



# Asian Journal of Religious Studies

“The Lord is truly among us.”

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# Asian Journal for Religious Studies

“The Lord is truly with us.”

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## Editorial

# New Year: Daring to Dream

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When life hits hard, all of us, especially the young, should try to get up again, letting others help them, and if they are bored, they should concentrate on doing good things for others, the Pope said on Sept. 20, 2017 during his weekly General Audience, reports *Catholic News Reporter*.

Reflecting on Christian hope, the Pope gave extensive advice on how to teach people, especially young people, to remain full of hope. No matter “where God has planted you, hope. Always hope,” he said, explaining:

- Enemy No. 1 is not out there somewhere, but inside oneself. “Don’t make room for bitter or dark thoughts.”
- “Believe in the existence of the most noble and beautiful truths” and trust that God, through the Holy Spirit, is ushering everything toward the good, toward “Christ’s embrace.”
- Believers are not alone in their faith. There are others who hope, too. “The world goes on, thanks to the vision of many people who created an opening, who built bridges, who dreamed and believed, even when they heard words of derision around them.”
- Never believe the struggles here on earth are “useless.” God never disappoints and he wants that seed he planted in everyone to bloom. “God made us to flower, too.”
- “Wherever you are, build!” When life gets hard, and “you have fallen, get up. Never stay down. Get up and let people help you to your feet.”
- “If you’re sitting, start walking!” Start the journey. “If you’re bored stiff, crush (boredom) with good works.”
- “If you feel empty and demoralized, ask if the Holy Spirit may newly replenish” that void.

- Work for peace among people. Don't listen to those "who spread hatred and division."
- No matter how different people are from one another, human beings "were created to live together. With disputes, wait patiently. One day you will discover that a sliver of truth has been entrusted to everyone."
- Love people. Respect everyone's journey — whether it be troubled or down the straight and narrow because everyone has a story behind them.
- Every baby born is "the promise of a life that once again shows it is stronger than death."
- "Jesus has given us a light that shines in the darkness; defend it, protect it. This unique light is the greatest richness entrusted to your life.
- "Dream of a world still not seen, but will certainly come one day. Think of those who sailed oceans, scaled mountains, conquered slavery or made life better for people on earth.
- Be responsible: "Every injustice against someone poor is an open wound" and countless generations will come after you have lived.
- Ask God for courage every day. "Remember Jesus conquered fear for us" and "not even our most treacherous enemy can do anything against faith."
- If fear or evil looms so large it seems insurmountable, remember "that Jesus lives in you. And, through you, it is he, who, with his meekness, wants to subdue all enemies of humanity: sin, hatred, crime and violence."
- Be courageous in speaking the truth, but never forget, "you are not above anyone." Even if one feels certain that he or she is the last person on earth who holds to the truth, "do not spurn the company of human beings for this" reason.
- Hold onto ideals and live for something greater than yourself, even if it comes at a high price.
- "If bitterness strikes, firmly believe in all those people who still work for the good; the seed of a new world is in their humility."
- Spend time with people who have kept a child-like heart. "Learn from splendor, nurture amazement."
- "Live, love, believe, and with God's grace, never despair."

May the New Year bring us hope and joy!

# Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment

**Jose Thayil SJ**

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The *Preparatory Document* of the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, to be held in October 2018 on the theme “Youth, faith and vocational discernment” was released by Pope Francis on Jan 13, 2017. This document is divided into three chapters. The first chapter, entitled ‘*Young People in Today’s World*,’ provides useful elements for contextualizing the situation of youth in today’s world. The second chapter highlights the importance of discernment in the light of faith in order to make life choices that truly correspond to the will of God and to the good of the person. The third chapter, entitled ‘Pastoral Action’, emphasizes the importance for the Church of accompanying young people in welcoming the joy of the Gospel, ‘especially in these times of uncertainty and insecurity’.”

This document is basically addressed to the youth. It deals with the faith and how can the youth help the church to communicate the Good News in the best way possible. The term ‘vocation’ is understood in a broad sense. It includes vocation to married life, priesthood, religious life, also vocation to be a social worker, teacher, healer, etc. Today’s youth need to make a proper discernment in order to find out the will of God in their life. The document considers youth to be between the ages of 16 and 29. So most of

what the document suggests will be very much applicable to young seminarians and religious.

The Church has decided to examine herself on how she can lead young people to recognize and accept the call to the fullness of life and love, and to ask young people to help her in identifying the most effective ways to announce the Good News today. The youth are very efficient in using the modern means of communication through Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and other electronic media. So they will be able to contribute much in spreading the good news effectively through electronic media. Good News has to be proclaimed through words, deeds and life. We have to become the Good News. Our words and deeds need to go together.

### **Situation of Youth Today**

A rapid process of change and transformation is the main characteristic of contemporary societies and cultures. The highly complex nature and rapid pace of this process is creating a situation of confusion and uncertainty never experienced before. We are not sure whether this state of affairs is a problem or an opportunity. The growth of uncertainty results in a state of vulnerability, that is, a combination of social unease and economic difficulties as well as insecurity in the lives of a large part of the population. We are living in a world of globalization, indifference and throwaway culture. Individuals and nations have become very self-centered and have lost concern for the poor and the marginalized. Compared to a privileged few, who can take advantage of the opportunities offered by the processes of economic globalization, many people live in a precarious and insecure situation, which has an impact on the course and choice taken in their life.

Today's generation of young people live in a world which is different from that of their parents and educators. Economic and social changes have affected the gamut of obligations and opportunities. Young people's aspirations, needs, feelings and manner of relating to others have changed as well. Furthermore, from a certain point of view, young people, because of globalization, tend to be more homogeneous in all parts of the world. Nevertheless, they remain in their local surroundings and their unique cultural and institutional settings, which have repercussions in the process of socializing and forming a personal identity.

The challenge of multi-culturalism is present in a special way in the world of young people; for example, with the special features of "second generations" (that is, those young people who grow up in a society and a culture different from those of their parents, as a result of migration) or, in a certain sense, the children of "mixed" marriages (from the vantage point of ethnicity, culture or religion).

Today, the younger generation is characterized by its relationship with the modern technologies of communication and what is normally called the "virtual world", which has very real effects. This "virtual world" provides potential access to a range of opportunities which previous generations did not enjoy, but not without its risks. Nevertheless, it is very important to focus on how the experience of technologically mediated relations might structure the conception of the world, reality and interpersonal relationships. On this basis, the Church is called upon to evaluate her pastoral activity, which needs to develop an appropriate culture.

With the Modi-wave catching up in the country, secularist values are at stake. Ban on beef seems to be the first step towards making India a Hindu nation. Most of the agitators

in Kashmir are young people. How does the church respond to the present political developments?

### **How Can the Youth Respond?**

There are times when we feel that we have no control over our lives. We often blame ourselves, others and life situations for our unhappiness or misery. We feel that our lives are controlled by outside forces whether they are people or situations. We feel helpless and become resigned to our fate of a lifetime of frustration and unhappiness. We become victims of external forces. As long as we feel this way we are reacting to the external realities and the source of our happiness and peace is placed outside of us. Instead we can learn to be proactive and our responses to the external realities can be controlled by us whatever may be the provocation from outside.

We may not be able to change many of the external realities. But we can change our attitude towards ourselves, others and situations. Attitudes are learned. Some of them are unconsciously imbibed in childhood from significant persons like parents, relatives and teachers. They can also be carefully nurtured through conscious training. Since they are learned they can also be unlearned. If we watch our thoughts, we can identify and correct our attitudes. Since attitudes are results of repeated thinking, they can be replaced by healthy attitudes by constant thinking in the opposite direction.

