HOUSE TOP

Vol. 21 No. 2

July - December 2021 *MSMHC Missionary Journal*



St Joseph: The Guardian of the mystery of God

MISSIONARY ANIMATION CENTRE

HOUSE TOP: MSMHC Missionary Journal
Vol. 21 No. 2 July - December 2021

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Published in 2021

MSMHC
MAC Publications

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Printed at : Luit Offset, Guwahati - 21

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"It is by encountering God's mercy especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation that we experience His truth and tenderness, because we know that God's truth does not condemn us, but instead welcomes, embraces, sustains and forgives us"

(Pope Francis)

Foreword

To the Light through Love

"There is an extremely powerful force that, so far, science has not found a formal explanation to" wrote Albert Einstein to his daughter Lieserl Einstein. "It is a force that includes and governs all others, and is even behind any phenomenon operating in the universe. This force explains everything and gives meaning to life. LOVE is the most powerful force there is, because it has no limits. If we want our species to survive, if we are to find meaning in life, if we want to save the world and every sentient being that inhabits it, love is the one and only answer."

Writing to the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith in 1952, Bishop Ferrando spoke of his resolute plan to reach out to all categories of people with the motto: ***To the Light through Love*** (*Ad Lucem per Caritatem*). The post-World War II saw the tribals in Northeast India leaping to catch up with the rest of Indians both in education and development through the tireless efforts of the missionaries. The Indian government, though appreciated the developmental works of the missionaries, resented any sign of conversion. Nonetheless, the missionaries worked tirelessly for the people, with all the respect and love for the culture of the people of Northeast India. The voice of the Shepherd, Bishop Ferrando then resounded: "From our part, we distanced ourselves from any shadow of politics, but always inspired by the love of Christ, we befriend the tribes, in order to give them the most important thing: "Life of the soul." Thus, the missionaries opened the arena of growth and progress by setting up schools and vocational training centres, dispensaries and health centres.

Hostility towards Christianity is growing ever strong. Plot against Christians are tactfully crafted. In many parts of India, Christians undergo every kind of persecution. We have come to a period where we cannot openly preach, or administer the Sacraments. Besides, digital media exposes people to the risk of addiction, isolation, gradual loss of contact with concrete reality and the divine. The most vulnerable are young boys and girls, women and children. There is a gradual replacement of religious values with the worldly pleasures and allurements, and the consequent scourge of abortion.

As daughters of a great missionary bishop, the MSMHC cannot stop proclaiming Christ, nor we can remain frozen before the tragedies of the people, especially, in places where people are less than enthusiastic about spiritual life and Gospel values. The basic question before the MSMHC is 'Creative Fidelity'. That is, how we can creatively live our founding charism in the present context. As Pope Francis rightly stated "Change of times" requires a "change of pastoral mindset." This calls us to lean toward, listen to, and perceive the new thing towards which God draws all of creation. A prayer that must shape our congregation's response to the needs of the world right now is to seek solidarity with the real faces of the world, our desire to listen to one another and to the brokenness of the world.

In this perspective, the MSMHC march forward with our charism of proclaiming, teaching and carrying out works of charity – all under the powerful force of LOVE. As Einstein stated, the MSMHC need to invent a bomb of love which alone can destroy the hate, selfishness, greed, war and violence that devastate the humanity.

Sr. Philomena Mathew
Superior General

Message

Father in the Shadows

When a child is born, right from the day, to him his father is his superhero. The child learns to move and take the first step with his father. Children therefore, look for ways to enchant their fathers and shower upon love with a heart full of Love. In this context I would say, it is very interesting to know about Joseph the carpenter who fathered Jesus. Matthew in his gospel asks a question, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son?" (*Mt* 13:54-55). The question asked has a type of parallel in each of the other Gospels (*Mk* 6:3; *Lk* 4:22; *Jn* 6:42), but no one says "carpenter's son." Only Mark 6:3 uses the word "carpenter," but applied to Jesus, without mention of Joseph. It was the natural responsibility of a father to teach his trade to the son. Besides the title "Son of David," Jesus receives from Joseph the title "son of the carpenter," adding a concrete human dimension that is part of the mystery of the Incarnation. The son of the carpenter who grew up working at his father's side would necessarily also be known to the people of his hometown as "the carpenter." The actual Greek word used for Joseph's profession is broader than simply "carpenter," and may be applied to a builder or a worker of any hard material such as stone or metal, thus opening a wide range of possibilities for the type of work that Joseph did.

The passage *Mt* 13:53-58 is the only time that this Gospel actually names Jesus as Joseph's "son" and it is the people of Nazareth, his own people who refer to him in this way. They are the first to take offense at his teaching, because they are all too aware of his ordinary human upbringing. This would give one explanation for

Joseph's absence in Jesus' ministry, which begins immediately with a voice from Heaven declaring "This is my beloved Son" (*Mt* 3:17). It could only cause confusion in people's minds to have Jesus' human father present while he was being revealed as the unique Son of God.

The presence of a human father was necessary for Davidic descent, for protection, affection, and instruction. The years of Jesus' life with Joseph and Mary at Nazareth are not recorded in history. It is reasonable to conclude that, in his human nature, Jesus learned from his parents, as every child must, and that what he learned was evidenced in the human manner in which he expressed his teaching and in the concrete images he used in the parables. Perhaps the very ordinariness of these years, in which nothing special stands out to record, is part of the principal information one needs to know about Jesus' human origins: he became like every other human being. Once Jesus' identity has been firmly established, one is prepared to receive the divine Good News he brings. From the absence of Joseph even when Mary is mentioned in the rest of Gospel, it may be concluded that he had died by the time of the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. No further data is available. The carpenter of Nazareth faithfully and unquestioningly fulfils all that God asks of him, and then just as quietly disappears.

Saving and Protecting the Child

Joseph is the visible protagonist who frustrates Herod in his intention to destroy the child. In this he exercises the protective role of father necessary for the survival of the child. Twice explicitly and once implicitly, it is again Joseph whom the angel of the Lord addresses for what regards the family (*Mt* 2:13,19,22). Both child and mother are mentioned in a passive role, entrusted to his care. As Joseph was a "just" or "upright" man of faith in accepting his role of father, so now he is an upright man of faith in

exercising that role by immediate, trusting, and unquestioning obedience to the three divine commands to flee by night to Egypt with Mary and Jesus, to return to Israel, and to move to Galilee where he settled at Nazareth. In the first two of these examples as in the initial dream, Joseph's response is described in words that repeat almost precise the words of the angel. This absolute and exact faithfulness to God in fatherly concern for the welfare of the child makes Joseph God's instrument of liberation and fulfilment. Humbly and quietly, he saves the Saviour's life and establishes earthly residence for him.

Joseph's Fatherhood

Joseph's fatherhood is the instrument for the Son of God to be called "Son of David" (*Mt* 1:1,20), "Jesus" (*Mt* 1:25), and "Nazarene" (*Mt* 2:23). That fatherhood is real, human, legal, affectionate, protective, and also educative. It is in accordance with fulfilment of the prophecies, and therefore is distinct from but obediently collaborative with the paternity of God, whom Jesus calls his Father.

In December 2020, Pope Francis' penned an apostolic letter titled *Patris Corde* (*With a Father's Heart*) in preparation for this year honouring St. Joseph. In his letter, Pope Francis describes St. Joseph's fatherhood according to seven aspects: as a beloved father; as a tender and loving father; as an obedient father; as an accepting father; as a creatively courageous father; as a working father, and as a "father in the shadows. The famous saying by Jim Valvano, "My father gave me the greatest gift anyone could give another person, he believed in me. The greatest gift therefore a father gives to his children is the unwavering faith that a father shows in his children which is the most important ingredient of human existence.

St. Joseph acted as a father-figure to Jesus in every sense. Pope Francis refers "father in the shadows." In his relationship to Jesus,

St Joseph was the earthly "shadow" of the heavenly Father. What he means by this is, he watched over him and protected him, never leaving him to go his own way. Fathers today can imitate this "shadow figure" throughout the lives of their children. Showing their physical and emotional availability to them, guiding them through good and bad times, yet allowing them to create their own path.

"Fatherhood and motherhood are the fullness of the life of a person" says Pope Francis. People nowadays do not want to have children, or just have one and no more. We can see many couples do not have children because they do not want, but they have two cats, or two dogs…. dogs and cats take the place of their children. Pope Francis continues, "This denial of fatherhood or motherhood diminishes us; it takes away our humanity. And in this way civilization becomes aged and without humanity, because it loses the richness of fatherhood and motherhood." We pray earnestly that every father figure in the life of a child may influence the formation of the child and create a conducive ambience for the upbringings of their children. Once Pope John XXIII quoted, "It is easier for a father to have children than for children to have a real father." May every child experience the same love and concern that Jesus received from his foster father St Joseph.

Sr. Bridget Diengdoh MSMHC
General Councillor for Evangelization

Editorial

A Focal figure in the Life of the Redeemer

One of the true blessings of the Catholic Church is our knowledge and friendship with the multitudes of Saints. Far from getting in the way of God, they reveal God's goodness and love for us. What is nice about Saints is that in reality, they were just like you and me. They entered this world with the same woundedness we see in ourselves, enduring the same struggles as we have in our life.

The Fathers of the Church from the earliest centuries highlighted that St Joseph took loving care of Mary and gladly dedicated himself to Jesus' upbringing. Similarly, he watches over and protects Christ's Mystical Body, the Church. As we read in the Gospel, next to Mary the mother of Jesus, there was no one closer to Jesus than Joseph, the spouse of Mary and the carpenter of Nazareth (Lk. 1). We may perhaps fall into a kind of sentimentalism in talking about Mary and Joseph, depicting their lives as almost angelic. It is true that, we cannot get closer to Jesus than they were. Nevertheless, in the case of Joseph, his life was not about just the feelings. It was about real life and realities of life. That's why Joseph is such a model for the head of the family.

The Emergencies Joseph faced

Life affords no higher pleasure than that of surmounting difficulties, passing from one step of success to another, forming new wishes and seeing them gratified. When Mary became pregnant by the power of God, she and Joseph were already betrothed. They had

not yet come together as husband and wife. Joseph must have felt that he was the most blessed man in Nazareth to get Mary as his wife. But the angel's message troubled Joseph immensely and at one point he wanted to divorce her quietly. Perhaps he must have gone through a surmountable mental agony in making the decision.

Mary returned from her visit with Elizabeth, and her body was showing she was pregnant. What must have gone through Joseph's mind when he saw her? His world had just come crashing down upon him; his future with her and all his dreams went up in smoke. It was indeed a harsh reality that the law said he had to put her aside. Try to imagine the pain and anguish when he realized what he had to do. We can thus say, well, he found out by that dream that everything was all right. Yes, but for those days and weeks prior to the dream, we dare not to dismiss the tragedy he was experiencing.

There is that moment of utter joy of taking Mary as his wife and then their journey to Bethlehem; his desperate search for a place of privacy so that Mary could give birth to her son. Then the joy of seeing the infant, the son of God had given to him as a father to protect along with Mary. At this time, you'll realize, Herod saw Jesus as a threat to him. Any parent who hears a threat against one of their children would know that feeling of utter panic. Moments of joy in the Temple when Jesus is offered to the Lord were great indeed. Life in Nazareth; father teaching his Son, Jesus, to pray and worship in the Synagogue, to learn about the history of his people, and even the hope for the future Messiah.

Finally, the trip to the Temple where Jesus got so interested in the scribes and teachers that he forgot to go with his own caravan of family, friends and neighbours returning to Nazareth. When Joseph and Mary discovered Jesus had been left behind, we can just imagine, how much he would have blamed himself for not being

more careful. I am sure that he must have felt guilty and that he had failed as a husband and father. Joseph as a fragile human being surely would have been upset with himself one or the other time. Sometimes we think Saints do not have those issues and problems. But, in fact they do have. Good and saintly men and women can also suffer from what they see as their own imperfections and failures. People can say, "Well, he had great faith." But faith does not lessen pain or hurt. Faith just helps us to get through.

Joseph as a Real Husband and Father

I say all these things because when you hear Joseph with the title, the "Spouse of the Virgin Mary," it is good to know Joseph was a real man, a real husband and a real father, who experienced all the ups and downs that go with those roles. He also links the idea to Pius IX's time of turmoil in society and in the Church because of war and the new movements of socialism, communism, materialism, all sort of -isms. St Joseph was certainly seen as a protector of the truths of the faith and fighter against the heresies that would damage our faith in any way. And St Joseph certainly upheld the dignity of Mary and Jesus and shows us how to uphold the dignity of human life, from the moment of conception to the moment of death. He certainly loves and respects us.

Patron of the Domestic Church

Catholic families take St Joseph as their patron. Just as Joseph is a patron of the universal Church, Joseph is the patron of the domestic Church, as well. Just as Joseph provided for Mary and Jesus and provides for the entire Church as well. As a whole, Joseph can be trusted to provide for the needs of the domestic church. Today families face challenges; fathers, mothers and children are going through dark times and facing evil which we never encountered and faced before. The title of "Patron of the

Universal Church" focuses on St. Joseph teaching Jesus how to practice the Jewish faith and to worship God devoutly. Similarly, "St. Joseph teaches the universal Church how to worship God, how to practice our faith, and how to fall deeply in love with Jesus."

Conclusion

Joseph was called to care for the holy family and to be a loving foster father of the Redeemer. The Lord used Joseph's trust and his unspoken fiat to make his incarnation possible. He is outstanding for his docility, silence and humility, ever attentive to the voice of God. Yet not a single word of his has been recorded in the Gospels. This is an indication of his adoring silence in front of the will of God. Thus, he is the model and patron of interior life. In this issue of the House Top, many articles deal with the very person of St Joseph. His simplicity of life, poverty, perfect submission to the will of God, his silence, patience and prudence in the midst of trying situations, his constant union with God, his purity of soul and body, and his hard work, etc. are but some of the virtues that each missionary Sister seeks to reflect in her life. We honour St. Joseph as our special patron saint and call upon him so that we too may faithfully fulfil the mission on earth as he did.

Sr. Viji John MSMHC

Lay Co-Responsibility in the Evangelizing Mission of the Church in North East India

Sr. Brigid Diengdoh MSMHC

Introduction

Lay co-responsibility in the evangelizing mission of the church is a topic of great importance. It helps us explore the great responsibility of the laity in God's plan for our Church in North East India. *Pope Emeritus,* Benedict XVI says, "Equally, ordained and lay people, are co-responsible for the Church's mission and must be formed accordingly."[1] He also said that "Lay people should not be regarded as 'collaborators' of the clergy, but rather as people who are really 'co-responsible' for the Church's being and acting."[2]

By Baptism Lay People share a responsibility in the Church's mission

A proper understanding of co-responsibility, can facilitate the beneficial involvement of lay people. Lay people make up the vast majority of the Body of Christ; yet, nearly all positions of authority within the Church are held by Clergies. However, following Vatican II, the Church has emphasized closer collaboration between priests and lay faithful. Through co-responsibility, the laity are invited to

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1 Cf. Benedict XVI, Church Membership and Pastoral Responsibility, 26 May 2009.

