

The background features a stylized, yellow-toned illustration of a church facade with a prominent dome and cross. To the left, there are several circular, decorative patterns resembling stained glass or intricate designs, set against a dark blue background with a subtle starry pattern.

With the Greatest Love



A Collection
of Novices' Selected Reflections

Sacred Heart Novitiate, Philippines
January 2021

*With the
Greatest
Love*

Lord Jesus,

What weaknesses did You see in us
that made you decide to call us,
in spite of everything,
to collaborate in Your mission?

We give You thanks for having called us,
and we beg You not to forget Your promise
to be with us to the end of time.

Frequently we are invaded by the feeling
of having worked all night in vain,
forgetting, perhaps, that You are with us.

We ask that You make yourself present
in our lives and in our work, today, tomorrow,
and in the future yet to come.

Fill with Your love these lives of ours,
which we put at Your service.

Take from our hearts the egoism of thinking
about what is 'ours,' what is 'mine,'
always excluding, lacking compassion and joy.

Enlighten our minds and our hearts,
and do not forget to make us smile
when things do not go as we wished.

At the end of the day, of each one of our days,
make us feel more united with You
and better able to perceive
and discover around us
greater joy and greater hope.

We ask all this from our reality.

We are weak and sinful men,
but we are Your friends. *Amen.*





Dedication

On this day we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord,
we present this collection of novices' selected reflections as
PRESENT

*to our beloved families and dearest friends,
to our brothers in the Society of Jesus, and
to all who have been God's presents to us in our ongoing interior journey.*

May the Christ-Child who has revealed His glory and power
in being born weak and powerless
draw us to the manger of His heart that loves us
WITH THE GREATEST LOVE.

There we shall celebrate together as one human family,
brothers and sisters, all.

Note to the Reader

The reflections in this collection were originally prepared to be shared at Mass on occasions that novices were assigned to do so as part of novitiate formation. Novices, past and present, submitted these individual reflections, from which we selected, edited, and compiled this collection. Thus, we recommend that the Reader treat every reflection individually: distinct from other reflections in terms of content and style, but nonetheless similar in theme and spiritual inspiration.

To achieve a sense of order and coherence as one collection of novices' selected reflections, we grouped together the reflections delivered at Masses in the community, the apostolate, and other celebrations like Masses with the retreat house and novitiate workers and with the people in the places of novitiate experiments (e.g., hospital experiment at the Philippine General Hospital), among others.

We then classified this set (of community, apostolate, and others) according to the liturgical seasons of the Church because the subject of most reflections was the Gospel of the day.

Meanwhile, we provided under their own separate headings the reflections delivered at Masses on Visiting Sundays, feast days of Jesuit saints and blessed, and celebrations honoring Mary and Joseph.

We placed special headings on Mary and Joseph for their being the Society's Mother and Patron, respectively. To them as well we continually entrust our relationship with Jesus and our vocation to the Society of Jesus.

To help the Reader find basic grounding while reading, we indicated in the footer of the first page of every reflection the liturgical celebration when the novice-sharer delivered it at Mass. Expect that reflections delivered at community Masses would have contents drawing from the sharer's experiences as a Jesuit novice, and so containing terminologies probably new and unfamiliar to individuals outside the Society. Moreover, those delivered at Masses in the apostolate area or with the novitiate and retreat house workers (commonly in Filipino) would take on familiar, almost informal, tones proper to communicate the Gospel values more effectively.

In essence, this collection documents the novices' fruits of prayer, spiritual conversations, personal reflections, and discernment in daily novitiate life.

A work-in-progress, this collection offers a taste of the depth, variety, and richness of the novitiate formation experiences, which facilitate the dynamic of wholeheartedly orienting every Jesuit novice to Christ and His mission.

For a more convenient reading, we employed hyperlinks to the titles of the reflections in the *Contents*. The Reader can simply click the title of the reflection s/he desires to read and s/he will be directed to the first page of that particular reflection. Once finished reading a reflection and the Reader desires to return to the *Contents*, s/he may click the header indicated in every page.

All images and graphics are taken from the novitiate community's server: *Novices on Borgia / Files / 0 Common / Pictures*. Credits are given to the original artists who rendered them.

The main reference for the biographical sketches in the reflections on the lives of Jesuit saints and blessed is: Tylenda, Joseph N., *Jesuit Saints & Martyrs: Short Biographies of the Saints, Blessed, Venerables, and Servants of God of the Society of Jesus*. 2nd ed., 1998. Chicago: Loyola Press.

EDITING TEAM

English texts: Martin C., John D., & Rogelio N.

Filipino texts: Robert B., Martin C., & Rogelio N.

Design & Layout: Martin C.

Overall: Rogelio N.

We are very grateful to Fr. Bill Abbott, SJ for proofreading the final copy, particularly the English texts. Other defects you may find are ours alone.

Foreword

Some Jesuits have compared our present experience of Covid-19 to the image of Iñigo de Loyola being stuck convalescing in bed after getting hit in the leg with a cannonball. This “cannonball experience,” like Iñigo’s, is somehow forcing us to look at the world from a new perspective: giving us a glimpse into something we may not have dared to imagine before, that is, looking at our world now, through the lens of a God who loves us, **WITH THE GREATEST LOVE**, in Jesus Christ, who prefers to be born poor and humble.

While recuperating for some months, Iñigo got bored and asked for something to read. He was hoping for books of tales and adventures popular during those times. But there were only two books available in the house: one on the life of Christ and the other on the lives of the saints. The experience of reading these books and reflecting on his own experience opened Iñigo’s eyes to a new reality, a new normal. He cast off his old normal. From that time on, the cannonball experience began to open his eyes to what he had failed to see and to what was essential in his life.

The novitiate life can also be likened to Saint Ignatius' cannonball experience, a two-year lockdown in order to experience a radical disconnection from the 'old normal' to a radical reorientation to a 'new normal,' that is, to a new way of relating with Christ in our world today.

This collection of novices' selected reflections offers fruits of their prayer and discernment, and of spiritual conversations, much like Saint Ignatius' experience, while recovering in his bed at Loyola. The reflections reveal their deep personal encounters with a God who loves each of them, WITH THE GREATEST LOVE.

We hope that as you read our novices' reflections in the following pages, their personal experiences may help radiate Christ's light and love in your life, especially this new year. And like the Star that guided the Magi, may these reflections draw you ever more deeply into the Greatest Love and Light Himself, Jesus Christ, the Emmanuel, God-with-us.

A Blessed Feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord!

Fr. Christopher G. Dumadag, SJ
Master of Novices
Sacred Heart Novitiate, Philippines
03 January 2021

Contents

vii **Note to the Reader**

x **Foreword**

Community, Apostolate, and Others

Advent

19 **Bagong Awitin** | Martin C.

22 **Balang Araw** | Martin C.

26 **Joy of God's Will** | Pius W.

29 **Listening to God** | John D.

32 **Pakikipagtagpo** | Rex C.

Christmas

36 **Balot ng Lampin, Nakahiga sa Sabsaban** | Rogelio N.

41 **Daluyan ng Kabanalan** | Renzo A.

45 **Growing with Jesus** | Peter F.

48 **Ordinaryo** | James Ryan S.

Ordinary Time

53 **The Banquet of God** | Mark W.

56 **Begging** | Patrick E.

58 **Built on Rock** | Patrick E.

61 **Enlargement of the Heart** | Robert B.

64 **Focusing on Jesus** | Peter F.

67 **Freedom** | Robert B.

70 **From Unbelief to Believing** | Ioseph Z.

- 72 **God's Presence** | James Ryan S.
- 74 **Katabing Santo** | Patrick E.
- 77 **Loving and Merciful** | Mamert M.
- 81 **Mithiin ng Puso** | Rogelio N.
- 84 **Modelo ng Pag-ibig** | Mamert M.
- 88 **“Napakatatakot Ninyo!”** | Alejo S.
- 91 **The Parable of the Passion Fruit Seed and the Yeast** | Pius W.
- 94 **Poor** | Martin C.
- 97 **Presensya at Pagmamahal** | Robert B.
- 101 **Relationships** | Martin C.
- 105 **Reserved** | Winston H.
- 108 **River Flow** | Renzo A.
- 110 **Schoolboy** | Pius W.
- 113 **Silent Presence** | Jasper O.
- 115 **Spiritual Family** | John D.
- 117 **Standing Firmly on God's Love** | Martin W.
- 119 **Strength and Weakness** | Gio W.
- 122 **Sycamore Trees** | Samuel G.
- 126 **Tatlong Bagay tungkol sa Pag-ibig** | Rex C.
- 129 **Tinapay ng Buhay** | Patrick E.
- 132 **The Watchful Servant** | James Ryan S.
- 135 **The Way of Compassion** | Rogelio N.
- 138 **Where My Heart Is** | Francis X.
- 140 **Wishful Thinking** | Patrick E.

Lent

- 143 **Awa at Habag** | Alejo S.
145 **Bulag** | Mamert M.
148 **Sa Kabila ng Bawat Pagsubok** | Gerard E.

Easter

- 152 **Believe** | Martin C.
156 **Hold Fast** | Renzo A.
159 **“I Have Never Left You”** | Martin W.
161 **Seeking God** | Tommaso G.

Visiting Sunday

- 165 **A Childlike Heart** | Gio W.
168 **Gratitude for Family** | Martin W.
172 **Holy Desires** | Rogelio N.
176 **Loving Relationship** | Jaclay J.
178 **Reformation** | Winston H.
181 **Relentless** | Gerard E.

Jesuit Saints and Blessed

- 186 **All Ye Holy Men of God** | Pius W.
189 **An Odor of Sweetness** | Francis X.
193 **On Mission** | Peter F.
196 **God’s Care** | Rogelio N.
201 **Heart to Heart** | Paulus S.
204 **To Be with Jesus** | Robert B.
209 **Single-heartedness** | Joseph W.
211 **OMG!** | Renzo A.

- 214 Love Incarnate** | Martin C.
217 Martyrs of Love | Winston H.
222 A Childhood Dream | John D.
227 To Keep before Our Eyes God | Martin C.
231 Coming, Lord! | Francesco L.
235 To Be Moved | Ioseph Z.
238 Kostka's Passion | Stanislaus L.
240 Perfect Resignation | Rogelio N.
244 A Love that Frees | James Ryan S.
249 Viva Cristo Rey! | Samuel G.
253 Extraordinarily Ordinary | Mark W.

Mary, Mother of the Society

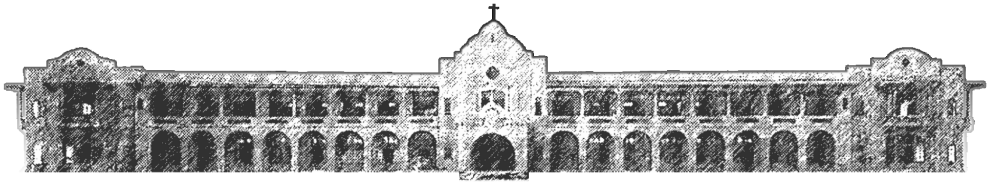
- 259 Holiness Within** | Stanislaus L.
261 On This Day | John D.
264 On the Way to God | Mark W.
267 Ad Jesum per Mariam | Rex C.
272 Treasuring | Patrick E.

Joseph, Patron of the Society

- 277 A Father's Love** | Gerard E.

283 Gratitude for Vocation

*Community,
Apostolate,
and Others*



The Jesuit community is a concrete space
in which we live as friends in the Lord.
This life together is always at the service of the mission,
but because these fraternal bonds proclaim the Gospel,
it is itself a mission.

Thus, each of us should constantly desire
that our own apostolic work develop,
be stimulated, and helped to bear fruit,
through the encouragement of our brothers.

In our world that knows too much division,
we ask God to help our communities
become “homes” for the Reign of God.

**We hear the call to overcome
what can separate us from one another.**

In our communities and apostolates,
we hear the call to rediscover hospitality to strangers,
to the young, to the poor, and to those who are persecuted.
Christ Himself teaches us this hospitality.

*From the Decrees and Documents of the 36th General Congregation
of the Society of Jesus*



Bagong Awitin

Martin C.

Noon pong nakaraang linggo, tumungo kaming mga nobisyo sa Dr. Jose Rodriguez *Memorial Hospital* (mas kilala sa tawag na Tala), sa *Philippine General Hospital*, at sa *Philippine Orthopedic Center* (POC) upang alayan ng mga pamaskong awitin ang mga pasyente roon. Matapos awitan, hinandugan din po namin sila ng ilang mumunting regalo, at saka nakipagkwentuhan. Napaka-*humbling* po ng karanasang ito. Dahil dito, masasabi kong ibang-iba ang aking Pasko ngayong taon kung ihahalintulad sa mga Paskong nagdaan.

Naranasan ko na rin pong mangaroling noong ako ay nasa kolehiyo. Sa mga mala-palasyong bahay kami pumupunta at nakalilikom kami ng libu-libong salapi. Matapos umawit, pakakainin pa kami ng kung anu-anong klaseng pagkain. Ibang-iba po ito sa aking karanasan ngayong taon. Bukod dito, marami pa pong pinag-iba.

Kakaiba ‘pagkat hindi lamang ito pawang programa o *performance*. Para sa akin, isa itong paglalakbay – isang paglalakbay mula sa aking sarili patungo sa Sanggol na nasa sabsaban, sa Sanggol na maliit at mahina (sa Ingles, *vulnerable, the Child Jesus, the Vulnerable One*). Napakahaba ng paglalakbay na ito; mahaba hindi dahil sa pagod na aming inabot, kundi dahil kinailangan kong makisalamuha sa mga pasyenteng inawitan namin upang lubusan kong mapagtanto ang diwa ng aming handog na mga awitin.



Meron pong isang lalaking pasyente sa *spinal ward* sa POC na nakatingala na lang sa kisame at hindi maigalaw ang katawan dala ng kanyang kondisyon. Sa pag-awit namin ng mga klasikong Pilipinong pamaskong awitin, naigalaw niya ang kanyang mga labi at nakiawit sa amin kahit na po walang tinig na lumabas sa kanyang bibig.

Isa po siya sa ilang mga larawang tumatak sa aking isipan, kasama ng isang batang nakalbo buhat ng *chemo*, ng isang lolo na maiikli at baluktot ang mga daliri sa kamay at paa dala ng *Hansenite disease* (dating tinatawag na *leprosy*), at ng isang magulang na tapat na nagbantay sa kanyang anak o ng anak sa kanyang magulang. Nabatid ko po sa mga larawang ito ang Sanggol, maliit at mahina, nakahimlay sa sabsaban.

Sa harapan ng mga maliliit at mahihinang taong ito, ang pag-awit sa tamang nota o sa tamang tiyempo ay naging pangalawa na lamang; hindi naging ganoon kahalaga ang mga iyon sa akin. Ang naging pinakamahalaga ay ang maipaalala at maipadama namin sa kanila ang tunay na diwa ng Pasko – ang ‘di magmamaliw at walang-sawang pagmamahal ng Diyos. Ito ang pinakamahalaga – hindi ako o kami, kundi ang Sanggol na Siya mismong nag-aalay ng awitin sa kanila.

Napakaganda po ng Unang Pagbasa dahil galing ito sa aklat ng “Mga Awit,” kaya naman ang pagbasa mismo ay isang awit. “Bumangon ka, aking mahal; halika, O aking dilag” (2:10) ang awit ng manunuyo, na awit din marahil ng Sanggol sa sabsaban para sa sanlibutan.

Gayon na lamang siguro ang tindi ng pag-ibig ng Diyos na Siya mismo ang susuyo sa atin, Siya mismo ang sasadya, at Siya mismo ang mag-aadya. Marahil nagtaka rin ang ilang mga



pasyenteng inawitan namin tulad ng pagtataka ni Elisabet: “At bakit ipinagkaloob sa akin na ang Panginoon ang Siya mismong magsasadya sa akin?” (Lucas 1:43).

Sa aking imahinasyon, ang Panginoon mismo ang umaawit sa mga pasyenteng nauubos na o wala nang buhok, tainga, ilong, kamay, o paa; sa mga pasyenteng bali-bali ang buto at ‘di makatayo; sa mga taong ‘di kaaya-ayang masdan buhat ng karamdaman; at sa lahat ng mga maliliit at mahihina: “Tumindig ka aking mahal, tayo na aking dilag... ipakita mo ang iyong mukha, iparinig ang iyong tinig, ‘pagkat matamis ang iyong tinig at maganda ang iyong mukha” (Mga Awit 2: 13-14).

Ngayong Pasko, tumungo po tayo sa sabsaban kung saan naroroon ang Sanggol at pakinggan Siyang umaawit sa atin ng isang matamis na awit ng pagsuyo. Inaanyayahan tayo ng salmista, “Magalak sa Panginoon, kayong mga banal, magsiawit sa kanya ng bagong awitin” (Salmo 33:2-3). Kung atin na ngang marinig ang Sanggol na umaawit sa tuwina, ano naman kaya ang bagong awiting itutugon natin sa Kanya? SHN



Balang Araw

Martin C.

Sa tuwing ikinukwento ko ang aking bokasyon, palagi akong nagsisimula sa mga magulang ko. Dumayo pa sila ng Batangas upang humiling ng isang anak na lalaki, matapos magkaroon ng tatlong sunud-sunod na anak na babae. Pagkalipas ng walong taon mula nang ipanganak ang pinakabata kong ate, ipinanganak na nga ako ng nanay ko. Apatnapu't dalawang taong gulang na siya noong panahong iyon, at ang aking tatay naman ay animnapu na. Kaya naman parang pahabol talaga ako; huling hirit kumbaga.

Laking tuwa siguro nila nang matupad ang kanilang hiling! Marahil sinlaki ng tuwa ng mga magulang na naririto ngayon noong una kayong magkaanak, o tuwing nagkakaroon ng karagdagan sa pamilya ninyo – mapa-anak, apo, pamangkin, at kung sino pa. Lalung-lalo na kung kayo po ay manugang, tama po ba?

Ang ikinuwento ko po ay isang kwento ng galak. Sa ating Unang Pagbasa at sa Mabuting Balita, natunghayan natin ang kwento ng mga taong nilingap ng Diyos na makatanggap ng isang balitang lubos na nakagagalak – ang pangakong sila'y magkakaanak. “Eh ano naman?” marahil tanong ninyo.

Sa Unang Pagbasa, dinalaw ng anghel ang asawa ni Manoa at sinabing siya'y maglilihi bagama't siya'y baog. Sa Ebanghelyo naman, sinabi ng anghel kay Zacarias na siya at ang asawa niyang si Elisabet ay magkakaanak kahit parehong napakatanda na at



marahil nagsawa na sa kahihintay. Hindi pang-karaniwan ang mga kwentong ito; ito po'y mga kwento ng galak!

Kung ang mga magulang po rito, nag-uumapaw ang galak sa pagsilang ng kanilang supling, paano pa po kaya sina Manoa at ang kanyang asawa na baog? Paano pa po kaya si Zacarias at Elisabet na kapwa matanda na? Siguro'y daig pa nila ang nanalo sa *lotto* sa tuwa at galak!

Ngayong gabi po, at ngayong panahon ng Adbiyento, pasukin at pagnilayan po natin ang galak ng mag-asawa sa ating pagbasa. Sa mga batang naririto ngayon, wala pa kayong malay noon, kaya subukan ninyo na lang isipin (sa Ingles, *imagine*) ang tuwa ni nanay at ni tatay noong kayo'y isilang. Sa mga magulang, subukan ninyong balikan at sariwain ang galak nang unang masilayan ang inyong mga supling. Marahil mayroon kayong bagong matutuklasan tungkol sa inyong sarili (o tungkol sa inyong anak o sa inyong magulang) o tungkol sa ating Diyos na Diyos ng mga sorpresa.

Napakaganda po ng pangalan ng ating komunidad – Bagong Silang, mistulang iminumungkahi sa atin ang pangako ng isang bagong simula, ng bagong umaga, ng bagong pag-asa. Ang mga mamamayan po ba ng Bagong Silang ay mga taong puno ng pag-asa? O nagsawa na at nawalan na tayo ng pag-asa sa mga pangako ng Diyos?

Hindi lamang pangako ng pagkakaanak ang mensahe ng anghel sa mag-asawang Elisabet at Zacarias, at kay Manoa at sa kanyang asawa; higit dito, pangako ito ng kaligtasan at pag-asa sa bayang hinirang ng Diyos: si Samson, ang anak ni Manoa at ng kanyang asawa, “ang magsisimulang magligtas sa Israel mula sa mga Filisteo,” ang mananakop ng Israel sa panahong iyon; si Juan



Bautista, ang anak ni Zacarias at Elisabet, ang dakilang propeta, ang maghahanda ng bayan ng Panginoon (“ipaghahanda niya ng isang bayan ang Panginoon”) sa pagpapakilala ni Kristo.

Mayroon pong awiting Adbiyento na ang titulo ay “Balang Araw.” Napakaganda po ng awit na ito; puno ng pangakong kaligtasan at pag-asa kahit tila imposible. Ang mga linya:

“Balang araw ang liwanag matatanaw ng bulag,
ang kagandahan ng umaga pagmamasdan sa tuwina.
Balang araw, mumutawi sa bibig ng mga pipi,
pasasalamat at papuri, awit ng luwalhati.
Balang araw, tatakbo ang pilay at ang lumpo,
magasayaw sa kagalakan, iindak sa katuwaan.”

Sa ibang sabi, balang araw ay maaaring mangyari ang ‘di natin inaakala!

Balang araw, kung loloobin ng Diyos, pagsisilbihan ko Siya bilang isang pari para sa Kanyang bayan. Sa “balang araw” kong ito, hindi ko maiwasang maisip ang nanay ko. Balang araw, “aawit [siya] ng pasasalamat at papuri” sa araw na ako’y magiging pari, at marahil mananariwa sa kanyang puso’t isip ang araw na hiniling niya ako sa Panginoon at ang araw na inialay niya ako pabalik sa Kanya. Makikiisa ang tatay kong nasa langit sa awit na ito, balang araw.

Marahil habang lumalaki si Samson at si Juan Bautista, bumubulong din ng “balang araw” sa kanilang mga puso si Manoa at ang kanyang asawa, at sina Zacarias at Elisabet... na balang araw, ililigtas ni Samson ang Israel mula sa mga Filisteo; na balang araw, panunumbalikin ni Juan Bautista sa paningin ng Panginoon ang mga anak ng Israel, gaya ng sinabi ng anghel. At marahil



umawit din sila ng pasasalamat at papuri nang masilayan ang araw ng katuparan ng pangakong ito ng Diyos.

Marahil malayo ang kwento natin sa kwento ni Manoa at ng kanyang asawa, o sa kwento ni Zacarias at Elisabet, ngunit malapit sa Diyos ang lahat ng patuloy na umaasa sa Kanyang mga pangako.

Siguro marami sa inyo ang tapat na nagsi-simbang gabi. Bakit po? Ano pong dahilan? Napakahirap ng buhay, ngunit bakit pa rin tayo nananampalataya? Tingin ko po ay dahil mayroong malalim na bahagi sa loob-loob natin ang patuloy na umaasa sa ating mga “balang araw.”

Kung gayon, ano o anu-ano po ang inyong mga “balang araw”? Maaaring: pagtatapos sa pag-aaral, kapalaran sa trabaho, kalayaan mula sa bisyo, kagalingan mula sa isang karamdaman, pagpapatawad mula sa miyembro ng pamilya o kaibigan, pagkakatipun-tipon ng mag-anak pagkatapos ng lima, sampu, o 20 taon, o minsan ay higit pa, at marami pang iba.

Ngayong panahon ng Adbiyento, ibaling po natin ang lahat ng ating mga “balang araw” sa Panginoon bagama’t tila imposible ang mga ito! At kasama ng ating pagbaling, hingin din natin ang grasya ng katapatan at kabukasan sa anumang sorpresang ipagkakaloob Niya sa atin. SHN



The Joy of God's Will

Pius W.

What is happiness? What is joy? Are they the same or are they different? These questions came into my mind while praying over today's Gospel (Matthew 21:28-32).

In my prayer, this parable of the two sons gradually became like the parable of happiness and joy. The two sons are respectively representing happiness and joy. At times, both of them can happen at the same time. At others, they do not necessarily go together. I would like to share my own experiences in the light of the theme of happiness and joy.

Last week, we the four *primi*, had our conference on the Old Testament with Fr. Manol Montesclaros, SJ. For me, it was not only a happy and but also a joyful experience. In his classes, he was quite energetic, active, and telling a lot of jokes to us. He often called us "the youngest brothers of the least Society of Jesus." Initially, I thought he was only making fun of this title. But later on, I observed that he was very earnest and sincere when he called us. I sensed that there was much care and concern filling his words. These warm words gave me encouragement in the journey of following Jesus and helped me feel more my relationship with the Society. Exteriorly, I was happy while listening to his multiple jokes. Interiorly, I had a deep sense of joy because of the spirit of "union of minds and hearts" contained in his words. In this particular experience, I felt happy and, at the same time, joyful.



However, happiness and joy do not always happen at the same time. One person may feel happy, but may not necessarily be joyful. My experiences of preparation for Christmas manifested this movement very well. In all the activities we have in preparing for Christmas these days, including house decorations, caroling practices, planning Christmas parties, and many others, I engaged myself in every activity and I really enjoyed the experience. But this happiness and excitement in these activities only lasted for a short time and easily fled away after I calmed down from the excitement.

Furthermore, I felt a sense of disconnection between Christmas and me. Somehow, it was difficult for me to fully taste the joy of the coming of Christmas. A realization came to me when I was praying over today's Gospel. I felt like the second son who said he would go to work in his father's vineyard but did not. Like him, I did a lot of things exteriorly, but I felt I was not doing the work of the Father, namely, preparing for the coming of Jesus in my heart.

There are also times when one may not be happy but has a deep sense of joy in his heart. Going to Muzon last Sunday let me experience this. Sitting on the chair in the covered courts while attending Mass, I felt a strong sense of joy in my heart in spite of the worries of being infected by the virus, not understanding the Mass and the sharing of Nato, hearing the loud music and other noises around, and many other distractions and difficulties present.

Still, the joy remained with me for quite some time. That joy was like the feeling of the postal service woman in the last story of the movie, *Paris, I Love You*. I fell in love with Muzon, and Muzon fell in love with me. This is the source of my joy – the joy coming from my connection with the people there in the presence of God. Maybe, this was the feeling of the first son as well. He said no to his



father in the beginning, but afterwards, he went to work and worked hard, making him experience the deep joy of fulfilling his father's will.

I ask myself again: What is happiness? And what is joy?

In my understanding, there are many factors leading to happiness. One may feel happy by eating the food he likes, doing what he wants, or just simply enjoying something. But I believe the deep sense of joy can only come from doing God's will and connecting with others in the presence of God.

Jesus experienced this joy when He said to the Father while agonizing in Gethsemane, "Not my will, but Yours be done." St. Francis Xavier's experience this joy while holding the signatures of Ignatius and his companions onto his heart, although he was physically far away from them. His joy came from doing God's mission through and with Ignatius.

Therefore, I beg the grace of identifying myself with Christ and doing God's will so that I may more and more have the deep-felt sense of joy that comes from Him alone. SHN



Listening to God

John D.

Today's Gospel on the parable of the two sons (Matthew 21: 28-31) speaks to me in three interconnected themes: vocation, repentance, and obedience.

I used to think that my vocation was fairly recent, but on deeper reflection, it started quite early. It was just that several times I made excuses and did not respond to God's call. I practically said no, much like the first son.

I recall asking a spiritual director (SD) why God called me quite late (I'm now 38!). He said I was called early on, but God's gentle whisper left unheeded over the years. God had to speak louder. "Don't wait for God to shout or slap you!" was my SD's parting advice.

The parable of the workers in the vineyard is another image that comes to mind. I find myself to be the worker who was hired late. Rather than asking God about hiring me "late," I am beginning to appreciate having been called at all.

I imagine that particular worker to be growing desperate as the day was nearing its end because he had nothing yet to feed himself and his hungry family. I notice the creeping despair and the sense of relief and gratitude when a master finally hired him. I see him working doubly hard for having been "saved from his desperate plight."

"Of the three vows, which do you find most challenging?" is a standard question in the Meet the Jesuits back in Arvisu House,



and all would say it is obedience. I used to think obedience should be easy. You just do what you are told. But obedience is much more than blind following.

It is no coincidence that vocation comes from the Latin *vocare*, meaning call or voice out, and obedience from *ob oedio*, meaning hear or listen. Both vocation and obedience are a dialogue between God and me.

Here in the novitiate, through the programs and structures that provide scaffolds, I am beginning to realize the depth of God's call, from recognizing His voice to familiarizing myself with the manner and content of His self-communication. It is a constant conversation. His call is fulfilled only when I truly listen and His words transform me, impelling me to action.

Conversing with the Lord is not easy, because it involves facing my brokenness and sinfulness, as the recent programs on self-awareness revealed to me. But I am constantly reminded that God is patient, merciful, and loving. He does not get tired of searching for me whenever I get lost.

Further contemplating the son who eventually changed his mind and regretted his initial refusal, I realized how transformation could be very challenging, especially for people like me, who used to live a pretty worldly and secular life. It would be difficult to unlearn certain things, certain habits.

I found out I am more set in my ways than I previously thought. By my own efforts, I kept trying and ended up failing and beating myself for failing to measure up to certain expectations, which I thought God had of me. This unlearning of old habits and learning of new positive ones will certainly take time, as it took time to develop the old ones in the first place.



Part of being patient is believing that everything happens in God's time. With this, I am also invited to beg for humility to accept my failures and to seek forgiveness from the Lord.

Ultimately, today's Gospel reminds me that faith requires action. God's holy men and women have attested since time immemorial that one's faith and love must be shown through action and not mere words. St. Francis of Assisi is quoted, "Preach; use words if necessary," thereby stating that preaching should be done by action. St. Ignatius of Loyola himself pointed out, "Love ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than words."

As I grow in this vocation every day, God gently reminds me that His call is constant and is not a one-time event. It is in the everyday action, the simple acts done out of great love that I say yes.

I heartily agree with Saint Teresa of Calcutta who said, "Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love." I can start in small things and grow in faith, hope, and love. I am invited to exercise these muscles of virtue just as one would exercise the muscles in the body. I can start with my faithfulness to everyday activities. I can listen more rather than talk. I can acknowledge my mistakes and limitations, and then ask forgiveness for my faults. I can be more generous and giving, even by simply letting go of control and just trusting. These can be ways of exercising obedience as well.

I pray to allow Jesus' love transform me slowly but completely, starting from my thoughts, to my words, and eventually, my actions, that I may finally be conformed to Him. A radical detachment, a radical reorientation... as if I am taken down, then rebuilt from ground up. Through this process I will come to realize that my vocation and God's will for me are one and the same. SHN



Pakikipagtagpo

Rex C.

Isang taon na po mula noong una akong nakisaya sa inyo rito sa Muzon. Masaya po akong maparito muli sa pagpapatuloy ng ating paghahanda ngayong panahon ng Adbiyento.

Sa maikling pagbabahagi ko po ngayong gabi, nais ko pong pagtuunan ang tatlong katangian na mapupulot mula sa ating pagbasa, at marahil, mahahalagang paalala rin sa atin ngayong Adbiyento: pagkamangha, pagkagalak, at pananalig.

Una, pagkamangha.

Sa aking pagninilay sa Ebanghelyo, isa sa mga pinagtakhan ko ay ang pagkagulat ni Elisabet nang dalawin siya ni Maria: “Sino ako upang dalawin ng ina ng aking Panginoon?”

Sa isang banda, masasabi kong pamilyar sa akin ang ganoong pakiramdam ng pagtataka o pagdududa. Bilang tao, malimit tayong nahaharap sa at napapaalalahanan ng ating mga kahinaan. Kung minsan pa nga umaabot tayo sa puntong ito na ang pagkakakilanlan natin ay ang mga sumusunod na kataga: “Mahina ako,” “Hindi ako kasing-galing ng iba,” “Malas ako sa buhay,” “Pinagkaitan ako ng talento sa pagkanta,” at marami pang iba.

Sa proseso ng paghuhubog o *formation* na pinagdaraan ko bilang isang *novice*, patuloy akong nahaharap sa ganitong klase ng pagkilala sa aking sarili. Malimit, naihahambing ko ang aking sarili sa iba. Katulad din ni Elisabet na nagtataakang dalawin ng ina ng Panginoon, minsan ko nang nasambit, “Sino ako para tawagin ng Panginoon?”



Marahil higit sa pagdududa ay pahayag ito ng pagkamangha ni Elisabet. Sa paanong paraan? Bagama't magpinsan sila, batid ni Elisabet na mayroong nagbago kay Maria – siya na ngayon ang Mahal na Ina ng Panginoon. Ang kanyang katauhan ay kaisa ng Diyos, at kailanman, hindi na ito maikakalas mula sa kanyang pagkakakilanlan.

Mula sa mga pagdududa ko sa sarili kong kakayanan, patuloy pa rin akong pinaaalalahanan ng Panginoon na nakatali ang katauhan ko sa Kanya. Araw-araw, bagama't minsang hindi ko napapansin, labis-labis ang mga paalala sa akin ng Diyos na naririto at naririyang Siya; nasa loob at paligid ko; nasa akin at nasa inyo; nasa lahat ng bagay. Marahil, gaya ni Elisabet, ngayong Adbiyento, tayo'y muling ibinabalik sa gayong karanasan ng pagkamangha sa pagdalaw at pagdating sa atin ng Panginoon.

Ikalawa, pagkagalak o kagalakan.

Sa Unang Pagbasa, matutunghayan natin mula sa aklat ni Sofonias: “Makikigalak Siya sa iyong katuwaan, babaguhin ka ng Kanyang pag-ibig, at Siya'y masayang aawit sa laki ng kagalakan.”

Sino po rito ang may *girlfriend* o *boyfriend*? Asawa? Sabi nila ‘pag matagal na kayong magkasama, darating sa puntong halos kamukha n’yo na ang isa’t isa. May patunay ang agham na nagagaya natin maging ang pagkilos ng taong ating hinahangaan o iniibig. Hindi man natin batid, pero nangyayari ito.

Sa pagninilay ko sa pagtatagpo nina Maria at Elisabet, sumagi rin sa isip ko na marahil may wangis na ni Hesus si Maria mula pa noong nagdadalang-tao siya; nakabakas na rin sa kanyang mukha ang presensya ni Hesus. Hindi maikakaila ni Elisabet na nagbago si Maria – binago ng pag-ibig ng Diyos.



Mapatutunayan natin ang kakayanan ng pag-ibig na baguhin tayo sa maraming karanasan. Lahat tayo ay nakaranas na siguro ng alitan, ‘di pagkakaintindihan, o tampuhan sa pagitan natin at ng isang kapamilya, kasamahan sa trabaho, kapitbahay, o ng iba pa.

May ganito rin po akong karanasan sa aming komunidad. Minsan, may pagsasagutang naganap sa pagitan ko at ng kapwa kong *brother* na humantong sa ilang araw ng walang imikan o pansinan. Alam kong may galit at pagtatampong nananaig sa loob ko tungo sa kanya, pero araw-araw isinasama ko siya sa aking dasal. Hindi sinagot ng Diyos ang mga dasal ko sa isang iglap, pero dumating ang puntong nagawa kong humingi ng tawad at tinanggap niya ito.

May mga bagay na hindi natin kayang gampanan o gawin sa simula (gaya siguro ng pagtanggap ni Maria na maging ina ng Diyos), ngunit sa ating paghiling at paghingi ng tulong mula sa Diyos, magagawa natin, kahit paunti-unting magbago at magmahal nang gaya Niya. Tayong iniibig ay binabago ng pag-ibig. Tayong iniibig ay nababagong maging katulad ng Mangingibig. At ayon sa pagbasa natin ngayon, para sa bawat nating pagsisikap na lampasan ang sariling kahinaan, ang Diyos ay masayang aawit sa laki ng kagalakan.

Ikatlo at huli, pananalig.

“Mapalad ka sapagkat nanalig kang matutupad ang ipinasabi sa iyo ng Panginoon!”

Kung hindi sumagot ng “oo” si Maria na maging ina ng Diyos, ano kaya ang maaaring nangyari? Sa huli, nais kong ibahagi na gaya na rin sa sarili kong karanasan, hinahayaan tayo ng Diyos na maging malaya sa pagsunod o hindi pagsunod sa Kanya.



Sa ating mga naniniwala, hindi lamang tayo basta naniniwala, tayo ay nananalig – patuloy nating ipinagdarasal at idinudulog sa Diyos ang katuparan ng Kanyang plano sa ating buhay. At hindi lamang tayo nananalig, sinusundan natin ang landas na alam nating makatutupad sa kagustuhan ng Diyos.

Nawa’y ngayong Adbiyento at sa darating na Pasko, muli nating maranasan ang pagkamangha na gaya ng kay Elisabet, kagalakan gaya nilang mga unang napuspos ng pag-ibig ng Diyos, at buong pananalig na salubungin ang pagdating at araw-araw Niyang pakikipagtagpo sa ating buhay. SHN



Balot ng Lampin, Nakahiga sa Sabsaban

Rogelio N.

Maligayang Pasko po, mga kapatid!

Bilang panimula, inaanyayahan ko po ang lahat na maglaan ng ilang sandali ng katahimikan. Umupo po tayo nang maayos, at kung maaari, ay ipikit po natin ang ating mga mata. Pakinggan po natin ang bawat salita at namnamin ang mensahe ng awit na ito: “Ang gabi'y payapa / Lahat ay tahimik / Pati mga tala / Sa bughaw na langit ... / Kay hinhin ng hangin / Waring umiibig / Sa kapayapaan / Ng buong daigdig.”

Nang akin pong pinagnilayan ang Mabuting Balita natin ngayong gabi – ang bersyon ni San Lucas ng pagsilang ni Hesus, iyon pong awit na ating napakinggan ang pumasok sa aking diwa at kamalayan. Sa akin pong imahinasyon, naganap ang pagsilang ni Hesus sa isang payapang gabi. Hindi po ibig sabihin na walang nangyayaring kaguluhan, subalit ang pagka-payapa ng gabi ay nababanaag sa presensya ng katahimikan.

Ito po ang unang detalyeng mabuting pansinin. **Sa presensya ng katahimikan ay isinilang ang Diyos.** Walang halong ingay, lindol, kulog, o kidlat. Hindi kumukuha ng atensyon. Simple at natural ang pagsilang tulad ng sa atin.

Napakinggan po natin na isinilang si Hesus sa Betlehem ng Judea, subalit ang talagang tirahan nina Maria at Jose ay ang Nasaret sa Galilea. Nasa may bandang timog po ng Israel ang Betlehem, samantalang sa may hilaga naman ang Nasaret. Mga 80



milya po ang layo ng dalawang bayang ito. Samakatuwid, marahil ay hindi inaasahan nina Maria at Jose na isisilang na pala si Hesus noong mismong araw na sila ay nagpatala sa Betlehem sa Judea.

‘Di tulad ng pagkakaroon ng *baby shower* at iba’t ibang paghahanda para sa pagsilang ng isang sanggol sa ating kapanahunan ngayon, walang naging materyal na paghahanda bago isilang si Hesus kina Maria at Jose. At dahil nga po sa kawalan ng bahay-panuluyan, isinilang si Hesus – ang ating Panginoon at Diyos – sa isang sabsaban o kainan ng mga hayop.

Ayon sa mga dalubhasa sa Banal na Kasulatan, halos wala pong pinag-iba ang kondisyon sa bahay-panuluyan sa mismong sabsaban. Sinasabing ang bahay-panuluyan ay parang *transient* kung saan panandaliang nagpapalipas ng gabi ang mga manlalakbay patungo o paalis ng Jerusalem. Ibig sabihin, sa bahay-panuluyan man o sa sabsaban, parehong marumi, masangsang, at hindi angkop para sa isang bagong silang na sanggol ang lugar. Ang pinagkaiba na lamang po siguro ay may maayos na bubong ang bahay-panuluyan, samantalang bukas at lantad naman ang sabsaban.

Ito po ang isa pang detalyeng mabuting pansinin. **Sa isang sabsaban isinilang bilang sanggol ang Diyos.** Tanging lampin at yakap ni Maria ang nagbigay ng init at proteksyon sa sanggol na si Hesus. Konkreto at masasalat ang pagka-dukha at pagka-mahina at pagka-bulnerable ng ating Diyos. Sa pagsilang ni Hesus sa isang sabsaban, sa kakulangan sa materyal na paghahanda ng kanyang mga magulang, tinuturuan tayo ng Diyos kung ano ang tunay at lubos na mahalaga sa buhay ng tao.

Sa pagpapatuloy ng kwento sa Mabuting Balita, lumitaw ang isang anghel ng Panginoon sa mga pastol na nasa parang,



nagpupuyat sa pagbabantay ng kanilang mga tupa. Noong panahong iyon, parang publikano o *tax collector* ang turing sa mga pastol. Dahil sa uri ng kanilang hanapbuhay, hindi na nila nagagampanan ang kanilang tungkulin sa templo, kung kaya't itinuturing silang marumi, makasalanan, at hindi karapat-dapat paniwalaan ng lipunan.