We are what our thoughts are. If we engage our minds in good, creative, positive and constructive thoughts, the results will be incredible. Therefore, we need to be extremely careful about what we allow to pass through our minds. Jesus said that a bad tree cannot produce good fruits and from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Lk 6:43). American psychologist William James remarked that



the biggest discovery of this age is the realization that by controlling our thoughts we will be able to control our lives. We don't have control over many things that happen to us or around us. But we can decide how we are going to respond to those situations. A tragedy can be a disaster for one, but the same tragedy can be an opportunity for beginning a better life for another. We look at reality differently according to our past experiences.

Happiness is the ultimate goal and the deepest longing of every human being. In our frantic search, we mistake pleasure for happiness. We tend to look for happiness in externals. We think that if we change our work, or place of work, or the people with whom we work, we will be happy. Life is meant to be happy and in every human being there are enough resources to lead a life of contentment. It is our attitude that makes all the difference. Our happiness is determined not so much by what life brings to us as by the attitude we bring to life. Bad circumstances are not excuses for making bad choices.

We go forward in life not by a series of chance-occurrences but by the conscious choices we make. It is totally within our power and control to give direction to our lives. We hold immense possibilities to lead a far more meaningful and challenging life. We are slaves of many silent assumptions. I think I have to be rich or well-connected socially to get started. Since I am from a poor family with severe limitations, I must not dream of success. I assume that my thinking is correct. That way I do not get the best advice possible.

Every place – be it a home, a society, an organization, or a country – has a culture. Culture in any place always moves from the top down, never from the bottom up. The Church

hierarchy and the religious can exert a lot of influence to create a loving and friendly atmosphere in the Church. We need to create a healthy culture wherever we are. For example, Pope Francis as the head of Catholic Church has brought a new culture in the entire Church. Bishops, Parish priests, Prime Minister of a country, Chief Minister of a state, president of a nation, class leaders, Student Council Representatives, etc., can bring about a new culture in their own respective areas.

In order to develop positive thinking, we need to become a seeker of goodness. You need to focus on the positives in your life. Start looking for what is right in a person or situation instead of looking for what is wrong. Looking for the positive does not necessarily mean overlooking limitations. A good way to invite change is to concentrate on the positive than the negative. Some people will find fault with every person and every situation. Pessimists are unhappy when they have nothing to complain about. They cannot enjoy their health because they think they may be sick tomorrow. They forget their blessings and count only their troubles. On the other hand, optimists enjoy peace of mind. They appreciate the good qualities and strengths of themselves and others. If they want to benefit from any institution or organization, they must be able to see goodness and greatness in that institution or organization.

If you want to lead a truly Christian life, stay away from negative people and influences. If you associate with them, you will soon become like one of them. Keep away from negative movies, television programmes, gossiping and negative news items.

The Pope reminds the youth the words which God spoke to Abraham: "Go from your country and your kindred and

your father's house to the land that I will show you". (Gen 12.1). He says that the same words are addressed to the youth today and they are to set out towards a future which is unknown but one which will surely lead them to fulfilment, a future towards which He Himself accompanies them. God's assurance is there in Jer 1:8: "Do not be afraid, for I am with you to deliver you."

Abraham received a compelling invitation, a challenge, to leave everything and go to a new land. What is this "new land" for us today, if not a more just and friendly society, which we deeply desire and wish to build to the very ends of the earth? A different world is possible. We need to work towards a world where there is equality, justice, peace, love and dignity for all. A better world can be built as a result of your efforts, your desire to change and your generosity.

But unfortunately, today, many youth want to create this "new land" by means of violence, force and war. Many are drawn to underground and terrorist groups. Many movies promote violence and taking the law into one's own hands. This ideology is slowly creeping into the Church circles also. Many Catholics are becoming Naxalites and Maoists.

Many of us are involved in some kind of social involvement as part of our ministry. Do we fall into the temptation of quick results through violence, bribe, etc.? We need to see things from the perspective of God. We need to love people and use things, not the other way about. We need to follow the path of suffering in order to bring about social transformation. Suffering is necessary for bringing about the Kingdom of God. *Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha* are the means taught by Mahatma Gandhi to bring about the Kingdom of God.

We believe in the risen Lord. Our God is a living God. He is concerned about the lack of life and promotes life (Ex 3:7-8). Our God is opposed to idols who do not act in order to support life (Ps 115:4-7). Mary's Fiat can be an inspiration for all of us. Let it be done to me according to your Word. From the time of Annunciation till the death of Jesus on the cross, Mary kept up her hope in the words of the angel Gabriel. After the resurrection, Mary remained with the disciples as the mother of hope. Christian hope is centred on Jesus and his redemption (1 Tim 1:1). Christians place their hope in the resurrection of Jesus. Since Christ has been raised from the dead, we too can hope to be raised like Christ (1 Cor 15:12-20).

Young people are the future of our nation and the Church. They have to take up the leadership roles in the near future. If they have the right motivation and the proper direction, our nation and the Church will be in the hands of committed and competent people. If their goals are clear, they will be able to make sacrifices in order to reach those goals.

The Editor and the Editorial Board wish  
*AJRS* readers a  
**Happy New Year, 2018!**

# Christ, the Risen Lord of Mercy

**Antony J. D'Cruz, O Praem**

Regensburg, Germany

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Christianity is based on the primary experience of Easter. So it is worthwhile to think and meditate about the fundamental truth of Christian faith, namely, Jesus' Resurrection. New Testament faith is *a priori* eschatological and depends on the Easter *kerygma*, the Resurrection of Jesus. This has been rightly pointed out by Jürgen Moltmann: "Christianity stands or falls with the reality of the raising of Jesus from the dead by God."<sup>1</sup> Faith in the Resurrection is also faith in the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Therefore, "Faith in the God 'who raised Christ from the dead' and the confession that 'Jesus Christ is the Lord are mutually interpretative.'"<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless the death and resurrection of Christ constitute one single action, which resumes in itself the entire life of Christ. And the stories of the resurrection, in fact, acquire credibility and reliability after the recognition of the truth of Christ's crucifixion, not before. Therefore, the heart of Christian faith is in the incarnate and crucified Son of God raised from the dead by the power of the Spirit (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:14).

This Christ event in its totality, that culminates precisely in his death and resurrection is not an ordinary event in human history but rather is the result of the absolutely free intervention of God as God in history. Therefore, their consequences, though they happened at one point in time, last-

ed throughout history and do not exhaust themselves. For instance, the Scriptural accounts tell us that the disciples fled (Mk. 14:50) and thought that the cause of Jesus was lost after his Crucifixion (Lk. 24:19-21). But “something happened” to the disciples after the Resurrection. The experience of the risen Christ captivated them in self-grounding truth because it carried along in it and with it the ground of their reality and a truth that is not just the result of humanity’s activity in its own history. This certainty of truth comes from the risen Jesus himself showing himself to his disciples. And the disciples understood Jesus’ Resurrection as the realization of the righteousness of God, and therefore, entrusted their future into God’s hands. Because of this certainty, disciples “cannot but” confess and commit themselves to what they have seen and heard and what now finds expression in the Christian *kerygma*. Against this self-grounding reality Paul writes to the young Church at Corinth: “if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain” (1. Cor. 15:14).

