

Vocations and Prayer



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"Here am I!"



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Publisher
Rogationist Fathers,
U.S.A. Delegation
Rev. Antonio Fiorenza, RCJ, President

Editor-In-Chief
Rev. Antonio Fiorenza, RCJ

Contributing Editor
Mónica J. Llerena, MS

Contributing Writers
Fr. Bruno Piccolo, P.I.M.E.
Fr. William Reiser, S.J.
Fr. John Bruno, RCJ
John M. Rinaldo, D. Min
Fr. Francisco Javier Flores, RCJ
Fr. Isaac Kalina, O.S.B.
Sr. Emily Beata Marsh, FSP
Fr. Peter Quinto, RCJ
Fr. Joseph Cisetti
Christopher Tasy
Dr. Bruce L. Thiessen

Art Director
Nikhil Nathu

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Karla Legaria

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ROGATE

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Vocations and Prayer

6635 Tobias Ave., Van Nuys, CA 91405
Tel. (818) 782-1765
Fax (818) 782-1794
Email: info@vocationsandprayer.org
www.vocationsandprayer.org

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Outstretched Hands

The Mystery of Prayer for Vocations and Service to the Poor

By Fr. ANTONIO FIORENZA, RCJ

"A hand held out is a sign; a sign that immediately speaks of closeness, solidarity and love," Pope Francis writes in his message for the 4th World Day of the Poor.

These words inspired us to select as cover of this issue outstretched hands and the biblical words "Here am I," presenting a vocational perspective of the Pope's Messages for World Mission Day 2020 and the 4th World Day of the Poor.

Two open hands remind us that Jesus, our Lord, walks with us and assures us of his presence in a gesture that means a permanent giving of himself and a request for our collaboration: "Whom shall I send? " (Is 6:8).

Two open and outstretched hands also signify our response to his call in an attitude of complete giving of our life to the service of God and his People: "Here am I, send me!" (Is 6:8). This is the story of the Prophets, Apostles, Saints, and everyone who, today as yesterday, moved by divine grace, decide to put themselves at the service of the Gospel with their words and actions.

Two outstretched hands to us are the hands of those who beg for our help, asking for emotional or tangible support. In this case, these outstretched hands also manifest our response to the cry of the poor, who "are and always will be with us to help us welcome Christ's presence into our daily lives [cf. Jn 12: 8]" (Message for WDP, 3).

My words are not meant to be religious rhetoric, nor are Pope Francis' words. They convey facts, actions, and stories of people's lives. In his message for the World Day of the Poor, Pope Francis emphasizes the example of courageous men and women, lay people, priests and religious who give their lives to save others in this time of Covid-19.

Recently, during my visit as Superior of the Rogationists in North America, I had the opportunity to meet our communities in California and Mexico. The dedication and selfless commitment of our priests and lay volunteers assisting the poor with food, clothing, catechesis lessons, and words of compassion and love impacted me. I know we are not in this alone. Many parishes and religious men and women are doing this

charitable work without expecting any reward.

Open and outstretched hands indicate prayer and supplication. Before God, we are all beggars and in need of his help and grace to live happily and to be saved. Pope Francis, faithful to the biblical tradition and the teachings of the Church, reminds us that "prayer to God and solidarity with the poor and suffering are inseparable," for "the Lord's blessing descends upon us and prayer attains its goal when accompanied by service to the poor" (WDP, 2).

If the Pope's teaching applies to every kind of prayer and supplication, it also applies when we stretch out our hands to implore the Lord of the harvest for the gift of the workers of the Gospel, as he has commanded us to do (cf. Mt 9:35-38; Lk 10:2).

St. Hannibal Mary Di Francia (1851-1927), an Italian priest, understood this mystery of prayer accompanied by charity. He combined the incessant prayer to the Lord of the harvest for the gift of the workers of the Gospel with permanent service to the poor. For this reason, he will be remembered in the history of the Church as "the Apostle of the modern pastoral care for vocations," as John Paul II defined him on the day of his canonization, May 16, 2004.

Vocations and Prayer, the Catholic magazine on vocations ministry, which this year celebrates its 30th anniversary, aims to embody and spread the charismatic inspiration and teaching of Saint Hannibal Mary Di Francia in the Church of North America: the primacy of prayer in vocation pastoral care accompanied by service to the poor. This is the permanent line of pastoral care for vocations that we can also find in Pope Francis' messages for World Day of the Poor and World Mission Day, where he invites us to stretch out our hands and commit our lives: "Here am I, send me!" ■



FR. ANTONIO FIORENZA, RCJ

Ordained in 1978. He holds a degree in Spirituality from the Lateran and Gregorian Pontifical Universities in Rome. Presently, he serves as the director of the Rogate Center in Van Nuys, California. afiorenza@rcj.org

Being a Missionary Today

Highlights from Pope Francis' Message for World Mission Day 2020

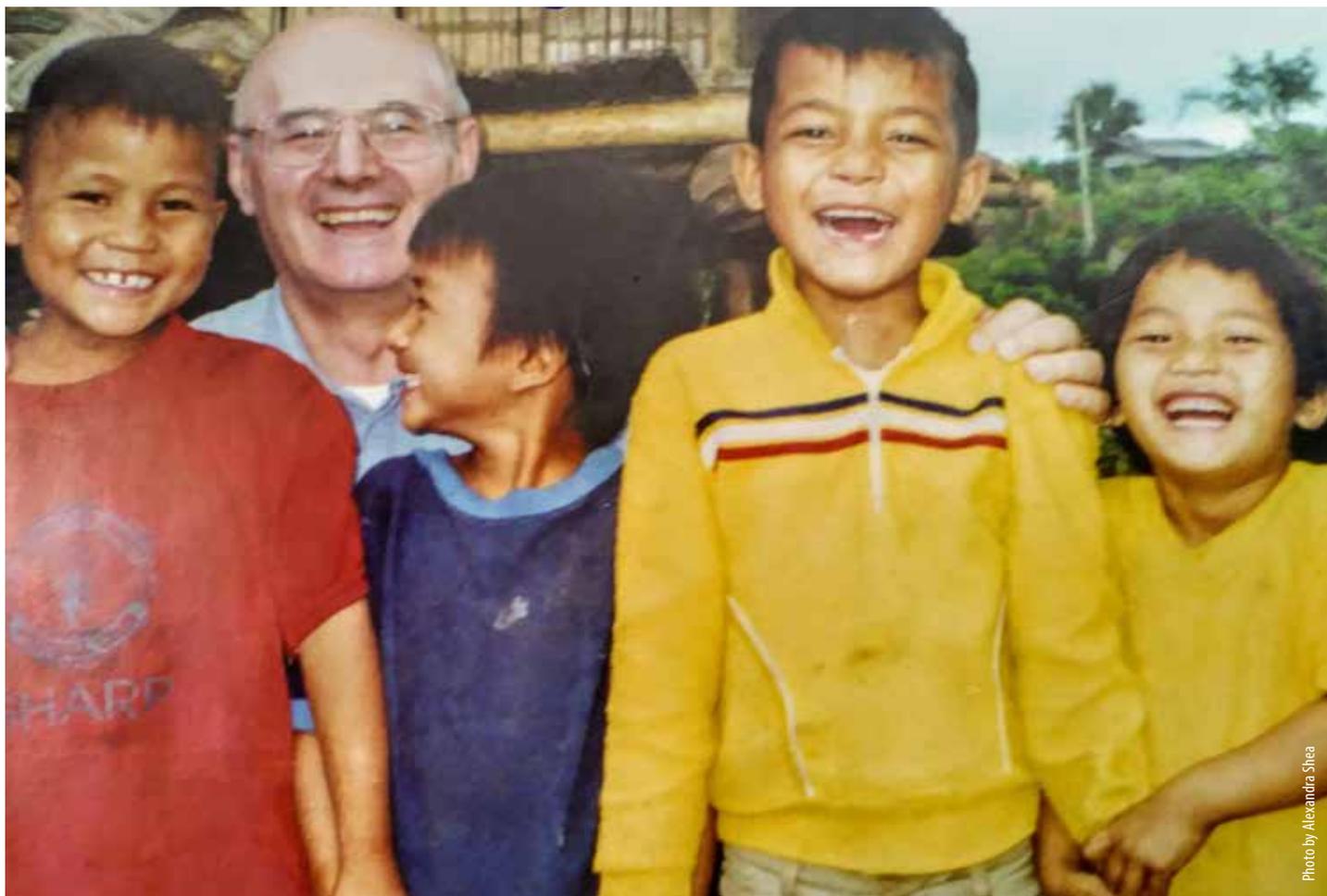


Photo by Alexandra Shea

By Fr. BRUNO PICCOLO, P.I.M.E.

"Mission is a free and conscious response to God's call. Yet we discern this call only when we have a personal relationship of love with Jesus present in his Church. Let us ask ourselves: are we prepared to welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, to listen to the call to mission, whether in our life as married couples or as consecrated persons or those called to the ordained ministry, and in all the everyday events of life? Are we willing to be sent forth at any time or place to witness to our faith in God the merciful Father, to proclaim the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ, to share the divine life of the Holy Spirit by building up

the Church? Are we, like Mary, the Mother of Jesus, ready to be completely at the service of God's will (cf. Lk 1:38)? This interior openness is essential if we are to say to God: "Here am I, Lord, send me" (cf. Is 6:8). And this, not in the abstract, but in this chapter of the life of the Church and of history."

From the Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for World Mission Day 2020.

As I reflect on my being a missionary what comes to mind is the beginning of my calling, the day of my First Communion, September 8, 1948, when I felt Jesus' invitation to be a priest. My response was: "Why not a missionary!" His response was "It's okay with

me." This was the start of an interesting journey through life.

Then there were years of seminary preparation, first in Italy and later in the United States, followed by missionary experiences in the Philippines, Los Angeles, Mexico with an indigenous tribe, Italy, and now back in the States. They were experiences that gave me the opportunity to learn languages, to come into contact with different cultures and peoples, to meet many friends, and to see places.

My concept of missionary was the priest or sister who goes to a foreign land among people who are non-Christians and spends the rest of his/her life with them. In 2011, Fr. Clem-

ent Vismara, P.I.M.E. was beatified. He had spent 65 years in Myanmar and had gone back to Italy only once. Afterwards, World War II took place and the Second Vatican Council saw 2,500 bishops from all over the world gathered in Rome every fall from 1962 to 1965.

What is the Missionary Vocation?

The world had become a village. Travel was made easy. Communications had put in contact peoples of different races, nationalities, cultures, religions. The missionary was no longer the pioneer, the savior, as I thought, and I asked myself: Who is a missionary? What is the missionary vocation?

The missionary is the believer who responds to the call of Jesus to share his/her faith wherever he/she is. Faith is received from others and our responsibility is to pass it on to others. The gift is so beautiful that we want others to share in that joy. Faith is transmitted through witnessing more than with words. Many people say: my priorities are God, family and friends. We are missionaries by witnessing our love for God and our care for family and friends.

After the first centuries of persecution that Christians were free to practice their faith, we saw the establishment of monastic communities followed later by mendicant orders, missionary congregations, congregations dedicated to education and to the care of the sick. The model was always the early Christian community described in the book of Acts. At times, we saw that individual missionaries, the ones we called the pioneers, achieved great accomplishments, but it was always a community that afterwards carried on the work started by them.

Nowadays, we find ourselves challenged by national identities, racial tensions, economic difficulties, religious revivals. We see millions of persons obliged to migrate. Notwith-

standing the fast ways of travel and the popular means of communications, the forming of humanity into a universal family needs tolerance, solidarity, respect and collaboration.