Ito po ang dagdag pang detalyeng mabuting pansinin. **Sa mga pastol unang ipinahayag ang pagsilang ng Diyos.** Sa simula't simula pa ay napaka-lapit na ni Hesus sa mga makasalanan, mga mahihirap, mga mahihina – mga taong itinatakwil ng lipunan.

Mga kapatid, natapos na po ang apat na linggo nating paghahanda. Sa pagsasara ng panahon ng Adbiyento ay atin pong sinasalubong ang panahon ng Kapaskuhan. Sa panahon ng Adbiyento, matimyas nating hinintay, ninasa, at hinangad ang pagdating ng Mesiya. Ngayon, sa tulong din ng liturhiya ng ating Simbahan, tinugon na ng mapagmahal nating Diyos ang biyaya na ating hinintay, ninasa, at hinangad. Ngayong Pasko, pinatitingkad at itinutuon ang ating atensyon sa pagsilang ni Hesus bilang sanggol – ang siyang tugon ng Diyos sa ating paghihintay, pagnanasa, at paghahangad.

Para kay San Ignacio ng Loyola, sa kanyang *Spiritual Exercises*, ang misteryo ng pagiging tao ng Diyos ay mababanaag sa tatlong magkakasugpong na bahagi. Una, nariyan ang isang mundong pinadilim ng kasalanan, puno ng karahasan, lugmok sa kahirapan, at uhaw sa pag-ibig at habag. Maraming tao ang naghahanap ng kasiyahan kung saan hindi ito matatagpuan. O kung masumpungan man ay panandalian lamang.



Ikalawa, mula sa kaitaasan ay namalas ng Diyos – ang Banal na Santatlo – ang kalunus-lunos na kondisyon ng mundo. Hindi galit o pagkamuhí ang naging reaksyon ng Diyos, kundi pag-ibig. Ang mismong pag-ibig na ito ang nag-udyok sa Ama upang ipadala ang Kanyang Anak sa mundo, sa pagpupuspos ng Espiritu Santo.

Ikatlo at huli, niloob ng Ama na isilang bilang sanggol ang Anak na, sa kapangyarihan ng Espiritu Santo, ay Siya na ngang ipinaglihi ni Maria at isinilang sa piling natin.

Samakatuwid, pag-ibig ang simula at katapusan, ang sentro at pundasyon, ng pagiging tao ng Diyos. Gayundin, bago pa man natin hintayin, nasain, at hangarin ang pagdating ni Hesus, ang Diyos mismo muna ang unang naghintay, nagnasa, at naghangad sa ating pagbabalik sa Kanyang pag-ibig. Marahil, hanggang ngayon, patuloy pa ring naghihintay, nagnanasa, at naghangad ang Diyos sa ating panunumbalik.

Magalak po tayo, mga kapatid, dahil hindi lang sa bayan ni David ang minsang pagsilang kay Hesus. Ngayon ay espiritwal na isinisilang din dito sa Muzon, sa bawat tahanan, ang sanggol na si Hesus. Ngayon, at sa tuwing pinipili nating umibig, magpatawad, makiisa sa paghihirap ng kapwa, makinig sa isang kaibigang nangangailangan ng matatakbuhan, o magtiwala nang ganap sa Probidensya ng Diyos, espiritwal ding isinisilang, at sana ay lumalaki, si Hesus sa ating mga puso.

Tulad ng pagsilang ni Hesus sa katahimikan, kailangan din siguro nating maglaan araw-araw ng katahimikan upang mapansin natin at mapagbulay-bulayan ang pagsilang at paglaki ni Hesus sa ating mga puso at mga buhay.



Tulad ng pagsilang ni Hesus bilang sanggol sa sabsaban, kailangan din siguro nating maglaan ng isang pusong salat o dukha upang si Hesus mismo ang magpuno sa kakulangan, magpayaman sa karanasan, at mamayani habang buhay.

At, tulad ng karanasan ng mga pastol, humugot po tayo ng inspirasyon na dumulog sa sanggol na si Hesus sa kabila ng ating pagiging makasalanan at hindi karapat-dapat. Panghawakan po natin ang bati ng anghel sa mga pastol, “Huwag kayong matakot! Ako’y may dalang mabuting balita para sa inyo na magdudulot ng malaking kagalakan sa lahat ng tao. Sapagkat isinilang ngayon sa bayan ni David ang inyong Tagapagligtas, ang Kristong Panginoon.”

Mga kapatid, sa pagdiriwang natin ng Pasko ng Pagsilang, ituon natin ang ating buong sarili sa palatandaang binigay ng anghel: isang sanggol na nababalot ng lampin at nakahiga sa sabsaban.

Naghihintay, nagnanasa, at naghahangad ang sanggol na si Hesus upang tayo ay dumulog nang may pasasalamat, kagalakan, at pag-ibig. SHN



Daluyan ng Kabanalan

Renzo A.

Merry Christmas po sa ating lahat!

Ngayon po ang kapistahan ng Banal na Mag-anak nina Hesus, Maria, at Jose. Ayon sa Ebanghelyo, tumungo sila sa Templo upang ihandog si Hesus na kanilang panganay na anak bilang pagtalima sa Kasulatan.

Sa aking pagninilay-nilay, naitanong ko sa aking sarili, “Ano ba talaga ang ibig sabihin ng pagiging Banal ng Mag-anak nina Hesus, Maria, at Jose? Paano natin masasabi na banal ang isang mag-anak?”

Napagtanto ko po na ang kabanalan nina Hesus, Maria, at Jose ay dahil sa kanilang pamumuhay na nagsilbing daluyan ng mga biyaya at grasya ng Panginoong Diyos. Daluyan po ng mga ano?

Una, ang Banal na Mag-anak ay isang daluyan ng pananampalataya. Kung papansinin natin ang detalye sa Ebanghelyo, ang pamilya ng Panginoon ay naging tapat sa mga tradisyon at mga kautusan ng Diyos. Malamang ay natutunan ni Kristo kung paano mahalín ang Diyos at ang kapwa dahil sa madalas na pagdarasal kasama ang Kanyang mga magulang. Kasama rin dito ang madalas na pagpunta sa sinagoga upang mapalalim ang kanilang kaalaman sa pananampalataya. Banal ang kanilang Mag-anak dahil sentro ng kanilang buhay at puso ang Diyos.



Ikalawa, ang Banal na Mag-anak ay nagsisilbing daluyan ng pag-asa. Nakaranas din sila ng mga pagsubok sa buhay. Payak lamang ang kanilang pamumuhay. Kumpara sa mga higit na nakaluluwag sa buhay na kayang mag-alay ng isang tupa, nag-alay sila ng dalawang bato-bato o inakay na kalapati sapagkat ito lamang ang kanilang nakayanan. Sinabi rin ni Simeon kay Maria na balang araw siya ay magdurusa bilang kanyang pakikibahagi sa paghihirap ng anak niyang si Hesus. Ngunit sa kabila ng lahat ng ito, naging matatag ang kanilang pamilya dahil sa pag-asang pinanghahawakan nila.

Ikatlo, ang Banal na Mag-anak ay naging daluyan ng pag-ibig. Ipinadama nina Jose at Maria ang kanilang pagmamahal kay Hesus sa kanilang pag-aaruga sa Kanya. Tinawag ang mga disipulong sundan ang Panginoon, habang sina Maria at Jose naman tinawag upang alagaan Siya. Tinawag ang mga disipulo na makinig kay Hesus, samantalang sina Maria at Jose naman upang turuan Siyang magsalita. Tinawag ang mga disipulo upang samahan si Hesus na tumindig at ipalaganap ang kaharian ng Diyos, habang sina Maria at Jose upang tulungan Siyang tumayo. Tinawag ang mga disipulo upang makibahagi sa paghihirap ni Hesus – pati na rin sa Kanyang pag-aalay ng sariling buhay – nang makamit natin ang buhay na walang hanggan, samantalang sina Maria at Jose upang makibahagi sa sakit na dulot ng panganganak nang tunay ngang makapag-alay si Hesus ng Kanyang buhay at pag-ibig.

Bilang isang anak, naging mabuti at mapagmahal si Hesus sa Kanyang mga magulang. Gaya ni Jose, marahil si Hesus ay isa ring manggagawa o karpintero. Marahil kumayod din siya para sa



Kanyang pamilya lalo na para kay Maria upang may makain sila sa pang-araw-araw.

Ang halimbawa ng Banal na Mag-anak ay isang paanyaya sa bawat mag-anak na maging banal. Ang bawat ama ay tinatawag na maging Jose, ang bawat ina ay tinatawag na maging Maria, at ang bawat anak ay tinatawag na maging Hesus. Ngayong Linggo, maaari po nating pagnilayan kung paano nagiging daluyan ng pananampalataya, pag-asa, at pag-ibig ang ating kani-kanyang pamilya.

Naalala ko po ang sarili kong pamilya. Malaki ang naging bahagi nila sa aking bokasyon sapagkat sa kanila ko natutunan ang biyaya ng pananampalataya. Lagi nila akong pinaaalalahanan na maging mabuting Kristiyano at maging mabuti sa kapwa. May mga nararanasan din po kaming kahirapan at mga pagsubok sa buhay ngunit sa aming pagmamahalan at sa awa ng Diyos nalalampasan namin ang mga iyon.

Sa mga magulang ko rin po naranasan ang mahal nang lubos. Dati pong *overseas worker* ang tatay ko na kinailangang magsakripisyo sa ibang bansa upang mabigyan kami ng maayos na kinabukasan. Ang nanay ko naman gumigising nang maaga araw-araw upang asikasuhin ang aming mga pangangailangan. Ilan lamang ito sa maraming halimbawang nagparanas sa akin ng tunay na pagmamahal.

Sa kasalukuyan, marami sa atin ang naghihirap dahil sa nararanasan nating pandemya. Sa pagdiriwang natin ngayon ng kapistahan ng Banal na Mag-anak, dalangin ko po na ang lahat ng mag-anak lalung-lalo na ang bawat mag-anak dito sa San Jose Heights ay patuloy na maging daluyan ng pananampalataya, pag-asa, at pag-ibig.



Sa pamamagitan ng awa at grasya ng Panginoon, patuloy pa sanang palakasin at pagtibayin ng ating Panginoon ang ating pananampalataya sa Kanya at laging alalahanin ang Kanyang presensya sa ating mga puso. Nawa'y patuloy pa rin tayong magbigay ng pag-asa at pagmamahal sa bawat isa lalo na sa mga panahong ito ng malaking pagsubok. SHN



Growing with Jesus

Peter F.

As I recollect my Advent experiences, I remember my last sharing on the feast day of St. Francis Xavier last December 3. I was asking the Lord to be born again into my messy world and redeem me from it. It seems today is the perfect day to examine what the Lord has done to me. Precisely, the Lord has been working all the time and has been doing His work solidly at every single moment in ways I could not figure out but simply enjoy the fruits. It was like after having a surgery; I would not ask how the surgeon had done his work but simply express my gratitude, full of joy.

Within the past month, it seemed I was caught in a circle again – falling into the trap of the evil spirit, staying faithfully with the tension, and being led out from the trap by God – which is nothing new beyond the Rules of Discernment in the *Spiritual Exercises* as described by Saint Ignatius.

Examining the whole process, while amazed at how “professional” the devil’s work had been and how so natural for me to follow his instruction without hesitation, I realized the central role of my core issue – which is about trust in myself, others, and God. The fact that God had revealed Himself to me even before I had a feeling of His rebirth in me indicated the messiness which was occupying my life. I believe this is preparatory for my awareness in welcoming Jesus anew, since I need to be redeemed constantly.

I remembered one of my *secundi* in making sense of this whole process. If you play computer games, you would have a sense



how similar this spiritual growth is with fostering a role in a game. When you enter a game by founding a character, you start a journey to build up a perfect hero according to his potential. Like the start of the spiritual journey, the growth is obvious in the beginning because it does not demand many experiences from one level to the next.

But the progression will look much slower in terms of leveling up after reaching a certain point. Sometimes, the player has to study the nature of the character again, in order to understand it more and develop it well. The regular player would know those moments are the driest time, for they involve more effort in carefully studying and exercising. At the moment when the demand is fulfilled, the player would get into another level as a reward. However, the excitement will not last too long because another period of trial will come soon.

So, what is the motivation of the players, especially for those who are addictive to computer games, if the process is made up of more dryness than excitement? Primarily, each player wants to be a god in the form of his own mindset and achieve it in the illusory world.

Is this desire – to be a god – suitable in our spiritual journey? It seems the answer is yes. Since we, as creatures, are made in the image of God and share the likeness of God. Perhaps, the instinct of being God-like was put in each of us from the beginning of God's creation. Or rather, the heavenly Father has always wanted to share His perfection with us ever since.

Going back to my experiences and meditations on sin in the past month, I realized how Satan, Adam and Eve, and I (in various moments of my previous life) wanted to be God, ever-powerful over all else, the ruler of all. Apparently, the knowledge of God went to



an extreme form, which was far away from the God who was incarnated for us in Jesus. In other words, to be like God is a good intention, but we do not really know the fullness of God. Instead of truly imitating God, we fall into the trap of choosing a God that has been created out of our own selfishness.

Today, the Church invites us to celebrate the incarnation of God, to welcome his rebirth in our hearts, and to listen to the Word from above – the Word made Flesh – to tell and show us who God really is. May we follow, love, and imitate the true God in Jesus, who is full of mercy and compassion.

Perhaps another fact worth noticing is that Jesus had had a long period of formation under Mary and Joseph before Jesus lived out the nature of God in public. Jesus was patient with His formation and growth. Now, the question to me is: Am I willing to let the baby Jesus grow up in me and with me after his being born in my heart?

Let us entrust once more our respective formation journeys into the hands of our Blessed Mother Mary who provided the perfect formation to Jesus, so that we may grow accompanied by Jesus growing, too – He who is our model and companion. SHN



Ordinaryo

James Ryan S.

Maligayang Pasko at manigong bagong taon po sa inyong lahat! Habang pinagdarasalan ko po ang Ebanghelyo ngayong araw na ito, isang katanungan po ang tumatak sa isip at puso ko na gusto ko pong ibahagi sa inyo.

Paano ko ba napapansin si Kristo?

Mahirap sagutin ang tanong na ito, lalung-lalo na kung itatanong natin sa konteksto ng nangyayaring pandemya. Sa panahon ngayon na puno ng paghihirap dulot ng Covid-19, kung saan maraming namamatay dahil sa *virus*, maraming naghihirap at namamatay sa gutom dulot ng epekto ng *lockdown* sa ekonomiya. Hindi ko po masasagot ang tanong na ito gamit lamang ang sarili kong limitadong pag-iisip. Ngunit natulungan ako ng ating Ebanghelyo upang mabatid kung paano naghintay, napansin, at nakita ni Simeon ang Panginoon.

Alam naman po natin na sa panahon ng pagsilang ni Kristo ay hindi rin mapayapa ang mundo ng mga Judeo. Ang bansa nila ay puno ng salimuot at saligutgot, at sinasakop ng maraming mga bansa na sa panahon ni Kristo ay nasa ilalim ng mga Romano. Kahit sa loob ng kanilang sariling komunidad ay magulo sapagkat ang mga sarili nilang relihiyosong awtoridad ay makasarili at mapang-api, at ito na nga iyong panahong pinako si Kristo, ang ating Diyos, sa krus.

Kaya ang mundo noon ni Simeon at mundo natin ngayon ay halos hindi nagkakalayo, may pandemya man o wala, ang



buong mundo ay naghihirap simula noon pa. Gayunpaman, napatanong ulit ako, paano nga ba naramdaman ni Simeon ang presensya ng Panginoon? Ang Panginoon na ang pagka-Diyos ay nakatago sa anyo ng isang ordinaryong sanggol, na ang mga magulang ay napaka-ordinaryo at mahirap. Walang-wala po talaga ang Banal na Pamilya ni Hesus sa materyal na bagay. Naaalala rin natin kung paano nanganak ang Mahal na Inang Maria sa kuweba o, sa ibang teksto, sa sabsaban at hindi man lamang sa loob ng bahay-panuluyan. At sa pag-aalay nila sa Templo, dalawang kalapati po lamang ang nakayanan ng pera nila.

Paano nagawa ni Simeon ito? Paano mapapansin si Kristo sa gitna ng kadiliman, sa gitna ng ordinaryong pangyayari at mukhang ordinaryong mga tao? Kung babasahin po natin nang mabuti ang Ebanghelyo, mapapansing ito pong lahat ay nagiging posible sa kanyang pakikinig at pagsunod sa Espiritu Santo. Napatanong ulit ako, paano ko nga ba mapapansin ang Diyos, na Siyang Katotohanan at Ilaw sa gitna ng kadiliman kung hindi ko man lang napapansin at sinusunod ang katotohanan at ang ilaw sa pang-araw-araw na mga ordinaryo kong gawain?

Dumarami ang mga tanong, ano po? Upang masagot ko po ang mga ito, babalik po ako sa Unang Pagbasa na galing sa sulat ni San Juan. Ayon dito, ang paraan upang malaman natin kung sino si Kristo ay iisa lamang at ito'y sundin ang kautusan ng Diyos. Ito ay kautusan na luma na at naroroon na sa simula pa lamang, ngunit mukhang bago na ngayon, dahil binuo na ito ni Kristo sa kautusan Niya ng pagmamahal.

Kung patuloy pa nating babasahin ang sulat ni San Juan, sa ikaapat na kabanata, sasabihin niya na ang Diyos po ay Pagmamahal. Sa taong nagmamahal, nakikita rin niya ang Diyos,



hindi po gamit ang mga ordinaryong mata, ngunit ang mga mata ng puso. Sa taong nagmamahal, ang Diyos ay nananahan sa kanyang puso.

Dito na natin makikita at mararamdaman ang presensya ng Panginoon sa panahon ngayon ng pandemya. Ang Diyos na nakatago ang kaanyuan, na nasa loob ng mga puso ng mga taong ginagawa po ang lahat ng kaya nila upang makatulong sa mga naghihirap ngayon, mga taong nagbibigay ng buong sarili sa kabila ng hirap at kadiliman. Tinutukoy ko po ang mga *frontliner* sa mga ospital at *quarantine centers*, mga nagtatrabaho nang maayos sa gobyerno, mga nagpapatupad ng kaayusan at kalinisan, mga nagpapaabot ng donasyon, at marami pang iba.

Pero hanggang dito lang ba ang presensya ng Panginoon? Dito lang ba nakikita ang pagmamahal? Paano na ako na naririto nakatago sa *novitiate*? Ang pagmamahal ba ay nakikita lamang sa mga *extra-ordinaryong* bagay at gawain?

Ngayon po na wala pa akong isang taon bilang isang *novice*, kami ay tinuturuan at binibigyan ng panahon at oportunidad na mapansin ang presensya ng Panginoon sa buhay namin at sa lahat ng bagay, at sa paraan ng pagmamahalan sa isa't isa sa komunidad at sa *apostolate*. Kung titingnan ko lang po ang sarili ko, mahirap po talagang makapaniwala na ang Diyos ay nananahan sa aking puso. Ang puso ko pa naman kung wala ang ilaw ni Kristo ay malamig, makasarili, at puno ng pangangailangan.

Ngunit ang Diyos po ay higit pa sa lahat ng iyan, dahil kahit sa katauhan kong malayo sa pagiging perpekto, Siya po ay nais tumira sa puso ko. Sa totoo lang, mas sanay pa ako sa pagpansin ng presensya ng Panginoon sa patuloy na pagtanggap ko



ng pagmamahal at gabay na galing sa iba kung saan dumadaan ang grasya ni Hesus: sa mga nagtatrabaho rito, sa mga kapwa ko *brothers*, at sa mga *Fathers* na laging nagbibigay ng patnubay, laging nagdarasal, at nagmimisa para sa ating lahat.

At lalo pa akong nagpapasalamat sa ibinigay na oportunidad na makarinig sa mga *sharing* po ng mga buhay ninyo sa *basic ecclesial community* (BEC) *sharings* natin. Dahil sa kabila ng di-katiyak-tiyak na lagay, ramdam na ramdam ko po ang presensya ng Panginoon sa pamamaraan ng pagmamahal ninyo po sa inyong mga mahal sa buhay.

Ilang halimbawa lang nito ay ang pagbibigay ng sarili ninyo sa trabaho upang mabigyan ng maginhawang buhay ang pamilya. O di kaya'y ang pag-aalaga ng mga nagkakasakit nating mga kapamilya. O di kaya'y ang pag-aalala para sa kinabukasan ng ating pamilya, kung makakapag-aral pa ba ang anak ninyo, o kung mabibigyan pa sila ng mabuting pangangatawan para makapagtrabaho para sa pamilya. O di kaya'y ang pagpapatawad at pagdarasal para sa mga kaaway at para sa mga taong sinasaktan tayo. Ang mga ito po lahat ay simple at pangkaraniwang mga nangyayari at gawain. Pero ito po lahat ay gawaing pagmamahal, sapagkat ito ay pagbibigay ng sarili natin para sa kabutihan ng mga mahal natin sa buhay, o sa ilan para rin sa kanilang mga di-kasundo, at ginagawa ito nang wala man lang kabayaran o kapalit. Ano nga ba ito kundi pagmamahal, pagmamahal na nanggagaling sa ating mga puso, ang puso kung saan nananahan ang ating Panginoon?

Mga kapatid, ngayon sa panahon ng Pasko at palapit na bagong taon, magtulungan po tayong magpaalala sa ating mga sarili, sa isa't isa dito sa *Sacred Heart*, sa ating mga pamilya at mga



kamag-anak, sa ating mga kaibigan, at sa ating mga kaaway. Paalalahanan natin ang isa't isang pakinggan nang mas husto at mas buo ang ating Diyos sa pamamagitan ng pagbabasa ng Kanyang Salita sa Banal na Bibliya, pagtanggap ng Kanyang Katawan at Dugo sa Banal na Eukaristiya, at paggawa ng mga konkretong gawain ng pagmamahal na nagmumula sa ating mga puso.

Sa ating araw-araw na pakikinig at paghahanap sa Diyos sa buhay natin, magiging tulad tayo ni Simeon, na atin ding mapapansin, makikita, at mahahawakan ang Diyos. Sa pagdating ng panahon na tayo po ay pumanaw, masasabi rin natin sa Panginoon, “Ngayon, papanawin mo nang mapayapa ang iyong lingkod, O Panginoon.” SHN



The Banquet of God

Mark W.

Both our Gospel today (Luke 14:15-24) on this parable of the banquet and its parallel in Matthew (22:1-14) emphasize how people often refuse God's invitation. They also highlight how, in spite of it, God continues loving.

On first reading, I thought the people who refused God's invitation were stupid. It seemed very easy to choose the more important thing, which was God's invitation. On second reading, though, I realized I was just like them.

For example, when I was younger, I would often find an excuse to escape attending Mass. It was like refusing to join God's party, the banquet He prepared. During those early years, I chose to play computer games over going to church. I thought it was more fun to watch movies or jam with friends. I thought it was okay to skip attending Mass. But all these were contrary to what my mother had been trying to teach me.

Once my mother encouraged me to be an altar server. I did not try out and simply told my mother that the parish did not allow me to join. I realized I had been distancing myself from God, especially from the Mass. I felt quite far from Him while growing up.

However, I also realized that having so many excuses to reject God's call was a worldly attachment. As I paid more attention to what Jesus said in the Gospel, I noticed He was communicating



three important points to me. The first person who refused to come said, “I have bought some lands.” Another said, “I have bought five yokes of oxen.” And another, “I have just got married.”

Land in this world means power. The more land you have, the more powerful you are. The second one speaks of property and money. And the third can pertain to carnal desires or sex or lust. Jesus practically mentioned where I am likely to stumble in my quest to follow Him.

Contemporary culture seems to teach us that these three – power, property, and sex – are the standards for being successful. Honestly, these had been my life purpose before I began responding more actively to God’s invitation. For example, I spent too much vacation time on earning money instead of grasping the opportunities to join family and church activities.

I remember what Saint Ignatius told St. Francis Xavier to bring the latter to conversion: “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world but in the process to lose his own soul?” This woke me up from the delusion of secular hedonism, as I shared in my vocation story.

By God’s grace, I am here in the novitiate. I think my life here is no longer dependent on those standards for pursuing a “worthwhile” life in the world. I have begun relying on God, who is the most important in my life.

Recently, our *secundi* brothers reported on the three religious vows. Maybe our Gospel story can also be related to these vows: power and obedience, property and poverty, and carnal desires and chastity. How interestingly God works! He knows our weaknesses already before we realize them.



While I still have superficial understanding of the religious vows, I can say that we are already beginning to practice them here in the novitiate. At the very least, we try to obey our way of proceeding here. There is no personal property, too! And no romantic relationships!

The vows are only one dimension, although they are very significant. In many other areas, I still find myself challenged and distracted from my real meaning and purpose. Father Ignatius, in the First Principle and Foundation, reminds me of who I am, whose I am, and for whom I am.

I proceed assured of God's love for me in spite of my weaknesses and imperfections. I come to His banquet confident in His welcoming embrace. SHN



Begging

Patrick E.

When I was just starting school, my father used to make it a point – to make it his duty – to drive me to my kindergarten. It would be a short ride but we would always pass this intersection with a traffic light and we’d often have to stop.

Every time, there would be a beggar knocking on car windows, knocking on our window, asking for alms. Sometimes he would be blind and have a can, sometimes it would be a small child, or at other times, a mother carrying her baby in her arms.

My father doesn't approve of begging, but he would always roll down his window and give a couple of coins. But he would tell the beggar, “Don’t beg, you lose your dignity when you beg.”

“You lose your dignity when you beg.” It is said that when a person begs, he is admitting that he cannot help himself anymore, that he is weak and desperate. It is an act of humility, many times of shame and disgrace and ridicule as well. For my father who values honor, self-respect, and dignity, begging is painful to do and even to see.

And yet, in today’s Gospel we find exactly the opposite: a mother begging, “Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon.” Right on cue, she gets looked down on and ridiculed, first by the disciples and then by Jesus Himself. “It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs,” He says. He compares her to a dog and yet she



continues, continues to ask, to entreat, imploring and begging Him to save her daughter.

It is easy to read this portion of the mother begging without too much drama and imagination, but – if I imagine my own mother kneeling down on the floor and crying and begging for my sake – for me to be saved from some condition... I don't think I'll be able to handle it... My heart would break.

It is precisely that image of a rejected and ridiculed mother still persisting, still begging for her child that moved Jesus to pity and made His tone shift from harsh ridicule to gentle consolation. He saw not anymore the shame and disgrace that accompanies begging, but what was behind it, at the root of it – the deep, deep love of a mother for her child. Because she was begging not for herself, but for her daughter, she could endure losing her dignity. Because she was begging for someone she loved, she could stomach being seen as helpless and weak and desperate. And our Lord responded generously.

This is the message to us: that even though the world may always see begging as an act of shame and disgrace and a loss of dignity, when we beg, especially when we beg for someone else, in the eyes of our Lord, we are doing a great act of love. SHN



Built on Rock

Patrick E.

The Gospel today reminds me of the story about Fr. Pedro Arrupe when he was in Japan, before he was elected General of the Society of Jesus. It is said that on the 8th of December 1941, while working as a parish priest in Yamaguchi, he was -- without warning -- arrested and thrown in jail.

It was wartime in Japan and Father Arrupe (a Spaniard) was suspected of being an international spy. He was probably kept in isolation and interrogated extensively many times. Thoughts of suffering for Christ and martyrdom must have repeatedly crossed his mind. Thirty-three long difficult days passed before he was finally released for... lack of evidence.

When he got out, he approached the tough-looking warden and asked, "Why did you keep me so long in detention?" The warden explained, half-apologizing, "For the Japanese, one of the most important elements for a case is the way the accused behaves. You always obeyed and were never rebellious. You are a priest and have dedicated yourself to study and prayer. You do what you say. Pardon the mistake, but you know that in time of war, everything is under suspicion."

"Don't concern yourself," said Father Arrupe, "I preach a doctrine that teaches me to love and suffer without harboring resentment." As soon as Father Arrupe said those words, he could not believe what he saw: when his eyes met the eyes of that hardened man... he saw tears being shed.



Fr. Pedro Arrupe is well-known as a man who prayed a lot, who always sought the will of God, and had a deep relationship with his Lord. In those 33 long difficult days, when, as in the Gospel, "the rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew" on him, Father Arrupe "loved and suffered without resentment" and showed that his values, his faith, and his identity were indeed built on solid rock.

If we give it a second look, even though it is unpleasant and often dreadful, tests of character like the one Father Arrupe went through – events and experiences that challenge our values, our faith, our identity – are a blessing because it is in trials like these – when we are outside our comfort zones, when we are stretched to our limit, when "the rain falls, the flood comes, and the wind blows" – it is in these situations, these "calamities," that we are given the opportunity to witness our own strength, to be surprised at our own resolve and to know the kind of rock God truly is in our lives.

I surely have had my moments of trial, especially here at Sacred Heart. Sometimes they are grand and drawn out, like serving in the mission areas or the 30 days of silence in the long retreat; other times the trials are small and trivial, but no less annoying and difficult to endure, like the routine of work and chores or sometimes pettiness among community members.

Though unpleasant, confronting these is a good test of one's values, one's faith, one's identity – one's vocation. I am sure that each one of us has gone through some storm before (or is going through one currently) – big or small – that has tested or is testing our values, our faith, our identity and on what it is built on.



If the story of Father Arrupe in prison is to teach us one thing, it is that the secret to building on solid rock is prayer: talking to God, listening to Him, developing a personal relationship with Him, always seeking and discerning His will.

The world may go to war, the innocent may be imprisoned, the unjust may prosper, "the rain may fall, the floods may come, the wind may blow," but if, through prayer, one is constantly listening and is attuned to, anchored to and built on the solid rock that is God, then there is no trial, no storm, no hardship that cannot be eventually overcome and conquered. SHN



Enlargement of the Heart

Robert B.

In 2018, two months before entering the Arvisu Jesuit Candidacy House, I was diagnosed with hypertension. My cardiologist told me that if I would not take maintenance drugs, my heart would enlarge due to high blood pressure. He explained to me that the heart, being a muscle, can grow bigger if it exerts more effort due to higher pressure.

I was reminded of this experience as I reflected on the Gospel today (Luke 13: 18-21). Jesus says, “[The kingdom of God] is like a mustard seed” which “when fully grown, [can become] a large bush. He continues, “It is like yeast” which when “mixed with flour [is] leavened.” In both images we see a transformation – an enlargement.

This enlargement is not an easy process. The seed needs to be buried deep into the ground before it can grow. The same goes with the yeast which needs to be exposed to immense heat before it can expand to become bread. Transformation needs pressure, heat, and even uncertainty.

This is quite similar to what I am going through in the novitiate, the “school of the heart.” Here, I am also exposed to pressure, uncertainty, and resistance in order to move towards transformation of the heart.

Fr. Eric Escandor, SJ told me in Arvisu that if ever I get accepted to the novitiate, it would be like entering an oven. He did not elaborate, but I thought it was an invitation to expect



experiences of pressure and tension, and after more than a year, I can now more fully agree with him.

I remember one experience with a brother last formation year. I felt offended by the way he questioned my decision. I told him, “You need to correct that.” After that incident, I resolved not to speak with this brother, or at least avoid him.

However, on April 29, Fr. Chris Dumadag, SJ reminded us that we choose to love because of Jesus Christ and we begin doing this here and now in the community. He said, “You do not start loving outside the novitiate; you start it now.” At that point, I felt some resistance in my heart that moved me to pray over the experience. I told the Lord that I did not want to speak with my brother, but since I felt He was inviting me to reconcile with him, I would do it. The Lord simply responded with the words, “Just do it, I will take care of the rest.” I asked the Lord to provide me with the opportunity to speak with my brother, and He did.

On May 1, before the Reconciliation Service, I apologized to this brother for my strong reaction. His response surprised me, “It’s alright. You can be real here.” When I heard those words, I felt my heart expanded.

After facing my resistance, it seemed more spaces opened within my heart. My heart can now accommodate my resistance, as well as my desire to reconcile with others. How easy it was for me to understand and accompany others like the people in the apostolate whom I only see once a week but not my brothers who are with me every day.

I realize now that the fruit of this experience and many similar ones is an expanding heart, one with wider spaces for my



negative feelings, weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and spaces, too, for the feelings, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities of others.

Perhaps this is what Jesus Christ means by the “Kingdom of God.” It is like having an expanding heart for one’s self and for others. His is an enlarged heart that forgave the repentant thief and asked the Father to forgive those who crucified him while undergoing excruciating pain. This is the same heart that understood Thomas’ doubt and forgave Peter’s betrayal.

This is Jesus’ continuous invitation for me: to allow my heart to expand by welcoming resistance and pain, to keep choosing to love even when it is difficult to love myself and others.

Hopefully, I will become what I choose. And I begin in the here-and-now, in our own community. Indeed it is good to ponder how much my heart has expanded since I entered these hallowed walls of the novitiate. SHN



Focusing on Jesus

Peter F.

After the Psycho-Spiritual Integration (PSI) Seminar-Workshop last month, I sensed God has been inviting me to immerse into my own emotional world, or at least to attend to my emotions and feelings which I used to ignore. Insofar as I am aware, I still have a long way to go in having the grit which is described by Fr. János Lukács, SJ in his article “Revisiting the Novitiate,” as the ability to manage strong impulses and feelings and the capacity to maintain integrity in stressful environments. Nevertheless, allow me to share the journey I have gone through with the Lord.

Soon after the PSI, I felt groundless. I was confronted by the clarity and intensity of my momentarily changing feelings and emotions. Confusion and restlessness made it difficult for me to distinguish where I was interiorly. Although I started to get in touch with my inner peace, which was solidly grounded on Jesus once I declared in prayer that I was God’s beloved son, I was still overwhelmed from time to time afterward.

With the help of the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus the tax collector, I begged for the grace of attentiveness to the presence of God. In my contemplation, the attitude of Zacchaeus echoed my eagerness to see Jesus whom I knew was somewhere near me, but then the critical voices inside me were getting in the way. As I imagined climbing up the sycamore tree with Zacchaeus, I felt drawn into my negative feelings instead of my desire to see Jesus. Like Zacchaeus, I could not bear the voices from the crowd. I even believed they were a part of my identity.



However, there was a firm voice amidst all the others, saying, “Hurry down.” It was Jesus, calling me out of my chaos at that moment. My inner peace returned through these words of Jesus. It was difficult to dismiss the voices from the crowd, but I followed the example of Zacchaeus; he focused on Jesus. After his encounter with Jesus, he could already let go of his possessions, power, and security. He held on to Jesus tightly and in all else lightly.

This was a beautiful insight but one that still has a long way to go from the mind to the heart. I looked into my experiences in the following days with the way Jesus accompanied Zacchaeus back home. It was a process to learn how to hold my emotions and feelings properly rather than being overwhelmed by them all the time.

After a few days I was once again overwhelmed by my negative feelings because of one unchanging reason – community life. Father Lukács provides a fitting description. He calls this the “illusion” of the evil spirit: “Illusions often take the form of general sentences: ‘I am no good.’ ‘They are idiots.’ ‘Nobody understands me.’ Or, ‘He always gets what he wants.’” He says further that humility is a truly indispensable attitude in living life daily in the novitiate.

Some of the aforementioned sentences recur in my mind. In one prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, I tried to detach from them and simply focus on meditating on Scripture. One helpful passage was the story between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Jesus’ identity as a Jew evoked the self-protective reaction of the Samaritan woman. At this I found myself reacting in the same manner to my brothers on certain occasions. I felt shameful for my



thoughts, deeds, and tendencies while standing before the image of Jesus and my brothers, but I was also grateful for the invitation to let go of my self-protective mechanisms.

I do not how know to do this just yet, but I believe one concrete way is to be humble just as Saint Ignatius instructs us all: “All should take special care to guard with great diligence the gates of their senses from all disorder, to preserve themselves in peace and true humility of their soul...” (*Constitutions* [250]).

In this Mass, let us beg for the grace to be attentive to Jesus more than to ourselves, and to be humble before others and before God. SHN



Freedom

Robert B.

Before coming to the novitiate, I believed that to be free was simply to do what I wanted. I persevered in life so that I could eat the food, buy the things, and go to the places I wanted. I could also help my family and others in the way I wanted. In other words, freedom for me was doing and getting what I wanted.

But as one Jesuit priest told us, “Sometimes our possessions possess us.” During the long retreat, my spiritual director told me that the *Spiritual Exercises* is an exercise of our freedom to choose God’s will. This now becomes my new definition of freedom: to choose God’s will, or simply, to choose God.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells us, “If your right hand causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away... And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go to Gehenna” (Matthew 5:29).

In praying over this, I remembered what Fr. Shogo Sumita, SJ told us in one Reconciliation Service: that what matters is not only about the sin but what it is that causes me to sin or to stop choosing God.

I realize that one of the things the *de more*¹ helps me to do is develop an awareness of the aspects in my life that influence my decision-making.

¹Daily time order for novices



Since I am no longer concerned with what to do within the day, I am able to notice more the things that motivate my choosing. Like an eye or an arm described in the Gospel, they can be sources of unfreedom or, in Ignatian terms, inordinate attachments. Allow me to share some that I noticed.

First, my preferences. One of the most challenging activities for me in the novitiate is the community meetings which have become more frequent recently because of the Covid-19 crisis. On these occasions, we heartily speak our minds on specific matters and issues. There are times I do not agree with my brothers or with the decisions made. I try to suspend my judgments whenever this happens. When I finally bring this experience to prayer, I realize I am, in fact, enriched by everyone's inputs.

In his letter "From Distraction to Dedication," Fr. Adolfo Nicolas, SJ shared how Saint Ignatius instructs the person about to finish the *Spiritual Exercises* (SpEx) on the right feelings and attitudes in the Church. Father Nicolas writes, "The words sound hard and difficult to accept but what the saint wanted was freedom, openness to something greater than few ideas, even if they happen to be my own."

I feel the same invitation here, that is, to widen my horizon so to be more open to consider ideas other than my own. It is the same invitation to be free of my own biases and preferences. Though it is not easy, I remind myself that this is also what the Lord wants for me.

Second, my "should's" or my conditions. Before the long retreat, Fr. Chris Dumadag, SJ invited us to set aside our past experiences of prayers and even our current image of God. When I heard this, I felt an intense resistance. I wanted to ask him, "Do you



want me to let go of the things, images, and experiences which made me closer to God?” After the SpEx, I realized Father Chris meant that these things are not God but only a means to Him.

Finally, my excessive self-reliance. I recall one of my favorite movies in the 90’s called the *Magic Temple*, which is about three young warriors sent by their master to save another world. I was struck with the master’s reminder to his doubting students: “*Darating ang tulong kung kinakailangan, ang mahalaga lang makitang kailangan ng tulong.*”²

Here in the novitiate, I become more aware of my own limitations, especially in this time of the pandemic. The more I recognize and embrace my weaknesses and depend on God more than on myself, the more I also recognize His providence.

They say that novitiate life is a desert experience where we can allow ourselves to undergo a certain kind of emptiness and detachment, where our motivations and desires are purified towards God. Fr. Manol Montesclaros, SJ taught us that the desert was where the Lord freed the Israelites from the bondage of sins and worldly desires. This is important for us because only people who are free can enter into a covenant with God.

Hopefully, by the end of two years in the novitiate, I am sufficiently freed of my own inordinate attachments that I may respond to God’s will for me more generously. Let us continue to beg for the grace of interior freedom that we may not be deaf to God’s call and be free to follow God’s will. SHN

² Help will come when needed; what is essential is to see one’s need for help.



From Unbelief to Believing

Joseph Z.

Growing up, I very rarely went to Church, so when I entered the seminary I asked my director many strange questions. I remember one of them was: “Why should we love everyone?”

When I proceeded with my brothers to work on our output for the Community Building workshop, I realized that I could be of little help in this work in spite of my willing heart. So yesterday I came with a certain resistance, stress, and tiredness. However, we began our prayer with the reminder: “Let us remember that we are always in the loving presence of the Lord.” In hearing this, I noticed that something was happening in my heart.

All of a sudden, I noticed that the atmosphere of the place changed – or my interior disposition did. Instead of being filled with stress and resistance, it became relaxing and lovely. Through this simple reminder, God pulled me out of my many negative attitudes, feelings, and thoughts, and directed my awareness to His loving presence in our midst and in each of us. At this, I also felt connected to everyone.

I then recalled my prayer on the Last Supper during the *Spiritual Exercises*. Jesus looked at His apostles including myself, one by one, and then fixed his eyes on me, saying, “This I command you: love one another.” That was a profound experience for me. Since then, whenever I think of that moment, I feel a sense of closeness to others. Jesus’ love for everyone unites me with others.