The Paschal Mystery manifests God’s mercy that meets human misery. The risen Lord shows us the mercy of the Father (cf. Lk. 6:36). The Mystery of the Resurrection is a mystery of Divine Love: God out of his love for this world sent his only Son to save this world (Jn. 3:16). But Jesus’ Crucifixion was a criminal act which humans carried out against God’s will. Humans tried to thwart God’s plan to save the world, but the Resurrection shows that God did not allow them to destroy his plan to save the world. More particularly, the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead re-orders the outward appearance of ordinary human historical events. The Resurrection reveals that evil and injustice do not have the last word. Ultimately, God wins over evil and

God's love prevails over hatred and reveals that death is not the end. Furthermore, the Resurrection of Jesus is a reinterpretation of the meaning of life, because our God is a God of life and love, and this love is the merciful love of God.

And this merciful love is the heroic act of *amor benevolentiae* that we see on the cross of Jesus. He does not condemn his opponents but forgives and prays for them from the cross (cf. Lk. 23:34). This is God's loving activity of loving-in-spite-of human persons' acts to thwart God's plan to save them. Furthermore, the Post Resurrection appearances of Jesus also prove this merciful love, i.e., although the disciples were unfaithful and left Jesus after his arrest, Jesus remains faithful. In spite of their infidelity, the risen Lord gathers them again and gives them a new perspective on life and new spiritual power.

This truth is very explicitly explained in the image of Divine Mercy, in representations of the crucified and risen Christ. In the image of Divine Mercy, we see the rays of blood and water flowing from the veiled pierced heart of Jesus, and the wounds on his hands and feet giving witness to the events of Good Friday. But the image also depicts Jesus forgiving sinners and giving them his love. Thus this image portrays the Mercy of the risen Lord, despite his Good Friday experience. This is the resurrection faith of the New Testament: *Jesus has risen, Jesus is the Lord of mercy, Hallelujah*. According to Pope Francis, the Joy of God is to forgive the repentant sinner. According to the Pope, the three parables from Chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke depict this Joy. These concern "the lost sheep; the lost coin; and the parable of the Prodigal Son"; they are typical of Luke. While the parables of both the lost sheep and the lost coin narrate the determination of God the Father to find 'the lost,' the parable of the Prodigal Son catches the

enduring salvific love of the merciful father who rejoices in the return of his son more dramatically. God is the loving Father who goes after 'the lost' in need of Mercy and, more importantly, God rejoices when he finds them back.

Therefore, the Easter season is a time to be touched by God's Divine Love: "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!" (Ps. 118:1). At the same time, God dares us to practice compassion for others. God's greatness is not found primarily in his mighty works but rather in his *kenosis* on the cross. Christ's self-emptying that culminated on the cross may be foolishness to the world (cf. Phil. 2: 7-8; 1. Cor. 1:23), but Christ exhibits the true love of God on the cross: to love and forgive humanity even when it wants to destroy him. cross exhibits the paradox of God's revelation, i.e., He has given signs of supernatural and given the testimony of the truth of God. He has made some extraordinary signs; he has healed the sick and he gave life to the dead. But Christ's death on the cross shows that he shared all human indigence to the end and never contradicted or suppressed the human freedom, i.e., "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him (Mat. 27. 42). Jesus identified himself with human beings in their experience of sinfulness, a forlorn situation of insecurity, thus offering them God's gift of love, the only real security for human persons. Against this background Jürgen Moltmann writes that:

What has already happened to Christ is representative of what happens to everybody: it is happening *pars pro toto*. Consequently, he has suffered vicariously what threatens everyone. But if he has suffered vicariously what threatens everyone, then



through his representation he liberates everyone from this threat, and throws open to them the future of the new creation.<sup>3</sup>

The cross is the *kenosis* of Christ. Its self-emptying constitutes a remarkable moment of meaning for human beings. Therefore, Christ's true act of *kenosis* had been a great force of Christianity as such, because, acts of true love spring from acts of humility. Therefore, Jesus could say at the washing the feet of his disciples, "For I have set you an example...love one another. Just as I have loved you..." (Jn.13:15, 34). God's mercy is a virtue worth emulating for us humans, because his act of love on the cross has somehow conquered the principalities and powers of this world, which culminates in resurrection. This is the symbolic expression of the cross and remains a symbol of our identity. Apparently, it's not just about not doing evil alone but also about doing good. This has been rightly explained by the Spanish philosopher, Xavier Zubiri, when he writes:

When Christ wished the common people to understand him more simply, he tells us, while talking about mercy, that in the next world when he judges us, he will say? For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink? And they will ask him? Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?? And he will tell them? As long as you did it to each one of my least brethren next to you, you did it to me.? (Mt 25:35-40). The very action of mercy by Christ is the same action by men. Reciprocally, the action of men, insofar as Christians, is identical to the very life of Christ.<sup>4</sup>

In every age people are weak and need kindness. God gives us the time "to be merciful as your Father is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). The basic human response to God's offer of love (cf. 1 Jn. 4:9-19; Jn. 3:16) is not the return of love to God

alone but also love for one's fellow human beings (cf. Mt. 19:16-19).

Our God is a God of life and love, of joy and goodness. This is the faith of the New Testament: Jesus Christ has risen; and he is the Lord of mercy.

## Notes

- 1 J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London 2002) 152.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 213.
- 3 J. Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ. Christology in Messianic Dimension* (London 1990) 155.
- 4 X. Zubiri, *Christianity*, 350 (Accessed from <http://www.catholicphilosophy.com/sys-tmpl/chapter4340351/index.html> on February 2, 2016)

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“Nothing glows brighter than the heart awakened to the light of love that lives within it.” —Guy Finley

“There will come a time when you believe everything is finished. That will be the beginning.” —Louis L’Amour

“Life is really simple, but men insist on making it complicated.” —Confucius

“Only through love can we obtain communion with God.” —Albert Schweitzer

“The soul would have no rainbow if the eyes had no tears.” —Native American proverb

# **GST on Charitable and Religious Trusts**

**Alex G SJ**

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**G**oods and Services Tax (GST), a major tax reform in India, came in to effect from July 1, 2017. But are we prepared for it?

GST is any supply of goods or services for a consideration, in cash or kind, in the course of business. It is applicable under different rates for different goods (0%, 5%, 12%, 18% and 28%), based on whether they are basic commodities or luxuries. Goods have different slabs, but all services attract a uniform rate of 18%.

**The following services/activities of the Charitable or Religious Trusts registered under 12AA are GST exempt (no need to register under GST):**

- 1. Charitable activities** related to public health, public awareness programmes in preventive health, family planning or prevention of HIV infection, activities related to advancement of religion, spirituality and yoga, advancement of educational programmes or skill development relating to abandoned, orphaned or homeless children, physically or mentally abused and traumatized persons, prisoners or persons over the age of 65 years residing in a rural area and preservation of environment including watershed, forests and wildlife. Similarly, service by way of public

libraries (not private libraries) is exempt from GST. *Other activities such as renting of premises, renting of playground, grant of sponsorship and advertising rights during events or functions will attract GST. Similarly, any income from the participants of yoga or other fitness camps will be chargeable under GST as it is different from advancement of religion, spirituality or yoga.*