2 Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI on the Occasion of the Sixth Ordinary Assembly of the International Forum of Catholic Action, Castel Gandolfo, 10 August 2012.

greater participation in Church governance. This involvement, works to eliminate clericalism by fostering a greater understanding of life in the Church. Even though the Priest celebrates Mass and manages the parish, he cannot be seen as individually responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of the Church in his area, rather, all Catholics - lay and ordained - share responsibility, each serving the Church through a variety of ways.

In the word of St. John Paul II, "The Lord entrusts a great part of the responsibility to the lay faithful, in communion with all members of the People of God."[3] For this reason, lay people's responsibility is indeed a co-responsibility. They live it not only by cooperating with others, but with the deep consciousness that each baptized person, no matter the state of life, enjoys a weighty responsibility for the life of the Church.[4]

We read, in *Apostolicam Actuositatem,"*As far as possible the laity ought to provide helpful collaboration for every apostolic and mission-ary undertaking sponsored by their local par-ish."[5] In the final message of the Synod for Asia, the Synodal Fathers, speaking about the laity, said: "Many signs indicate that the Spirit is empowering them for an even greater role in the coming millennium which could be called the Age of the Laity."[6] There seems to be an implicit admission that the second millennium has not been that of the lay faithful. There has been a number of studies on the role and mission of lay faithful, especially after Vatican II. The documents of Vatican II, specifically *Lumen Gentium*, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*[7] and *Ad Gentes*, the Apostolic

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3 Saint John Paul II, Christifideles Laici 32.

4 Cf. Episcopal Commission for Doctrine Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 4.

5 *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 10.

6 Message of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, Vatican, May 13, 1998.

Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, the Codes of Canon Law (CIC) 1983, and the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO) have dwelt on lay faithful co-responsibility quite elaborately.

The Church of Post-Vatican II, saw the co-responsibility role between those in authority and the laity. The Church was seen as the people of God. Every baptized member partakes in the priestly, kingly and prophetic functions of Christ. The lay faithful share in the priestly functions of Christ by offering spiritual worship and all the hardships of everyday life. They share in the kingly role of Christ by overcoming the kingdom of sin in their own lives, and by striving energetically and constantly to bring all humanity with all its riches back to Christ. Charity is the best means by which the lay faithful exercise and manifest their kingly function. They share in the prophetic role of Christ by evangelizing the world, and by being witnesses to faith and love of Christ. Therefore, all, whether priests, religious or lay faithful, have equal status in the eyes of God and the Church. The Church will be fully alive only when laity participate in the *Tria-Munera*.[8] The triple vocation of the Christians, the call to holiness, to ecclesial communion and to apostolic mission, is common; it pertains to all of us as the Body of Christ, and therefore to each of us as members of that Body, "You are the Body of Christ and, individually, members of it" (1 Cor 12:27).

It is baptism that gives the laity a share in the three-fold mission of Christ as carried on by the Church. The distinction between the clergy and the laity remains a matter of internal ordering of the

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[7] *Apostolicam Actuositatem* is the Second Vatican Council's *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*.

[8] The *tria munera* refers to the clergy's ministries of teaching, sanctifying and governing, which correspond to Christ's threefold office of Prophet, Priest and King.

Church and it is based on the distinction between the common priesthood and ministerial priesthood. The Second Vatican Council brings out also the typicality secular quality of lay person. It includes engagement in temporal affairs, employment in a secular profession and living in ordinary circumstances of family and social life. Like leaven, the lay faithful are called to live in the world and transform the world. They are called to do God's work in the world.

In accordance to Code of Canon Law Can. 204, and the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO) Can. 7[9], the lay faithful and the clergy are both responsible for the accomplishment of the mission of the Church. The mission of the Church does not belong to the clergy and consecrated persons alone; the lay faithful share in this mission. It is not the clergy and the consecrated persons that give the lay faithful a share in the mission of the Church, but they share by virtue of their baptism which incorporated them as members of the Church.

The particular responsibility each person has within the Church is not separable from the responsibility that all Christians have by virtue of their Baptism. St. John Paul II made this clear: "Because of the one dignity flowing from Baptism, each member of the lay faithful, together with ordained ministers and men and women religious, shares a responsibility for the Church's mission."[10] A Christian cannot carry out this mission in isolation, but only in communion with the entire People of God.

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9 "The Christian faithful are incorporated in Christ through baptism, have been constituted as the people of God; for this reason, since they have become sharers in Christ's priestly, prophetic and royal function in their own manner; they are called, in accordance with the condition proper to each, to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world" (CCEO C. 7).

10 John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* 15.

Lay Co-Responsibility in the Evangelizing Mission of the Church in North East India

The miracle of the growth of the Catholic Church in North East India, in spite of odds, is the result of the missionary enthusiasm, dedication, hard work and collective efforts of generations of priests, religious and laity, particularly the lay catechists, who had only one cause in mind, and that was, 'the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ.' The lay faithful are the key to the first evangeliza-tion in many areas in North East. We should not forget that God was there before we arrived! One significant aspect of the growth, is the *emergence of leaders from the indigenous tribes* – several bishops, hundreds of priests and women religious, who are engaged in a variety of ministries not only in the region, but elsewhere in the country and in some of the difficult parts of the world.[11]

My Missionary Experience of Lay Co-Responsibility

In my 30 years of experience as a Touring Sister, I found that lay faithful especially the local catechists and women, have played significant role in the life of the Church in North East India. The pastoral activities of Fathers and Sisters in the villages have double effect because of the collaboration of lay faithful. They are the torch bearers who announce to the people of the pastoral visit of the Sisters and Fathers. In unfamiliar places they act as translators. They help in catechizing, organizing prayer meetings and conducting liturgical services in the village Churches in the absence of priests. They preach the Word of God. In fact, in every parish in North East the vast majority of people in the villages hear the Word of God from the local catechists. They take the lead in leading me to each home, explaining about the family. They follow up the faith

[11] Cf. North East India Regional Bishops' Council: Proclaim the Good News to the Nations, NEIRBC, Guwahati, 2016.

of the faithful. Thus, a great part of the success of mission in North East must be attributed to the local catechists' efforts. Many of them have been shining examples of Christian life and holiness. As long as there is lay co-responsibility in evangelization, the Church in North East will continue to grow. Hence, I acknowledge, I respect, and I value greatly the enormous contribution made by the lay faithful to the preservation of Christian faith and growth of the Church in North East.

Lay Co-Responsibility in Mission *ad gentes*

I do see that Mission *ad gentes* 'was' and 'is' relevant for the laity in North East India because of the geographical, cultural and social situation. The lay faithful have made an immense contribution to the first evangelization, catechumenate and the preparation of people for the various sacraments. In almost all the villages in North East the evangelization was begun by the lay faithful - the village Catechists, village teachers, the women and others. They act as bringers of good news and sharers of the faith. When the new convert is ready, they inform the priests and sisters. In turn the sisters go for instructions and the priests perform the rites of the sacraments. Hundreds of men and women bore witness to their faith, some even face persecution and martyrdom. Because of their untiring effort the Church grew in numbers. Today, in nearly all the places of North East the Church is present and is able to give witness to Jesus Christ. Without the contribution of lay faithful, the Church in North East India would not be what it is today. The lay faithful have played a very important role in evangelizing the people of North East.

Lay Co-Responsibility in Family Visits

In the villages the Laity, particularly the local catechists and women, would undertake visiting of the families in their respective villages, especially in times of distress, sickness, death or any other form of

suffering in families. They pray for the sick and organize prayer meetings in the families. Through family visit they take the opportunity of presenting Christ to the people and inviting them to the faith in an attitude of love and respect. Often such friendly visits pave the way to new contacts and open up the path for the lost ones to repentance and to a renewed relationship with God.

Lay Co-responsibility in Evangelization through Christian Families

In our North East context, Christian families have a special role to play in the evangelizing mission of the Church. Good Christian families are not simply the objects of Church's pastoral care; they are the Church's effective agents of evangelization. Family values like filial respect, love and care for the aged and the sick, love of children and harmony are held in high esteem in all North East cultures and traditions. Parents and elders bear witness to their children by creating a home where love, tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity and selfless service are being experienced. They educate their children in faith by speaking to them about God, teaching them prayers and leading them to the Church. Vocation to priesthood and religious life are nurtured during prayer and talk. They encourage their children to join these lives. Our Christian families in North East have promoted good number of vocations to the various ministries in the Church. I am happy that in many parishes in North East a high number of lay people are fully conscious of their Christian responsibilities. The Church of North East have come of age with its own hierarchy, clergy, religious and laity. Thanks to all good Christian families.

Lay Co-Responsibility in Evangelization through Various Associations

The co-responsibility of the lay people in the mission of the Church through various lay peoples' associations - Men, Women and Youth

are praise worthy. Members of these associations, are conscious of their obligation to be authentic witnesses of Christ and to contribute to the progress of God's kingdom. They participate in liturgical services through their melodious singing, provide to the needs of the Church for liturgical celebrations and assist in organizing major events of the Church. They take initiative in evangelization, works of piety or charitable service to the poor and animation of the temporal order with the Christian spirit. They also participate in the decision making process of the Church at some levels.

Lay people play significant role in social and political life of the people where missionaries cannot approach. They cater to the holistic needs of the society. Women associations in particular, with God's gift of compassion, sensitivity, femininity, and their "feminine genius" enabled them to participate fully in the life of the Church and Society, thereby, becoming the source of hope in renewing and humanizing society. As St. John Paul II pointed out, "Without the contribution of women, society is less alive, culture impoverished, and peace less sustainable."[12] This is true with the Church and society in North East.

The presence of different lay movements or lay associations helps parishes to grow. I quote here the statement of Late Archbishop Dominic Jala: "A Parish that does not have any lay movement or lay association is a dead Parish."[13] The various lay movements and associations, have been the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the Church in North East India.

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[12] John Paul II, Angelus, Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo, 23 July 1995.

[13] This is the statement made by Late Archbishop Dominic Jala, Shillong Archdiocese, at the Salesian Family gathering, at Pastoral Center, Shillong, 2015.

Lay Co-responsibility in the Church through Parish Pastoral Council (PPC), Small Christian Communities (SCC), and Finance Committees.

Parish Pastoral Councils, Small Christian Communities (SCC), and Finance Committees are another means of the laity in co-responsibility with pastors for the building of the Church. Among all the consultative bodies in which the laity participate, it is the PPC which has become the focus of great attention. Formation of Parish Pastoral Council (PPCs) is enlisted as a pastoral priority. The PPC members are instruments for building up the parish as a true fellowship, as they share in the pastoral mission of the Church. Through PPC, the laity participate in the parish decision, and other matters concerning the life of the Church. Parish Councilors are challenged to care for people (Mt 4, 18-25) and to build up the Church in their areas. Small Christian Communities are the means by which the Church is brought down to the daily life of the people. In them, the Church takes on flesh and blood in the life situations of people. There is a need for greater lay co-responsibility in the Church through Parish Pastoral Councils (PPC), Small Christian Communities (SCC), and Finance Committees. A training in team ministry and other related skills is very necessary for members to function effectively.

The MSMHC with Lay Co-Responsibility

The MSMHC Congregation is fully involved in the mission of the Church, which is "missionary by its very nature." The primary charism of the Congregation focuses on mission *ad gentes* and catechetical instruction, especially of women folk, girls and children. The Sisters learn the local languages and adapt themselves to the cultures and customs of the people that make them effective in their work of evangelization. The five dimensions of Lay co-responsibility with MSMHC in building up the Church in North East India:

i) Promotion of the two movements. Young Apostles of Christ (YAC), and Women Apostles for Catechesis (WAC). These movements are gateways for lay people and the MSMHC to be fully involved in the missionary activities of the Church in North East India. Along with the sisters, the WACs and YACs organized village tour, visit families, visit and pray for the sick, catechism classes for children on Sundays, organize Oratories, preach the Word of God, animate prayer services, and conduct adoration to the Blessed Sacraments. Through WAC and YAC movements the women and youth are trained to be equipped as catechists for faith formation and for proclamation of the Gospel. They take up leadership in SCC.

WAC and YAC are also means for fostering vocation. Prayers are set aside for this purpose. Many YAC members have joined Seminaries and different formation houses of various congregations in North East India and other places.

ii) Supporting the Local Catechists. The MSMHC are empowering lay faithful by giving a Catechetical Training to Local Catechists men and women wherever they work in North East and other states in India. The aim is to let them be effective and fruitful in their ministry. The sisters and the local Catechists work as a team in Evangelization.

iii) MSMHC Past-Student Association. The MSMHC stretches its energy and creativity in evangelization through its Past-Pupil. The MSMHCs Past-Pupil Association enable the past students to carry out their responsibility and be fruitful in their lives and in the world through the formation they have received. These young people were prepared to give back what they learned from the MSMHC to other young people. The Sisters namely the Principals and headmistresses of the schools are assigned to help them in ongoing spiritual, ethical, and social formation. They also help them in identifying apostolic needs.

iv) Collaboration with other Christian Denominations and People of other Religions

MSMHC uses the social apostolate as a means for evangelization. In this process they collaborate with Christians of other denominations, and peoples of other religions. Through various meetings and animations, they grasp the opportunity to animate with Gospel values. In turn people spread the Gospel values they received to other peoples. By this dynamic and prudent cooperation, which is of special importance in temporal activities, the MSMHC bear witness to Christ, the Savior of the world, as well as to the unity of human family. Their job in the new evangelization is to support and participate in the charitable works of the Church, and make that connection between those works and the Gospel message.

v) Collaboration with Members of other Lay Persons' Associations

The Sisters collaborate with **members of** other Lay Persons' Association such as, Youth Association and Women Association, in building up the Kingdom of God in the region. Through their collaboration, both the sacramental life and spiritual life of the faithful are taken care, and the Gospel is preached to the peoples.

Critical Observations and Practical Suggestions

It is encouraging to find the Spirit of co-responsibility among priests, religious and lay faithful in the past and present mission of the Church in North East India. The empowering presence of the spirit among the laity is seen through their commitment to evangelization and catechesis. Their involvement in ecclesial life and enthusiastic participation in Small Christian Communities are commendable. The role of local catechists and teachers in the villages concerning Church's pastoral and educative activities is praiseworthy.

- It is true that in all Church settings, lay people are working with priests and religious. But it is high time that priests and religious see them as "collaborators" and "co-workers" and not just as hired or paid workers. Jesus says in John 15:15: "I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father." This is the attitude priests and religious need to have with regard to lay people who work with them in various sectors of their Mission. They must regard the laity not as passive recipients of the priestly ministry, but as co-workers, equal in dignity to them. They are called to foster greater lay co-responsibility in leadership, animation, and decision-making at various levels in the Church.
- The lay vocation in the Church must be preached.
- Encourage Volunteerism among lay people from our own schools, parishes and mission stations. Training them to take up roles and responsibilities in their own settings, will in due course bring about religious vocations or give us robust lay people who can contribute greatly to the Mission of the church.
- In witnessing the Gospel in every area of life in society, lay faithful can play a unique role in rooting out injustice and oppression; and for this they must be adequately formed. As pastoral proposals, we can suggest that the laity be given an integral formation and training. To this end, I join the Synod fathers[14] in proposing the establishment of Lay Formation Centers to prepare the laity for their missionary work as witnesses to Christ today.
- The Church in North East need to have large number of well-educated and well-formed laity, who would collaborate

[14] *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 45.

and co-responsible with the clergy to make impressive progress in evangelization, and in building the Church and the society. Hence, the local Churches are to become aware of lay people's missionary vocation and responsibility, and promote them.