During my seminary formation years, I liked speaking with my directors because I had so many questions begging for answers. (I actually did not think those sessions were to be considered truly spiritual direction, since I even had no “experience” of God; I just kept on asking questions.) As a result, I was assigned to different directors each semester; it seemed no one wanted to guide me.

I went to my directors frequently, except to one. On my very first meeting with him, I told him, “Father, I noticed that I feel proud of many things, and I look down on others.” He replied immediately, “What are you proud of?” That really hurt me. It was as if he said there was nothing I could be proud of in myself. Since then, I went to him only when I needed to, according to the policy of the seminary. But despite that, I found him to be a wonderful director and counsellor; he encouraged me and helped me a lot in my discernment.

Now, five years later, I am standing here in the hallowed grounds of Sacred Heart Novitiate, sharing my stories with the Lord. I feel so grateful. Sometimes when I look back, I really feel very amazed at my faith in God. That’s a great miracle and grace! I could not imagine how God turns a man who believed nothing but his mind to a man who believes without understanding. SHN



God's Presence

James Ryan S.

Way back when I felt lonely and hurting as a small child, God embraced me in the arms of my mother. When I saw myself as unacceptable and not worthy of attention, God gave me affection through the warm smiles and hearty laughter of my friends. When I found myself unlovable and unloving, God called my heart to His very act of love – doing simple acts of surrendering for the good of the other. In loving in this very way, I experienced a painful betrayal, like an experience of falling into the deep and dark abyss, from which God eventually saved me.

As I struggled to make sense of my life, God consoled me with the very depth of His love. When I became strongly attracted to the Lord, God had been inviting me to the way of living and loving which He had already set for me.

Setting my eyes on the Lord, I then sought what I thought the Lord had wanted for me – moral perfection and “sinlessness.” This ultimately led me to an idealization of and my eventual attachment to the religious life which, I thought, was the best means to achieve perfection.

Yet, the Lord slowly and lovingly revealed in a bittersweet way that it is I – the self – whom I wanted to repair desperately and deny unconsciously.

Now seeing myself so broken, sinful, and unworthy, I sometimes doubt and question this calling for such a life. God



would remind me time and again that for whatever grace I need it is ultimately He who will provide. Broken vessel though I am, God loves and delights in me so much.

As perplexed as I am for not having any such background experience or data about the Society of Jesus and God's invitation for me to become part of it, He reminds me of His gift of faith back when I was zealously discerning His will.

As doubtful as I am of my desires for not being too "deep" in wanting to be a Jesuit, God lets me remember how He labored immensely, provided bountifully, as well as healed me gently through the members of the Society while I was still a candidate.

Now in the novitiate, without failing to be grateful for the care and nourishment I have received so far, I continue to experience confusion. Yet in this confusion, God reassures me in prayer, saying, "Trust in the community." I then retorted, "How? How could I?" He replied, "I am here."

Let me conclude with a prayer to the Lord: "Lord, I continue to beg for your grace, in remembering all the gifts I have unknowingly and knowingly received, that in this remembering, I may continue to be dependent and grateful like a child. You have always been with me, dear Lord. Help me to remain always with You. Amen." SHN



Katabing Santo

Patrick E.

Mas madali at mas sanay siguro tayong isipin at makita ang mga apostol ni Kristo, ang mga alagad ni Kristo, bilang mga santo; sa larawan man o estatwa, sila’y mga banal na tao. At tama naman ito dahil sila ang mga unang nagpalaganap ng Mabuting Balita ni Kristo. Sila ay nagsipagkalat sa mundo bilang mga testigo ng nabuhay na Kristo. Dumaan sila sa hirap, nagkaroon sila ng maraming kaaway, at ang iba ay pinatay pa – si Pedro ay pinako rin sa krus – para kay Kristo. Sila’y mga santo at banal na tao.

Ngunit, totoo rin na malimit nating nakikita sa mga Ebanghelyo ang kahinaan at, kung minsan, ang pagkamakasariili ng mga apostol. Nagsitakbuhan sila sa takot sa hardin ng Getsemani noong aarestuhin na si Hesus – iniwan nila si Hesus – si Pedro lang ang naiwan. Pero kahit si Pedro tinalikuran si Hesus dahil sa takot; sinabi niyang hindi niya kilala si Hesus nang tatlong beses! Kahit mabubuting tao ang mga apostol at gusto nilang sumunod kay Hesus, kung minsan din talaga, lumalabas ang kanilang mga kahinaan. Ang Ebanghelyo ngayon ay isa na namang halimbawa nito.

Anong nangyari? Si Santiago at Juan ay lumapit kay Hesus, may hiling. Anong hinihingi? Ilagay raw sila sa tabi ni Kristo kapag Siya ay naging hari – isa sa kanan, isa sa kaliwa. Ibig sabihin, sila ang magiging mga prinsipe, ikalawa lamang kay Kristo sa kaharian Niya. Ang kapal ng mukha nila! Kumbaga sa mga pulitiko ngayon, mga epal sila. Ba’t naman sila ang iaangat ni Kristo sa Kanyang



ibang mga apostol? Kaya naman hindi katakataka ang reaksyon ng ibang mga apostol: nagalit sila. Sumama ang loob nila. At malamang naghahanda na silang awayin ‘yong dalawang makapal ang mukha. Mag-aaway-away ang mga apostoles!

Ngunit sa pagkakataong ito, namalas din natin ang galing ni Kristo. Imbis na palakihin pa ang away, ginamit Niya ang sitwasyon bilang oportunidad na turuan sila tungkol sa tunay na pamumuno, sa paraan ni Kristo ng pamumuno – ang pamumuno sa pamamagitan ng paglilingkod. Ang mas maganda pang ginawa ni Hesus ay hindi niya pinaalis sina Santiago at Juan. Apostoles pa rin sila. Kung may pulitikong gumawa ng ginawa nila – na masyadong ambisyoso at nakiki-epal – ngayon, sinisira niya lang ang pagkakataon niyang manalo sa eleksyon.

Pero iba kay Hesus, iba ang tingin Niya sa sitwasyon, iba ang Kanyang sukatan, iba ang paghuhusga Niya sa mga tao. Oo, nakikita Niya ang pagiging ambisyoso nina Santiago at Juan, nakikita Niya ang takot at karuwagan ng Kanyang mga apostol, nakikita Niya na kung minsan ay para silang mga batang nag-aaway. Subalit nakikita rin Niya ang kabutihan sa kanilang puso, ang pagmamahal nila sa Kanya, at ang kagustuhan nilang sumunod at tumulad sa Kanya.

Walang taong perpekto. Kahit ang mga apostol, ang mga santo, maraming kahinaan – hindi sila perpekto. Pero nakikita ni Kristo na may potensyal silang maging mabuting instrumento sa Kaharian ng Diyos. Ganoon din ang tingin ni Kristo sa atin: na oo, may mga kahinaan tayo, hindi tayo perpekto, ngunit may malaking kapasidad din tayo para sa kabutihan, may puso rin tayo na mapagmahal, at may hangarin din tayong maging mabuting Katoliko, mabuting magulang o kapatid o anak.



Kaya sa susunod na may makaharap o may makatabi tayo, huwag lang nating isipin ang mga kahinaan niya at mga pagkakamali niyang nagawa. Tingnan din natin na may kabutihan din siya sa puso at tinatawag din siya ni Kristo bilang alagad.

Malay ninyo, si *brother* – paloko-loko lang yan – pero baka balang araw maging santo ‘yan! O baka ang kapitbahay ninyo o kaya ang katabi ninyo – pangiti-ngiti lang yan – pero baka balang araw maging santo ‘yan! Hindi natin alam.

Kaya para hindi magkamali, tularan natin si Kristo na imbis na puro kahinaan at kamalian ang nakikita, nakikita rin ang kabutihan sa bawat isa, ang banal sa bawat isa, at ang potensyal nating lahat na maging santo. SHN



Loving and Merciful

Mamert M.

In our Gospel today (Matthew 13:24-30), Jesus continues with his parable discourses on the sower and the seed that he sows. He proposes the story of a sower who, after sowing good seeds, is attacked by his enemy: an enemy who comes tiptoeing like a thief in the night and maliciously sows weeds among good seeds.

In the course of the parable, we hear about the wisdom of the sower, who decides to let both weeds and wheat grow together, before separating one from the other. The parable ends with the following words from the sower: “First collect the weeds and tie them for burning; but gather the wheat into my barn” (v. 30).

In light of this, I propose two very important, primordial traits of God that this parable may be telling us. Perhaps we can take them with us today and ponder them in our hearts. The first, my dear friends, is God’s unfathomable love, and the second, His infinite mercy.

As with all of Jesus’ parables, today’s is replete with symbols. For our own purposes here, perhaps we can agree that the sower whom Jesus refers to is actually Himself, and that the good seed refers to the Good News that He proclaims. We can also agree that the field is pretty much the world with its entire people (including us), and that enemy is none other than the devil himself.

We can also further agree that the wheat refers to the fruits of the Good News sown by Jesus, while the weeds are the outcome of



what the enemy, the Evil One, has sown. That is to say, the wheat refers to people whom we can rightly call children of Light, children of the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, the weeds can refer to children of the dark, that is, children that are lost because of the Evil One.

Every parable that Jesus teaches us in the Gospels is actually alluding to the Kingdom of God. Simply put, Jesus teaches us about God's unfathomable love and about His infinite mercy. In our parable today, Jesus paints the picture of a wise sower who, after discovering the growth of weeds amongst his wheat, decides to let both grow together until harvest time. The sower knew that if he pulls up the weeds before the wheat is fully grown, he runs the risk of pulling up the wheat as well.

It is in this picture, my dear friends, that Jesus points us to God's unfathomable love: that is, the kind of love that allows both the good and the bad to co-exist, a love that allows for both the wheat and the weeds to grow together. Here we also have a picture of that age-old tension, an epic battle, the on-going tug-of-war between good and evil.

And we ask why? Why does God allow this to happen? Why, for instance, does God allow blatantly corrupt people to exist, to even thrive and be on top of the food chain, as it were? Why does God allow philandering, perhaps even physically abusive husbands and fathers to run free? Why do illegal loggers and indiscriminate miners flourish, thereby wreaking havoc on our environment and in many ways directly causing many of the recent calamities that have befallen us? Why does God embrace them and many other "bad and evil ones" in this unfathomable love? Why does God continue to embrace us, despite our sinfulness, our weaknesses, or habitual patterns of unloving?



My friends, I think the answer lies in the second trait of God that today's parable is trying to tell us: that is His infinite mercy.

Going back to our parable, we hear of the wise sower's decision to wait for harvest time before separating the wheat from the weeds. And as the story goes, he waits for harvest time so that he can fully harvest his wheat and keep them in his barn, while the weeds will be bundled up for burning. I think it is here that Jesus points us to God's infinite mercy.

God waits – He patiently waits – for the harvest time to come, for the time of judgment in the last days. He waits before He does anything with those whom we earlier on agreed to call the children of the dark, lost ones. He patiently waits because maybe, just maybe, the blatantly corrupt, the murderers, and the thieves will have a last-minute change of heart. And His infinite mercy cannot but accept erring but repentant sinners back into the fold, however lost they may have been in the dark.

Our God of the unfathomable love and infinite mercy patiently waits for the conversion of these lost ones, so that He too may take them, together with the children of the Light, take them into His barn, into His loving embrace.

Dear friends, in light of this reflection, how then are we to respond? What might God be asking of us in this regard? Perhaps we can draw inspiration from St. Ignatius of Loyola, whose feast we will be celebrating at the end of this month, and for whom this third day of our novena Masses is being offered. I think Saint Ignatius is a shining example of a weed that turned into wheat, that is, of a bad person converting to good. Though he wasn't a thief or a murderer, his loose lifestyle as a soldier – that of womanizing and boozing and of painting the town red – were not the least bit edifying. No, these actions were not saintly at all.



But in God's unfathomable love and infinite mercy, He called on Ignatius and made him into an altogether different soldier: God made him a soldier under the banner of Jesus Christ. The key that we can take from St. Ignatius is that oft-repeated phrase, "seeing God in all things, and all things in God." That is to say, to see God in all of creation, be it in man or woman, or in the environment in general. To see God in all things and all things in God means seeing Him even in the blatantly corrupt, in the philandering husband, in the illegal logger. So we see that for God, there is hope for everyone.

Dear friends, to see God in this way means to beg for the grace of growing in unconditional love. It also means to beg for the grace of being forgiving towards others and, most especially, to ourselves. To see God in this fashion is to aspire towards being merciful towards others.

However, to love unconditionally and to be forgiving and merciful does not happen in a vacuum. It does not happen by simply thinking about it. We have to do our part in the work of the Kingdom, whatever that might be. It might be small; it might be big. It might be noteworthy; it might be forgettable. Nevertheless, it is something that needs to be done for the salvation of souls, both ours and that of others.

So with Saint Ignatius we beg – we beg ceaselessly for the grace of our own conversions, of our own becoming more loving and more merciful, as we too follow the banner of Christ as our founder did more than 480 years ago. SHN



Mithiin ng Puso

Rogelio N.

Sa isang article sa *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, sinasabi na papataas nang papataas ang *suicide rate* hindi lamang sa Pilipinas, kundi sa maraming bansa sa buong mundo. At karaniwang nagpapakamatay ay mga kabataan. Dito po sa Pilipinas, isang *survey* ng mga *high school students* na may gulang 13 taon hanggang 17 taon noong 2015 ang nagpakita na 17 porsyento ang sinubukang mag-*suicide*, samantalang 12 porsyento ang nag-isip na gawin ito. Sa datos ngayon ng *World Health Organization*, ang *suicide rate per 100,000 population* ng mga Pilipinong lalaki ay tumaas mula 4.5 patungong 5.2 sa taong 2000 hanggang 2016, samantalang sa mga Pilipinong babae naman ay tumaas din mula 1.8 to 2.13.

Noong ako po ay nag-aaral sa kolehiyo, meron kaming isang kaibigan na sinubukang mag-*suicide*, dahil na rin sa kanyang *clinical depression*. Nang aming malaman, agad kaming pumunta sa pinagdalong ospital upang siya ay bisitahin. Nakausap ko po nang personal ang kanyang nanay at nadama ko kung gaano kahirap para sa kanya ang mabalitaang hahantong sa ganoon ang kanyang anak. Gayunpaman, dama ko rin po ang kanyang pagpapasalamat sa Diyos at sa aming presensya, kung kaya't pinakiusapan din niya kami na patuloy na maging kaibigan sa kanyang anak.

Mga kapatid, minsan ay mahirap pong isipin kung paano humahantong sa pagpapakamatay ang isang tao, liban na lamang kung mayroon talaga siyang malubhang *psychological/psychiatric condition*. Nakarinig na po ba kayo ng ganitong pananalita: “Kung mawawala iyan sa akin, mabuti pa’y mamatay na ako! Bakit pa ako



mabubuhay, kung wala na iyon?” Ibig sabihin, may mga bagay po o kaya tao o kung anuman na kapag nawala sa isang tao ay parang katapusan na ng lahat. Ilang halimbawa ay pagpanaw ng minamahal, pagkasira ng mga ari-arian, o kaya ay pagkawala o paglaho ng yaman at tagumpay.

Sa ating Mabuting Balita, napakinggan nating sinabi ni Hesus na wala ni isang bato sa Templo ang matitirang hindi gigibain ng mga kaaway. Mabigat ang pananalitang ito para sa mga Judio sapagkat napakahalaga ng Templo para sa kanila. Sabi nga po ng isang manunulat, “Walang ganuon katibay sa buhay na ito ang hindi maaaring masira, at walang ganuon kahalaga ang hindi maaaring mawala.” Sa gayon, pwede po nating pagnilayan kung saan o sa kung ano o kanino po kaya natin itinutumbas ang ating buhay.

Alam n’yo po ba na sa buhay ni San Ignacio ng Loyola, ang *founder* ng Kapisanan ni Hesus, kung saan po kami mga *novices*, ay halos humantong siya sa pagpapakamatay? Sa kanyang talambuhay, nasasaad, “Habang ang isang alaala ay pumukaw sa iba pang alaala, isa-isa niyang naisip ang kanyang mga kasalanan at muli siyang nakaramdam ng pangangailangang mangumpisal. Matapos niyang isipin ang mga bagay na ito, namuhi siya sa kanyang buhay at natukso siyang tapusin na ito” (*Autobiography* 25).

Subalit, sa pagpapatuloy ng kanyang talambuhay, nasasaad, “Sa ganitong pangyayari, minabuti ng Panginoon na gisingin na siya na tila mula sa isang panaginip. ... Mula sa araw na iyon, malaya na siya sa mga pag-aalinlangan at tiyak niyang ninais ng Panginoong palayain siya nang dahil sa Kanyang awa” (Ibid.).

Marami pa pong kamangha-manghang grasya ang ipinagkaloob ng Diyos kay San Ignacio. Kung lalagumin ang kanyang buhay, maaaring sabihing natutunan ni San Ignacio na



palaging itumbas ang kanyang buhay at sarili sa buhay at sarili ni Hesus. Itinuon niya ang kanyang kalayaan, kalooban, isip, gunita, lakas – ang kanyang lahat-lahat – sa ikararantal ng Diyos at ikaliligtas ng mga kaluluwa.

Mga kapatid, ngayon po ay ika-33 Linggo na sa Karaniwang Panahon. Matatapos na sa isang Linggo, sa pagdiriwang ng Kristong Hari, ang kalendaryo ng ating Simbahan. Pagkalipas nito ay papasok na tayo sa panahon ng Adbiyento bilang paghahanda sa Kapaskuhan. Sa konteksto ng nalalapit na pagtatapos at muling pagsisimula, inaanyayahan po tayo na pagsikapan nang may buong katapatan na itumbas at ituon ang ating buhay at sarili kay Hesus lamang. Sabi nga po ni Santa Teresa ng Avila, “Papanaw ang lahat ng bagay; ang pag-ibig ng Diyos ay mananatili kailanman.”

Habang isinusulat ko po itong huling bahagi, naisip ko si Bro. Richie Fernando, SJ. Isa po siyang Heswita na nagmisyon sa Cambodia, at doon ay pumanaw nang sabugan ng granada habang sinusubukan niyang pigilan ang isang estudyanteng may kapansanan na may dala nito sa eskwelahan. Sa isa sa mga nalathala niyang *journal entry*, nabanggit niya, “*I wish that when I die, people would remember not how great, powerful, or talented I was, but that I served and spoke for the truth, I gave witness to what is right, I was sincere with all my words and actions. In other words, I loved and followed Christ.*”¹

Bilang isang nagnanais maging paring Heswita, ito rin po ang mithiin ng aking puso. Mga kapatid, hilingin po natin sa ating mapagmahal at mahabaging Diyos na ganito rin ang ating naisin at isagawa bilang Kanyang mga anak. SHN

¹ Sana kapag pumanaw ako, maaalala ako ng mga tao hindi dahil sa ako ay magaling, malakas, o talentado, kundi dahil naglingkod ako at nagsalita para sa katotohanan, tumestigo ako sa kung ano ang tama, naging totoo ako sa lahat ng aking mga salita at gawa. Sa maikling sabi, minahal at sinundan ko si Kristo.



Modelo ng Pag-ibig

Mamert M.

Sa ating narinig na Mabuting Balita (Mateo 22: 34-40), ipinahayag ni Hesus ang pinakamahalagang utos sa Kautusan. Ang sabi Niya’y, “Ibigin mo ang Panginoon mong Diyos nang buong puso, nang buong kaluluwa, at nang buong pag-iisip. Ito ang pinakamahalagang utos. [Ang pangalawa naman ay gaya nito]: Ibigin mo ang iyong kapwa gaya ng iyong sarili.” Ang sabi nga ng mga dalubhasa sa Bibliya, “Ang dalawang mahalagang utos na ito ang siyang buod ng Kautusan: pag-ibig sa Diyos nang buong pagkatao at pag-ibig sa kapwa gaya ng sarili.”

Minsan, mahirap maintindihan ang mga turong naririnig natin sa mga pagbasa. Oo, klarung-klaro na ang tema ng Mabuting Balita ay pag-ibig. Klarung-klaro. Ngunit minsan, ang mga bagay na napakasimple ang siyang mahirap gawin, mahirap isabuhay, mahirap isipin. Madalas kasi, bilang isang hamak na tao lamang, makasalanan, suwail, mahina, at basag, mahirap maka-*connect* kay *God*. Kumbaga sa *text*, *no network service* o di kaya’y *zero load* na.

Sa mga panahong ganito na mahirap maka-*connect* kay *God*, kung kailan *no network service* o kaya’y *text message sending failed*, ang Diyos na ang Siyang nagbibigay-linaw sa Kanyang sinasabi. At sa aking pagsubok na pagnilayan ang Mabuting Balita sa umagang ito, dinala ako sa mga lumang awiting ito na sa wari ko’y alam o kilala ng halos lahat ng mga naririto ngayon.

Ang tanong ngayon ay kung sa papaanong paraan tayo matutulungan ng mga awiting ito upang intindihin ang mensahe ng



Panginoon para sa atin? Paano magiging totoo para sa atin ang dalawang pinakamahalagang kautusan na ito sa pamamagitan ng mga kantang ito?

Ang mga kantang ito’y *love songs* kung tawagin. At gaya ng lahat ng *love songs*, may mangingibig na siyang kumakanta nito sa kanyang iniibig, sa kanyang iniirog. Kaya simple lang ang ating gagawin upang matulungan tayo ng mga awiting ito: iisipin lamang natin si Hesus ang mangingibig na ito, na tayo ang Kanyang iniibig, at tayo’y inaawitan ni Hesus ng mga awiting ito. Pakinggan natin at namnamin ang sinasabi niya sa atin.

“Ngayon at kailanman, sumpa ko’y iibigin ka, ngayon at kailanman. Dati mong pag-ibig wala akong pakialam, basta’t mahal kita kailan pa man.

At kahit ano pa ang iyong nakaraan, mamahalin kita maging sino ka man.

Kahit na ilang tinik ay kaya kong tapakan kung ‘yan ang paraan upang landas mo’y masundan. Mahal kita, pagka’t mahal kita.

Kahit ilang ulit ako’y iyong saktan, hindi kita maaaring iwanan.

Dahil kaya sa’yo nang maitadhanang ako’y isilang sa mundo upang sa araw-araw ay makapiling mo.

Bakit labis kitang mahal? Pangalawa sa Maykapal, higit sa aking buhay...

Halaga ngayon ay pag-asa, dala ng pag-ibig saksi buong daigdig... walang hanggan ay hahamakin, ‘pagkat walang katapusan kitang iibigin.

At isang araw pa matapos ang mundo’y magunaw na, hanggang doon magwawakas pag-ibig kong sadyang wagas, ngayon at kailanman.”



Mga kapatid, ang Diyos ay pag-ibig. Batid natin ito. Turo sa atin ito. At si Hesus ang kabuuhan ng pag-ibig ng Diyos sa atin, ang Siyang ipinadala ng Diyos Ama upang tayo’y iligtas sa kasalanan at kamatayan. Ang turo ni Hesus sa atin ngayon ay ang ibigin ang Diyos sampu ng ating buong pagkatao, at ang pag-ibig sa kapwa gaya ng pag-ibig sa sarili.

Ngunit ano nga ba uli ang pag-ibig? Ayon sa Unang Sulat ni San Pablo sa mga taga-Corinto (13: 4-8; 13), “[Ang] pag-ibig ay matiyaga at magandang-Ioob, hindi nanananghili, nagmamapuri, o nagmamataas, hindi magaspang ang pag-uugali, hindi makasarili, hindi magagalitin, o mapagtanim sa kapwa. Hindi nito ikinatutuwa ang gawang masama, ngunit ikinagagalak ang katotohanan. Ang pag-ibig ay mapagbatá, mapagtiwala, puno ng pag-asa, at nagtitiyaga hanggang wakas... Ang tatlong ito’y nananatili: ang pananampalataya, pag-asa, at pag-ibig; ngunit ang pinakadakila sa mga ito ay ang pag-ibig.”

Sino naman ang ating kapwa, bukod at higit pa nga sa ating pamilya’t mga kaibigan? Sila ay yaong mga nabanggit sa ating Unang Pagbasa ngayon: “ang mga taga-ibang bayan, mga babaing balo, mga ulila at mga kapus-palad.” Samakatuwid, sila ang mga taong mas kapos pa sa atin, ang mga nangangailangan, ang mga naliligaw. Hindi na tayo kailangan pang tumingin sa malayo o sa ibang lugar, dahil dito mismo sa atin matatagpuan na natin ang ating kapwa. Ang paanyaya sa atin ni Hesus ay mahal in at ibigin ang mga ito kagaya ng pag-ibig natin sa Diyos: ang ibigin sila sampu ng ating buong pagkatao, kagaya ng pag-ibig natin sa ating sarili.

Mga kapatid, wala nang mas hihigit pang modelo para rito kundi si Hesus, na Siyang nanumpang iibigin tayo ngayon at kailanman; Siya na walang pakialam sa ating mga nakaraan basta’t mahal tayo kailan pa man, maging sino pa man tayo; Siya na tiniis kahit na ilang tinik; Siya na mahal tayo, pagka’t mahal tayo; Siya na



kahit ilang ulit nating saktan ay hindi tayo maaaring iwanan; Siya na itinadhanang isilang sa mundo upang sa araw-araw ay makapiling natin. Labis-labis Niya tayong mahal, pangalawa lamang sa Maykapal. Inibig tayo higit sa Kanyang buhay, buhay na ibinuwis alang-alang sa atin. Walang hanggan ay hinahamak, sapagkat walang katapusan tayong iniibig. Ang pangako pa nga Niya’y isang araw pa matapos ang mundo’y magunaw na, hanggang doon magwawakas ang pag-ibig Niyang sadyang wagas, ngayon at kailanman.

Bilang pagtatapos, nais kong iwanan kayo ng isinaling dasal na ito ni Pd. Pedro Arrupe, SJ, na pinamagatang, “Dasal Kay Kristo na Ating Modelo.” Nawa’y manatili ang diwa ng dasal na ito sa ating mga puso sa ating paghihiwa-hiwalay mamaya at pagtungo sa ating kaniya-kanyang bahay.

“Higit sa lahat, bigyan mo ako ng *sensus Christi* na siyang bukambibig ni San Pablo: na ako’y makaramdam ayon sa iyong nararamdaman, sabay ng mga damdamin ng Iyong Banal na Puso, na ang puno’t dulo ay pag-ibig para sa Diyos na Iyong Ama at pag-ibig para sa sangkatauhan.

Wala nang mas humigit pa sa Iyo sa pagpapakita ng pagbibigay, ng pagbubukas-palad, Ikaw na nag-alay ng Iyong buhay alang-alang sa Iyong mga kaibigan. At nais Kitang gayahin hindi lamang sa Iyong nararamdaman kundi sa pang-araw-araw na buhay, gumagawa hangga’t maaari ayon sa mga ginawa Mo rin.

Bigyan mo ako ng biyaya, ng mala-Kristong pang-unawa, ng bawat tibok ng Iyong puso, upang sa ganoon ako’y mabuhay na naaayon sa Iyong Espiritu, kagaya noong Ika’y namuhay sa mundong ibabaw. Amen.” SHN



“Napakatatakot Ninyo!”

Alejo S.

Tayo po ngayon ay nasa ika-12 Linggo sa Karaniwang Panahon. Sa ating napakinggang Ebanghelyo, isinalaysay sa atin ang pagpapahupa ni Hesus sa malakas na bagyo. Pagkatapos N’yang pahupain ang unos, pinagsabihan ni Hesus ang Kanyang mga alagad, “Napakatatakot ninyo! Bakit? Wala pa ba kayong paniwala?” (Marcos 4:40)

Ano ang ibig sabihin ni Hesus dito? Bakit tila Siya’y nainis sa Kanyang mga alagad? Masama bang sabihing, “Guro, halos mamamatay na tayo at bale-wala sa Iyo”?

Kung titingnan nating mabuti, mapagtatanto natin na pinagsabihan sila ni Hesus hindi dahil napuspos sila ng takot, kundi dahil hindi nila napaglabanan ang kanilang takot o pangamba. Nakalimutan nila na kasama nila si Hesus sa bangka at tiyak na walang mangyayaring masama sa kanila. Masasabi nating ipinapakita rito na hindi pa talaga nila lubos na kilala si Hesus. May pag-aalinlangan pa rin sila sa kakayahan ni Hesus bilang anak ng Diyos.

Kanino nga ba nila ipinagkatiwala ang kanilang mga sarili, buhay, at pamilya? Saan ba sila dadalhin ng kanilang pagsunod kay Kristo? Sino nga ba ang taong ito? Mga katanungang maaaring sumagi sa kanilang mga isipan habang sila’y binabayo ng unos.

Sa simula, ang mga alagad ni Hesus ay katulad din nating may pananampalataya at sumusunod sa Diyos, ngunit minsa’y nag



-aalinlangan at nananatiling malayo sa Kanya. Kumbaga, hindi pa handang papasukin si Hesus sa ating pang-araw-araw na buhay. Takot tayong maiwang nag-iisa sa gitna ng unos ngunit minsan mas malaki ang takot nating madiskubre na sobra palang malapit ang Diyos sa atin at nararamdaman nating hindi tayo karapat-dapat sa piling Niya dahil sa ating mga kasalanan.

Sa Unang Pagbasa, makikita rin natin ang kahalintulad na tema sa aklat ni Job. Sa gitna ng unos at matinding pagsubok sa kanyang buhay, si Job ay napuno rin ng pag-aalinlangan at mga katanungan sa Diyos. Kung papaanong sinagot ni Yahweh si Job mula sa gitna ng makapal at madilim na ulap, tayo rin ay kadalasang binibigyan ng tugon ng Diyos sa kabila ng sakit at mga pagsubok sa buhay. Hindi ipinagyayabang ng Diyos ang Kanyang kapangyarihan at karunungan sa kabila ng mga ito, ngunit gusto Niyang ipamalas sa tao ang kadakilaan at katapatan Niya sa atin.

Sa pagmamasid at paghanga sa mga kababalaghan ng sangnilikha, nadidiskubre natin ang dakilang kapangyarihan at kakaibang pamamaraan ng Diyos sa paggawa at pagdesisyon sa mga bagay-bagay. Kaya naman sa Ikalawang Pagbasa, tayo ay inaanyayahang laging mamuhay na puno ng pag-asa at pananalig sa Diyos na buhay dahil ang Kanyang di maarok na pagmamahal ang nagbubuklod sa atin bilang mga bagong nilikha ng Diyos.

Sa ating pang-araw-araw na pamumuhay, tayo ay inaanyayahang palalimin pa ang ating pananampalataya sa Diyos. Kadalasan sa ating buhay, tayo ay dumudulog lamang sa Kanya at nagdarasal kapag tayo ay nakararanas ng matinding pagsubok o problema sa buhay. Sa kasalukuyang panahon, tayo ay madalas makaranas ng mga natural na kalamidad tulad ng lindol, baha, sunog, at iba pa.



Nabibigatan tayo sa mga pasanin sa buhay at minsan gusto na natin itong sukuan. Sa kabila ng mga ito, tayo ay inaanyayahang labanan ang mga unos at pagsubok sa ating buhay at manatiling matatag sa pananampalataya tulad ni Job at ng mga alagad ni Hesus. Patuloy nawa nating hanapin at pasalamatang mga biyaya ng Diyos sa araw-araw sa kabila ng mga unos at pagsubok sa ating buhay.

Sa pagpapatuloy ng ating banal na pagdiriwang, hilingin natin sa Diyos ang biyaya ng paglalim at paglago ng ating buhay-pananampalataya sa Kanya at ang biyaya ng pag-asa at pagbangon mula sa mga problema at unos na nararanasan natin sa ating mga buhay, kasama na rito ang biyaya na mamuhay sa kasalukuyan at harapin ang bukas na puno ng pag-asa at pagmamahal. SHN



The Parable of the Passion Fruit Seed and the Yeast

Pius W.

In today's Gospel (Luke 13:18-21), Jesus uses two parables to describe the kingdom of God. One is that of the mustard seed and the other of the yeast. Both objects are very familiar to the Jewish people. However, it is difficult for me to imagine how the mustard seed grows since I haven't seen one.

I would like to put these two images in the context of our novitiate life. The Gospel passage may be paraphrased like this: "What is the kingdom of God like? To what can we compare it? It is like the passion fruit seed which Tommaso took and planted in the novices' farm and beside the covered courts. Now, when it is fully grown, it becomes a large bush and bears fruit for the novices to enjoy. Again, to what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like the yeast which the retreat house staff took and mixed with wheat flour until it became fresh bread for breakfast."

In either comparison – with the mustard seed and the yeast, or with the passion fruit and the bread – one theme is very clear: the kingdom of God begins very small, then expands marvelously as it grows.

At the time of Jesus, the kingdom of God begins as a rather small seed in the form of the words and deeds of Jesus. When Jesus calls and later on sends His disciples to preach the Good News to the whole world, they are still only twelve ordinary people who have yet to grow in knowledge and in faith. The seed of the kingdom grows over time until it becomes the Church we have today.



This progression applies to my own vocation story. The first seed of my vocation was planted by my grandmother when I was still a little child. She would narrate Bible stories to me and bring me to church almost every day. At that time, the seed was as tiny as the mustard seed and was even hidden or buried in the ground for a long time. And yet today, I am here at Sacred Heart Novitiate, receiving the formation which I could not have imagined before. No doubt, it is only God who makes these things happen. It is only through the grace of God that the seed of my vocation could germinate.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus also mentions how the seed grows. He says, “The seed would sprout and grow. And of its own accord the land yields fruit, first a blade or leaf, then the ear (of corn), then the full grain in the ear” (Mark 4:28). This reminds me that growth is a process and it does not happen overnight but rather slowly over time. Hence, it requires patience from me and all of us.

This manifests very clearly in my vocation story where I clearly sensed the presence of God in my growing desire to find my true vocation. In particular, I was deeply touched by one experience in the Xavier Youth Group back in China. There, I personally experienced God’s forgiveness and unconditional love. In my prayer, He washed away all my sins with His precious blood and removed the guilt that burdened me. I felt a strong relief in my heart and it seemed I became a new man in Jesus Christ.

That was the first time I became conscious of God’s unconditional love. This experience became one of the most important reasons I decided to pursue the religious life. I believe it was also the moment the seed of my vocation began to sprout. Along the way, my desire for this way of life became stronger. The seed of my vocation also grew.



Sometimes, still, to my frustration, I still tend to expect radical change overnight. Noticing this, I continue to beg the Lord for the grace of patience that I may allow for this growth and change to happen in God's time. SHN



Poor

Martin C.

One grace I received during my experience of the *Spiritual Exercises* was that of embracing my humanity, a grace which continues to be deepened to this day.

To be human is to come to that frightening but freeing realization that I am in fact poor, that I am created poor, in need of others and of God, that I am not self-sufficient as I made myself out to be. A passage from Ezekiel (28:2) strikes deep: “You are a man, and not a god, however you may think yourself like a god.”

I have experienced this humanity, this deep poverty, in many ways recently.

Firstly, in prayer, where I am confronted by matters concerning the self – my struggles, my core issues, my sinfulness – at the face of which I have no recourse but to turn to my Creator with a child-like disposition. In the most recent Reconciliation Service, I decided to come without my ever-prepared handwritten notes enumerating my sins, just me and my sinfulness. Confessing in this manner brought me to tears. I was reminded of the precious gift given me in the novitiate: being sustained by the mercy and love of God. If my sinfulness were to be accounted, I no longer deserve to be here let alone live. But no matter how many times I fail – how many times I switch God and His gifts – I am given the chance to choose my Creator anew daily.

Secondly, in choosing my Creator, or at least in desiring to choose my Creator. A feeling of intense desire, accompanied by an



overflow of tears, swept over me as I witnessed my *vovendi* brothers, now scholastics, profess their perpetual first vows. Reviewing the experience, I recognized I had before my eyes a clear hope for the future: that I, too, profess the same vows to the Lord. It is a hope to which I can point and say, “That! That is what I desire! A life of total entrustment to the Lord.”

It felt as if all the significant points of my vocation story were pointing to this desire and hope. The image of my scholastic brothers kneeling before the Eucharist and their heartfelt profession made witnessing such moment a very tender one. This was an experience of my own poverty because even this very act of desiring comes from God; I could not desire anything, let alone make an offering of myself, without it being granted to me as grace by the Lord who is the “Father and Mother of all desires.”

I need to beg for this desire constantly, for I am a man, and not a god, and trusting well that God desires me more than I could ever desire him.

Thirdly, I experience much poverty in the interplay of joy and pain in community living. Perhaps my brothers will agree that our living as community is characterized by moments of communion as well as non-communion, of understanding as well as misunderstanding, of agreement as well as disagreement.

On occasions of communal discernment, for instance, we find ourselves one moment rubbing and clashing against each other and then laughing and smiling, and patting each other’s backs shortly after. Within our communal discernment is also my personal discernment where I exercise loving prudence in my relationships, and at times, I fail.

Living in community results in grief inasmuch as joy.



The spiritual writer Henri Nouwen, in his book, *Here and Now*, says, “Grief and joy should not be too far apart.” He says, “Here a completely new way of living is revealed. It is a way in which pain can be embraced not out of a desire to suffer, but in the knowledge that something new will be born in the pain.”

Saint Ignatius believed that poverty was a grace and he asked his Jesuits that poverty “be loved as a mother.” If this poverty is my very humanity, then loving poverty is like loving that very human part of me which the Lord loves very much. I am already poor for I am created poor – for I am a man, and not a god – and yet being poor is something I need to choose, exercise, and beg for constantly as grace. General Congregation 34 says, “[W]e must appreciate poverty and desire it as grace.”

In this Mass, let us ask for this grace, to be poor or to desire to be poor so as to be truly human, relying not on our own efforts and merits but on the mercy and love of God, for just as Jesus assures us in the Gospel today, “For human beings this is impossible, but for God, all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).
SHN



Presensya at Pagmamahal

Robert B.

Sa ating Ebanghelyo ngayon, narinig natin na nais makita ni Haring Herodes si Hesus dahil sa ginawa Niyang mga kagila-gilalas na bagay. Kayo po ba, nakita ninyo na si Hesus? Nais po ba ninyo Siyang makita? Ngayong umaga, hayaan ninyo pong ibahagi ko sa inyo kung paano ko nakita si Hesus sa nakalipas na isang buwan sa inyong tahanan.

Noong Setyembre 14, Kapistahan ng Pagtatanghal sa Banal na Krus, itinanong sa akin ni Patrick kung bakit ipinako si Hesus. Sabi ko, “Kasi mahal niya tayo.” Nagtanong siyang muli kung bakit tayo mahal ni Hesus. Sumagot ako, “Kasi nga kapatid Niya tayo. Hindi ba ang mga kapatid, minamahal?” Ngumiti siya. Naunawaan niya ang ibig sabihin ng ang “mga kapatid [ay] minamahal.” Tulad ni Patrick, nakita at naranasan ko rin po ang pagmamahal na ito mula sa tatlong grupo ng tao.

Una, mula sa mga *Missionaries of Charity (MC) Brothers*. Araw-araw bumabangon sila upang manalangin at matapos noon sisimulan na nila ang mga gawain dito na naranasan din namin. “*Apostolate*” po ang tawag dito. Ibig sabihin nito: paglalaba ng damit, pagpapaligo ng *small boys* na *bedridden*, pagpapakain at paglilinis ng *big boys*. Uulitin ko po ha, araw-araw, Lunes hanggang Linggo ang mga gawaing ito. Walang *rest day*, at ginagawa na nila ito nang napakatagal na panahon: 15, 25, o halos 30 taon ng kanilang buhay.



Nakita ko rin silang inaaruga ang mga bata, kinakantahan, tinuturuan, shine-*shave* ang mga balbas, nakikipaglaro, at kung minsan, nakikipag-asaran. Kahit po kami’y naramdaman ang kanilang pagmamahal sa pagbabahagi nila ng karanasan, pero ang pinakapaborito ko sa lahat ay laging may pagkain sa mesa. Ayaw po nilang magutom kami. Payo nga nila sa amin, “*Eat more, pray more, work more, and sleep well.*” Sa mga *MC Brothers*, salamat sa nakita at naranasan naming pagmamahal mula sa inyo.

Ikalawa, mula sa mga nanay at iba pang *workers*. Gaya ng mga *MC Brothers*, araw-araw din silang bumabangon upang siguraduhing maayos ang mga bata – na nakakaligo sila nang dalawang beses sa isang araw, may maayos na pagkain, malinis na mga damit, maayos na mga *records*, nakakainom ng gamot sa tamang oras, at iba pa.

Isang humanga po ako ay ang pagmo-*monitor* ng mga nanay sa mga pagbabago sa bawat bata. Nakita ko po ang tiyaga at pasensya nila. Higit pa sa pagbibigay ng mga pangunahing pangangailangan, dinidisciplina, at pinapangaralan din nila ang mga bata. “Kailangang matuto ng mga bata dahil para rin sa kanila iyon,” ang madalas nilang ibahagi sa amin. Sa mga nanay, mas higit ko pong nakilala ang mga bata dahil sa pagbabahagi ninyo ng kanilang mga kwento at karanasan. Maraming salamat po sa inyong pagmamahal.

