



Asian Journal of Religious Studies

“The Lord is truly among us.”

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Editorial

Caring for Mother Earth

Just days after President Donald Trump announced his decision to pull the United States out of the Paris Agreement on combating climate change, Pope Francis issued a reminder about the universal need to care for the Earth.

The Pontiff tweeted on June 5, 2017 : “We must never forget that the natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone.” The Pope referred to World Environment Day, which is celebrated on June 5, as a way of sensitizing people to the need to live in harmony with nature, in order to ensure sustainable development and the future of humanity.

“Connecting people to nature” is the motto chosen by the United Nations for this year’s day with a view to a more friendly and constructive relationship between humans and the environment. The purpose is to encourage us to “go outside and go into nature to appreciate its beauty and reflect on how we are an integral part and how much we depend on it.”

Trump dealt a major blow to the international effort to protect the environment with his announcement on June 1, 2017 that the U.S. will withdraw from the 2015 accord. Under the terms of the deal, U.S. cannot officially withdraw until November 2019. When it does, the U.S. will join Syria and Nicaragua as the only other countries outside the agreement to combat climate change.

Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, head of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, described the move as “a huge slap in the face.” Barely a week ago, the U.S. president met with Pope Francis for the first time and promised to read the pontiff’s 184-page encyclical on climate change. Francis gifted Trump a copy of his 2015 encyclical, “Laudato Si,” which makes the case that climate change is inherently a moral and spiritual issue that disproportionately affects the poor and the marginalized.

The encyclical outlines Francis’ staunch belief that the environmental crisis facing the world is caused by human activity, and that the world’s leaders must act swiftly to confront what he called a “global problem with grave implications.”

“Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming, or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it.”

“Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming, or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it,” Francis said in the encyclical.

May we learn to take care of mother earth so that we can hand it over to our posterity tenderly and carefully. We need to remind ourselves that the earth is sacred and we are part of it. We are called to shepherd and not conquer it!

Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ
The Editor

Sannyasa and Consecrated Life

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S*annyasa* in India and consecrated life in Christianity represent lives of renunciation in two different traditions. Though both have a common aim that is liberation, the ways and methods adopted by them are different. *Sannyasa* in the Indian tradition, in general, is a life of total renunciation after going through student life (*Brahmacharya*), householder's life (*Grihastha*) and life in the forest (*Vanaprashtha*). These three stages of life are a preparation for *sannyasa*. Whereas consecrated life in the Christian tradition doesn't require these preparatory stages, because the seeker heavily depends on God's grace and it is a divine call. However, a Christian consecrated person in India may draw inspiration from *sannyasa* so that the consecrated life may become more relevant to the Indian context.

1. Origin of Asceticism in India

There are different opinions among scholars regarding the origin of asceticism in India, the earliest signs can be seen in the Indus Valley Civilization. The characteristics of the three-faced deity and, the priest-king concentrating on the tip of his nose and other miniature statues indicate the familiarity of the people of Indus Valley with ascetical practices and meditation as early as 2500 BC. Some other scholars suggest that the Rg Vedic *Munisukta* 10.136, as a reliable source of the origin of asceticism in India. Asceticism

originated in India as an ‘individual phenomenon’ and it consists of “a complex number of traits viz. celibacy, austerity, concentration and ecstasy.” There are references to *muni*, *yogi*, *sannyasi*, *kesin* etc., in the Vedas. *Vratyas* (wandering almsmen) in the Vedas could be the prototype of *sannyasa* of the later years.

2. Asceticism in Buddhism

Bhikkhus, *Samanas*, *Yatis*, *Sannyasins* and *brahmanas* are the terms used in the Buddha and Jaina tradition for ascetics. For attaining the supreme goal, *Nibbana* ‘family men go from home to homelessness.’ The wandering almsmen (*bhikkhu*) of the early times of Buddhism started living in primitive settlements which were called *av-*

“When he has thus become a samana, he practises self-restraint in accordance with the fundamental precepts. He attains mindfulness and clearness of comprehension.”

asa or *arama*. There is a reference to a wandering Ascetic Potthapada with a following of three thousand wandering ascetics in the *Potthapadasutta of Dighanikaya* (No. IX.406 p. 125). Buddha, to a question by King Ajathasattu of Magadha, on the merit of being a *sramana* or *brahmana* said, “When he has thus become a *samana*, he practises self-restraint in accordance with the fundamental precepts. He attains mindfulness and clearness of comprehension.” (*Samannaphala Sutta of Digha Nikaya*. No. 193).

4. Sannyasa in the Upanishad

A *sanyasin* or a monk is expected to reach perfection and total detachment in life. Austere life style has been the hallmark of *sannyasa*. This will enable the seeker to develop detachment to actions and result of actions. During the time

of the major Upanishads (700-550 B C) renunciation (*tyaga*) became the focus of the Upanishadic search for the knowledge about Brahman. Seventeen out of the 108 Upanishads deal with the concept *sannyasa* in terms like *bhiksu* (one who lives on alms), *sannyasin* (one who has completely renounced the world), *parivrajaka* (one who wanders around without a home), *avadhuta* (mystic who is beyond ego-consciousness) and *paramahansa* (one who practises spiritual discernment, superswan).

4. *Sannyasa* in the Hindu Literature

Family life, according to the *Dharmasastras* is the highest form of life. Kautilya in his *Arthashastra* explains the four stages of life as eternally determined based on the three Vedas. Kautilya allows a man beyond the age of copulation, after distributing the wealth he acquired among his sons and wife, to become an ascetic (*A S II. 30-31*). According to *Vaikhanasadharmaprasna* Brahmins alone were allowed to become *sannyasi*. However, Manu extended it to the twice born (*Dvija*, whose sacrament of initiation is regarded as a second or spiritual birth).

Vyasa in the *Mahabharata* refers to *varnasramadharma* in Ch. XIII. In the *Uma-Maheshwarasamvada* Siva tells Uma the characteristics of a *vanaprastha* as “yogic postures and penances, rituals and vows, shaving of the head, yellow robes, and adherence to the path of good” (*Mbha XIII. 141*). Meditation is the highest power of yogins. Bhagavad Gita does not specifically speak about *sannyasa* as a state of life. Gita does not agree with various methods of self-torture as a means of liberation because they are demonic practices.

In the *Ramayana* hermits, *munis* and *risis* through austere practices acquired yogic powers like intuition (Ram

VII.9.19, seeing things in the faraway places (Ram I.84; Sage Gautama), getting divine eye, ability to see past present and future, (Ram I.3.4.6.7; Valmiki). *Virasana* was a common posture adopted for meditation, (Manu VII.10.4. Manu was of the opinion that one should enter *sannyasa* when one's hair turned grey and that too having passed through the three stages or *ashramas* in their respective order, (Manu VI.2, 33). Only a *brahmana* is entitled to enter the fourth *ashrama* i.e., *sannyasa*. A *sannyasi* is allowed to possess only three things i.e., a seven knotted bamboo stick, a gourd full of water, and an antelope's skin. Patanjali systematized the science of yoga in eight steps based on ethical values, physical mental discipline, and control of senses leading to concentration, meditation and finally *samadhi*. Yoga's focus is on spiritual enlightenment and experience of supreme bliss. *Tapas* is one of the means of knowing Brahman (Br. Up. IV.4.22).

“The true self is imperishable; therefore, when a man finds it, he finds happiness which does not come to an end... know first that ‘I’ and then you shall know the truth. To know all except the knower is but ignorance.”

Ramana Maharshi's message to Paul Brunton reveals the essence of *sannyasa* in Indian tradition, “The true self is imperishable; therefore, when a man finds it, he finds happiness which does not come to an end... know first that ‘I’ and then you shall know the truth. To know all except the knower is but ignorance.”¹

5. Christian Consecrated Life in India

Most of the Christian religious congregations both men and women, follow western model of religious life which is rather alien to Indian masses. Our life style, dress code and imposing institutional structures alienate the ordinary people from us. It is indeed a very encouraging sign that many of the religious congregations realizing these limitations are reinterpreting their constitutions and adapting themselves to Indian context. There are a number of consecrated people and ashrams following the Indian Christian *Sannyasa* tradition in India today.