- Include the laity in the process of consultation and decision-making in committees and councils. The code of Cannon Law states: "Lay persons who excel in necessary knowledge, prudence and integrity are qualified to assist the pastors of the Church as experts and advisors in councils according to the norm of law."[15]
- In order to foster co-responsibility, the laity must receive good formation in the Catholic faith. Religious education is to be given even to adult, not merely to children preparing for sacraments.
- To equip the lay faithful for the transformation of the socio-cultural and politico-economic structures of society, they must be imparted with a thorough knowledge of the social and ethical teachings of the Church.
- It is the task of the Pastors to ensure that the laity are formed as evangelizers, able to face the challenges of the contemporary world, not just with worldly wisdom and efficiency, but with hearts renewed and strengthened by the truth of Christ.
- A special office, should be established at the center for the service and promotion of lay apostolate. It can serve as a well-equipped center for communicating information about the various apostolic programs of the laity, and assisting the laity in their apostolic works with its advice.

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[15] CIC, c.228, §2.

- In the participatory Church, everyone must feel included and wider participation of women must be promoted. Women are to be regard as co-workers in the apostolate especially in pastoral programs, diocesan and parish councils.
- Parishes need to establish an operational framework for the development of parish youth evangelization programs. Parish churches are to be a place of spirituality and prayer for youth. Parish Priests are to take active interest in young people, and meet them on a regular basis and strive to transmit the Gospel of hope to them. They also need to provide opportunities for teens and children to deepen their faith in Christ and create platforms to develop leadership qualities and teamwork.
- If the lay people are to exercise co-responsibility in the Church and the world by virtue of their Baptism, they need to nurture themselves and to be nurtured. They should be persons of prayer, live a life of holiness and life of witness; have spirit of sacrifice, humility and simplicity; they are to be close to the poor, committed to the marginalized with transparency of character among other qualities. Their apostolate will be effective only by being transformed into individuals of prayer and a spiritual community.

Conclusion

The Holy Spirit continues to renew the youthfulness of the Church in North East India through the lively participation of so many lay faithful. This is witnessed through the active participation in the Liturgy, in the proclamation of the Word of God and catechesis, in the multiplicity of services and tasks entrusted to the lay faithful and by the flourishing of groups, associations and spiritual movements. May lay people feel their own commitment to co-responsibility in evangelizing mission of the Church: with prayers, study and active participation in the life of the Church, with an attentive and positive gaze at the world, in the constant search for

the signs of the times. We hope that all members of the Body of Christ take up together the responsibility of bringing Christ, the only Saviour, to the world, in a spirit of family, friendship, and communion.

Mission to the Wounded World of Pandemic and Beyond Challenge and Responses in our Times

Sr. Mary Sangma MSMHC

Introduction

Lives for millions of people have changed radically across the world in the upsurge of Covid19, paving the way for untold suffering experienced in all its different forms. Humanity seems to be increasingly shaken. The pandemic has led to a drastic loss of human life worldwide. Millions of enterprises face an existential threat. The pandemic has harmed the poor and vulnerable the most, threatening to push millions more into poverty and misery. Thus pain, uncertainty and fear, and the realization of our own limitations brought on by the pandemic, highlights an urgent need for a far-reaching rethinking of our styles of life, our relationships, and the organization of our societies and, above all, the meaning of our existence.[1] At the same time, the pandemic has also made the already existing inequalities and inequities explode.

Along with this, we are also facing fear and uncertainty of what awaits next. There is a lurking fear that this pandemic that has taken the world into a situation of alarm will have its continuing effects for a long time to come. It is an immense challenge that we are facing with, in our homes, our Churches and our

[1] Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter. *Fratelli Tutti* On Fraternity (3 October 2020) no.33.

workplaces. The Covid-19 has brought revolutionary changes in almost every aspect of life. There is no doubt that this pandemic has caused lots of stress that is impacting mental health worldwide. The pandemic has prompted the Church in a new way to usher in an engagement with renewed urgency and responsibility to reach out to the needs of the people in varied forms. Individuals and religious institutions and civil society organizations in solidarity, have risen to the occasion to provide humanitarian relief aimed at the poor and the helpless.

Our responsibility today is to continue to respond perseveringly and creatively to the wounded world of pandemic and beyond. We are continually challenged "as the People of God to take on the pain of our brothers and sisters wounded in their flesh and in their spirit" [2] The Church is called to be what the world would look like, if it were in touch with God through Jesus Christ. This understanding of the Church makes the link between Church and society clear.

This pandemic presents our community of faith with an opportunity to witness how the Spirit works in times of crisis beyond us and around us. Our faith invites us to respond to this pandemic in creative and unique ways, born of love, compassion and self-giving. Therefore, the considerations made here are not the absolute solutions or answers to the enormous problems we are facing in our time, but a few reflections as to how we can become partakers in the face of human suffering during pandemic and beyond, in the light of some of the recent teachings of the Church.

Drawing Close to the Poor

The poor have been the most vulnerable in this time of Covid and have suffered greatly. They continue to struggle in the midst of

[2] Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation. *Evangelii Gaudium* (20 November 2013) no.20.

their powerlessness. The lockdown affected adversely the poor, especially women, migrants and refugees, daily labourers, the slum-dwellers and the jobless poor, the rickshaw-drivers, construction workers, scavengers, domestic workers, street children and those who are mentally or physically challenged.

The Covid-19 pandemic reminded us how interdependent we are: what happens to one person can soon affect many others, even on the far side of our planet, for we all share the same sorrows, the same hopes, and the same potential. To this point what does it mean to be the 'Church of the Poor' in our time? The Church needs to stand in solidarity with the poor, as she believes that her evangelizing mission involves a moral responsibility as well as a task of protecting the dignity of persons that calls for radical engagement.

Pope Francis' in his encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti,* invites us to listen to the cry of the poor and to recognize the seeds of hope and of the future that the Spirit continues to sow even in our time. The question is how we can remain significant in the struggle and cry of the poor, of the effects of the pandemic, the injustices and inequality, the violence, the brunt of the aftermath of the pandemic faced by the poor and the marginalized? This allows us to analyze, reflect and make judgment on what is happening from the perspective of our Christian faith and the Church's moral and social teaching.[3] It should stir us to share our stories - of what we are doing and should be doing - and support each other and express solidarity and act together to transform and heal the world.

The Church as a whole has enormously rendered her services to the affected poor during the pandemic, which is understood as a *special form of primacy* in the exercise of human and Christian

[3] Pope Francis, Message for the 2020 World Day of Migrants and Refugees (13 May 2020) *L'Osservatore Romano,* (16 May 2020) 8.

charity. But our commitment does not consist exclusively in activities or programs of promotion and assistance; but above all an attentiveness which considers the other in a certain sense- as one with ourselves. This loving attentiveness is the beginning of a true concern for the poor. True salvation means the liberation of the hungry, the homeless, the displaced person, and all human beings who have been excluded from society which now has affected more severely in our time. We are called to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them. More than ever before, the Church in India is called upon to be a Church of the poor, and stand in solidarity with the powerless and the marginalized in our society.[4] Indeed, the moral teachings of the Gospel point to the transformative power of the faith.

We all have the responsibility to love, share, and care for each one and for all things. This means rooting out selfishness, greed, indifference, insensitivity and self sufficiency, when all the others are suffering in the face of the pandemic and such similar catastrophes. This requires responding to the cry of the poor for the Church is the sacrament of God's power and presence here on earth. The signs of this Sacraments are signs related to the poor.[5] We become docile and attentive to the cry of the poor and to come to their aid. It means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity.

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4 Mathew George, "Mission of the Church in the Indian Context" Contextual Reflections, Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong.30-35.

5 Mathew George, "Mission of the Church in the Indian Context" Contextual Reflections.36.

Attentiveness to the most Vulnerable People

While everyone is facing unprecedented challenges of pandemic and its aftermath, the most severely affected and vulnerable ones are the women, those who are rarely in the headlines, migrant workers, refugees, marginalized racial and ethnic groups, single-parent households, children and youth of the world's poorest countries, gypsy-traveler -families, those with physical or mental illnesses and the elderly, mothers in the prenatal period and those families who have lost their bread winners, just to mention a few.

Women are the worst affected ones of the pandemic. They are bearing the brunt of the economic and social fallout of Covid-19. Women who are poor and marginalized face an even higher risk of Covid-19 transmission and fatalities, loss of livelihood, and increased violence. Globally, 70 per cent of health workers and first responders are women. With the Covid-19, came the massive job losses, shrinking of economies and loss of livelihoods, particularly for women. Weakened social protection systems have left many of the poorest in society unprotected, with no safeguards.Ginette Azcona, lead author of UN Women's latest report, From Insights to Action *says* "women are likely to experience long-term setbacks in work force participation and income. They bear the brunt of care responsibilities as schools closed and family members fall"[6]

During the lockdown girls were more exposed to sexual exploitation, teen pregnancy as well as child labour and a greater burden of chores and care work at home. All this led to an increase in drop-outs from schools. *Fund's* analysis, suggests that if similar patterns are repeated with Covid, 20 million girls will never return to school. While at the same time the situation of the domestic workers has

[6] Ginette Azcona, "COVID-19 and its Economic Toll on Women" *From Insights to Action* (2020) 2.

been dire. Around the world, a staggering 72 per cent of domestic workers have lost their jobs.[7]

Another Vulnerable group that needs our care and attention is the children at risk. An entire generation of children has now seen its education interrupted. At their peak, nationwide closures disrupted the learning of 1.57 billion students - or 91 per cent of schoolchildren worldwide -

with devastating consequences. Marginalized children pay the heaviest price as inequalities in learning widen. Especially girls are less likely to return. Some 346 million young people do not have access to the internet for remote learning. And for those who rely on school-based nutrition programmes, closures means-being cut off from the food they need to learn and thrive. Overall, the pandemic had a negative impact on the mental and physical health of many children and young people.[8] As a result, this generation of students, and especially the more disadvantaged ones may never achieve their full education and earnings potential

The Covid-19 pandemic causes major *emotional distress.* Many are going through feelings of loneliness and isolation, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress syndrome, thus causing a major impact on *mental health*. The most common distress reactions include anxiety, insomnia, perception of insecurity, anger, fear of illness, and risky behaviors. Patients having mental disorders are vulnerable during the pandemic.

Our response to this pandemic must encompass and focus on those whom society often neglects or relegates to a lesser status. United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet

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7 Global Fund,"Global Fund Results Report Reveals COVID-19 Devastating Impact" (September 2021) 3.

8 UNICEF, "Protecting the Most Vulnerable Children from the Impact of Corona Virus: An agenda for Action" (*September 2020)*

says," The health of every person is linked to the health of the most marginalized members of the community."[9] Evangelization requires being prophetic - to speak out against social evils and proclaim the coming of a new world, a new reality. The Church can monitor, denounce and resist human rights violations and abuses - including totalitarian state control that diminishes freedom in the guise of containing the pandemic.

Impact of Devastating Wars and Political Conflicts

Every war leaves our world worse than what it was before. The ongoing raging war and political conflicts in countries coupled with the pandemic situation will have an untold suffering of its kind on the people battling against Covid-19, and its consequences. Long-suffering Afghanistan is bracing on a new wave of misery caused by the ongoing conflicts. The country which managed through the pandemic waves last summer is at risk of developing yet another variant of Covid.Asia is the continent where in addition to the enormous suffering caused by the pandemic, there are also grave problems due to the situations of war in Afghanistan and Myanmar, reports the Atlas of *World Wars and Conflicts Fides*. Colonel Baser, who has been serving in the Afghan security forces for 10 years, Says, "The Covid-19 outbreak was an occasion and an opportunity to join all hands, stop killing brothers in this country and fight against the virus together, But unfortunately, the Taliban continues shedding blood and killing brothers."[10].

There is yet another grave concern over recent Russian invasion of Ukraine, which can be termed as another dark chapter in the history

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[9] Michelle Bachelet, "COVID-19 and Human Rights: Protecting the Most Vulnerable"2020 UN's Report: https://unglobalcompact.org/academy/covid-19-and-human-rights- protecting-the-most- vulnerable (accessed on March 4, 2022).

[10] Colonel Baser,"Afghanistan: War in the Time of Corona virus" *The Diplomat"* (April 2020).

of humankind. Despite a peace deal and the devastating spread of Covid, the humanitarian consequences on civilian populations will be devastating. There are no winners in war, but countless lives will be torn apart. We are witnessing day after day reports of casualties and people fleeing their homes to seek safety. This hard situation is pushing Ukraine towards its worst recession in decades-possibly a depression-with devastating consequences for its most vulnerable people. People living in conflict-affected areas, further, face additional deprivations, the report found. The ongoing shelling damaged many water supplies, which has deprived them of running water during the pandemic, while unemployment and extreme poverty increase the vulnerability.

As India emerges from the second wave of Covid-19, pandemic that engulfed the nation at the beginning of 2021, it continues to face multitude of challenges across numerous fronts. India's farmers' protest against discriminatory laws of the government, presents an increasingly difficult challenge to the farmers already grappling with the corona virus.

War and strife, deliberate acts of avarice, greed, and self-centeredness of leaders contaminate and paralyzes from what should be benefitting for the people. As evidenced, many lives have been lost due to the pandemic. Central to this tragedy is the inequity prevalent in various social structures that is mercilessly revealed. Civilian lives and civilian infrastructure must be protected and safeguarded at all times, in line with International Humanitarian Law. Pope Francis says "War is a failure of politics and of humanity, a shameful capitulation, a stinging defeat before the forces of evil" (*FT.*261).[11] Let us not remain mired in theoretical discussions, but touch the wounded flesh of the victims.

[11] Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no.261.

Collaboration and Co-responsibility

Caring for the victims of the pandemic and the consequent crisis is a priority for the Church in collaboration with civil society and government institutions. The Church must continue to mobilize its resources in supporting relief and humanitarian efforts. The present Synod of the Church is the culmination of this effort to bring greater degree of openness, collaboration and mutual listening and communion with all the others in its effort to contribute its resources generously. This means -journeying together which involves participation in the decision-making process- in governance, united in an effort to come to the aid of our wounded world here and beyond.

It also means providing psycho-spiritual care for the bereaved and front-liners who may be suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. This can take the form of counseling. There is also a need at the grassroot levels to respond to their basic needs both material and spiritual. To be actively pro-life and contribute charitably for the welfare of those suffering from pandemic. The best way to fulfill one's obligations of justice and love is to contribute to the common good according to one's means and the needs; to promote and help public and private organizations devoted to bettering the conditions of life.

