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PROTAGONIST OF TRUTH, PROMOTER OF PEACE

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‘We heal as one’: Philippine bishops reconsecrate nation to Mary

By Roy Lagarde

THE Catholic Church in the Philippines has turned to the mother of Jesus for protection amid the contagion and death brought about by the coronavirus pandemic.

The church hierarchy, in solidarity with a number of bishops’ conferences around the world, marked the Marian month by consecrating the nation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Archbishop Romulo Valles, president of the episcopal conference, led the consecration of the Philippines to the Blessed Mother on May 13, the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima.

The bishops sought the intercession of Mary for the “healing” of all those who contracted the virus and for the “strength and protection” of both the frontliners and the public.

“We pray as one. We heal as one. We renew the world as one through this act of consecration,” Valles said.

“This our country’s way to implore the grace and mercy

Consecration / A6



Bishop Dennis Villarojo of Malolos leads the national consecration of the country to the Immaculate Heart of Mary at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima in Valenzuela City on May 13, 2020. SANDIGAN – DIOCESE OF MALOLOS

‘Forgotten’: Prelate hits slow Marawi rehab efforts

A CATHOLIC prelate in southern Philippines has lamented the government’s slow rehabilitation efforts of Marawi.

It’s been three years since the last shots of war were fired in Marawi but Bishop Edwin Dela Peña said “nothing much has happened since then”.

“Ground zero is still an image of destruction reminiscent of the early days of the siege,” Dela Peña said on May 23.

Attention to Marawi, he said, had also been overtaken by recent events such as the Taal volcano eruption, the coronavirus crisis, and the typhoon “Ambo”.

“These relegated us to the backdoor of history... to the point of being completely forgotten from the national psyche,” according to him.

Thousands of residents living in the main battle area of the city have yet to return home, with many of them still living in temporary shelters.

The prelate said that he and other residents of St. Mary Cathedral compound in Marawi have also



This file photo shows damaged houses and buildings in Marawi city on Feb. 7, 2018. DUYOG MARAWI

been living “in exile” at a village in Lanao del Norte.

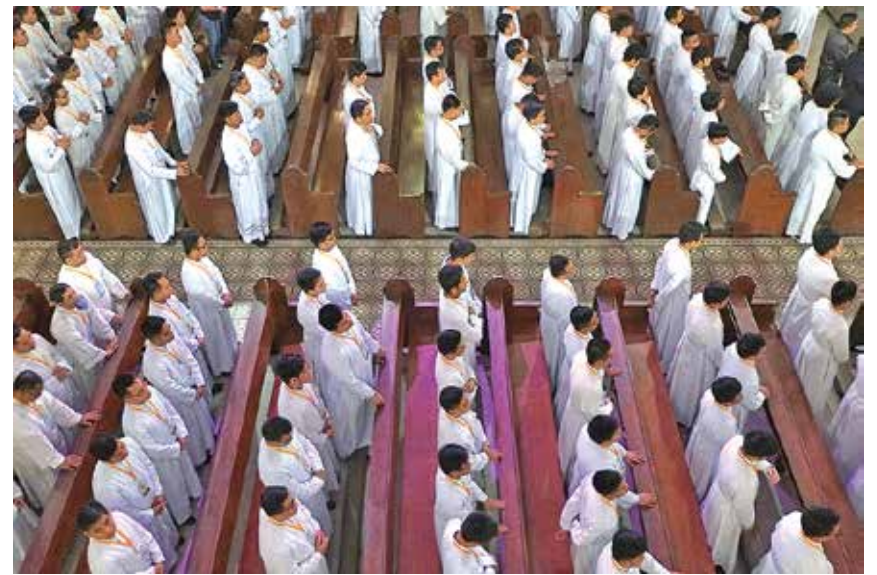
“All IDPs (internally displaced persons) from the ground zero are still living in temporary shelters,” he added. “The future is still uncertain for all of us”.

The country’s Islamic city was

besieged on May 23, 2017 by hundreds of local and foreign militia affiliated to Islamic State.

The government imposed martial law and large parts of Marawi were destroyed in five months of fighting between troops and militants that killed nearly 1,200. (CBCP News)

Seminary formation can’t be done online but...