Consecrated life as a form of ascetical life is the participation of the 'communion of life' in the church as a means to perfection following the example of Jesus who 'humbled himself, becoming obedient to death' to do the will of the Father. Throughout the history of consecrated life in the Church, the eremitical and coenobitical aspects were always present but in varying proportions. Voluntary celibacy was a clear sign of a person's being committed to an eremitical or a coenobitical way of life.

6. Origin of Monasticism in the Church

Antony of Egypt, a solitary monk (c 251-356), Athanasius, Bishop and acetic (c 295 -373) and Pachomius, founder of organized monastic communities (292-346) were shining examples of ascetic life in the early centuries of Christianity. Basil the Great (c.330-79) the founder of Eastern Monasticism, provided the basis for the Rule still followed by religious in the Eastern Church. This Rule is called Asceticon, and consists of questions asked by devout persons and answers given by Basil on monastic life during his travels. Monasticism in the west is inspired by St. Benedict of Nursia

(c.480-c.550). Monastic life is a search of God in the Church through the practise of charity, humility and hope experiencing the guidance of the spirit in prayer and self- sacrifice. Basil in his letters elaborately dealt with monastic life in solitude which became a source of inspiration for Benedict in his book *Rule of Benedict*.²

7. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556)

He was one who read the signs of the time responded by placing religious life outside the monastic mould. His attempt was how to further the Kingdom of God and assist in the mission of the Church in the world. The Council of Trent (1545-63) spoke of religious life as superior to marriage. The documents of Vatican II insist on the universal call to holiness. The *Perfectae Caritatis*, Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life, call for a return to the sources or Christian life and to the original inspiration and an adjustment to the changed conditions of today.

8. The Desert Fathers

Living in solitude and prayer with total dependence on God, they play a vital role in the ‘wilderness spirituality’ in the Church. Consecrated life in the Church is a call into the wilderness and total dependence on God. The vast majority of the consecrated people live in the world actively involved in the struggles and problems of the people. But there is a small minority of consecrated people who follow the spirit of the desert, hermit, and wilderness traditions.

Swami Abhiksiktananda speaks about *sannyasa* as the most precious treasure of Indian spiritual tradition from which the Christians in India learn a lot. Vatican Council II exhorted the members of the Church to “acknowledge,

preserve and promote whatever good things, spiritual and moral as well as the socio-cultural values found among them' (N.A.no 2). *Perfectae Caritatis* encouraged Christians in different countries to integrate the ascetic and cultural aspects into Christian religious life.

9. Need for Integration

There was a felt need in the Indian Church to integrate the ideals of Indian *sannyasa* into the

There was a felt need in the Indian Church to integrate the ideals of Indian sannyasa into the consecrated life in the Church.

consecrated life in the Church. This desire of the church was clearly articulated in the national seminar on Church in India held in 1969. During the inaugural address of the All India Seminar on Church in India Today, Cardinal Pignedoli, the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, stressed the need for Indian Christian *sannyasa*. We live among the Hindu and Buddhist *sannyasa* tradition where the monks are respected as the embodiment of wisdom and detachment.

In 1950 Swami Parama-arupi Ananda and Abhikshik-tananda started Saccidananda ashram in Santivanam, Trichy, which encouraged others to start Christian ashrams in India. Abhikshiktananda was of the opinion that *sannyasa* and monasticism are the meeting point of the Church in India and the Indian religions. *Sannyasa* reveals the greatness and depth of India's spiritual heritage through men who renounced everything in search of God experience. He felt that *sannyasa* would be the appropriate starting point of inculturation and adaptation in India. The Women's section of the Catholic

Religious of India in their annual meeting in Bangalore in 1976 advised its members in India to integrate the positive elements from *sannyasa*.

10. Insights from Sannyasa for Consecrated life in India

a. Renunciation

Renunciation is the core of *sannyasa* in the Indian tradition. According to Ramana Maharshi, renunciation is not discarding the external things, but of ego. A *sannyasi* may experience equanimity of heart; dualities of life will not disturb his equilibrium any more. Jesus wanted his disciples to renounce everything and follow him. Our religious dress more than being a symbol of simplicity and renunciation functions as a sign of separation and superiority. Ordinary people feel distanced from the consecrated people.

b. Relevance of Religious Vows

Chastity enables a person to remain pure in mind and body, vow of obedience helps a person to completely empty one's ego and poverty increases the complete dependence on God. Whatever happens, a *sannyasi* is happy always. In Hinduism *brahmacharya* is the highest spiritual value, it is walking with *brahman*. Both in Hinduism and Christianity *brahmacharya* is union with God and love of humans.

c. Austere Life Style

Severe ascetical practices of unimaginable intensity have been associated with *sannyasa* in India. *Sannyasis* endure extreme ascetical practices in order to progress in spiritual life. "In summer let him expose himself to the heat of five fires, during the rainy season live under the open sky, and in

winter be dressed in wet clothes, thus gradually increasing the rigour of his austerities” (Manu VI. 23).

d. *Meditation*

Meditation is the foundation on which a *sannyasi* builds his spiritual life. Manu says, “By deep meditation let him recognise the subtle nature of the supreme Soul, and its presence in all

“By assuming this central institution of religious in India, purifying and transforming and in a way transubstantiating it, the church will realize the most important step towards the integration of India’s spiritual riches as a whole.”

organisms, both the highest and the lowest.” (Manu VI.65). Through meditation one can attain indescribable benefits (Manu VI.73). Vat II in its decree on the relationship with non-Christian religions, acknowledged the contemplative aspect of Hinduism, ascetical practices and deep meditation and loving trusting flight towards God. (N. A. no. 2).

e. *Role of a Guru*

Guru is the one who dispels the darkness in the mind of the disciple. In the Indian tradition guru is equated with Brahman, one who has realized Brahman. He is an enlightened person like Buddha. An enlightened guru will practise whatever he/she teaches. We in the consecrated life need enlightened gurus who are capable of guiding others to God. A genuine teacher will easily know the inner life of the disciple and guide him/her accordingly.

Conclusion

Consecrated life in India will undergo unprecedented changes in the future; already the process is going on. The economic prosperity in the country, influence of secular

ideologies, availability of enormous opportunities outside for better life, absence of inspiring models in the religious life, reluctance of religious congregations to read the signs of time and translate them into practical life, unwillingness of young people to go through rigorous and austere life, intolerance towards being challenged, lack of credibility and will for formators to care-front those who are in formation are some of the factors that will impact consecrated life in the coming years. As a result houses that are built on solid foundation will survive and others will face turbulent times. In this struggle for survival some of the congregations and individuals will compromise with the core values which will be equally disastrous in the long run. Alternate models of consecrated life will emerge. Indian *sannyasa* is a great tradition which still continues to exercise tremendous influence on the life and values of the people India. In spite of all the limitations, as Abhikshiktananda says, *sannyasa* is the appropriate partner to reinvent and reinvigorate consecrated life in India.

Let me conclude with the words of Abhikshiktananda, a genuine seeker from Europe who integrated the Christian monastic ideals and Indian *sannyasa* in the right spirit, “By assuming this central institution of religious in India (*sannyasa*), purifying and transforming and in a way transubstantiating it, the church will realize the most important step towards the integration of India’s spiritual riches as a whole.”³

Notes

1. Brunton, Paul. *A Search in Secret India*. New York: S. Weiser, 1981, p. 146.
2. See Chittister, Joan. *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages* the Crossroad Spiritual Legacy Series. New York: Crossroad, 1992.
3. Abhikshiktananda. “Christian Sannyasis,” *Clergy Monthly Supplement*. IV (1958) p. 107.