The mission of the Church is carried out all over the world. Everyone is called to build the community and to get involved in it. What is needed are people who commit themselves to this task and like in the Old and New Testament times, and throughout the centuries of the history of Christianity.

New Ways of Evangelization

God continues to call individual persons for this mission. Besides the traditional religious orders who continue to carry out their work through the centuries, we see new ecclesial communities being born, ecclesial movements formed by men, women, and their families, and charismatic prayer groups spreading. The great historical communities had lay people join them in living their spirituality. They called them the third Orders.

Today, I see more and more new religious communities formed by men, women and laity, single and married, bound by one charism: evangelization, Eucharistic Adoration, service to the poor, caring for indigenous groups, and fostering ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. The consecrated persons are like the heart that pumps the blood into the rest of the body. They are totally dedicated to the charism so that the laity may share in the same spirit and incarnate the spirituality into the various aspects of human life: business and work, medicine and care for the sick, education, apostolic activities, prayer, congresses and religious celebrations, sports events, care for creation through concern for ecology and means of communications.

Humanity is one family. Pope Francis in his message for World Mission Sunday for this year reminds us that we are all in the same boat. We need to care for one another in all the dif-

ferent aspects of our daily life. He too shows us the example by traveling to the “peripheries of the world” and reaching out to the marginalized and discriminated, to the most abandoned.

What brought about the faith was a community that worked together in mutual understanding and collaboration. I have seen schools, hospitals, sports centers, centers for rehabilitation for persons with disabilities, care for the homeless and the migrants, and faith communities that have built their churches for prayer gatherings and the reception of the sacraments.

The Pope reminds us that everyone is called to collaborate in the task of spreading the faith. Through the centuries the greatest witness to the faith was given by the gift of one’s life, martyrdom, and this is still a powerful witness even today. That is an extraordinary grace. What we need to do is to carry out the ordinary witnessing of our faith in unity with others by sharing and fostering the collaboration in unity and diversity.

As for any goal to be achieved: independence, freedom, justice, what is needed is persons who commit themselves to these goals. God continues to call individual persons also today. He repeats to everyone in every age of history: “You too go to my vineyard” (Matthew 20,4). ■



FR. BRUNO PICCOLO, P.I.M.E.

Has been a priest for 55 years. He is a member of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions. Currently, he works in the United States.

Our Hands, Our Mission, Our Prayer

A Brief Vocational Catechesis



Photo by Tim Bogdanov

By WILLIAM REISER, S.J.

Many years ago, in high school, I came across a book by E. J. Edwards entitled *These Two Hands*. It's the story of a young missionary—Father Frank—in the Philippines. At the story's beginning Frank was deathly afraid to touch and anoint an older woman dying with leprosy; he could hardly bring himself to look at her. She died alone, unanointed; he was ashamed. At the end of the story, we find him rushing into a shack in flames to rescue a leper trapped inside. In doing so his hands are fiercely burned and permanently disfigured.

The image of those hands is one I've never forgotten, an icon of what we would name today inculturation and solidarity. It haunted me because I knew his fear. In the story's final pages, looking at the outstretched hand of a man who had come seeking forgiveness, the priest reflects: "It came home to him with startling clarity that this was the way of human hands and would be their endless way ... some outstretched to receive, others to give." And so it is, "the way of human hands." Pope

Francis heads his message for the World Day of the Poor this year with the words of Sirach, "Stretch forth your hand to the poor" (Sir 7:32). Sometimes, as Father Frank learned, the hand that stretches to give and the hand that stretches to receive are the same hand.

1. Open hands

What points might we draw from Pope Francis' 2020 Messages for World Mission Day and World Day of the Poor that might serve as a brief catechesis on vocational awareness in a time of pandemic? I suggest there are three, and perhaps we should start with hands:

"A hand held out is a sign; a sign that immediately speaks of closeness, solidarity and love. In these months, when the whole world was prey to a virus that brought pain and death, despair and bewilderment, how many outstretched hands have we seen! The outstretched hands of physicians ... The outstretched hands of nurses ... The outstretched hands of administrators ... The outstretched hands of pharmacists ... The outstretched hands of priests ... The out-

stretched hands of volunteers who helped people living on the streets and those with a home yet nothing to eat. The outstretched hands of men and women who worked to provide essential services and security. We could continue to speak of so many other outstretched hands, all of which make up a great litany of good works. Those hands defied contagion and fear in order to offer support and consolation."

I think here of two gospel texts. When Jesus encountered the leper, Mark writes, "Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him" (Mk 1:41). And shortly afterwards it was a man with a withered hand: "and he said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was restored" (Mk 3:5). In the first scene it is Jesus who stretches out his hand; in the second, it is a man in need. To determine whether we are living our vocation as Christians we might do well to ask ourselves, "In what ways have I stretched out my hands? When have I asked others to stretch out their hands, so that I might offer my support and my consolation?" Francis writes, "The



Photo by Rogationist Fathers, Tonalá, Mexico

ability to stretch forth our hand shows that we possess an innate capacity to act in ways that give meaning to life.” This is a major vocational sign.

2. Prayer that embraces the world

Hearing the Lord’s voice and listening to the world are two sides of the same spiritual coin. “Today, if you hear his voice,” says the psalmist, “do not harden your hearts” (Ps 95:7-8). And where do we hear that voice? Above all we discern God’s voice in what is taking place around us. Francis writes, “Understanding what God is saying to us at this time of pandemic also represents a challenge for the Church’s mission. The poverty of those who die alone, the abandoned, those who have lost their jobs and income, the homeless and those who lack food challenge us.” The pandemic has forced us “to rediscover that we need social relationships as well as our communal relationship with God.” God speaks in our historical moment; our response to what we hear is what we mean by vocation. Francis refers to this as “the call to mission, the invitation to step out of ourselves.”

Yet the pandemic is not the only event through which God is speaking to us. Perhaps the strongest, most sustained call upon us that Francis has drawn our attention to is the voice of the environment, of the earth, of the Pachamama. He does this in his encyclical *Laudato sí* and, more recently, in *Querida Amazonia*, his apostolic exhortation on the Amazon Region, particularly chapter three (“An Ecological Dream”). While pandemic is the context in which the call to mission is being heard right now, the more formidable context is undoubtedly ecological. Unfortunately, there are still far too many who refuse to hear the earth’s voice; the psalmist’s plea “do not harden your hearts” seems especially relevant today.

The pandemic called for a response that is both moral—we behave towards one another differently—and spiritual—we are drawn to a more world-centered prayer. The pandemic pressures us to step out of ourselves. It has reminded us that “we are on the same boat” and that “all of us [are] called to row together.”

Yet the environmental crisis is asking for this much and a lot more. Instead of thinking of ourselves as being above, in charge of, or apart from the natural world, we need school-

ing in humility: we are part of that world, creatures of the earth, our common home. To be authentic—“if today you hear his voice”—in today’s world, vocational spirituality requires an ecological grounding. Indigenous cultures worldwide, just like those of the Amazon and the Andes, have a wisdom to share with the rest of the Church about our relationship with the earth. The option for the poor is at the same time an option for nature and the environment. “Option” may not be the right word anymore; actually, we have no choice but to recalibrate our interior lives so that stewardship and humility, not dominion or privilege, shape the way that we live, make choices, and worship. Fervent ecological sensibility would be another major vocational sign.

3. Solidarity with the poor

The third element of our vocational catechesis is hardly new, but it is absolutely essential. “Prayer to God and solidarity with the poor and suffering are inseparable,” Francis writes. He is not simply speaking about praying for the poor; he is talking about praying with them, in the sense of the letter to the Hebrews: “Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are



Photo by Rogationist Fathers, Tonala, Mexico

mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering” (Heb 13:3). For then he adds, “In order to help the poor, we ourselves need to live the experience of evangelical poverty.” Maybe we could sharpen his point further by saying: In order to pray with the poor, we need to share their experience: their daily anxiety, their fears, their powerlessness, their hands stretched out across borders—and in many cases, the courage of their faith. And here the two threads of environment and solidarity that run through Francis’ thinking come together.

Francis wrote in *Laudato sí*, “If the present ecological crisis is one small sign of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity, we cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships... Our relationship with the environment can never be isolated from our relationship with others and with God” (#119). And primary among the relations we have with others is our relationship with the poor. But how to do that?

The pandemic has made us realize, Francis says, that “we need a new sense of fraternity.”

A fractured human race needs to realize that we belong to a single human family. Whatever divides us should never be so strong as what unites us. We all come from God, and each of us is made in the divine image and likeness; solidarity (or fraternity, or human ecology: it’s all connected) is based on this truth. And this truth has a vocational implication.

How to move beyond barriers? The only effective way, of course, is to get to know and make friends with people on the other side of our cultural, social, economic, racial, and religious fences. In fact, if we can become good friends with at least one person or family on the other side of the divide, we stand a good chance of opening ourselves to “the other”—the many throughout the world who are different from us. Yet Francis urges us to take a further step and to “live the experience of evangelical poverty.” That’s a difficult step, but friendship and love for those on the other side make that step easier to take.

Solidarity is a feeling word; hands have to stretch out and they have to touch. The third element of our vocational catechesis, there-

fore, is our readiness to meet those who are different from us as our equals, and this applies especially to the outsiders who are poor. “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your rich neighbors,” Jesus told his host. “But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you” (Lk 14:12-14). Evangelical poverty does not begin with detachment and letting go. It starts with getting to know people who are poor, and sharing their experience, and having them as our friends. As Father Frank discovered, sometimes the hand that stretches to give and the hand that stretches to receive is the same hand. ■



WILLIAM REISER, S.J.

Is a professor of theology and chair of the Religious Studies Department at Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts. He also serves in Hispanic ministry in two parish communities.

The Unbroken Chain

Prayer, Vocations, and Service to the Poor



Photo by Congregation of Rogationists

By Fr. JOHN BRUNO, RCJ

When Cardinal Bergoglio was elected Pope, Cardinal Cláudio Hummes of São Paulo told him, “Do not forget the poor people.” Bergoglio cherished this suggestion and chose the name Francis, inspired by St. Francis, the Poverello of Assisi.

Pope Francis stressed this choice continually and instituted “The World Day of the Poor,” now in its fourth celebration. The emphasis of love for the poor was stressed by Jesus himself in the Gospel when he said, “Blessed are the poor” (Matt 5:3). Jesus then told people they would be judged on how they recognized him hidden in the poor, the hungry, the naked, the imprisoned, the immigrants, the sick (cf. Matt 25:35).

The Catholic social teaching “Option for the poor” encourages us to imitate Christ’s love for the poor by working to create a society where the needs of the poor are always considered first. This love is inspired by the gospel of Beatitudes, Jesus’s poverty, and his concern for the poor.

This year’s papal message “Stretch forth your hand to the poor” (Sir 7:32) emphasizes once again that “we have an opportunity to encounter the Lord Jesus, who has revealed himself as present in the least of his brothers and sisters” (Stretch Forth, 2020).

How do we relate this message to the work for vocations? We can see an unbroken chain between vocation, prayer, the poor, and our final destiny.

Vocation and prayer

Vocation is our call to fulfill our life’s purpose. When we discover our vocation we are full of joy. But we do not invest our energy only for ourselves! Like Jesus, we will feel the need to help people “troubled and abandoned like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt 9:36). Jesus commanded us “to pray the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest” (Matt 9: 35-38; Lk 10:2). Prayer and dialogue with God are necessary for our discernment, but it will also help us to discover the needs of others and to move us beyond our discovery invoking the Lord for others.

