Homily - 09/23/21 - Father Orville Cajigal, PSM.

Feast of St. Matthew

September 21, 2023

Two weeks ago we visited our confreres assigned to the Sideia Mission Center in Papua New Guinea. It includes at least 3 other islands that are difficult to reach, especially when the sea is rough. The parish entrusted to us is so large that, despite the hard work of the confreres, Mass is celebrated in the different areas once every two months. In the parish, the religious sisters have not been able to maintain their presence and apostolate because of the lack of religious. This left a void that made the people long to have religious sisters in the mission center. I have asked three congregations and there is no positive response. When we were with them, we experienced the need and the urgency of having consecrated persons to walk with them.

We visited a nearby parish that has been entrusted to us for the time being. This is because there is no priest assigned to them. Our confreres take turns celebrating the Eucharist for them. The parish leaders ask us to send Rogationists to their parish. They expressed a strong desire to have priests or Rogationists with them. To see their poverty and their cry for priests and consecrated persons makes us uneasy. Something has to be done for the people.

In addition, a bishop of a poor diocese in the mountains of Papua New Guinea contacted us and invited us to participate in the life of the diocese.

They are overwhelming. I felt helpless because their situation requires immediate action to provide confreres. But there are no confreres available to be sent immediately. I experience the reality of limitation, of inadequacy. I think this is the point of the experience. God allows difficulties, limitations and insufficiency so that we can see God as the provider of grace, so that we can overcome difficulties, so that we can experience his abundance that surpasses our limitations and his grace that is more than sufficient for us.

The Gospel tells a part of the vocation story of Matthew. It is inevitable to see his limitations and the dark side of his life. He has a job that requires him to collect money for the hated Romans. It is not surprising that he is considered an outcast and associated with sinners by mainstream society. He belongs to a marginalized sector of the community. In common parlance, he could easily be labeled as corrupt because of his situation. However, his present situation highlights God's inclusive love for people who are set aside by mainstream society. We see the goodness of God in transforming Matthew into a faithful apostle. God's holiness shines through the person of Matthew. We come to know the story of God in the vocation story of Matthew.

Matthew tells us that it is good that we experience difficulties and limitations because they lead us to look at God and ask for His help. It is formative in the sense that we trust God who provides. Going back to my story, if we had available confreres, we would simply send confreres there. Since we did not have available confreres, it opened the way for me to pray and ask the Lord to send holy and more priests and consecrated persons so that more poor and needy people could be served. The experience showed me in a concrete way the importance and relevance of the ROGATE at this time. It is also a tool for self-reflection and evaluation for me. Am I faithful in my prayer life? Are we faithful to our prayer life? It is an invitation to spend more time in prayer. Our prayers are needed by the modern "sheep without a shepherd", the Church and the world.

We experience a shortage of religious in our situation. It is good in a sense that we recognize that God is the only Person who can provide us with more and holy religious. We must pray to receive them.

The challenges we face are reminders that God is powerful to help, guide and support us. They are invitations to pray more. They are encouragements for us to support one another. They are exhortations for us to continue to trust God. The challenges highlight the goodness of God and His love that transforms us into holy and faithful Rogationists.