The Changing Face of Addiction: A Journey of 35 Years of Kripa Foundation

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In the year after the Canonisation of Mother Teresa, Kripa Foundation owes a special debt of gratitude to the saint of the gutters. It was she who first felt the need to find a solution to the cause of abject poverty. Her sisters felt the helplessness of dealing with the poor who had hit rock bottom of poverty and hunger owing to Addiction to alcohol and drugs. In the year 1981 she showed me a dying destitute at *Asha-Daan* who was a former Air Force Pilot! It was with the three persons recommended by the then superior Sr. Cabrini, along with the road side drunks and drug addicts especially along Chapel Road, that Kripa Foundation was born. The average age of our clients in those days was 45 to 55 years. While today the average age has dropped to 14 to 24 years! Above all there is a global trend of increasing addictions, not just to Alcohol but all kinds of substances and behaviours. With the easy availability of disposable money and the attraction of seeking pleasure oriented entertainment, all kinds of agents of self-gratification are making an inroad into gullible youth and adults. There is a captive clientele for all satanic creative self-gratification. The most widespread one being ‘pornography’. With the easy and cheap access to technology like mobiles and internet, even underprivileged and destitute children are observed indulging in such

preoccupation. It was Carl Gustav Jung who remarked that Addiction is a “fight between Gods.” He said that God and Satan are at war and Satan uses mind altering substances such as Alcohol to deviate the original thirst in the human being. He explains that we all thirst for love, for God. However instead of exploding in this love and God, Satan deceptively “implodes” this thirst through all kinds of Addictions. Dr. Jung also said that he did not like the word “Satan” because of the misuse of this phenomenon by Religions in the form of “the Devil.” But it is this Evil that has cleverly named Alcohol “Spirit” and makes people think that they are able to handle this chemical with their own strength which is a deception. Because an alcoholic or addict would never be able to fight this evil with their own strength and would be doomed to relapses and repeated failures until they either lose their mind or have an untimely death! Hence the formula that Dr. Jung gave is “*Spiritus contra spiritum*” meaning; only by God’s Spirit (His Grace) can one overcome the spirit, viz. alcohol! And so the entire effort of the Archdiocesan project for battling Addiction and AIDS is named Kripa, which in Sanskrit means “God’s Grace.”

Addiction also brings about many addiction related ailments such as HIV AIDS. Through the KRIPA AIDS project we are able to reach out to those afflicted by a variety of blood borne pathogens. From primary care projects for prevention of addiction and HIV infection to the care and support of HIV AIDS infected, Kripa has multiple projects across the country that cover not only the individual afflicted but also the family and society that is “affected”. In the dimension of the family and society the big obstacle is “Denial.” Both family members as well as society at large are not aware of the wide spread phenomenon of Addiction. Our educational institutions and especially the management of many are to-

tally blind to the presence of all kinds of addiction rampant within their premises. In a renowned institution we also came across ex-students and dropouts operating as Pedlars! There are some very affluent institutions that have attracted many parents to send their children for higher education. Even Medical and Engineering Colleges including Management Institutions are challenged by the presence of an ever growing lobby of “Weed users.” The tragedy is that while the kids tell their parents and also themselves believe that this is not a drug, we have an increasing number of cases who are the victims of cannabis and alcohol induced Psychosis and schizophrenia.

There is also a ‘Holier than thou’ attitude of ***“It is a dubious luxury to think that you are not an addict.”***

the Parent generation who think that addiction is a problem of the youth but their child would not be affected. It was Dr. Vernon Johnson who said that “it is a dubious luxury to think that you are not an addict.” A Kripa recovery from a slum discovered that his father was a gambling addict and had even gambled away the ‘mangal sutra’ of his wife! The man was then coerced into treatment by the timely encouragement of the Parish Priest where he was employed. Today addiction has become a life-style for many. Owing to the rise of materialistic attraction and affluence, all kinds of greed and attachments to so called “status symbols” are driving our people into a life style that brings about stress and stress related ailments. One of the major fall out of stress is Addiction and so when people talk of “chilling out” it is mainly giving in to all kinds of gratification that drag them into compulsive use.

In the recent teachings of Pope Francis, especially “*Amoris Laetitia*” one finds most relevant instructions to prevent giving rise to an addictive generation. The role of the family is

paramount in the prevention of addictive behaviour. Many children, totally oblivious of the genetic predisposition fall victim to social use initially and then slip into compulsive use. Those not having this component may be able to quit relatively easily and walk away from this evil while about one tenth of the youth destroy their entire career and life. Hence building strong relationships in the family is the best investment that Parents can make, moreover, the most precious gift one can give their child is the quality of love they observe between their parents. Martin Buber said that Love is an '*I-thou*' relationship. When a person does not receive that love one chooses a substitute and it becomes an '*I-It*' relationship. That '*It*' stands for a variety of addictive substances as well as sex, gambling, power and god in the form of religious fundamentalism. The changing face of addiction is making our life more and more insecure and uncertain. It is therefore necessary that we identify the addictive component in all break down of the human being and work as friends of Kripa to restore our original blessing.

The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few. The only way we can fight this evil is by a strong sense of fellowship. The healing principle of Kripa is 'mutually shared vulnerability empowers one another.' We invite more and more youth and families to become friends of Kripa and spread the good news that though Addiction is a "no-cure" ailment, there is treatment and recovery and we can all be "wounded healers" in the likeness of Jesus. As the twelfth step of the self-help model states, "having had a spiritual awakening ...we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

The Mystery of Evil

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God is good and all His creatures are good (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, etc.). But the presence of evil in and around us baffles us and defies any rational explanation. God is not the author of evil. Instead of blotting it out entirely from the created realm, God tolerates evil and uses it to serve his plan, in which the evil has a positive role to play. What follows below is a reflection on this role of evil in the mystery of God's salvific plan for mankind.

1. Inscrutable Plan of God

Paul the Apostle goes into ecstasy as he reflects on the inscrutable plan of God: "Who has ever known the mind of the Lord? Who has ever been his adviser? Who has given anything to him, so that his presents come only as a debt returned? Everything that exists comes from him and is caused by him and exists for him. To him be glory for ever" (Rom 11:34-36)! God's plan/will is absolute - "Nothing can be added to them, nothing subtracted, it is impossible to fathom the marvels of the Lord" (Sir 18:6) and, "with him there is no such thing as alteration, no shadow caused by change" (Jas 1:17). Therefore, "There is no change of mind on God's part about the gifts he has made or of his choice" (Rom 11:29). The Apostle writes to the Corinthians on the mysterious plan of God: "It is of the mysterious wisdom of

God that we talk the wisdom that was hidden, which God predestined to be for our glory before the ages began. None of the rulers of the age recognised it; for if they had recognised it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but it is as scripture says: What no eye has seen and no ear has heard, what the mind of man cannot visualise; all that God has prepared for those who love him; to us, though, God has given revelation through the Spirit, for the Spirit explores the depths of everything, even the depths of God” (1 Cor 2:7-10).

God’s sovereignty is supreme and no one else can challenge it. God is “far beyond our reach. Supreme in power, in equity, excelling in saving justice, yet no oppressor” (Job 37:23). As king David extols, “Yours, Lord, is the greatness, the power, the splendour, length of days and glory, everything in heaven and on earth is yours. Yours is the sovereignty, Lord; you are exalted, supreme over all” (1 Chron 29:11). And, “You have no right to demand guarantees where the designs of the Lord our God are concerned. For God is not to be threatened as a human being is, nor is he, like a mere human, to be cajoled. Rather, as we wait patiently for him to save, let us plead with him to help us. He will hear our voice if such is his good pleasure” (Jdt 8:16-17). Therefore, the Apostle Paul declares: “If God wants to show mercy on someone, he does so, and if he wants to harden someone’s heart, he does so. Then you will ask me, ‘How then can he ever blame anyone, since no one can oppose his will?’ But you - who do you think you, a human being, are, to answer back to God? Something that was made, can it say to its maker: why did you make me this shape” (Rom 9:18-20)?

Man is subject to his Creator’s plan, according to which “a hard lot has been created for human beings, a heavy yoke

lies on the children of Adam from the day they come out of their mother's womb, till the day they return to the mother of them all" (Sir 40:1). Each one has to make his choice: "A human being has life and death before him; whichever he prefers will be given him" (Sir 15:17). God is not the author of evil but he uses it to our advantage as our Saviour. As his creatures, it is not for us humans to challenge God's wisdom which will triumph in any case.