Rebuilding 'Our Wounded World' with Compassion and Charity

The pandemic has wounded our world far beyond all human minds can imagine, with its devastating consequences for individuals and communities and families grappling to respond to its consequences. The pandemic has also reminded us how interdependent we are. In his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis calls all to act instead as neighbors, lifting up and rehabilitating the fallen for the sake of the common good and encourages rebuilding 'our wounded world'

through framework of the Good Samaritan. Jesus' mission was indeed a mission filled with compassion. It's this compassion that made a difference in his mission and enabled Him to be with the people. There is a need for more humanity, more love and authentic connection.

Living in the time of this global pandemic, compassion and a deep sympathy should move us to action. In order for us to be moved with compassion, we must see people through the eyes of compassion, with empathy that allows us to truly see their suffering, which moves us to reach out to relieve their suffering. Are we taking the time to stop and see those in need who are part of our family and friends? Our response to the world's suffering depends on what we choose to notice. Let us choose to expand our compassion and be bearers of hope in the midst of pain and suffering. Only this way will we change this story of pain and suffering, to be one of compassion and communion. Love is the kind of attention that brings a broken and bleeding world back to health. When Jesus looks at a lost world, he feels compassion, and then moves to action. This love will make a difference for those in despair and give them hope and healing.

Finding Spiritual Calm when all else is in Turmoil

In these days of doubt and questioning, negative news is utterly all-encompassing, exposing us consciously and unconsciously to much more of the downside of the pandemic than any appreciable upside. We may not easily understand God's presence in the Covid-19 and the way we are moving in the face of hard challenges of our time, but let us trust that God enables us to find spiritual calm when all else is in turmoil. This pandemic presents our community of faith with an opportunity to witness how the Spirit works, no matter what else is falling apart around us. This is immensely comforting, a tremendous answer to all our earnest desires for healing.

Covid-19 pandemic reminds us that we are deeply human and fragile and at the same time we are deeply spiritual. This, however, is a time to wait patiently with hope to spring forth something meaningful in our spiritual journey. There is the divine assistance that can only bring us back to life. Even in the face of suffering in the manner of Job, God cares for us despite the pandemic. On the other hand, hope against despair can give us the strength to bear the sufferings and bring us hope.[12] Living of the Gospel life provides us with a spiritual grounding. This crisis is a portal to something that is possible to overcome.

Finally, the virus has taught us the benefits of silence and solitude so that we can look into ourselves and explore the deeper recesses of our consciousness. We are so involved in superficial activities that we seldom get time to look within. In the ultimate analysis, it is our inner consciousness that will express itself in our actions and relationships. If we can find deep within ourselves the divine light: that is the core of our being; this will uplift not only each individual but society at large. We realized that it took a global pandemic to make us aware of the importance of life and what truly matters in it. Though the Covid-19 crisis has brought the world to a halt and sadly, the health and economic impact is disastrous, but from a spiritual angle, the pros will outweigh the cons making us a global community with spiritual connectivity. In a way, Covid-19 is also a battle for our souls, a spiritual battle for the 21st century; a battle we must win.

Journeying Together with a Continued Assistance

The Covid-19 pandemic has taught that we are all travelers on our way; we need each other for a harmonious co-existence as human

[12] Scholasticah Nganda, "Let us be bearers of hope in the midst of pain and Suffering" (12 September 2020), *https://www.globalsistersreport.org/news/coronavirus/column/ (accessed on* 5 March 2022.

beings. The pandemic showed that human beings are resilient. It revealed our collective strength and generosity of heart, at the same time exposing our limitations and vulnerabilities. While we saw extraordinary acts of compassion and kindness, the pandemic also revealed that we are capable of behaviors reflecting the dark side of our humanity. The Church today clearly defines that we are a global community, all in the same boat, where one person's problems are the problems of all. Once more we realized that no one is saved alone; we can only be saved together.[1313]

As life is becoming normal again after the pandemic, there is a fear of continuous upsurge of virus coming back but the impact has been enormous in all the areas of life. We might just sit back to think that all is well again and our humanitarian services and our good will to serve the humanity during this pandemic is all over. But it is here that we are challenged to respond creatively and much better. Our constant assistance and accompaniment of those in difficulty will be needed most; to share our resources and our energies and continuous help.

Our enduring task should be in caring for our wounded world; caring for the victims of the pandemic and the consequent crisis. As Christians, we hope and pray for the wisdom for our political leaders that they pursue the common good; recognize the frustrations of the people whom they are called to serve, and find new ways to accompany those most need of special assistance. From our part we can reach out to embrace our brothers and sisters in which every way possible; sharing our time and precious resources as a clear sign that we are all connected; we are all members of the one family of God journeying together on the road that is leading us towards the full realization of God's kingdom now and beyond.

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[13] Extraordinary Moment of Prayer in Time of Epidemic, (27 March 2020): *L'Osservatore Romano,* (29 March 2020).

Conclusion

The global pandemic acts as a revelation of our need to face the crisis courageously. Through the centuries the Church has found herself facing numerous crisis' worse than what we have now. The Spirit-filled Christian community have survived and thrived even in the worst situation and continued to fulfill her mission. In our time it is an opportunity to express concretely the warmth of God's love as we strive to heal our wounded world and move beyond the path of social friendship with individuals, communities, peoples and nations. We need to read together the signs of the times in the midst of this pandemic affected world.

It is a challenge that requires global cooperation and unity, a component of compassion to alleviate suffering, and a greater responsibility to exercise our faith to witness divine intervention. Every crisis is an opportunity to rebuild things that have been neglected. Pope Francis emphasizes everything and everyone as interconnected. This is a clarion call during this pandemic and beyond to act together in solidarity. It is a call to think and act and collaborate to design the course to follow and implement right steps to alleviate the pains and sufferings of the people.

As Christians and as religious, we are particularly called to be prophetic and meet the current needs and cries of our wounded world and fulfill the mission of the Church, taking into account our contemporary contexts and cultures to serve the 'common good of our common home'. As we face these crises together, we continue to pray to the Spirit of God and move forward together in communion, participation and in our mission of caring for the vulnerable, the wounded world through individual and community endeavors.

St Joseph: The bringer of souls to Jesus

Sr. Rosita..... MSMHC

Introduction

St. Joseph is the earthly icon of God the Father, Jesus is the true Son of God, and Blessed virgin Mary is the icon of the Holy Spirit. He is well known as the patron of a happy death. He died in the arms of Jesus and Mary and much more than that he is our spiritual father who desires to lead us to Jesus, Mary, the Church and growth in virtue. During the time of great famine in the Old Testament, Pharaoh instructed the Egyptians "Go to Joseph and do all that he shall say to you" (Gen 41:55). Today the Catholic Church is speaking to people and telling them "Go to Joseph". As we have come to know St. Joseph more, we can love him more and learn to turn to him frequently in our spiritual lives. He is the only human person who has been given the title of "saviour of the Saviour." It was St. Joseph who saved Jesus by taking him to Egypt when Herod wanted to murder the new born King. The virgin Mary loves Joseph because he was her faithful, chaste and virtuous husband. Mary's heart always felt the strength, holiness and calmness of St. Joseph. With Virgin Mary, the first to bring messiah to the nations, St. Joseph is the second greatest human person in history because he too, shares in the role of bringing souls to Jesus.

1. Bishop Stephen Ferrando a great devotee of St. Joseph

Devotion to Mary and Joseph was closely linked to Bishop Ferrando and his family as it was to the people of his native place at Rossiglione. Right from the early days, Ferrando cultivated an

unbounded trust in God. The simplicity of St. Joseph, his patience and dependence on God, became an example for his family. St. Joseph intervened in their life and showed them how to encounter God in daily life. People of Rossiglione confidently turned to St. Joseph with their needs and petitions. Besides trusting in St. Joseph's sure protection, they also trusted in his noble example, which served as a model for the Christian community, whatever the duties and state of each one might be. His devotion to St. Joseph was matured in the Salesian Congregation. St. John Bosco says, "To be truly devoted to St. Joseph means to imitate his virtues."[1] Besides, Don Bosco saw in St. Joseph an authentic model for Salesians who wanted to develop their own human and Christian personality.[2] The practices of piety in the oratory of Valdocco, sodalities and devotions and especially devotion to St. Joseph and his hidden sanctity guided his life and apostolate as a Salesian missionary in Northeast India.

2. Courage to discern the inscrutable ways of God

Through dreams God revealed himself to St. Joseph. Speaking about St. Joseph, St, Theresa of Avila says that St. Joseph had an astonishing influence with God. So she wished to persuade everyone to honour him with particular devotion. When the angel appeared to him in a dream (Mt 2:13), he obeyed the call of God and departed immediately for Egypt. He discerned the will of God and responded to it without delay. So Joseph can help us discern the voice of God. According to Pope Francis, dreams symbolize the inner life of each one of us, that inner space that each of us is called to cultivate, where God manifests himself and speaks to us.[3] However, he warned of other voices of our own fears, experiences, hopes

1 Cf. E. Ceria, *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, Vol. 11, 214.
2 M. Wirth, *Don Bosco and His Salesians*, 48.
3 Francis, *General Audience*, 26 January 2022.

as well as voice of evil one, who wants to deceive or confuse us. Pope Benedict XVI said: God alone could grant Joseph the strength to trust the angel.

How much holiness is there in Joseph! He lived for Mary and his trust in her suggested a way he could remain in observance of the law and save the honour of his bride. Unlike people who turn to exaggerate or gossip, Joseph remains quiet. God's voice intervened in Joseph's discernment and God revealed to him the meaning of living a just life. God's help strengthened him and he could see life's circumstances from a different perspective. Though Mary and Joseph had their dreams and expectations concerning their life and future, God unexpectedly comes to their life with struggles, which Joseph could not have imagined would happen. However, both of them opened their hearts to God with their courageous 'fiat.'

Bishop Ferrando could also have been confined to many circumstances that initially seemed dramatic. But his trust in God's providence took shape over time and illuminated the hardships with meaning. His future plans were shattered with many disasters that beset the mission. With all the risks that awaited, he founded the Congregation of the MSMHC, with heart open to God's grace. Then God intervened and let the congregation grow to the present day. The Founder was confident that under the protection of St. Joseph, the Sisters will be happy and all shall go well with them.[4] He exhorted the Missionary Sisters to imitate the examples and virtues of St. Joseph: work hard and do everything with purity of intention. He wrote to them: Sanctify your work, actions, by accompanying them with acts of love to God and spiritual aspirations."[5]

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4 S. Ferrando, "Letter to Sr. Nellie", 23.3.1948, in *From the Heart of a Father Who Loves You*, p. 22.

5 S. Ferrando, "Letter to the novices", 22.12.1945, in *From the Heart of a Father Who Loves You*, p. 20.

3. Inspiration to do Right Things

St. Joseph is an extraordinary figure, yet at the same time "one close to our own human experience."[6] He did not do astonishing things, nor did he appear special in the eyes of those who met him. Through his ordinary life, he accomplished something extraordinary in the eyes of God. God recognized in St. Joseph, the heart of a father who was able to give and generate life in the midst of daily life. After each dream St. Joseph had to change his plans, take a risk, sacrificing his own plans to fulfill the mysterious plan of God. He abandoned himself confidently to God's grace, setting aside his own plans. Therefore St. Joseph is an outstanding example of acceptance to God's plans. As a true seeker of God's plan St. Joseph was never worn out in his search to understand the revealed truth and in committing himself to it. In the present day context, our missionary work and our good will to do charitable activities are being scrutinized by others, hence, we have to follow St. Joseph's paradigm of discernment and go forward tirelessly and fearlessly to live the missionary commitment.

Life often put Bishop Ferrando too in situations too difficult to understand. As the Bishop of the vast Assam mission, when problems and poverty assailed Bishop Ferrando, he prayed for God's light and followed the example of St. Joseph which helped him to do right thing. God gave him courage and fortitude to withstand the ordeals of fire that destroyed the Cathedral, World War II, Flood and other natural calamities for which he had no answer. Bishop Ferrando certainly experienced dangers that threatened him and the mission of Assam. In moments like these, he turned to God and sought the intervention of St. Joseph, who is the protector and guardian of the Church. All those who honour

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6 Francis, "Dreams, Service, Fidelity", in *L'Osservatore Romano*, (26.3.2021) 4.

St. Joseph make progress in virtue for he favours in a striking manner the spiritual advancement of souls who commend themselves to him.[7] Bishop Ferrando sought the help of St. Joseph because he knew that St. Joseph is truly a man closest to Christ, even in eternity. Jesus perpetually shines his divine face on St. Joseph and responds to his every request and desire on behalf of souls.

4. Guided through Prayer

Even in the midst of thickest confusion and utter helplessness God guided St. Joseph. His long journey to Egypt was undoubtedly a dangerous journey. He had no time to ask any questions to the angel to clarify his doubts regarding the journey. His perfect obedience rendered him the amiable head of the Holy family. In the dream Joseph came to know that it was right that he should marry Mary, since she had conceived her son through the power of the Holy Spirit. "By God's providence, Joseph came to a deeper understanding of divine justice and its authentic demands."[8] Throughout centuries Christians have been inspired by the example of St. Joseph, confidently turning to him with their needs and petitions. In our times, it would seem that heaven wants to draw our attention even more to the greatness of St. Joseph. Keeping St. Joseph closer to our hearts will always bring us greater union with Jesus and Mary.

His own life lived in the simplicity of Nazareth shows us how to encounter God in the silence of our hearts in the midst of our ordinary duties. St. Joseph did not do extraordinary things, but rather by the constant practice of the ordinary and common virtues, he attained that sanctity which elevates him above all the other

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7 Cf. Donald H. Calloway, *St. Joseph Gems*, Stockbridge, Marian Press, 2020, 35.

8 Francis, "To love means to choose life's responsibilities", in *L'Osservatore Romano*, (3.12.2021) 2.

saints. Here St. Joseph teaches us a great lesson: the deeds of others may seem imperfect. We should be careful to judge them carefully, judge in such a way that neither your conscience not their good name be hurt. St. Joseph teaches us a great lesson for our daily living in communities to judge rightly as the righteous husband of the Most Holy Virgin did, not lack light for comprehending the truth about how the holy virgin conceived. The outcome of St. Joseph's trust in God resulted in his total dependence on God. As a man of prayer, he never thought of his position, privilege and power. Jesus must have resembled Joseph: in his way of working, in the features of his character, in his way of speaking, doing all works for the glory of God and his preference for using everyday situations to find God's hand at work in them all.

5. Acceptance of God's plan

The openness of Joseph and Mary to God's saving plan brings their love to a maturity expressed in the virtues of chastity, fidelity, respect and humility. These virtues in fact give direction to our mission, purpose in life and endurance to face all what God sends in our life. He participated in the mission of the Father without human resistance. Being open to God's ways, he could give his full share in the redemptive plan of God. As a devoted and God-centered person, who set apart time for prayer according to the Jewish tradition, St. Joseph sets examples for us to be close to God, to discern God's will and respond to it in total obedience. St. Joseph invites us to follow the paradigm set by Jesus, to defeat the cunning ways of the evil one with the power of the Word of God. Joseph, a person very close to God in prayer could participate in the salvific plan of God and fulfill his own role as the foster father of the redeemer. The justice of Joseph is seen precisely in the fact that he obeys the Lord, absolutely, without any question. He became aware that he was called to play a big role in the plan of God.