Hundreds of major seminarians attend the opening Mass of this year’s “Kapatiran” at the UST Chapel in Manila, March 4, 2017. ROY LAGARDE

ONLINE classes have never been an option in seminary formation—until the coronavirus pandemic came along.

But the bishops insist that seminary studies cannot be done fully online because “the other pillar of priestly formation requiring personal accompaniment in the context of community”.

Archbishop Socrates Villegas, chairman of the Episcopal Commission on Seminaries (ECS), said that “intellectual formation” is not the only factor for consideration in seminary studies.

“The seminarians need to be accompanied in their pastoral, spiritual and human formation

Formation / A6

Many afraid to attend Mass due to coronavirus, archbishop says

WHEN a southern Philippine archdiocese resumed holding public Masses on a Sunday, the gatherings weren’t quite what church authorities expected.

Archbishop Martin Jumoad of Ozamiz said the turnout at the city’s Immaculate Conception Cathedral was much lesser than the usual Sunday attendance.

“People are afraid to come to church because of this pandemic. Practically only few attended our Masses when we opened the church,” Archbishop Jumoad said.

The prelate inaugurated

the full opening of the cathedral on May 17 and five other parishes in the city held public Masses for the first time in two months, in the latest easing of coronavirus restrictions in the city.

Religious services were forbidden with the lockdown, which was eased in many parts of the country last week.

The archdiocese is holding Masses under strict new guidelines worked out between the church and local government authorities.

The faithful will have to wear masks and observe physical distancing. The



The Immaculate Conception Cathedral in Ozamiz City opens its doors to the faithful on May 17 adhering strictly to government health protocols such as physical distancing, use of face masks and installation of foot baths. WENDELL TALIBONG

churches also installed foot baths.

Ozamiz cathedral could accommodate around 1,500 worshippers. “But in most Masses, church attendance was only about

300 people,” Archbishop Jumoad said.

“Still, it was good we did it and we hope next Sunday church attendance will increase, he said. (CBCP News)

Manila bishop pushes back vs IATF restrictions on religious activities

MANILA Apostolic Administrator Broderick Pabillo on May 17 led the charge against government restrictions on religious services, saying that limiting Mass attendees to five or 10 people even under relaxed quarantine rules was unreasonable and even “laughable.”

The Catholic Church had been largely compliant with restrictions imposed by the Interagency Task Force (IATF) on the Management of Infectious Diseases since the lockdown, cancelling public Masses and Holy Week activities and switching to online platforms.

In a Facebook post, Pabillo questioned the IATF’s basis for limiting Mass-goers to five during the modified enhanced community

quarantine (ECQ) and 10 during the general community quarantine (GCQ), pointing out that there were no such limits for offices and business establishments.

“It is just another way of saying that you do not have religious activities,” he said.

“Where did they get these numbers? Why is it that they do not give the absolute numbers of persons who can enter a store, or work in the office, or in the factory? Do they say that only 10 persons should be in an office, or that 20 persons work in a factory, or that only 5 persons can enter a store at a time? This would be preposterous!”

Pabillo also pointed out that

IATF / A6

Our Lady in the weeds: Knights of Columbus find forgotten grotto



The restored shrine at Our Lady of Good Counsel Camp. **KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS.**

CNA Staff— The St. Scholastica Council 14485 of the Knights of Columbus thought they were doing a routine community service project, clearing out vegetation at a summer camp. They did not expect to stumble upon a long-forgotten shrine to the Virgin Mary.

The local knights' council in Lecanto, Florida, has worked with the Our Lady of Good Counsel Camp for years. The camp, which is located in Floral City, is a co-ed youth camp in the Diocese of St. Petersburg, and it is run by the pastor of St. Scholastica Parish.

According to the Knights of Columbus, "it was natural that when the grounds needed some sprucing up and physical improvements, the Knights were called into action," they said in a release.

The knights were instructed to build a path that would improve accessibility to the camp and chapel for campers with physical disabilities. While they were

working on that project, they happened upon "a clump of rocks covered with vegetation."

"Upon closer inspection, we found a grotto and pond, which had been covered with vegetation for decades," said Les McGlothlin, the spokesman for the council.

Realizing what they had found, approximately a dozen knights worked for three days to unearth the forgotten shrine. The rocks of the grotto were pressure washed and restored, and the statue of the Virgin Mary was repainted and fixed up. The knights built a path leading up to the statue out of stones from a former mess hall at the camp.