2. Evil in the Plan of God

The Sacred Scripture says: "God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). But "Death came into the world only through the Devil's envy" (Wis 2: 24a). God, in his wisdom, had anticipated the fall of Adam and that was in the plan of God; for "mere human nature cannot inherit

the kingdom of God: what is perishable cannot inherit what is imperishable" (1 Cor 15:50). Therefore, "this perishable nature of ours must put on imperishability, this mortal nature must put on immortality" (1 Cor

God is not the author of evil but he uses it to our advantage as our Saviour. As his creatures, it is not for us humans to challenge God's wisdom which will triumph in any case.

15:53). And, "while we are still alive, we are continually being handed over to death, for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may be visible in our mortal flesh. That is why we do not waver; indeed, though this outer human nature of ours may be falling into decay, at the same time our inner human nature is renewed day by day" (2 Cor 4:11, 16).

God subjected the entire creation to futility in order to redeem it: “it was not for its own purposes that creation had frustration imposed on it, but for the purposes of him who imposed it- with the intention that the whole creation itself might be freed from its slavery to corruption and brought into the same glorious freedom as the children of God” (Rom 8:20-21). The ‘disobedience’ here is an obvious referred to the sin of, Adam through whom “sin came into the world, and through sin death, and thus death has spread through the whole human race because everyone has sinned” (Rom 5:12). Thus, although God “created human beings to be immortal, he made them as an image of his own nature” (Wis 2:23), “human beings are not immortal” because of sin that brought death (Sir 17:30) and, “flesh and blood think of nothing but evil” (Sir 17:31). God uses the envy of the Devil to realize His salvific plan: “For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all” (Rom 11:32). The Apostle exclaims: “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God” (Rom 11:33)!

The purpose of enslaving all human beings to sin was “only to show mercy to them all” (Rom 11:32b). Having affirmed this, Paul the Apostle goes into an ecstatic mode on the inscrutable plan of God: “How rich and deep are the wisdom and the knowledge of God! We cannot reach to the root of his decisions or his ways. Who has ever known the mind of the Lord? Who has ever been his adviser? Who has given anything to him, so that his presents come only as a debt returned? Everything there is comes from him and is caused by him and exists for him. To him be glory for ever? (Rom 11:33-36)! God’s mysterious plan encompassed not only human beings but also the whole creation: “the whole creation is waiting with eagerness for the children of God to

be revealed. It was not for its own purposes that creation had frustration imposed on it, but for the purposes of him who imposed it - with the intention that the whole creation itself might be freed from its slavery to corruption and brought into the same glorious freedom as the children of God. We are well aware that the whole creation, until this time, has been groaning in labour pains” (Rom 8:19-22).

The Apostle Paul gives us a graphic description of the human condition enslaved to sin: “I do not understand my own

God alone can deliver man from his enslavement to evil: “Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death? God - thanks be to him - through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

behaviour; I do not act as I mean to, but I do things that I hate. While I am acting as I do not want to, I still acknowledge the Law as good, so it is not myself acting, but the sin which lives in me. And really, I know of nothing good living in me - in my natural self, that is - for though the will to do what is good is in me, the power to do it is not: the good thing I want to do, I never do; the evil thing which I do not want - that is what I do. But every time I do what I do not want to, then it is not myself acting, but the sin that lives in me. So I find this rule: that for me, where I want to do nothing but good, evil is close at my side. In my inmost self I dearly love God’s law, but I see that acting on my body there is a different law which battles against the law in my mind. So I am brought to be a prisoner of that law of sin which lives inside my body” (Rom 7:15-23).

God alone can deliver man from his enslavement to evil: “Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death? God - thanks be to him - through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom

7:24b-25a). According to God's master plan, Christ "was marked out before the world was made, and was revealed at the final point of time for your sake" (1 Pet 1:20). Christ's mission was directed to freeing the human race "from the slavery of sin" (Rom 6:6) and become children of God and "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, provided that we share his suffering, so as to share his glory" (Rom 8:17). To be eligible for redemption, one finds oneself enslaved to sin "as Saviour of the world." (1 Jn 4:14). God let the whole human race fall into slavery to sin so that he would reveal himself as God of merciful love: "God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but so that through him the world might be saved" (Jn 3:17). For, "love consists in this: it is not we who loved God, but God loved us and sent his Son to expiate our sins" (1 Jn 4:10).

3. The Role of the Evil

The evil is not just an accidental but rather an indispensable means to the realization of God's plan. He "wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4) and "the point of all our toiling and battling is that we have put our trust in the living God and he is the Saviour of the whole human race but particularly of all believers" (v. 8). Saint Luke has Paul the Apostle say in *The Acts*: "We must all experience many hardships before we enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Ben Sirach would say: "Gold is tested in the fire, and the chosen in the furnace of humiliation" (Sir 2:4-5). Saint Peter reverberates the same view when he writes: "The merit in the sight of God is in putting up with it patiently when you are punished for doing your duty. This, in fact, is what you were called to do, because Christ suffered for you and left an example for you to follow in his steps"

(1 Per 2:20-21) To crown it all, we have the categorical declaration of Jesus: “No one who does not carry his cross and come after me can be my disciple” (Lk 14:27).

The evil, thus, plays a pivotal role in God’s salvific plan for human beings. God the Potter tests his work of art in the kiln of varied afflictions, just as “the kiln tests the work of the potter, the test of a person is in conversation” (Sir 27:5), One day the disciples of Jesus asked him: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should have been born blind?” ‘Neither he nor his parents sinned,’ Jesus answered, ‘he was born blind so that the works of God might be revealed in him’ (Jn 9:2-3). Evil is overcome by “the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord” won by his Self-emptying that culminated on the cross (cf. Phil 2:6-8; Heb 5:7-8).

Reassuring his disciples, Jesus said: “Be courageous: I have conquered the world” (Jn 16:33) and “every child of God overcomes the world. “The victory that

Using trials and hardships, “God works with those who love him, those who have been called in accordance with his purpose, and turns everything to their good.”

has overcome the world - our faith - . . . (by) the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” (1 Jn 5:4-5), “because he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 Jn 4:4). Therefore, “the Evil One has no hold over him” (1 Jn 5:18). Any victory over evil would mean overcoming the world and the Evil One in it because “the whole world is in the power of the Evil One” (1 Jn 5:19) and “everything there is in the world - disordered bodily desires, disordered desires of the eyes, pride in possession - is not from the Father but is from the world” (1 Jn 2:16).

Using trials and hardships, “God works with those who love him, those who have been called in accordance with his purpose, and turns everything to their good” (Rom 8:28), as he does with the branches of Christ the true Vine: “every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more” (Jn 15:2). The cleansing is done “by means of the word that I have spoken to you” (Jn 15:3), “something alive and active: it cuts more incisively than any two-edged sword: it can seek out the place where soul is divided from spirit, or joints from marrow; it can pass judgement on secret emotions and thoughts” (Heb 4:12).

A very important consideration is that God, for whom nothing is impossible, can convert what is evil into good. Bible offers us a number of instances to substantiate this; God turns the evil designs of the brothers of Patriarch Joseph in the O. T. to their own advantage, as Joseph told them: “The evil you planned to do me has by God’s design been turned to good, to bring about the present result: the survival of a numerous people” (Gen 50:20). Although Adam brought down the whole humankind with his fall, God turned it into a blessing by sending His own Son as the saviour of the whole human race.

4. Christian Response to Evil

God not only tolerates evil but also he uses it in the realization of his salvific will. The Christian has to fall in line with God’s plan. He must tolerate it and learn to live with it, taking every care not to be overcome by it. The Apostle shows us the way: “that I should not get above myself, I was given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger from Satan to batter me and prevent me from getting above myself. About this, I have three times pleaded with the Lord that it might leave

me; but he has answered me, ‘My grace is enough for you; for power is at full stretch in weakness.’ It is, then, about my weaknesses that I am happiest of all to boast, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me; and that is why I am glad of weaknesses, insults, constraints, persecutions and distress for Christ’s sake. For it is when I am weak that I am strong” (2 Cor 12:7-10).