Although from a royal lineage, he was very poor. By the sweat of his brow he had to earn a living, not for himself but for his spouse and his Son, even though he was the Son of the Most High[9].

Bishop Ferrando, a missionary disciple was always open to the ways and will of God and lived and worked as God-centered person. Some of the virtues that remarkably present in the life of Bishop Ferrando was his ability to see God's hand at work in all that he was entrusted in order to accomplish God's plan in the Church. Joseph and Mary were his examples in the midst of inevitable challenges. He could find true joy and freedom that came from his ability to trust God's just and providential concern for his life.

6. Constancy of St. Joseph

As regards to St. Joseph's constancy, he displayed it wonderfully when seeing Our Lady with Child, not knowing how that could be, his mind was tossed with distress, perplexity and trouble.[10] Yet in spite of all he never complained. He was never harsh or ungracious towards the Virgin Mary. He remained just as gentle and respectful in his demeanor as he had ever been. The awareness that he is participating in the plan of God guides him to be constant and available to God.[11] The availability to God enables one to be available to fellow beings. Joseph's constancy to God made him possess the virtues of faith, hope and love which enabled him to obtain true intimacy with God. He sacrificed totally and surrendered to the demands of the Messiah's coming into his home. The interior life that St. Joseph possessed gave him the power of making great decisions, readiness of will and submit himself to God.[12]

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9 Cf. Benedict XVI, "The Holy family", in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 16.3.2011, 9.

10 Cf. Rosalie M. Levy, *Joseph the Just Man*, New York, Daughters of St. Paul, 1955, 137.

11 Cf. Francis, "Dreams, Service, Fidelity", in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 3.4.2016,

12 Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos*, 26.

The Gospels show that St. Joseph lived entirely for others and never for himself. His constancy in living for the Holy Family and his guardianship has made him patron of the Church. He made every effort to find and prepare a place where Jesus could be born. He supported his family through his work. He adapted to different circumstances with an attitude of never falling into discouragement. Joseph willingly welcomed life's frequent and often unexpected journeys. Each time he was willing to face new circumstances without complaining, ever ready to give a hand to resolve situations. He constantly watches over us as he watched over the Holy Family of Nazareth. The Gospels tell us that "Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night" (Mt 2:14). This reveals his prompt concern for the good of his family.

He is the "righteous man" (Mt 1:19) who persevered in serving God. He did not take any hasty decisions in his anxious moments. His life was built on constant fidelity, which reflected in his perseverance in working as a humble carpenter. One might wonder how St. Joseph could develop such fidelity? In the light of God's own faithfulness. St. Jerome says: Since St. Joseph was a just man, holy and perfect in all virtues, it is certain that nothing that savoured of impurity ever entered his life. There is nothing on record that he ever had any other spouse than the Virgin Mary, it is also certain that he remained a virgin all his life.[13] Inspired by the Gospel, the Fathers of the Church from the earliest centuries stressed that just as St. Joseph took loving care of Mary and gladly dedicated himself to Jesus Christ's upbringing, likewise he watches over and protects the Church of which the Virgin Mary is the exemplar and model.[14] St. Thomas Aquinas states: There are many saints to whom God has given the power to assist us in the necessitates of life, but the power given to St. Joseph is unlimited.

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13 Cf. Donald, H. Calloway, *St. Joseph: Gems*, 55.

14 Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos*, 1.

It extends to all our needs, and all those who invoke him with confidence are sure to be heard.

Conclusion

St. Joseph personifies before God and the Church the dignity of the man who works with his hands, but he is always the provident guardian of our families. He was so engaged heart and soul, in protecting and providing for the Holy family at Nazareth. Don't we believe that now in heaven, he is the same loving father and guardian of the Church and our families? Because of his sublime dignity which God conferred on his faithful servant St. Joseph, the Church has always highly honoured and praised St. Joseph, next to his spouse, the Virgin Mother of God and has besought his intercession in times of trouble.[15] Speaking to the Missionary Sisters, Mother Theresa Villa said: "The life of St. Joseph was a life of faith. Pray to him that he may obtain for us the true spirit of faith."[16] Following the virtues of St. Joseph, Bishop Ferrando lived combining prayer with charity; his life and prayer was inextricably linked to charity. When one combines prayer with love for neighbour then one is able to understand God's message, will, plan, etc. in one's life. Pope Francis said the following in his meeting with families in Manila on 16th January 2015: "I have great love for St. Joseph, because he is a man of silence and strength. On my table I have an image of St. Joseph sleeping. Even when he is asleep he is taking care of the Church."

Bishop Ferrando recognized the authority that was placed on St. Joseph by God as foster father and guardian of Jesus. He presented to him the spiritual and temporal needs and St. Joseph did exercise his patronage so powerfully. He recommended the Missionary Sisters to have devotion to St. Joseph. In moments of deprivations

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15 Cf. Pius IX, *Quemadmodum Deus*, 8 December, 1870.

16 Cf. MSCA A2, T. Villa, "Letter to the Missionary Sisters", 1.3.1957.

and wants, dangers and calamities, he often told the Sisters, St. Joseph will guide and protect them.[17] He is the model of all Christian virtues and holiness. St. Joseph's simplicity, poverty, perfect submission to the will of God, his silence, patience and prudence, his constant union with God, his spirit of hard work are some of the virtues, the Founder recommends the Sisters to reflect in their life.

[17] Cf. S. Ferrando, *From the Heart of a Father Who Loves You*, 62.

St. Joseph: A Saint for all times

Sr. Nycy Joseph

All virtuous things have their beginning and end in God, like manner 'The Year of St Joseph' ended on 8th December 2021 but our journey in the footprints of St Joseph will never end. St. Joseph continues to be at our side as a guardian, protector and a powerful intercessor. His personality will ever attract us, as we continue to learn from his fatherly heart. The year of St. Joseph was filled with the happenings of good and not so good events. The Pandemic with its rise and fall kept us on our knees by gazing our eyes on the Cross of Christ, the inexhaustible mystery.

Pope Francis inaugurated the Year of St. Joseph on 8th December 2020, and to mark the occasion of this special event he came out with an Apostolic Letter, *Patris Corde*[1] (With a Father's Heart). The three aims of this document are: to increase our love for St Joseph, to encourage us to implore his intercession and to imitate his zeal and virtues. When Pope Francis wrote the Apostolic letter-*Patris Corde* he had in mind to honor those workers who never appear in the newspapers and on the TV screen, yet successful with their magnanimous contributions for the growth and development of the society and world at large. He wanted to recognize the role of doctors, nurses, storekeepers, cleaning personnel, caregivers, transport workers, volunteers, priests who went out of their way to care for the lost, least and last during the

[1] Francis, Apostolic Letter, *Patris Corde*, 8 December 2020**.** (Hereafter referred as *Patris Corde*)

outbreak of the Pandemic. The Apostolic Letter reintroduced to us the 'Just Man' of the New Testament.

Joseph was a Man of 'Faith'

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines Faith as "the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself."[2] God spoke to Joseph in dreams; the gospels tell us that he had four dreams, and after each dream, Joseph did what was commanded by the Lord, through the Angel. "He got up…taking the child and its mother…went" (Mt 2:14, 21). The faith of Joseph was incredible as he plunged into the arms of his heavenly Father like a steward, watchful and faithful (Luke 12:42-48). Mother Teresa of Kolkata often remarked, "We are not called to be successful, but faithful." St John Paul II, wrote about the faith journey of St Joseph, "The path that was Joseph's, his pilgrimage of faith ended, when Mary stood at the foot of the cross on Golgotha, when Christ returned to the Father, and when she was present in the upper room on Pentecost on the day the Church was manifested to the world, having been born in the power of the Spirit of truth. Nevertheless, Joseph's way of faith moved in the same direction: it was totally determined by the same mystery, of which he, together with Mary, had been the first guardian."[3]

In our daily life we may often visit the Eucharistic Lord, may take active part in the popular devotions, may visit our sick brethren, all this can be a journey of faith like St. Joseph. The Jews used to go ingroups on pilgrimage, to the temple of Jerusalem. And as soon as they get the glimpse of the temple from far, they were filled

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2 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1814, Bangalore, Theological Publications in India, 2002.

3 John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Redemptoris Custos*, 15 August 1989, 6.

with joy and would start singing psalms in anticipation. Many a time we are drawing near to God, by giving up all our sinful acts and tendencies, the extra hours spending in prayer can make us Christocentric in our dealings with our neighbor. St Joseph, the man of faith will continue to inspire us as we continue to pray, "Lord increase our faith" (Lk 17:5).

Joseph's Life of Hope

Where there is faith, there is hope, because faith leads to hope. During the pandemic the entire humanity hoped for better time. In times of grief and fear the psalmist strengthened his soul "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God (Ps 42:5). St. Joseph never complained but 'he turned the problem into possibility.'[4] His hope was strong like the man who built his house on a rock. *"And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock"* (Mt 7:25). Once Pope Francis said, the hope of St. Joseph, which was blended with faith, made him to convert a stable into a dwelling place for God.

The storms of life can paralyze our life like the apostles who were battling with the boat in the sea. But one need not fear as "the virtue of hope responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man; it takes up the hopes that inspire men's activities and purifies them so as to order them to the Kingdom of heaven; it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude. Buoyed up by hope, he is preserved from selfishness and led to the happiness that flows from charity."[5]

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4 *Patris Corde*, 1.

5 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1818.

During our earthly pilgrimage may we be increasingly concerned with "speaking words of comfort, strength, consolation and encouragement, and not words that demean, sadden anger or show scorn"[6]

'Charity' (Love) in the Life of Joseph

The Godly virtues of faith and hope pave way for Charity. Because without love no person can reach God, who is love itself and the author of love. "Love is a gift that gives meaning to our lives. It enables us to view those in need as members of our own family, as friends, brothers or sisters. A small amount, if given with love, never ends, but becomes a source of life and happiness."[7] The four Evangelists have not recorded a single word spoken by St Joseph in the Gospels. What we only have is his deeds, and they are sufficient for us to know the height and depth, breadth and width of his personality, that he was a just man (Mt 1:19). He was ever ready to do the will of God and therefore he is rightly called as *the earthly shadow of the Heavenly Father*[8] by Pope Francis.

Christian life calls us to practice charity. The Parable of the Rich man and Lazarus has shown us that even the sins of omission can deprive us from the kingdom of God because we can't imagine a Christian society without Charity. "Love (*Caritas*) will always prove necessary, even in the most just society."[9] On the Day of Judgment we will be judged on our acts of charity. "Whatsoever you do to the least you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). St. Joseph who is a champion of charity can inspire us to be more charitable.

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6 Francis, Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, 3 October 2020, 223.

7 Francis, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem" Lent: A Time for Renewing Faith, Hope and Love" https://www.scd.org/news/message-his-holiness-pope-francis-lent-2021.

8 *Patris Corde, 7.*

9 Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, 25 December 2005, no. 28.

What can we Learn from the Life of St Joseph?

Joseph of the New Testament, very much resembles the Dreamer Joseph of the Old Testament. Both became powerful instruments in the History of Salvation. God has a plan for each and every one of us (Ps 139). The three theological virtues practiced by Joseph will draw us closer to the heart of God, to experience his warmth and riches, resulting in our own conversion. The words of Pope Francis are worth quoting, "Dear brothers and sisters, every moment of our lives is a time for believing, hoping and loving…as communities and as individuals – to revive the *faith* that comes from the living Christ, the *hope* inspired by the breath of the Holy Spirit and the *love* flowing from the merciful heart of the Father."[10]

St Joseph Teaches us to Say YES (*Fiat*)

Like Mary even Joseph was chosen to be the Foster Father of Jesus. With all meekness Joseph said 'Yes' to the will of God as Mary said yes at the Annunciation and Jesus declared his yes at the garden of Gethsemane. The 'yes' of Joseph was not merely from the lips but from all his soul, from his heart and might. Whenever he was commanded by the angel in the dream, *Joseph got up-took the child and its mother-went.* "And he said to them," Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him" (Mt 4: 19-22). The journey of St Joseph reminds us about the journey of the people of Israel to the Promised Land. As per the instruction of the angel, Joseph travelled from Nazareth-Bethlehem, Bethlehem-Egypt and Egypt-Nazareth. By his *Fiat* Joseph declared his yes at every time. "Who then is the faithful

[10] Message of Pope Francis for Lent-2021.

and wise steward, whom his master will put in charge over his household, to give his servants their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master finds so doing when he arrives. I assure you and most solemnly say to you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions" (Lk 12:42-44).

St Joseph Teaches us to be JUST

One of the noble titles given to St. Joseph in the Bible is that he is a *just man* (Mt 1:19). The word 'just' is enough for us to know about the personality of Joseph. The psalmist describes that the just man is the "one whose walk is blameless, who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from their heart; whose tongue utters no slander, who does no wrong to a neighbor, and casts no slur on other (Ps 15: 2-5). Since Joseph was a just man, he was determined to do the will of God. If God had called Mary to be at His own service, how could he desire her for himself? Certainly, the root of this justice is a sense of great humility in following the will of God. Joseph did not want to pass as father of the Divine Child.[11] Due to his righteousness he is also called as the 'Most Chaste spouse' who already anticipated the kingdom of God here on earth. "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns" (Is 52:7).

St Joseph Teaches us to Love our Families

John Paul II used to frequently say that the future of humanity passes through families. So family is the entity through which God continues to express His love to build up His Kingdom. Joseph being a Just man never wanted to humiliate Mary in public so after learning that the child is of the Holy Spirit, he goes ahead by accepting Mary as his wife. According to *Patris Corde*, St Joseph

[11] George Kaitholil, *St. Joseph: The Man Jesus Called Father*, St. Paul's Publications, Mumbai, 2021, 42-43.

protected the name-dignity-life of Mary. God ordained the family unit as a vital part of human society. What a great joy and honor waited for Joseph and his house. With great sense of responsibility, he fulfilled all his duties as the head of the Holy Family.[12] Pope Benedict XVI wrote that Joseph taught us that it is possible to love without possessing, and it was true in case of Joseph. Possessive love imprisons and makes our life miserable whereas the chaste love liberates us.

St. Joseph Teaches us to Love the Church

Pope Pius IX declared St Joseph as the Patron of the Catholic Church. He is protecting the Churches, religious organizations and ecclesiastical sodalities named after him. He is really a 'true miracle' through which God saved Mary and Jesus according to Pope Francis. In the parable of the shrewd manager, Jesus says that whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much (Lk 16:10). St. Joseph through the centuries has directed the Church and its leaders through thick and thins. Besides being the guardian of the Church, he is also the guardian of the unfortunate, needy, exiles, afflicted, poor and dying. By becoming the lawful father of Jesus and by naming him, Joseph enters into a relationship with Jesus. Today the Church needs Fathers who are not overprotective or possessive of their children, but allowing them to decide for themselves by enjoying the freedom.[13] "For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel" (1 Corinthians 4:15). The love that with which St. Joseph loved Jesus was to the extent that the parable of the Prodigal son is inspired by him.[14]

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12 George Kaitholil, *St. Joseph: The Man Jesus Called Father*, 22.