2. **Religious** precincts: Income by way of conducting a religious ceremony, renting of a religious place meant for general public (a parish church premise), where the rent of the room is less than Rs. 1,000/- per day, the rent of premises, community hall, kalyanamandapam or open area is less than Rs. 10,000/- per day and the rent of shops or other spaces for business or commerce is less than Rs. 10,000/- per month is exempt from GST. Seminaries and religious societies may take shelter under this provision, if there is no other taxable supply. Thus, income from a religious ceremony like Christmas or Navratri functions and religious events/poojas conducted on special occasions like religious festivals is exempt from GST. *However, in some cases, when the income loses its religious nature, it is chargeable under GST. E.g. Renting out space during Ganeshutsav or other religious functions to agencies for advertisement hoardings to promote their business or donations received for a religious ceremony with instruction to advertise the name of the donor, such income is chargeable under GST.*
3. Services by way of **educational activities** specifically for the abandoned, orphans, homeless children, physically or mentally abused persons, prisoners or person over age of 65 years or above residing in a rural area are exempt from GST. To understand the applicabil-

ity of GST on other type of educational activities, we have to first understand what the output service and input service mean. Output services are those rendered by a service provider to others. Here, education is the output service rendered. Input services are those that are used for providing an output service. Here, bus service, catering service, security service, etc. are the input services used for providing education. According to the GST rules, all output services by a school and pre-school to its own students, faculty and staff are fully exempt from GST. So also input services by way of catering, canteen, security, house-keeping, maintenance, cleaning and services relating to admission or conduct of exams hired by a school and pre-school for providing education are also exempt from GST. Output services by approved colleges and approved vocational service centres to its own staff and students are exempt under GST, **but input services by way of catering, canteen, security, house-keeping, cleaning, services relating to admission or conduct of exams provided for them by the third parties are all taxable under GST.** *Services of all other types of educational institutions (e.g. Unaided courses in approved colleges, all unapproved private educational institutions, seminary colleges, IIT coaching centres, etc.) fall under the ambit of GST. So also all services given, in the nature of a “commercial activity”, i.e., for a consideration/payment, like rentals, uniform supplied (both material and stitching), badges, bookstore, etc. even in schools and pre-school centres will attract GST.*

4. **Health related activities:** Health care services by a clinical establishment, an authorized medical practitioner or para-medics and services provided by way of

transportation of a patient in an ambulance are GST exempt. But services such as hair transplant, cosmetic or plastic surgery done purely as a luxury are not GST exempt. Similarly, if charitable trusts running a hospital appoint specialist doctors, nurses and provide medical services to patients at a concessional rate, such services are not liable to GST. But on the other hand, if hospitals hire visiting doctors or specialists and deduct some money from the consultation fees payable to doctors, there may be GST on such amount deducted from fees paid to doctors. All services other than mentioned here provided to charitable trusts will attract GST. There is no exemption for supply of goods by a charitable trust. Thus any goods or services supplied by such charitable trusts for consideration (sale) shall be liable to GST.

5. Services by a **hotel, inn, guest house, club or camp-site, by whatever name called, for residential or lodging purposes**, having declared tariff of a unit of accommodation below Rs 1,000 per day or equivalent are free of GST. Hence, **hostels, old age homes, working women hostels, hotels, clubs, guest houses**, etc., if they charge below Rs 1,000 per day for lodging (accommodation) only, then they are free from GST. *Here boarding is a taxable supply and will attract GST.*
6. **Agricultural activities:** Cultivation of plants and rearing of all types of animals (except horse) for the purpose of food, fibre, fuel or raw material are kept out of GST. Hence, all agricultural related activities, supply of labour for agriculture, processes involved in an agricultural farm, renting or leasing of agro machinery or vacant land with or without structure, harvesting, drying, packing, loading, unloading and transport to warehouse, agents purchasing from farmers and even

agricultural activity by a job worker are all exempt from GST. Hence, any farm produce, poultry, bee keeping, etc. and the service providers for this industry like seeds, manure, chicks, feed, medicine, etc. are GST exempt.

Here, it can also be added that since any **donation received** without any consideration is a supply of neither goods nor service, it is exempt from GST. **Mass wine**, because of the alcohol content, will not attract GST, but will incur the usual sales tax. **Normal unpacked food items** like rice, dal, pulses, grains, vegetables, fruits, etc. will not attract any GST. Any **rental income out of a residential property** is also GST exempt.

**The following services/activities of the Charitable or Religious Trusts will attract GST and hence need GST registration:**

1. Any person who is registered under earlier laws of excise, service tax, VAT, etc.
2. If there is even a **single item taxable** under GST, and the aggregate value crosses Rs 20 lakhs (Rs 10 lakhs for NE states).
3. Any **inter-state sale or service**, irrespective of the aggregate value of Rs 20 or 10 lakhs.
4. Any occasion of **reverse charge mechanism (RCM)**, esp. while getting the services of an advocate or an author writing for a publishing agency.
5. Any **job work related to printing and textile processing**
6. **Input services of all approved educational institutions of higher studies** as well as **input and output services of all unrecognized educational institutions**

**of higher studies** will attract GST. Hence, services by way of catering, canteen, security contracts for an organization other than the pre-school and school up to higher secondary will attract GST.

7. Similarly, activities such as working women's hostel, hostel of higher studies for private students, seminar-ies (if taken as an educational activity), old age homes, etc., will attract GST, if the inmates are charged for their boarding (food). Here, if the charge is only for accom-modation and it is below Rs 1,000 per day will, it will be out of GST.
8. Any **e-commerce** or online buying and selling will at-tract GST.
9. GST of 5% is applicable on rosaries and 12% on stat-ues, *but clay statue will not attract GST.*
10. Any activity of a “**business nature**” that involves a **sale component or consideration** (e.g. Sale of school uniform, badges, stationery or other handicraft material, sale of scrap, etc) will attract GST.
11. Ordinary but **packed food items and sugar** will carry a GST of 5%.
12. Similarly, any **incentive received**, income on **adver-tisement in souvenirs, hoarding rent, events income, entry tickets of more than Rs 250 for events**, etc. will attract GST.

**Note:** There are two options available for those falling under GST:

(1) A composite scheme facility is available for small businesses with an annual turnover of less than Rs 1.5 crores (Rs Rs 1 crore for NE states) per annum, who have to pay



GST at the rate of 1% for manufacturers and traders and 5% for restaurants, canteens and food suppliers. See if you fall under any of these categories. However, those dealing only with non-GST supplies or involved in inter-state business or doing e-commerce or providing services other than restaurants and canteens cannot avail this scheme. However, construction work, which is considered a supply of service, cannot avail the composite scheme. Those registered under the composite scheme of GST have to file 5 returns (4 quarterly returns and one annual). Under this scheme, you can only issue a bill of supply and not a tax invoice. There is no input tax credit too. Neither can you collect the GST tax from the beneficiaries. You have to pay GST out of your own income on the total annual turnover, including the tax exempt items.

(2) The normal GST, where your GST liability is on the taxable items only. Those registered under normal GST, and whose annual turnover is below Rs 1.5 crores also have to file 5 returns (4 quarterly returns and one annual), but whose annual turnover crosses Rs 1.5 crores have to file 37 returns in a year (3 returns every month and one final consolidated return at the end of the year). In this option, you could collect the GST amount from the beneficiaries and deposit the same in the Govt treasury, because you would issue a tax invoice. You also have the advantage of input tax credit on the input tax you have paid. **The competency and knowledge required to do this would mean hiring a qualified person to handle these demanding requirements. Hence, if you are falling under GST due to a negligible amount of income (e.g. Income from hoarding rent, uniform, sale of handicraft items, etc.), it may be worth considering dropping such activities so that you are out of GST and all its cumbersome demands.**

## **“Only the Best Are Good Enough:” Interview with Missiologist Fr Julian Saldhana SJ**

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*AJRS: For more than 40 years, you have been involved in missionary research and deliberations. You have been able to form many seminarians, who contribute to a dynamic Indian Church. What are your reflections on the contemporary needs with regards to mission in India.*

Julian Saldhana: One cannot lay down an exact blue-print for India as a whole, because of the immense variety of situations and contexts. Besides, evangelization itself is a broad concept which embraces many elements (Cf. EN 17). Furthermore, the evangelizer is limited by his own abilities and resources. There is no single manner of mission which is applicable everywhere. It calls for much originality and initiative on the part of the evangelizer, to decide how to go about in the concrete context. What is important is to have a vision of evangelization. No wonder, that J. Shütte, late Superior General of the SVDs once remarked: “For the missions only the best are good enough!”