McGlothlin said that the council moved to restore the grotto in order to "preserve an important part of the history of the camp and of Citrus County."

To prevent the grotto from being lost to nature once again, the knights were sure to spray weed killer to prevent the overgrowth from returning.

In addition to the statue of Mary, the knights also restored and repainted four other statues at the camp, and has in the past worked to provide additional maintenance to the camp's facilities. The council also works each year to raise funds in order to send disadvantaged children to the camp.

The Marian statue at the grotto wasn't the only religious image to get a makeover from the knights. Recently they refurbished and repainted four other large religious statues on the grounds.

"We returned them in their original glory," McGlothlin said, adding that the St. Scholastica Council stood ready to respond the next time the camp called for help. **(CNA)**

Kenyan bishop: Poor could be exploited in COVID vaccine trials

NAIROBI, Kenya— A Kenyan bishop said testing potential coronavirus vaccines on his countrymen could disrespect human dignity, and amount to a breach of the country's constitution, especially if Kenyans are not fully informed of the risks involved in testing new drugs.

"Whereas the Covid-19 pandemic is a grave matter at hand, it should not in any way be used to compromise the rights and dignity of the citizens" of Kenya, Bishop James Wainaina of the Diocese of Murang'a said May 7.

Because "vaccines or drugs may have side effects on the citizens, we must be convinced of the safety of the same and preservation of the citizens' dignity."

"Everything should be done

with maximum openness, and testing should not be carried out on unsuspecting citizens," he added.

The bishop's statement came after Kenyan media reports that drugs and vaccines in development to treat COVID-19 could be tested in the country.

"The media has been awash with many messages and video clips talking about the intentions of foreign research agencies to come to Kenya to test some Coronavirus vaccines and drugs," Wainaina said.

"This matter has left many Kenyans wondering whether the circulating information has been true or not."

The bishop made particular reference to a May 5 report from Kenya's highest circulation

newspaper, Daily Nation, which claimed that "local researchers participating in an international study are seeking final approval from agencies to test three drugs on Kenyans."

The bishop said that alleged testing plans are disrespectful to Kenyans and a possible indicator of opportunistic tendencies by foreign agencies to take advantage of the "poor" who are bribed into human subject research unethically.

"The 'Glory of Kenya' that we sing about in our national anthem implies that Kenyans deserve respect," Bishop Wainaina observed.

"All of us must remain vigilant to the foreign insurgences, including research agencies that plan to come and lure poor Kenyans

with money, and instill fear of the disease in order to get people to agree to undergo trials of such vaccines and drugs."

"Poverty, it must be said, or sickness does not remove the dignity of a person. The dignity of the poor must nevertheless be protected," he added.

Wainaina noted that Kenya's constitution requires the opportunity for public participation in decisions concerning a matter as serious as human drug trials.

"The fact that this matter was circulating in the media and the Government failed to address it openly leaves the public with more questions than answers," Bishop Wainaina noted in his May 7 statement. **(CNA)**

California church sues over governor's reopening plan

WASHINGTON, D.C. Newsroom— A protestant church in California is suing the state for ordering churches to remain closed while some businesses can reopen during the coronavirus pandemic.

South Bay United Pentecostal Church in Chula Vista, California filed the lawsuit on May 11 through the Thomas More Society, alleging that the state's plan of allowing certain businesses—including shopping malls and restaurants—to reopen before churches is unconstitutional.

"We feel it is totally unacceptable. It's relegating the churches to a second-class status," attorney Charles LiMandri told CNA on Wednesday.

Churches, he said, "enjoy special status" under the Free Exercise clause of the First Amendment, and "if anything" should be allowed to open before other organizations, provided that they follow public health guidelines for social distancing and hygiene.

California has been under a strict stay-at-home order during the COVID-19 pandemic, as one of the first U.S. states

to see a spike in virus cases.

In late April, Governor Gavin Newsom released a four-stage "Resilience Roadmap" plan to reopen the state; the plan is now in "Stage 2," where "lower-risk businesses" are allowed to begin reopening. Retail stores can offer curbside pickup and manufacturing businesses can reopen, and by the end of the month shopping malls and restaurants are expected to be having customers. Liquor stores and marijuana dispensaries have been allowed to keep doing business in the state during the shutdown.