Prayer and help to the poor

When will prayer be efficacious to discover our vocation and invite others to

do the same? We need to be concerned for others. Jesus was moved with compassion. The prophet Isaiah tells us: "Releasing those bound unjustly... Setting free the oppressed... Sharing your bread with the hungry... Clothing the naked is what pleases God. Then you shall call and the Lord will answer, you shall cry for help, and he will say 'here I am'" (Is 58:6-9). No wonder that many young people discover their vocation working with the poor and many religious communities receive more vocations when they work with the poor.

Working with the poor and serving Jesus

We cannot ignore that the last judgment will be based on our service to the poor "Whatever you did to the least of my brothers and sisters you did it to me" (Matt 25:40). Working with the poor is not just social action, but a discovery of the Lord we seek and who give us strength in our mission. It is said that Mother Teresa of Calcutta, picking up the dying people found in the gutters, was told: "I would not do this work for a million dollars!" She answered, "Neither would I!" She was holding in her hands the Master whom she cherished above everything else.

Serving Jesus and receiving heaven

At the end of our life we will be judged on love (St. John of the Cross). We can hear Jesus telling us: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, receive the reward" (Matt 25:34). We are not just serving Jesus in the poor, we are "storing treasures in heaven... and where our treasure is there will also be our hearts" (Matt 7:20-21).

Receiving heaven and fulfilling our vocation

The Second Vatican Council reminds us of "the universal call to holiness." The primary purpose of our vocation, as we are told in many Religious Constitutions, is to become saints and to fulfill our life's purpose.

We come to the full circle of our vocation and no link of the chain can be broken or eliminated. "Prayer to God and solidarity with the poor and suffering are inseparable... I reiterate this basic truth in the life of the Church, for the poor are and always be with us to welcome Christ's presence into our daily life" (Stretch Forth, 2020, 3).

A life dedicated to vocations and the poor

I would like to use the example of how the encounter with a poor transformed the life of a person and brought him to an intense prayer to obtain good workers for the Church. Hannibal Mary Di Francia (1851-1927) was the son of a noble family directed to a life of literary excellence and a career in the Church. When he was a deacon, he encountered a beggar, named Zancone, whom he helped and promised to visit where he lived. He went to visit him in Avignone (Messina, Italy). The place was defined by one of his contemporaries as "a damned piece of land, where a band of beasts lives." He decided to live there and to minister to the poor children, men and women rejected by society.

With great sacrifice he was able to transform the place and the people. But in his great activity in favor of the poor, a thought was always present in his mind. He writes:

"I would reflect: what are these few orphans that are saved, and these few poor that are evangelized, in comparison with millions who are lost and are abandoned as sheep without a shepherd? I was considering the limits of my wretched efforts and the very small circle of my possibilities, and I was looking for a solution" (Rogationist Anthology p.224).

He found "a wide unlimited solution in the adorable word of our Lord Jesus Christ: 'Pray the Lord of the harvest to send workers to gather his harvest'" (Matt 9:38). He saw unlimited possibilities to help and evangelize the poor in

this prayer of petitions for vocations. He wrote: "To make this prayer universal, with the Lord's help, I will be ready to meet any sacrifice, even to give up my life" (Rogationist Anthology p. 390). He found and reached the purpose of his call. He was proclaimed Saint by Pope John Paul II on May 16, 2004, and recognized as promoter of the prayer for vocations and father of abandoned children and people in need.

Do I "stretch forth my hand to the poor" in our community, clients as we call them in our Service Centers? Do I love, cherish, respect, and give dignity to the poor? Do I elevate the poor to the level of the rich and successful? St. Hannibal considered the poor "great and princes before God." But he considered the rich also poor when they lacked the Lord. I would like to conclude with the words of St. Hannibal Mary Di Francia:

"I feel a bond of holy friendship with everyone on earth, either of my religion or another, rich or poor, employer or worker, humble or needy people or high aristocracy. I have seen a brother and my Lord in everyone of them. The most beautiful things I have desired for me in this life or the next, I have desired equally for all" (Di Francia, Letter to friends).

"In this journey of daily encounter with the poor, the Mother of God is ever at our side" (Stretch Forth, 2020 10). ■



FR. JOHN BRUNO, RCJ

Is a pastor at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Sanger, CA and the Vicar Forane for the Fresno rural area. Fr. John was the editor of Vocations and Prayer magazine for over 12 years.

Promoting Peace, Justice, and the Integrity of Creation

Interview with Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse Gebresilasie, MCCJ, Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus

By VOCATIONS AND PRAYER STAFF

I am Fr. Tesfaye, a Comboni Missionary Priest from Ethiopia. I joined the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus, with the desire of following Christ and announcing the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. I learned about St. Daniel Comboni, a great Missionary of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who lived and died in love with Africa and Africans, and I said to myself: Let me try! I professed my First Religious Vows on May 01, 1991, and was ordained a priest on August 26, 1995. From 1995-2004, I served in Pastoral Ministry (Evangelization) and in the Ministry of Vocation Promotion-Formation. As part of my preparation to work in Sudan and Egypt, I received a Licentiate (Master's Degree) in Islamic studies at the Pontifical Institute of Islamic-Arabic Studies (PISAI) in Rome. In 2003, I took a short course to prepare for service in pastoral vocations at the UPS (Salesian University) in Rome. From 2005-2009, I served as Provincial Superior in Ethiopia, and from 2009-2012 as Assistant General. Since 2015, I have been serving as Superior General.

Describe in a few words the mission and charism of your Congregation.

The Institute, or Congregation, of the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus, "has the purpose of carrying out the evangelizing mission of the Church among those peoples, or groups of peoples, not yet or only inadequately evangelized" (Rule of Life 13). We have commitments of Evangelization, which includes the Pastoral Ministry, Mission Promotion, and Formation and Human Development in Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe. We do work mainly among brothers and sisters who need listening to the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ, particularly among those who suffer because of poverty and marginalization. We have



Photo by Comboni Missionaries

inherited the Missionary Charism of our Father and Founder, St Daniel Comboni, in communion with the Comboni Missionary Sisters, Comboni Secular Missionaries and the Comboni Lay Missionaries. Many, who share the same passion, love and commitment at the service of God's Mission, are our Associates, Friends and Benefactors of Comboni Missionaries.

Where is your Congregation present around the world?

We are present in 40 countries: 17 countries in Africa, 10 countries in the Ameri-

cas, 9 countries in Europe, and 3-4 countries in Asia.

What is your Congregation's Ministry in the U.S. and North America?

The Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus have a long history in the USA since their first arrival in 1939. At this moment in time, they serve in seven communities in the USA located in the Los Angeles, California area, Chicago Archdiocese, Cincinnati Archdiocese, and Newark Archdiocese. These Comboni communities, along with the Comboni community



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of St. Joseph Parish, in Kitchener, Ontario-Canada, comprise the North American Province (NAP). The Comboni Missionaries in the USA are committed to the work of evangelization in parishes among African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans and the more significant American population.

The Comboni missionaries in the USA are committed to “evangelization, mission and vocation promotion, formation, as well as promoting peace, justice and the integrity of creation.” Also, we do promote and support missionary ministry elsewhere in the world. We are grateful to all our Benefactors who have helped with incredible generosity the activities of the Comboni Missionaries in the other parts of the world.

Are you seeing an increased interest in vocations to religious life in your congregation around the world? If so, is it mostly young people who are considering a vocation?

First of all, we thank God for the gift of new vocations we receive and for the perseverance of those already called to be Comboni missionaries. Yes, we have a good number of young people interested in our Comboni Missionary Vocation, but

we also have people whom we may consider as late vocation people joining us.

In which places of the world have your congregation seen the greatest increase in vocations?

Nowadays, we have more and more vocations in several African countries. In Europe, where we got many vocations in the past, we have less Comboni vocations. In the American Continent, more precisely in Mexico and South America, we have a good number of young people interested in our Comboni Missionary vocation; we have also candidates joining us in Asia, mainly from Vietnam and the Philippines.

What about vocations in your congregation to religious life in the United States?

Our Congregation is blessed with many vocations. We have had USA citizens who became Comboni Missionaries and did serve God and their brothers and sisters in the different parts of the world. We thank God for these American vocations. We are grateful to all our benefactors who have supported us with our expenses for our Formation program. Currently, we have fewer vocations from the USA. However, we have confreres committed in Vocation Promotion and Mission awareness

programs. We are grateful to Pastoral agents in the Local Church who allow us to do Mission Appeals and Vocation Promotion. Lately, our confreres in the Los Angeles area have started what they call “Comboni Home-Based Seminary.” These are young people who are discerning missionary life as Comboni Missionaries. They live with their families but do attend retreats, Eucharist and other sacraments as part of their Christian life. We thank God for the Comboni Lay Missionary Program (CLMP) and the Vocations they share with the world.

As a superior general you have several meetings with superiors of other congregations around the world. What is your impression about the general trend of vocations to religious life?

Yes, now and then there are meetings of those of us who serve in General Leadership positions. More or less the situation is similar, in some parts of the world we have fewer and fewer vocations and in other parts of the world, there is a growing number of vocations. We all believe that the Lord continues to call us to be His disciples and apostles as consecrated men and women. We also ask ourselves what methods do we have to use to do Vocation Promotion in the actual context



Photo by Comboni Missionaries

of the young people. However, we also examine our life and ask questions: What is that makes our life unattractive to the youth? At times, why is our life experience not credible or authentic to the point that young people don't want to embrace it while they look for a more profound and sincere way of following Christ?

According to your experience and charisma, what are the main points for an effective pastoral care for vocations to religious life today?

I think much has been said and written on this. For me, at different levels of our journey of Formation, we need to commit ourselves, with deep and profound convictions but also with joyful trust; that the Holy Spirit continues to work in the heart of our young people. It is good to know the background of our young candidates. Very few people might come from a perfect setup or desirable background. However, as many come from broken or dysfunctional realities, it is good to see if they have made a good journey of encounter with our Lord Jesus. A profound experience of the Good News of God's love in their lives as individuals and community is determinant.

Then at the different phases of For-

mation, we need not only prepared but also exemplar religious men and women who might be called to serve in Formation. There is also a need for attention to be given to our faith and religious communities. The values of God's Kingdom will make them witness as a community of brothers and sisters in fraternity. Their lifestyle, as individuals and community, can help and influence the pastoral of vocations.

How are the activities of the pastoral care for vocations organized in your congregation?

We do organize the pastoral care of vocation through different activities, such as Come/zoom and See programs, retreats, organized time for short Mission-Pastoral Experience/trip, Community Life Experience. We also have a period we call Aspirancy or Pre-postulancy in which those who aspire to be Comboni missionaries are in contact with and participate in different initiatives. Today we use Social Communication technology. Our candidates are called to live in an intercultural community in the future. So, during the Postulancy, Novitiate and the period of Temporary Religious Vows, we invest a lot so that we may grow in learning how to live and evangelize as a community.

Are there any other thoughts you would like to share with us on the topic of vocations?

I want to thank you for this opportunity to share some ideas. I want to express my gratitude to your Religious Congregation, which reminds the whole Church that we need to pray for Vocations. It is what our Lord Jesus Christ told us to do. It is the Lord who calls individuals and communities at the service of God's mission. The world and the Church all belong to God. Our Congregations-Institutes originate from God, the Holy Spirit, who inspired our Founders and Foundresses. It is God who is in charge of the whole humankind and the universe. It is God's heart revealed in the Heart of Jesus who has a passion for the people of God and continues to call persons to serve and take care of Missio Dei (the mission of God).