Ikatlo, mula mismo sa mga bata. Sa totoo lang, *challenge* talaga sa akin itong karanasan na ito dahil hindi ako sanay makisalamuha sa mga bata. Pero naging madali ito dahil sa pagmamahal na ipinakita ng mga bata sa amin. Kinailangan ko lang pumunta sa tabi nila at sila na ang bahala sa amin.



Minsan sinubukan ko pong magpaligo ng alas-kwatro ng umaga na talaga namang nakakapagod. Subalit paglabas ko ng banyo, bigla akong niyakap ni Ramon at sa isang iglap nawala ang lahat ng pagod ko.

Nakita ko rin kung paano nila mahalín ang isa't isa. Noong minsang sinabihan ko si Gilbert na punasin ang laway niya, si Ace ang nagpunas nito para sa kanya. Sa mga sandaling iyon, parang natutunaw ang puso ko. Hindi sila mahirap mahalín dahil punung-puno sila ng pagmamahal. Sa mga bata, maraming salamat sa inyong pagmamahal.

Minsan naitanong ko kay Tita Belen, “Bakit kaya nilikha ng Diyos ang gaya ni Nestle halos 30 taon nang *bedridden*?” Tumimo sa akin ang sagot ni Tita. Sabi niya, “Siguro para matuklasan din natin kung bakit tayo nilikha ng Diyos? Kayo, bakit ba kayo nandito ngayon?”

Bakit nga ba kami narito ngayon? Bakit nga ba tayong lahat nagkakatipun-tipon ngayon upang ipagdiwang ang ika-10 taong anibersaryo ng Bukal ng Kapayapaan? Sa aking naging mga karanasan sa nakalipas na isang buwan, dahil ito sa malalim na pagmamahal ng Panginoon sa atin. Nilikha Niya tayong lahat upang mahalín at magmahal.

*Today as we celebrate the 10th Community Foundation Day, let us remember that our sole foundation is Jesus Christ. The reason we, the children, and this establishment are here is the unconditional love of Christ for us. Jesus Christ is the First Principle and Foundation.*¹

¹ Ngayong araw, sa ating pagdiriwang ng ika-10 taon ng pagkakatag nitong komunidad dito, alalahanin po nating ang nag-iisang pundasyon natin ay si Hesukristo. Ang kanyang walang-kondisyong pag-ibig ang siyang dahilan kung bakit tayo, ang mga bata, at ang institusyong ito ay naririto ngayon. Si Hesukristo ang unang saligan at pundasyon.



Namamalas natin ang presensya ni Kristo sa bawat isa sa atin at sa ating mga gawain. Sa bawat pagma-*mop* ng *tiles six times a day*, sa paghuhugas ng pinagkainan, sa paglalaba ng damit, o sa paghawak kay John Ray tuwing inaatake siya ng *seizures*. Sa mga nanay na matapos ang trabaho ay mag-aasikaso pa sa kanilang mga bahay, sa mga MC *Brothers* na pagkatapos ng *apostolate* dito ay lalabas pa upang tumulong sa iba pang mahihirap, sa pagngiti ni Nestle pagkatapos siyang paliguan. Sa lahat ng mga iyon, naroon si Kristo.

Minsan gaya ni Haring Herodes, hinahanap natin si Kristong Mesiyas na kayang bumuhay ng patay, magparami ng tinapay, magbigay ng paningin sa bulag, at gayo’y kayang magpatigil ng Covid-19. Hindi lang sa mga kagila-gilalas na bagay natin masusumpungan ang Diyos. Ipinakita at ipinaranas ninyo po sa akin sa nakalipas na isang buwan na tunay na buhay ang Diyos!

Sa tuwing pinipili nating magmahal kahit na nakakapagod, kahit ang sakit-sakit na, kahit parang napakahirap, at sa kabila ng lahat ng mga pagsubok, nararanasan natin ang presensya ng Panginoon.

Sabi ni Sta. Madre Teresa ng Calcutta, “*Not everyone can do great things but everyone can do small things with great love.*”² Alam ni Santa Teresa na kaya nating piliing magmahal. May kalayaan tayong umibig dahil una na tayong inibig ng Diyos. Ang patuloy na imbitasyon ng Diyos sa atin ay maging bukas na magbigay at tumanggap ng pagmamahal mula sa Kanya at sa ating kapwa. SHN

² Hindi lahat kayang gumawa ng mga malalaking bagay, pero lahat kayang gumawa ng mga maliliit nang may malaking pag-ibig.

This sharing was delivered at the Thanksgiving Mass in Cavite, where the novice-sharer (together with two others) spent one month in the Missionaries of Charity Brothers’ Home for the Abandoned Special Children.



Relationships

Martin C.

Sifting through my many experiences and interior movements in the past week, I find relationships to be the common theme. I am always in relationship – with others and with myself. As the novitiate helped me grow in my relationship with the self, I noticed, too, how much I depend on my human relationships for my personal and spiritual progress. Without such relationships, there is not much I can do on my own. Without my family, my brothers, and my superiors – and the Lord – I cannot do anything.

First, family.

It was pleasing to see my family for the first time since January through the recent virtual “Visiting Sunday.”¹ The first person I saw in the video was my ten-year-old niece Ellie who was using her own Zoom account. My sisters and my mother followed. They all looked well. I believe Daddy in heaven joined the meeting, too.

My eldest sister Jaisa is a thesis away from finishing her master’s program. My second sister Jhoan is busy looking after her daughter Ellie who attends classes online. My youngest sister Jaymie is proud to share about her fundraising effort to help the struggling jeepney drivers of the village at the height of the pandemic. As for my mother Precy, well, not even the pandemic can stop her from her Zumba which she now does online.

¹A day for novices and their families to come together



In turn I shared about our activities during the lockdown and our “hospital” experiment in Cavite. I told them I was fine, safe, and happy. Asked why I do not respond to their messages, I simply assured them that “no news is good news.” That was about our conversation last Sunday.

It is good the novitiate taught me to look beyond the externals and the “superficials” to recognize the joy in their faces and voices throughout the 30-minute call. They have no idea what happens deep within me in the novitiate, but such knowledge is not necessary for their loving. They love me just because, and they love me through and through, and I love them very, very much. Truly my relationship with them is of love.

Second, my brothers.

For my penance, my confessor last Friday asked me to pray for one or two persons in the community who may be experiencing difficulties in any way. The opportunity to carry it out earnestly came two days later. Last Sunday, on separate occasions, I had the chance for spiritual conversation with two brothers. Without anticipating it to happen, I found it to be an experience of attentive and compassionate listening, of listening to their pain.

As I listened, I deliberately allowed for moments of silence between us; whenever someone shares with me I make it a point to listen more than to speak, so as to allow the Spirit to work in both of us. My brothers often thank me and compliment me for my listening to them, but I say in my heart and to the Lord, as he teaches us in the Gospel today, “[I am] an unprofitable servant; [I] have only done what I am supposed to do” (Luke 17:10).

And this is what I am supposed to do: to listen, to be present, and to suffer with, if necessary. My relationship with my brothers,



among other things, is of compassionate listening. But in all these, I am merely a servant; there is a Master who is doing the work. I find this Master at work concretely in my relationship with my superior – the third relationship.

In the midst of my preparations for my *Constitutions* reporting on trust in God and in superior, I find more and more how my relationship with my novice master is, as André de Jaer says, a “privileged relationship.”² Last Saturday I felt an intense push-and-pull at the thought of expressing *mea culpa* to Father Master for a fault I had made. The pull denied the need to do so for such a “petty” matter, I thought, and yet the greater push, influenced by my reading of the *Constitutions*, encouraged me to bare my soul to my superior. The words of paragraph [551] became real to me:

“Thus in everything [subjects] should proceed in a spirit of charity, keeping nothing exterior or interior hidden from the superiors and desiring them to be informed about everything, so that the superiors may be the better able to direct them in everything along the path of salvation and perfection.”

I found great favor in finally admitting my guilt, being dealt with much gentleness by Father. In my superior, I find “a competent and faithful person” who gives me “loving admonition... and aid in everything” just as Father Ignatius had hoped. My relationship with my father-superior is indeed of trust.

What is trust? To me it is a deep faith that my father-superior loves me regardless of my faults, loves me to the bones, and loves me as his own. This is the same with my relationship with the Lord, the most important relationship of all, the point of all human relationships.

² In his book, “Together for Mission: A Spiritual Commentary on the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*”



Finally, it is in accordance with my personality type to want to be true to myself, to have a personal identity. I learned this identity, while it is my own, can only be fully found in relation to, or more precisely, with others.

At this point in my life and in my novitiate formation, I am only truly myself if I live as a brother to my brothers, a novice to my superior, a beloved to my Lover. I am only truly a Jesuit in relation to Jesus. As General Congregation 35 beautifully says, “[We] Jesuits know who we are by looking at [Christ].”

In this Mass, let us look at Christ and find in Him who we truly are. SHN



Reserved

Winston H.

The Gospel today is very meaningful. It narrates the story of a servant waiting for his master's return from a wedding. At the start, Jesus said, "Let your belts be fastened around your waists and your lamps be burning ready" (Luke 12:35).

The people of Jesus' time wore long flowing robes which were tucked under the girdle to make work and travel easier. Therefore, "let your belts be fastened" means you must be ready to work. This image speaks of a permanent state of readiness for those who await the return of their master.

There are many possibilities during the period of waiting. First of all, it is late, everyone is sleepy, and nobody knows what time the master will return.

The lamps in the Gospel indicated there was darkness. It was dark, so lamps were needed. The servants were waiting in an atmosphere full of uncertainty.

Wait. Just wait. Until when? Nobody knows.

I don't like to wait. Waiting is a torture for me. When I was a teacher, if my student came in the classroom late, he or she would be ordered to stand outside the classroom!

Perhaps the longest wait in my life, as I shared in the Psycho-Spiritual Integration (PSI) Seminar-Workshop, happened during my depression in childhood. I waited for seven years, begging the Lord day and night that, through His mercy, the depression would leave me one day.



I always cried for no reason. My whole body felt like being thrust into a dark abyss. I called for help, but no one responded. I could only hear the echo of my own voice. My body and my heart always felt restless. I could not sleep at night and was always tired.

I had no friend, no companion. Nobody knew how to save me from depression. The only thing my mother told me was “pray.” I prayed every day and night, begged and begged, begged in fear and anxiety. My mother did not tell me when I would be healed. She just asked me to pray.

Until one day, when I was 15, I had a bad day in school. My classmate grabbed the basketball from my hand during the game. I was deeply depressed. When I reached home, I cried alone. Imagine a 15-year-old teenager crying for losing a basketball.

As I was crying, I brought a Bible and a cross from my mother’s room. I cried out loudly, “Lord, have mercy on me! Have mercy on me!” Then, I sang the following song: “I lift You up, Lord.” I kept repeating the lines, “I lift You up! I lift You up!” And I lifted up my Bible.

At this point, I heard Jesus tell me, “Winston, I am here. You waited for me for seven years, and now I am here for you. Come, bring all your burdens onto my cross. From now on, I carry your pain, I heal you, and I love you.” Finally, Jesus arrived and knocked on my door. Since then, I recovered from my depression. I was totally changed.

Christ reverses our roles. He puts on an apron, seats me at table, and grants me thousands of graces! Eventually, He brings me here to Sacred Heart Novitiate.



This is the way I understand the Gospel today: never lose hope. Never lose hope when you are covered by darkness and uncertainties. Always be watchful. If we use the language of PSI, “notice” – always have your belts fastened and your lamps lit up.

We kept mentioning “hopeful” during our PSI sharing. But remember, we are hopeful not only because our wounds have been healed or our issues have been resolved in the process. We are hopeful because as disciples of Jesus, our “names are inscribed in heaven” (Matthew 10:20). This is the reason we are hopeful.

If I persevere – have my belt fastened and my lamp burning every day – I believe when I finally arrive at the lobby of heaven, an angel will approach me and say, “Welcome back, your room is reserved.” SHN



River Flow

Renzo A.

While conversing with a *primi* brother a week ago, I asked him how he was doing thus far in the novitiate. From his response, I thought he was doing just fine. Nonetheless, I found myself saying to him, “Well, if you ever feel confused, restless, lonely, and even tired sometimes, that’s okay. At least you know you’re alive.”

I have shared with some brothers how I was experiencing some difficulty recently – a state of being groundless. I described it to them as an uncomfortable and unsettling experience of confusion, uncertainty, and insecurity. It’s like being in between “what was” and “what is yet to be.” Experiencing such can be very difficult. This is perhaps part and parcel of being human. Still, as I had been accustomed to having a sense of control, security, and certainty, the experience of losing them can be very arduous for me.

I personally resonate with the image of human life as a river flow as suggested by Fr. John Foley, SJ in his article, “Stepping into the River.” Being a flow, he says, life is never solid. Indeed I could be coursing through valleys and fields; I could be wide and deep, somewhat sure of my course, dreaming of the vast ocean I long for and fear at the same time; at times, I could be tumbling over rocks and stones and my seemingly quiet life torn into rapids; I could be in a dreary pace, forward-bound but unsure why.

As I constantly bring this image to prayer and to spiritual direction, I believe the Lord is actually inviting and leading me to truly feel and start embracing that uncertainty, insecurity, and even confusion are inevitable in my life. That perhaps, just like a river, I



am not meant to be in a solid state; rather, I am meant to flow to the sea albeit with some reversals and curves.

In today's Gospel, Jesus warns us not to be misled. He says, "[M]any will come in my name saying, 'I am he' and 'The time is at hand'" (Luke 21:8). These warnings may not necessarily pertain to fellow human beings or to false prophets. Personally, they could point to my own attachments, my old securities, my self-sufficiency, and my fixation with certainty.

My experiences of groundlessness and confusion lead me to profound encounters with God, the ultimate ground of all. He remains my anchor, especially when all of my old securities vanish. Amidst all these feelings of confusions and uncertainty, I am constantly led to God who tells me unfailingly: "*Hindi kita malilimutan, hindi kita pababayaan.*"

I believe I am called to embody the disposition of surrendering each and every day to the Lord and to seek Him in all things, even in the midst of life's confusions.

While preparing for my *Constitutions* report on *discreta caritas*, I realized that our experiences in the novitiate such as the *de more*², the experiments, the workshops, and other "structures" provide me plenty opportunities to exercise and to deepen the quality of my surrendering to God's love, so that with much choosing, complemented by prayer, devotions, and discernment, I may live out daily the spirit of *discreta caritas* or discerning love.

Just like Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, I beg for the grace to have that disposition of complete trust in and surrender to the Father, and I pray with much conviction as Jesus did: "Not My will, but Yours be done." SHN



Schoolboy

Pius W.

How would I describe my life during my first month here in the novitiate?

To answer this question, I borrow the words of our founder St. Ignatius of Loyola while he was in Manresa: “During this period God was dealing with me in the same way a schoolteacher deals with a child while instructing me.” (cf. *Autobiography* 27)

For me, in the past month, the novitiate is like a school, a school of the heart, where the Lord treats me like a schoolboy lovingly, patiently, but also toughly.

Upon entering the novitiate, I immediately felt so loved by God. When I recited the Act of Consecration to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, I felt Jesus surround and welcome me with His open arms. When I went to confession on the first Reconciliation Service, I could not help but keep crying because of a strong feeling in my heart that I was forgiven and embraced by a Father who loved me no matter how gravely I had sinned against him.

Although I met this period of transition with some difficulties, I felt that the Lord always encouraged me and showed his desire to become intimate with me. Indeed, the Lord treats me lovingly.

A schoolboy also implies a sort of naughtiness, that is, he might commit mistakes along the way. This is also true of me. After the announcement of the new house offices, I felt excited and



anxious at the same time. A question that kept coming to my mind was, “What will I do if I make mistakes?” This disturbed and even burdened me. I already felt stressed even before committing any mistake.

It was also at this point when I received some graces. For one, I was reminded again and again by my *secundi* brothers and my formators that while committing mistakes is acceptable, what is more important is my attitude towards it. They also reminded me to be patient with myself. I am so grateful for this community where I am assured I need not be afraid of making mistakes, where I experience a God who is patient with me, and where I continuously learn to be patient with myself. Indeed, the Lord treats me patiently.

A good schoolteacher not only treats the schoolboy lovingly and patiently, but also knows when and how to challenge him so that he might grow in maturity. Here I want to recall Father Ignatius’ experiences in Manresa. At that time, Ignatius was greatly troubled with scruples. Even though he had his general confession at Montserrat and had done so with great care, at times it seemed to him that he had not confessed certain things. This brought him much suffering.

But it was also this moment when he came to realize more clearly about his interior movements, the good spirit and the evil spirit. I was challenged in a similar manner as Father Ignatius.

During the Journal-keeping Workshop, I felt overwhelmed because so many new ways of understanding myself, including ones I found difficult to accept, suddenly came out. Distressed by these revelations, I finally said to them: “STOP.”



But later on, after having reflected on this experience, I found that it was God who was challenging me so that I would go out of my limited understanding of myself and begin to see myself in the eyes of God. Here, the Lord challenges me toughly.

I beg the grace of childlikeness – that of a schoolboy – that I may continue to experience God’s love and patience for me amidst whatever challenges that may come. SHN



Silent Presence

Jasper O.

As I was reading the Gospel passage (Luke 8:19-21), I remembered a movie I watched a few years back, *Mary of Nazareth*. Like today's Gospel, there was that exact scene from the movie when the people around came to Jesus telling Him that His family was there to be with Him. At that moment, Jesus looked straight into Mary's eyes saying those words in the Gospel today: "My mother and my brother are those who hear the word of God and act upon it."

Oh my God! I don't know about you, but if I were there, I would be very furious!

The movie portrayed well what I would have felt. Everyone in that scene was enraged by Jesus' seemingly ungrateful response. Even the disciples looked with shock as things unfolded in front of them. I am one with those around unhappy at the "ungratefulness" Jesus seemed to be showing.

At this point, the camera panned towards Mary gazing simply at Jesus, saying softly to herself, "My Lord, my God." That's humility! Mary certainly knows Jesus through and through. Mary certainly knows Jesus through and through.

As I was thinking about this, I remembered my own mother. There were moments when I cut her off in my life, saying to her when I was younger, "I hate you and you are not my mother."



Even with such hurtful words, she never stopped loving and nurturing me, this mischievous boy, to the best of her abilities.

Today, my family is probably celebrating the Mid-Autumn Festival back home in Singapore because my mother never fails to ask us to come back home to have mooncake together. She is truly the glue in my family.

Gazing on the full moon, I also recall Our Lady's silent presence as she reflects onto me the love that comes from her Son. In gratefulness to God for my biological mother and my Mother in Heaven, I pray to act always upon the word of God. SHN



Spiritual Family

John D.

“Who are my mother and [my] brothers [and sisters]?” (Mark 3:33) This is a parallel of our Gospel today, which at first glance looks difficult to understand. It gives rise to more questions than answers. What is Jesus telling here? What is the lesson He desires to impart to His listeners?

In the Marcan account, there is a prelude to the story. Jesus’ relatives set out to seize Him because they thought Him out of His mind (cf. Mark 3:20-21). Then His family – mother and brothers and sisters – came, wishing to speak with Him. Aside from asking who his mother and brothers and sisters were, Jesus replied, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the Word of God and act on it” (Luke 8:21; cf. Matthew 12:49-50 and Mark 3:34-35).

It seems counter-intuitive that the Messiah who preached love and forgiveness dismissed His immediate family. Did He not value His family, particularly His mother and close relatives? Jesus would again mention family and leaving home in laying the cost of radical discipleship.

Several months ago, when I was still a Jesuit candidate, I found out my mother had gotten Covid-19 and she was symptomatic. My anxiety grew steadily as my mother’s symptoms worsened and even my father contracted the virus. I could not take care of them because they were in the United States and I was here in Manila.

Days went by and my worry turned into panic. I could scarcely sit still. My mind began to imagine the worst-case



scenarios. For several days, I was just by myself. While I brought this matter to prayer, there was one statement I dared not say: “Lord, Thy will be done.” I was afraid that, by telling it to the Lord, something I had no control of would happen. It would be as if I were giving my permission and allowing things as they occurred.

Distraught, anxious, and doubtful, I begged for the grace to understand better and to be open to God’s message, especially in times of apparent despair. In prayer, God whispered to me how much He loved my parents and that He loved them infinitely more than I did and could. This assurance from God relativized my anxiety and doubt. Yes, I still worried about my parents, but I felt a deep sense of peace, just enough for me to say, “Come what may, God loves me and my parents. He knows what is best.”

Here in the novitiate, I am learning to rely solely on God for my well-being and that of my family. I am learning not only to offer myself but also my family and loved ones. I am becoming at-home with the reality that everything, including my family, is a gift from God. I am being led to be grateful to the Giver of the gifts in my life.

Did Jesus not value His own family? Not really. Based on my experience, He simply invites me to order my values in the context of my relationship with and following of Him. While there is detachment, Jesus does not ask me to forsake my family. He even beckons me to expand it, especially through my brothers in the community.

As I grow in this process of welcoming more people into the abode of my heart, I am guided by the following words from Fr. Nil Guillemette, SJ: “If Jesus was born of a mother and entered a human family, it was so that every man might enter a spiritual family whose Father is God.” I pray to deepen in this spiritual family through the Society of Jesus. SHN



Standing Firmly on God's Love

Martin W.

In the beginning of the Psycho-Spiritual Integration (PSI) Seminar-Workshop, Fr. Beda Liu, SJ kept reminding us, “Before you reconnect with your past traumas and darkness, make sure you are standing firmly where you feel secure.”

Fr. Chris Dumadag, SJ also emphasized the same message in his homily: “In the darkness of the desert, far from the Promised Land, we know and remember there is something greater – the love of God.” This was exactly what I held on to when the two-week PSI session came to an end. I was not at ease, yet I tried to stand firmly on God's love.

I was disoriented after the workshop. In front of the many data new and old, confirmed and formerly denied, heavy and light that were revealed to me, as well as the things I sensed remain undiscovered, I simply felt lost. I didn't know how to proceed, what attitudes to carry on, or even where I was. In my Examen, I asked the Lord for clarity: “Lord, how should I see myself now? Or how do You see me now?”

I remember speaking with a brother intimately. It was such a consoling moment even though we talked about our present discontentment, confusion, struggle, and the helplessness we felt before all these. While conversing with him I really enjoyed being heard, accompanied and appreciated. In recalling this experience, I felt the Lord sitting beside me and telling me, “As your brother did, I appreciate you and I love you!”



At that moment, I found again my very security and assurance – the love of God – on which I can stand firmly and move forward confidently.

Sometimes I feel incredibly amazed at my own conversion from being a person full of ingratitude, complaints, and negativity to one willing and desiring to receive God’s love.

One of my experiences of God’s love came from my family.

On May 19 this year, upon being accepted to the novitiate, I actually did not feel much joy. I knew my mother was in the hospital again because of pneumonia. I did not tell anyone about her situation, not even my fellow Chinese brothers, until we flew back to China. Upon arriving, I rushed to the hospital together with Tommaso to see my mother. I stayed there for two weeks until it was safe for her to go home.

On those days at home, besides sharing my fruitful and quite formative life in the Philippines, I even tried convincing my parents that I was open to forego the novitiate and stay behind, lest we undergo a financial crisis. With great love, they opened their hearts to tell me how much more concerned they were of me than of themselves. My whole family’s great support and solidarity, once again, revealed to me how much I am loved by God beyond my imagination and understanding. Without this love, I would not be here. With it, I can embrace whatever is ahead of me.

I end by sharing my prayer experience yesterday. As I was sitting quietly with Jesus under a small tree, He intimated, “I love you!” I asked Him, “Lord, where will your love lead me? To the vows? The priesthood? Another way of life?” Actually, I had no need for a concrete answer. I simply knew His love would lead me on and that was enough. SHN



Strength and Weakness

Gio W.

This is my 27th day here at the Philippine General Hospital. Looking back to what has been, I feel very blessed and very grateful for encountering a kind and loving God throughout this whole month. Indeed, after one month in this hospital, I received innumerable graces from God and experienced different images of God. This exposure is truly a very precious and tangible encounter with God.

Every day, I visited, talked, and listened to the patients in different wards. Though I am Chinese having difficulty understanding Filipino, people did not mind and still showed their kindness to me. In every conversation, people were kind enough to speak in English and experience “nose-bleed” just to be able to talk with me for hours, just for me to know their stories. I have certainly received so much grace from my interactions with the patients.

Let me share two important graces I have received in this hospital exposure.

First, life is a process of surrendering myself fully to God.

Before coming for this exposure, I was a little bit afraid. I was afraid to see the vulnerabilities of life. Almost every day on my first week in Ward 9, I would hear news of deaths, especially of small babies struggling for just one more day to live in this world. I often felt scared and very heavy.



My fear brought me back to my own experience in the hospital as a patient. I was also afraid when I was hospitalized. Seeing and experiencing the vulnerability of life, I have deeply understood that life is not something that I can control. Life is a gift totally from God. God can give life and He also can take it away at any time.

Life is not in my hands. In my prayer while looking at the cross, I realized Jesus was inviting me to be like Him on the cross, that is, to surrender myself totally to God. I am afraid because I do not want to let God take care of my life. I want to control this life and I do not want to lose it, but what God wants me to do is to let God be the Lord of my life.

Second and last, I have experienced God strengthening me through my weakness.

In my encounters with different patients, I heard many of them plead, “Brother, may God save me.” Or, “Brother, this is already my second life. I used to hope I could live five years more. Now that I am still alive, maybe I can hope for ten years or fifteen...” Some would also remark, “Brother, I underwent this operation and I survived.”

In listening to the patients, God did not only show me the fragility of human life; but, more importantly, He allowed me to experience His strength in human weakness. God strengthened my heart through experiencing His power.

I remember one *nanay* I met in Ward 8 who shared with me her fears of undergoing a brain operation. There was no friend or relative around as she waited in the operating room. She simply



prayed, asking God for courage and strength to go through the operation. She told me she felt much calm and readiness after praying.

When I was listening to her sharing, I felt God fully alive for and in her. In the weakness of *nanay*, God manifested his divine strength and comfort. In my prayer, I realized that facing my weaknesses is not something I should be afraid of, but is a chance to trust in God fully and hope in Him alone.

I am very grateful for all my experiences here. I will continue to pray over them, even as I pray for all the patients whose lives have touched me. SHN

This sharing was delivered at the Philippine General Hospital, where the novice-sharer spent one month of being with the patients, as part of the formation program.



Sycamore Trees

Samuel G.

Seven years ago, the first Jesuit I met gave me the book *Climbing on a Tree* which is about vocation promotion and discernment. This book's impression on me has remained since then. The book's cover features the story of Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus. While preparing for this sharing, I fondly remembered this book, and so I went to the library where I found a copy. Holding it again and scanning through it made me recall many of my first encounters in the Society.

Meditating on Zacchaeus' conversion story, I found Zacchaeus' actions deeply attractive. He began with a desire to see Jesus, and then he acted on this desire by exerting effort regardless of the difficulties before him. Had Zacchaeus only focused on the crowd and thought that it was so hard to see Jesus, without acting on his desire, he might have missed the chance of encountering Jesus.

Given this point about Zacchaeus' actions, I realized that having the desire for Jesus is good, but it is not enough. It is essential to act on the desire by finding ways to see Jesus. My spiritual readings have led me to believe that an authentic desire leads to action.

On my part, I know I have the desire to build a deep relationship with the Lord, but many times I do not put my desire into concrete action to improve our relationship. For example, during the last Psycho-Spiritual Integration (PSI) Seminar-Workshop, I felt I was so busy and tired that it seemed my Examen



was random. I even made the workshop an excuse to skip my Examen. Jesus was waiting for me at those times, but was I generous to give space and time for the two of us?

Perhaps the constant invitation for me is to find space and time for me and Jesus, no matter what happens. This relationship is similar with other friendships. Without spending time and knowing each other, the relationship will not grow.

In my meditation, I saw the crowd around Jesus like a wall. It was a wall of people in front of Zacchaeus, which prevented him from seeing Jesus. Slowly the scene transformed into another image: the crowd or the “wall” of people became my fears, sinfulness, confusion, and self-centeredness, which prevented me from seeing Jesus. On the other hand, the sycamore tree became the people who helped me see and know Jesus. I found much consolation in this image of the sycamore tree, especially as I looked back on my journey of knowing Jesus.

Along my journey, the sycamore tree appeared from time to time. In every stage of my life, there was always a sycamore tree standing beside me; sometimes two, at other times, three or more. These people that served as sycamore trees have helped me encounter Jesus in spite of the wall between me and Jesus. Recalling their names and faces and how they have helped me become closer to Jesus, especially in times of great need, brought me a lot of consolation and moved me to profound gratitude.

Now that I am in the novitiate, a sycamore tree is always available to help me see more clearly. Sometimes, the tree is one of my brothers. At other times, it is one of the formators. The question that comes next is whether or not, given the presence of a sycamore tree (like Father Master), I can be open to it and let it hold me.



This is not easy to do. I noticed I have the tendency to defend myself or to hide something I do not want to acknowledge or accept. It seems like there is a voice inside me that says, “I am now a *secundi*, I should be more spiritually mature and should not have this problem. If I share it with Father, he might judge me or be disappointed with me.” Normally, the voice would come to me strongly before having an Individual Colloquium (IC) session. I would struggle with myself. I would then spend some time to pray about it, through which I would receive the inner strength and peace to be more open.

For instance, on the day of my latest IC with Father Master, I was disappointed and confused because, after the PSI, I became more sensitive to my impure and selfish motivations. I wondered why I always had these when I simply wanted to love and serve others. I was greatly confused.

What helped me honestly share with Father was my *Constitutions* topic – humility. During the first week of preparations for the report, I dedicated much time to the readings and tried to get as many insights as possible though I felt very stressed due to my poor English and my high expectations of myself for my presentation.

However, one day I got an emotional insight. I felt much relaxed and changed my disposition. I came to realize that what is more important is how I live out or practice the virtue of humility in my novitiate life. I then reflected on how I could practice humility, especially in my relationships with my brothers and formators in the community, and in simple ways such as while doing manualia, dishwashing, and other chores, and most importantly in being faithful to my prayer life and to God.



Humility became a prominent theme in my daily Examen.

The IC with formators was a good opportunity as well to practice humility. I learned that humility is knowing and acknowledging the truth about myself and the world around me. After knowing my problems, the next step is to acknowledge them. With such understanding, I entered Father Master's IC Room and shared with him everything I noticed in myself.

In our conversation, I was very surprised at what Father pointed out to me. He said that when I become aware of my impure motivations, my love for God becomes pure. I was enlightened by his words.

My motivations are often mixed, good and bad, but I am able to make space for them. It is up to me now to choose whether or not I will allow my impure motivations to influence me more. When I choose not to act on them, then I can begin to love God purely.

My experiences have given me much hope to choose to love God purely in spite of my many impure motivations. I see this as an example of being open to the sycamore tree, through which I am helped to clarify my relationship with the Lord. I am helped to see Him more clearly and love Him more dearly, so to follow Him more nearly.

Had I only listened to the negative voice inside me and not been open about what was happening to me, I might have remained confused until now. I continue to pray to have the openness and humility, especially given the sycamore trees God provides me in every step of the journey. SHN



Tatlong Bagay tungkol sa Pag-ibig

Rex C.

Pagpasensyahan n'yo po kung ang pagbabahagi ko ngayong umaga (bagama't hindi ako eksperto) ay tungkol sa pag-ibig, o mga bagay na natutunan natin bilang mga sumusubok nang umibig.

Una: mahirap pa lang mag-*move on*.

Wala man akong sariling *love story* na maibabahagi ngayong umaga, alam nating hindi madali ang mag-*move on*. Totoo rin ito maging sa trabaho o maging sa komunidad tulad ng sa atin – ang hirap mag-*move on*.

Hindi natin maikakailang may mga mabuting naidulot ang nakaraan o anumang nakasanayan na natin sa ating buhay, kaya't hindi rin nagiging madali tanggapin minsan kapag may mga pagbabagong dumarating. Sa mga magulang, madaling punahin ang sa pananaw natin ay hindi kaaya-ayang pag-uugali ng mga manugang natin. Sa mga may-asawa, bukod sa asawa, minsan, mahirap pakisamahan ang mga biyenang. Sa komunidad tulad ng sa amin na kalahati ay *foreigners* o galing sa ibang bansa, may hindi pagkakasundo sa pamamaraan at pakikitungo sa iba. Totoo rin ito maging sa ating araw-araw na gawain, kapag may mga bagong patakaran, bagong proyekto, maging bagong kasamahan.

Sinasabi sa atin ng Mabuting Balita ngayon na walang magkakagustong uminom ng bagong alak kapag nakainom na ng inimbak. Mas madaling manatili sa nakasanayan na. Mas madaling ipagpatuloy lang ang kung anong nakagisnan na. Sa isang banda,



maaaring ito rin ang maging balakid upang maranasan natin nang ganap ang kabutihang naidudulot ng Mabuting Balita ni Hesus.

Ngunit ano ba ang imbitasyon sa atin? Inaanyayahan tayong tanggapin nang buong puso ang wika at pangaral ni Hesus, maging ang mga turo na mahirap pangatawanan o isabuhay. Halimbawa, sinabi ni Hesus na mahalín ang Diyos nang buong puso at mahalín ang kapwa tulad ng pagmamahal natin sa ating sarili. Mukhang kaya naman, pero sinabi rin niyang mahalín ang ating mga kaaway. Sa isip-isip natin – “masungit na ‘ko dati pa,” o ‘di kaya naman, “matagal ko nang hindi kasundo ‘yan,” o kaya, “wala nang pag-asang magbabago pa siya.” Sabi nga nila, “*So sinong mag-adjust?*”

Mahirap tanggapin ang pagbabago, dahil madalas, nangangahulugan din ito na tayo mismo ay kailangang magbago. Mahirap mag-*adjust*, ngunit inaanyayahan tayong buksan ang ating isip sa posibilidad na kaya nating magbago, at bigyang-puwang ang Diyos at ang grasyang nagmumula sa Kanya.

Ikalawa: walang iisang paraan, o tamang paraan ng pagmamahal.

“Ang mga alagad ni Juan ay malimit mag-ayuno at manalangin, gayon din ang alagad ng mga Pariseo. Ngunit ang mga alagad mo’y patuloy ng pagkain at pag-inom.”

Tulad ng mga Pariseo, maaaring minsan na rin tayong nahulog sa bitag ng tanong na “Bakit?” “Bakit siya pinayagang mag-*leave?*” “Bakit siya may asawa/*girlfriend/boyfriend*, ako *single* pa rin?” “Bakit ako nalalagay sa alanganin, habang siya, sinuswerte sa buhay?”

Hindi natin maiiwasang maghambing, at bilang tao, may kanya-kanya tayong pamamaraan ng pagpapahayag ng pananampalataya at paniniwala na maaaring hindi tugma sa iba.



Gaya ng pagmamahal, ang ating pagtugon sa Panginoon ay may panahon at kontekstong sinasang-ayunan. Maaaring sa ngayon, masaya tayo para sa grasyang kaloob sa atin, samantalang bukas o sa makalawa ay mas mangibabaw ang lungkot na ipinapahayag natin sa pagdarasal.

Kaya siguro mahirap magmahal, dahil lagi't lagi tayong mangangapa sa kung anong naaayon. Ngunit marahil, tulad ng paalala ni Hesus at bilang sagot sa tanong nating “bakit,” may tamang panahon para magdiwang o mag-ayuno – at kahit ano pa mang paraan ang piliin natin, mas matimbang ang intensyon at taimtim na pagnanais na loobin ang nais ng Diyos para sa atin.

Bilang pangwakas, ikatlong bagay tungkol sa pagmamahal: walang nananalo sa pag-ibig na hindi sumusubok.

Mga kapatid, hindi tayo iniwan ng Panginoon sa ating pangangapa sa dilim – maraming tao, bagay sa paligid, at mga pangyayaring nagsisilbing gabay at paraan upang maranasan natin Siyang ganap.

Nawa'y matutunan natin, sa tulong at grasyang kaloob ng Panginoon, na maging bukas sa pagbabago, at maihanda ang ating sarili upang tanggapin Siya bilang inumin na nagbibigay ng buhay at lakas, at bilang dalisay na halimbawa kung paano nga ba ang umibig. SHN



Tinapay ng Buhay

Patrick E.

Hindi ako sigurado kung napapansin po ninyo, pero noong nakaraang linggo, ang Ebanghelyo ay tungkol sa tinapay: sinabi ni Kristo na Siya ang Tinapay ng Buhay. At noong linggo bago noon, may tinapay pa rin sa Ebanghelyo: nagpakain si Hesus ng tinapay sa 5,000 tao.

Ngayon, tinapay na naman. Sinabi Niya ulit na Siya ang Tinapay ng Buhay at ang tinapay na ito ay ang Kanyang laman, ang Kanyang katawan na kapag kinain ay magbibigay ng buhay na walang-hanggan. Puro tinapay.

Sa totoo lang, sa susunod na linggo, tinapay pa rin: nag-aaway na ang mga Hudyo kasi hindi nila naiintindihan ang sinasabi ni Kristo tungkol sa tinapay at laman, at ayaw nilang kumain ng laman ng tao. Paulit-ulit ang tinapay ngayong buwan.

Bakit puro tinapay? Ano ang nangyayari sa mga Ebanghelyo ngayong buwan?

Simple lang: itinatatag ni Kristo ang sakramento ng Misa, ang kanyang dakilang pag-aalay, paghahain ng Kanyang sarili – laman at dugo – sa atin upang mailigtas tayo. Naging mas malinaw ito sa mga disipulo noong Huwebes ng Huling Hapunan nila: tinaas Niya ang tinapay, nagpasalamat at sinabing, “Ito ang Aking katawan,” at pagkatapos, ang alak, “Ito ang Aking dugo.”

Ito rin ang nangyayari sa bawat Misa: ang tinapay ay nagiging katawan ni Kristo at ang alak ay nagiging dugo ni Kristo.



At kapag tinanggap natin si Kristo, pumapasok Siya sa atin at tayo’y nagiging mas katulad Niya: mas mabuti at mas mapagmahal.

Kung iisipin natin, parang ordinaryo lang ang pagbabagong-anyo ng tinapay para maging Katawan ni Kristo – linggu-linggo naman nangyayari ang Misa. Pero may mga tao, sa totoo lang may kaibigan ako, na kahit imbitahin, ayaw tumanggap ng Komunyong. Hindi dahil sa may malaki siyang kasalanan at hindi pa nagkukumpisal; sa kabaliktaran: siya ay mabuting Katoliko at mapagmahal na asawa, ngunit ayaw niyang tumanggap ng Komunyong, ayaw niyang tumanggap ng Katawan ni Kristo.

Bakit? Sabi niya, “Dahil hindi ko naiintindihan ang Komunyong. Hindi ko naiintindihan kung papaano nagiging laman ng tao, Katawan ni Kristo, ang tinapay.” At sabi pa, “At dahil hindi ko naiintindihan at napapahalagahan ang Komunyong,” dagdag niya, “ayaw kong tumanggap nito.”

Hindi ko alam kung natanong ninyo na rin ito dati. Maniniwala ba talaga ako na tunay na nagiging katawan ni Kristo ‘yong tinapay? Naiintindihan ko ba talaga kung papaano ito nangyayari?

Noong nagbahagi ang kaibigan ko, naisip ko, sa loob-loob ko, “Ako rin, hindi ko rin naiintindihan kung papaano nagiging laman ni Kristo ang tinapay. Pero tumatanggap ako ng Komunyong at naniniwala akong tunay na Katawan ito ni Kristo.”

May punto naman ‘yong kaibigan ko. Iniisip ko lang na... si Kristo ay namatay (pinako sa krus) at nabuhay; at kung kaya Niyang mamatay at mabuhay, at kung kaya Niyang magpakain ng 5,000 tao (noong nakaraang Ebanghelyo), siguro naman kaya rin Niyang gawing katawan Niya ang ordinaryong tinapay.



Iyon nga ang ipinangako Niya sa Huling Hapunan: “Ito ang Aking katawan... ito ang Aking dugo. Ulitin ninyo ito sa pag-alaala sa Akin.”

Ito ang mensahe ng Ebanghelyo ngayong mga nakaraang linggo: na binibigay ni Kristo sa bawat Misa, hindi lamang tinapay na ostia, hindi lang puro tinapay, kundi ang Kanyang Katawan at Dugo, upang sa paghahain ng Kanyang sarili bilang sakripisyo para sa ating mga kasalanan ay malaman natin kung gaano Niya tayo kamahal.

Ang Ebanghelyo ngayon ay magandang paalaala na tuwing pumipila tayo at tinatanggap natin ang nagbagong-anyong tinapay, tinatanggap natin ang pagmamahal ni Kristo na siyang nagbabago sa buhay natin: upang tayo ay maging mas mabuti at mas mapagmahal sa ating kapwa. SHN



The Watchful Servant

James Ryan S.