In areas where there are many priests and religious, these should consider offering their services for life or for a limited period, in areas where the need is greater. Likewise, in areas where vocations are plentiful, bishops should consider establishing “mission houses” as recruiting centres

for areas of greater need. The example of Mangalore diocese, which started the Bidar mission (now the diocese of Gulbarga) and is currently helping in East Africa, is worth emulating.

*AJRS: The Church is essentially missionary. How do we proclaim Gospel values in contemporary India, without projecting ourselves as triumphalistic and superior?*

JS: It was Archbishop Angelo Fernandes of Delhi, who said in an intervention in the Bishops' Synod of 1974: "We must bear in mind, that the Church is not God's sole agent of evangelization." Many non-Christians unwittingly further gospel values. Collaborating with all people of good will in promoting what is truly human and truly Christian is what he termed 'macro-evangelization'. This will often be for us a humbling, rather than a triumphalistic experience.

AJRS: From your long experiences in missionary fields, what are some of the lessons you have learnt, which you would like to share with the readers of Asian Journal of Religious Studies?

JS: Here in Asia, particularly in India, human relations are very important; the *dialogue of life* is much more important than theological dialogue. The FABC explained it so: "being with the people, responding to their needs, with sensitiveness to the presence of God in cultures and other religious traditions, and witnessing to the values of God's Kingdom through presence, solidarity, sharing and word". As Paul told the first Christians: "Whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all ..." (Gal 6:10).

The missionary ideal is well summarized in the phrase coined by Charles de Foucauld: "**universal brother**". One

can hardly explain it better than does John Paul II: the missionary “bears in himself the Church’s spirit, her openness to and interest in all peoples and individuals, especially the least and poorest of his brethren. As such, he overcomes barriers and divisions of race, caste, or ideology. He is a sign of God’s love in the world - a love without exclusion or partiality” (RM 89). This ideal is particularly relevant in India.

*AJRS: Given the concrete Indian situation, what is your advice to priests, pastors and missionaries?*

JS: We communicate more by what we are than by what we do. Holiness of life is a prime requirement in a priest or missionary: “It is not enough to update pastoral techniques, organize and coordinate ecclesial resources, or delve more deeply into the biblical and theological foundations of faith” (RM 90).

Here in India, the witness of life is valued immensely more than doctrines and dogmas. This is linked with the conviction, that concerning the ultimate Reality we cannot grasp what it is, but only what it is not. Whatever be the doctrines held, one looks for the transformation wrought in the life of the witness: personal experience and detachment. Not infrequently, one is asked, “What is your experience (‘*anubhava*’) of Christ?” Or: “Do you really believe what you are proclaiming? Do you live what you believe? Do you really preach what you live?” (EN76).

*AJRS: Thanks for your book, “Exploring Frontiers.” What are some of the salient insights that you want to communicate through your book?*

JS: My book covers a wide variety of topics. It shows that a genuine renewal of theology and the Church must be based on historical facts on the one hand, and on the very principles which the Church professes.

*AJRS: How do you see the Indian Church of the future?*

JS: We need to focus resolutely and courageously on the vision which Vatican II discerned for us: “*Particular traditions, together with the individual patrimony of each family of nations ... can be taken up into Catholic unity. Finally, the individual young Churches, adorned with their own traditions, will have their own place in the ecclesiastical communion ...*” (AG 22). The comprehensive inculturation called for by John Paul II (EA 20-22) needs to be fostered. This requires bold and imaginative steps, whose outcome will be the emergence of new Rites within the Church.

*AJRS: What is the impact of Pope Francis on today’s mission theology?*

JS: Pope Francis has reminded us of our pastoral priorities. In our preaching and catechesis, we should not place the communication of doctrines ahead of or above transmission of the *experience* that, “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you. And now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you” (Ev.Gaud. 164).

*AJRS: Thank you very much. May God accompany you in all your ventures!*

Fr. Julian Saldanha SJ is a well-known missiologist, St. Pius X College, Mumbai. Email: [jusalsj@gmail.com](mailto:jusalsj@gmail.com).

# Pope Francis: The Pope Who Dares to ‘Live the Questions’

**Denis Rodrigues**

Consultant, Pune

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*“..... the point is to live everything  
Live the questions now, perhaps you will then,  
gradually, without noticing it,  
live along some distant day, into the answer.”  
Rainer Maria Rilke*

Pope Francis is a man who all his life has lived his faith, questions and all.

For many people, Catholics and otherwise, who Francis is, and what he stands for as a person, is perhaps epitomised in a single statement: “Who am I to judge?” That remark has also generated a backlash, both inside the Church and outside. Moral relativism is, and always has been, a bugbear for established religion. If Francis is to be judged guilty on this count, then he could probably find solace in the thought that he would be in the same boat as Jesus, who when challenged by a clear and unequivocal statement of law, countered with an ad hominem answer – “Let him who is without sin throw the first stone!” The Catholic Church, through the centuries, has tried to deal with the ambivalence in applying absolute standards to specific actions and people, and the distinction between dogmatic and pastoral theology is of good standing. What is new perhaps, is that

the Pope himself has given a clear and unequivocal priority to mercy.

Another extraordinary characteristic of Francis is that he is apparently impervious to the temptation of power and its trappings. He wears those words of Rudyard Kipling well and has shown that he

*can talk with crowds and keep (his) virtue,  
or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch.*

He has held high office from his thirties. Yet even as he walked through the corridors of power as Novice Master, Provincial, Archbishop, Cardinal and Pope, Francis has retained a simplicity and sense of equality that perhaps can only be compared to someone like Mahatma Gandhi. The saying of Lord Acton, himself a committed Catholic, “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely” was originally made in a context of the Papacy and the Inquisition. Francis though, even in the Vatican is a blithe spirit sailing serenely through perilous shoals!

In many ways he is a conservative but in a way that is anathema to many Catholic conservatives. He is a liberal in most things, and yet on the issue of clerical sexual abuses, some of his actions are more conservative than those of his arch-conservative predecessor.

When all is said and done, Pope Francis was, and is an enigma. As Jesuit Provincial he walked a tightrope dealing with Jesuit activists in Argentina. He was accused of collaboration with the authorities and yet as Bishop he risked his own life to stand in solidarity with some of his priests under threat on the same score. He was accused of abandoning two Jesuits when they were imprisoned and tortured, yet, he also gave his own identification papers to a man who was in danger and even drove him to a border post to help him es-

cape. One might disagree with him but cannot fault his integrity. Once again in Kipling's definition., he was a 'man'

*If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you...  
Then you'll be a Man....*

By this yardstick, and on all counts, Pope Francis is a man.