Let us continue to pray for Vocations. May Mother Mary pray for and with us all! We also pray for the front liners, through Health Ministry, who serve all those who suffer from illnesses, particularly during the Coronavirus Pandemic. May we reach out our heart. Reach out our words. Reach out compassion that moves, invisibly, where we cannot touch. AMEN! ■

Refocusing our Attention on our Relationship with Christ

Three Obstacles to Evangelizing Catechesis and How to Overcome Them



Photo by CDC

By JOHN M. RINALDO, D. MIN.

If Covid-19 hadn't already changed the way we do Church, leave it to the Vatican to drop a strong statement of challenge regarding the future of catechesis in the Catholic Church.

On June 25, 2020, the president of the Pontifical Council Promoting New Evangelization, Archbishop Rino Fisichella, presented the release of the updated "Directory for Catechesis" with some of his own comments on the state of catechesis today. In his statement, he described three "chokeholds" or obstacles that the new Directory addresses:

1. "Treating catechesis as if it were a school subject with information a teacher imparts to students according to a fixed calendar and with a fixed text;
2. "The mentality by which catechesis becomes the condition for receiving a particular sacrament of initiation, with a consequent void opening up once initiation has ended;

3. "The exploitation of a sacrament in the name of pastoral strategy, so that – for example – the time frame for confirmation is dictated by the need not to lose the small flock of young people remaining in the parish."

With the release of the updated directory, the Vatican is clearly challenging how we go about sacramental preparation and faith formation in the 21st century Church. Although the directory does provide some guidance for pastoral leaders, individual parishes and dioceses are left to their own devices to interpret and implement specific strategies to overcome these three obstacles.

Let's break down each obstacle and discuss potential strategies.

Obstacle #1: Catechesis as a subject in school

If the Catholic Church can hang its hat on one thing, it is that we are an intellectual and academic tradition. This is to be commended and encouraged. The Church can clearly articulate why it believes what it believes. Our model of

formation has mirrored that academic model for generations. The challenge Archbishop Fisichella names is that the Catholic faith ends up being just one subject to be taught alongside many, like math and history. Therefore, our strategy has been to imitate what is done in schools and teach it like a subject.

The problem is that faith is not just about what we know. It's also about Who we know.

Evangelization is about pastoral conversion and bringing us into relationship with our Creator. When we treat the faith only like a subject to be taught in school, then we engage the mind, but not the heart. Evangelizing catechesis aims to accomplish both.

Where to begin:

It is important to start with a story. Specifically, the individual catechists' story of conversion. Many lay people feel inadequate to be a catechist because they feel like they don't know enough about their faith. However, the only qualification required to be a catechist

Called to Mission Today

1. Introduction

All Christians are called to be missionaries of the Gospel. We are men and women touched and transformed by the joy of God's love, who cannot keep this experience just to ourselves. For "the Gospel joy which enlivens the community of disciples is a missionary joy" (Evangelii Gaudium, 21).

2. Exposition/Eucharistic Song

Brief silent adoration prayer (kneeling before the Holy Sacrament)

3. Liturgy of the Word

The presiding minister then goes to the chair, where he prays the following opening prayer:

Opening Prayer

O God, who in the power of the Holy Spirit have sent your Word to announce good news to the poor, grant that, with eyes fixed upon him, we may ever live in sincere charity, made heralds and witnesses of his Gospel in all the world. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

A Reading from the Acts of the Apostles (13:46-49)

Responsorial Psalm (or an appropriate song)

Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 7-8

R. O God let all the nations praise you!

May God have pity on us and bless us;
may he let his face shine upon us.
So may your way be known upon earth;
among all nations, your salvation. **R.**

May the nations be glad and exult
because you rule the peoples in equity;
the nations on the earth you guide. **R.**

The earth has yielded its fruits;
God, our God, has blessed us.
May God bless us,
and may all the ends of the earth fear him! **R.**

4. Meditation

A Reading from the Writings of Pope Francis (see p. 18, #1)

Homily

5. Adoration/Prayer Time

Silent Prayer (The Rosary may also be said here, whole or part)

Intercessions

Strengthened by the Holy Spirit, we become a people of "prophets" sent to announce to the world the wonders of God's love and mercy. We pray together and say: *Lord, make us instruments of your love.*

- Lord, send the Holy Spirit you have promised, that your Church may be continuously renewed and be able to guide the people gently towards salvation. We pray:
- Lord Jesus, you want to make one holy people from all nations. We bless you for having called us to be missionaries of your love in the world. We pray:
- Lord Jesus, contemplating your presence in the sacrament of the Eucharist, give us a better understanding of our missionary vocation and instill in our young people the desire to serve you as priests or consecrated people. We pray:
- Lord Jesus, grant the missionaries working in mission land to remain strong and zealous witnesses of Christ's love for all. We pray:
- Lord Jesus, instill a real missionary spirit in those who live their lives for others: parents, priests, religious men and women, doctors, everyone in the healing ministry, teachers and formators, so that they can become instruments and witnesses of your love. We pray:
- Lord Jesus, our love and our hope, grant us gathered here that we may respond to your call making ourselves available to others. We pray:

(Other intercessions may be offered here)

Our Father...

Loving God, grant us generous and loving hearts that we may show charity and mercy to everyone we meet, keeping in mind that each person is your beloved child, redeemed by the most precious blood of your divine Son Jesus, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Community Prayer for Vocations *(kneeling before the Holy Sacrament)*

Lord Jesus, you commanded your apostles to throw once again the fishing nets, to go and teach all peoples and be your witnesses everywhere. Make your voice heard by many generous people who appreciate the beauty of total self-giving. Send us holy priests who will renew, in every special way, your life-giving presence. Raise zealous people who may become yeast in the Church. Send vocations for our many brothers and sisters who are waiting for your Word. Revive among the laity numerous forms of collaboration at the service of the Gospel. Grant that each one of us live our life with profundity so that we may spread your kingdom of justice, truth, love, and peace on earth. *Amen.*

6. Benediction/Reposition

Serving the Poor

1. Introduction

"Stretch forth your hand to the poor' (Sir 7:32). Age-old wisdom has proposed these words as a sacred rule to be followed in life. Today these words remain as timely as ever. They help us fix our gaze on what is essential and overcome the barriers of indifference. Poverty always appears in a variety of guises, and calls for attention to each particular situation. In all of these, we have an opportunity to encounter the Lord Jesus, who has revealed himself as present in the least of his brothers and sisters (cf. Mt 25:40)." -Pope Francis

2. Exposition/Eucharistic song

Brief silent adoration prayer kneeling before the Holy Sacrament.

3. Liturgy of the Word

The presiding minister then goes to the chair, where he prays the following opening prayer:

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, present in our midst in the sacrament of the Eucharist as well as in the poor, grant us the virtue to see you in the face of those in need and to hear you in the cries of the exploited. Remind us that what we do to the least amongst us, we do it to you, who are God, and who lives and reigns with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

A Reading from the first letter of Saint John (3:14-18)

Responsorial Psalm (or an appropriate song)

Psalm 41: 2-5.13

R. Blessed the one concerned for the poor.

Blessed the one concerned for the poor;
on a day of misfortune, the Lord delivers him. **R.**

The Lord keeps and preserves him,
makes him blessed in the land,
and does not betray him to his enemies. **R.**

The Lord sustains him on his sickbed,
you turn down his bedding whenever he is ill. **R.**

Even I have said, Lord, take note of me;
heal me, although I have sinned against you. **R.**

In my integrity may you support me
and let me stand in your presence forever. **R.**

4. Meditation

A Reading from the Writings of Pope Francis (see p. 18, #2)

Homily

5. Adoration/Prayer Time

Silent Prayer (The Rosary may also be said here, whole or part)

Intercessions

We give glory to God, whose kindness knows no limit in Jesus Christ, let us pray: *Kindle in our hearts the fire of your love.*

- Lord Jesus, bless your Church with the gift of new vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life, so that she may grow day by day in the service of the poor. Let us pray:
- Lord Jesus, you became like us in all things but sin; teach us how to share with others their joy and sorrow, that our love may grow deeper every day. Let us pray:
- Lord Jesus, look at the developing nations, lacking in means to resolve their serious problems. May they receive the assistance they need from wealthy countries. Let us pray:
- Lord Jesus, help us to feed you in feeding the hungry, and to give you drink in assisting the thirsty. Let us pray:
- Lord Jesus, we implore your mercy for all of us gathered here before you present in this most Blessed Sacrament. May we live our own vocation in serving you and our brothers and sisters, especially the most in need. Let us pray:

(Other intercessions may be offered here)

Our Father...

Lord Jesus, we praise and thank you because you continue to show your loving attention to human sufferings through religious men and women who, in your name, offer their lives to serve the poorest and most neglected in our society. Multiply the number of priests, missionaries, men and women who consecrate themselves to you in religious life or in secular institutes; bless those who dedicate their lives to the service of the poor. You are God, who lives and reigns with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Community Prayer for Vocations *(kneeling before the Holy Sacrament)*

Lord Jesus Christ, we adore you hidden in the most supreme mystery of your infinite love. We raise our zealous plea to you. Redeemer of mankind, deign to send holy apostles for the salvation of all peoples. Call efficaciously, generous men and women to your service. Jesus, you are always present among us in the Blessed Sacrament and live with us. As you once called the Apostles, call many to follow you.

6. Benediction/Reposition

HOLY HOUR

All for Love

1. Introduction

To love means to be close, to share, to live with, to give your life for others. This is the meaning of the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God: Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. He remains with us forever in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Precisely by contemplating the mystery of the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, we learn to make our life a gift for others, because only in loving, our life finds meaning and fulfillment.

2. Exposition/Eucharistic song

Brief silent adoration prayer kneeling before the Holy Sacrament.

3. Liturgy of the Word

The presiding minister then goes to the chair, where he prays the following opening prayer:

Opening Prayer

We praise and thank you Lord Jesus, because you desired to perpetuate your presence in the sacrament of the Eucharist and instituted the priesthood to bring your life and salvation to the world. Grant us to be your faithful disciples by stretching our hands towards all our brothers and sisters, above all those more in need of your love. You are God, who lives and reigns with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

A Reading from prophet Isaiah (61:1-3)

Responsorial Psalm (or an appropriate song)

Psalm 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10.

R. Lord, come and save us.

The Lord God keeps faith forever,
secures justice for the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets captives free. **R.**

The Lord gives sight to the blind;
the Lord raises up those who were bowed down.
The Lord loves the just;
the Lord protects strangers. **R.**

The fatherless and the widow he sustains,
but the way of the wicked he thwarts.
The Lord shall reign forever;
your God, O Zion, through all generations. **R.**

4. Meditation

A Reading from the writings of Pope Francis (see p. 18, #3)

Homily

5. Adoration/Prayer Time

Silent Prayer (the Rosary may also be said here, whole or part)

Intercessions

May, brothers and sisters, our heavenly Father call us all into active service in the Church. Let us offer to him our prayer: *Lord, send holy apostles into your Church.*

- For our Holy Father, Pope Francis, all bishops, priests and deacons: May God who chose them to shepherd his Church give them wisdom, good health, and strength in their ministry. Let us pray:
- For new vocations to the priestly ministry: Send, Lord Jesus, priests for the whole church, priests according to your heart, and in number sufficient for the increased needs of the Church and of the world. Let us pray:
- For all those discerning a vocation to the priesthood: May the light of the Holy Spirit guide and direct them, and show them the way to which God is calling them. Let us pray:
- For vocations to consecrated life: call, Lord Jesus, our young people, men and women, to the observance of the evangelical counsels, so that there may never be a lack of people in the church who testify your love among the poor. Let us pray:
- For our community: Lord Jesus, bless our community with the gift of many people willing to approach, serve and evangelize the poor. Let us pray:

(Other intercessions may be offered here)

Our Father...