This Gospel reminds me of a family event which happened a year ago, the return of my beloved older sister. My sister is this happy-go-lucky, bubbly character, who has been working as a nurse in the United States (US) for the past two years. The moment we knew that she would be returning here in the Philippines, everyone in the family immediately sprang into action and took initiative in taking part in preparing for her arrival. This included cleaning her room back in our hometown, while my older brother and I took charge in arranging her room for staying here in Manila.

When we thought that everything was going quite smoothly, there was then a potential problem at that time with President Trump and the US government regarding non-citizen travelers going in and out of their country. There was now this cloud of uncertainty mixing with the potential joy in our waiting for my beloved sister. We were awaiting her with a concoction of emotions of both excitement and agony. Nevertheless, we persisted in our preparation and waited.

Indeed, we “girded our loins and lighted our lamps,” so to speak, waiting for our sister’s return, ready to open any doors immediately whenever she might come and knock. We waited not in passivity, but in activity. An active preparing that has an affective sweetness in the heart, inflamed not simply because of our capacities in functionally preparing, but because of its being



animated and motivated by the very delight and love we have for our dear sister. Waiting to the point of uncertainty and darkness.

This tender desire and longing for a loved one, a desire that expresses itself through active preparation to the point of agonizing oneself in uncertain waiting is what I feel the Lord is inviting me to in the way I relate with Him through this Gospel. This waiting is a tension, a push and pull between activism and passivism. For someone like me who has lived most of my life trying to earn even just a single affirmation through the actualization of ideals, who is easily tempted to sway into extreme activism.

This extreme activism appears good and sounds good to the self as I do see much fruit with regard to growth and development that spans from the functional to even the psycho-emotional dimensions. But is this what the Lord really desires for me?

God is inviting me to, yes, still prepare and be active, yet also to wait for Him patiently and to pay attention to His gentle prodding. To remember that the Kingdom of God within and without is to be waited for, not to be built. As in the Our Father, “Your Kingdom come.” Rather to receive it and welcome it into my life, and then into the life of others. Like in the Gospel, after the Master has arrived and has seen his servants all prepared, He will then more than generously serve His own servants. God is the One who builds, God is the One who gives.

Am I then invited to swing on a guilt trip towards the swerving trap of self-abasement? Should I then shame myself for being too active to a fault? For making into my own project what is God’s? No.



There is much value to my preparedness and activism, not as an end in itself, but as an expression of one of the deepest values, which I feel the Lord truly desires, this yearning and longing for Christ Himself stemming deep from my heart. This core desire of longing to be in union with Christ.

In my active waiting for my Master, may I be able to offer and be animated by this tender desire and longing for Him, which I believe is also His own longing for mine. SHN



The Way of Compassion

Rogelio N.

By December, it will have been a year since the pandemic began wrecking almost every corner of the globe, leaving several hundreds of thousands of people deprived, desolate, and, even worse, dead. Add here the aftermath of recent typhoons, especially Ulysses which, according to one news report, left more than 60 casualties, displaced 325,000 people, and damaged P1.5 billion worth of properties and infrastructures in the country.

One brother shared with me his anxieties over the possible enduring and adverse effects on health and wellness by the horrors of this pandemic. Our community, although partially insulated from the differing forms and disorienting degrees of suffering and pain in the world today, is definitely not spared from experiencing insecurity and groundlessness. And for this, I am moved with gentle gratitude and joy. It is grace to be deeply affected, to experience what evening means, to navigate through the night, and to surrender little by little to our Lord and His promise of dawn.

These days I've been praying with the Stations of the Cross, in response to Christ's invitation for me to accompany Him carrying the Cross every day. This spiritual exercise brings me back to my Third Week experience in the long retreat. I still fear the blinding bareness of Good Friday and the helpless waiting of Black Saturday. And yet Jesus beckons me to stay close to Him and His pain. He is grateful for my presence.



I remember one point in Pope Francis' address to General Congregation 36, saying, "We can always improve somewhat in allowing ourselves to be moved by the Lord on the cross, both in his person and as present in the sufferings of so many of our brothers and sisters – indeed the majority of the human race! Just as Father Pedro Arrupe said, wherever there is pain, the Society is there [*or better said, has to be there*]."

As I trek this way of compassion, the initiative, the providence, and the labor ultimately belong to the Father. It is He who has provided for the graced opportunity to listen intently to the frustrations, fears, and worries, as well as the hopes, desires, and dreams of our novitiate and retreat house workers. It is He who has found ways to channel our piles of clothes and reach out to flood-stricken families. It is He who moved me to accompany a struggling brother in his darkness and to continue to provide him encouragement. It is He who had strengthened me to console my own family after two typhoons ruined our abode, and He as well who stirred my will to manifest our need for help. It is He who touches people's hearts to share their resources with the needy. It is unmistakably He in Jesus who keeps urging me on in case the waves get stronger and the night seems darker.

Perhaps the people in the Gospel who inquired when the end would happen and what signs there would be when the end was near (Luke 21:7), did so in search of security and grounding. At times, I would catch myself asking along the same line of thought: "Lord, when will this pandemic end?"

Jesus, demonstrating his care, warns me not to be deceived. He directs me to Himself who is my present, my here and now, my



principle and foundation. He reminds me that He is victorious over suffering and pain, by going through them even to the point of death. He encourages me to stay with Him, and so find meaning in loving and embracing what He has loved and embraced (*Constitutions* [101]).

Indeed, the road is rough, but the roughness is less felt when traversed with love and with someone who loves me and someone I am growing to know, love, and follow every day. I believe this is what is truly essential, rather than scratching for security in external signs and grappling to know when the end will come.

Advent is in the air. I beg that Jesus sustain and increase my yearning for Him every single day, and find Him, like Father Ignatius, in whatever time or circumstance. I proceed ever grateful and always assured that Jesus is first in yearning for me. SHN



Where My Heart Is

Francis X.

In 2014, when I was in Arvisu House, I saw a photo of a young Jesuit hanging on the wall on the first floor corridor going to the bedrooms. Out of curiosity, I asked one of my batchmates then, “Who is that guy?” Later on, I learned a lot of his stories. He is a Jesuit scholastic named Richie Fernando. From their sharing, I understood what he meant when he wrote down this sentence: “I know where my heart is.” This indeed was revealed by his own deeds – not only by the way of his death, but also by his way of living his daily life.

I know that the Pharisees are believers in God. I still wonder though if they know where their hearts are. Jesus, too, believes in the Father and He knows where His heart is.

First, let’s look at Jesus Christ. When He was challenged and tested by the Pharisees, He was not afraid. He pointed out their intentions, and helped them see their underlying motives. He replied with patience and gentleness; He responded out of His love for them.

Through His actions, it seems that He is not human, as He would always act extraordinarily. But in my prayer, when I had a colloquy with Him, He shared with me His feelings. Similar with what I have felt, He too was angry, disappointed, and frustrated. However, the difference is that He is open-minded. He allows Himself to enter the heart of those who are against Him, to



understand where they are coming from, and then shows God's face to them. This reveals to me where His heart is. He knows that He is God's beloved Son, and He is invited to love and to forgive as the Heavenly Father does. His heart is possessed by God alone and is poured out for the entire human race.

Now we turn our attention to the Pharisees. How about them? With their mindset, probably, they also think they know where their heart is, as I do, too. I am a Catholic, and I believe in God, and I even see myself as God's beloved child. But the question is: "Do I authentically feel where my heart is?" And, "Am I blinded by my own thoughts, feelings, emotions, and needs so that I falsely set my heart on a boxed-in God?"

Last week during the conference of Fr. Paulini Zhai, SJ, there were several words that disturbed me: communal, depth, and renewal, among others. Dwelling on these words, I felt the invitation to go beyond myself and to open and expand my heart to the unknown, the uncertain and the unfamiliar, so that I could be led by the Holy Spirit to encounter God who is the Creator of everything, who is much greater than what I know.

Now, with greater confidence and total trust, I can be an authentic disciple of Jesus Christ like Richie Fernando, and give witness to where my heart is. It is in God alone and made manifest through sharing in the mission of our crucified and risen Lord: to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, to restore the sight of the blind, and to release prisoners from bondage.

SHN



Wishful Thinking

Patrick E.

There was once a time, actually several times, when because of either having such a long list of things to do or of just being so busy, activity after activity, and not having time for myself or because I don't find what I'm doing meaningful or enjoyable anymore, I wished, I desired – and perhaps you had at one time as well – I yearned to be a child once more. To go back to being a child: to not have to worry, to be free to do what I want, to just relax and play. “How nice it is to be a child,” I would think to myself.

In today's Gospel, the disciples probably had a similar impression of children, but in a rather negative light. Some biblical scholars say that in the Jewish culture, children were considered unimportant, having no practical value (they could not work) and thus had no rights in Jewish society. That was probably how the disciples saw the children who wanted to approach Jesus. They must have thought, “The Master is too important and too busy to be bothered by children.”

But Jesus, in His greater wisdom, does the opposite, the unexpected. Instead of shunning, He calls, He welcomes the children: “Let the children come to me.” And He tells His disciples, “The Kingdom of God belongs to children... whoever does not accept the Kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.” He told His disciples then and He is telling us now to be like children.



Over these past few months since I came to Sacred Heart, I have been repeatedly asked by my Novice Master to go back to and pray over my childhood memories, back to when I did not have to work, to when I was not under pressure, to when I was free to relax, to just be myself and play.

Why go back to my childhood? Because, when faced with the life-defining question, “Is this life, is Jesuit life for me?” and the very real prospect of making life-long promises of poverty, chastity, and obedience in accord with this life, I could not help but ask, “*Kaya ko ba talaga ang buhay na ito? Nang habang-buhay?*” It may be enjoyable now, but what about next year or five years from now or ten and 20 years from now?

According to my formators, it is only as a child, it is only the inner child in me, it is only when I am childlike that I can make such a commitment. It is only when I can trust enough to let go, to let things be and relax, when I can be in touch with and know my deepest desires and be true to myself, when I can enjoy what I am doing, be happy and be at peace in giving myself, and be able to just have fun and play – that is when I will be able to take a leap of faith to commit and make promises, life-long vows, to a life and to a future full of potential hardship and so much uncertainty.

It is when I am like a child that I stop asking myself, “*Kaya ko ba 'to?*” and instead ask, “*Gusto ko ba 'to?*” It is when I am like a child that I will know what life I truly desire, know what my vocation is and be able to reach out, grab it, own it, and commit to it wholeheartedly.



If at some point, you wish, you desire, you yearn to be a child once more, don't feel so bad because that is Christ's wish for you, too. And contrary to what the disciples believe, it is good to be a child. It is good to trust in the Lord as children would their parents and let go of our worries and relax; it is good to follow our heart and pursue our dreams and deepest desires; it is good to go where we will be happiest and to where we will find the greatest meaning.

In doing so, in being like children, we are able to approach Jesus, know His will for us, and take that leap of faith into His Kingdom. SHN



Awa at Habag

Alejo S.

Sa ating napakinggang Ebanghelyo ngayon (Juan 8: 1-11), isinalaysay sa atin kung papaanong sinubok muli si Hesus ng mga guro ng batas at ng mga Pariseo para magkaroon sila ng dahilang ipahuli siya at kasuhan. Para sa kanila, si Hesus ay tila isang tinik sa kanilang landas na kinakailangang alisin.

Kaya naman naisipan nilang dalhin sa templo ang isang babaeng nahuling nakikiapid. Ito ay isang bitag kay Hesus dahil kung hahatulan ni Hesus ang babaeng makasalanan, masisira ang Kanyang mabuting reputasyon sa mga tao; subalit kung hindi naman Niya ito hahatulan, lalabas na sinusuway ni Hesus ang nakasaad sa batas ni Moises. Sa Lumang Tipan, sinasabi na ang sinumang mahuling nakikiapid ay kailangang batuhin hanggang sa siya'y mamatay.

Ano ang ginawa ni Hesus? Wala.

Hindi Niya kinondena at hinatulan ang babae. Kung nagpakita si Hesus ng gayong respeto sa makasalanan at hindi Niya kinondena ito, tulad ng pagkondena ng ibang tao, nangangahulugan bang hindi Niya isinaalang-alang ang mabigat nitong kasalanan at sinuway rin Niya ang batas ni Moises? Hindi.

Bagkus, ipinapakita sa atin na iba ang pamamaraan ng Diyos kaysa sa tao. Iba ang pamamaraan ni Hesus upang mapagbago ang isang makasalanan at akayin ito pabalik sa Kanya. Ipinapakita sa atin ni Hesus na magkaiba ang pagsasabi sa isang tao na ang kanyang gawi ay mali kumpara sa pagkokondena agad sa taong nagkamali o nagkasala.



Hindi sinabi sa Ebanghelyo kung ano ang sinulat ni Hesus sa lupa, pero narinig natin kung papaanong sinabi Niya sa kanila, na ang walang bahid ng kasalanan ang siyang unang bumato sa babae. Dahil dito, unti-unti nagpulasan ang mga taong nakapaligid sa babae at wala nang nangahas pang bumato sa kanya.

Ngunit hindi roon nagtatapos ang kwento. Sa isang madamdaming eksena, tumindig si Hesus at sinabi sa babae, “Babae, nasaan sila? Wala bang humatol sa iyo? ... Hindi rin kita hahatulan. Humayo ka at mula ngayo’y ‘wag nang magkasala pa.”

Hangad ng Diyos ang tuluyang pagbabalik-loob ng isang nagkasala at ang kanyang pagpapanibagong-buhay. Nagbibigay ang Diyos ng pangalawang pagkakataon. Ika nga, habang may buhay may pag-asa. Papaano pa magbabago ang isang tao kung pinagkaitan na ito ng buhay at pagkakataong ituwid ang kanyang landas? Kadalasan, kinokondena agad natin ang isang taong nagkasala o nagkamali sa atin. Hindi tayo naglalaan ng palugit para mabigyan sila ng pagkakataong magsisi at magbago. Nawawala ang awa at habag para sa mga taong nagkasala.

Sa Ebanghelyong ito, ipinakita sa atin ni Hesus kung ano ang nararapat gawin. Oo, mahalaga ang hustisya, mahalaga ang batas, subalit hindi rin dapat mawala sa atin ang pagiging makatao at maawain. Ikondena ang pagkakamali ngunit bigyan ng pagkakataong magbago ang nagkakasala.

Sa Dakilang Taon na ito ng Awa at sa pagpapatuloy ng ating banal na Misa, hilingin natin sa Diyos ang biyaya ng pagpapatawad at pagkakaroon ng pusong mahabagin, mapagmahal, at hindi mapanghusga. Nawa’y ang ating mga puso ay maging kahalintulad ng Kamahal-mahalang Puso ni Hesus. SHN



Bulag

Mamert M.

Sa akin pong pagninilay-nilay sa ating Ebanghelyo sa umagang ito (Juan 9: 1-34), ang wari ko pong buod ng sinasabi nito sa atin ay ito: na ang pagharap sa katotohanan ay isang napakahalagang punto sa mensaheng pag-ibig ni Hesus para sa atin.

Kapag ating hinarap ang katotohanan nang may buong paniniwala't pananampalataya sa Kanya, ipinapangako sa atin ni Hesus na magdudulot ito ng kaligtasan, kalayaan, at buhay. Sabi nga ni Hesus sa ibang parte pa ng Ebanghelyo ni San Juan: “Ako ang Daan, at ang Katotohanan, at ang Buhay” (Juan 14:6).

Tingnan natin ang nangyari sa taong ipinanganak na bulag sa ating Ebanghelyo at sa mga Pariseong nabanggit. Upang maiparating sa mga ito ang kapangyarihan at kaluwalhatian ng Diyos Ama na Siyang nagsugo sa Kanya, pinagaling ni Hesus ang lalaking ito at binigyan ng kakayahang makakita.

Sa paggawa Niya nito, ipinamalas ni Hesus ang pagmamahal Niya sa Ama at sa lalaking ipinanganak na bulag. Ipinamalas ni Hesus ang kanyang pagmamahal para sa Ama sa pamamagitan ng pagsunod sa kagustuhan ng Ama. Ipinaramdam ni Hesus ang pagmamahal ng Diyos para sa lalaking bulag sa pamamagitan ng pagpapagaling ng kanyang kapansanan.

Sa pagpapagaling ni Hesus sa lalaki, binigyan niya ito ng kaligtasan mula sa kapansanan nito. Binigyan siya ng kalayaang makakita at ng pagkakataong mabuhay nang lubos at ganap.



Ipinakikita rin ni Hesus sa atin kung ano ang magiging epekto sa buhay ng isang tao kapag hindi natin tinanggap at hinarap ang katotohanan. Makikita natin ito sa mga Pariseo sa ating Ebanghelyo. Sila’y nakakulong sa kanilang kayabangan at kahambugan pagdating sa kaalaman tungkol sa mga batas.

Bagama’t malinaw na isang milagro ang nangyari sa lalaking ipinanganak na bulag, ipinagpilitan nilang gawain ng isang demonyo ang pagpapagaling sa kanya, at hindi mula sa Diyos.

Kayabangan at kahambugan. Kawalan ng pagpapakumbaba. Ito ang mga katangiang meron ang mga Pariseong ito kung kaya’t hindi nila maharap ang katotohanan. Sa parehong paraan, hindi nila makamit-kamit ang kaligtasan, kalayaan, at buhay na dulot sana ni Hesus.

Atin ngayong itanong sa ating mga sarili: sa puntong ito ng buhay ko ngayon, kagaya ba ako ng mga Pariseo sa kwento, na punung-puno ng kayabangan at kahambugan, at wala ni katiting na pagpapakumbaba sa aking pamumuhay?

O kagaya ba ako ng lalaking ipinanganak na bulag, na buong -pusong sumasampalataya at naniniwala kay Hesus, at may tapang na hinaharap ang katotohanan sa buhay ko? Hinaharap ko ba ang katotohanan, ang mensaheng pag-ibig ni Hesus: ang mensaheng nagsasabing ibigin ko ang Diyos nang buong puso, diwa, at lakas, at ang mahalín ang aking kapwa gaya ng pagmamahal ko sa aking sarili?

Ipinanganak tayong lahat na bulag at kadalasang may mga katangiang kagaya ng mga Pariseo. Kung kaya nga pumarito si Hesus sa ating piling, nagpakatao, nagpakasakit, at namatay sa



krus, upang Siya ang maging liwanag natin at makakita tayong muli; upang tubusin tayo sa ating mga kasalanan; at upang bigyan tayo ng buhay na walang hanggan.

Sana ngayong panahon ng Kuwaresma, habang ating pinaghahandaan ang paggunita sa Semana Santa, ating hilingin sa Panginoon na buksan ang ating mga mata, ang ating mga puso, at ang ating mga diwa, upang ating tunay na maharap ang Katotohanan nang may lakas ng loob at pagtitiwala. Sa gayon, makapamuhay nawa tayo nang lubos at ganap, at higit sa lahat, nang malaya. SHN



Sa Kabila ng Bawat Pagsubok

Gerard E.

We're back! Nandito na naman po ang mga *cute* sa San Jose Heights.

Isang buwan po kaming nawala pansamantala rito sa atin sa Muzon dahil 30 araw na nag-*retreat* ang mga *first year* nating *brothers* sa *novitiate*. Limang oras silang nanalangin kasama ni Hesus. Kaya kung titingnan n'yo po sina Bro. Nato, Stanis, at Chesco, may mga ningning sa kanilang mga mata na parang mga tala. Tala... Tala...

Wala naman po ang mga *second year* dahil ipinadala po kami sa iba't ibang lugar. Napunta si Bro. Eddie sa Caloocan habang sa Pasig naman kaming tatlo nina Bros. Martin at Francis. Kung kami naman po ang pagmamasdan ninyo, kayo na lang po ang humusga pero “bawal *judgmental*.” Nangitim, nangayayat, at mukha kaming nagkagalis. *Change topic* na lang tayo!

Noong nakalipas na buwan, kinukupkop po ako ng isang pamilya mula sa Maybungga Floodway. Lima kami sa pamilya; anim kung isasama ang alagang pusa na si Kitty. May dalawa akong kapatid na nasa una at ikaapat na baitang.

Nakatira kami sa isa sa mga *room for rent* sa gilid ng tulay. Napakaliit po ng aming tirahan. Halos 5 *feet* x 6 *feet* lamang ang laki ng aming tinutuluyang bahay. Kapag gabi, tabi-tabi kaming natutulog. Nakalusot ang aking paa sa loob ng *cabinet* upang maidiretso ko ang aking katawan. Madalas pakiramdam ko parang



binubugbog ako ng aking kapatid dahil sa likot niyang matulog. Minsan pa nga nakapatong na ang dalawang paa niya sa dibdib ko.

Ang tatay ko ay isang *construction worker*. Noong unang linggo, walang *project* na ibinigay sa kanya. Kaya kapag wala siyang pasok, wala ring suweldo. Kapag walang suweldo, madalas ang hindi pagkakaunawaan ni Nanay at ni Tatay. Mula noon, araw-araw po akong nagdarasal sa Diyos na sana magkatrabaho ang aking tatay.

Nakaramdam po ako ng tunay na gutom sa Pasig. Naalala ko pa ang unang Huwebes na naroon kami. Naglalakad ako at ang isa pang *brother*. Gutom na gutom ako noon, ngunit hindi ko sinasabi sa aking kasama. Habang tinitiiis ko ang aking gutom, kumakain naman ng karioka ang aking kasama. Sarap na sarap siya sa kanyang kinakain habang naglalakad.

“*Wow! This is delicious! Take one. Take one!*” sabi niya sa akin. Inaalok niya ako kumain.

Sabi ko, “*No, it’s okay.*” Pabebe pa ako.

“*Get one!*” pilit niya.

Nagpapilit din naman ako. Pagkatikim ko ng isang pirasong karioka, tuwang-tuwa po ako at kahit papaano may laman na ang tiyan ko. Sobrang saya ko! *Feeling* ko *best friend* ko ang *brother* na ‘yon noong mga oras na iyon!

Dahil sa hirap ng pagpapahinga at saka kakulangan sa pagkain, nagkasakit po ako. Sipon na sipon ako at nanghihina. Nagkaroon ako ng maraming pantal sa buong katawan. Sabi ng mga bata, galis daw. Dahil doon, dinala ako ng nanay ko sa *emergency room*. Sabi ng mga doktor na hindi iyon galis kundi *viral infection*. Bumalik daw ako sa kanya kung may paninikip ng dibdib,



pagdurugo ng gilagid, o pagdumi ng dugo. Mabuti at wala naman pong nangyaring ganoon.

Malayo din ang simbahan mula sa aming tirahan. Para makasimba kailangan po naming maglakad ng 30 minuto. Madalas mas mahaba pa ang lakaran kaysa sa buong Misa at pagdarasal kung isasama ang oras na ginugugol namin sa paglalakad pabalik.

Nag-alaga rin ako ng mga kapatid kong nag-aaral sa elementarya. Sinusundo ko ang aking kapatid tuwing alas-dose. Ito ang dahilan kung bakit ako nangitim. Pinapakain ko rin siya ng tanghalian pagkatapos sunduin. Nalaman ko na mas mahirap pala magpakain kaysa magsundo sa kainitan ng araw. Madalas pa nga puro sabaw lang ang gusto niyang kainin. Bukod sa pagsundo at pagpapakain, ipinaghuhugas ko pa sila ng pinagkainan.

Siguro ang madalasang hindi pagkakasunduan ng mga magulang ko ang pinakamahirap sa lahat. Nangyayari ito dahil sa kakulangan sa pera. Minsan pakiramdam ko hindi ako pinapansin ng aking nanay kapag mainit ang ulo niya. Iyon siguro ang naging pinakamahirap.

Marami man po akong pinagdaanang pagsubok sa Pasig, may mahalagang aral naman akong natutunan – ang maging mapagpasalamat.

Nagpapasalamat po ako sa Diyos dahil mayroong pamilyang tumanggap sa akin sa kabila ng kanilang kahirapan. Nagpapasalamat ako na nakilala ko sila.

Nagpapasalamat ako sa Diyos sa pagbibigay kay Tatay ng trabaho.

Nagpapasalamat ako sa Diyos dahil hindi kinagat ng daga ang paa ko tuwing nakalusot ang mga ito sa *cabinet*.



Nagpapasalamat ako sa Diyos para sa pagkaing pinaghirapang kitain nina Nanay at Tatay at para sa *brothers* at mga kapitbahay na nagbibigay ng pagkain kapag nakikita nilang lantang gulay na ako sa gutom.

Nagpapasalamat ako sa Diyos para sa doktor na tumingin sa akin, kay Nanay na nagdala sa akin sa ospital, sa *brothers* na nagpahiram ng *jacket* at *scarf*. Nagpapasalamat ako dahil hindi dumugo ang gilagid ko o hindi nanikip ang paghinga ko.

Nagpapasalamat ako na binibigyan ako ng Diyos ng lakas na maglakad kahit malayo ang simbahan upang sumimba.

Nagpapasalamat ako sa Diyos para sa tindera na nagdagdag ng sabaw para ulamin ng kapatid ko. Nagpapasalamat ako dahil nag-aaral ang kapatid ko at binigyan ako ng Diyos ng lakas para sumundo.

Nagpapasalamat ako sa Diyos para sa mga batang kumausap sa akin noong hindi ako kinakausap ng nanay ko. Nagpapasalamat ako dahil nauunawaan ko kung bakit ako hindi kinakausap ng aking nanay.

Higit sa lahat, nagpapasalamat ako dahil sa kahit anong hirap na dumaan sa aking buhay, kasama ko ang Panginoon na pasan-pasan ang krus. Kasama ko siya sa bawat oras na dumaan sa Pasig.

Napapaisip ako ngayon, “Paano ko kaya iibigin ang Panginoon na unang nagpakita sa akin ng Kanyang kagandahang-loob?”

Ngayong panahon ng Kuwaresma, magpasalamat tayo para sa panahong ito upang magsisi at magbalik-loob sa Panginoon na walang ibang ginusto kundi ang kagalingan natin. Sana sumama rin tayo sa Kanya. SHN



Believe

Martin C.

In the past days and weeks, the Gospel readings had the disciples not believing in the risen Lord in spite of the reports that some had seen Him.

In Mark (16: 19-15), “When [the disciples] heard that he was alive, and had been seen by [Mary Magdalene], they did not believe... He appeared to them and rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart.”

In John (20: 19-31), Thomas said, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

And, in Luke (24: 13-35), the two disciples on their way to Emmaus said, “Some women from our group have astounded us: they were at the tomb early and did not find his body.”

Perhaps integral to our human nature is to “not believe” in certain things unless we see them with our own eyes. In today’s Gospel (John 6:30-35), we see another unbelieving group of people in the crowd who asks Jesus, “What signs can you do that we may believe in you?” and further, “What can you do?” It comes out stronger in Filipino: “*Ano ba’ng kaya mong gawin?*” Note that this is the same crowd who “were filled” with the loaves and fish in the preceding account.

In this time of Covid-19, I find myself belonging to the same unbelieving crowd, skeptical that things will get better soon, that there is good happening outside, and that God indeed is in control.



When the crowd asks, “What can we do to accomplish the works of God?” Jesus responds with profound simplicity: believe. He says, “This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent.” In other words, to trust in Jesus.

In prayer, I considered how I might have stopped believing and trusting in the Lord consciously or unconsciously. I noticed I have stopped reading the papers, resigned that there is nothing I can do anyway. I have ignored praying for my family back home, taking for granted that they are safe and comfortable, and neglected that they, too, are in need of prayers, Covid or no Covid.

On several occasions, I have neglected to be intentional in my prayers, dwelling simply on whatever comes to mind, and waiting for the Lord to give me consolation. I noticed, too, that I started packing food and goods merely out of duty, succumbing to boredom, and losing touch with the meaning and the spirit of what we do and why we do it. I began feeling entitled as a result of my busyness and my tiredness, failing to be grateful for all my benefits. At one point, I became irritable and sensitive to things that were meant to be enjoyed rather than be annoyed at.

In all these, I might have quietly crept back to my former passivity; I might have just given in to despair. I see now the importance of one of the prayers in the Litany of Supplication: “Open us to hope, O Lord.”

When Jesus says to the crowd, “This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent,” he summons them and us to believe. This is how we are to accomplish God’s work, that as we find ourselves involved in a flurry of works – packing, transferring, loading, dishwashing, cleaning, reporting – we accompany them



with believing. “We believe in you, O Lord” is another supplication in the litany.

Without believing, all our works will not make sense. Without believing, our efforts will be meaningless. We can do many works but still hide behind each of them saying, “I did this” or “I did that.” Even when we have done all that we could ever do to help ease this pandemic, without believing, we will find ourselves bored and burned out.

Furthermore, unless we believe that our encouragement notes on the food packets go a long way to uplift even just one front-liner, those notes will remain mere words. Unless we believe that a half kilo of *tuyo* and two small packs of pork & beans can indeed save one family from hunger, even just for a day, our tiredness from transferring and loading goods will just be a meaningless exhaustion. Unless we believe that Christ is truly present in the Blessed Sacrament we expose and adore daily, our prayers will remain empty and dry.

The crowd asks Jesus for signs that they may believe in him. Jesus tells them, “I am the Bread of Life.” **Jesus himself was the sign they were looking for.** He was in front of them; the Bread of Life was in their midst, but they did not believe. In the present day, Jesus remains in our midst and is just as present to us as he was to that crowd. Our daily Mass and Exposition, food delivery to Tala, packing of goods, *Spiritual Exercises* (SpEx) presentations – these are the signs that God is truly present and laboring in us and through us. We need not ask the Lord, “[Lord], give us this bread always” for he has never left us.



Rather, in this Mass, let us ask for the grace to believe and to trust in Jesus. We can have all the signs in the world, but still not believe, and still not trust.

“But how do we believe?” you may ask. Honestly, I do not know. If I were part of the crowd in Jesus’ time, I probably would have left him too. However, I am reminded of my SpEx experience wherein many times the Lord would ask me, “Do you believe me?” or “Do you believe this?” To which I always, in the end, responded with “Yes, Lord... but please, help me; help my unbelief.”

Before I know it, asking the Lord to help my unbelief is already believing. SHN



Hold Fast

Renzo A.

As our novitiate community began discussing the transition from the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) to the general community quarantine (GCQ) or the so-called “new normal,” I had also begun being preoccupied with feelings of uncertainty. Questions like “What will happen next,” “When is this going to end,” “When are we going to have the ‘old normal’ back,” “What are we going to do now,” “What are we going to do next” gradually surfaced in my mind – questions none of us could answer.

Though I feel grateful for the wonderful opportunity to help our brothers and sisters in need through our goods- and lunch-packing initiatives, I also could not help but feel worried as I sensed that transitioning to the “new normal” would not be easy for all of us – for our government, for many of our relatives and friends, and most especially for the poor, including those we meet in the Apostolate.

Sometimes I get weary thinking and wondering about all these as I am very much a person who wants to be in control. However, this whole Covid-19 situation brings me ever closer to the reality that whatever control I think I have is merely an illusion and that I am never actually in control.

As I bring all these to prayer, I remember the words of my high school principal: “Hold fast.”

“Hold fast to what?” you may ask.



Hold fast to the ‘here-and-now.’ Difficult as it may be to accept, Covid-19 is our here-and-now. Yet, somehow, this situation became an opportunity for me to stop, look, and listen; to go deep into my relationships, may it be with God, with myself, or with others; to recognize my preconditions, tendencies, and biases. Becoming aware of these led to opportunities to go beyond my likes and dislikes and to experience the inconveniences of not being in control.

Our table reading yesterday, “Resurrection in Dark Time” by Fr. Brendan McManus, SJ challenges us to live every day like a Resurrection day. He says, “To be fully present, in the moment and living the paradoxical tragedy-wonder of life. It is all about gratitude: to see the absolute giftedness of every moment, the wonder of every encounter, the silver lining on every cloud.”

Hold fast to whom?

Hold fast to people, particularly to the community. I am grateful for my novitiate community because of the support it provides me – and the support I get to give – during these difficult times. Sharing with and listening to each other give us opportunities to encourage, strengthen, and build each other up in times like these.

Finally, hold fast to God. Jesus, in today’s Gospel (John 15: 26 - 16:4a), while telling His disciples He is returning to the Father, is also inviting us to hold fast to the Advocate, to the Holy Spirit – the Spirit who leads us to see that the basic sin was and is the refusal to believe in Jesus; that although Jesus was found “guilty” and apparently died in disgrace, in reality righteousness has triumphed, for Jesus has returned to His Father; finally, that it is the ruler of the



world, Satan, who has been condemned through Jesus' death. Holding fast to the Spirit means holding fast to hope.

Much of what we feel these days may be uncertainty, despair, and anxiety. However, it is good to remind ourselves to hold fast – to people and to God – now more than ever.

As we continue to celebrate Easter, we are reminded – and at times challenged to realize – that suffering does not have the last word. That death does not have the last word. That this Covid-19 pandemic does not have the last word.

And that all shall be well because of Christ. SHN



“I Have Never Left You”

Martin W.

“I am going away and I will come back to you.” (John 14:28)

The Gospel readings these days are all about Jesus’ farewell discourses. Many of His words are about “leaving”: “In a little while the world will no longer see me”; “I am going to the Father”; “I am going to prepare a place for you.”

Though he appeals to us to have faith in Him by assuring us He will return, to me it still sounds a bit saddening. In today’s Gospel, Jesus says, “If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father.” It is challenging and puzzling for me. Why Lord? Why do you have to leave?

Having received encouragement from Fr. Paulini Zhai, SJ, I had started revisiting my own *Spiritual Exercises* journey, desiring to renew and deepen the graces I received.

In one prayer I reviewed my past and recalled all the moments in which I felt and experienced God’s love. I was led to contemplate my very “creation.” I saw myself as an infant in the midst of beautiful clouds, lying on a cradle, feeling serene and carefree, and laughing innocently. The Holy Trinity and Mother Mary surrounded me. They, especially the Father, beheld me with great joy. “How blessed I am,” I reflected.

However, something else happened in the following prayer. While trying to relish that joyful moment, I suddenly felt sad and asked the Lord, “This is not real, at least not always, isn’t it? Why



can't this moment last forever?" Unhappy memories and feelings of frustration, confusion, and even resentment started to flash in my mind, and so I questioned yet again, "Lord, why would you leave me?"

To my persistence, I heard an inner voice respond, "My son, I have never left you. My son, I have never left you." I remembered Jesus' promise to His disciples: "I am with you always." I wanted to believe this. Who else in this world can promise me the same? Yet I found myself still rebelling.

I return to Jesus' words in the Gospel: "If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father." I never truly understood what this meant. If I were one of the disciples then I would have answered, "No, Lord, if You love me, You would not leave. You would not let this moment end. You would stay."

I notice that many times my reasoning would go like this: "If You love me Lord, things would not be like that." "If You love me, You would do this or do that." I set many "would's" for the Lord only to return to Him eventually, begging for His healing.

"My son, I have never left you." I do believe that though Jesus has gone to the Father, He has never left us. Though there might be times we feel He seems distant, as in this time of the pandemic, he has never truly left us. He gives us His Spirit, the Holy Spirit who will teach us everything and remind us of all that He had taught us.

Finally, Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." May this peace remain in us, comforting our troubled and fearful hearts. SHN



Seeking God

Tommaso G.

I was struck by the question one *primi* brother asked during the Spiritual Exercises study: “What have been God’s ways of ‘confirming’ you not only in consoling moments, but also, even more, in challenging ones?”

In the novitiate I am invited to be at-home with the feelings and tensions in my heart as I know they point to my deepest desires for God. I learn that only God’s presence can fill my emptiness when that of others seems insufficient. Everything is relative and only God is absolute. My heart will only be satisfied if I enter into a relationship with the Source of everything.

Let me share some steps I found helpful in seeking and finding God in daily life.

First, I will be faithful to God in prayer.

Community life easily comes to mind when thinking of “challenging times.” When facing difficulties in this area, I choose to be faithful in prayer, especially the Examen. Slowly I have realized how faithfulness in prayer really helps me surrender my negative feelings into the hands of God.

As I recall my experiences within the day, I simply stay with my tired body and my weary heart and let the presence of God fill me, then I will feel very grateful for everything. In the end I will ask for forgiveness for any wrong decision or action I made toward myself or others.



Second, I will turn my desires toward God.

I try to notice and be attentive to the different movements in my heart. When I focus on my selfish desires, I feel anxious and disturbed, but when I focus on God, desiring him by asking, “Where are you, Lord, at this moment?” I feel my tensions ease and I feel more joyful. I have learned to be more familiar in distinguishing these two movements just as our Father Ignatius learned. I feel very happy knowing God really teaches me as a schoolmaster does a child.

Third, I will remember God’s goodness to me and to others.

I remember how gracious God was to me in the past and even now. This entails remembering my own goodness – despite my weaknesses and limitations – and the unchanging fact that I am God’s beloved no matter how others think of me. Finally, I remember how good others are no matter how negative I feel towards them at times.

All these I hope to continue to do with God’s grace. SHN



Visiting Sunday

When his parents saw him they were astonished;
and his mother said to him,

“Child, why have you treated us like this?
Look, your father and I have been searching
for you with great anxiety.”

He said to them,

**“Why were you searching for me?
Did you not know that I must be
in my Father's house?”**

But they did not understand what he said to them.

Then he went down with them
and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them.
His mother treasured all these things in her heart.



A Childlike Heart

Gio W.

Before I start my sharing I want to ask you a question, “As we celebrate today the feast of the *Santo Niño*, do you feel you are still young?” Of course, we do not have the same age as when we were small children, but I believe it is possible to be like a child in our heart. I remember a priest in Taiwan (I think he is now more than 100 years old) who asked our provincial regarding a young priests’ meeting, “Father, can I join the meeting because I feel I am still very young?”

In today’s Gospel (Mark 1:14-20), Jesus tells us, “Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a little child will not enter it.” Children have a pure heart. They do everything wholeheartedly. I think Jesus is inviting all of us today to have childlike hearts.

Let me share my reflections on the heart. I believe the heart is more important than the words I say, and it is more important than what I can do. In the Society of Jesus, the novitiate is called the school of the heart. It is like a mother’s womb because future Jesuits are born here. We novices enter here to reform our hearts and gain a new life in Jesus. It has a very deep meaning for the Jesuits. Today I want to share how my heart has been changed by God’s love as a Jesuit novice.

For me, life in the novitiate, the school of the heart, is a life of growing with the Lord in my heart and experiencing God’s love in



every small thing. For me, a childlike heart is a heart with a simple desire: one that totally relies on God and does everything also from the heart.

In this novitiate, through different experiences, I realized how important the desire in my heart is. The desire to encounter God even in the smallest things in my life and the desire to give my heart to God and allow him to reform my heart as He wants are very important desires of the heart. I believe these are great graces from God, but they are not easy to live out.

This heart gifted to me by God brings me the courage and the passion to face my life. I remember as I was preparing my presentation on the *Autobiography of St. Ignatius*, what touched me most was the desire in Saint Ignatius' heart: of totally surrendering himself to God. His life was totally changed by God beginning from his heart.

I really believe that everything starts with a desire in one's heart, and so I am reminded to treasure this kind of heart. The desire in my heart gives me the courage to trust in God and to follow God even in very challenging things. As I have experienced here in the novitiate, God has been working in me through my heart. God does not only help me face the challenges in my life. He also gives abundant graces from the challenges I face.

Last December, before Christmas, we had *Simbang Gabi* in three different apostolate areas. During that time, I had two opportunities to share in Filipino. Even though prior to entrance day I had three weeks of Filipino classes with my teacher Miss Pang, I only remembered simple phrases like “*Kamusta ka?*” “*Mabuti ako.*” and “*Yon lang.*”



Delivering a sharing in Filipino was very difficult for me. The first time was in my own apostolate area, Camarin. The second was in Bagong Silang. When I was sharing in Bagong Silang, I was really amazed by God and amused by myself. I remember the afternoon before I went to Bagong Silang, a brother spent more than three hours in helping me practice my pronunciation. Finally, I went there with an anxious heart. After that evening Mass, on the way back to the novitiate, a brother told me that the people there could understand my Filipino, but not my English. When I heard this I really wanted to laugh at myself. For me, I only understood my English, but almost nothing in my Filipino.

When I reflected on this afterwards, I realized that what pushed me and gave me the courage to share in Filipino was the desire in my heart. The desire in my heart was more important than the words I spoke to them. I believe the people understood my heart more than my words. God moved in my heart and in the hearts of the people in the apostolate areas.

As we celebrate the feast of *Santo Niño* today, we are reminded of our Lord Jesus Christ, who became a child and allowed God the Father to transform His heart as He “grew in wisdom and grace.” Like Jesus, we are invited to continue to follow God through a childlike heart, because God works in our hearts, in Jesus’ heart, through which He will change our lives. SHN



Gratitude for Family

Martin W.