13 *Patris Corde, 7*

14 *Patris Corde, 4*

St. Joseph Teaches us to Work

St. Joseph has given us an example of a life made perfect through diligent work. By his hard labor St. Joseph took care of the Holy Family. We too must conscientiously carry out the work God has entrusted to us. Anyone who is in close union with the Lord will have the happiness of meeting God. Our positive attitude to our work brings blessings on it. Our work has its value and merits, only when it is united with the redemptive work of Jesus.[15] One must never be ashamed of his duty and St. Joseph at all times guides us as he is the patron of all the workers. When our work becomes wearisome and when we feel worn out, let us beseech the intercession of St. Joseph that he may teach us to work. In the same way our love and respect for workers is the measuring rod of our spiritual life. Pope Francis wrote the Apostolic letter-*Patris Corde* to honor those workers who never appear in the newspapers and on the T.V screen. He wanted to recognize the role of doctors, nurses, storekeepers, cleaning personnel, caregivers, transport workers, volunteers, priests who went out of their way to care for the lost, least and last during the outbreak of the Pandemic. We must realize that it is the fruit of the hard work of our workers that we enjoy in various ways and it is they who change our world into a beautiful place for all to live in.

St. Joseph Teaches us to be Creatively Courageous

In the Apostolic Letter, *Patris Corde*, Pope Francis honors St. Joseph with the title, *creatively courageous Father*. The life and mission of St. Joseph was not a bed of roses. When difficulties come there is an inclination to give up or to run away. In the case of St. Joseph, he handled his difficulties with creative courage. He was able to transform problems into possibilities. When there was

[15] Gerard Vettukalumpurath, *St. Joseph of Nazareth*, St. Paul's Publications, Mumbai, 2021, 118.

no place in the inn, he transformed the stable into a dwelling place for God. His tireless journey speaks about his patience and courage in finding a solution. "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-11). When we are battling with the storms of life let us pray to Joseph for creative courage.

St. Joseph Teaches us Love God and our Neighbor

The love of God and Love of neighbor is the summary of all the laws and prophets. In the incarnation, God brought His gift of love. We recognize God's unconditional love only when we are attentive to His voice. We experience the power of God's love, only when we are constantly open to his invitation and ready to mould ourselves according to His will. For us humans meeting God in others is the visible sign of our love of God. By remaining true to God and true to humans, St. Joseph becomes the ideal for us.[16] He becomes the patron of 'Happy death' as after fulfilling his mission he ends his pilgrimage in the company of Jesus and Mary. With his silence St. Joseph teaches us to be Good Christians by 'giving to Caesar what belongs to him and to God His due'. We ought to communicate love in the simplicity of our daily relationships with others as Joseph did. May the life of this Just man, patron of our congregation, loving and obedient, guardian of the families and the Church continue to inspire us for eternity.

[16] Gerard Vettukalumpurath, *St. Joseph of Nazareth*,73.

Prayer to St Joseph

Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer
Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
To you God entrusted his only Son;
in you Mary placed her trust;
with you Christ became man.
Blessed Joseph, to us too,
show yourself a father
and guide us in the path of life.
Obtain for us grace, mercy and courage,
and defend us from every evil. Amen.
(Pope Francis)

Joseph: A Father in Obedience to God

Sr. Trillina..... MSMHC

Introduction

Obedience is not measured by our ability to obey laws and principles. Obedience is measured by our response to God's voice. Joseph believed obedience as the mother of success and he climbed the ladder of success in fathering the Son of God. With his fiat Joseph protected Mary and Jesus and taught his Son to obey the will of the Father. Called by God to serve the mission of Jesus, Joseph cooperated in the great mystery of Redemption. St. John Paul II commented, "Joseph is an accepting Father because his unconditional acceptance of Mary and the child is an important gesture even today, where psychological, verbal and physical violence towards women is so evident."[1] Joseph, the husband of Mary also trusted in the Lord, he accepts in his life even the events that he did not understand. His spiritual path is not one that explains, but accepts, which does not mean that he is resigned. Instead, he is courageously and firmly proactive, because he was consigned to the gift of fortitude, and filled with hope, thus he was able to accept life as it is, with all its contradictions, frustrations and disappointments. In practice, through St. Joseph, it is as if God were to repeat to us: "Do not be afraid" because faith gives meaning to every event, however happy or sad, and makes us aware that God can make flowers spring up from stony ground. Joseph did not look for shortcuts but confronted reality with open eyes and accepted personal responsibilities.[2] He was the greatest

[1] John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos*, 26.

[2] Vatican News, Pope Francis Apostolic letter St. Joseph 08 Dec. 2020.

Saint, not because he did great things but, in his simplicity, striving to do everything with love according to the will of God. He is a man of deep faith, deep humility, perfect virginity and ardent love of God. He was a man who does everything with conscious mind. Following his exemplary life do we have such deep faith? Do we perform our activities with conscious mind? He is inviting us to listen to the voice of God in the Silence of our hearts in order to do the will of God. This article is an invitation to all the readers to understand better about his Obedience to God and also how he brought up the Holy Family.

Obedience of St. Joseph

St. Joseph was an excellently obedient servant of God. His form of obedience is not just in mere observance of the law; he shares in Mary's form of obedience to God. St. Joseph is an epitome of obedience because he gave way for the will of God in his life. He did all he could never to obstruct the will of God. While Mary totally surrendered herself to the will of God, Joseph totally gave way for what God had pre-destined to happen. Joseph appeared like resolute man, who knew what he wanted; a determinate personality, who was strong enough to execute his plans and bring about his desired results. He was a man of action, who spoke by his works. Yet, he was a man of God, who would never resolve what would displeases God, and was ready to execute what God commanded. Thus, his virtue of obedience lies in his faith and relationship with God.

St. Joseph was a faithful son of King David's lineage. He seemed to have embodied the hope of an eternal dynasty from the house of David; he was duly recognized as of the house of David. He was a worthy son, a man that was down to earth with his family heritage, and was found worthy to stand in the name of his ancestor, David. Where David was recognized as a man after God's heart, his lineage son, Joseph grew to become a father, a man who dwells

with God. So, Joseph was faithful to the great virtues that characterizes the hope of an eternal dynasty in the house of David. He was a chaste man, just hardworking carpenter, quiet man, respects women, fears God, sensitive and attentive.

Saint Joseph was obedient even to civil authorities. He obeyed the directive of Emperor Augustus Caesar to go to his native town of Bethlehem for census. Despite the inconveniences of making the long journey since Mary was due for her child birth, Joseph obeyed the civil directives. He was also obedient to the religious laws of the time. This is obvious as he went with Mary to dedicate the Child according to the temple rules. And every year, he would lead Mary and Jesus for an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem.[3]

St. Joseph's act of obedience shines out the most in his encounter with the angel, through a dream. He obeyed the message of the angel to take Mary home as his wife. He obeyed when the angel told him to name the child, Jesus. He obeyed when told in a dream to escape with the child to Egypt, even without any definite time-frame to return. He obeyed when asked to return. These were no easy moments for him, but he obeyed. Surprisingly, he even obeyed promptly and completely. Such level of humble and unreserved response can only come from a man who lives under God's commandments.[4] We know St. Joseph's obedience when look at how he rose at night at the angel's voice and giving no care to hunger, hardships, or cold went to Egypt where he led a hard life until the next command of God.[5]

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[3] Cf. Joseph Pronechen, "St. Joseph: Proclaimed Patron of the Universal Church 150 Years Ago," in *Register*, https://www.ncregister.com/author/joseph-pronechen, accessed on 2/2/2022.

[4] Jude Chinwenwa Nwachukwu, St Ann Catholic Church, PPL, Okokomaiko, Lagos.

[5] Donald H. Calloway, *Consecration to St. Joseph: The wonders of our Spiritual Father*, October 22, 2019, 83.

Joseph Builds the Holy Family

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, is our best example of a loving family. Joseph listened to the angel and accepted his divine mission by taking Mary as his wife and becoming the foster-father of Jesus. The Holy Family and the virtues that he exercised holds an understandably high place in the affections of the faithful. The Sacred Liturgy praises St. Joseph in thanksgiving to the heavenly Father as the just man, the wise and loyal servant, whom you placed at the head of your family. With a husband's love he cherished Mary, the Virgin Mother of God. With fatherly care he watched over Jesus Christ. Pope Paul VI once said, "St Joseph is the model of those humble ones that Christianity raises up to great destinies ... he is the proof that in order to be a good and genuine follower of Christ, there is no need for great things, it is enough to have the common, simple and human virtues, but they need to be true and authentic." St. Bernardine of Siena reflected that St Joseph "is the key which unlocked the treasures of the Church of the Old Testament, for in his person all the excellence of Patriarchs and Prophets comes to the completion of achievement, seeing that he alone enjoyed in this life the full fruition of what God had been pleased to promise foretime to them. It is therefore with good reason that we see a type of him in that Patriarch Joseph who stored up corn for the people. But the second Joseph has a more excellent dignity than the first, seeing that the first gave to the Egyptians bread only for the body, but the second was, on behalf of all the elect, the watchful guardian of that Living Bread which came down from Heaven, of which whosoever eats will never die" (Sermon on St. Joseph). In our own day, Pope Benedict XVI has reflected a number of times on the virtues of St.Joseph. On a Sunday for the Angelus he said,

> St. Joseph's silence does not express an inner emptiness but, on the contrary, the fullness of the faith he bears in his heart and which guides his every thought and action. It is a silence thanks

> to which Joseph, in unison with Mary, watches over the Word of God, known through the Sacred Scriptures, continuously comparing it with the events of the life of Jesus; a silence woven of constant prayer, a prayer of blessing of the Lord, of the adoration of his holy will and of unreserved entrustment to his providence.[6]

To be faithful as humble collaborators with divine plan over our lives, we need along with the protection of Virgin Mary, that of St. Joseph, a most powerful intercessor. "St. Joseph, the pillar of the family, teaches us the importance of motherhood, fatherhood and children. He is the Saint of the childhood and hidden years of Jesus.[7] He teaches modern man that the only true definition of a family is that is consists of a mother, father and children. The notion of a "modern family" is a deception from the devil. The redefinition of marriage and family causes the breakdown of society, culture, morals, and true family values.

In the person of St. Joseph, we can see what it means to be a husband and father. They must be self-sacrificing spirit for women and children and the common good. It is honourable for men to sacrifice themselves for others. Manhood and fatherhood are perfected through love, sacrifice and faithfulness to those entrusted to their care.[8]

The Patron of the Fathers and Families

We know that Joseph embraced Jesus as his own son, and loved him dearly. He was a man of great faith and obedience to God. Thus, he is made the patron of fathers and families**.** St Joseph

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6 Benedic XVI, "Angelus," *L' Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, 18 December 2005, 14.

7 Cf. George Kaitholil, *St. Joseph: The man Jesus Called Father*, St. Pauls, Mumbai, 2021, 50-58.

8 Cf. Donald H. Calloway, *Consecration to St. Joseph: The wonders of our spiritual Father*,2019,104 -105.

was not an absentee father. He was readily available, both in the difficult times and joyous times. His fatherhood was concretely expressed in his having made his life a service to the mystery of Incarnation and to the redemptive work connected with it. His devotion to his family is a model for fathers today, who are easily tempted towards allowing disordered attachments to pleasure distort and hinder their dedication to their family. St Joseph was a reliable and trustworthy guardian of the holy Family. According to St Francis de Sales, St Joseph was the custodian of the hearts of Jesus and Mary, the grace of love that he received from the Holy Spirit makes him a participant of all the goods Mary possessed, and which made them grow marvellously to perfection. Joseph is also patron saint of the Universal Church, expectant mothers (pregnant women), travellers, immigrants, house sellers and buyers, craftsmen, engineers, and working people in general.

The Church continues to recommend St Joseph as patron of fathers. Family life today appears to be threatened. We have more things to tear us apart than to unite us; there are several forces battling against unity in the homes. Many fathers are gradually losing their capacity to make binding commitments. We see from St Joseph how a person's virtuous and spiritual life translates into a pillar that supports others. Joseph is like a mustard seed sown that grows into a big shrub (Mk 4:30-32). Let us embrace St Joseph today; seeking his intercession and learning from his example. Our families shall stand secure on Jesus Christ, who is the Cornerstone from which we rise as supporting pillars of God's household. Let us allow ourselves to be filled with St Joseph's so that our noisy world and our family can become movement of grace and blessings to one another by listening to God's voice in our daily lives.[9]

[9] Fr Jude Chinwenwa

In his Apostolic Letter entitled *Patris corde* (With a Father's Heart), Pope Francis describes St. Joseph as a beloved father, a tender and loving father, an accepting father, a father who is creatively courageous. Joseph defended, cared, protected, and raised Jesus under his fatherly love. May all men look to St. Joseph and invoke his intercession, whether they are fathers or father figures.[10] Pope Francis wrote, "Fathers are not born, but made. A man does not become a father simply by bringing a child into the world, but by taking up the responsibility to care for that child. Whenever a man accepts responsibility for the life of another, in some way he becomes a father to that person."[11]

Fatherly Love and Care of Joseph

Joseph was not father of the Son of God just accidently. He was appointed by God himself to the juridical father of Jesus. His fatherhood "is one that shares in authentic fatherhood and the mission of a father in a family."[12] He gave Jesus "by a special gift from heaven all the natural love, all the affectionate solitude that an affectionate father can know."[13] Thus, Joseph and Jesus lived in a constant and deep relationship of love. Joseph's fatherly love for Jesus was indeed matched by Jesus' filial love for Joseph. Joseph and Mary loved Jesus selflessly and devotedly. Theirs was a mutual and reciprocal.

As a result, Joseph deserves great reverence and trust, far more than the angels and other saints. On account of his role in the life of Jesus and his intimacy with him. Joseph ranks high among the saints, second only to Mary, his wife and the mother of Jesus.

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10 Cf. Francis, Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde*, 8 December 2020**,** (Hereafter referred as *Patris Corde*).

11 Cf. *Patris Corde* 34.

12 *Redemptoris Custos* 21.

13 *Redemptoris Custos*, 8.

Pope Leo says, "He was the guardian of the Son of God and reputed as His father among men. Hence it came about that the Word of God was humbly subject to Joseph, that He obeyed him and that he rendered to him all those offices that children are bound to render to their parents. From this twofold dignity flowered to the obligation which nature lays upon the head of families, so that Joseph became the guardian, the administrator, and the legal defender of the divine house whose chief he was."[14]

Conclusion

When we listen different people's opinion about St. Joseph, we found that He was a man of Silent obedient, ready to sacrifice amount of difficulty and problem in his life journey. We see a man who only thought of serving Mary and Jesus, never ever himself. He works hard to provide material things to Mary Jesus. He was a simple craftsman who served his neighbour through his handiwork. He taught His Foster Son Jesus the value of hard work. Therefore, in our day today's life, we have many tasks to accomplish like St. Joseph Do we have time to be silent and attune to the inspiration of the Holy spirit? He is inviting us that a family, a home, a community, and a Parish are not built on power and possessions but goodness; not on riches and wealth, but on faith, fidelity, purity and mutual love. Let us ask St. Joseph to be with us in our mission, as we continued to proclaimed the love of God. Let us become another Joseph in the world as we carry out the light of Christ each day to our different activities.