Lord Jesus Christ, you gave us the Eucharist as sacrament of your love and your presence among us. May our worship of this sacrament of your body and blood help us to experience the salvation you won for us and the peace of the kingdom where you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. *Amen.*

Community Prayer for Vocations (kneeling before the Holy Sacrament)

Lord, in the course of the centuries you deign to call and send throughout the world men and women who offered themselves for your kingdom. You have raised patriarchs and prophets, you prepared the birth of your Son Jesus by calling Mary, the Virgin of Nazareth, to be united with Him in the work of redemption. In the footsteps of the Apostles, you have called innumerable pastors who offered their own lives for the flock entrusted to them. Even today, raise new apostles in your Church. Owner of the harvest, send holy workers to your harvest. We pray to you, hear us O Lord. *Amen.*

6. Benediction/Reposition

Readings for Meditation

1. From the Message of Pope Francis for World Mission Day 2020

Called to Mission Today

Mission is a free and conscious response to God's call. Yet we discern this call only when we have a personal relationship of love with Jesus present in his Church. Let us ask ourselves: are we prepared to welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, to listen to the call to mission, whether in our life as married couples or as consecrated persons or those called to the ordained ministry, and in all the everyday events of life? Are we willing to be sent forth at any time or place to witness to our faith in God the merciful Father, to proclaim the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ, to share the divine life of the Holy Spirit by building up the Church? Are we, like Mary, the Mother of Jesus, ready to be completely at the service of God's will (cf. Lk 1:38)? This interior openness is essential if we are to say to God: "Here am I, Lord, send me" (cf. Is 6:8). And this, not in the abstract, but in this chapter of the life of the Church and of history.

Understanding what God is saying to us at this time of pandemic also represents a challenge for the Church's mission (...) Being forced to observe social distancing and to stay at home invites us to rediscover that we need social relationships as well as our communal relationship with God. Far from increasing mistrust and indifference, this situation should make us even more attentive to our way of relating to others. And prayer, in which God touches and moves our hearts, should make us ever more open to the need of our brothers and sisters for dignity and freedom, as well as our responsibility to care for all creation. The impossibility of gathering as a Church to celebrate the Eucharist has led us to share the experience of the many Christian communities that cannot celebrate Mass every Sunday. In all of this, God's question: "Whom shall I send?" is addressed once more to us and awaits a generous and convincing response: "Here am I, send me!" (Is 6:8). God continues to look for those whom he can send forth into the world and to the nations to bear witness to his love, his deliverance from sin and death, his liberation from evil (cf. Mt 9:35-38; Lk 10:1-12).

2. From the Message of Pope Francis for the Fourth World Day of the Poor (n. 2-3)

Serving the poor

2. [...] Prayer to God and solidarity with the poor and suffering are inseparable. In order to perform an act of worship acceptable to the Lord, we have to recognize that each person, even the poorest and most contemptible, is made in the image of God. From this awareness comes the gift of God's blessing, drawn by the generosity we show to the poor. Time devoted to prayer can never become an alibi for neglecting our neighbour in need. In fact the very opposite is true: the Lord's blessing descends upon us and prayer attains its goal when accompanied by service to the poor.

3. How timely too, for ourselves, is this ancient teaching! Indeed,

the word of God transcends space and time, religions and cultures. Generosity that supports the weak, consoles the afflicted, relieves suffering and restores dignity to those stripped of it, is a condition for a fully human life. The decision to care for the poor, for their many different needs, cannot be conditioned by the time available or by private interests, or by impersonal pastoral or social projects. The power of God's grace cannot be restrained by the selfish tendency to put ourselves always first.

Keeping our gaze fixed on the poor is difficult, but more necessary than ever if we are to give proper direction to our personal life and the life of society. It is not a matter of fine words but of a concrete commitment inspired by divine charity. Each year, on the World Day of the Poor, I reiterate this basic truth in the life of the Church, for the poor are and always will be with us to help us welcome Christ's presence into our daily lives (cf. Jn 12:8).

From the Message of Pope Francis for the Fourth World Day of the Poor (n.10)

All for Love

10. "In everything you do, remember your end" (Sir 7:36). These are the final words of this chapter of the book of Sirach. They can be understood in two ways. First, our lives will sooner or later come to an end. Remembering our common destiny can help lead to a life of concern for those poorer than ourselves or lacking the opportunities that were ours. But second, there is also an end or goal towards which each of us is tending. And this means that our lives are a project and a process. The "end" of all our actions can only be love. This is the ultimate goal of our journey, and nothing should distract us from it. This love is one of sharing, dedication and service, born of the realization that we were first loved and awakened to love. We see this in the way children greet their mother's smile and feel loved simply by virtue of being alive. Even a smile that we can share with the poor is a source of love and a way of spreading love. An outstretched hand, then, can always be enriched by the smile of those who quietly and unassumingly offer to help, inspired only by the joy of living as one of Christ's disciples.

In this journey of daily encounter with the poor, the Mother of God is ever at our side. More than any other, she is the Mother of the Poor. The Virgin Mary knows well the difficulties and sufferings of the marginalized, for she herself gave birth to the Son of God in a stable. Due to the threat of Herod, she fled to another country with Joseph, her spouse and the child Jesus. For several years, the Holy Family lived as refugees. May our prayer to Mary, Mother of the Poor, unite these, her beloved children, with all those who serve them in Christ's name. And may that prayer enable outstretched hands to become an embrace of shared and rediscovered fraternity.

is to be baptized and to have experienced God's movement in their lives.

The most important thing a catechist can do is share their story of faith with those they are ministering to.

Young people are compelled by story, not facts. We are drawn into good movies and good books not because of the facts that are shared, but because the emotion of the adventure calls to us. Every catechist should be trained to share their story of faith and conversion. Everything else can be taught or looked up.

The training of catechists is a key element to overcoming this obstacle. We must encourage our catechists to not only use the text or resource that is provided, but to share from their own story of faith, their own experience, or the experience of others, including the Bible.

Obstacle #2: Catechesis ends after initiation

We know that we see an incredible number of families decrease their Mass attendance and involvement in the Church immediately after the sacraments of initiation are received, especially the sacrament of confirmation with adolescents. We have created a catechetical model where receiving the sacraments is the end prize. Once we receive the prize, we disappear from the Church.

Many pastoral ministers bemoan the fact that many families treat the sacrament of confirmation as a graduation. With all the teaching and requirements that we have put in place, combined with obstacle 1, we shouldn't be surprised that this happens.

Where to begin:

My friend, Diana Macalintal, wrote an incredible book, *Your Parish is the Curriculum*. In it, she effectively argues that evangelizing catechesis and formation happens when we involve those that are being formed into the life of the parish.

Our formation programs should not

only include traditional teaching, but should also include involvement in the life of the parish. Our focus should be on a formation model of apprenticeship. An apprentice is one who learns a trade by being taught through hands-on methods the skills of that trade by an experienced mentor.

For the Church, the trade we are apprenticing people towards is discipleship.

The experienced mentor is the catechist and the parents.

We learn by doing. Once we learn the basics of the faith, it is time to begin living it by engaging in service projects, volunteering for liturgy, serving on the pastoral council, becoming a catechist, etc. It is in those moments that we begin to train young people that what we do in Church is not just about the sacraments, but it is about living out our faith in action inspired by transformational power of the sacrament.

Every formation program needs to include opportunities outside the classroom so that we learn that discipleship is not just a subject to be taught and that it does not end once one receives the sacrament. It is a lifelong journey.

Obstacle #3: Using the sacrament as a strategy to keep young people in the Church longer

The age when the sacrament of Confirmation takes place is dictated at the Diocesan level by the local bishop. This article will not address at what age is appropriate for young people to receive the sacraments. There are excellent pastoral and theological reasons to argue many sides.

For many of us, the age in which a sacrament is administered is not in our control. However, our attitude towards the sacraments of initiation are.

It almost seems universal that pastoral leaders think to themselves that the sacrament of confirmation is the "last chance"

to hook young people. When we facilitate sacramental preparation with this mentality, we perpetuate that thought with young people and their parents.

Where to begin:

The best place to begin to dismantle this obstacle is to address obstacles number one and two first. By the very nature of implementing strategies around the first two obstacles, we automatically begin to change our mindset that confirmation is not the final opportunity.

Think about all the requirements that we put in place to receive the sacrament of confirmation. I'm not against requirements. But when we focus so much energy on making sure young people have "checked all the boxes," we perpetuate the idea that sacrament is about those check marks and not conversion.

As people of faith, we also need to remember that the Spirit bestows the graces of the sacrament in His own time, not our time.

As pastoral leaders, catechists, and parents, we certainly have a role to play and we should begin to address all these obstacles. And, at the same time, it takes faith for us to entrust our young people to the movement of our God who ultimately knows what our children and youth need.

These three obstacles are well engrained in the life of the Church. If we are to succeed in our mission to evangelize, then we must dismantle these obstacles in our parish and refocus our attention on conversion and a relationship with Christ in the context of our Catholic community.



JOHN M. RINALDO, D. MIN

Is a coach and trainer for the Parish Success Group and an Adjunct Lecturer for Santa Clara University. John is the co-host of "The Church Podcast," where weekly they discuss "all things ministry to help you do Church better." You can find out more at www.ParishSuccessGroup.com.

Called To Call Others

The Rogationists' Vocation Promotion Ministry

By Fr. FRANCISCO JAVIER FLORES, RCJ

Jesus's command to "ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest" (Mt 9:38) urges us to pray and to invite others to follow him as religious men, women and priests. Just like Andrew brought Simon to Jesus, and Philip invited Nathanael to come and see the Messiah, we are also called to call others to follow Jesus (Jn 1:40-46).

In my role as the Vocations Director for the Congregation of Rogationists Our Lady of Guadalupe Delegation (California, USA and Guadalajara, Mexico), I work with our vocations team to promote vocations work and prayer. I would like to share some of the vocations promotion strategies for 2020-2021.

First, if we need to promote vocations, youth and those discerning a vocation need to be informed. Our vocation ministry starts by promoting vocations through different means. For example, we cannot hold large events due to Covid-19. Then a perfect starting point is social media. We will introduce the Rogationist Seminary in a short video. It is important to introduce our Congregation's Formation House because it is here where the future seminarians will be under formation during the first stages of their seminary life. In addition, we will record, edit, and post vocation videos on our website and various social media channels. With the help of other Rogationists priests, also members of the vocations committee, we plan to produce one-minute vocation videos to share their vocation stories and to instill in youth an interest about God's call for them. In addition to posting on social media, we will make available vocation flyers, posters, and prayer cards.

Although these means of promotion may help us reach a greater number of

youth, the best way to promote vocations consists of establishing a personal rapport with young people, walking by their side, and talking about their vocation discernment.

Second, it is very important to have a vocation promotion program that is simple and easy to follow. The Rogationists' program is one year long, starting in July 2020 through July 2021. We have divided this year's program into two parts.

We will implement the short-term goals during the first six months. They include:

- Getting to know the candidates and accompanying them closely before entering the seminary.
- Inviting them once a month, preferably the last Sunday of each month, to the Seminary for vocation orientation.
- Getting acquainted with the candidates' families.
- Preparing them to take a step further by welcoming them as external seminarians within their own families.