Dear families and friends, as we all know, yesterday – 25th of January – was this year’s Lunar New Year, or popularly called Chinese New Year. In China, people call it the Spring Festival. For a traditional agricultural country, the lunar calendar which is the time guide for planting, farming, and harvesting plays a central role in the people’s daily life. With the coming of the spring, the land now is woken up from its long sleep in winter and it is the time to resume farming activities. People celebrate the Spring Festival with joy and excitement, coupled with the wish for a good harvest. Though Chinese society has significantly changed, the Spring Festival remains to be the most important to one and all.

Just like the Christmas and New Year for the Filipinos, the Spring Festival is also a time for Chinese families to gather and celebrate together. Tens of millions of Chinese, however far away they are and no matter how difficult it might be, would go home to be able to celebrate the festival with their families... unless you are a novice! Of course, here in the novitiate, we also celebrate festivals like this as one community. Even so, the Spring Festival this year still made me naturally think of my family far away in China.

My brothers in the community know my mother’s situation from my sharing with them. She was diagnosed with pneumonia in 2016. Since then, she had to be taken to the hospital again and again because her lung easily got infected. I was still a candidate in China at that time and her situation was something I really had to take into consideration for my discernment.



On August 1, 2018, our Entrance Day, as the novitiate gate closed, her health was the only thing that unsettled me. Every day, at every Mass, I pray for her. Every time I call home and speak with her, I want to hear that she is at home and not in the hospital.

Thank God! I have known that since I entered the novitiate, she has never been taken to the hospital again. She has already recovered. Before, even taking a short walk would make her tired, but now she can do the usual house chores, like cooking and even going to the nearby town for marketing! That's enough consolation for me!

What I find more beautiful is to see how God's grace works in her even in that suffering. My sister told me that once my mother shared how she reflected why there used to be many arguments between her and my father. My mother admitted that, perhaps, she was too self-centered and demanding and lacked understanding. She even expressed her regret on sometimes being too strict with me and my sister when we were younger. And to those against whom she used to have many judgments, now she seems to be more understanding and patient.

Being sick has made her get in touch with her own vulnerability. She has become more humble and more loving. As what we have been undergoing here in the novitiate, she has also been learning the same thing.

As to my vocation, my mother has always been 100 percent supportive, even while lying on the sickbed. She holds it firmly that to be a priest is the best for me. I always hear her saying these words to me, "Don't worry about me. Be persevering. I am praying for you."



On the other hand, my father is not as supportive. He understands the consecrated life is not an easy way and he prefers me to live a normal life. Though I did not fulfill his wish, he still loves me very gently and quietly. After my mother got sick, he had taken care of her very dedicatedly, without any complaint, without putting any pressure on me. At times, I would share with him about my life as a brother, my community, my experiences and learnings, and I would see him smile more and more. Seeing me find joy and meaning in my vocation, he seems to be more understanding and accepting of my choice.

Recalling all those graces received in my family brings me to the contemplation of the family of Jesus. At 30, Jesus proceeded to his public ministry. At that time, Saint Joseph had already passed away. In other words, Mary was widowed.

Leaving his loving mother must have been a very difficult decision for Jesus. Naturally, he would be concerned, worried, or even anxious about her from time to time. Many times, in solitude and prayer, Jesus must have entrusted His mother to His heavenly Father. Perhaps, He would also try to find some time to visit Nazareth just to see whether His mother was well, and then spend time – though probably short – with her.

As to Mary, I don't know whether she fully understood in the beginning the mission of her Son. When hearing Jesus giving sight to the blind, healing the sick, converting the sinners, comforting the marginalized, preaching truth and love, Mary must have felt very proud, giving her Son all her support.

Or we can imagine Jesus going home at times simply because he was tired, and also Mary cooking him his favorite dish, which would make Him feel recharged. In moments when Jesus felt



frustrated at being rejected by others, it must have been Mary who listened to him, comforted Him and cheered Him up. And as Jesus was journeying around the whole Judea, Mary herself was on the same journey with her Son in her heart.

Isn't this loving relationship in the family of Jesus and Mary and Joseph also the storyline of all our families? Today, let us offer a prayer of deep gratitude for our families. We thank them, whether they are present here or not. Let us continue to journey together and be united by God's ever-abiding love! *Guo Nian Hao!* Happy New Year! SHN



Holy Desires

Rogelio N.

Before I came to Arvisu House for my candidacy year, I had been with the Jesuit Vocations Direction Program (VDP) for more than three years. One memorable experience I had as VDP member was when we visited the National Penitentiary. Twice, we went to the Medium Security Compound and interacted with persons deprived of liberty (PDLs), particularly those who were studying under an education program in which the Philippine Jesuit Prison Service continues to be of great assistance.

I was struck by their countless stories: from horrifying accounts of death inside the prison cells to every PDL's crime story that brought him behind bars, to heartfelt narratives of conversion and longing for forgiveness from their own families, relatives, and those they wronged, and even to a flickering, yet inextinguishable hope of someday being free to live again. Common to all PDLs I met was an arising plea – a deep desire perhaps – to be beheld by the “free” world as worth respecting and welcoming, even not necessarily worth loving.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, as we celebrate Prison Awareness Sunday today, let us spread the word of hope – that deep desire – of our own brethren in the National Penitentiary, as well as of all others in prisons and jails. Let us behold them as fellow human beings who are worth our respect and warm welcome.



Speaking of imprisonment, when Fr. Eric Escandor, SJ, the Philippine Province’s national vocations director, visited our place in Tagkawayan, Quezon Province to speak with my parents about what I would be entering into, my mother remarked, “*Parang nakakulong si Tutoy nang dalawang taon.*”¹ (I wonder if the parents or guardians here with us said the same thing about their sons!) We knew my mother was joking, but Father Eric himself clarified, “*Hindi naman po...Hehe... Kasi ‘pag nakakulong, may ginawang kasalanan.*”²

Thankfully, since I entered last August 1, I’ve never felt I am in prison while here in the novitiate. Perhaps my experience of imprisonment is more interior than exterior. This kind arises from my inordinate attachments or un-freedoms. Inordinate attachments are people, things, ideologies, needs, habits, fears, perspectives, prejudices, and relationships, among others, that hinder the way to God. These obstruct the joy of living as God’s beloved creature, and get in the way of loving the Creator in return. In other words, my un-freedoms dis-tract, divert, or dis-engage me from being my authentic self.

My experience of the first three months of novitiate life is about giving flesh to the “I” – the self that I desire to offer the Lord through the Society of Jesus. We began with community building that highlighted norms, practices, and views of our respective cultures, especially living in an international community. Then followed workshops on prayer, journal keeping, and the genogram wherein we revisited our family history and configured how it has affected us in our identity formation.

¹ My son will be like staying in prison for two years.

² Not really, Ma’am... because if one is in prison he must have done a crime.



Moreover, we spent the first two weeks of October articulating the conscious and unearthing the unconscious parts of ourselves, expressing the ideal and confronting the actual of our true selves – all with the hope for wholeness and integrity. Just recently, we had our enneagram sessions helping us better clarify our personality types that show our basic fear and basic desire, and so become aware of the invitation to let go and ground ourselves in who we truly are.

And I manifest to you, our beloved family and friends, that giving flesh to the “I” is not easy. However, once we’ve touched base with our true selves, including our un-freedoms, tendencies, capacities, and strengths, we are able to relate with the Lord in a real, honest, and loving way.

We become discerning not to become, to stay, or to return to being self-absorbed like the man in the Gospel who prayed, “O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity – greedy, dishonest, adulterous – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income” (Luke 14:11). Instead, given the wholeness and clarity of the “I” – the free and authentic self – we can readily and openly express our deep, holy desire – our unceasing longing for God. The tax collector in the Gospel knew who he was, and so with such clarity of need for God’s mercy, he was in touch with his deep desire, sighing, “O God, be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13).

Notice, brothers and sisters, that we as human beings possess in our interiority our own deep, holy desires. The PDLs I met deeply desired to be beheld as worth respecting and loving. The tax collector deeply desired to be forgiven by the Lord. I think even the Pharisee possessed a desire for the divine as well. Maybe he was just



yet to come to terms with his true self. And we too, Jesuit novices in formation, deeply desire integrity – to live in the joy, love, and freedom of being attached to Jesus Christ alone.

In this Mass, let us thank the Lord for the gift of our respective, dear families (whether they are present here or not), for through them God incarnates His love, compassion, and providence for us. We are also grateful for our personal support system that includes our friends. And so, our beloved families and dear friends, please pray with us and for us as we continue to respond to the Lord's promptings and learn from Christ's gentle mastery during our stay here in the novitiate – the school of the heart.

With our Blessed Mother and Father Ignatius, we also beg the Lord that we touch base with our deep, holy desires that are probably covered up by our un-freedoms. We pray that the Holy Spirit penetrate our being and bring us closer to home. SHN



Loving Relationship

Jaclay J.

Visiting Sunday is one of the most-awaited activities here in the novitiate because this is the time where many of my brothers will have the chance to meet their beloved families and friends. For us foreign brothers, I believe we feel the same way and share the same excitement to meet our dear brothers' families. In fact, after a few Visiting Sundays, I grew familiar with and felt part of my brothers' respective families. In Italian, *mia familia, tua familia* which means "my family, your family also."

Instead of having a good relaxing Sunday at home or doing personal errands, many of you (family and friends) have come to the novitiate to meet us. This, for me, is a gesture of your love and affection for your sons, brothers, or friends who are here with us in this novitiate.

I find this loving relationship between family members quite comparable with that of the Child Jesus and His parents. I am sure most parents can relate with the worries that preoccupied Mary and Joseph when the twelve-year-old Jesus was lost in the Temple. Maybe Mary and Joseph pointed fingers at each other, or they probably blamed themselves for their carelessness. I could only imagine the anguish in their hearts, the trouble and devastation that fraught their minds.

We are told in the Gospel that Mary held all of these things contemplatively in her heart. The parents of Jesus did not burst into



a rage or did not try to shame Jesus by their punishing words. Instead, they lovingly brought Jesus home to Nazareth.

We novices have recently concluded our Community Building wherein we had the chance to exercise giving and receiving feedback from one another, both positive and negative. It was an enriching as much as a disturbing (in a healthy sense) experience for most of us. I truly felt the whole process was done out of loving concern to help each other, especially in recognizing blind spots while not appeasing our wounded pride or being fueled by a desire to get even.

It was an experience that allowed me to see the impact, whether good or bad, of my own behaviors on my brothers. My brothers helped me see what I did not see, feel what I did not feel, and think what I thought otherwise. When I thought I was joking or having fun, little did I know I already offended a brother. Thus, I was also led to reflect on my capacity for community life and human relationships.

In general, I was moved to keep pondering what I have done, what I am doing, and what I ought to do to improve and strengthen my loving relationship with my brothers. It may sound difficult but I take it as God's invitation to be better each day and rely solely on His grace and love.

As we also celebrate today the feast of the *Santo Niño*, let us be drawn to the Child Jesus who reminds us that He has come to be with us in joy and in pain, in every human experience except sin. After all, He is first in establishing a loving relationship with us. SHN



Reformation

Winston H.

Do you still remember the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus in the Gospel of John? Nicodemus asks Jesus, “How can a man be born again once he is old?” How to be born again... tough question!

Jesus’ reply was very deep. He said, “No one can enter into God’s Kingdom without being begotten of water and Spirit.”

What Jesus said was true. But I have another answer, perhaps an easier way to respond to the question. If Nicodemus asks me today, “Winston, how can one be born again?” I would reply, “Very easy, join the Jesuits! Join Sacred Heart Novitiate!”

It’s true. In the past one month, we experienced spiritual rebirth in our formation, as Jesus proclaimed in the Gospel today, “Reform your lives!”

Brothers and sisters, we stay in this place not simply to complete our formation, but to reform our lives! This is a kind of reformation... reforming my life... walking with Jesus.

After *Simbang Gabi* and Christmas Day, we organized the Jesuit Vocation Workshop for 23 participants interested in the Jesuit vocation. All the *primi* served as the guides, or what we traditionally call “angels,” to the participants. We shared our vocation stories with them, guided them, and encouraged them. We were not only reforming our lives, we were also sharing how we experienced God’s love in this process of formation.



When I was listening to them, I could easily resonate with their struggles. At the same time, I felt grateful. I remembered my parents who had been so supportive of my vocation. It was never easy to let go of me, their own child, but they did! And you, our beloved families present here, did too!

I would like to thank all the parents with us today – *tatays* and *nanays* – don't forget we are here because of you. You taught us how to pray and how to love. You taught us to love Jesus more than anyone and anything. You first reformed our lives, so we would be able to reform the lives of others in the future. Let us give a round of applause to our parents.

Two weeks ago, we had another workshop: Community Building. We gave feedback to each other during the workshop. It was an unforgettable experience for me. I was so nervous! Just imagine sitting in a room with two formators around, and then all the brothers entered the room one by one to give both edifying and dis-edifying feedback. Again, that was a great opportunity to reform my life.

The process was intense. Working for seven years in Malaysia, I was conditioned by my co-workers, even taught, to be tough always! It was about showing my strengths and hiding my weaknesses. But this workshop required my weaknesses to be seen! And the beautiful thing was, after the workshop, after we gave and received feedback, I could feel our relationship became closer.

I love my brothers not because of their strengths or talents. I love Chesco because Chesco is Chesco himself, not because he is good in preaching or he is caring! I love Stanis because Stanis is Stanis, that's it! No reasons or conditions. If we need to find a reason or set some conditions before we love, we are all unlovable.



This place, Sacred Heart Novitiate, invites all of us novices to become our true selves. In this community, I could find the love of Jesus... how He loves me unconditionally... without reasons and conditions.

We heard in today's Gospel that James and John abandoned their boats and followed Jesus. We, Jesuit novices, abandoned our boats, too, in order to go deeper into the life of Jesus and bring His life and His love to the whole world. Please continue to pray for our reformation. SHN



Relentless

Gerard E.

Relentless. In Filipino, *walang humpay*. In Chinese, *wu xian*. In Japanese, I don't know.

Relentless: This is how God revealed Himself to me during the 30-day retreat.

From February 3 to March 7, my *primi* brothers and I spent the days in solitude and in prayer. It was a journey of prayerful silence so we might see, hear, touch, feel, and taste the presence of God.

Life in the novitiate is slow. We have no access to internet, cellphone, and television. In fact, today's newspaper will be available to us by tomorrow. So please, whatever you read in the news today, don't share with us yet. Otherwise, you will be preempting the news for tomorrow.

During the 30-day retreat, we did not just slow down. We stopped. We dropped everything, even our daily schedules so each of us would be totally focused on Jesus.

In this age of internet, social media, and travel, staying in the novitiate is unconventional. I also asked myself quite a number of times why I decided to come and stay here... what continues to make me stay here. Thankfully, through the 30 days of silence and prayer, I found the answer to my question.



There is only One that can truly fill the emptiness in my heart. It is Jesus Christ. During the long retreat, I came to know deeper who Jesus Christ is. It is He who called me here and led me to be here. He is my most faithful companion in life.

In my contemplation of the raising of Lazarus, I saw how Jesus cried for Lazarus. He is, as the Gospel would say, the one whom Jesus loves. I was surprised to see Jesus devastated by the loss of Lazarus.

It was the first time for me to realize that Jesus was not unaffected by the death of His friend. In fact, I heard Him crying and wailing. I thought because He is God and because He knows that He has the power to raise Lazarus back to life, He is also free from the pain that we experience in our lives. I thought He is free from the pain of losing a loved one. I did not know that Jesus, too, has feelings and desires.

I thought God does not know my feelings. I knew He cares for me, but I did not realize He knows my pains, my frustrations, and my failures. I often told God, “You know nothing (Jon Snow).”

While growing up, my mother’s aunt always took me to church with her. However, she died when I was nine years old. I was beside her when she suffered a heart attack early in the morning of March 22. She was leaning on my frail body when she breathed her last. Her death resulted in very difficult moments in our family. At the time, I did not know that I was left broken by my aunt’s death and by the hardships we had to face.

During the 30-day retreat, I was asking God, “Where were you during those times? If you truly loved, why did you allow us to experience her sudden loss? Why did you allow that we undergo many struggles?” I was resentful towards God.



God gently reminded me of who He is and what His heart is like – the heart of God is the heart of a father. I was reminded that though there were difficult moments, we were able to surpass and rise above these challenges. Indeed, God, like a father, provided and has continued to provide for our family.

As I journeyed with God in those 30 days, I realized how flawed my image of God was. God was never indifferent to what I was going through. He knew my struggles and even shared my pain. Jesus Christ Himself felt the pain of losing a loved one when He lost His dear friend Lazarus. More so, Jesus Christ Himself was crucified. He was crucified so I would know that in times of difficulty, suffering, and pain, He is with me.

Gazing on the cross means so much to me now. On the cross, Jesus reminds me that I am deeply loved even in tribulations. On the cross, I see a God who shows me the deepest love by staying by my side even when I have forgotten Him.

Jesus will never leave me in pain and sorrow. It is I who choose to move away from Him. Despite the many times I leave Him, Jesus reminds me that He is crucified on the cross so that I may be reconciled again with Him. I know now that I am like Lazarus for Jesus. I am the one whom He loves.

This is the Jesus I encountered in the 30-day retreat. His love for me is more than what I can imagine. He cares for me more than I care for myself. He cares for my family more than I can care for them.

In knowing this love, I beg for a heart solely focused on Jesus who gives meaning to my existence. Whatever may come my way in the coming months, I know that I am in the hands of a God who loves me more than I love myself. SHN

*Jesuit
Saints &
Blessed*



At the heart of Ignatian spirituality is the transforming encounter with **the mercy of God in Christ** that moves us to a generous personal response.

The experience of the merciful gaze of God on our weakness and sinfulness humbles us and fills us with gratitude, helping us to become compassionate ministers to all.

Filled with the fire of Christ's mercy, we can enflame those we meet.

This foundational experience of God's mercy has always been the source of the **apostolic audacity** that has marked the Society and which we must preserve.

*From the Decrees and Documents of the 36th General Congregation
of the Society of Jesus*



All Ye Holy Men of God

Pius W.

Today, in the Jesuit liturgical calendar, is the feast day of all the saints and blessed of the Society of Jesus. Today, all the Jesuits around the world joyfully remember their brothers who have been canonized and beatified.

When I was looking at the Jesuit liturgical calendar, I was deeply amazed that there are so many Jesuit saints across the centuries. For example, among the First Companions, there are three great saints: St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society; St. Francis Xavier, the zealous missionary; and St. Peter Faber, the expert of the *Spiritual Exercises*.

There also are three young Jesuit saints who lived short but meaningful lives: St. Stanislaus Kostka who died at 18 during his noviceship, St. John Berchmans who died at 22 during his philosophy, and St. Aloysius Gonzaga who died at 23 during his theology.

There are great theologians and doctors of the Church as well, including St. Peter Canisius and St. Robert Bellarmine. Of course, there are also Jesuits martyrs, including the North American Martyrs who shed their blood in proclaiming the Gospel to the indigenous peoples. And then the Martyrs of Central America who gave their lives speaking out against injustice. There are many other Jesuit martyrs who willingly delivered their lives for the sake of Christ. Furthermore, there are other Jesuits whose love of God and humble lives have been rewarded in heaven.



However, as I was reading their stories, besides the amazement, a sense of sadness came into my heart because I felt that I was so far from them. I am merely a novice and I am so tiny compared with them. How could I imitate them? Instead of being inspired by them, I felt unworthy and frustrated by the reality that I am such a sinner who is filled with wounds. This thought deeply disturbed me and I did not know how to respond to it.

Luckily, while I was still preparing my sharing, I accidentally found Pope Francis' homily on the celebration of All Saints' Day in 2019. It seemed to have answered my self-doubt. He said the saints are not some distant, unreachable human beings. Rather, they trod the same difficult path of life along which we travel, with all its successes and failures.

Pope Francis' words reminded me that saints are not superheroes. Their holiness is not automatically obtained, as Pope Francis said, that "holiness is the fruit of God's grace and our free response to it." After reading his words, I was awakened from self-pity and began to reflect on my novitiate life. Do I allow myself to receive God's grace? Am I responding to God's grace?

I found that many times I was pursuing holiness by my own efforts and ignored God's graces. For instance, recently, I was complaining in one of my prayers that I did not have enough time to pray. In the morning, I need to prepare for morning praise or set up for Mass or serve at Mass. Hence, 30 minutes is shortened to 15 minutes or even less. Then for the evening exposition, part of its time is occupied by community Mass, Litany of Solidarity, and Benediction. There is only very short time left for me to pray. I continued to complain to God until I suddenly found that I spent more time complaining rather than praying.



When I further reflected on what was happening to me, I came to realize that it seemed I wanted more time for prayer and I wanted to be holier by praying more. But, in fact, I was relying on my own efforts to earn graces from God. Yet, my efforts turned out to be blocking the channel of God's free graces. It is exactly the opposite side of holiness, which Pope Francis expressed in his homily.

Maybe I can learn something from Saint Ignatius. When he was in Manresa, his own novitiate, he described that "God deals with [him] in the same way that a schoolteacher deals with the schoolboy while instructing him." Similarly, I am in the novitiate, this initial stage of formation. Maybe I can just simply allow myself to be loved by God and to receive freely the graces which God has prepared for me in His divine plan and in His time. Maybe I can just simply engage more in the daily life of the novitiate and attend to all the activities with all my heart. Maybe I can trust more the process and my formators. Hopefully, all these will not be built only by relying on my own efforts, but more on God's providence.

Finally, I end my sharing by quoting the words from the first characteristic of Our Way of Proceeding as documented in General Congregation 34: deep personal love for Jesus Christ. It says, "In remorse, gratitude, and astonishment – but above all with passionate love – first Ignatius, and then every Jesuit after him, has turned prayerfully to 'Christ our Lord hanging on the Cross before me,' and has asked of himself, 'What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What must I do for Christ?' (SpEx [53]) The questions well up to form a heart moved with profound gratitude and love. This is the foundational grace that binds Jesuits to Jesus and to one another."

On this day, I beg the grace of allowing myself to be loved by Christ. SHN



An Odor of Sweetness

Francis X.

St. Peter Canisius was born on May 8, 1521 at Nymwegen in the Netherlands. His boyhood was uneventful. He began his schooling in his native town. He was prominent at school and good at his books. When he was 15, he was sent to pursue his studies in Cologne, where he took his master's degree in 1540 at the age of nineteen. After an encounter with St. Peter Faber in Mainz, he made the *Spiritual Exercises* under Faber's direction, and on May 8, 1543, at the age of 22, he made a vow to enter the Society of Jesus. He started his noviceship at Cologne. Four years later, he was called to Rome, and then had his tertianship under the direction of Ignatius.

Reading these simple life stories of St. Peter Canisius, what impressed me is that he was a gifted man. He was an ordinary person, yet he was gifted with talents and companions. These stories remind me of my own giftedness – how blessed I am – particularly in being accepted to be a Jesuit novice for the second time (but in reality, we are not always lucky; so please don't attempt to try this yourselves, brothers!).

What I want to highlight here is not how the Society of Jesus needs me, but instead, how much I need the care and love of the Society of Jesus. This action of love and generosity of the Society of Jesus speaks and shows the truth revealed to me and which stays in my heart: I am a forgiven sinner deeply loved by God.



St. Peter Canisius is considered the Second Apostle of Germany because of his deep love for Christ, which is manifested by his service to the people. During his tertianship, in February 1548, he was sent to Messina in Sicily to teach. One year later, at the end of June in 1549, he was called back, and on September 4, he pronounced his profession before Ignatius. Then his life mission started.

After profession, he was immediately sent to Ingolstadt, where he spent his next 30 years laboring in various parts of Germany. There he went around on foot to preach to the poor and the rich alike, the laity and the clergy, other religious and all kinds of people. He was also a pioneer of Catholic education in Germany. He founded or helped to found many famous schools and colleges throughout the country.

Our saint today was a prolific writer, too. He wrote letters to accompany others to God. Fr. Otto Braunsberger took 30 years to collect his letters from 260 libraries and bookshops in more than 11 different countries, and they filled eight volumes large octavo, running to 7,500 pages. He was the author of catechisms, prayer books, theological treatises, and lives of saints. On the occasion to defend the Catholic Church, he devoted his every leisure moment for ten years from 1567 to 1577 for a 796-page book.

Despite these impressive achievements, St. Peter Canisius experienced a lot of difficulties and trials in his lifetime as a Jesuit. These were caused by his companions, outsiders, Church authorities, and the demands of mission. In all these, he trusted in God to face and solve them with courage and strength.

How did he look at these sufferings? I would like to quote his words which he used to describe Ignatius, our founder:



“He is a man who lives out his patience in trials, his love for the Cross of Jesus Christ, his piety, his familiarity with the source of all good, his confidence in God, his natural and supernatural prudence, his faith, his zeal for souls, his apostolic activities, his obedience to the point of blindness, the rectitude and purity of his plan.”

Knowing this great man – a man of God’s mission – I felt inspired and grateful to be his follower in going the same path as Ignatius who resolved to imitate Jesus Christ our Lord to carry out God’s mission.

Right now, as a Jesuit novice in formation, with the help of formators, I am trained and exercised in these areas so that my heart can be stretched and enlarged, so that I can strive to share my giftedness in the future in whatever mission, and so that, like St. Peter Canisius, I may always be ready, available, and generous in responding to God’s calling.

During the last period of his life, St. Peter Canisius experienced a very different lifestyle. If he used to do great missions before, this time, because of his physical condition and old age, this poor man could simply be seen trying to sweep the corridors of the house and helping in the scullery. As he grew weaker, he lost capacity even in carrying out those small things. Eventually, he was confined in his room, and later on became bed-ridden. On December 21, 1597, he breathed his last and attained union with God – seeing Him face to face.

What impresses me here is his great inner peace in accepting his powerlessness, uselessness, and vulnerability. His deeds tell me that he is a man of God, always living in the here-and-now, and striving to cooperate as a steward of God’s creation. Knowing this



simple yet extraordinary man, my heart is enkindled to be a faithful companion of Jesus Christ. What his life means to me is that I am invited to give back to the Lord my everything, and to trust in His providence and desire to give of Himself in the here-and-now.

St. Peter Canisius was beatified on November 20, 1869 by Pope Pius IX and canonized and proclaimed a Doctor of the Church on May 21, 1925 by Pope Pius XI.

To end, I use St. Peter Canisius' daily morning prayer. It is his secret to live out his holiness. It is a fitting reminder for me and for each one of us. It is a prayer that captures the same spirit of the Principle and Foundation:

“O my Lover of Lovers, I offer You my heart to be as it were a rose in bloom, attracting Your eyes all day long, and delighting Your Divine Heart with its fragrance. I offer it to You too as a chalice from which You may drink Your own sweetness, with all that Your will this day deigns to operate in my soul. More, I offer my heart to You as a fruit for Your banquet of most exquisite savor, which eating You may so take to Yourself that it will feel blissfully conscious of being within You. And I pray that every thought, every deed, every act of my will, this day, may be directed according to the good pleasure of Your most beneficent Will.” SHN



On Mission

Peter F.

Fr. James Berthieu was martyred on the island of Madagascar, off Africa's east coast, in 1897. He was a Frenchman and was born into a farming family. Before he entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus, he had been a diocesan priest for ten years. Before he finished his second year as novice, after his manifestation to his Provincial Superior, he was assigned to the mission in Madagascar which the French held as a colony.

Around the time of the Society's suppression, Fr. James Berthieu might have been tempted to leave his mission area because of unstable circumstances, but he never stopped finding and working on a new mission in a different place, even doing farm work while not able to do pastoral work. He was never short of fidelity and flexibility in whatever mission he was given. He always worked and lived for the greater glory of God.

Eventually, a rebellion took place near his mission station and it threatened the safety of the Catholic community because the local non-Catholic people thought the missionaries wanted to occupy their land and take their resources. Fr. James Berthieu had to organize the people running away from danger. He was able to find a shelter for them in one village, but the persecutors later arrived and arrested him. Father Berthieu told the chief that he would rather die than renounce his faith. That was June 8, 1896. He was beatified by Pope Paul VI on October 17, 1965.



Like many other the martyrs, Fr. James Berthieu was hated by the world and fulfilled what Jesus said in the Gospel today on the Beatitudes (cf. Matthew 5:1-12). Whenever I read stories of martyrs, I always wonder how strong their faith was that they had overcome all their fears – especially the fear of bearing physical pains.

I remember, once last year, Father Paulini mentioned at the beginning of the Mass to pray for the repose of the soul of the father of Fr. Peter Wang, SJ. I was shocked because I thought it was Father Peter who had died. I thought he had died in persecution just like a very active priest in China whose body was found in a river after being missing for many days. Since then the question of whether I am willing to bear any persecution for the sake of the Catholic faith comes back to me time and again. I feel scared every time I imagine that.

Perhaps Fr. James Berthieu lived out the Beatitudes, especially through his experience of being persecuted. It is no doubt that we are called to live out the will of God. The words of Jesus, such as the Beatitudes, must be the will of the Father, too. After our study of the *Spiritual Exercises*, we know that virtues such as humility and poverty are meaningless unless we put them into action for the sake of Jesus. In our formation, we all know we are called to love the Lord and collaborate with his work as our own mission. I believe all martyrs died with an authentic passion and love for the Lord and for His mission.

We Jesuit novices are always told that the community is our mission now and we are each other's formators. As I see it, our community and our formation are both our missions.



There are two questions. First, how can I carry out these missions in concrete actions? Second, do I want to take this mission throughout my life, even to the point of being “martyred?”

Jesus has given us an orientation and anchor in the Beatitudes. I believe that if we live them out, we will be effective formators of each other. Lastly, if you still fear being martyred after following the Beatitudes, don’t worry, Jesus said, you should be happy. SHN



God's Care

Rogelio N.

At a time when the Church is becoming increasingly aware of certain aspects of its missionary work which, enlightened by the Gospel, are leading to new orientations and to activities which integrate human and Christian progress, the personality and work of Fr. Joseph de Anchieta – Apostle of Brazil – cast new light on these efforts and become a source of inspiration and guidance.

As a student at Coimbra University in 1548, Joseph won the affection of his companions with his open and happy nature, but nonetheless suffered from time to time from bouts of depression. In one of these moods, as he knelt before the statue of the Blessed Virgin in Coimbra Cathedral, he was suddenly overcome by a sense of such serenity that he at once made a vow of chastity and decided to devote himself exclusively to the service of God. That was 1551.

Reports from the East of the missionary zeal of Francis Xavier inspired Joseph to follow in his footsteps and become a Jesuit, and so it was that on May 1 the same year – the feast of St. Joseph the Worker – he entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus in Coimbra. By this time, the eleven-year-old Society was flourishing under the *cura* – or care – of Father Ignatius himself.

Two years later – when only nineteen – he was sent to the missions in Brazil, as his doctors prescribed for him a long rest in a better climate than Portugal. During his noviceship, his health had failed and he had suffered a spinal injury when a ladder had fallen on his back.



With six other Jesuits, Joseph landed at Bahia and immediately went to Sao Vicente where he had his first contact with the Tupi Indians living on the outskirts of the settlement. He was adept at languages and within a short time learned Tupi-Guarani, the language commonly spoken among the native population. More than academic, his interest was oriented towards bringing to these people the faith in Jesus Christ and the progress God wants for all nations.

Joseph was in Brazil, as he saw it, for the sake of the simple and humble Indian peoples. He tried to associate with them more and more closely, to share their lives, to understand their ways and customs, their character and way of thinking, their primitive moral and religious concepts. At the same time, he was not blind to their obvious faults and weaknesses, especially their heavy emphasis on revenge and their incredible cruelty.

In 1554, he accompanied his superior to the small village of Piratininga, where they hoped to establish a mission and a school. It was from this mission in Sao Paulo that today's great metropolis developed. Joseph's assignment was to teach Latin to those studying for the priesthood and to teach grammar and to give catechetical instruction to the Tupi and Portuguese children. During the ten years he spent there, he worked unremittingly to better equip the Indians in receiving and responding to the grace of Christ.

In 1563, while still a scholastic, his provincial chose him as his closest collaborator. Together they undertook a very difficult mission to the Tamoyo tribe to negotiate peace between them and the Portuguese. The negotiations lasted longer and Joseph was held hostage for five months. Several times he barely escaped with his life from the savagery of some Indian chiefs who were



cannibals. One by one he won the Tamoyos who were especially impressed by the fact that he could not be tempted to break his vow of chastity, and that he preferred to spend the night in the open, the cold, and the rain, rather than be involved in the drunken and dissolute orgies enacted in the very hut they had housed him in.

It was during this period of loneliness and frustration that Joseph wrote his famous Latin poem in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Since there was no writing paper at hand, he wrote his elegant couplets in sand on the beach and learned them by heart, to be written properly later. The poem had 4,172 lines.

Joseph was ordained priest at 32. He continued to undertake subsequent missions, among which involved the foundation of Sao Sebastiao, the present Rio de Janeiro. He became superior of Jesuit houses, and in 1577, was appointed Provincial of Brazil, an assignment that lasted a decade.

His twenty years as superior marked the peak of his work. Though besieged by heavy cares, he continued to deepen his life of prayer and union with God, to give constant proof of virtue which the Church would later declare heroic. Even as a young religious, Joseph saw and experienced that missionary work would require enormous effort, almost superhuman patience and, above all, limitless Christian love. He lived his life with an operative freedom, characteristic of the Jesuit way of proceeding: open, adaptable, and eager for any mission that was given him. He labored with Christ where the needs were inadequately or not being met at all.

Noticeably, Fr. Joseph de Anchieta's most striking feature was his constant concern to get close and adapt himself as far as possible to the identity of those he sought to lead, and did lead, to Christ. He shared their life fully and came gradually to understand



their mentality and their habits, discerning and appreciating their real qualities.

His intuitions about the methodology of evangelization and his courage in putting them into effect cannot be understood unless one delves deeply into his life and touches the source of his driving force: his unshaken faith and his attachment to Him who became human for love of humanity.

Father Joseph's missionary achievements were clearly due in part to his great natural abilities. However, their deepest roots lay in the charity, goodness, and kindness which could only be adequately explained by his intimate union with God – with Him whose faithfulness and love neither waver nor falter, always increasing and impelling the heart to love as He has loved with the greatest love.

In other words, Father Joseph's care of mission and of the people entrusted to him proceeded from his own personal, intimate experience of being cared for as a son of the Church and the Society, and essentially as a son beloved by the Father.

As a novice discovering more my interiority, I find rest, refuge, and security in God's abiding care, fundamentally expressed in His merciful and faithful love for me. God further incarnates this care in the persons, encounters, conversations, and experiences in the community and with creation.

In the past two to three months of being locked down, it is God's loving care that has sustained me to wake up every morning with fresh hope. It is God's loving care that invites me to choose being present over thinking about the future, noticing gently over judging harshly, appreciating more deliberately over dismissing immediately, trying to be more accepting of revealing parts of



myself over denying they do not or should not exist, and asking for an increase of trust day by day over regressing to self-sufficiency and control.

In a very real sense, I feel that it is the Lord and the Lord alone who has been sustaining me – carrying me in His arms like my father did when I was little, holding me by the hand as my mother usually does when we take a walk together, or teaching me how to pedal and achieve balance as a dear friend patiently did when I first learned to cycle.

Indeed, (to borrow the words attributed to Fr. Pedro Arrupe) what can be more practical than falling in love with and finding security in Him who cares so much? This must have been Fr. Joseph de Anchieta's fundamental experience that had molded his heart and propelled his will to make a generous personal response in caring for Christ's mission and taking gentle, fraternal care of the people entrusted to him – the very people first cared for by Christ. SHN



Heart to Heart

Paulus S.

The eldest son of a royal family, Aloysius Gonzaga was born in Castiglione, Italy on March 9, 1568. Naturally, he was supposed to inherit the family's wealth, and so his future was already determined.

It is said that a person plans his course but God directs his footsteps (cf. Proverbs 16:9). When Aloysius became a knight, he was convinced that the princely life was not for him. He wanted to be a Jesuit because of having a Jesuit confessor. His desire was confirmed on August 15, 1583, while praying before an image of Our Lady. Interiorly, he felt that this was what God was asking of him.

His father was very angry upon knowing Aloysius' desire to be a priest. He then sent Aloysius and his brother on a tour of the courts, hoping that Aloysius would change his desire. But Aloysius never changed his desire. He finally wore out his father, who then granted his consent. He went to Rome and presented himself to Father General Claudio Aquaviva. He entered the novitiate on November 25, 1585.

The maxim that led him to the novitiate remained with him throughout his years: "I am a piece of twisted iron; I entered religion to get twisted straight." Aloysius gave himself totally to the process of becoming a Jesuit. After two years of novitiate formation, he pronounced his vows in 1587.



The following year, there were famine and plagues in Italy. In Rome, Aloysius worked directly with the sick. He carried those he found dying in the streets, took them to a hospital, washed and fed them, and prepared them to receive the sacraments. Once he told his spiritual director, Fr. Robert Bellarmine, “I believe my days are few. I feel such an extraordinary desire to work and serve God... that I cannot believe that God would have given it to me if He did not mean to take me at once.”

As he was serving patients in the hospital, he contracted the disease. The illness grew worse, however, so that he never did recover. Aloysius had been told in prayer that he would die on the octave of *Corpus Christi*. When that day arrived, it was June 21, 1591, Aloysius received *Viaticum* and that night as his eyes were fixed on the crucifix he held in his hands and as he tried to pronounce the name of Jesus, he passed on to eternity. That year, Aloysius Gonzaga was only 23 years old. He is truly a “martyr of charity.”

Reflecting on St. Aloysius Gonzaga’s life, I saw how he lived out what he believed, in spite of the difficulties and dangers that came his way. As Saint Paul described in the First Reading (cf. 2 Corinthians 11: 18, 21-30), Aloysius has undergone and suffered for his beliefs, for his faith and love for Jesus.

We have heard in today’s Gospel: “Where your treasure is, there your heart is also” (Matthew 6:21). Aloysius knew where his heart was, so he convinced his father to let him enter the novitiate and gave himself totally to the process of formation.

The novitiate is called the “school of heart.” Here, all formation, experiments, and courses, among others, are about the heart. It is a process from the heart to the Heart, from the desire to the Desire.



While reviewing my *Spiritual Exercises* journal, I checked the number of times I used the Chinese character *Xin* (which means heart). There were more than 200 times. We know that Chinese characters do not appear alone, but usually in pairs. Of the 200 times, *Sheng Xin* (Sacred Heart) was the most frequent. *Ping Xin* (indifference) and *Dan Xin* (worry) came next.

In the process of the formation of the heart, I am usually worried too much because my heart is twisted too, and clothed with selfishness and vanity. My heart needs to get twisted straight. It is indeed restless until it finds rest in God, like the seed that seeks soil and water to ground itself and grow.

The heart is the center of life. The novitiate has been teaching me how to pause myself, to feel, to see, and to discern: where I am, where my heart is, where or how my desire leads me, what God desires me to be, what God is telling me in a particular situation, where God is leading me to go.

In this journey, my heart encounters His heart. My desire encounters His desire. Or better said, His desire encounters my desire; His heart encounters my heart. And this is my heart – longing, transforming, and burning – to know Him deeply, love Him ardently, and follow Him closely in my daily life. SHN



To Be with Jesus

Robert B.

Let me share brief sketches of each of the five saints we celebrate today. Afterwards, let us look into what unifies all of them as sons of the Society of Jesus.

The first saint is Bernardine Realino who entered the Novitiate in 1564 at 34. He had a law degree and was a magistrate (and even became a mayor of a town in Northern Italy) before he joined the Society of Jesus. In the course of his career, the realities of life, professional disappointments, and private sorrows (like the loss of his much beloved wife) brought him to his spiritual maturity.

In Naples, he met two novices and saw it as a means for realizing his ideals to act on Christian principles. For ten years in Naples and more than 40 in Lecce (also in Italy) where he was one of the founders of a college, he was spiritual adviser to many people. When he reached advanced old age, he could no longer exercise the ordinary ministries of the Society yet still continued to help many people by his prayers and by his advice and shining example.

The second saint is John Francis Regis who lived during the first decades of the 17th century in France. Regis asked to be sent to Canada but was refused, so he stayed in Le Puy (also in France) where he was called “Father of the Poor.” He was seen in the slums, the prisons, and the hospitals. He cared for the sick with his own hands. He found work for the redundant, denounced the black market, and even organized a soup run. He opened a home for street



girls and fearlessly dragged them away from the men who used or exploited them.

Regis was not able to go to Canada which could have made him a fellow martyr of other Jesuit missionaries to North America, but the life he lived was as meaningful, as Father Vitelleschi wrote, “He died like a true son of the Society – busy about his holy work and fighting for souls.” This true son of the Society was made principal patron of the French Jesuits in 1963.

The third saint is Francis Jerome who entered the novitiate in 1670. The following year, he became part of the country mission in Southern Italy and remained there after his studies – until his death in 1716. Jerome spent his life with the slum-dwellers in this area. He loved them with a truly Christ-like love and with lifelong devotion. He shared their lives spent for the most part on the streets.

