12

### **Jesus as the Way, the Truth and Life**

A famous American author says; "What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals." Today's gospel strongly affirms that Jesus is the way to the Father. A way usually leads to a destination. But it is difficult to identify the way with the destination. For instance, the way to our cathedral cannot be identified as the cathedral. It would be strange if the way itself becomes the destination. Then, isn't it something strange that Gospel according to John shares with us today?



Jesus is the way to the Father. He is the life and the truth. He says that He is the way and the destination as well. The Father and the Son are mutually indwelled. So, one who finds the way finds the father himself. The Son is the supreme revealer of the Father. That is, we know the Abba only through and by his Son. Thus it is an invitation to all to receive eternal life by accepting Jesus - the way, the truth and the life. The Spirit of the Lord leads us to the fullness of the truth. So, let us pray to the Holy Spirit to walk in the correct path in our daily life and to also lead our life partner, children and friends to Jesus.

Finally may our goals be not to achieve something but to become true disciples of Jesus. May we truly experience Jesus as the Way, Truth and Life. **-Bibin**

May 21, 2017; VI Sunday of Easter

I Acts 8:5-8.14-17; II 1Peter 3:15-18; III Jn 14:15-21

### **Holy Spirit is with Us**

Today we are called to reflect on the theme ‘Divine presence of the holy spirit’, it refers to the missionary age of the Christians and the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit given to the apostles. Jesus offers us His Holy Spirit to be with us forever. In the Gospel Jesus calls Him the advocate, the spirit of truth who will live in the hearts of the believers to console and guide them. Even though the presence of the Holy Spirit is a free gift of God’s love it is only received by those who desire and prepare themselves for it.

The first reading from the Acts of the Apostles exhorts us with the persecution of the early church in Jerusalem and yet Christianity spreads through the surrounding places. Philip went through the towns and villages of Samaritans proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ. The apostles were called to lay their hands on them, so that the community receives the Holy Spirit. Today the priests and religious are called to continue the work of the apostles and proclaim the message of Christ.

The Gospel continues the farewell discourse of Jesus, where He prepares his disciples not only for his coming suffering and death

but also for his resurrection and ascension. He promises them that even afterward he will remain with them but in a different way from now. The reading is the continuation of last Sunday where we left off. Last Sunday's passage centered on believing in Jesus, and today it centers on loving Him. Those who love Jesus keep his commandments. In other words, covenant fidelity is an outpouring of love. Jesus is about to leave the world and return to His Father and when He is no longer physically present He promises to send another advocate, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth to be with us always.

Many in the world do not recognize the Spirit. They people are deaf to the Spirit. The disciples of Christ however do know the Spirit, and though Jesus tells his disciples that He is about to leave them and they are clearly alarmed. Jesus assures them that they will not be deserted like orphans. The followers of Christ will never be cut off from Jesus. They will always share His love, peace, joy and hope in their day to day life. He reassures the disciples that He will come back; he will continue to be with them but in a different way. Therefore, 'Anybody who has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me, will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.' **-Derhasat Narzary**

May 28, 2017: Ascension of the Lord  
I Acts 1:1-11: II Eph 1:17-23: III Mt 28:16-20

### **Making Disciples of All Nations**

The Gospels contain many parables of a master who sets out on a long journey and gives his servants charge of his estate until his return. In the feast of the Ascension of the Lord parable becomes reality. Jesus departs to his heavenly Father and leaves his disciples in charge of the affairs of his kingdom till his return in glory. Each of the Gospels we have ends with a scene in which Jesus finally takes leave of his disciples. These farewell scenes focus not on describing the event in detail but on the last words that Jesus leaves with his disciples. In fact, the very fact of a bodily ascension of Jesus into heaven is described only by Luke. It is Luke who wrote

the Acts of the Apostles from which we got our first reading today. A later ending of Mark also includes the Ascension. There are important similarities and differences between Luke and Acts on the one hand, and Matthew and Mark on the other, regarding the details of this farewell scene.

For example, in Luke-Acts the Ascension takes place in Jerusalem, whereas in Matthew and Mark it takes place in Galilee. Both traditions, however, agree that it took place on a mountain. In Luke-Acts the Ascension happens forty days after the Resurrection during which period Jesus appears repeatedly to his followers. In Matthew and Mark there is no indication of this time period between the Resurrection and the Ascension, rather the first appearance of Jesus to his disciples after the resurrection is also the last. The gospel writers apparently were not aiming at accuracy in historical details; they were more concerned with transmitting a message.