However, churches remain closed and are not allowed to reopen until Stage 3 of Newsom's plan, "potentially months away," LiMandri said.

In that stage, churches are grouped together with "higher-risk" businesses such as movie theaters, nail salons and tattoo parlors where customers will either crowd a closed space or will be in close proximity to staff.

"I don't know how they can justify it, because eating in a restaurant is not a constitutional right. Going to church is a constitutional right," LiMandri said.

The church says it has a "large sanctuary" for spacing congregants apart from each other, and is equipped with masks, gloves, and protective gear. It already runs an outdoor food distribution operation with staff wearing masks and gloves, LiMandri noted.

"Religious expression is not a hobby," he said, distinguishing religious services from "non-essential" recreational activities. "For the faith communities, it is very much an essential activity."

On May 5, a federal judge in Sacramento ruled that the state had the authority to restrict religious services as part of its emergency police power.

There is an effort underway by some Christian churches to reopen by the end of the month in spite of the governor's order, LiMandri said.

"If 1,000 or more Evangelical pastors start services, what's the governor going to do—arrest them all?" LiMandri asked.

So far, the Catholic dioceses in the state have closed voluntarily to help reduce the spread of the disease, and to "cooperate and avoid confrontation." **(CNA)**

Vatican Briefing

Vatican Museums will reopen June 1 as Italy opens borders to tourists

The Vatican Museums announced May 23 that it will reopen on June 1, two days before Italy opens its borders to European visitors after nearly three months of lockdown. Entrance to the Vatican Museums will only be possible via prior reservation to limit the number of people in the museum and stagger entrance times. All visitors will be required to wear a mask, and mandatory temperature checks will be conducted at the entrance. To prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus, group visits to the museums will be capped at a maximum of 10 people. The Vatican Museums will have been closed for 12 weeks since the Italian government announced the closure of all museums and archaeological sites throughout the country on March 8. **(Courtney Mares/CNA)**

Pope Francis appoints new archbishop for Taiwan's capital

Pope Francis appointed May 23 Bishop Thomas An-Zu Chung as the next Metropolitan Archbishop of Taipei, Taiwan. Chung, who currently serves as bishop of Chiayi, Taiwan, will replace Archbishop John Hung Shan-chuan, who has retired at the age of 76. The Holy See is the only remaining country in Europe that recognizes Taiwan as a country. The Holy See and Taiwan have had formal diplomatic relations for 77 years. However, the nunciature in Taipei has not been led by a nuncio since Oct. 25, 1971, when the United Nations ceased to recognize the Taipei-based government as the government of China. The pope also appointed Chung to serve as the apostolic administrator of the Matsu Islands, an archipelago of 36 islands in the East China Sea, and the Kinmen Islands, which are located under four miles from the mainland People's Republic of China. **(Courtney Mares/CNA)**

Pope Francis moves financial records office under Secretariat for Economy

Pope Francis on May 20 moved the office of the Vatican's financial records database under the management of the Secretariat for the Economy—reversing a decision he made in 2016. According to a rescript May 20, starting June 1 the Data Processing Center (CED) will no longer be run by the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See (APSA)—the Vatican's sovereign asset management body—as was first defined in the apostolic constitution Pastor bonus in 1988. Instead, the Secretariat for the Economy, under the leadership of prefect Fr. Juan Antonio Guerrero, S.J., will oversee the work of the office and its employees. Pope Francis first moved the financial records office from the competency of APSA to the Secretariat for the Economy in July 2014, a few months after he created the secretariat as part of his financial reform of the Curia. **(Hannah Brockhaus/CNA)**

Pope Francis says prayer opens the door of hope

Prayer opens the door of hope, Pope Francis said at the general audience Wednesday. Speaking via livestream due to the coronavirus crisis, the pope said May 20 that throughout history prayer had helped people to see beyond their suffering. He said: "Men and women who pray know that hope is stronger than discouragement. They believe that love is more powerful than death, and that it will surely triumph one day, even if in times and ways we do not know." **(CNA)**