We expect to complete our long-term goals by the end of the 2020-2021 period. They include welcoming the external seminarians into the first stage of formation at the Rogationist Seminary. During the second half of the year, vocation encounters will be more frequent and the candidates will be more involved in the several events our religious community sponsors. They will become more aware of the possibility of starting their actual seminary formation by the end of the year. Whoever is ready and willing to enter in the seminary may do so with the vocation committee's approval.

Thirdly, when religious and priestly vocations are scarce, lay people need to be involved in promoting vocations in different ways also. Vocation Ministry does not

work alone. The first and foremost activity in which lay people must be involved is in praying to God to send out holy vocations to the whole Church. Yet, there is a great need to instill in the minds and hearts of the laity Jesus's categorical imperative of begging to God, the Father, for more workers in the Church and in society.

For instance, every parish can set up a schedule to pray for vocations on Thursdays. If we ever want to be successful at promoting vocations, prayer must be the backbone of this vocation ministry. Furthermore, if prayer is the starting point, action must come right after. Lay people need to be involved in this ministry and work with us closely in various vocations activities such as vocation announcements, vocation retreats, altar servers' vocation gatherings, and vocation musical band rehearsals and presentations, just to name a few.

Jesus called his first disciples Andrew and Philip. These two disciples called others such as Simon Peter and Nathanael. They became the voice, the feet and the hands of Jesus who continue to call others to follow him more closely in religious and priestly life. We are the Andrews and the Philips who can call and accompany others as they respond wholeheartedly to Jesus' call. ■



FR. FRANCISCO JAVIER FLORES, RCJ

Is the Vocations Director of the Rogationist Fathers in Mexico and USA. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy from Saint John's Seminary in California and a Bachelor's degree in Theology from Don Bosco Center of Studies in the Philippines.

Words of Warning and Hope to the World's Leaders

The Prophet Zephaniah's Message



Photo by Priscilla Du Preez

By Fr. ISAAC KALINA, OSB

Zephaniah introduces himself to his readers from the very start as “Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah.” Among the prophets, this is a rather unique introduction with its genealogy reaching back to Zephaniah’s great-great grandfather, Hezekiah. He wanted to highlight his royal lineage as a descendant of one of Judah’s good kings. He prophesied in Jerusalem, with many references to temple worship, betraying his strongest ties with Israel’s re-

ligious culture and traditions. All these factors draw for us the image of one who was at the center of Judah’s world, in an active socio-political and religious manner; he rubbed elbows with the rich and powerful giving his prophecy greater impact.

Zephaniah’s book tells us that he prophesied during the reign of Josiah, the king of Judah from 640 to 609 BC. We can trace exactly when he prophesied by referencing the details and historical events in the text. Our prophet predicted the fall of Nineveh, occurring

in 612 BC. And he frequently quoted from the scroll-writings of the Law that he discovered in 622 BC.

Promises of Healing

This means that Zephaniah grew up during the reign of Josiah’s predecessors: Josiah’s grandfather, the evil king Manasseh, and Manasseh’s son, the young evil Amon. As a young man, the prophet-to-be would have been surrounded by pagan rituals and sinful practices. But Zephaniah grew into a man of God, able to stand before the

people proclaiming God's message of judgment and hope to a people that had gone astray.

The iniquity of the inhabitants of Judah, and especially Jerusalem, weighed heavily upon Zephaniah's heart and conscience. He was a contemporary of Jeremiah who was known as the "weeping prophet." His words bore much fruit but the subsequent results were not lasting. That things did actually change in Judah for a time as a consequence of these harsh words helps us to see that these were encouraging exhortations to bring about a change.

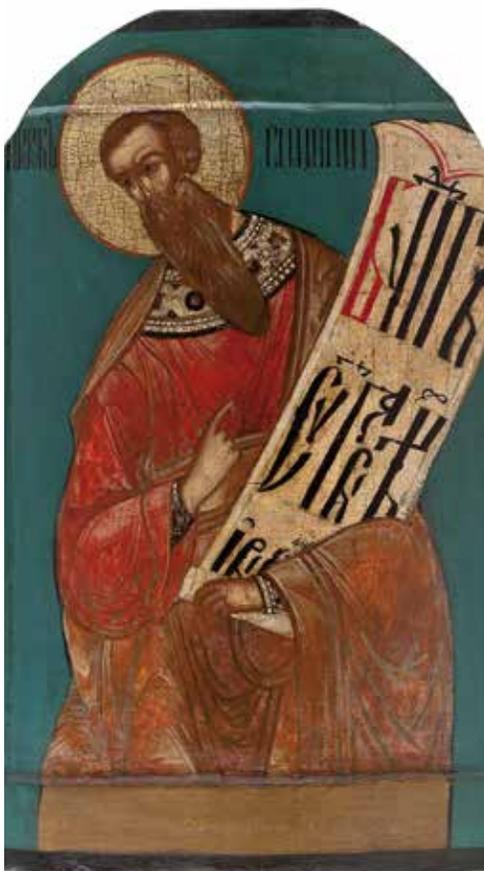
Zephaniah, like his fellow prophets, did not merely condemn, but he engaged in frequent socio-political criticism in order to bring about Judah's healing. Zephaniah follows his words of warning with promises of healing: "I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord."

This prophet's focus on the failures of Judah's leaders underlines the importance of faithfulness on the part of those entrusted with power and authority in our communities. It also highlights the risks that people in positions of power face in being continually tempted to exploit their positions for their own personal gain. No one is immune from such risks, not even the current President of the United States of America, Mr. Donald Trump. Judah's fate following Josiah's reforms warns us today not to put too much weight on the importance of the particular individuals who occupy those positions. King Josiah responded to Zephaniah's warnings. But he died young and his reforms faded away with him. Israel's faith now depended upon the ordinary common folk and the poor people's observance of the Law, keeping the Torah live in their day to day lives. This became the focus of many of the minor prophets.

Stubborn People

We find in this man Zephaniah one

not unlike King David, of royal lineage, a man after God's own heart, who as a young shepherd sang the psalms as he went about his daily work. Time, temptation and the Spirit shaped David's heart! In this prophet, we also discover how to walk with the Lord in pursuit of the wisdom David's son, King Solomon prayed for and was granted, more



than riches, possessions and fame. God chose the Israelite people as His own; not because they were greater, mightier or closer to their God, but precisely because they were the smallest of nations, the most unlikely to be favored.

We can describe these people then, as today in terms of our own fragile humanity that struggles in search to understand the heart of this God. They were a people that remembered they were loved and set free from slavery in an oppressive Egypt. But these people were fickle, hard-headed and stubborn, they vacillated back and forth in trying to be genuine followers and servants of the One God, as if on a roller coaster,

murmuring their excuses for their own lukewarm faith. But they loved God sincerely and wanted to fulfill His commands. These problems stemmed from the sins of those entrusted with leadership, entrusted with guiding, loving their people, but let themselves be misled by worldly ambition and a thirst for power that blinded them to God.

Leading in a Troubled World

No wonder we Christians read from the Prophet Zephaniah during Advent when the whole Church is anticipating the arrival of its Savior. Humanity awaits something new at Christmas, something at which Zephaniah hinted. We remember when Jesus was born, its setting in a turbulent Roman Empire during King Herod's reign with its reality of poverty and violence. Our prophet was born into a crazy world just like ours. Power rivalry and the fear of one's enemies can make otherwise good people do horrendous things. This is the world through which God comes to us. Not some other world! But this world dichotomously filled with faith and hope and sin.

God promised us much more than the world, more than all the worlds together are able to offer! Like Jesus, we still live in the world of Zephaniah, this world absorbed by injustice, poverty, factions, sin, and disease. It is into this world we are all flung not knowing what direction to take. But we do well as long as we remember that God is the boss, He can and does still work through all of this world's contradictions and problems as He promised. Amen! ■



FR. ISAAC KALINA, OSB

Is a native Californian who became a Benedictine monk at St. Andrew's Abbey in Valyermo in 1984. He has worn many hats: Prior, Subprior, Kitchenmaster, Youth Director, Asst. Novicemaster, Vocation Director & Junior master. Fr. Isaac holds a Master's in Addictions Counseling.

United with Jesus

Following in the Footsteps of Mary's Vocation

By Sr. Emily Beata Marsh, FSP

"And you yourself a sword will pierce."

(Luke 2:35)

On September 8, the Church celebrates the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Just one week later, on September 15, we celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows. This Gospel is one of the options for Mass on the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows. It might seem a little strange to reflect and pray with Our Lady of Sorrows so soon after reflecting and praying with Mary's birth. But it's not as strange as we might at first think.

Mary's vocation in this world was complete union with her Son. She realized this physically when she carried him in her womb. She also realized this spiritually throughout her life by being the first disciple and apostle of her Son. She was united to him in his joys—his hidden life with Mary and Joseph, his choosing of the twelve disciples, his miracles and healings, and ultimately his resurrection. She was also united to him in his sorrows and sufferings—Joseph's death, being rejected by the people he was sent to, and of course his passion and death. Mary accompanied him in all of this.

"And you yourself a sword will pierce so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." How was Mary able to so closely accompany Jesus? And what can we learn from this? For the answer to these questions, I think that we have to return to Mary's hymn of praise, the Magnificat, when she says, "The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name." Mary has an intense awareness that God is the one acting in her life, that God has united himself to her life, her

joys, and her sorrows. This awareness is born of reflection on her life, and leads her to praise and thanksgiving.

Because Mary knows deep within her that God has united himself to her, she is able to unite herself to him in every moment of her life. Holiness, in its essence, is uniting ourselves to God more and more in each moment, day, situation, and circumstance of our lives. We can move toward this in many ways: talking to Jesus about what we're doing or what we're going through, asking Jesus to walk through our day with us, stopping before we start to do something or have a meeting or talk to someone and asking Jesus to do it with us.

Mary also teaches us another way of being united to God. She had the unique privilege of being physically present to Jesus during his earthly life. She could ask him how he was feeling, what he was happy about or worried about, or how she could help him. Jesus is just as truly present to us as he was to Mary during his earthly life—which means that we can ask him these things, too! We can ask Jesus what he thinks about things. As we tell him what is on our mind and heart, we can ask him what is on his mind and heart. These are very powerful and tangible ways of remaining united to Jesus throughout the day.

"And you yourself a sword will pierce so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." Jesus wants to be united with us in everything—joys, victories, sorrows, challenges. Sometimes we feel our union with him even more in the sorrow than in the joy. When someone is present to us in good times, we know that they love us, but when they are present to us in bad times, we really know that

they love us. So just as Mary shows her love for Jesus by allowing her heart to be figuratively pierced by a sword of sorrow, and by standing by him at the foot of the cross, so Jesus shows his love for us by standing by us in our not-so-great, difficult, even heart-wrenching moments.

This is so crucial for vocational discernment. Mary fulfilled her vocation by being united to Jesus; we, too, fulfill our vocation by being united to Jesus. As we unite ourselves to him more and more, we begin to live a life of union with him, and this is the point of every vocation.

Let us allow Jesus to accompany us and unite himself to us in every moment of our day, no matter what that moment entails. And let us accompany Jesus in the movements of his heart. There is no better day than a day lived entirely with Jesus.

Jesus, I unite my mind to yours, my will to yours, my heart to yours. In every joy and in every sorrow, may you be the one that I live with and live for. Mary, teach me to be united to Jesus as you were. Amen. ■



SR. EMILY BEATA MARSH, FSP

Professed her final vows in June 2018. Sister Emily is currently the National Vocation Director for the Daughters of St. Paul.