[14] Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Quamquam Pluries*, 3.

Consecrated Chastity and Solitude

Sr. Theresi Zoremsangi MSMHC

Consecrated life evolves along with the passage of time. There is a vast difference from its origin to the present day. For those who seriously look at religious life, many questions torment their hearts. Since the Vatican Council, there has been new experiments and proposals aimed at giving fresh vigour to the profession of evangelical counsels. But it has also been a time of tension and struggle in which well-meaning endeavours have not brought out positive results (VC.13). In the midst of these changes, pulls and pushes, it seems that we remain confused and confounded. This has brought out a crisis of meaning, relevance, direction, orientation, and purpose. The present crisis and confusion bring in a felt need to have a renewed vision of the evangelical counsels. Actually the speciality of religious vocation lies in how one lives the values embodied in the counsels and expressed in fidelity to the charism. Every vow is a hidden call for conversion, a hidden call for holiness, a hidden call for integrity and harmonious existence with God himself, human beings and all other created things. The counsels embody rich and inexhaustible realities whose truths and meaning cannot be fully explained, expanded and grasped by just taking a single dimension. Each counsel carries with it all aspects of human life and requires extensive study and reflections. This work attempts to share a terse reflection on one of the aspects of consecrated chastity i.e. in its relation to solitude. And since consecrated chastity is an element of consecrated life, we shall begin with the clarification of the terms for a better understanding of consecrated life.

1. Clarification of Terms: Consecrated Life and Religious Life

"Consecrated Life" is the term designated for all those who seek to follow Jesus radically through the profession of the evangelical counsels.[1] This includes: hermits, monks or nuns, mendicant orders, apostolic congregations, secular institutes and missionary congregations. The very nature of this vocation involves a public witness to Christ and to the Church.

"Religious life" (*Vida Religiousa*) is one form of consecrated life with a special commitment to live in community. A stable form of community life in an institute canonically erected by the competent ecclesiastical authority manifests in a visible way the covenant and communion which religious life expresses. "For religious, communion in Christ is expressed in a stable and visible way through community life. So important is community living to religious consecration that every religious, whatever his or her apostolic work, is bound to it by the fact of profession and must normally live under the authority of a local superior in a community of the institute to which he or she belongs. Normally, too, community

[1] It is in the Vatican Council II that "consecration" was used to denote this life act of self-giving and obligation to service. Pope Pious XII had used the expression, "states of perfection." Council reminds that baptism is the fundamental consecration of every Christian and the religious, "in order to derive more abundant fruit from this baptismal grace, make profession of the evangelical counsels in the Church . . . in order to be free from hindrances . . . and in order to be more intimately consecrated to the service of God'(LG.44). Also, in *Perfectae Caritatis:* "This constitutes a special consecration, which is deeply rooted in their baptismal consecration and is a fuller expression of it" (PC.5). This is further affirmed in the New Code of Cannon Law which calls this life, "life consecrated by the profession of the evangelical counsels" (CIC, can. 373). Excluded from this terminology are "Societies of Apostolic Life," which the new code says, "resemble" institutes of Consecrated Life (CIC. Can.731). Canon 603 describes eremitical life in broad outline.

living entails a daily sharing of life according to specific structures and provisions established in the constitutions. Sharing of prayer, work, meals, leisure, common spirit,"[2] "relationships of friendship, cooperation in the same apostolate, and mutual support in community of life chosen for a better following of Christ, are so many valuable factors in daily progress."[3] Another aspect of the public nature of religious consecration is that the apostolate of religious is in some sense always corporate. Religious presence is visible, affecting ways of acting, attire, and style of life.

2. Clarification of Terms: Vows and Evangelical Counsels

Vow simply means making a promise. It can be made by anyone for any purpose. So it is not necessarily linked to religious life as such. On the other hand, evangelical counsels are intrinsic to the very life and mission of Jesus in the gospels. The identification and point of reference is Jesus who is poor, chaste and obedient.

3. Prophetic Witness through Vowed Life

Religious life is designed for prophetic witness from its very inception. An important part of prophetic witness is living out our vows individually and collectively with authenticity. Through this we become Gospel signs by the way we live, work, pray, and preach.[4] To understand the prophetic nature of our vows we must first understand how human civilization and religious values are related. Religious life in its varied expressions is one of the most pervasive forms of liminality. Liminality may be described as "an ambiguous, sacred, social state in which a person or group of persons is separated for a time from the normal structures of

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2 *Essential Elements in the Church's Teachings on Religious Life*, Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes, 1983, 19.

3 Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio*, 1971, 39.

4 Pat Lynch, "Religious as Prophets," *Religious Life Review*, 36, 183 (1997), 88-89.

society."[5] It is a product of the creative imagination, seeking to respond to the pressing needs of the contemporary world driven by a new vision of the future.[6] Thus the values of religious life are inherent to human civilization and will tend to seek expression in a liminal framework. In other words, human civilization needs the values of the vowed life, but in a manner that challenges and inspires in the context of each new age.[7] Today, the liminal function of religious life has been challenged and is now reappearing in strange and unexpected places like the basic Christian communities, new age movements, feminism, ecology groups and a host of others.[8] Hence, we need to ask ourselves about the cultural and spiritual stance we adopt towards the modern world. As religious do we understand this world with "its expectations, its longings, and its often-dramatic characteristics?"[9] Only when we address our world, sensitive to its needs and evolution, with a view to responding in a manner appropriate to our time, can we hope to become liminal once more.[10] So, here is a call for liminality by living the vows in a prophetic way; and hence, the need to understand the vows and its implications in a deeper manner. We need to understand their archetypal values, which point to their altruistic nature, that, it exist not for its own sake, but for society at large as it spring up from the deepest hopes and dreams of the society which the religious strive to articulate it on behalf of the people.[11] So, archetypal values

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5 Diarmuid O' Murchu, *The Prophetic Horizon of Religious Life*, (London: Excalibur Press, 1989), 37.

6 D. O' Murchu, *The Prophetic Horizon of Religious Life*, 37.

7 D. O' Murchu, *The Prophetic Horizon of Religious Life*, 38.

8 D. O' Murchu, *The Prophetic Horizon of Religious Life*, 40.

9 Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (7 December, 1965), Post Concilliar Document, ed., Austin Flannery (Mumbai: St. Paul Publications, 2013), 4.

10 D. O' Murchu, *The Prophetic Horizon of Religious Life*, 40.

11 D. O'Murchu, *The Prophetic Horizon of Religious Life*, 41.

are related to the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. As an archetypal value, the vows are not just for religious themselves but they say something to all human beings.[12] In this context consecrated persons have a liminal calling to provide a mirror in which the people can see reflected in them their own searching, struggles, and hopes for a meaningful existence.[13] It arises from those deep spiritual yearnings of the human heart as people strive to articulate, explicate, and negotiate their key values. To live the values embodied in the vows, the religious has to translate them into her personal, interpersonal, social, and political action in a dynamic manner.[14] It is a challenge today to go beyond the traditional meaning of these vows and explore its deeper meaning in order that we become prophetic in our vowed life. *Each of the vows has its own implications in the life of a religious.* Since the vows cover the whole existence of human beings, a detailed treatment of it will not be possible in this brief work. We shall deal specifically the vow of Chasity in its relation to the solitude. Consecrated life is strengthened by solitude and is deeply associated with it. A life of solitude or rather, love for solitude facilitates the consecrated soul in living a healthy affective life.

4. Traditional Understanding of Chastity

The history of religious life tells that the understanding of religious life evolves from time to time; and along with it, the understanding of the vows. Traditionally, consecrated chastity has been interpreted as refraining from all types of sexual and genital interaction in a single lifestyle.[15] For centuries this vocation was

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12 D. O'Murchu, *The Prophetic Horizon of Religious Life*, 49.

13 Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Poverty, Celibacy and Obedience: A Radical Option for Life* (New York: A Crossroad Book, 1999), 18.

14 D. O'Murchu, *Poverty, Celibacy and Obedience: A Radical Option for Life*, 17.

15 Felix Podimattam, *Consecrated Chastity Revisited* (Delhi: Media House, 2006), 15.

suffocated with spiritualism. All passionate and sensual feelings had to be controlled and restrained as it was understood to be contrary to holiness. And thus, it is taken as an obstacle to progress in spiritual life. This has done violence to the understanding of human body and sexuality which resulted in hatred for body and sexuality. Therefore, the major issue of today is the healing of the wound caused by this violence.[16]

5. Contemporary Understanding of Chastity

Today consecrated chastity is interpreted as a vow for relatedness. According to this understanding, chastity is a call to engage with the emerging issues of psychosexual relating in the contemporary world, which indicates a mature and balanced way of relating the other. It is also a call to live the unfolding process in a way that is holistic and liberating and to highlight the spiritual implications of this new understanding.[17] The deepest meaning of consecrated chastity is love relationship with God. It is this love relationship with God that makes the person love the others and all that is around her. In order to experience this love relationship with God in her daily life, the consecrated person has to spend time with this love object in the ambiance of silence and solitude. This indicates that celibate solitude is the root of immediacy to God.[18] Therefore, there is a need to situate this vow in a contemplative context of prayer and solitude. For this, what is required is an atmosphere of silence.

6. Situating Chastity in the Context of Solitude

Today, the traditional practice of silence is diminishing. Silence and solitude are almost alien to religious houses. Most people are so averse to silence and to being alone or to feeling alone that they

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16 D. O'Murchu, *Poverty, Celibacy and Obedience: A Radical Option for Life*, 60.
17 D. O'Murchu, *Poverty, Celibacy and Obedience: A Radical Option for Life*, 49.
18 Felix Podimattam, *Consecrated Life Revisited* (Delhi: Media House, 2006), 61.

do everything they can to forget their solitude. They do everything they can to avoid being alone and having to face themselves. They keep busy, always on the go, organizing this or promoting that, even under the guise of spreading the Kingdom of God. Why would I be afraid to stop, to be silent, to be alone? When I am quiet, if my quiet is not filled with daydreams or plans for more distractions, I come face to face with my own self in the lonely ground of my own being. I become increasingly aware of me within me, the real me. Out of silence, on being alone, sometimes disturbing emotions come to the surface which is sometimes alarming or upsetting. This is the reason why we sometimes fear being alone.

Aloneness has to be transformed into solitude. Aloneness is, in a certain sense, the inner structure of the life of the consecrated person as faithful and fruitful mutuality is the inner structure of matrimony. All consecrated life is organized around the single-minded God-quest, the affective concentration of the whole of one's life on the *one thing necessary*, which is union with God. This aloneness, if cherished, attended to, and dwelt in as the heart of one's vocation, finds its positive meaning in solitude. If it does not find its meaning here it will lead, sooner or later, to a bitter and empty isolation, to the boredom and mediocrity of the "professional" minister, or to abandonment of the life itself in search of affective fulfilment.[19]

When a religious is content with the style of life she chooses, when she embraces the solitariness of the vow of chastity, she lives it joyfully. With this joy in her heart she proclaims to the world of her contentment through her life of independence as she does not depend on others for her happiness and that the source of her happiness is in God. Her joyful life is a manifestation of her connection with God whom she takes as the source of happiness.

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[19] F. Podimattam, *Consecrated Life Revisited*, 61.

All other relationships are secondary to this. Relationship breaks up when I idolize my friend into a God. My friends are human beings who are not able to take the place of God and who can never give me the permanent happiness I long for.

Celibacy as it has been said at the beginning is a vow of relatedness which means that it points towards a love relationship. This love relationship must first of all be in tune to God. It is our love for God that makes us love all the rest. In order to be able to love God and others we need to have connection with God in the silence of our hearts. Silence is an energizing device that gives vitality to our inner self, besides its being the link to our connection with God. It is in silence that I discover my true self. The authenticity of my communication and relationship with the world depends on the authenticity of my relationship with myself. The justifications I make about myself and my acts, the way I interpret other people around me confronts me when I am with my own self in silence. Reflecting my own self in silence I am made to see how I interact with others. It is in the ambiance of silence that I see things clearly as it is. All the misunderstandings and clashes gets harmonize in solitude. Entering into silence is also the means to care for myself. It is a deeper form of caring for oneself. This is the reason why it is therapeutic.

The practice of interior solitude is a must for a religious. One needs to learn to enjoy silence which will lead one to solitude. It is more of an inner atmosphere, or spiritual climate within a person, a level of consciousness in which one confronts her inner depths. It also designates the journey within, the process of spiritual 'emptying', whose goal is the realization of one's transcendent identity, and one's unity with God and one's fellow beings. It is the very essence of being a person and interior solitude belongs to everybody. To be a human being is to be aware of solitude in oneself as a basic and inevitable human reality, a solitude which is

one's own, yet, at the same time, a solitude that is really shared by everyone. The discovery of this inner solitude is thus a discovery that one is really a person. Only persons of interior solitude are capable of the love which holds society together. *This is the solitude that is required for living the vow of consecrated chastity, "solitude of the heart that strives to be deeply present to the call of our world and to the stirrings of the creative Spirit. Above all else it is about perception, about seeing, and seeing depth."*[20] *This ability to see is the wisdom of the heart that digs deeply to unravel and reclaim what was lost or disrupted and to rediscover its beauty again as a precious gift of God. It* is from this depth that we begin to recover "our real story as a psychosexual species, endowed with the erotic propensity to relate in love and justice, not merely with other humans, but with all those creatures who populate our world, and with the earth itself as the cosmic womb of erotic possibility."[21]

CONCLUSION

The vow of consecrated chastity lived in association with solitude helps the consecrated men and women to live in a dynamic manner and fulfil its liminal purpose. Through this vow that is lived with awareness of the beauty of love that is endowed to human beings by God, it is a life-giving and love-giving source to this loveless world. As it has now been understood as a vow for relatedness or a vow to love the other with respect, it is a vow to build communion and not a vow that stifles oneself or the other from expressing what one really is or what one is called to be. All these can be realised if the consecrated person live this vow in association with time spent in solitude. It is solitude that makes one integrated, that makes know oneself and to come home to God, the true source of living water. Solitude is the time when one pulls oneself together.

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[20] D. O'Murchu, *Poverty, Celibacy and Obedience: A Radical Option for Life*, 60.

[21] D. O'Murchu, *Poverty, Celibacy and Obedience: A Radical Option for Life*, 61.

One pulls together the scattered self which is the source of becoming an integrated person. Integrity of life makes one loving and other-oriented. One of the best examples is Mother Teresa who spent her time loving the unloved, who is now known as the *Angel of Compassion*. This is the essence of chastity. It is in this attitude of loving that this vow should be practiced to fulfil its liminal calling. The practice of interior solitude also helps one to enter into stillness within, which creates just the right amount of distance, enabling the consecrated person to be present where she is, even in a crowd or market place. Only persons of interior solitude are capable of the love which holds society together.