Holy See donates to WHO fund for medics on pandemic front line

The Holy See has pledged to contribute to the World Health Organization's emergency fund supplying protective equipment to medics fighting the coronavirus, an archbishop has said. Addressing the World Health Assembly, held remotely in Geneva, Switzerland, May 18-19, Archbishop Ivan Jurković highlighted the Church's efforts to combat the disease that has claimed the lives of more than 319,000 people worldwide as of May 19. He said: "The Holy See has pledged to contribute to the WHO Emergency Fund for the supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to front-line medical workers and has already made various donations to the regions in need of urgent help." **(CNA)**

Vatican calls attention to growing food crisis from coronavirus

The coronavirus emergency is also causing a food-related crisis, Vatican officials said Saturday, encouraging people to do their small part to help those who are going hungry. "What happens now with the coronavirus crisis is it is increasing food-related problems," Fr. Augusto Zampini-Davies said during a livestreamed press conference May 16. "We know the value of a society is determined by how we treat the poorest, the most vulnerable, so what are we going to do for all these people, who, apart from the health issues, are suffering from hunger or food-related problems?" he asked. **(Hannah Brockhaus/CNA)**

Pope Francis supports scholarships in Lebanon as country faces 'severe crisis'

Pope Francis has donated \$200,000 to support 400 scholarships in Lebanon in an expression of his concern for the country's young people, the Vatican announced May 14. The Holy See press office said that Lebanon was experiencing a "severe crisis" that risked robbing younger generations of hope. The press office said the pope had decided to send the donation to the apostolic nunciature in Lebanon "in the hope of achieving a gesture of solidarity." It clarified that the pope's gift was sent in addition to aid channeled to the Middle East through an emergency fund created last month by the Vatican Congregation for the Oriental Churches. **(CNA)**

Pope Francis entrusts China to the Blessed Virgin Mary

VATICAN— Pope Francis Sunday entrusted China to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and asked people to pray for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the most populated country in the world.

“Dear Catholic brothers and sisters in China, I wish to assure you that the universal Church, of which you are an integral part, shares your hopes and supports you in trials,” Pope Francis said May 24 after the Regina Caeli prayer.

“It accompanies you with prayer for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so that the light and beauty of the Gospel, the power of God for the salvation of whoever believes, can shine in you,” the pope said.

Pope Francis imparted a special Apostolic Blessing upon China for the feast of Our Lady Help of Christians. The Marian shrine of Sheshan in Shanghai, which is dedicated to Our Lady Help of Christians, remains closed on this feast after the Diocese of Shanghai suspended all pilgrimages for the month of May to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

“We entrust the pastors and faithful of the Catholic Church in that great country to the guidance and protection of our Heavenly Mother, so that they may be strong in faith and firm in fraternal union, joyful witnesses and promoters of charity and fraternal hope, and good citizens,” Pope Francis said.

“May Our Lady always guard you!” he added.

In his Regina Caeli address, the pope reflected on the words of Jesus recorded in Gospel of Matthew for the feast of the Ascension of the Lord: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

China is home to more than 10 million Catholics, with six million registered as members of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, according to official statistics.

The Holy See and the Chinese government signed a provisional agreement in 2018 on the appointment of bishops in the state-sponsored Church, the terms of which have still not been publicly released. In the wake of the deal, previously excommunicated bishops of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, which is overseen by the Communist Party, were received into full communion with the Vatican.

A report published in 2020 by the U.S. China

Commission found that Chinese Catholics suffered “increasing persecution” after the Vatican-China deal. It said the government was “demolishing churches, removing crosses, and continuing to detain underground clergy.” Priests and bishops have reportedly been detained or have gone into hiding.

Earlier this week, the Vatican revealed that Catholics in China were able to use the most popular Chinese state-monitored social media platform, WeChat, to livestream Pope Francis’ daily Mass during the coronavirus pandemic.

It is unclear whether Catholics in China were also able to watch the livestream of this Sunday Marian prayer for their country on WeChat due to the heavy censorship of all Chinese online media.

Pope Benedict XVI established the custom of praying for China on the Marian feast of Our Lady Help of Christians in 2007, and composed a prayer to Our Lady of Sheshan for the occasion.

Pope Francis entrusted to the intercession of Mary Help of Christians all Christian disciples and people of good will who are working for peace, dialogue between nations, service to the poor, and the custody of creation.

The pope also marked the fifth anniversary of publication of his environmental encyclical, *Laudato si’*. He said that he wrote *Laudato si’* to “draw attention to the cry of the Earth and the poor.”