### **But a Man Born After His Time?**

One can only wonder what the Church and the world would have been if Francis had become Pope after John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council. The world was in ferment and youth all over the world were looking for meaning and purpose. They had many questions and they did begin by seeking for answers within their Christian heritage. Musicals like Jesus Christ Superstar and Godspell (in modern parlance) went viral. What the world needed then was a Pastoral Pope, a People's Pope, a Pope who was not afraid of living the questions people were asking. What they got instead was a Dogmatic Pope. Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini in the early days of Vatican II was part of the vanguard looking for change, but reportedly was terrified by the implications of the student revolts of 1968 which changed his thinking radically. As Paul VI he continually provided old answers to vital new questions especially regarding contraception. Contrast this with Pope Francis and his *insistence that the Church is too focused on matters of sex and not on people*. Paul VI's successor Pope John Paul II continued along the same dogmatic lines but also distinguished himself as a Political Pope. Carol Wojtyla was undoubtedly a great man and probably should share credit for the dismembering of the Communist monolith. He could well take his place with other political Popes like



Leo I who dealt with an earlier threat from the East by talking down Atilla the Hun when he threatened to lay waste to the European heartland. But he could also be compared to Julius II, the warrior Pope who donned armour and wielded the sword in defence of the Faith – and the Papal States. It is difficult to see how Pope Francis fits in with this tradition....

This is perhaps *the* question which Pope Francis should not, and in fact cannot, continue to live. And the question is whether he can be the kind of Pope he would like to be, as long as he is a prisoner of the Vatican. Pius IX, another political Pope was considered to be a prisoner in the Vatican. Today Popes are no longer physically imprisoned (again by virtue of the Lateran Treaty, a pact between two political entities) but they are still prisoners of a mentality that persists through Leo I and Leo III, through Gregory VII and Julius II, and finally in John Paul II, a mentality that seeks a role for the Church in the political processes of power.

Pope Francis has always managed to be himself throughout his religious and ecclesiastical journey. But one can believe that was because of his ability to keep a clear separation between state and religion, between politics and religious structures. His approach is like that of Jesus “to render unto Caesar the things that are of Caesar and to God the things that are of God”. Can he still be himself as head of the Vatican State and a member of the European Union ?

The Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky has an interesting story about the Jesus’ second coming. Today perhaps that same plot would have a different twist:

Jesus came back to earth and “went about doing good, healing those who were oppressed by the devil”. And wherever he went people flocked to listen to him and he listened

to them and he answered their questions about life and love and he shared the good news that the kingdom of God was in their midst. And he was tired because the people were round him continually. So he went to Rome and he rested for a while with his friend Francis. And Francis asked him what he should say to his flock. And Jesus answered: "Tell them what you learnt from me, that I desire mercy." And Francis asked him another question: "What should I say to Government Leaders when they visit me?" So Jesus asked for a coin and he brought one to him. And Jesus asked Francis, 'Whose face is that ? And he answered 'mine', for it was a Euro coin of the Vatican State. And Jesus was silent .... and walked away sad. For he loved Francis greatly.

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"All major religious traditions carry basically the same message, that is love, compassion and forgiveness ... the important thing is they should be part of our daily lives." —Dalai Lama

"You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection." —Buddha

"Blessed are those who can give without remembering and take without forgetting." —Elizabeth Bibesco

"To love yourself right now, just as you are, is to give yourself heaven. Don't wait until you die. If you wait, you die now. If you love, you live now."

—Alan Cohen

# Christian Life between Memory and Hope

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“The Believer is essentially ‘one who remembers’”  
-Pope Francis

The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* is *Magna Carta* of the pastoral vision of Pope Francis for the renewal of the Church. It does say something to all of us; to the hierarchy, to the priests and the consecrated men & women, to the theologians, to the lay faithful and to the youth and the children. It is a document rich in content and filled with pastoral thrust. Here heart speaks to the heart. That is the beauty of this exhortation. Who is a Christian believer? People have answered this question differently. Anyone could answer that a Christian is one who is baptized with the trinitarian formula. For Oscar Romero (1917-1980), former Archbishop of San Salvador, El Salvador and a martyr for justice and peace, ‘a Christian is one who incarnates Christ in Life’. What is the answer given by Pope Francis? For him, “a believer is essentially one who remembers” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 13).<sup>1</sup> What does Pope want to say? I would claim it is the whole truth about Christian Life!

## Faith is Remembrance

Faith is the remembrance (memory) of the salvific act of God accomplished through the history of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The central point of this salvific history and memory is the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. Pope Francis writes: “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness” (EG 1). Faith is the remembrance of this transforming experience with Jesus. “Memory is a dimension of our faith which we might call “deuteronomic”, not unlike the memory of Israel itself. Jesus leaves us the Eucharist as the Church’s daily remembrance of, and deeper sharing in, the event of his Passover (cf. *Lk* 22:19). The joy of evangelizing always arises from grateful remembrance: it is a grace which we constantly need to implore” (EG 13).

It is also worth noting that Evangelist John relates both Faith and Memory in explaining the role of the Holy Spirit. “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (Jn 14, 26). It is the Church that keeps alive this memory which is faith. Church’s life itself is in this memory. Therefore, one can rightly say that she is at the same time the agent as well as the “remembering subject” (LF 38)<sup>2</sup> of this memory. That is why it is observed that the “Church is a mother who teaches us to speak the language of Faith” (LF 38). It is equally true to say that faith is essentially ecclesial. It is in the faith of the Church that one participates through Baptism. So the profession of faith is two dimensional: personal as well as ecclesial. Church is the primary subject of Faith. Therefore, Pope emeritus Benedict XVI exhorts:

Confessing with the lips indicates in turn that faith implies public testimony and commitment. A Christian may never think of belief as a private act. Faith is choosing to stand with the Lord so as to live with him. ... The Church on the day of Pentecost demonstrates with utter clarity this public dimension of believing and proclaiming one's faith fearlessly to every person (PF 10).<sup>3</sup>

Faith is a public act and liturgy is the public celebration of this faith. Therefore, each Christian should celebrate and live this memory with the Church and by participating in the life of the Church.

### **Believer Is One Who Remembers**

If faith is essentially a remembrance of the experience of encountering Jesus it logically follows that a believer is essentially one who remembers. A Christian is one who lives in the memory of the encounter with Jesus and the memory of the paschal mystery disclosed in Christ Jesus. Moreover, a Christian is one who lives in this remembrance and one who celebrates this remembrance. This is what Pope Francis means when he writes that "The Believer is essentially 'one who remembers.'" The content of this memory is the encounter with Jesus. That is why Pope Benedict XVI writes that "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (*Deus Caritas Est* 1).<sup>4</sup> In the words of evangelist John this encounter/event is characterised by the experience of God's love. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should ... have eternal life" (3:16). This encounter is salvific (EG 1). It is the memory of this encounter and the memory of the salvific mystery and history that guides a Christian leading one to have renewed hope in the Lord.

From another perspective one is able to understand the theology disclosed in the statement of Pope Francis that a Christian is essentially one who remembers. The liturgy which is the commemoration and public proclamation of faith is celebrated in and through signs and symbols and through different liturgical seasons. Thus liturgical season is the saving memory of the paschal mystery. Therefore, celebration of the different liturgical seasons enables one to live in the memory of paschal mystery (SC 102).<sup>5</sup> Liturgy is the source and summit of Christian life (SC 10).<sup>6</sup> The Eucharist which is the heart of the liturgical celebration of the Church and also the source of all Christian spirituality is also a memorial celebration. Thus, one can conclude that a Christian is essentially one who remembers the mystery of faith with the Church (SC 99) because Church is the ‘Subject’ of this celebration. She keeps this memory alive in her life and empowers others to keep this memory alive in their personal life (LF 38). In this light one has to say it again that faith as well as its memory are essentially ecclesial.

