

Do Not Provoke the Nazarene!

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“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,

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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