So what is the message, the charge that Jesus gives his disciples as he takes physical leave of them? It is: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

These are the last words of Jesus as recorded differently in the Acts and in Matthew and Mark. All of them are in agreement that (a) Jesus gave his disciples a mission, a task to engage them till he returns in glory, and (b) he assured them of divine assistance in the carrying out of this mission.

The mission is to bear witness to the Good News of Jesus to the ends of the earth, to go into all nations of the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.. The universal reach of this mission is very clear. The message of Jesus is meant to be good news in the ears of all humankind irrespective of nationality or culture. Given the fact that till date many nations have embraced other religions in preference to the gospel, maybe it is time to ask: Are these people rejecting the message of Jesus or are they rejecting the messengers and the way in which they have presented it?

The air of superiority and triumphalism assumed by many Christian missionaries is a disservice to the gospel and not part of the good news. Have we perhaps spoilt the Good Story in the telling?

At the beginning of the twentieth century, some mission-minded Christians started a periodical and called it “The Christian Century.” That title was an expression of their triumphalistic belief that by the end of the century the whole world would have been Christianized. Today we have hopefully grown wiser and humbler as we realize that in the 20th century, not only did we fail to Christianize the whole world, but rather that we added two world wars to our record of “accomplishments.”

The spreading of the Good News to all nations is not a goal that can be attained by dint of human might and craft. That is why Jesus promises to empower his messengers from on high by his abiding presence and the Holy Spirit. The challenge of sharing the Good News with all humankind should, therefore, begin on our knees as we confess that we have often taken matters into our own selfish human hands and promise to give the Holy Spirit a chance. -**Munachi E. Ezeogu, cssp** (From Internet)

June 4, 2017: Pentecost Sunday

I Acts 2:1-11; II 1 Cor. 12:3b-7, 12-13; III Jn 20:19-23

### **The Language Everyone Understands**

“King without palace, soldier without weapon but still conquered the whole world without fighting, but only by Love. He is the resurrected Jesus.” Today we are celebrating the feast of Pentecost. The word Pentecost literally means “Fiftieth,” because it was celebrated fifty days after the Feast of the Passover. It was originally a day of thanksgiving to God for the completion of good harvest. At Pentecost, two loaves of bread were offered in gratitude for the harvest. Later, the Jews added the remembrance of Yahweh’s covenant with Noah, which took place fifty days after the great deluge, to the Feast of the Pentecost. Still later, they made this feast an occasion of thanksgiving to God for His

Sinaitic covenant with Moses, which also occurred fifty days after the beginning of the Jewish exodus from Egypt.

Today both the Jews and the Christians celebrate Pentecost. But for the Christians it is a memorial of the day the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles and the Virgin Mary in the form of fiery tongues – an event that took place fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus. Pentecost also commemorates the official inauguration of the Christian Church by the apostolic preaching of St. Peter, resulting in the conversion of 3000 Jews to the Christian faith. It is thus the official birthday of the Church.

The first reading describes in detail, the miraculous transformation that took place during the Pentecost. The disciples experienced the power of the Holy Spirit as it flooded them like parted tongues of fire. As a result of this experience, the frightened apostles were transformed into brave witnesses of Jesus, powerfully proclaiming Him as the promised Messiah-- the Lord and Saviour of all mankind. On this occasion, the Jews and proselytes from other countries, who knew very little of Aramaic or Hebrew, miraculously heard the Word of God in their own languages. The Holy Spirit gave this “power of tongues” to the apostles in order that their message could reach every heart. He empowered the early Christians to radiate the love of Christ and their strong faith. It was this “anointing by the Holy Spirit” that supported and strengthened the early Christian martyrs during the period of brutal persecution that followed.

This feast also takes us to the language of the heart. A child may not know the spoken language but surely feel and experience the language of love. That could be expressed in many ways, where there is love, smile exists for ever. Wherever there is love miracle happen. Wherever there is love, hatred ends. Wherever there is love, peace begins. Wherever there is love the community transforms. wherever there is love the society develops. Because God is Love. **-Dn. Pritam Bara**

June 11, 2017: Trinity Sunday  
I Ex 34. 4-6,8-9; II 2Cor13. 11-13; III Jn 3 16-18

### **The Depth of Our Relationships**

First Sunday after Pentecost, the Catholic Church celebrates the feast of the Holy Trinity. It is a feast of relationships; relationship among the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Therefore it is apt to ponder over our family ties.