For the Christian, the end does not justify the means. He cannot resort to violent means to redress his grievances. Jesus lays down the norms to deal with evil and its perpetrators: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly. To anyone who slaps you on one cheek, present the other cheek as well; to anyone who takes your cloak from you, do not refuse your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and do not ask for your property back from someone who takes it. Treat others as you would like people to treat you” (Lk 6:27-31). The Apostle Paul codifies Christian response to evil so lucidly: “Never pay back evil with evil, but bear in mind the ideals that all regard with respect. Do not be mastered by evil, but master evil with good” (Rom 12:17, 21; cf. 1 Thes 5:15). “Never repay one wrong with another, or one abusive word with another; instead, repay with a blessing. That is what you are called to do, so that you inherit a blessing” (1 Pet 3:9).

Our attitude towards evil administrators/rulers is to be governed by the norms laid down by the Gospel: “pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar - and God what belongs to God” (Matt 22:21). The Apostle Paul lays down the following general norm: “Pay to each one what is due to each: taxes to the one to whom tax is due, tolls to the one to whom tolls are due, respect to the one to whom respect is due, honour

to the one to whom honour is due” (Rom 13:7). This is the logical conclusion to the principles he lays down to govern the attitude towards authority and obedience: “Everyone is to obey the governing authorities, because there is no authority except from God and so whatever authorities exist have been appointed by God. So anyone who disobeys an authority is rebelling against God’s ordinance; and rebels must expect to receive the condemnation they deserve. Magistrates bring fear not to those who do good, but to those who do evil. So if you want to live with no fear of authority, live honestly and you will have its approval; it is there to serve God for you and for your good. But if you do wrong, then you may well be afraid; because it is not for nothing that the symbol of authority is the sword: it is there to serve God, too, as his avenger, to bring retribution to wrongdoers. You must be obedient, therefore, not only because of this retribution, but also for conscience’s sake. And this is why you should pay taxes, too, because the authorities are all serving God as his agents, even while they are busily occupied with that particular task” (Rom 13:1-6). This position has been reiterated the Apostle Peter: “For the sake of the Lord, accept the authority of every human institution: the emperor, as the supreme authority, and the governors as commissioned by him to punish criminals and praise those who do good. It is God’s will that by your good deeds you should silence the ignorant talk of fools” (1 Pet 2:13-15).

No distinction is made between an upright ruler and an evil ruler who occupies the chair of authority. Resistance to a legitimate authority, whether upright or wicked, is resistance to God, who is the sole source of human authority. Then, what about obedience to the unjust or sinful dictates of the lawful ruler? Christian response is submission and patient endurance

to unjust treatments. Violent resistance is totally foreign to the radical nonviolence of the gospel as symbolized by the cross. The only justifiable violence for the disciple of Jesus is self-inflicted violence to discipline oneself (cf. 1 Cor 9:27; Matt 11:12), involving patient endurance.

Persevering in patient endurance of “hardship develops perseverance, and perseverance develops a tested character, something that gives us hope, and a hope which will not let us down, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us” (Rom 5:3-5). Our perseverance under various trials and hardships, we prove our authenticity as the Apostle Paul did: “in everything we prove ourselves authentic servants of God; by resolute perseverance in times of hardships, difficulties and distress; when we are flogged or sent to prison or mobbed; labouring, sleepless, starving; in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness; in the Holy Spirit, in a love free of affectation; in the word of truth and in the power of God; by using the weapons of uprightness for attack and for defence: in times of honour or disgrace, blame or praise; taken for impostors and yet we are genuine; unknown and yet we are acknowledged; dying, and yet here we are, alive; scourged but not executed; in pain yet always full of joy; poor and yet making many people rich; having nothing, and yet owning everything” (2 Cor 6:4-10).

The principles of communism are taken from the lifestyle of the Proto-Christian community as described in *The Acts of the Apostles* (2:42-47; 4:32-35): no private property, everything held in common, and distribution according to each one’s need. But use of violence as means to bring desirable the social change is totally foreign to the gospel

with which a Christian cannot compromise. The end does not justify the means. With its atheistic slant, the use of violent and unjust means to bring about social change, denial of individual right, etc., Marxism is un-Christian.

In the Parable of the wheat and the darnel in Matt 13:24-30, 38-41, Jesus makes it clear that God is not the author of evil, but the devil, the Evil One (vv. 25 & 38). *The Book of Wisdoms* corroborates this: “Death came into the world only through the Devil’s envy” (Wis 2:24). God tolerates evil. The darnel grows along with wheat until harvest when it will be separated from the wheat and consigned to blazing furnace: “Let them both grow till the harvest; and at harvest time I shall say to the reapers: First collect the darnel and tie it in bundles to be burnt, then gather the wheat into my barn” (Matt 13:30). On the Day of Reckoning, the Evil and its perpetrators will be brought to judgement: “This is how it will be at the end of time: the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the upright, to throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth” (Matt 13:49-50). “The Son of man will send his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of falling and all who do evil, and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. Then the upright will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Anyone who has ears should listen” (Matt 13:41-43)!

The time of testing and purification will be short-lived. “You will have to suffer only for a little while: the God of all grace who called you to eternal glory in Christ will restore you, he will confirm, strengthen and support you” (1 Pet 5:10). It is nothing when compared to the eternal glory that will follow it: “In my estimation, all that we suffer in the

present time is nothing in comparison with the glory which is destined to be disclosed for us” (Rom 8:18).

However, in his foreknowledge and providence, God has made definitive accommodation to evil in his eternal plan. Instead of becoming insecure and frightened because of the enormity of evil around us, we must take refuge in God and wait in pertinence for the unveiling of his plan for the salvation of the human beings. As we tread along our path to God, we must steer clear off the lure of evil, “for the fascination of evil throws good things into the shade, and the whirlwind of desire corrupts a simple heart” (Wis 4:12). One must not “Turn neither to right nor to left, (but) keep your foot clear of evil” (Prov 4:27). And, “Stand at the crossroads and look, ask for the ancient paths: which was the good way? Take it and you will find rest for yourselves. But they have said, “We will not take it” (Jer 6:16). Adversity is endured patiently until the end: “anyone who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matt 10:22; cf. Lk 21:19).

Conclusion

As Ben Sirach observes, everything that exists has God as its source: “Good and bad, life and death, poverty and wealth, all come from the Lord” (Sir 11:14). So Job would ask: “If we take happiness from God’s hand, must we not take sorrow too” (Job 2:10)? And, “the fear of the Lord leads to life, it brings food and shelter, without fear of evil” (Prov 19:23). Therefore, “whatever happens to you, accept it, and in the uncertainties of your humble state, be patient, since gold is tested in the fire, and the chosen in the furnace of humiliation” (Sir 2:4-5).

Do Not Provoke the Nazarene!

P. A. Chacko SJ

Dumka

“Wealth and power are situations that can be good and beneficial to the common good, if placed at the service of the poor and of all, with justice and charity. But when, as too often occurs, they are experienced as a privilege, with selfishness and high-handedness, they are transformed into instruments of corruption and death.” --Pope Francis

“It’s worthwhile being a vagrant because you get to meet the pope.” The comment of a homeless man in Rome after having had a sumptuous breakfast with Pope Francis on the latter’s 77th birthday! Even the dog who also had such a VIP privilege could have said that much and more if it could utter and mutter words like a human being.

It is not surprising that Pope Francis, who took the name of St. Francis of Assisi for whom all beings in the universe were his brothers and sisters, could think of inviting the homeless and even a vagrant dog to have company at his birthday breakfast.

Argentine Jorge Mario Bergoglio had a good part of his formation in the school of life. As a dashing youth he not only enjoyed a good Tango with his onetime girlfriend, but also he swept floors and ran tests in a chemical lab as a teen.

Described as ‘a compassionate conservative, whose views are often considered progressive,’ the Pope envisioned today’s Church in terms of compassion and solidarity with the

lost and the least. “I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting, and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security,” he stated. “I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures.”