Apart from the few hours a day he gave to prayer and sleep, he spent all his time with the slum-dwellers in the unsanitary and disreputable streets and squares of the city. His was an unending city mission. But through the ministry of the Word and the sacraments of Penance and of the Eucharist, he brought about a real moral reformation which lasted long after his death.

The fourth saint is Bl. Julian Maunoir who walked the roads of Brittany (which was formerly a northern province of France) preaching missions from parish to parish. He had dreamed of setting off for Canada like his fellow scholastic, Isaac Jogues. But as it happened, his native region was to be his field of action, especially where the Breton language was spoken – until his death in 1683. In his ministry in this area, tens of thousands flocked to hear him and receive the sacraments. Most of them were peasants and fisher folk. Such was the life of the man who, throughout his long apostolic



career, was the principal architect of religious renewal in Brittany. For the Breton people, Maunoir was and remains the “Tad Mad,” the good father.

The fifth and final saint is Bl. Anthony Baldinucci who was born in 1665 of a noble Florentine family in Italy. He was 13 years old when the idea of dedicating himself to God first occurred to him. He entered the novitiate at St. Andrea, Rome in 1681. His dream was to become a missionary like Francis Xavier, and he repeatedly asked to be sent to India, China, or Japan; but his bad health ruled this out, even too a life spent in the schoolroom.

Eventually, Baldinucci was appointed to a mission of teaching catechism to children and the uneducated, the resolution of quarrels, and the help of the sick and imprisoned, typical Jesuit ministries right from the time of Saint Ignatius who had included them in the Society’s *Formula of the Institute*.

He remained in Frascati, Italy (about 10 miles, south of Rome), living the Gospel values, taking the word of God to the smallest hamlets, devoting himself to the poor and the dying, bringing peace to disturbed consciences, reconciling enemies, and putting himself entirely at the disposal of those who needed his help.

What is common among the five Jesuit saints we celebrate today?

I noticed how they all made themselves available for the mission entrusted to them. All of them gave themselves because of Jesus Christ. Julian Maunoir, John Regis, and Anthony Balduniccio wanted to follow the footsteps of their fellow missionaries and be sent outside Europe but circumstances did not allow them. They could have been martyrs like Isaac Jogues or missionaries like Matteo Ricci or Francis Xavier, but as Bro. Gboy Enriquez once



shared with us, it should be us – and not someone else – who respond to God’s personal call to us. Their dispositions to continue following the will of God made their lives a living testament of the Gospel regardless of the circumstances.

I was inspired because what they did are like what we used to do in our apostolate areas, listening to our *nanays* and *tatays*, teaching catechism to the children, ministering to the sick, and praying for other people, among seemingly ordinary things.

Once again, I was reminded that it is not the circumstance that will make us encounter God or do the will of God but our disposition to be with Him, to keep our focus on Jesus Christ. This can happen by doing what we are asked out of love for Christ. Our availability for the mission is truly integral to our Jesuit identity. This availability comes from the desire to be with the Lord, because as I have seen in our Jesuit saints today, they did their mission with Christ-like love.

Yesterday, I shared with one *secundi* brother my realization that their stay in the novitiate was already numbered. In 30 days, our *secundi* would be sent to various places. We will be indeed a dispersed community. We will never know after that day when (or whether) the 24 of us will be complete again.

As we remember these five saints today, I am reminded of our Jesuit characteristic of union of minds and hearts. These five Jesuits did not live together in a community. They existed at different times and spaces. They never even personally met each other. And yet what bonded them together, what united them, was the person of Jesus Christ who called them. This is the same Jesus who has called each of us to be with Him either in the Society of Jesus or somewhere else.



*Hindi na mahalaga kung saan tayo papunta. Ang mahalaga sino ang kasama.*¹ Jesus Christ continues to unite our hearts and minds wherever we are. At the end of our lives, what matters is the response we make to our fundamental call, which is to be with Jesus Christ forever. SHN

¹ It does not matter where we are going. What matters is who is with us.



Single-heartedness

Joseph W.

As we are preparing for the profession of perpetual first vows of the *secundi* and for welcoming the new novices, I would like to take the theme of “preparation” for my sharing. In today’s Gospel, what is Jesus telling the crowds to prepare them to be his disciples?

At first, I was struck by the metaphors Jesus used – the images of a housebuilder and a king. I wondered what these really meant. I could not relate how building a tower and winning a battle connect to renouncing one’s possessions to follow Jesus. It seems that the heart of a housebuilder and of a king is a calculating heart.

The housebuilder and the king calculate the cost, plan out the strategies, and evaluate the chances of victory and completion. They calculate for gain. Everything is transactional and target-oriented. How can I relate these images to the cross?

Reflecting on these more, I realized that the metaphors of housebuilder and king are not about calculating and planning, but about the theme of single-heartedness. In fact, both the housebuilder and the king are very clear about their goals and they put all their efforts to reach them. They know where they are and prepare everything to fulfill what they want. They represent an image of single-heartedness to follow Jesus. Indeed, they are calculating because they are willing to use everything for one sole purpose – Jesus.

Jesus is asking for my single heart to walk with Him.



Today marks one year of my stay in the novitiate. I ask myself, “Do I always have a single heart?” I found myself, more often, like Martha – anxious and worried, distracted by many external things, and disturbed by the tensions of daily living.

But Jesus never feels tired of coming to me. Indeed, Jesus is the one with such a single heart. He is the one who does not care about losing everything. He is the one who goes out to search for the lost and bears His cross and suffering even if He knows that doing so can mean failure. He is the one with the single heart seeking only God’s will. Jesus invites me to put my heart at home with His heart and He will provide the space to carry the tensions in my everyday life.

This single-heartedness of Jesus is also what Father Ignatius imitated in his life. Carlos Valles, SJ, a Spanish Jesuit missionary and writer in India, shared a little habit of Ignatius in one of his books, *The Art of Choosing*, “He [Ignatius] would stop himself bodily in the middle of a corridor and ask himself silently: Where am I going and what for? I’m going to the chapel to pray. I’m going to the dining room to eat. I’m going to meet somebody. Where and what for. Every moment. Every step.” By checking the *where* and the *what for*, Ignatius made every small concrete step towards God – the principle and foundation of his life.

As we are going through the period of transition and proceeding to the coming days of activities, perhaps the question from Father Ignatius would be an anchor for us to direct our hearts, our minds, and our actions to our Lord who is so rich in love and mercy: “Where am I going and what for?” Let us beg for the grace of single-heartedness to serve and love the Lord in the community. SHN



OMG!

Renzo A.

Today we celebrate the memorial of Bls. James Bonnaud, priest and Companions; Joseph Imbert and Jean Nicolas Cordier, priests; Thomas Sitjar, priest and Companions, martyrs of hatred against Christianity and the Catholic Church.

In 1926, Pope Pius XI beatified 191 French priests, all of whom were massacred in the early days of September 1792, during the French Revolution's terrible first Reign of Terror. Of this number, 23 were Jesuits.

In its origins the French Revolution intended to right the wrongs of the people suffered under aristocratic rule, but little by little the leaders of the revolution transformed it into a rabid anti-Catholic persecution. Prior to the revolution, the French liberals had succeeded in 1762 in having the Jesuits suppressed in France; their schools were closed and the Jesuits either went into exile or took up other ministries.

Later in 1773, Pope Clement XIV yielded to the demands of European governments and suppressed the Society throughout the world. The 23 blessed commemorated on September 2 and 3 are sometimes called “ex-Jesuits” since their martyrdom took place during the years of the Society’s suppression; nevertheless, because they always remained Jesuits in desire and intention, Pope Pius XI called them Jesuits in the announcement of their beatification.

One of the 23 Jesuits who was martyred in the early days of September is Bl. James Julius Bonnaud. As a child he was taken to



France where he was educated in a Jesuit school in Paris. He entered the Society in 1758. When the Jesuits were expelled in 1762, he entered the Vincentian seminary, and then he earned degrees in theology and canon law. He authored several scholarly works and in 1789 wrote the archbishop's pastoral letter in which he warned the faithful of an imminent persecution against all institutions: political, civil, and religious.

He then moved to Paris and continued to write against the revolutionaries and their anti-papal Civil Constitution. Because he staunchly defended the rights of the Church and spoke out against the revolution and its ideals, the revolutionaries were especially eager to silence him. Finally arrested sometime after August 10, 1792, he was among those imprisoned in the Carmelite monastery and there he died for Christ on September 2.

Just last week, while eating supper, my fellow *primi* novices, Fr. Shogo, and I were talking about the martyrs of the Church, particularly the Japanese and Filipino martyrs. As I was reflecting on the lives of these martyr-saints like Blessed James and his companions, the term OMG came into my mind. Not “Oh My God,” which these martyrs probably said when they were about to be killed! Kidding aside. O is for “openness,” M for “magnanimity,” and G “generosity.”

Blessed James and the other French Jesuit martyrs had open hearts. They became “ex-Jesuits” because of the suppression, but they remained open to the Spirit of God moving them into a not entirely different direction – no longer in the Society of Jesus, but still as priests, in order for them to serve the Church.

They were magnanimous. Magnanimous is from the Latin *magnus* which means “great” and *animus* meaning “soul.” These



great souls wholeheartedly received God's grace of courage and accepted God's mission for them in spite of the dangers of persecution.

Finally, they were generous missionaries, audacious laborers in the Lord's vineyard. Blessed James and his companions willingly offered their lives for Christ and the Church.

May the lives of Bl. James Bonnaud and his companions inspire us to keep hearts that exclaim OMG when called by the Lord to collaborate in His mission of reconciliation: open, magnanimous, and generous. SHN



Love Incarnate

Martin C.

In Bagong Silang, Caloocan, where several of us Jesuit novices go for apostolate every Sunday, we encounter parishioners who live the simplest of lives and yet give freely and generously of their time and resources to the Church and to others, including ourselves.

We get to know the ministerial and personal stories of parish workers and basic ecclesial community (BEC) leaders who work tirelessly for the sake of the parishioners. We listen to parents and grandparents share their joys and sufferings in keeping and providing for their immediate and extended families. We accompany our three scholars, currently in their first year of college, who persevere in following and honoring their parents and chasing their dreams of a bright future.

In all these, the common denominator is love – which Saint Robert Bellarmine must have perfectly understood and exemplified.

“Eminent scholar,” “greatest theologian of his age,” “intrepid defender of the Church” are some descriptions used by writers and historians to honor St. Robert Bellarmine, and rightfully so. He must also be what the first reading tells us about: “with good reputation,” “able to teach,” and “to take care of the Church of God” (cf. 1 Timothy 3: 1-7). But before he was any of these, Saint Bellarmine was a Jesuit who lived an obedient, chaste, and simple life. In other words, a loving life.



Born in 1542 in the small city of Montepulciano in central Italy, the young Robert professed his vows in 1560 in Rome. Gifted with a remarkably brilliant mind, the 22-year-old Robert preached at the cathedral while still unordained and studying philosophy in Piedmont. In Padua where he studied theology, he preached every Sunday and became one of the city's favorites. In Louvain where he transferred, he gave sermons in Latin to the university community.

After being ordained in 1570, and while serving as a professor at the Jesuit theologate in Louvain, he became familiar with the writings of the Protestant Reformers, especially those of Martin Luther and John Calvin. This led the intelligent Father Bellarmine in 1576 to teach "controversial theology" at the Roman College that tackled the theological disputes dividing the Christian Church and clarified the Roman Church's position. In 1586, Father Bellarmine published the *Controversies*, his most famous work, read by Catholics and Protestants alike.

The succeeding years found Father Bellarmine rising in the hierarchy of the Church. Having served as rector of the Roman College and provincial of the Naples Province, Father Bellarmine was asked by the pope, Clement VIII, to be his theological adviser in 1597 after the death of Francis Toledo, a Jesuit cardinal.

Two years later, the pope named him cardinal though this was not favored by the Jesuit General at that time. Then, in 1602, the Holy Father named Father Bellarmine Archbishop of Capua, a pastoral appointment he took seriously; he preached every Sunday in his cathedral and, during the week, visited one parish under his jurisdiction. In a conclave in 1605, Father Bellarmine was one of the leading candidates, but he prayed, "From the papacy, deliver me, O Lord!" Pope Paul V was elected then.



Adviser to the pope, cardinal, and archbishop though he was, Father Bellarmine remained a Jesuit at heart. He remained true and faithful to his Jesuit training and to his vows. With a heart for the poor, he gave generously to them and lived very simply. With a spirit of availability, he shepherded his flock through regular visits to his parishes and to the various ministries entrusted to him – a manifestation of his chastity. He offered the same availability to God whenever he made his annual eight-day retreat which he eventually extended to an annual thirty-day retreat, where he wrote several spiritual books. When he asked Pope Paul V's permission to retire at 77, he was told that neither the Church nor the pope could do without him. Obedient as always, Father Bellarmine stayed.

What can we learn from St. Robert Bellarmine? Very few of us, if any, will be bishops, cardinals, or advisers to popes, and only a select few can be as intelligent and outstanding as he; but we can be as loving or desiring to love, as the people we meet in Bagong Silang have already shown. Regardless of our circumstances, gifts, and vocational choices, we can learn much from Father Bellarmine's example of simple living, chaste loving, and obedient following. All these flow from and point to love, which, as Saint Ignatius would say, is shown "more by deeds than by words."

Perhaps we can ponder what little acts of love we will do today. How can I love, more by deeds than by words, my fellow novice, a community member, a member of my family, a friend, or a person entrusted to my care?

In this Mass, let us beg the Lord for the grace to incarnate love through our deeds, that we may glorify Him who was Himself Love Incarnate. SHN



Martyrs of Love

Winston H.

Today, we celebrate the feast of Sts. John de Brébeuf and Isaac Jogues, and their companion-martyrs. Do you know how many martyrs there are in the Society of Jesus? Three hundred and twenty-three. My fellow Jesuit novices, we are not only joining the Society of Jesus, we are joining the Society of Martyrs.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us reflect on these questions: “Are you ready to die for your Faith? Are you ready to become a martyr for your Faith?”

The mission of New France or Canada was considered as the hardest of all on account of its climatic conditions and the barbarous habits and character of the natives. Up to 1608, only sailors and fur merchants landed on its shores. They returned to their lands without venturing inside.

Father Brébeuf was a big man, six-foot-three, a giant. He was ordained in 1622, at the age of 29, in France. He was among the first group of Jesuits to leave their homeland in 1625 to serve in the Huronia mission. He spent the next two years learning the native Huron language and their customs and beliefs. He was soon able to write Huron grammar, translated a catechism, and prepared a phrase book.

However, his initial converts were only the dying whom he baptized. The different cultures and languages were a huge barrier for evangelization. On June 7, 1637, the feast of the Holy Trinity,



Father Brébeuf had his first adult baptism, and the convert's name was Pierre Tsiouendaentaha. The missionary had waited for 11 years before his first adult baptism finally took place.

But there also broke a storm. An epidemic of smallpox had spread in the villages of the Hurons that winter, and their sorcerers spread the tale that the Jesuits were to blame. The lie received confirmation on the day of Pierre's baptism.

The Fathers exhibited the pictures of Jesus and Mary and of the Last Judgment. The Hurons thought that statues and pictures were not imaginary representations but living and real beings. So some began to say that the figures represented in the picture of the Last Judgment – people writhing with pain – were those who had died with the plague, and that the dragons and snakes were the animals that the Fathers had used to poison them.

The epidemic lasted all winter and during that time the Jesuits baptized more than a thousand people, all at the point of death. Some Hurons blamed the Jesuits for causing the epidemic in order to make conversions.

When Father Brébeuf started a mission at Ossossane, the council of village chiefs blamed him for the epidemic and decided that he and his missionaries should die. Father Brébeuf moved to the mission headquarters at Sainte-Marie and began work with another tribe, the Neutrals.

In 1640, as the missionary was returning from four months of fruitless effort with a tribe of Neutrals near Niagara Falls, he saw a huge cross in the sky coming from across the lake, the land of the other tribe, Iroquois. When his brothers asked how large the cross had been, he answered, "Large enough for all of us."



At dawn on March 16, 1649, the Iroquois swarmed the palisades and the Hurons who were mostly Christians were taken as prisoners. A renegade Huron informed the Iroquois that they had finally captured Father Brébeuf and that he deserved the choicest torture they could imagine. The Iroquois slaughtered the sick and aged in their cabins and set fire to the village. The missionaries were stripped, had their fingernails torn out and fingers chewed, and were forced to run naked through the winter snow and endure the cold March winds.

While Father Brébeuf still sagged half-alive against a pole, they tore flesh from his thighs and roasted and ate it, while he looked on through his bloody eyes. Then they scalped him; and finally one of them, seeing that he was about to die, drove a knife into his chest, cut out his heart, and roasted it so that the Iroquois could devour it and ingest into themselves the courage of this giant. His torturers began early in the morning. He did not die until four o'clock in the afternoon.

Nine years before his death, Father Brébeuf had made a vow that martyrdom would not elude him. The vow ended with these words:

“And since you have deigned to die for me, I, therefore, my beloved Jesus, offer you from this day forth, in the sentiments of joy which I now feel, my body, my blood, and my life, in order that I may die for you alone. Let me so live that you will grant me this favor of dying thus happily. Therefore, my Savior and my God, I take from your hand the chalice of suffering and I will invoke your name: Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!”



I was deeply moved when I read what he wrote, “I take from your hand the chalice of suffering.” The courage of a martyr!

Let us see another martyr, Isaac Jogues. The personality of Isaac Jogues offers a contrast. He was not a founder or superior of a mission. He was a delicate soul, of an exquisite sensitiveness, easily moved; the soul of a humanist, anxious to express himself well; a man distrustful of himself and his own judgment, of his own initiatives.

Yet grace has made a saint out of him. Conscious of his own weaknesses, he admired his companions and was generous to them. His obedience fired him with a silent courage. His sensitiveness inspired his tenderness towards the wild men who put him to death. Born for great friendship and compassion, he developed a passionate love for Christ, especially the suffering Christ. Like Father Brébeuf, he received a special call to the cross and was granted mystical experiences characterized by the expectation of martyrdom.

The total number of Hurons baptized during their time is estimated to have exceeded 6,000 in a population of about 10,000, which means that the majority had accepted Christianity.

My friends, what can we learn from these saints?

On July 21 of this year, my parents and my best friends sent me to the airport of Kuala Lumpur as I was leaving them for two years to enter the Jesuit novitiate in the Philippines. Before I entered the gate, I hugged them one by one, around 15 of them. And then I walked away... They were waving their hands and crying. It seemed like I was going to die and would never come back again.

And I smiled. I looked strong and relaxed. Yet the moment I turned around, I shed my tears. I was sad, but I was very firm in my



resolve that I did not walk alone. Jesus was walking beside me, putting his hand on my shoulder, and speaking to me tenderly, “Winston, I will take care of your beloved family and friends.

Though I love them so much, I chose to leave them and come here. I believe we all have the same sense of enthusiasm to give our whole lives to God. One-hundred percent! Detachment from the world and total living in the will of God.

Let go, in order to let God – let God become the master of our lives. We do not need to die for Jesus physically. We are not Father Brébeuf or Isaac Jogues or Richie Fernando, but we can die in our daily lives, die in our own will, and live in His divine will.

Let me share one of the prayers of St. Thérèse of Lisieux:

“In order to live in one single act of perfect love, I offer myself as a victim of holocaust to your merciful love, asking you to consume me incessantly, allowing the waves of infinite tenderness shut up within you to overflow into my soul, and that thus I may become a martyr of your love, O my God!

May this martyrdom, after having prepared me to appear before you, finally cause me to die and may my soul take its flight without any delay into the eternal embrace of your merciful love.”

It may be hard for us to become like the martyrs we celebrate today, but every one of us can follow the way of Saint Thérèse, doing little things with great love, becoming martyrs of God’s love, allowing ourselves to be drowned in the love of God. We can offer every beat of our hearts as a holocaust to God. This is our martyrdom. SHN



A Childhood Dream

John D.

Today we celebrate the memorial of two martyrs who are related in part to the Philippine Jesuits. One is a Jesuit blessed, Fr. Diego Luis de Sanvitores, and the other is the second Filipino saint, a fellow Bisaya, a lay volunteer catechist equivalent to today's Jesuit volunteers: Pedro Calungsod.

Bl. Diego Luis de San Vitores was a Spanish Jesuit missionary who founded the first Catholic church on the island of Guam, establishing the Spanish presence in the Marianas Islands. He was born in Burgos, Spain on November 12, 1627. As he was growing up, his parents attempted to persuade him to pursue a military career, but Diego instead chose to pursue his religious interests. In 1640, he entered the Jesuit novitiate and was ordained priest in 1651.

Believing his calling was to serve as a missionary to non-Christians and wanting to emulate the example of St. Francis Xavier, Father Diego requested to be assigned to a mission in the Philippines, which was granted, and then later to the Marianas Islands.

Born on July 21, 1654, Pedro Calungsod's origins have been disputed by several locales in Visayas: Ginatilan, Cebu; Molo, Iloilo; Southern Leyte; and Bohol. All these were under the Cebu diocese during his time.

Pedro received basic education at a Jesuit boarding school, mastering the catechism and learning to communicate in Spanish.



He also likely honed his skills in drawing, painting, singing, acting, and carpentry, as these were necessary in missionary work.

In 1668, Pedro, then around 14, was among the young catechists chosen to accompany Spanish Jesuit missionaries to the present-day Tumon, Guam. He accompanied Father Diego to Guam to catechize the native Chamorros.

Life in the Ladrones was hard. The provisions for the mission like food and other needs did not arrive regularly; the jungles were too thick to cross; the cliffs were very stiff to climb; and the islands were frequently visited by devastating typhoons. Despite all these, the missionaries persevered, and the mission was blessed with many conversions. The missionaries reached out to the *poblaciones* (towns) and baptized over 13,000 natives. *Capillas* (chapels) began to rise at various sites as Catholic instruction became extensive. A school and church were even built and dedicated to St. Ignatius of Loyola in the city of Agadna in the northeast.

The hospitality of the natives however soon turned to hostility as the missionaries started to change traditional Chamorro practices which were incompatible with Christianity. The missionaries objected to their ancestral worship. They also opposed the *urritaos'* (young men) practice of consorting with young unmarried women in public houses outside the sacrament of matrimony. The missionaries considered this as a form of institutionalized prostitution.

In 1672, Pedro (by then, around 17 years old) and Father Diego (the superior of the mission) came to a village to baptize a newly born baby girl. They had to ask Matapang, the child's father,



for his permission, but he angrily refused the baptism. Matapang used to be a Christian and a friend of the missionaries.

Determined to kill the missionaries, Matapang went away and convinced another villager, named Hirao, to join him. Meanwhile, during that brief absence of Matapang from his hut, Father Diego and Pedro took the chance of baptizing the infant, with the consent of the Christian mother.

When Matapang learned of the baptism, he became even more furious. He violently hurled spears first at Pedro. The lad skirted the darting spears with remarkable dexterity. The witnesses said that Pedro had all the chances to escape because he was very agile, but he did not want to leave Father Diego alone. Those who knew Pedro personally believed that, because he was a very valiant boy, he would have defeated his fierce aggressors and would have freed both himself and Father Diego if only he had some weapons, but Father Diego never allowed his companions to carry arms.

Finally, Pedro got hit in the chest with a spear and fell to the ground. Hirao immediately charged towards him and finished him off with a cutlass blow to the head. Father Diego gave Pedro the sacramental absolution. After that, the assassins also killed Father Diego.

Matapang took the crucifix of Father Diego and pounded it with a stone while blaspheming God. Then, both assassins denuded the bodies of Pedro and Father Diego, dragged them to the edge of the shore, tied large stones to their feet, brought them to sea, and threw them into the deep. The remains of the martyrs were never to be found.

When the companion-missionaries of Pedro learned of his death, they exclaimed, "Fortunate youth! How well rewarded his



four years of persevering service to God in the difficult mission are: he has become the precursor of our superior, Padre Diego, in Heaven!”

They remembered Pedro to be a boy of very good disposition, a virtuous catechist, a faithful assistant, and a good Catholic whose perseverance in the Faith even to the point of martyrdom proved him to be a good soldier of Christ.

Regarding Pedro Calungsod’s charitable works and virtuous deeds, St. John Paul II declared during the beatification, “If anyone declares himself for me in the presence of men, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven” (Matthew 10:32). From his childhood, Pedro had declared himself unwaveringly for Christ and responded generously to his call.

Young people today can draw encouragement and strength from the example of Pedro, whose love of Jesus inspired him to devote his teenage years to teaching the Faith as a lay catechist.

During the homily on the day of his canonization, when Pedro Calungsod was the only one without a first class relic (for his body was forever lost at sea; only a second class relic, the cutlass used to hack his head and neck was found), Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI said, “May the example and courageous witness of Pedro Calungsod inspire the dear people of the Philippines to announce the Kingdom bravely and to win souls for God!”

Reading the lives of these two martyrs, I cannot help but be edified by their short but fulfilling lives. It was in fact a childhood dream of mine to be a missionary. It still is, and by God’s grace, I pray it will come to fruition. I initially thought it noble to bring with me Christ and share Him with those who have not heard the



Gospel. However, I am reminded that Christ comes ahead of me to unchartered lands. It is He who brings me to where He needs me – and all of us – to be.

With the increased interculturality promulgated by the Second Vatican Council, as well as the recent synods like the Amazon Synod, the present-day Church is challenged to be true to Christ's commissioning of His disciples (yes, including each of us here today) to go out to the ends of the world and spread the Gospel.

Last Sunday was World Mission Sunday. May we always remember in our prayers the missionaries all over the world, men and women who work tirelessly for God's kingdom. We pray that God send more workers to the harvest, and that we, through and by the Holy Spirit, be sustained in faith, hope, and love as Christ's collaborators in the vineyard. SHN



To Keep before Our Eyes God

Martin C.

From a prayerful reading of the life of Bl. Dominic Collins, an Irish Jesuit Brother and martyr, I sensed three things the Lord is inviting me to grow in: discernment, obedience, and faithfulness.

First, discernment.

From a well-established family, Dominic Collins was born about 1566 in Youghal town in Cork County, Ireland. At that time, Irish Catholics suffered persecution under Queen Elizabeth I. Anglicanism was established as the official religion of England and Ireland in 1560. Because only a few careers were open to young Catholic men, 20-year-old Collins ventured to France, and there enlisted in the army where he spent nine successful years of military career in the cause of the Catholic League. After his time with the French military, he then served the Spanish navy.

In Lent of 1598 in La Coruña, Spain, Collins had a providential encounter with the Irish Jesuit Father Thomas White who had come to hear the confessions of his fellow citizens. Dominic told the priest what seemed to stir in his heart – a desire to do something more, because neither the world nor soldiering interested him any longer.

In the First Reading (cf. Philippians 1:1-11), we hear Saint Paul addressing and praying for the people of Philippi, that their “love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value...”



“To discern what is of value.” Dominic Collins’ apparent loss or decrease in interest in the military life was accompanied by an increase in perception that eventually led him to “discern what is of [true] value” in his life. Perhaps, many of us present here, too, like Dominic Collins, experienced a decrease in interest and energy for the things of the world, and an increase in perception and desire for something more, something we know not what, something we can only discover if we begin – and dare – to ask, search, and “discern what is of [true] value” in this life.

Dominic Collins told Father White of wanting to become a Jesuit and so the latter introduced him to the superiors in the area, which brings me to the second point – obedience.

Obedience, as we know, comes from the Latin *oboedire* which means, “to listen.” Collins’ following of the promptings of the Spirit, incarnated in Father White’s counsel was an act of obedience, that is, an act of listening. In 1598, Collins entered the Jesuit novitiate in Santiago de Compostela as a brother. Apart from tending to the sick who were struck by a plague in Santiago, little is known about Collins’ life as a novice; we can only surmise that those two years of novitiate, as in our case here, were marked by much listening, much trusting, and, therefore, much obeying his Jesuit formators and superiors. By trusting in his superiors, Collins must have also learned to trust in the very One whom his superiors represented – God.

St. Ignatius of Loyola in the *Constitutions* wrote, “It is very helpful for making progress and highly necessary that all devote themselves to complete obedience, recognizing the superior, whoever he is, as being in the place of Christ our Lord and



maintaining interior reverence and love for him” ([284]). This Dominic Collins must have interiorized, obeying not simply his superiors, but God Himself.

Collins pronounced his first vows in 1601. His vow of obedience was put to the test very early and unexpectedly when after seven months, he was assigned as companion and assistant to Fr. James Archer who was to set sail as chaplain of the Spanish expedition to assist the Catholics in Ireland persecuted under the English Crown. They departed for Ireland in September 1601 and after several encounters with the English found refuge at Dunboy Castle where Collins tended to those wounded in battle. Later on, the English army attacked the castle.

Collins was taken prisoner in his home county of Cork, where he was told his life would be spared if he volunteered information about Catholics and undertook some service to merit the queen’s favor. He refused. When offered an honorable position in the military or Protestant ecclesiastical promotion, he again refused. Even when his family and relatives came to beg him to renounce his faith and suggested he could remain a Catholic in heart while outwardly conforming to the new Anglican religion to save his life and to spare the family from humiliation, he refused still.

His every renunciation was a declaration of his faithfulness to God, the third and final point. This faithfulness could only come from a deep personal love for Christ.

In July 1602, Collins was interrogated and condemned to death by hanging. Wearing his Jesuit cassock, he cheerfully climbed the ladder, and at the top, exclaimed that he had come to Ireland to preach the Catholic Faith. To an English captain, he said he would most willingly undergo not one but a thousand such deaths for the same cause.



The beginning paragraph of the *Formula of the Institute* of the Society of Jesus is a fitting description of the life and martyrdom of Dominic Collins who was a soldier-of-the-world turned soldier-of-God:

“Whoever wishes to serve as a soldier of God beneath the banner of the cross in our Society... and to serve the Lord alone and the Church... should, after a solemn vow of perpetual chastity, poverty, and obedience... strive especially for the defense and propagation of the faith by the ministry of the word... and works of charity... he should further take care, as long as he lives, first of all to keep before his eyes God... and then let him strive with all his effort to achieve this end set before him by God.”

Dominic Collins from the moment he committed his life to the Lord until the moment he surrendered it kept before his eyes God. In this Mass, let us beg for the grace to discern, to obey, and to be faithful; and to be able to do these, for the grace of a deep personal love for Christ, in order that we may keep him, always, before our eyes. SHN



Coming, Lord!

Francesco L.

Alphonsus Rodríguez, was born in Segovia, Spain, on July 25, 1533. His father was a successful wool and cloth merchant and the family was financially established. At about age 27, he married Maria Suárez and the young couple had three children, Gaspar, Alphonsus, and Maria. Unfortunately, their happy life together did not last long. In quick succession, his son Gaspar died, then his daughter Maria. Afterwards, his wife, and finally his youngest and dearest son, Alphonsus. Sadly, his cloth business also closed down due to heavy taxes.

Alphonsus suffered deep anguish and despair; for a time, he viewed himself and his life empty and meaningless. Yet, in his experience of darkness, still came in him questioning and deep desire to seek for meaning and purpose; and God's grace enlightened him to seek for spiritual direction among the Jesuits. It grew in him that his life's meaning and purpose was "in, with, and for" God, to love and be loved by God, and to do God's will. Gradually, a desire to give himself to God as a Jesuit also grew.

Twice he asked if he could enter the Jesuits, yet also twice he was met with refusal because of his age and health. However, the provincial back then overruled the examiners' decision and finally admitted Alphonsus, with the remark, "if Alphonsus were not fitted to be a priest or a brother in the Society of Jesus, he could, nevertheless, enter to become a saint"; and so Alphonsus entered in the year 1571, at age 37, and after two years, took his first vows as a Jesuit brother.



From then on, he was assigned various roles in different colleges, until in 1579 when he was assigned to what was to be his life-long assignment in a college in Majorca. He took on the humble task as a doorkeeper, but this he did with sincerest and utmost passion and love. Each time the bell rang, he looked at the door and imagined that it was Jesus waiting and standing outside. On his way to the door, he would utter, “I’m coming, Lord! I’m coming, Lord!” Every visitor who came was revered, and greeted with the same joyful, kind, and loving smile with which Brother Alphonsus would have revered and greeted his beloved God.

He was well-loved by many – various students, for example, would seek advice, encouragement, and prayers from him. One of the students who was inspired by him and whom he eventually mentored was St. Peter Claver, the great Jesuit missionary who served the slaves from Africa in Cartagena, Columbia. Perhaps Claver was influenced by the humility of Brother Alphonsus so much that the former joyfully and wholeheartedly accepted being called the “slave of the slaves.”

In 1615, Brother Alphonsus was confined to his bed; and when it became clear that he was about to die, the Jesuit community gathered in his room. At the conclusion of their prayers, Brother Alphonsus looked at all of them with much love and reverence, then lowered his eyes to the crucifix that he was holding, kissed it, and said, “Jesus!” With the name of his very meaning and purpose on his lips, Brother Alphonsus went to God, on this day in 1617.

In knowing more about Brother Alphonsus, I could not help but ask myself, “What is his secret? What is the inspiration behind his conversion to selflessness and love? What interior movements has he experienced that led him to the profound humility to revere others as he would revere God?”



In Father Gavina's write-up about Brother Alphonsus, it was said our saint today showed the way to holiness through knowledge of self and knowledge of God. In fact, Brother Alphonsus, in his writings, would repeat the phrase of Saint Augustine, "Lord, let me know Thee; let me know myself."

The humble knowledge and acceptance of himself, including his brokenness, giftedness, capacities, and limitations – his very humanness – all allow for the humility to let the grace of God work in him, enabling him to strive to overcome whatever put him away from God. The acknowledgement of the reality of his humanness lies, according to Father Gavina, at the center of Brother Alphonsus' spirituality.

I could only imagine Brother Alphonsus praying in front of his Creator, expressing and being as real as he could before God, sharing with great trust and security his fears, anger, disappointments, and all the other things that we would perhaps still find embarrassing to admit. His were simple prayers that allowed him to revere God by being unguarded and bare before Him. It was as simple as honestly saying to the Lord, "Lord, I am in despair. I am annoyed, angry, jealous, resentful, bitter, doubtful... Lord, please help me."

Brian Gallagher once said the more Brother Alphonsus allowed himself to be real before God, the more God Himself became real to him: more tangible, though also more awesome, more loving, and certainly, more challenging. This deep-felt sense and understanding of God's realness made him see that the Lord reveres, loves, and accepts him as he is, with all his dark places and all his unworthiness.



When we ourselves are convinced (or when we simply desire and choose to be convinced) of this unconditional love God has for us, we begin to see more clearly and respond to things more lovingly and freely.

Like Brother Alphonsus to the students, his brother Jesuits, and to anyone he met, may we begin to revere and love others as they are and not so much as what we expect them to be. May we love and accept others with the certainty that God loves and accepts them as they are, just as God accepts each one of us, too.

Like Brother Alphonsus, may we begin to be profoundly grateful, secure, and content with God's love and grace, so that our desires for worldly power, riches, and successes, become relativized.

And like Brother Alphonsus, may we begin to see that even in the seeming smallness, simplicity, and mundanity of our daily lives and our daily tasks, there can always be an opportunity to jump out of our comforts, go running with much eagerness, availability, and willingness, and pronounce with much conviction, reverence, and love, "I am coming Lord! I am coming!" SHN



To Be Moved

Joseph Z.

Yesterday, when I was outside the parlor reflecting on what to share with you today, I was disturbed by some very slight noise. When I opened my eyes, I saw the sheep standing still at my left, looking at me intently. It seemed they were waiting for something to happen. I felt confused and curious about what they were doing. And I thought maybe I should say hello to them. But before I could say anything, I realized that I was reflecting.

This realization brought me back to close my eyes as if the sheep had disappeared. Yet the image of those sheep kept coming up in my mind. I had to force myself to be more focused on my reflection. Suddenly, I heard noise rising from behind me. I turned my eyes and saw the sheep moving from my left side to my right through the stairs. Then I knew they were waiting for me to move so that they could pass by.

I don't know why, but as I watched them passing by with their heads bowed down, I felt sad. This sadness later brought up many faces of people I had hurt before because of my coldness and ignorance of their needs.

Many times, I only focused on my own needs and seldom allowed myself to be influenced by others. I rarely allowed myself to care for other people's needs and feelings.

Jesus reminds me that what I do to my least brothers is what I do to Him. Maybe I should interpret His words directly – how I relate with people is possibly the same way I relate with Him. I think



this really makes sense why, now, I am having difficulties in communicating with God. Maybe, the key for me to make progress in terms of my relationship with God is to allow myself to be influenced by others.

Fr. Rupert Mayer is a model in this area. He dedicated his whole life to his people and country. He sheltered people when they were homeless; he shared their fear and helplessness during the war; and he involved himself with the discussions on the direction of his country, particularly holding his stance against Adolf Hitler. He kept allowing himself to be moved by the people he was with and the environments he was in.

No less than God Himself exemplifies this. He allows Himself to be affected by this broken world, and he has sent His only-begotten Son. Jesus, too, continually to let Himself be influenced by His disciples and friends, as expressed in his feelings of anger, pity, worry, grief, happiness, and sadness, among many others.

God continues to labor in the world, for us, for me. His being eternally moved by the world is the hope of our salvation, my salvation. I beg for the grace to be moved, and so to labor with God who is always moved and moving, out of deep love.

I end my sharing with some words from John Nash as we heard in the movie, *A Beautiful Mind*. He says,

“I always believe in logics and numbers, in the equations and logics that lead to reason. But after a lifetime of such pursuits, I ask, what truly is logic, what decides reason. My quest has taken me through the physical, the delusional, and back. And I have made the most important discovery of my career. The most important discovery of my life.



It is only in the mysterious equations of love that any logical reasons can be found.”

Yes, God created the world, creates the world, is creating the world in love. Love is the basic element of His work. Only in Love do we find reasons. Only in Love do we dare to love, dare to put ourselves at risk of being influenced and being changed. SHN



Kostka's Passion

Stanislaus L.

After reading the life of St. Stanislaus Kostka, there was one word that came to my mind: PASSION. This word appeared in my prayers many times these days.

Because of passion, Peter and Andrew left their nets and followed Jesus at once. Because of passion, Levi left everything behind and followed Jesus. Because of passion, the child Jesus stayed in Jerusalem for three days without his parents, trusting greatly in His heavenly Father. Because of passion, Jesus died on the cross once and for all. Because of passion, St. Stanislaus Kostka left his family to be a Jesuit.

What makes them passionate? What makes me passionate? I strongly believe it is one's intimate and personal relationship with God. It is one's ever-present and ever-growing longing for truth and for God.

In our faith sharing last Tuesday, I shared how difficult it was to experience losing my motivation and passion. After several years of living in community as a religious, I felt my passion was weakening, mostly because of what I consider as daily and petty things. I shared how passionate I was when I was younger and how this had waned as years went on.

As I continued reading the life of our saint today, I asked myself, "How can I be passionate for someone if I am not really close to him/her? How can I be passionate for God if I am not really close to God?"



In his article explaining Part VI of the Jesuit *Constitutions*, Fr. Joseph Conwell, SJ describes an angel as one who stands always in contemplation before the throne of God and is ready to go anywhere God may wish to send him. I think this is what passion is all about. This is the passion of St. Stanislaus Kostka. He constantly contemplated before the throne of God and was ever ready to do God's will. No wonder his novice master described him as an angel.

I remember a Chinese saying that goes, "Never forget your primordial heart, so that you may reach your destination." I pray that the Lord lead me always in my journey and keep me close to Him every day. SHN



Perfect Resignation

Rogelio N.

Between his life at the college of Saragossa, where St. Joseph Pignatelli was ordained a priest in 1762, and the humble dwelling in which he retired with a few remaining Jesuits at Rome, stretched more than 40 years of exile and wandering. Yet, these arduous years testify to how our saint today had profoundly understood and lived out what it meant to trust in the Lord alone.

In the words of Pope Pius XI who beatified him, “[Father] Pignatelli stood like a rock, unmoved by the tempests of earth and air and water... He stood ever firm and erect in the face of all the perils, persecutions, and tempests that assailed him, with eyes and heart raised aloft and always turned to God, like those pilots who keep their direction ever before them, and remain calm, where others are agitated and perturbed.”

St. Joseph Pignatelli’s tribulations began at Saragossa in 1767 when its mayor, given a royal decree, went to the Jesuit college and arrested all the members of the community. [By that time, the Jesuits had already been expelled from Portugal (1759) and France (1764).] Father Pignatelli was asked by the Rector to act in his stead. Given his family name from a noble parentage, Father Pignatelli did his utmost to secure fair treatment for his religious brethren, but his pleadings were in vain. By the end of April that year, more than 500 Jesuits had been put on board 13 cargo ships, but without a definite destination. After years of wandering, they were left on their own: thinned, foot-sore, travel-stained, and worn-out.