### **Life between Faith and Hope**

In continuation of what we have discussed above one can reasonably say that a Christian is essentially who believes, hopes and loves (Acts 2, 42; 1 Thes.5, 8). The memory as well as its celebration leads to hope. Faith and Hope are inseparable. Therefore, it is not wrong to say that hope is the first fruit of believing. The reason is:

Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy. It makes us fruitful, because it expands our hearts in hope and enables us to bear life-giving witness: indeed, it opens the hearts and minds

of those who listen to respond to the Lord's invitation to adhere to his word and become his disciples (PF 7).

For Pope Benedict XVI "Faith is the substance of hope" (SS 10)<sup>7</sup> because "[t]o come to know God—the true God—means to receive hope" (SS 3) and that "in faith [we have] the key to "eternal life"" (SS 10). Therefore, what is advisable is that Christians have to rediscover the hope because "[t]he dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open" (SS 2). Today, even Christians fail to live with hope and many like others want to build their 'eternal tent' here on earth. Holy Father puts this in the following way: "We who have always lived with the Christian concept of God, and have grown accustomed to it, have almost ceased to notice that we possess the hope that ensues from a real encounter with this God" (SS 3). Therefore, the imperative is given to us that we need to rediscover hope for "[t]he one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life" (SS 2). A life without hope is not worthy of its name Christian. Because of the indissolubility of faith and hope one is right in saying that we are saved by hope. That is the reason why Pope Benedict XVI with St Paul could say that we are saved in hope.<sup>8</sup> Thus, it can be conclusively stated that a Christian lives in the memory of the redemptive mystery which gives saving hope.

## Notes

- 1 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, 2013. Hereafter abbreviated as EG.
- 2 Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, Encyclical Letter, 2013. Herewith abbreviated as LF.
- 3 Pope Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, Apostolic Letter for the Indiction of the Year of Faith, 2011. Herewith abbreviated as PF.
- 4 Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, Encyclical Letter, 2005.

- 5 *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Second Vatican Council Constitution on Liturgy. Herewith abbreviated as SC.
- 6 Therefore, the Church teaches that “Devotions proper to individual Churches ... should be so drawn up that they harmonize with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some fashion derived from it, and lead the people to it, since, in fact, the liturgy by its very nature far surpasses any of them” (SC 13).
- 7 Pope Benedict XVI, *SPE SALVI* Encyclical Letter, 2007. Herewith abbreviated as SS.
- 8 “*SPE SALVI facti sumus*”—in hope we were saved, says Saint Paul to the Romans, and likewise to us (*Rom* 8:24). According to the Christian faith, “redemption”—salvation—is not simply a given. Redemption is offered to us in the sense that we have been given hope, trustworthy hope, by virtue of which we can face our present ...” (SS 1).

## References

- Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, 2013.
- Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, Encyclical Letter, 2013.
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- Pope Benedict XVI, *SPE SALVI* Encyclical Letter, 2007.
- Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Second Vatican Council Constitution on Liturgy.

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“Man is lost and is wandering in a jungle where real values have no meaning. Real values can have meaning to man only when he steps on to the spiritual path, a path where negative emotions have no use.” —Sai Baba



## Faith Reflections

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*[Instead of the usual Homily Notes for every Sunday, it was decided to take various themes and reflect on them. Such an attempt will not limit the reflection only to the particular Sunday but will have greater relevance even beyond a particular Sunday. Your comments are welcome. -The Editor]*

### Mary: Mother of God

**Yandava Joseph Naresh**

Christmas is the feast of God's love for humanity. We say that God is love but no one had seen the love of God. The baby that was born at Bethlehem was the love of God made incarnate and made visible. Today, is the Octave of Christmas. We are taken once again to the scene of the Nativity. The Church is stressing on Mother Mary's part in this wonderful mystery of God's love for us. That is why we celebrate the feast of Mary, Mother of God. Someone might ask: 'How can Mary really be the Mother of God?' True, Mary was the mother of Christ' human nature and she did not produce his divinity. True, that the mother of an ordinary human child produces only its body not its soul, for God, directly creates each soul. Yet, we say without hesitation that she is a mother. In a similar way, since Christ is once person, even though Mary has not produced his divine nature, she is well and truly the mother of the whole Christ, who is true God and true man.

God had bestowed on Mary many privileges but the greatest of them of all was her Divine Motherhood. Because she was to be the mother of God, God preserved her from 'Original Sin.' It is because of her divine motherhood that God bestowed upon her

greater graces than those he bestowed on the highest of angels and saints. It was because of her Divine Motherhood that, at her death, God preserved her body from corruption and assumed her body into heaven. But when Mary uttered her “fiat”, her “yes”, in response to the message of the Angel Gabriel, she became not only the Mother of God in the physical order of nature, but also in the supernatural order of grace, she became the mother of all who would be made one under the headship of her Divine Son. The mother of the head would be the mother of the branches. Our Divine Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, is the only son of our blessed mother by flesh. But Our Lady has to have other children, not, according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. The spiritual maternity of Mary is realized in a very real sense in the work of redemption. When Jesus offered himself on the cross as a spotless victim, Mary united her offering with that of her son and thus in a very real sense cooperated in the work of redemption. It was in the hands of Mary that the first oblation was made on the day of the Presentation in the Temple and, it was in her company and with her full cooperation, that the sacrifice of the baby through shedding of blood at the circumcision was completed. Lastly, this spiritual maternity of Mary is realized by her sharing in the distribution of graces. According to St. Bernardine of Sienna, she can distribute the graces to whomsoever she pleases, and when she wishes and in whatever manner she chooses.

She is our true Mother whose love for us has no limit. All the love that mothers bear their children or have ever had for their children is but a shadow in comparison with the love Mary bears for each one of us. (Based on Numbers 6:22-27; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21)

## **Called for the Glory of God**

**Jino V. O.**

The Word of God invites us to ponder over certain aspects of the Divine call. The call of God is beyond the expectations and criteria of human thinking. As a means for the fulfillment of the plans of God, He calls whomever He likes, without any consideration of place, age and abilities. But certain basic qualities are required

from our part. The first is, to be in the presence of God. In the first reading Samuel is seen besides the Ark of God. It's the same as that of being in the presence of God where the chances of hearing the call of God will be very high. The second is the willingness to respond to the call. The call calls for a response. By our response, we know the call. If one does not respond to the call at the right time, it cannot be answered in the right spirit. Here, Samuel was sleeping in the temple but he did not hesitate to respond even though his sleep was interrupted.

In order to discern whether it's a call to religious life a senior and a God- experienced person's guidance is an inevitable factor. Those who experienced God can easily realize the call of God and can direct others in the right way. Here, in the case of Samuel, Eli became instrumental in interpreting that it was a call from God. In the Gospel also, we see similar incidents where John the Baptist directs his own disciples to follow Jesus. His attitude is like that of a mere servant as Jesus mentions earlier "When you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'" (cf. Luke 17:10) This attitude of John the Baptist really challenges us because many of us forget the real purpose of our call and, instead of directing others to Christ, we attempt to draw them to follow us.. The clear understanding of one's own mission is very important to realize that we have been to be 'called' up into the very heart of Jesus. This act of pointing others to Christ is also done by the first two disciples who experienced Jesus first. Those who experience Christ cannot keep that experience to themselves for it needs to flow out to others.