The Pope’s clarion call inviting the Church to be on the periphery is quite challenging. It is on the periphery of human society we see stark realities staring us in the face. He invites us to see the drab desert of people’s lives bereft of justice and charity while islands of wealth and power have a heyday. He puts it thus: “Wealth and power are situations that can be good and beneficial to the common good, if placed at the service of the poor and of all, with justice and charity. But when, as too often occurs, they are experienced as a privilege, with selfishness and high-handedness, they are transformed into instruments of corruption and death.”

The Pope is well aware of the world’s socio-economic and socio-political situation. If just eight individuals own as much wealth as the poorest half of the world’s population,

“I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting, and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.”

economic justice and social equality are a far cry. There is no question of a fair distribution of wealth without which there is no economic empowerment. The Indian situation too is nothing to be proud of. “As of Nov. 2016, India is the second-most unequal country in the world. The richest 1% of Indians own 58.4% of the nation’s wealth. The richest 10 % of the Indians own 80.7 % of the wealth. This trend is going

in the upward direction every year, which means the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer.” (Wikipedia)

In today’s world, where wealth and political power are happy bedfellows, the use of wealth to capture political power and, thereby, control people’s lives is a scandalous reality that needs to be condemned by all sensible people. That is why the Pope spoke out against global abuses and the misuse of political and economic power. He sees wealth and power as instruments that can and should be put at the service of human development. He does not believe in development for the few and deprivation for the rest. When wealth and power are used as privileges plated with selfishness and high-handedness, corruption mounts. Access to fair share of wealth or social and economic justice is denied to the poor and the powerless. It is a death knell. “They trample the heads of weak into the dust of the earth, and force the lowly out of the way” (Amos, 2/7).

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The prophetic words of Amos ring loud and clear in Pope Francis’ words and actions. Borrowing Amos he is telling the Church and the power-wielding leaders of the world that the Lord is not content with the present world scenario: “I take no pleasure in your solemnities; Your offerings I will not accept, ...Away with your songs!, But if you offer me holocausts, then let justice surge like water, and goodness like an unfailing stream” (Amos, 5/21-24)

In a country where poverty rubs shoulders with human misery, can the Church in India afford to build churches modelled on palatial mansions costing upto 40 or 50 crores?

According to the Laity Voice, the Kerala Church's mad rush in competing to build more and more 'splendid' churches is scandalous to say the least. How will the Lord approve of the festal celebrations and solemnities studded with their ornamental glory in those royal mansions? When will sense and sensibility prevail? The disapproval is already in the air by the voice of the laity calling for a halt for such a church in Changanacherry diocese in Kerala. Perhaps, the voice of the moneyed and the powerful lobby which controls Church politics along with their scandalous donations and the collusion of the hierarchical power centre will drown all dissenting voices.

The Pope's call to place "wealth and power at the service of the poor and of all, with justice and charity" is not just for world leaders but, all the more so, for the Church of Jesus Christ. Let us not be party to a situation where the Nazarene will be provoked to come with a whip in hand!

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Homily Notes

July 2, 2017 XIII Sunday in Ordinary Times
2 Kgs 4:8-11, 14-16a Rom 6:3-4, 8-11 Mt 10:37-42

Cost of Discipleship

“Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” This week’s Gospel continues the section of Matthew on discipleship which we have been reading for the last a few weeks. Jesus calls his disciples to make a radical commitment that manifests authentic discipleship. He asks his disciples to be prepared to make difficult choices, to know where their ultimate allegiance lies, if it comes down to such a decision. He summons to absolute discipleship, a commitment that must surpass even the demands of love and respect for one’s parents and family, which are among the most fundamental injunctions of Jewish faith. According to the mind of Jesus, the Kingdom imperative should take priority over family loyalties. Jesus is not saying that his disciples should not love their parents and families, but that family bonds must ultimately be subordinate to the new kinship that comes from a deep personal relationship with him. It is a question of choice, of a love which could in some way “compete” with one’s commitment to Jesus. For a true disciple, commitment to Christ must trump every other allegiance and relationship, no matter how tender or close to one’s heart. This is true especially at a time when some in Matthew’s community (largely Jewish-Christian?) may have been struggling with the difficult choice between professing Christ and retaining links to their family because Jesus demands a commitment and allegiance stronger than love for our parents or children.

In order to follow him radically, he says to take up our cross and follow Him. To find our life is to lose it, and to lose our life in him is to find it. So far in his narrative, Mathew has made

no reference to Jesus' death on a cross. Much of the context up to this point is that of relationships within Jewish families or Jewish communities. To the ears of his hearers, cross speaks of Roman punishment, the excruciating penalty facing those who challenged national security. Jesus wants us to know that those sent out to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom realize what may lie before them.

In the lives of each of us there is a cross, there may be something painful, big or small, something that we wish to be different. The cross can be caused by somebody else, or we may bring a cross on ourselves due to our choices. Sometimes the cross is neither the fault of others nor ourselves, but because of the accidents of life or simply because we are human and do not have the perfection of God. At times we may deny that we have a cross. Perhaps we do not want to face the pain of the cross so we pretend that everything is fine, we have no cross. But one of the mysteries of life is that a grace awaits us if we carry our cross just as resurrection awaited Jesus after he died. I think that it is part of God's mysterious plan that we carry a cross because it keeps us close to God. If we deny our cross we are losing out on the grace God has planned to give us. Jesus says, "Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

-Thomas Karimundackal

July 9, 2017 XIV Sunday in Ordinary Times

Zec 9: 9-10: Rom 8: 9, 11-13: Mt 11: 25-30

Union with God

The Gospel invites us to have an intimate relationship with God. This relationship is possible when we are united with Christ because He is the fullness of God's revelation. Furthermore, this union is reached when we respond positively to God's call by being faithful to our state of life.

St Athanasius famously said that "the Son of God became man so that we might become God." According to the New Testament, the religious experience of the earliest Christians was derived from and dependent upon Christ. Christian experience is more than an imitation of the life and teaching of Jesus. It is the present experience of the risen Christ indwelling the believer's

heart by the Spirit. Both Johannine and Pauline literature refer to this reality by emphasizing the inclusive and corporate personality of Christ.

Paul more often than any other New Testament authors combines the preposition “in” (en) with some designation for Christ. The phrase and its cognates occur some two hundred times in Pauline literature. The apostle uses the term ‘in’ more than one sense, and scholars have attempted to interpret the concept in a variety of ways (e.g., mystical, existential, sacramental, local, eschatological, and ecclesiastical). In places, the words “in Christ” can be understood as just another way of designating a Christian (Eph 1:1 ; Php 1:1 ; Col 1:2 ; 1 Thess 4:16).

It is clear, however, that the words “in Christ” also have soteriological meaning for Paul (Rom 8:1 ; 2 Cor 5:19 ; Eph 1:20). Being “in Christ” is presented as the only basis for justification and glorification (Col 1:27). This is not a mysticism of absorption, the losing of human identity in the divine, but rather an intimate communion with God through Christ.

Thus genuine union with God demands our total commitment and self-surrender to the will of God. Though following the path of God is not an easy task but it is possible because of the master’s accompaniment in the journey of one’s life. Let us be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit who enables us to be related to God and to our brethren. **-Deacon Anudhan Hembrom**

July 16, 2017 XV Sunday in Ordinary Time
Isaiah 55:10-11; Romans 8:18-23; Matthew 13:1-23

Bearing Good Fruits

“Believe, that whatever comes from the mouth of God will accomplish on earth without any fail”

Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, it is common in our society to have fears about the future. Most of the time these fears are unfounded. Still we want to listen to other human beings who will console us. But today’s readings are inviting us to believe in the words of God and in the person of Jesus Christ. They assure us that whatever Jesus says will be done according to His will without any fail.

In the first reading we heard a practical example that the rain that comes from above will definitely water the ground and shows its effects afterwards. In the same way whatever Word comes from the mouth of God will be fulfilled. In Mat: 5: 18 Jesus says, “For truly I tell you until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all is accomplished.”

In the gospel reading we heard about the parable of the sower. Usually, the pastors focus on the land, which is rocky, thorny, hard or fertile. Today I would like to focus on the seed, the Word of God. What kind of seed the pastors are sowing and what kind of seed we are receiving in our field of hearts. If we receive the good seed, what Jesus wants to sow in the hearts of people, we will bear good fruits which can be useful for everybody.