Those who were spared were unanimous in their praise of Father Pignatelli. He was not the only link, but one of the strongest. Attached to the poor and humble Christ, he renounced any opportunity to preserve himself, which would separate him from his brother-Jesuits and the Society. Before going into exile, he was told that, if he wished, he could stay with his relatives. In fact, official orders were sent from Madrid to San Bonifacio (where he was ministering to exiled Jesuits) that he should be given suitable lodgings and treated in a manner befitting his rank. These he refused, as well as the idea of being transferred to another religious order. In a letter to his brother who was Spanish Ambassador in Paris at the time, he said, “I will never leave the Society; rather am I ready to lay down my life a hundred times.”

Two years later in 1773, a far more crushing blow fell when the Society was suppressed all over the world. Broken-hearted as he was and plunged into the depths of sorrow, Father Pignatelli still had the courage to say to his brother-Jesuits, “God foresaw from all eternity the calamities that have fallen upon us. In His infinite wisdom and paternal solicitude, He has Himself ordained everyone of the sufferings which are ours. What then can we do or say, but show that we are His children? There is no nobler act of self-sacrifice than adoringly to submit to the plans of God’s providence, and humbly repeat the prayer, *Fiat voluntas tua*, ‘Thy will be done!’”

For the next 24 years, Father Pignatelli resided as a secularized Jesuit, allowed to say Mass in private, but forbidden to preach or hear confessions, treated as a dangerous man, and branded with disgrace. In this period of darkness, however, God’s light continued to shine as Catherine the Great of Russia had allowed the Jesuits to continue to exist in her territories. Furthermore, in 1793, a house of the Society was opened in the



estate of Parma, following the duke's wish to have Jesuits in his territory again. Father Pignatelli associated himself with that house and in 1797, at the age of 60, renewed his solemn vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to his Creator and Lord.

Father Pignatelli's last days were storm-swept as the greater part of his life had been. When the French soldiers occupied Rome, once more the Jesuits were in danger of being sent into exile, and it was mainly due to the old Father's endeavors that this calamity was averted. His final exertions on behalf of his brothers sapped the remnant of his enfeebled strength. He died in 1811, unable to witness the restoration of the Society in 1814.

My colloquies with Father Pignatelli revealed how much he loved the Society of Jesus. His was the love and affection a son would have toward his mother. And when the Society was suppressed, Father Pignatelli's grief was comparable to that of a son who lost his beloved mother who had been there for him since he was conceived. This intimate, inseparable bond between him and the Society sustained him to console his brothers and exert every effort to care for them.

Without question, at the core of Father Pignatelli's love for the Society and his brother-Jesuits was his love for Jesus Christ. In the words of Fr. Pedro Arrupe (who spoke of three loves – the Society, the Church, and Christ – in his golden anniversary homily in 1977), “The third love is Jesus Christ... Christ who comes to meet me on so many occasions of joy and of sorrow, as a close friend... Christ who said to St. Ignatius of Loyola at La Storta, ‘I wish you to serve us.’ Without this love for Christ, the Society would no longer be the one that Saint Ignatius founded, the Society of Jesus.”



At the beginning of this month, I was rocked by the tempest that was super-typhoon Rolly, and then Ulysses, which both hit my hometown severely, including my family. These storms were over, but I felt they were just beginning to ravage my heart. Father Pignatelli's "Prayer of Perfect Resignation," (which I often recited at the beginning of the day), of loving and trusting surrender to the Lord, has become harder for me to recite and exercise. And yet, as I am being taught by the Lord to exercise it day by day, I know it is becoming more real and honest and true.

In this laborious process, the Society has been present with me: guiding and warning, supporting and challenging, caring and trusting. I am reminded that the labor ultimately belongs to God on whom I can cast all my worries and cares.

Father Pignatelli's intimate knowledge of Jesus and His Society must have given him the surest hope that the Society would be restored. He trusted in the Lord Jesus alone, for it is only through Him, Saint Ignatius writes in the Jesuit *Constitutions* [812], the Society can be preserved and increased.

The years of suppression certainly purified Father Pignatelli's love for Jesus and His Society. In like manner, my experiences of limit situations thus far in this initial stage of formation constitute a fertile ground for my interior growth and transformation, if only I will allow the Lord to labor in my life.

In the seeming ordinariness of every day, definitely far from the historic experiences of our saint today, the Lord meets me with heartfelt excitement and joy, with much patience, tenderness, and solicitude, with newness and love beyond compare. May I grow in the truth that God is faithful, and that He is enough for me. SHN



A Love that Frees

James Ryan S.

Today we commemorate the feast of three saints: Roque Gonzalez, Alonso Rodriguez, and Juan del Castillo. They are priests of the Society of Jesus, missionaries to the indigenous peoples of South America, and martyrs who gave their whole lives for Christ's mission.

Let us begin with Gonzalez. He was born in 1576, in the city of Asuncion, capital of Paraguay, a country in South America. He was of Spanish ancestry. Before he became a Jesuit, he was ordained as a diocesan priest in 1599. He was only 23.

He immediately became active in the Church's mission to protect the local natives near Asuncion, the Guarani Indians, from being further exploited for slavery by the Spanish settlers, the *encomiendas*. His mission was to evangelize the Guarani in their own tongue, and to encourage them to transfer to a type of sanctuary, called a reduction, a just and secure governance system organized by the Church. His ministry was so successful that the new local bishop saw so much in Gonzalez that he wanted the missionary to rise to the ecclesiastical rank.

However, he found his heart among the locals, and thereby as an escape from ecclesiastical dignities, he then begged to leave so as to enter the Society of Jesus in 1609 at the age of 33. So evident was his love for the natives that after his long retreat he was immediately sent on a risky mission. He was to accompany a Jesuit Father, Vincenzo Griffi, to immerse themselves and pacify another



tribe, the Guaycuru. The Guaycuru were aggressive warriors who ravaged Indians and Spaniards alike. The government proposed to exterminate them. The Church, however, through the Jesuit Provincial suggested for them a more Christ-like way. The mission was now in the hands of Father Griffi and the saint. That was then the beginning of his mission which was to direct and establish reductions, to secure governance systems, to liberate the natives from oppression both from external forces imposed by the Spaniards, and by interior forces in their own communities imposed by their powerful and abusive witch doctors.

The reduction entailed both spiritual and social development. The saint immersed his presence as being Christ among the natives, and recognizing Christ who were in the natives. As a community, they lived and ate together, allowing him thereby to win the hearts of the locals. While nourishing them spiritually through Sacraments, he also taught them functional skills of plowing, sowing, and harvesting of crops, masonry to build chapels, and the art of making sacred images. In 1611, just after he finished his novitiate, Father Gonzalez was catapulted to become the director of the reduction of Saint Ignatius, which was established as the first and the model among all reductions.

His love for the natives always burned in him as he continued to look for other natives who were still being oppressed. Such was his desire that by 1615 he started to found reductions, one after another, located in what is today southern Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and northeastern Argentina – all over South America.

It was November 1, 1628 in Caaro when the saint was entering the area of a powerful native chief and sorcerer, Nezu, who saw the liberation of the locals as a threat to his reign. Intent on killing the saint and his fellow missionaries, he initially feigned



acceptance and welcome, then planned to murder them at the opportune moment. There on the morning of November 15, just after celebrating Mass, at the moment where Gonzalez manually helped the locals set up the belfry of the chapel, Nezu's henchmen rushed at him and split his skull with an axe and mangled his head and face, blow after blow.

The other two Jesuit saints, Alonso Rodriguez and Juan del Castillo, were also on the same mission and were both killed by the same henchmen. They were both born in Spain: Rodriguez in 1598, del Castillo two years earlier. Both of them entered the Jesuit novitiate as young men in 1614.

After the novitiate, both were assigned to the mission in South America where they spent the rest of their earthly lives. Rodriguez was ordained in 1624 at the age of 26, while del Castillo a year later at the age of 29. After their ordinations, both were assigned to different reductions, all founded by Gonzalez. Rodriguez went to a reduction along the Paraguay River where he then met Gonzalez in 1628, accompanying him to Caaro and their eventual death. Rodriguez was only 30.

Del Castillo, on the other hand, co-founded a reduction in 1628, just near the area where the first two saints were killed. As this was within the area of Nezu, del Castillo was then targeted as the next victim. The henchmen found him on November 17 praying the breviary. They dragged him to the woods, where they beat him to death. He was only 32. The three saints were canonized by Pope St. John Paul II in 1988.

Encountering these saints through my readings, I could not help but notice their availability to be sent on such missions. Missions that involved unchartered territories and the void of



civilized comforts. Missions that involved people with different languages, norms, and worldviews; people who could reject, hurt, and kill them. Yet, these people were not just spiritually enslaved but were also socially oppressed. The love of Christ for these natives could not stop itself from being expressed through these saintly people, who had in them at their core their own personal love for our Lord.

It then begs me to question, “Do I have that level of love for our Lord? Am I willing and available to give myself for others unconditionally?”

I have my answer by looking at my own life experiences in the past and recently here in the novitiate. I am reminded of my own interior enslavement which expresses itself in my interior anguishes over personal discomforts, in my punitive criticisms over the shortcomings of others and especially of myself, and in my many impure motivations when doing all sorts of actions, even spiritual ones. Yet, there is also a voice inside me desiring to reach out, to help, and to be with the “poor” who are within and around all of us amidst all the struggles we are facing: the pandemic, economic starvation, massive typhoons that I can only hear of and not even see and experience.

There is this interior tension of being already there, my own desires, but obviously not there yet, my own limitations and human weaknesses. In what way can I live with such tension but still look at the example of today’s saints, that is, their almost unknown and humble years of formation? For what else is the formation process but a giving of oneself, entrusting of one’s whole being to Christ through the incarnated expression of formation structures and through the formators themselves?



Here, I am being reminded and being invited by Christ that formation is indeed a mission in itself, a mission of Christ liberating me from everything that is hindering me from wholly giving myself to Him. A mission which demands of me to surrender and trust fully in His love and grace. SHN



Viva Cristo Rey!

Samuel G.

On August 10, 1911, Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez entered the Jesuit novitiate and after two years pronounced his vows. He was ordained a priest 14 years later.

During those years, the political atmosphere in Mexico was rapidly changing, with attacks against the Catholic Church and the clergy. In 1926, the Catholic Church there experienced terrible persecution. The government suppressed all public worship and closed the churches. Every Catholic priest was now a hunted criminal.

However, Father Pro continued his priestly duties in secret; he established stations in different parts of Mexico City and visited them once a week to preach, hear confessions, celebrate Mass, and distribute Communion.

As I contemplated his daily life in this dark and difficult time, I was very inspired and moved by his courage and service to the Church. He was very prudent in his actions, experienced hunger many times, hid himself in a corner every now and then, prayed to God for a long time at night, and cried for the suffering Church and the people. At the same time, he brought hope and peace to the faithful Mexicans, strengthening them in their fear and helplessness.

Reflecting on all these actions of Father Pro led me to the image of “laboring with Christ.” *Spiritual Exercises* (SpEx) 95 writes, “...Whoever wishes to come with me must labor with me.” Father Pro came and labored with Christ. He did not escape his



responsibility but faithfully responded to the invitation of Christ in that dark time, when the Church was persecuted and Christ was suffering.

His love for Christ made him willingly labor with Him and accompany the suffering Church. As Saint Paul said in his letter to the Romans, “What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us” (Rom 8:35,37-38).

Saint Paul’s words expressed what Father Pro experienced. Indeed, the love of Christ became his source of strength and hope. As I sensed the spirit behind Father Pro, I came to realize that this is also the desire I hold in following Christ. This is the motivation that drives me to move forward and to be closer to Him.

As the situation was worsening, Father Pro’s superior considered it was better to order Father Pro to go into hiding. As a good Jesuit, he obeyed. At the same time, he sincerely represented his cause to his provincial and expressed his desire to accompany the people in need.

Father Pro knew many priests had retreated out of fear or obedience. Yet, true to his being a son of Ignatius, he wanted to do a little bit more. He wanted to be with the people who were in dire need of the help of the Church. The provincial was so impressed by his letter that he gave Father Pro the permission to resume his activity, but cautioned him to do so with utmost prudence.

For me, this is a lesson on obedience and manifestation. Obedience is not only about listening and obeying. It is also about letting the superior know me, including my desires, talents, thoughts, feelings, strengths, and weaknesses, so that the superior



has more data for discernment and decision-making. This is the importance of manifestation of conscience, which requires openness and transparency. Perhaps this is the disposition I should keep in me in terms of my relationship with my superiors in the Society of Jesus.

Constitutions [627] allows a Jesuit to “represent the motions or thoughts that occur to him contrary to an order received, meanwhile submitting his entire judgment and will to the judgment and will of his superior, who is in the place of Christ our Lord.”

Father Pro obeyed first, and then he also represented what was in his heart. I can imagine if his provincial had not given him the permission, he would have still obeyed the order. And yet, if he had not expressed himself, all of these things would not have happened as they did.

Father Pro carried on his clandestine priestly work until he was found out and arrested on November 18, 1927. President Elías Calles wanted to teach the Church a definitive lesson and make an example of Father Pro. He decided on the execution set just five days after the innocent priest’s arrest.

Reflecting on this point, I really felt Father Pro was innocent. This execution was so similar to the execution of Jesus! In Mark 15, Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas to them and, after he had Jesus scourged, handed him over to be crucified. Here, the government persecuted the Church and just wanted to make an example of Father Pro. Both Jesus and Father Pro did nothing wrong but unfortunately became the victims of political plots.

Father Pro followed and served his Master Jesus Christ and even experienced the same persecution. How could his Master Jesus forget him in His glory? SpEx 95 continues, “so that through



following me in the pain he or she may follow me also in the glory.” This is also my hope when I am in pain for the sake of following Jesus. Jesus is also my strength, especially when I am weak.

When Father Pro saw the rifles pointing at him, his face turned into a smile for he knew that God was accepting his sacrifice. He stretched out his arms in the form of a cross and reverently said: “*Viva Cristo Rey!*” (Long live Christ the King!) SHN



Extraordinarily Ordinary

Mark W.

One of the statues of two young Jesuit saints in front of the entrance of this Main Chapel is St. John Berchmans. He was born in Diest, Belgium on March 13, 1599. In his early years, he imbibed the piety that pervaded his parents' home. At nine, he attended the local school and lived in the rectory of the parish with several other boys interested in the priesthood. The pastor instructed them in prayer and in serving Mass, and helped with their studies.

In 1612, John went to Mechlin to serve in the household of Canon Froymont while attending the cathedral school there. It was difficult to work after a full day in class, but since he wanted to be a priest, he was willing to embrace the means no matter how toilsome they were.

In 1615, when the Society of Jesus opened its college in Mechlin, John transferred there, met the Jesuits, and chose to join them rather than pursue the diocesan priesthood. His decision was a disappointment to his father, since the family needed the help he could give them as a diocesan priest. Nevertheless, his father consented, and John entered the Jesuit novitiate in Mechlin on September 24, 1616.

As a novice, he performed all the prescribed duties with joy and exactness. He learned how to control himself and not yield to instinct. He also made it a rule always to impose some penance on himself when at table. Nothing was too small or humiliating for him – everything was the will of God.



After John pronounced his vows as a religious on September 25, 1618, he went to Antwerp to begin philosophy, but three weeks later was asked to go to Rome instead. He arrived in Rome on December 31 and lived at the Roman College. He was as faithful to his religious duties and studies there as he had been in the novitiate. He enjoyed his three years of philosophy and did so well that when the course concluded in 1621, he was asked to defend it in a public disputation on July 8.

As a result of studying hard for his final exam and preparing for the public disputation, John became weaker. He hoped he would regain his strength after it was over, but being the best of the Jesuit students, he was asked to represent the Roman College at another public disputation on August 6.

John's health was greatly debilitated by the strain of study. On August 7, 1621, the day after the second disputation, he had his first attack of dysentery; then a fever, which he could not shake, set in. Seeing how pale and weak the 22-year-old scholastic had become, the superior directed him to the infirmary. Each day he became feebler.

On the morning of August 11, after receiving his Lord in the Eucharist, John asked to be anointed. Then asking for his crucifix, rosary, and rule book, he said: "These are the three things most dear to me; with them I willingly die."

His last night was spent in prayer. The following morning, August 13, when the Jesuit community heard the tolling bell at 8:30, they knew that John was in Paradise.

John Berchmans was beatified in 1865; canonized in 1888.



Extraordinary accomplishments are not required for holiness. It was John's ordinary deeds done extraordinarily well that brought him to sanctity. The simplicity of his life made him admirable. His rector wrote, "What we universally admired in him was that in all the virtues he showed himself perfect and that, with the help of divine grace, to which he responded his utmost, he performed all his actions with all the perfection that can be imagined." This is what is most striking about St. John Berchmans.

Like Mother Teresa said, "We all cannot do great things but all of us can do simple things with great love." I tend to focus on accomplishing great things usually driven by my ego, neglecting the small and simple things. Before starting here in the novitiate, I thought that two years of novitiate formation were too long and the time would have been better spent on more worthwhile endeavors.

Actual achievement and success were more important to me. But more and more I realize I am wrong, for nothing is too small here – everything is the will of God, just like how Berchmans viewed his novitiate life. He was faithful even in the little things.

As the formators always say, this is a "school of the heart." Exactly in the small things, I am being formed by God who is my best teacher, here and now. Now I learn to surrender myself little by little, to be little like another young saint, Therese of the Child Jesus. She had her "little way." Proverbs 9:4 says, "Whoever is a little one, let him come to me."

Jesus is also calling me, reminding me to be childlike, to allow God to lead me, to trust totally as a little child trusts his father. I remember Fr. Peter Pojøl's homily last November 1, when he said that holiness is being a child of God.



Indeed, I am being invited to be God's little child, beginning with the very little things. I believe these little things done with great love are enough for God, rather than my extraordinary accomplishments. In this little way, I realize everything that happens in my life is a sheer gift, and the condition for receiving it is total availability.

After all, to be a saint is to be true to oneself, to be God's little child, engaging with the ordinary things of life. Let us follow the footsteps of St. John Berchmans and entrust ourselves to God in everything. SHN



***Mary,
Mother
of the Society***

Let us ask Our Lady of the Way,
in a colloquy like that of a son with his mother
or a servant with his Mistress, to intercede for us
in the presence of the “Father of mercies
and God of all consolation” (2 Corinthians 1:3),
that He may place us once again with the Son, with Jesus,
who takes up the cross of the world
and asks us to take it up with Him.

Let us entrust her with our “way of proceeding”...

Let us ask our Mother to guide and accompany each Jesuit
together with that portion of the faithful People of God
to which he is sent, on the ways of consolation,
compassion, and discernment.

*From the Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the 36th
General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*



Holiness Within

Stanislaus L.

If I were to summarize Mother Mary's life, I would use her response to Gabriel at the Annunciation: "May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38b). Mary embodied this response, this yes to God throughout her whole life. There was not a hint of self-centeredness in her life, which was absolutely for God, beginning from the moment of her conception.

Mary's yes is not unfamiliar to me, since I already said this many times in my life. Leaving my home country to enter the novitiate last year is like saying to the Lord, "May it be done to me according to Your word." In times of confusion and trouble, like being in this pandemic for almost a year now, with millions of people continuously affected, every day is like saying to the Lord, "May it be done to me according to Your word."

However, I can also say that I have not yet lived out this yes totally. Many times I still fall short in my yes to the Lord. It can be as simple as not following the *de more*, skipping my prayers, or not helping a fellow novice who is in need of help, as if saying, "May it be done to me according to Your word... BUT not now... maybe next time."

During these past few weeks, especially in the study of the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* and in the Human Sexuality and Affectivity Seminar, I have discovered and revisited many of my weaknesses and my shadows, which affect my relationships: with



myself, with others like my community, and with God. These parts of me make me say no, or say a half-hearted yes, instead of a total yes. Every half-hearted yes is like rejecting the Lord's word and His grace.

Nevertheless, the Lord assures me in the Second Reading (cf. Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12) that He had chosen me even before I was created. With this, I believe that He has already given me more than enough grace. And yet there are still times I choose to reject Him: in choosing slavery over His freedom, in being indifferent over loving in His way, in preferring my pretense over His truth, in choosing to say no, rather than saying yes to Him. In other words, there had been countless times I fell down and went astray.

Today's solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary inspires me and reminds me that holiness is not impossible. In fact, to be holy is to be my true self. At the core of my being, I experience God's divine and life-giving presence.

I continue to beg for the grace of attentiveness and awareness to God's indwelling, so that, like Mary, I may not lose touch with the divine and life-giving presence within me, and that with her I may immediately and totally respond to God: "May it be done to me according to your word." SHN



On This Day

John D.

“Be it done to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38b)

The Blessed Virgin Mary’s *fiat*. Her YES. It never really sank deep into me the depth and gravity of her yes to God’s plan. I previously thought that if she did not say yes, someone was bound to say yes. I had a funny image of the Archangel Gabriel marching around searching for suitable candidates like Prince Charming looking for Cinderella.

But this view changed when I started to realize the importance of Mary’s yes. She was a young Jewish maiden betrothed to Joseph as was the custom back then. Her life was planned. So I imagined her surprise when Gabriel came along with the bomb of an announcement. And it was not a question that the angel asked but more of a declaration, for God already pre-ordained and knew that Mary would consent. But that does not decrease the value of her yes. For as God is all powerful and all-knowing, He respected Mary’s free will.

I am tempted to draw parallels between Mary’s *fiat* and that of my own. This yes was an issue between me and God in my vocation story, which was confusing at the beginning, especially since there was no angel announcing the call!

I was confused since I was already content and relatively living a happy life. I had no major problems and issues. I was enjoying my work and, in fact, was planning to go into additional



training. I had plans much like Mary had plans. But God came and “disturbed” me. Mary too must have been confused and disturbed as she asked, “How can this be?”

I like the following prayer by Francis Drake:

“Disturb us, O Lord,
when we are too well pleased with ourselves;
when our dreams have come true
because we dreamed too little;
when we have arrived in safety
because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, O Lord,
when with the abundance of things we possess
we have lost our thirst for the water of Life;
when, having fallen in love with Time,
we have ceased to dream of Eternity;
and in our efforts to build a new earth
we have allowed our vision for the New Heaven
to grow dim.

Stir us, O Lord,
to dare more boldly,
to venture more seas,
where storms shall show your Mastery
where losing sight of land
we shall find the stars.

In the name of Him
who pushed back the horizons of our hopes
and invited the brave to follow Him.
Amen.”



I encountered this prayer a few days before entering the Arvisu Jesuit Candidacy and, in retrospect, it spoke to me as if I had already said this prayer long before, when I was too complacent, too comfortable, and thought I had no need of God and God had no need of me. Now I figured God had answered this prayer of mine even before I said it (or even thought of it).

I was indeed disturbed, as despite all that I thought could bring me happiness, there remained only emptiness and despair. What for? What is the reason? What is the purpose? It is also apt that I have just read Fr. James Martin's book where I first encountered the expression, "God-shaped hole in the heart." Perhaps that is the best description of this void, this longing for God that only He can fill.

As I look back to a little more than one year since this pivotal event in my life, this rebirth of sorts, I am overcome with deep and overwhelming joy. I am filled with spiritual consolation that I know for certain I am where I am supposed to be, I am who I am supposed to be, and I am on the path God has set for me.

While the call is clearer now and as I am slowly recognizing the presence of God in all things and moments, especially in the here-and-now, the future is still shrouded in mystery. In the midst of this mystery, I am at peace because of God's ever-abiding mercy and love. I trust in Him who sent Gabriel to Mary with the assuring words, "The Lord is with you."

Believing too that the Lord is with me, I beg for the grace of faith like that of Mary that I too may respond generously, "Be it done to me according to your word." I ask continuously for Mary's perpetual help and intercession, especially on this day I was born.



On the Way to God

Mark W.

Today is the memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows. Let me share about this special mother in my life, from the beginning of my journey up to now as I follow Jesus Christ here in the novitiate. Let me also share how my understanding of Mother Mary and her sorrows have grown and evolved.

My first memory of Mother Mary is a mysterious mother whom I never knew. I remember my parents often took me to visit the shrine which we called Mother Mary's mountain in my province. Before we went down the mountain we would say goodbye to Mother Mary. There I would see my mother crying and I would ask her, "Whom are you crying to?" She would respond, "Our Mother Mary."

Actually, I was confused with the relationship between the three of us. Did my mother and I have the same mother? That was amazing! This was my first idea of Mary. But now, I think I understand why my mother cried to Mother Mary. A mother would understand what other mothers go through and how a mother loves her children. Gradually, Mary has become my mother on whom I can rely. She is no longer just a concept or a statue for me, but truly a mother who loves me so much.

First, Mother Mary is a source of comfort for me and my defender against evil.

Every time I feel sad, anxious, helpless, hurt, or misunderstood (sometimes not fully understand) by others, I always



go to her and find consolation. During more than one year of being in the Philippines, there were several times I really missed my family. I would then go to Mother Mary and feel the sense of family's company. Then the loneliness would fade and only fullness would be left.

Mother Mary also helps me a lot in being chaste. In the usual Monday Meet-the-Jesuit forum in Arvisu House, the common question we would ask the guest Jesuit was, "Father (or Brother), among the three vows, which one do you find most challenging?"

Most of them answered that chastity would be more challenging for young Jesuits. I agree with this response very much. At times, I can feel the evil spirit preying on my weaknesses. Maintaining chastity is one of them.

If you are wondering how I fight the temptations, I am proud to say that Mother Mary is my defender. I go to her immediately. She is the Mother, Most Chaste. St. Ignatius of Loyola, the Society's founder, himself received much help from our Mother Mary in keeping his chastity and fighting temptations.

In a dream last week, I got a letter from a girl breaking up with me. However, I also got a letter from Mother Mary urging me to keep my chastity. When I woke up, I felt so happy instead of feeling sad for breaking up with the girl. Mother Mary always cares for me, even in the smallest things.

Second and last, Mother Mary concretely shows me obedience in sorrow.

Today, the world experiences immense sorrow and suffering because of the pandemic. The only thing most of us can do is pray over and over again. During the times I checked if my prayers were



bearing fruits, I would realize the situation was only getting worse. So I complained to God and asked why He would not listen to our prayers. I asked why all of us were still suffering.

I believe many people have the same thoughts. We always try to fit God's will into our own human terms. It seems God's way of saving the world should be the way we humans think He should. Reflecting with a confused heart on my faith life during these tough times, I turn to Jesus and Mother Mary and look at how they faced suffering.

Today's First Reading (cf. Hebrews 5:7-9) speaks of how Jesus, God though He is, learned obedience through what He suffered. Mother Mary, too, after having been chosen by the Lord to bear Jesus, underwent suffering. She suffered with Jesus on the way to the Cross. Her heart was broken upon beholding her wounded Son dying on the cross. I can only imagine the sorrow in her heart at the time!

But how did Mother Mary face her moments of deep sorrow and pain? She obeyed, followed, and trusted God wholeheartedly as she always did from the very beginning.

Pope Francis highlights that this pandemic has created a space and time for conversion. Indeed, we must slow ourselves down and reflect. In doing so, we pray to come to a realization that sorrow is not the end. It is only a way to strengthen our faith, deepen our hope, and live out our love for God, like Jesus and Mother Mary showed in their obedience in sorrow, even without fully understanding God's will. SHN



Ad Jesum per Mariam

Rex C.

This morning, indulge me as I share with you two stories: one remembered, the other imagined.

One Father in his homily posed this question: “Have you ever experienced death in your family?” And so begins my first story.

I had been away for work when my *lolo* passed away almost five years ago. Shocked as I was to receive the news, I calmly rode the bus home. It seemed like the longest 12-hour ride of my life. When I arrived, preparations were well underway.

My mother was on top of things – buying my *lolo*’s barong, entertaining relatives and visitors at the wake, making arrangements for the funeral, and settling bills, among others.

My mother’s name is Janua Coeli, which means Gate of Heaven – one of the titles of our Blessed Mother. True to her name, she was a pillar of strength for us. I did not see her break down, at least not immediately, until it was just us again.

Was it courage? Perhaps. What was clear to me was that my mother had a soft spot in her heart for all of us in the family, that all our concerns take precedence over her own, and that we, in one way or another, count on her for advice, assurance, and affection.

Since the lockdown, the past weeks have had me missing my family. I remember those days of coming home exhausted from work, taking naps or a full day’s rest on the couch, and waking up to



see my mother sitting next to me, reading the paper, or doing something else. She would ask me if I wanted to eat and then prepare it for me.

There were also days when she would sense something bothering me despite my efforts to hide it. Yet she knew better than to ask, “What’s wrong?” and simply respected the space I needed. She would still be there though, present and available, as if to say, “I am here.”

This Covid-19 situation has once more put me in touch with my dependence on my mother for security, comfort, and the quiet assurance of her presence.

Now my second story. Seeking help for my own prayer, I approached one brother to ask if he knew of any accounts of Jesus’ tenderness towards Mary. He responded with the scene we heard from our Gospel today: “When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, here is your son.’” (John 19:26)

I did not completely agree with him. Where was tenderness in addressing your own mother as “woman”? Did not Jesus call others by the same title? To the woman caught in adultery, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” (John 8:10) To the woman fetching water from the well, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.” (John 4:21)

We see Jesus addressing Mary as “woman” early on. At the wedding feast at Cana, Jesus addresses her quite dismissively: “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” (John 2:4)



John, in his Gospel, intended to portray Mary, in all her humility, as one among commoners. In his article, Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM, refers to this as Mary's *kenosis*: "Mary's *kenosis* consisted in the fact that, instead of asserting her rights as the Messiah's mother, she let herself be deprived and appeared before all as a woman just like any other woman." Still, I remained wanting, seeking for signs of tenderness by Jesus towards His mother.

A hint arrived upon watching *Passion of the Christ* during the Holy Week. One scene was on the hidden life of Jesus. As Jesus was busy with carpentry work, Mary came up to Him and asked, "Are you hungry?" As He was about to see what she had prepared, Mary stopped Him and offered to pour Him water to wash His hands. A rather mischievous Jesus splashed water on Mary before finally kissing her.

I remember watching Mary closely, and later imagining her own experience. She did not turn her back and had her eyes locked on Jesus. She watched the life of her Son, "the flesh of her flesh," gradually and painfully slip away. It must have been heart-wrenching. It must have been the humblest of places to be – to withhold every control and instinct to protect your Son from harm and to put your faith in Him amidst all confusion and protestation welling from within.

In recalling the disturbing scene at the foot of the cross, as Mary kissed the foot of Jesus and had her face smeared with blood, I was brought to contemplate the depth of love and connection between her and Jesus. I can only surmise how life was for them in their hidden years, but it must have been rich with experiences of profound love.



One beauty of the *Spiritual Exercises* is that it allows us to imagine and allows the Lord, to use this faculty to speak to us. Jesus must have surprised Mary in many ways – mischievously as mentioned, or sweetly by kissing or embracing her, or delicately by bringing her flowers. Mary must have nursed the wounds of Jesus whenever he got hurt from playing outdoors. Under the same roof, Mary and Jesus must have shared stories over meals, laughed over the same jokes, and worried about how to get by on days when they barely had enough.

When fate finally brought them to the foot of the cross, Mary knew very well not to ask; she knew all too well the heart of her Son. Mary’s response must have come from a very profound and real experience of God’s tenderness that there was no room left to question, to complain, or even to assert her right as a mother. There was absolute docility. I imagine her uttering the same words of Jesus to the Father: “Not my will, but Yours be done.”

These are stories of two mothers: one remembered, the other imagined. These are stories of two mothers whom I have come to love and still learn to love each day.

Janua Coeli, Gate of Heaven. Unlike a gate that is massive and intimidating, now I imagine this gate to be a mother’s arms. May the memories of our mothers and mother-figures – the *nanays* in our apostolate areas, the *nanays* we have come to know in our experiments, and the *nanays* we encounter daily – and our intuitions and contemplations of Mary our Mother all remind us of having been cradled in tender arms, of being accompanied in all our joys and pains, and of receiving a foretaste of heaven by bringing us and Jesus into the world.



Finally, our Gospel today also tells us: “Then he said to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.” (John 19:27)

Today, as we venerate Mary as the Mother of the Society, we are especially graced with someone whose example we can emulate. In accepting Mary from Jesus as our own mother, we pray through her intercession to be graced like her: with having a bold heart that dares to embrace suffering instead of being blinded by confusion, with nurturing a compassionate heart – a being-with that endures and persists despite one’s selfhood, and with letting God inspire in us a hopeful heart that trusts and remains steadfast against the shaky, uncertain future that lies ahead.

Dear brothers, may you, too, be graced to remember and imagine – your mother, our Mother – today. *Ad Jesum per Mariam.* “To Jesus, through Mary.” SHN



Treasuring

Patrick E.

I was praying over the Gospel (cf. Luke 2: 15-19) and I thought, “Oh no,” here we go again. It’s another one of those wonderful yet frightening and bewildering times for Mary ever since she gave her “yes” to the angel.

This time, she had to go to Bethlehem, once there, looking and looking but not finding a place to give birth to the “Messiah” except a manger, and then a bright star shining like a beacon – one wonderful surprise after another – and now, in the reading, shepherds have come saying angels brought them good news and led them to the manger. One wondrous event after another; it must have been overwhelming for Mary. I can just imagine her at that moment... raising her eyes and whispering, “My God, what have I gotten myself into?”

Now, I suspect we do not really have to think very hard to recall an instance when perhaps we were suddenly assigned an important responsibility or position or abruptly missioned to some far-away and lonely place or, without explanation, enrolled in a long course difficult and alien to us. And we were just shocked and overwhelmed and bewildered but it was already happening and so we could not help but just look up and ask, “My God, what have I gotten myself into?”

And perhaps, for us... sometimes... it is followed up by questions like: “Is my boss or my superior really sure about this?” or “Maybe he or she made a mistake?” or “Am I really the best person for this?”



However we must have felt during those moments of shock and awe, Mary, a teen-ager, sitting next to that dingy manger, cradling in her arms the Savior of the world, the stars shining like crazy and angels singing their praises – however we must have felt in our own predicaments, I’m pretty sure she must have felt worse. More shocked, more frightened, more confused and yet – and yet – what was her response? “Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart.”

Not denial, not indignation, not bitter complaining, but acceptance accompanied with deep trust in God’s fidelity and generosity: I may not understand everything now, she must have thought, but whatever happens, I know God is with me and He will take care of me.

And so we see: “Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart.” This is her way, Mary’s way, this is Our Lady’s Way – a wholehearted “yes” to God and an unwavering trust in His fidelity and generosity.

Perhaps she knew, even at her young age then, something our formators and directors, and maybe we ourselves, already know by heart: that it is when we are surprised, when we are tested and challenged, when we are forced to stretch beyond our comfort zones, when we don’t know what to do anymore and we cling to God – it is then, it is then that we grow the most, when our best selves emerge and when we are showered most with blessings.

We know that these moments of testing and growth and grace become, as with Mary, experiences that will define us, that will give us strength later on and will be memories we can truly treasure.



Mary is surely a tough act to follow. Her way is not at all an easy way, but the Lord still invites all of us, especially when we pray, to try: to try not to look up in frustration so often asking, “My God, what have I gotten myself into?” but instead to try and see, as Mary did, that all that has happened (the good and the bad) and is yet to happen (scary or exciting) are simply God’s ways of showing His great love for us and, in the end, they are gifts – gifts that are worth treasuring in our hearts. SHN

*Joseph,
Patron
of the Society*



Joseph saw Jesus grow daily “in wisdom and in years and in divine and human favor” (Luke 2:52).

As the Lord had done with Israel,
so Joseph did with Jesus: “he taught him to walk,
taking him by the hand; he was for him like a father
who raises an infant to his cheeks,
bending down to him and feeding him” (cf. Hosea 11:3-4).

In Joseph, Jesus saw the tender love of God.

From Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation "Patris Corde"



A Father's Love

Gerard E.

Last week, as I was listening to the sharing of my *primi* brothers about their *Spiritual Exercises* experience, my heart was particularly moved by one story about a father's love. One brother shared that initially he was envious of his classmates' school projects. Theirs were fancy and expensive. What he had was a simple miniature wooden toy. However, his disposition about his school work changed when he realized that his project was created by his father. His own father labored for what he had. That for me was a concrete experience of a father's love.

It made me remember my own father. There was time when my father bought me a toy after attending the 9-am Mass at Saint Joseph Cathedral. I could not remember what exactly he bought me that day, but I still know the priceless joy that the toy gave me. Since then or because of that incident, I have liked going to Sunday Masses. I can say that it is my father who made Sunday Masses appealing for me!

Another brother recounted to me that when he was in Grade 2, his father braved the waist-deep floods, carried him in his arms, and brought him safely home from school. In other words, his father poured all his courage and strength for his safety.

In my urban poor experience, I was privileged to go to work with my foster-father Jojo. I accompanied him in his carpentry work. I sat beside him bored while he patiently put the cement on the wall.



After some time, he suddenly blurted out, “I have to work hard. It’s Alex’s birthday on Sunday.”

Then it came to me. All along while he was sweating and I was feeling bored, he was thinking of his daughter Alex. Alex was his motivation for work. Later on, I would hear stories of how my Tatay Jojo worked hard for his daughter when she was diagnosed with a heart disease. Tatay Jojo was doing everything he could for his little child.

Like our respective fathers, Saint Joseph is a man who would do anything for his small family. He must have saved money for the pregnancy of Mama Mary. He must have created toys for the little Jesus. He must have accompanied the boy Jesus to the synagogue too. He must have worked hard to provide for his beautiful wife and adorable little boy.

During my *Spiritual Exercises* experience, I saw Saint Joseph so broken-hearted when he learned of the news that Mary had a baby not his own. He was devastated. And so I asked him, “Why don’t you just find another woman?” Saint Joseph replied to me, “Gboy, it is Mary whom I love.” *Parang* movie. It’s like a movie.

At that moment, I found a truth for Joseph – he loved Mary and Jesus with all his life. I suppose he is the patron saint of the dying because of this total love for his Mother and Son.

In my recent contemplation, Saint Joseph told me that his life changed when Jesus was born into his life. With Jesus, his life found meaning and direction. Jesus was the driving force of his life. Jesus was the reason behind his every action. Saint Joseph gave everything to Jesus and Mary because Jesus and Mary were his everything.



Saint Joseph lived what I prayed for during my *Spiritual Exercises* that all my thoughts and actions be directed unto Jesus! Saint Joseph lived my *Constitutions* topic – Ignatian Indifference. Jesus was the absolute in his life, the center on which everything else revolves. It is then fitting to have Saint Joseph as the patron saint of our beloved Society of Jesus because of his deep, personal love for Jesus.

Isn't to love the Lord the reason of my stay here in the novitiate? Am I not here to know Him more deeply? Am I not called to recognize and appreciate His goodness and graciousness in my life?

After almost two years in the novitiate, I have come to realize in my heart that this deep personal love for Jesus is what characterizes us, the Society of Jesus. We are a Society because of our love for the One whose Name our Society bears. First is our deep personal love for Jesus. All the other ideals follow – solidarity with the poor, *magis*, thinking with the Church, care for the environment. The primary and most essential is our Lord and our deep personal love for Him.

It was said that Saint Ignatius saw God at every moment He desired. His heart loved God so much that he yearned to see and find Him at all times. Like Saint Ignatius, I hope to see and be convinced that God is laboring in this pandemic – working among the front-liners, suffering with the sick, consoling the dying, living with the poor, strengthening our Church. (Perhaps, even cooking with and through Kuya Dong for our breakfast.)

In seeing the Lord during this pandemic, I hope to be moved to accompany Him.



And so I pray,

“O God, grant me a heart that constantly seeks for You so that in seeing You, I may love you. And when I don’t see You, let me believe in Your love that is too audacious and too incomprehensible for my wounded and sinful heart.

Grant me that hunger, that longing and yearning for You, so that like Saint Joseph, I may love and serve You in all things. I make this prayer to You who gave Your All to me, Your only begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ.” SHN

Gratitude for Vocation

O Jesus, through the love of Your adorable heart and the intercession of Your Virgin Mother, Mary, and her most chaste spouse, Saint Joseph, we humbly ask You to make us truly grateful for all Your blessings, especially for calling us to Your own Society, and we ask the crowning mercy of Your love that each of us may persevere in this vocation to the end.

Remember dear Lord, that the harvest to be gathered for eternity is great, but the laborers are few, and that You told us to pray that laborers be sent to the harvest.

We pray therefore, that through the intercession of Mary and Joseph, You may send large numbers of fervent novices to our novitiates, particularly our Sacred Heart Novitiate, who in time will become zealous workers in your fields, for the greater glory of Your name, the advancement of devotion to Your Sacred Heart, and the salvation of souls You redeemed with Your precious Blood. *Amen.*

*For the name of someone in your area from whom you can
obtain further information about the Society of Jesus
or with whom you can discuss the possibility
of becoming a Jesuit, please text or call:
0917-JESUITS (537-8487).*



***Most Sacred
Heart of Jesus,
have mercy on us.***