“For you, Jesus. If you want it, I want it, too!”

Blessed Chiara Luce Badano

By Fr. PETER QUINTO, RCJ

What can a young person teach us about how to face pain and suffering? There is so much suffering in the world that those who say that there is no God seem to have a good case not to believe in his existence. But as Christians, we believe that suffering has been redeemed when Jesus underwent his passion. Through his Paschal Mystery, we who once were lost, have now been saved from eternal damnation. God’s holy people show us how to embrace the Cross of suffering.

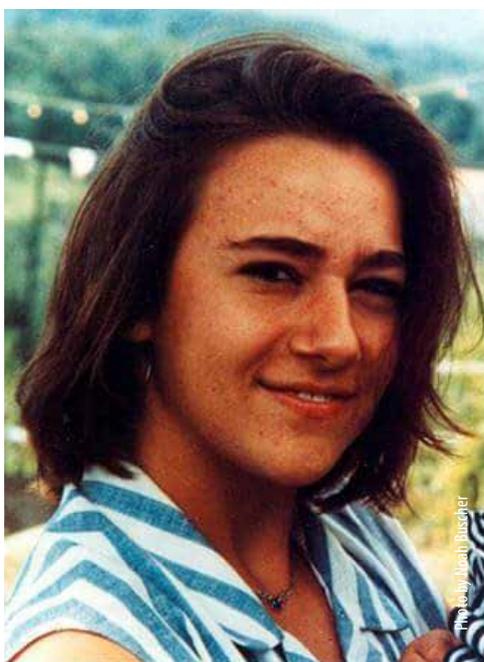
Chiara was born on October 29, 1971, in Savona, Italy, in a small village called Sassello. Her parents, Ruggero and Maria Teresa, waited 11 years before they finally had Chiara, raising her in the Catholic faith.

Chiara had a crucial encounter with the Focolare Movement when she was about nine years old. She participated with her parents in the Family Fest, a major international meeting held in Rome. Her discovery at this event of “God’s immense love” profoundly affected her relationships with her family, friends, and classmates.

As she grew older and entered high school, Chiara was like any other girl her age who enjoyed being with friends, played sports, sang, danced, and stayed out late with them. Her friends saw something extraordinary in her ability to listen and her spiritual sensitivity, confiding in her their doubts and struggles. Her mother asked her if she ever spoke of God to her friends. Chiara’s response was, “I must not talk about Jesus, I give them Jesus.” She explained that she gave her friends Jesus by “listening, then with the way I dress, but especially with my way of loving.”

Chiara was 17 years old in the summer of 1988 when, while playing ten-

nis, she felt a sharp pain in her shoulder that was eventually diagnosed as an aggressive bone cancer which spread quickly and paralyzed her. But even after she lost the use of her legs, Chiara remained positive in her attitude. She continued, despite the pain, to possess a supernatural joy. Instead of seeing the pain as a curse, she offered it all as a sacrifice to God. She



continually said, “For you, Jesus, if you want it, I want it, too!” Chiara refused morphine, saying, “It reduces my lucidity, and there’s only one thing I can do now: to offer my suffering to Jesus because I want to share as much as possible in his suffering on the cross.”

From the hospital bed, Chiara continued to live and offer every challenge. She spread her joy and love for Jesus through messages, postcards, and posters. Many of her friends who visited her would say afterwards: “At first we thought we would visit Chiara Luce to keep her spirits up, however, we soon realized that in fact, we were the ones who needed her. Her life was like a magnet drawing us towards her.”

One of the doctors said about her, “Through her smile, and through her eyes full of light, she showed us that death doesn’t exist; only life exists.”

Knowing that the end of her life was getting closer, Chiara said to her mother, “Don’t shed any tears for me. I’m going to Jesus. At my funeral, I don’t want people crying, but singing with all their hearts.” It was on October 7, 1990, that Chiara left this world. Her last words to her mother were: “Good-bye. Be happy, because I’m happy.”

The cause for Chiara’s canonization was officially opened in 1999 and she was proclaimed “Venerable” on July 3, 2008. The miraculous healing of a child suffering from meningitis attributed to her intercession was recognized by Pope Benedict XVI who beatified her on September 25, 2010.

In his message for the XXVII World Youth Day, Pope Benedict XVI said: The young Blessed Chiara Badano, who died in 1990,

“experienced how pain could be transfigured by love... The key to her peace and joy was her complete trust in the Lord and the acceptance of her illness as a mysterious expression of his will for her sake and that of others.” ■

Source: www.chiiradandano.com



FR. PETER QUINTO, RCJ

Is a Rogationist priest and assistant pastor at St. Jane of Chantal Catholic Church in North Hollywood, California.

On the Waterfront of Our Lives

Hearing Christ in the Cry of the Poor



Photo by Richard Fullbrook

By Fr. JOSEPH CISETTI

The 1954 film, *On the Waterfront*, stars a young Marlon Brando and tells the story of dockworkers facing the oppression of organized corruption. One of his friends, Joey Doyle, who is about to report the wrongdoing, is shot and killed and then another worker, Kayo Dugan, who is about to testify, is killed when a load of cargo is purposely dropped on him. Father Barry, played by Karl Malden, is the priest who comes to pray over the dead man. He also gives one of Hollywood's most positive portrayals of a Catholic priest.

With both toughness and compassion, as well as a marvelous incarnational the-

ology, he speaks to the workers and crime bosses all around him saying,

Some people think the Crucifixion only took place on Calvary. They better wise up. Taking Joey Doyle's life to stop him from testifying is a crucifixion. And droppin' a sling on Kayo Dugan because he was ready to spill his guts tomorrow – that's a crucifixion! And every time the mob puts the crusher on a good man, tries to stop him from doing his duty as a citizen – it's a crucifixion. And anybody who sits around and lets it happen, keeps silent about something he knows has happened, shares the guilt of it just as much as the Roman soldier who pierced the flesh of Our Lord.

At that point someone throws something at him and yells, Go back to your church Father. He responds:

Boys, this is my church! And if you don't think Christ is down here on the waterfront, you've got another guess coming! Every morning when the hiring boss blows his whistle, Jesus stands alongside you in the shape up. Every fellow down here is your brother in Christ! But remember, Christ is always with you. Christ is in the shape up. He's in the hatch. He's in the union hall. He's kneeling right here beside Dugan. And He's sayin' with all of you, if you do it to the least of mine, you do it to me!

The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe and the Gospel for the celebration this year (Matthew 25:31-46) reminds us that Jesus is a different type of king with a different type of kingdom. This is a king who will sit upon his glorious throne but at the present time this king goes about in disguise among his people, in what St. Teresa of Calcutta called, the distressing disguise of the poor. Jesus travels among us in the hungry, the thirsty, in the stranger and the naked, the ill and imprisoned, in those who are in need including the unborn. The Second Vatican Council said, In the voices of the poor Christ himself can be heard, crying out for charity from his followers. When Christ cries out, what do we do? Our response is important and as Jesus reminds us, it has eternal consequences.

Seeing Christ in our neighbor, particularly in our neighbor who is in need, is challenging but it is also freeing and beautiful. It is challenging because it does not allow us to keep God cooped up in a church and because it makes demands of us—to give of ourselves to others. It is freeing because this caring about others, this loving our neighbor, leads us out of the prison of our own ego and it's life giving. And it is beautiful because it can lead us to realize how close Jesus is to us and how we can see, serve and touch him today. Jesus can be as close as the person next to you. It is beautiful because at the end of a day, we can look back and see how we may have served Christ in others.

It is always important to note what Jesus says and to take it to heart. It is also important to pay attention to what he does not say. Jesus does not say we have to solve world hunger nor does he say we have to solve any of the other problems but he does say that we have to do something and that if we don't it can be our own ruin.

These six categories that Jesus gives us form the greater part of what we call the corporal works of mercy—how we serve others in a very physical way. In addition to the six that Jesus mentions, over the centuries a seventh has emerged and that is to bury the dead. In that same

spirit, we also speak of spiritual works of mercy. These are: to instruct the ignorant, to counsel the doubtful, to admonish sinners, to bear wrongs patiently, to forgive offences willingly, to comfort the afflicted and to pray for the living and the dead.

While Jesus lists six categories, this can expand to all that we do in every little way. It can include things like: I was upset and you calmed me down; I was lonely and you spent time with me; I was ignorant and you educated me. I was sad and you told me a joke and cheered me up.

In the Eucharist we see Jesus under the form of bread and wine. The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that the Eucharist commits us to the poor. In the early Church St. John Chrysostom observed that the same Jesus who said this is my body and this is my blood, is the same Jesus who said, I was hungry and you did not give me food. In other words, we can also see Jesus in the poor and needy.

In the voices of the poor Christ himself can be heard, crying out for charity from his followers. With lives of intentional faith, may we respond to his call that is challenging, freeing and beautiful. Christ is down here on the waterfront of our lives wherever that may be. To paraphrase Father Barry:

Everyone here is your brother and sister in Christ! But remember, Christ is always with you. Christ is at home, at work, with your friends, and wherever else you may be. And He's sayin' with all of you, if you do it to the least of mine, you do it to me! ■



FR JOSEPH CISETTI

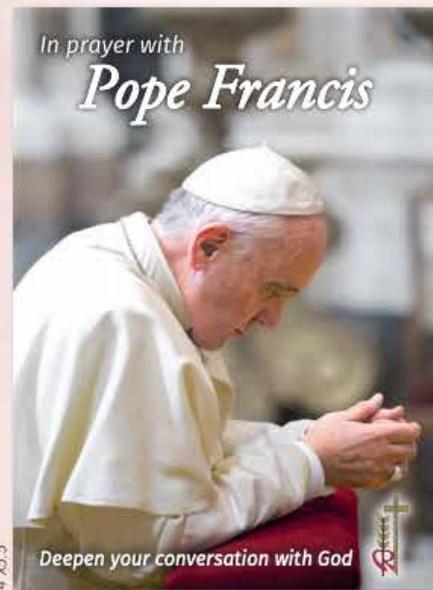
Is a priest of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph where he worked in the Vocation Office for a number of years. Presently, he is pastor of St. Therese North in Kansas City, Missouri.

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A Community at the Service of the Poor

The Food Center at Saint Anthony of Padua Parish in Reedley, California



By CHRISTOPHER TASY

Saint Anthony of Padua Parish in Reedley, California has served the poor of their community through dedicated volunteers for 41 years. They see the words of Saint James as not mere words, but actions: "Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (James 2:17). Saint Matthew also exhorts the faithful to serve the poor: "For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink" (Mt 25:35).

In 1979, the parish became a local affiliate of The Saint Vincent De Paul Society, which offers person-to-person service for those less fortunate in the communities of which they serve. When that affiliation ended a few years ago, its name changed to Saint Anthony's Food Center. When the Rogationists of the Heart of Jesus assumed care of the parish in March 2020 under the leadership of Father Denny Joseph and Father Javier Flores Lopez, one goal of theirs was to maintain and grow the ser-

vice of the Food Center.

As an agricultural center, Reedley is billed as "The Fruit Basket of the World" and as a result several thousand farmworkers and packing house workers - many of whom are low-wage immigrants from Mexico and Central America - have made this area home. The seasonality of their work disallows a great number of them from a regular paycheck and, consequently, a predictable food supply.