African Mission; Beyond belief!!!

Sr. Mary Clara Topno, MSMHC

"Go into the whole world" (Mk 16:15)

You are witnesses of these things. **And behold I am sending the promise of my Father upon you, but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high (Mt 28: 18-19).**

My African Mission is an amazing story in my life. It came to me like a thief without any warning to rob my heart. It surprised me to the core, you believe it or not, getting Religious Obedience at the Altar (did any msmhc ever get like that?). It was on the occasion of my final vows on 8 December 2000. Since I was still pursuing my studeis in christianity at Mysore, I joined my juniors for my final profession. All our second year Novitiate preparations went well. Two of the sisters too were chosen for mission abroad but they were told to pray over it during the retreat. But me, I was peaceful untill that moment when I was told about my obedience. The Holy Mass began with so much of prayers and devotion, everything went well. It happened that while taking photograph with my dear ones on that Altar of my final vows, filled with excitement of final commitment, in that pushing crowd I just grabbed Sr. Mary Thadavanal, the then Mother General for a photograph with me and my family, that was the time my new mission was communicated to me personally, as the Mother General said to me; *"Hi Clara I have good news for you. Oh, Mother please tell me; oh, you are chosen for the "African Mission"*. Immediately my happiness diminished. By hearing this, I was

speechless and had nothing to say to Mother YES /NO, all the more my heart was beating fast. I just listened to her in wonder. Then I shared this message with my dear ones. That time their expression also was positive saying; "yes, you are getting chance to venture foreign Mission Land." I had absolutely nothing to say to them too. I in my heart just pondered of the African Mission. I never ever dreamt about this kind of obedience. But at the same time, I bowed to mother's request which came from God and accepted to go to Africa to work there as pioneer missionary. Though Mother General gave me obedience for 3 years and then to come back to India. But 'lucky or unlucky, till today I am in the African Mission. Later, I realized my vocation and Mission as the choice of God, "you did not choose me but I chose you" (Jn 15:16).

Hyderabad: After sometime I was sent to Hyderabad for six months for IT (Information Technology) training, in preparation for African Mission. I too learned typing, sewing and embroidery in Boys Town, Hyderabad in 2001. Soon after the completion of the studies, I returned to Little Flower Convent Hatigaon. While staying at Hatigaon, our travelling documents /passport were processed. My African Mission pioneering companions were: Sr. Elsa Joseph Puthenpurackle, Sr. Mariette Joseph who were the volunteers for the same. They were volunteering to the mission and I was the chosen humble instrument in the hands of God. No one ever told me about it before, that's why I was shocked but accepted though. There was no way to say 'no' to the missionary call because soon after the final vows it was my first obedience for the mission abroad. I thank Sr. Cecilia Rodrick who helped to process all our travel documents. When everything was ready, we were prepared spiritually, physically and emotionally through many prayers and outings/visiting various other convents. Peachland, Malki, there sisters prepared prayer service and served sumptuous meal to give us farewell. Sr. Mary Thadavanal accompanied us to all the

convents. She was the one arranged all these internal and external preparations.

Bon voyage: a great and solemn sendoff prayer service was organized by the Generalate and Hatigaon community for the African Pioneers on the eve of our journey. I cried piercingly during the prayer service. But there was no other way to escape but Carry on this mission. The Holy Mass was celebrated by Rev. Fr. KC Jose SDB on 28th October 2001 in the morning and gave meaningful homily. The mass was offered mainly for our safe journey and for the successful mission in Africa. The pioneers were accompanied by prayers and juniors waving flags to bid us farewell as we started our journey towards unknown Africa. Sr. Mary Thadavanal then superior general accompanied us to the new mission Swaziland. She stayed with us for a week, to see us settle down properly.

Mumbai: as we arrived Mumbai airport, we were the first to check in. but due to excess baggage we were restricted to go ahead. We tried all the more to pull out things from one box to another still weight was the same. Somehow someone, divine providence helped us to pay for the excess luggage charge. Even we were about to miss out the flight that evening. But God who allows everything to happen, took upper hand to control those situations. We really felt His protection and accompaniment all through our journey until we reach our destination.

Johannesburg: when we arrived at Johannesburg and looked for someone who could receive us and accompany us to Pretoria to get stamp in our passport, but there was none so we hired a taxi and went to Pretoria and got stamp on the passport. Immediately we returned to the airport to board flight to Swaziland; by then the flight to Swaziland was already gone. So, we took the next flight to Swaziland. Meanwhile people at Swaziland were waiting for us since morning at Matsapha airport.

Swaziland: We arrived Swaziland called "Matsapha Airport" on 29 October 2001 in the afternoon. People waited so long for us along with their Bishop at the airport. As they saw us coming down from flight, they made a loud noise with their joyful song and received us the Indian Missionaries for the first time in their soil. They were all over joyed, as they saw us on our exit, we knelt, bowed down and prayed, surrendering everything to the Lord. People offered us a bouquet of fresh Rose flowers each. The Salesian Priests came to the airport to receive us. Fr. Coleman the Rector of the community drove us to St. John Bosco parish and placed us in the well-furnished convent, he also took us around the parish and welcomed us warmly along with people. Bro. Walter Triniang SDB, took lots of photographs and videos on our arrival at the airport.

Initially, we joined to learn driving in the city, Manzini. And slowly we got used to the people and place and to travel alone by buses. At the same time started to visit families in the afternoon but people of the parish didn't wish to see us going to the families by ourselves so they arranged a boy who would take us to the catholic families for prayers and home visit. I was assigned by Bishop Luis Ndlovu, to teach IT (Information Technology) at the St. Anne's Girls High School. The Lab wasn't ready for the computer classes nor there was any computeres. The lab was furnished only in the year 2003. I was also given charge of parish youth and visit families. Sr. Elsa joined St. Teresa's Clinic at Manzini and Sr. Mariette joined St. Mary's Clinic Lobamba that time. That's how we began the mission there. Finally, the fourth member Sr. Bina Basumatary arrived Swaziland after 7 months and joined the community. She started parish catechesis and began preschool with 4 children. The Diocese of Manzini gave us 10 computers to begin computer lessons at home. The preschool and the computer classes were our income generating projects that time. Some few university students used to come and learn computer and, on their completion,

of course, they were given certificate too. Later, Sr. Susan Soreng joined the community and took over preschool and Sr. Bina was transferred to Lesotho. Sr. Susan takes good care of the children and teachers at the preschool until today. She takes care of other apostolates in spite of her ill health. I am grateful to other sisters who shared the mission in Swaziland in the bygone years.

Place and People in General: The Kingdom of ESwatini (Swaziland) is a beautiful country surrounded by its natural beauty- mountains and hills and ever green nature. The Swazi people are very sociable, loving, caring, friendly and open, receptive to the Good News of Jesus Christ. They are also religious minded and peace-loving people. Hence the kingdom of ESwatini (Swaziland) is a peaceful country. As a whole, the Swazi people are very loving and simple and also Intelligent. Swazi Nation is very beautiful with beautiful greeneries all over.

The Swazi or Swati (Swati: Emaswati, singular Liswati) are a **Bantu ethnic group in Southern Africa**, inhabiting Eswatini, a sovereign kingdom in Southern Africa. The culture of Swazi people involves **music, food, religion, architecture, and kinship**, among many other things. These people are composed of various Nguni clans who speak the Nguni language siSwati.

Faith & growth: Christianity was introduced in Swaziland in 1825 during the reign of Mswati II. King Mswatti II invited Christian missionaries to his kingdom and the Methodist Wesleyan Mission was the first church established in the area in 1844. There are approximately 60,000 Catholics in **Eswatini**, around 5% of the total population. The country forms a single diocese, the Diocese of Manzini. The Catholic Church began in **Eswatini** in 1913 with the arrival of Servite missionaries who began to work in Mbabane. Two of **Eswatini's** bishops were born in **Eswatini:** MandleNkhosi Zwane and Ncamiso Ndlovu.

Experience: My experience in Swaziland and with the Swasi people are very appreciative. I can say they are wonderful people. They accept me as an understanding and loving sister and friend. As I am an outgoing person my friendly approach makes them happy. No matter a child, adult, youth or elderly, I relate with them well. They know me by my name, where ever I move, on the road, village or school, children call me out by my name. They wave their hand to greet me until I wave my hand, they would not move, especially the children.

Youth (YAC): dealing with young people was challenge for me, I needed to have so much of patience as they are slow in nature, the work also becomes slow. They are submissive spiritually but helpless financially, as they have no job, very few are holding job but they do make their own living somehow. Oratory: Many little children come to the oratory with bigger ones and they like to play together expecting something to eat. We used to provide them somethings and again whenever we get from super market donors. We teach them health and hygiene, values and morals through little stories. In the beginning and at the end of the gathering we pray together. Students in the school: The Class room / the Computer Lab, my special room, where I interact with the African queens who are simple but smart. Students in the school too love me because of my friendliness with them. I Am a teacher to them in the class room but a sister and a friend outside the classroom. I am engaged in IT teaching since long period of time, I love teaching computer. Those days the students did their IT learning very well and many of them are employed because of their computer knowledge. But now students don't value computer learning as the smart phones have replaced computer. But it is amazing for the students who are coming from rural areas. There are many girls who have been trained by me until today. I am happy about it because many are working happily and are able to support their families.

Almost all the apostolates are shared and carried out together in the community until today. I like family visit most because by doing that I meet many people and listen to their life stories. I love to give advice and suggestions by this I get many inspirations.

Mozambican Mission

Ponta do Ouro (also Ponta d'Ouro) is a town in the extreme south of Mozambique, lying on the Mozambique Channel, south of Maputo and just north of the border with South Africa. The name is Portuguese for "tip of gold", referring to a cape at the southern part of the beach. It is known for its beach, dolphins, offshore diving and deep-sea fishing.

I was transferred to pioneer another mission land in Mozambique in the year 2014. My pioneering companion was Sr. Saroj Kindo. Another strange mission which we have to begin from the grass root level. We struggled and toiled to bring up the mission there. With look of eyes, no one will see the work being done there but only those who underwent hardships will know the reality. It is a very beautiful tourist area, surrounded with green mountains, full of sand in the country. We found very difficult in walking, many shoes and sleepers were broken because of walking in the sand. It is not easy to walk in the sand but Later we learned to walk. I found people are simple, poor but friendly. They have very little and more generous. The language seemed funny in the beginning but so lovely, I learnt it from small children to communicate with others. In a week two three different days of SCC made feel very good to meet people praying together. Though they work in the hotels but on return, they go for SCC. Every experience taught me life and dependency on God. For without Him, I could do nothing.

Challenges: as a whole **Structural unemployment and poverty** are persistent and growing problems in contemporary

Swaziland. Small businesses have been advocated as an important means of generating employment in which Swaziland is not an exception. In spite of this country problem, my problem is not being able to master their language, custom and culture. It is rather difficult many ways to adapt. How many Years spent, it doesn't matter, I will remain as Indian ever. I can only communicate to make my work done, people understand my language of love and understanding for them. That's how I managed thus many years. Actually, people speak English language in the country very well and I am mostly in the school and with the young people, children, women and adults. My little expression of love towards African Mission below:

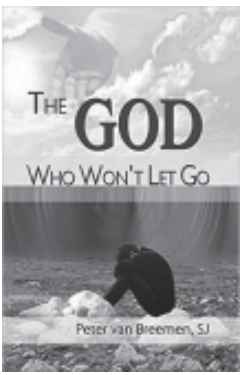
Born to live, love to serve

I was sent as a missionary to you. My beloved Africa,
I came in contact with you on 29 October 2001.
I met you for the first time. Our exchange of love shown in our faces with sweet smile and admired each other. And in my anxiousness, you consoled me that you are just like me.
We are the same in our looks, we resemble our creator.
Though we differ from each other
only in skin colour, language, custom and culture,
yet we belong to same God in nature and worship.
You didn't hesitate to accept me, instead you accepted me as your own and gave me opportunity to grow with you.
The food that sustained us is the same but difference is that you consume packed and fast food and me, the fresh from the green garden of our Father.
We are refreshed with the sun of the day,
beamed with stars and moon at night,
bathed with the showers of blessings like rain drops.
We are healthy and happy

to take shelter under His mighty wing.
We Undertake our mission of teaching, preaching and healing.
Our bond of collaboration is to be admired by many.
So, we fear nothing in this world of pain, no evil/ harmful
creatures/monsoon nor covid that threaten our lives
but fear only one who has created all these
and who has power to save you and me.
Being human is to take responsibility to save
and to accomplish responsibility is heavenly.
Let our love be Genuine my beloved Africa until the day we depart from
this earthly home and be united
with our heavenly Father in heavenly abode.

To proclaim good news is the birth right for a person one who is "Baptized and send". For me I truly believe that I am chosen by the Lord from all eternity and sent thus far to proclaim him. I think He didn't choose me for a particular place or people but to the whole world.





The book, "The God Who Won't Let Go" written by Peter Van Breemen SJ, deciphers the unconditional love of God that remains eternal and unchanged. It discloses that at a time when nothing seems to last, one can hold on to God, who never fails. This 176-page book is divided into twelve parts for easy reading and understanding. Every part of the book is aptly concluded with prayer of trust and surrender.

The book begins with the explanation of human being's search for God in whom is the fulness. It also spells out the uniqueness of Christianity which reveals a God who loves the world. The message is further clarified with the narrations from the Bible. Alongside this thought, it points out the need to have the right attitude in prayer. It is said, "Prayer springs from confidence in God who loves us, who desires our growth and well-being." The example of Moses who waits on the top of the mountain all by himself, in complete solitude and silence reveals the fruitfulness of prayer that impacts not only oneself but others. The second part of the book guides the reader to delve deep into the thought of God's surpassing love which never lets us down but leads us to truth and lasting freedom.

The book emphasizes that because of love, for love, and in love God would never let go of us, no matter how meaningless we find

life, and how miserable we find ourselves to be. The book will certainly inspire us as we read through its pages, exploring into the depths of God, the reality of God's Love, Forgiveness, Compassion and Mercy. Finally, it guides us to find ourselves walking into the very heart of God, realizing God's love holding onto us through every turn in our lives.

The book, "God Who Won't Let Go" is a book worth reading as it is loaded with deep reflections on God's love which is unalterable. The author, Peter van Breemen invites us to experience for ourselves the God whose love is eternally unconditional, and there is absolutely nothing that can take us away from the love of God. He says that God loves us into existence and longs for us to have life and joy in abundance. The message conveyed in this book is relevant for all ages and it gives a sure direction to all of us to reach the fountain of life.

The writer, Peter van Breemen, SJ has authored several books. He has been a member of the Jesuit order since 1945 and has worked extensively in novice and priest formation. His influence on the church stretches worldwide with best-selling books published in many languages. He is also a well-known retreat preacher and spiritual director.

Sr. Shiji James MSMHC