In the Gospel we hear from the evangelist St. John, for God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. And the first reading from Exodus we see the depths of His love that Lord is merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and so on.

In the gospels, the manifestation of God's love is depicted as the lamb of God. What's the meaning of this metaphor? Leviticus chapter 16 and explain it convincingly. Prophet Aron sacrifices two lambs, one for the sin offering and the second for the atonement of the sins of the faithful. The lamb being sacrificed for the sins of the people in the new testament is Jesus.

This sort of sacrifice still happens in our families. Parents sacrifice their career, comforts, energy for their children. Spouse sacrifice his or her comfort zones for the sake of family and to strengthen the mutual bond to each other. By doing this they become a blessing to one another. It is inevitably visible in the modern nuclear family. May the feast of Holy Trinity helps us to love and rise to next level of greatness. That of deep and genuine relationship among ourselves and with God! -**Nixon SVD**

June 18, Sunday: Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ  
I Dt. 8:2-3, 14b-16a; II 1Cor 10:16-17; III Jn 6:51-58

### **Breaking Ourselves for Others**

Today the Catholic Church celebrates the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, Corpus Christi. It is the solemn celebration of our belief that the Body and Blood of Christ is really present

in the Holy Eucharist. This is really an auspicious occasion for expressing our joy of the institution of the Holy Eucharist on Maundy Thursday and the sober atmosphere of the Good Friday.

The readings of this feast lead us into the depth of the Eucharistic theology. The Lord provided manna from the heaven and water from the rock in the wilderness journey of Israel to sustain and strengthen them on their way to the Promised Land. This manna and water in the desert prefigure the Eucharistic body and blood of Christ. Jesus offers his own body and blood for the nourishment of our souls in our journey into the eternal life. "I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world." Jesus gave us his own body and blood as our spiritual food in the form of bread and wine in order to abide in us and make us united with him. "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person." This Eucharistic communion with Christ finds its fulfilment in our unity with our brethren. It is when the Christ in me recognizes the Christ in others that the Eucharistic communion is fulfilled. Thus we all together should build a Eucharistic community in Christ where all abide in love and service for each other. This is what St. Paul envisioned when he writes to the church in Corinth: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."

As we celebrate the solemnity of the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be strengthened in our faith in the presence of the lord in the Eucharist. Receiving Corpus Christi demands from us to be alter Christi. So we shall live a life of Eucharistic communion breaking up ourselves for the service of others and be life givers after the example of Jesus Christ our Lord and Master.

**-Arun CST**

June 25, 2017: XII Sunday of the Year  
I-Jer.20:10-13; II-Rom.5:12-15; III-Mt.10:26-33

**Do Not Be Afraid!**

Today's liturgy of the Word invites us to live without fear. The readings remind us of the hostility we will encounter as we carry on the work of Jesus in the world and so the readings encourage us to persevere in doing the work of Jesus. They assure us that our work will be effective despite the opposition we encounter. In the Gospel Jesus commands his disciples not to fear their persecutors.

The first reading from Jeremiah reflects on the suffering of the believer. Jeremiah is confident that God would not let his enemies overcome him. He says, "But the Lord is with me, like a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail." In the second reading Paul assures the faithful followers of Jesus that they need not be afraid of opposition because they share in the death and resurrection of Jesus. With these words of encouragement Paul explains why, in spite of the bitter experience of opposition, their work will be effective. Since Jesus, by his death and resurrection has conquered sin, his followers will eventually succeed in carrying out His works of bringing joy to the world. We need not be afraid of those who oppose us, for we are united with Christ in His resurrection.

If we are loyal to Jesus in this life, Jesus will be loyal to us in the life to come. On the other hand, if we are too proud to acknowledge that Christ is our Lord and Saviour, He will not acknowledge us in the next life. Hence we must not deny Him through our silence, word or deed. We must not be ashamed to live as people of faith and proclaim our Christian convictions when necessary. Sometimes we are afraid that we will make a wrong decision. Sometimes we are afraid of what others will think when we speak of Jesus. Sometimes we are afraid of what the future will bring to us. At the root of these fears is the fear of loss. Every fear we have is grounded in the knowledge that we have something or someone to lose.

*(Contd on p. 37)*