-Ritesh Kujur

July 23, 2017 XI Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wisdom 12:13, 16-19; Romans 8:26-27; Matthew 13:24-43

Weakness and Strength

One of the most important discoveries coming from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's years of studying evolution is that it's normally the weakest link that survives; the strongest usually becomes extinct. The reason is simple: the weakest is forced to adapt, and adaptation is the key to evolution. Because the strongest frequently can't adapt when its environment or circumstances change it's doomed to disappear. We have no dinosaurs walking around today; they simply couldn't adapt to a changed environment.

The famed paleontologist and theologian observed that once evolution reached the stage of “reflexive consciousness” - not only are we conscious, we're conscious of being conscious – we change when we freely decide to change. He concluded that, at this point along the evolutionary road, the only force that can compel us to evolve is the force of love. In other words, we now must make a free, conscious decision to make ourselves weak.

Teilhard was convinced that, by insisting his followers give themselves for others, Jesus was actually handing us the blueprint for the next, essential stage in our evolution toward the “omega point:” that moment when all creation becomes one in God. Those who make themselves weak by loving will evolve; those who insist on falling back on their strength and refuse to love will become extinct.

Weakness is at the heart of our faith. Our Wisdom author points out how even God becomes weak for our sake. In today’s passage the writer reflects on one of Yahweh’s best-known personality traits: forgiveness “Though you are master of might, you judge with clemency, and with much lenience you govern us; for power, whenever you will, attends you.” Whenever someone forgives, someone gives up his or her power over others. Weakness is simply an essential element of forgiveness. Paul seems to have surfaced the necessity of this weakness thing long before Teilhard began his research. He’s convinced that during our weakest moments God becomes our strength. As he reminds the Christian community in Rome, “The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness.” We can’t do it alone.

Matthew’s Jesus presumes weakness is even a part of God working effectively in our daily lives. Though two of today’s three parables stress the growth of God’s presence from ultra-small to ultra-large, the first parable assures us that God’s kingdom will always be a “mixed bag.” There’s never going to be a time when communities committed to surfacing God or the risen Jesus in their life will be made up solely of wheat. Weeds will always be in the mix. Those waiting to make their move until everyone in a particular Christian community proves to be a faithful follower of Jesus are going to have a long wait. The gospel Jesus expects us to give ourselves to good and bad people; to those who are sincere, and to those who simply are along for the ride. When we choose to love, we choose not to discriminate. God will eventually take care of rewarding and punishing. Our job is to take care of loving.

The older I get, the more I appreciate our Catholic practice of creating “geographical parishes.” Our communities are made up of anyone living in a certain area. We don’t “go to this church” because everyone theologically agrees with us, or belongs to the

same political party, or shares the same racial or ethnic background. We're expected to become church with all who show up on any particular weekend. Seems we could accomplish much more if we could work with people who are like ourselves.

Yet, as Teilhard would remind us, the weakness which forces members of a geographical parish to constantly adapt, is actually our strength, our guarantee we'll constantly evolve. Copyright 2014 – Roger Vermalen Karban

July 30, 2017 XII Sunday in Ordinary Time

I Kings: 3: 5, 7-12: Rom: 8: 28-30; Mt 13: 44-52

The Treasure that is Jesus

“Blessed are the people who find the kingdom of heaven and live in it!” Dear friends in Christ Jesus, in the present world most of the people live today, is almost for one's own name, fame and wealth and living according to the one's own pleasure and for their own relatives to live a royal life and enjoy as long as they live on earth without considering about the other. But in today's first reading we see that Solomon asked God the gift of wisdom rather than anything else which belongs to the world like fame, name and wealth. He found the worthwhile thing which is good in the sight of God and received everything whatever is needful to him in the world to rule the people of god. In the gospel reading we hear about the Kingdom of God, is like a treasure which is hidden in the field, fine pearls and like a net which catch all kinds of fish.

The treasure which Jesus speaking about here is flowing in the midst of our soul, in the very nucleus of our being. It is the Kingdom of Heaven. It consists in lovingly finding, in a mysterious way, the Source of life, of all beauty, truth and goodness, and to remain united to the same Source until, our pilgrimage over and free of all useless trinkets, the Kingdom of Heaven we have been looking for in our heart and have fostered with faith and love, blossoms forth like the glowing flower that lets its hidden treasure appear in all its splendor. Again the kingdom of heaven is like a trader who is looking for fine pearls. Maybe this treasure is only to be found by those difficult to be satisfied, or who do not

make do with what they got, by idealists and adventurers. In our temporal order, we tend to qualify the eager and unconformists as ambitious persons, but in the spiritual world, they are the saints. They are those willing to sell everything to buy the field, as St. John of the Cross points out when he says, that you may possess all things, seek to possess nothing. That you may be everything, seek to be nothing.

Let us look into our lives and see whether are we finding the valuable presence of Jesus Christ among us and his knowledge to help and lead his people to his presence? (Internet)

August 6, 2017 Feast of Transfiguration of the Lord

Dn. 7: 9-16, 13-14; 2 Pet. 1: 16-19; Mt. 17: 1-9

Lord, Touch and Transform me

“The great lesson is that the sacred is in the ordinary, that it is to be found in one’s daily life, in one’s neighbours, friends and family, in our backyard” (Abraham Maslow). Today, on this feast of Transfiguration of the Lord, we in the gospel the Transfiguration event and the experience the disciples had on their journey to Jerusalem. Transfiguration is a privileged moment of manifestation of Jesus’ glory, divine confirmation of His status as Son of God and an affirmation of his mission. From all these manifestations we are able to understand the true identity of Jesus which demanded from us to listen to him. By listening to the Word, Jesus was strengthened to go to the cross. By listening to the Word we are strengthened to follow Him.

In the gospel Jesus led Peter, James and John up to a mountain to transfigure. The mountains are places of encounter with God. Think Moses on Sinai receiving the law, Elijah in the whirlwind. We go up mountain to get closer to God. Where is our mountain, our place of encounter with God, our place of stillness, solitude, quiet, reflection? If we are to even attempt to live in a relationship with God, we need a mountain top where we escape from the noise, the hustle, the bustle of life, and enjoy being still in the presence of God. Transfiguration account is followed immediately by the story of the epileptic boy, who the disciples were unable to cure. It is, perhaps, a challenge and a reminder to us,

that when we glimpse the glory of God, it makes us more painfully aware of suffering and injustice, and our own inadequacy of response to this. Though the disciples preferred to remain on the top of the mountain, Jesus leads them down. Thus Jesus offers us the lesson of unity of contemplation and action. Prayer leads to action for others, and action leads back to prayer. Our actions should receive their vitality and energy from our God experience. We can be so close to heavenly things that we are no earthly good. We can transfigure the lives of others, or disfigure. Let's be people of the transfiguration.

The gospel teaches that the transfigured can only be true followers of Jesus by following him in day today life: by trying to make this life a little better place for others; by searching for Jesus in the pained and hurt faces that confront us in this life. We have to find Jesus in the sad faces, in the insecure, the fearful, in the sick, in the streets anywhere in the world where a Christian can make life better. For this we have to fix one eye on the top of the mountain and the other on the wretched situations of world in need here below.

So in this Eucharist we can pray to the Lord that touch and transform me to experience the sacred in the ordinary that it is to be found in one's daily life, in one's neighbours, friends and family, in our backyard. **-Ciril Vallomkunnel**

August 13, 2017: XIX Sunday in Ordinary Times

1 Kgs 19:9a, 11-13a Rom 9:1-5 Mt 14:22-33

Calming My Inner Sea

And Jesus was not a magician, as Pope Francis reminds us. So "taking the five loaves and the two fish [Jesus} looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds" (Mt 14:19). Yes, the disciples gave them to the crowds, and the miracle happened even as they gave out the loaves. The miracle happened in the hands of the disciples.