Another important aspect we see at the end of the Gospel is Jesus changing Simon's name to Peter. This act of changing a name has a lot of implications in the Hebrew tradition. Primarily, in the mind of the Hebrew, the name contains within itself the "soul," the character of a man, indicating what he is in the depth of his being. In fact, no one had ever been called by the name of Peter till then. The definite task to be the 'rock' upon which Christ's Church will be built is given to Peter by this act. The divine vocation is transformed into a specific mission conferred by the Mes-

siah.

The purpose of our divine call is clearly mentioned in the Second Reading, that is, the glory of God and his kingdom. For that, purity of life is very much important. St. Peter reminds us “as he who called you is holy, be holy in all your conduct” (cf. 1 Pet 1:15). This call is not restricted to priesthood or religious life. As St. Paul advises the Corinthians “in whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God” (cf. 1 Cor 7:24). It is the call for each and every one of us to remain attached to God in holiness. In the Gospel passage, it is clearly mentioned that ‘they remained with Him’. After remaining with Jesus, only the first two disciples could point out Jesus to others. So that “remaining with God” is important.

The word of God invites us

- to live close to God
- to respond to the call of God properly
- to help others to understand the Divine Call from the abundance of our own God-experience
- to be aware of our own duties as a ‘called one’
- to glorify God through purity of life

Let us try to listen to the invitation of God and respond to our Divine Call whole heartedly.

(Based on 1Sam 3:3b-10.19; 1Cor 6:13c-15a.17-20; John 1:35-42)

## **Fishers of Men**

**Binod Hembrom**

The Word of God is alive and active today and will be forever. However, the Word of God made Jonah to get up, and inspired him to go to Nineveh, that great city, in order to proclaim to it the message that Yahweh would instruct him with. Jonah accepts the invitation of God and left everything for the sake of proclaiming the Word of God. Today, this message is very applicable to each and every one of us that we much listen to the invitation of God and proclaim His Word to the whole of humanity.

We are called to be the witness of Christ by proclaiming Him as the King of the Universe and Savior of the world. As a Christian, we are called to be witnesses of Him. Just as the disciples of Jesus did it in their life time. They were asked to be the witnesses of those things which they had seen with their eyes, heard with their ears and experienced with their hearts, of Jesus, as their Master. We too, have the same disposition towards Him, as disciples of Jesus had. The very identification of being a Christian depends upon in projecting Christ to the world by our way of life.

St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians reminds us to be more convinced in our faith attitudes. Very radically Paul says that whatever is in this world has no meaning in terms of the long race that has to be run. But, today, our attitude to the things of the world is very different. We cannot control the desire to choose the right things which can give us real happiness in our life. We need to project ourselves as happy Christians to the world. The things of the world will not give us the inner satisfaction in our life. Today, Jesus is telling us very strongly that, everything will pass away from this world but the love of Jesus will remain with us forever. So, let's allow ourselves for change in order to be real disciple of Christ.

The Gospel of Mark (1:14-20) gives us the very essential message that "The time has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." When news reached Jesus that John was imprisoned, Jesus returned to Galilee and began to preach the Gospel. We can visualize the proclamation of the kingdom not only as a gift, but also with a demand to "repent". Here, Jesus is seen as coming in the "fullness of time", since he was the messenger promised in the Old Testament. Jesus repeats the message of John the Baptist, "Repent and believe in the Good News". The emphasis of Mark's Gospel is that Jesus' coming is the Gospel, the "good news". Jesus calls four fishermen at the Sea of Galilee - Simon, who later will be later renamed Peter, Andrew, James and John. Once again we don't know what was there about Jesus that led Simon, Andrew, James and John, and others to leave their homes and families to follow Christ. Did they know Him already? Was this their first contact with Him? In any case, there

was something remarkably compelling about Jesus to cause these and others to follow Him into an uncertain future.

We too are disciples of God, chosen and called personally by Jesus. We believe that God calls each one of us. God not only calls us to follow Jesus, but also calls us from the fields and careers of our lives. God calls people to be pastors and workers to build up his Church. But God's call is not limited to the clergy. God calls every single one of us. However, every job that works to build up and maintain society is a calling - teacher, insurance salesman, car mechanic, politician, and so on also are called within their family structures - mother, father, aunt, uncle, child, and so on serve God in family set ups. God's call is always into an uncertain future. When we enter into our calling, we have no idea how it will all end up. Hence, we believe in the Divine Providence of God. When we believe that God has called us, we will perform to the best of our ability. We need to have an inner disposition for following Christ. We need to leave everything for the sake of Christ to spread the Kingdom of God. Thus, faith is the core part of our being Christian, which turns us into His vibrant witnesses. Let's have a burning desire to be deeply rooted in our faith in order to project ourselves as true ambassadors of Christ to establish the Kingdom of God.

(Based on Jn 3: 1-5, 10; 1 Cor 7: 29-31; Mark 1: 14-20)

## **To Know to Believe to Forgive**

**Kuruvilla Pandikattu**

### **To Know:**

- The Lord knows me much more than I know myself, since he is closer to me than I am to myself.
- He knows my weakness, my vulnerability
- He knows me - personally, intimately, directly. Yet He accepts me, affirms me.
- It is not knowing about me, but knowing me.

\* “Because God is the witness of his inmost self, and the sure observer of his heart” (Wis 1:7)

### **To Believe:**

- Since God knows me truly and accepts me unconditionally, I have the courage to believe in myself and in God.
- It is also believing not only that but also believing in God and in myself. Believing implies that I believe that God exists, He is loving etc. But believing in implies that I truly believe in him. I rely on him. I can depend on his outpouring of grace.
- To believe in Him is difficult and challenging, but not impossible.
- Can I really believe in myself, because God, in His Unconditional Love, believes in me and enables me?
- It is still more difficult to believe in others. The God I believe in, also believes also in the others, who may not be like me. Can I believe in Pravin Tagodia, even when I do not agree with his vision? Can I believe in my friends, who make use of me at times and who irritate me? Truly, God, in his all-knowing wisdom, believes in them.
- “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree ...” (Luke 16:6)

### **To Forgive:**

- If I know my God, who knows me personally and accepts me with all my blemishes...
- If I believe in God, who believes in me as well as my friends/enemies, I am also called to forgive them for the harm done to me.
- To forgive others is to recognize that, in spite of all my good intentions, I myself have harmed others.

- It implies that others have harmed me. I have also harmed them.
- After recognizing the depth of my fault, can I raise myself to the height of forgiveness, based on our common trust in God.
- Forgiveness is not forgetting, but enabling the wounds to make ourselves more compassionate
- If Gladys Staines could forgive Dara Singh, if Sister Selmy could forgive Samandar Singh, we too can.
- That's the only way of living together humanely.
- "If he returns to you seven times saying, 'I am sorry,' you should forgive him." (Lk 17: 5)

### **The Challenge:**

- "We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools." Martin Luther King Jr
- Can we base our forgiveness on the all-knowing wisdom and love of God alone?
- Can we truly know ourselves and others?
- Can we truly believe in the other and in God?
- Can we truly forgive ourselves and others and be more compassionate and all embracing?
- Firmly, gently, lovingly our faith is based on our Christian Vision of God knowing, believing and loving us!

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"When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy." —Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi

"The most common form of despair is not being who you are." —Søren Kierkegaard