That is where Saint Anthony's Food Center tries to fill in that gap. Though there are other outlets in the area for the poor to obtain food, Saint Anthony's is the only one staffed entirely by volunteers, financially supported solely by the parish, and which receives no outside, corporate or government funding. Each month, the parish takes up a second collection at Sunday Mass and that money goes directly to the Food Center. The collection, along with the rare gift received from gen-

erous benefactors, allows the Center to operate. The parish rents an old video storefront which the Food Center uses to store and distribute food as well as having a small collection of clothes donated, which the clients can choose free-of-charge.

Because of the limited nature of income and volunteer hours, the Center distributes food 1-2 Saturdays per month. From March to September, food distribution is once per month, serving roughly 150 families. From October to February, we distribute twice per month (300 families). The food baskets usually contain rice, beans, assorted cans of vegetables, pasta, cooking oil, and corn masa. At Christmas, the baskets include chickens and many other items we don't usually provide. As a result, anywhere from 200-300 families receive a food basket at the Christmas distribution. Assistance is usually tied to how positive or negative the economy tends to be at the time. This year, with many people out of work due to the pandemic, we

expect many more families seeking assistance. Because those who receive assistance are limited to living in the area around Reedley, recipients are required to show a driver's license and a cross-reference to a bill containing their name and address.

Food distribution is not the only act of charity performed here. For nearly 30 years, the Food Center has sponsored an annual dinner on Thanksgiving Day that is open to the community for no charge. Though most of the patrons are needy, we promote the dinner as a community event where everyone is welcome; we've had retired people, college students who couldn't afford to go home for the holidays, and other folks who simply had nowhere to go for Thanksgiving. This event grew out of a partnership with a local restaurant owner who began serving a Thanksgiving Dinner in his small cafe. Most of the recipients were Catholic, so a parishioner approached the owner and offered to host the dinner at the parish Saint La Salle School cafeteria, which could serve up to 200 people at a time.

Over time, the Center took more responsibility and now serves between 500-600 people every year on Thanksgiving Day. Those who come to the dinner are treated as guests; they are greeted at the door, escorted to their table, and served their dinner. What makes this such a special occasion is that so many people get involved: those procuring the food and supplies, decorating the cafeteria, preparing and serving the food, and cleaning up afterwards (often the most thankless job). All this is accomplished through the generosity of the parishioners who give their monthly donation to the Food Center and those who faithfully volunteer year after year.

What type of person volunteers at the Food Center, let alone take charge of the operation? Grace Lo-

pez has been in charge of the Food Center since 2007 after volunteering for 3 years before that. She credits Mother Teresa of Calcutta for her dedication to the Center; to quote St. Teresa:

"At the end of our lives, we will be judged not by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made or how many great things we have done. We will be judged by 'I was hungry and you gave me to eat. I was naked and you clothed me. I was homeless and you took me in.'"

The Center's volunteers follow the same words attributed to Saint Teresa and also offer critical help. From picking up and delivering the food to bagging beans and rice to putting the food baskets together to physically distributing the food to keeping the Center clean involves effort that revolves around volunteers' work and family hours. The volunteers also span in age from high school to senior citizens as well as from different socio-economic backgrounds, making this a truly Catholic Endeavour. Since the arrival of the Rogationist Fathers in March, not only have they greatly supported the Center, but have proffered ideas to expand its reach. The parish has been privileged and blessed to have had such support for more than 40 years and with the grace of God the Father will continue its mission to support those in the Reedley area who need a little extra help. ■



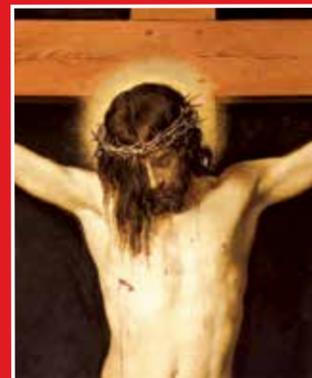
CHRISTOPHER TASY

Is a retired biopharmaceutical sales professional, a married father and grandfather of 4 adult children, and a parishioner/catechist for St. Anthony of Padua Parish in Reedley, CA. One of his sons is currently in his fourth year of priestly formation for the Diocese of Fresno.

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The Bethlehem Star and Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

Let us be Enlightened!



Photo by Greg Rakozy

By DR. BRUCE L. THIESSEN, PH.D.

When Thanksgiving arrives, we're supposed to be thankful, even as one of the world's most difficult, troubled and turbulent year in history comes to a bitter end.

By the times Christmas arrives, we're supposed to spread the cheer, while stopping the spread of the virus, and putting a mask over our Covid frowns.

This year, celebrating these holidays in the same way we always have celebrated them, will be challenging for all, to say the least, but especially for those seasonally afflicted each year with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," is a pithy expression, and it is directly applicable to Seasonal Affective Disorder (aptly abbreviated as SAD). For those keenly aware of their vulnerabil-

ity to SAD symptoms, early autumn is the best time to prepare.

SAD is a light-deprivation disorder, and, with winter approaching, and more time spent indoors due to Covid-19 fears, sunlight deprivation, is often accompanied by deficiencies in vitamin D.

SAD symptoms are very similar to those of other affective disorders. These include feelings of sadness, which often lead to a sense of hopelessness, and, in some cases, suicidal thoughts and gestures. The fact that SAD is potentially life-threatening, is all the more reason for one to prepare for the onset or possible emergence of SAD symptoms.

Other symptoms of SAD include insomnia, withdrawal, listlessness, and anhedonia, a diminished level of interest in activities once experienced as pleasurable, and rewarding.

2020 has ushered in some unique environmental factors that can, and in many cases, likely will compound symptoms of SAD, and render the condition more severe. These include months of lockdown (including byproducts such as loneliness, isolation and touch deprivation); grief (for those who lost loved ones due to the virus); uncertainty about the future, and financial woes.

Fortunately, there are steps to ensure the preservation of mental and emotional wellbeing, during the potentially daunting winter months that lie ahead.

As a psychologist, I have already noticed a marked rise in cases involving depression and anxiety. As the daylight hours shorten, I fully expect to observe a marked increase in SAD diagnoses.

Here are some habits that those prone to SAD can begin to establish, in an effort

to ward off SAD symptoms, and to keep the SAD wolf from howling at one's doorstep:

1. Take advantage of every opportunity to take in sunlight. As the days get colder, and often cloudier, there will be the occasional warmer, sunnier day. Look for those and make sure to make the most of each one, planning in advance, outdoor activities.
2. Find ways to brighten your home, perhaps with the aid of an interior designer (if you can afford one). This could include installing a skylight (a way to also conserve energy); adding lighting to darker rooms in your home; and adding bright colors, by painting walls, adding bright, colorful paintings to walls; and making sure decor is bright, and cheerful. During the holidays make sure to "deck the halls." Make sure your tree contains lots of bright lights and sparkling decorations. That goes for your home, in general—indoors and out.
3. Create a "sunshine playlist." If you stream your music, it will be very convenient to create a playlist of songs that are light, cheerful, and sunny-sounding. Play them often. They will brighten your spirits. If you are a fan of the holidays, that playlist could include songs like Have a Holly Jolly Christmas, Silver Bells, and Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree (Brenda Lee's original hit is especially bright and cheerful).
4. Establish a strong support system, made up of friends, family, and, if spiritually guided, seek out that sort of illumination.
5. Establish a routine. Building structure into your world, will make your world seem brighter.
6. Draw light from the Bethlehem star, and all it signifies—hope, new beginnings, salvation, new birth. Keep the Christmas story close to your heart, as a way of self-soothing through the season.
7. Seek therapy, if needed. What I've addressed to this point, only involve

environmental aspects of SAD, along with ameliorative environmentally-based recommendations.

But I believe that, in most cases, its internal "darkness" that contributes most profoundly to the development of SAD. That darkness may include past trauma; the harboring of grudges; and unresolved internal conflicts, also likely stemming from problematic childhood events that interfere with one's emotional and cognitive development.

To be clear, this is not a pitch for me to gain more clients, as I am already overwhelmed with a heavy caseload. It is an acknowledgement that SAD is often more complicated than simply a matter of light deprivation.

Reaching out for help might be difficult because it involves bringing deeply personal issues to light (pardon the pun).

But in the end, there are no shortcuts to overcoming SAD. One might have to spend a little time in a Dark Room, before finding the light at the end of the tunnel.

In a Dark Room

Original song: words and music by Bruce L. Thiessen aka Dr BLT © 2020

*You've been hidin' in your trailer
with your demons
tragic memories, tortured visions
voices screaming
you're neurotic you're psychotic
so pathetic
but you're human
other people just don't get it*

Chorus:

*you'll wait in the dark
till it's all been revealed
tell me your thoughts
and way that you feel
I'm just a man, no Messiah it's true
but I have been trained
to cast out all your darkness and gloom*

*in the dark room
in the chasm of your psyche
follow me as you wear tread
off your Nikes
you're mental mental health athlete*

*I'm the trainer
you project on, your container*

*you'll wait in the dark
till it's all been revealed
tell me your thoughts
and way that you feel
I'm just a man, no Messiah it's true
but I have been trained
to cast out all your darkness and gloom*

*In the dark room navigating all your sorrows
all your tears and all your fears of your tomorrow
with some help from up above I will read you like a mental health Moses
Lord will need you*

*you'll wait in the dark
till it's all been revealed
tell me your thoughts
and way that you feel
I'm just a man, no Messiah it's true
but I have been trained
to cast out all your darkness and gloom*

To check out *I'm Decoratin' my Heart for Christmas* by yours truly, use this link: <https://youtu.be/hgqCn2vwT7A>

For more information, visit this writer's official website: www.drbltmusic.com ■



DR. BRUCE L. THIESSEN, Ph.D.

Is a licensed clinical psychologist, who emphasizes the therapeutic value of music. Dr. Thiessen currently works at a community health clinic in San Diego. He is also a prolific singer/composer and family man.

www.drbltmusic.com

Compiled by Monica J. Llerena

USA



30 Years Promoting Vocations Work and Prayer

Vocations and Prayer Magazine Celebrates its 30th Anniversary

“The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest” (Matthew 9:37-38).

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USA



Virtual Vocations Congress

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The 4th Youth in Search Vocations Congress (Congreso Vocacional Jóvenes en Búsqueda) will be broadcasted on social media for four hours of uninterrupted transmission from St. Elisabeth Parish in Van Nuys, California on November 14, 2020.

Jóvenes en Búsqueda (JEB) was born as a response to the youth's need of finding their place in life. By responding to God's call to live their vocation to which they are called, whether to marriage, religious or priestly life, or celibate life, they can discover the way to happiness.

This event is made possible thanks to the commitment to promote vocations of various lay people and religious organizations such as ESNE (El Sembrador Nueva Evangelización), the Archdiocese of Los Angeles Office of Vocations, and the Rogate Center (Rogationist Fathers).

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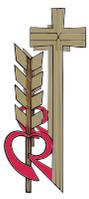
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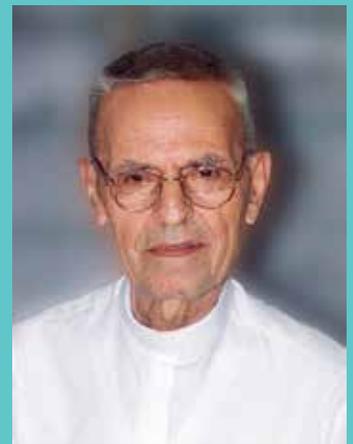
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*“There is
nothing better
than doing
God’s will
because He is
our Father.”*

Fr. Joseph Aveni

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