Were not the disciples able to calm the sea? After the miracle of loaves, Jesus "made the disciples get into the boat and go be-

fore him to the other side” (Mt 14:22). What is Jesus up to – isolating himself from the community of disciples? Sure enough, the boat struggles “beaten by the waves; for the wind was against them” (Mt 14:24). But there was no need for the disciples to panic. The miracle of loaves had taken place in their hands. So while in the high seas, they just had to believe. Since they lacked faith, Jesus would walk on the water to show that he is still in control. But they panic. “They were terrified, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out in fear” (Mt 14:26).

You too can conquer evil! Peter conditionally recognises the power of Jesus: “Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water” (Mt 14:28). As if to ask, if you are truly with me, is it also possible for me to conquer evil? And Jesus said, “Come!” (Mt 14:29). What follows is a drama to test the faith of Peter. Finally, there is a happy conclusion: “And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God” (Mt 14:33).

Today, Jesus invites me to come out of the security of my boat, to move towards him in faith, with a willingness to overcome evil that is within me and all about me. I am not alone. He is with me. With him, there is multiplication of the loaves and calming of the sea happening in me. (Indebted to <http://www.sahayaselvam.org>)

August 20, 2017: XX Sunday in Ordinary Times

Is 56:1, 6-7 Rom 11:13-15, 29-32 Mt 15:21-28

Turning Insult to Commitment

Isaiah tells us: “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” [Is. 56:7] In this prophetic exhortation and warning, the Lord promised to bring to His holy mountain all the foreigners, the Gentiles, who unite themselves to Him.

This particular passage from the Holy Scriptures placed an emphasis on the Temple of the Lord, on worship, on the Sabbath, on fasting and on the Law. At the same time, there was a reference to universal salvation, the necessity for purification and the fulfillment of hopes through the arrival of the promised Messiah. In summary, today’s passage from the Holy Bible echoed the fulfillment of the Heavenly Father’s Divine plan that was mani-

fested by our Lord Jesus Christ who instituted the Holy Catholic Church.

Today's Reading from the Gospel of Matthew, the account of Jesus and the Canaanite woman, is one of the rare encounters of Jesus with Gentiles. What is unusual about this event is that the woman was a Canaanite. In deuteronomic and postdeuteronomic literature, the Canaanites were viewed as a very sinful race that embodied every possible evil and godlessness. The Canaanites were viewed as a nation that was to be exterminated. As it was not the general practice for the Jewish people to mix with the Samaritans, also, it was not the general practice for them to mix with the Canaanites. So what was Jesus to do when He was approached by a race that was avoided by the Jewish people?

At first, he ignored her. He did not answer her at all. The more Jesus ignored her, the more the woman shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!" The more the woman shouted, the more the disciples of Jesus were getting annoyed and urged Jesus to send her away so she will stop shouting. [Mt. 15:23] In this particular case, when the disciples were urging Jesus to dismiss the woman, this was not a request to just get rid of her, but to dismiss her by granting her petition. To this, Jesus answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." [Mt. 15:24] How harsh these words must have sounded to the woman. Anyway, the determined lady knew a good thing when she saw it and she was not about to give up on Jesus. She threw herself at His feet and repeated herself, "Lord, help me." [Mt. 15:25] Jesus responded, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." [Mt. 15:26] To this, she answered, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." [Mt. 15:27] Seeing how great her faith was, she having remarkably persisted, Jesus told her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish. And her daughter was healed instantly." [Mt. 15:28]

The conversation that took place between Jesus and the Canaanite woman is an example of dialogues that are admired in the Near East. Many refer to this type of dialogue as wisdom. Why wisdom? Because it requires a certain ability to match a riddle with a riddle, a wise saying with another wise saying, an insult with another insult, or as in our case, to turn an insult into a commitment (internet).

August 27, 2017: XXI Sunday in Ordinary Times

Is 22:19-23 Rom 11:33-36 Mt 16:13-20

Encountering Jesus Personally

Who is Jesus for me? The gospel text of today once again invites us to reflect on this question. Let us explore three possible implications of this event described in the gospel narration of today, and in so doing we might understand what it could mean for us today. We humans come to realise who we are in our interaction with other people.

Significance for the Apostles: To know and love him more intimately. The event described in the gospel of today was also an invitation to the disciples to deepen and personalise their own understanding of Jesus. It is also an invitation to you and me. Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador is reported to have said: “Christianity is not a collection of truths to be believed or laws to be obeyed. Rather, Christianity is a person. Christianity is Christ.” This intimate and personal knowing of Jesus is not merely an intellectual or rational activity, but an experience that is mediated by the Spirit of God Himself: “Simon son of Jonah... it was no human agency that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven” (Mt 16:17).

Significance for Peter: To follow him more closely. The location for the event described in the gospel text of today is Caesarea Philippi. The non-Jewish location would have been selected by Jesus just for the sake of seclusion. And the mountainous setting could also suggest a location for an encounter between God and Humans. Interestingly, Caesarea Philippi was also known for a temple dedicated to the Greek god Pan, who was the god of shepherds. This geographical context reminds us of John 21:15-19, which could be considered the Johannine parallel to the synoptic version of the gospel reading of today. In John, Jesus wants to be sure of Peter’s love and not just his understanding of Jesus as the ‘Son of God’. Built on this personal relationship with Jesus, Peter’s own leadership would consist in shepherding.

Today, Jesus invites each one of us to love him as the Son of God – even enabled by the Spirit – and be shepherds to each other. Thus we can truly encounter him and make him known to others. (Indebted to <http://www.sahayaselvam.org>)

Book Review

Binoy Pichalakkattu SJ *Bridging Mathematics, Philosophy, and Theology Fuzzy Logical Thinking for Science-Religion Dialogue*. Christian World Imprints, New Delhi. ISBN 9789351482116 (HB) pp. 128+xiv Rs 400.

More and more people, both at the popular and academic levels, are convinced today of the need for creative and critical dialogue between science and religion. Such a dialogue is essential for the future of humanity. This recent book by Dr Binoy Pichalakkattu SJ is an attempt to place such a dialogue in the framework of fuzzy logic.

The book argues that a fuzzy model of critical realism will provide a mathematical base to overcome the binary thinking without indulging in reductionism and relativism. The author believes the model offered by fuzzy logic will offer an inclusive epistemological framework for science-theology dialogue where multiple referential claims reinforce one another. possibilities of fuzzy logic in comparison with binary, relativist and probabilistic thinking. It also brings to light the limits of fuzzy logic and thereby the limits of a fuzzy model of critical realism. The study ends by suggesting a few possibilities for exploring fuzzy thinking in religions and developing a fuzzy language for talking about God and religions. Such an attempt enables a deeper and creative way of dealing with science, religion, theology and philosophy.

After explaining the insights of fuzziness in a way understandable to the popular audience, he explores the significance of critical realism as a starting point to encounter reality. Then he explores the rich mathematical insights from fuzzy logic and provides a new and dynamic model for science-theology

interaction. Such an attempt, we are convinced, is essential for developing a fertile womb for meaningful science-religion dialogue.

The work is significant from the point of view of method of dialoguing between science and religion. According to the Second Vatican Council, "Methodological research in all branches of knowledge, provided it is carried on in a truly scientific manner and in accordance with moral norms, can never conflict with faith, because the things of the world and things of faith derive from the same God." (GS 36).

This book is highly recommended for all those who are interested in philosophical, theological or scientific research.

Mathew Jayanth SJ (ed). ***Indian Theologies: In Search of Methods and Models for Theologising***, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, 2017. ISBN: 978-93-5148-048-8 pp. 236+xxxvi, Rs 350.

In addition to providing tools for theologizing in Indian context, this relevant book promotes reflection on important dimensions of theologising enriched by feminist, interreligious, oriental and postcolonial preparatives, as also its consequences and processes. The advancement of efficient communication of theology is facilitated. The fruit of a seminar on Indian theological methods held at Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, this book looks into the identity of the Indian theologians, their task, the purpose of theologising in India, the location, consequences and process.

The ten articles that comprise this volume are valuable both as individual units and as collective search for Indian theologising. The book stresses the fact that "Indian theological methods are not matters of technique," but the "awareness of who an Indian theologian is, the what, why and how of the theological activity of the theologian and the consequences of one's theological undertakings for the Indian churches and the nation."

The book is recommended for students, teachers and scholars of theology.