Pope Francis spoke during his Regina Caeli address via livestream video recorded in the library of the Vatican’s Apostolic Palace. However, for the first time in more than 10 weeks, people were allowed to be present in St. Peter’s Square when the pope appeared in the window to give a blessing.

Each person who entered the square was required to wear a face mask and security enforced social distancing for the people gathered outside of St. Peter’s Basilica, which reopened to the public on May 18.

After more than 5 million people around the world have been documented with COVID-19, the pope asked Our Lady Help of Christians to intercede “for the victory of humanity over every disease of the body, heart, and soul.”

“The feast of Ascension tells us that Jesus, although he ascended into Heaven to dwell gloriously on the right hand of the Father, is still and always among us for us to derive strength, perseverance, and our joy,” Pope Francis said. *(Courney Mares/CNA)*

‘His prayer life was edifying’, Filipino priest says of St. John Paul II who ordained him

ROME— A Filipino priest ordained by Pope John Paul II thinks that the modern day saint’s life and teachings are a model on how Christians should live their faith.

Rome-based Father Gregory Gaston said John Paul II was “truly a father”, caring not only for Catholics but also for other Christians and non-Christians.

“His living of the priesthood was an example for us priests,” Fr. Gaston said May 18 as he recalled the 100th anniversary of the birth of the saint.

Wherever he goes around the world, John Paul II, he said, never failed to remind people to put Christ at the center of their lives.

In the World Youth Days, he said that the pope always encouraged the young people to live their Christian life well, by being close to God through prayers, and close to others through a life of service.

“He would always lead us to look into the different realities with the eyes of faith, knowing that it is God who guides each one of us,” said the Rector of the Pontificio Collegio Filipino.

He and another Filipino, Stephen Simangan, were

among those ordained by John Paul II to the priesthood during the International Eucharistic Congress in Seville, Spain in 1993. Fr. Simangan is now a chaplain at the Philippine Coast Guard.

Fr. Gaston considers his ordination by the pope-turned-saint himself as a “blessing” and the turning point of his life.

According to him, the saint’s spirituality is best characterized by his intense prayer life.

“His prayer life was indeed edifying,” said Fr. Gaston, who also served at the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for the Family from 2002 to 2007.

“I think that because of his intense prayer life, Pope John Paul was able to work hard, giving himself totally to God and to others,” he added.

John Paul II visited the Philippines twice during his 27-year reign. In February 1981, he beatified the now St. Lorenzo Ruiz in Manila. Fourteen years later, he went back to Manila in January 1995 for the WYD.

Fr. Gaston also noted that every WYD, there was an increase in vocations to the priesthood and religious life.



Pope John Paul II lays hands on Gregory Gaston as he ordains him to the priesthood during the International Eucharistic Congress (IEC) at the Seville Stadium in Spain in 1993. L’OSSERVATORE ROMANO

“May Pope John Paul II’s 100th birthday bring many of our young men and women to discover the grace to give themselves fully to the Lord, wherever God might have led them in this life,” he said. *(CBCPNews)*

School goes on for Collegio Filipino priests

ROME— Life in time of coronavirus is not easy for anyone, least of all for the Filipino priests studying in Italy, one of the hardest-hit in the world.

While some priests residing at the Pontificio Collegio Filipino in Rome have returned to the Philippines recently, classes carry on for most of them.

Fr. Gregory Gaston, PCF Rector, said that the priest-students are taking part in online classes since lockdown forced universities to shutdown.

“Our online classes continue. We are on our last month because June is the exam period and the end of the second semester,” Gaston said.

There are at least 35 Filipino priests at the Collegio but five of them decided to return to the Philippines amid the pandemic.

Three priests had gone home as early as March and two others joined the repatriation flight from Milan to Manila on April 28.

“It’s normal for some to go home for different reasons but majority have remained with us here,” Gaston said.

Some universities in Rome have already laid their plans to finish the current semester and for the next academic year.

The Pontifical Gregorian University, for instance, continued doing online classes including exams. It is set to open the next school year in October depending on the gravity of the situation.

Meanwhile, the Pontifical Urban University, wherein Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle is the grand chancellor, will not open for the next academic year.

Also called the Urbaniana, the university is administered by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples that Cardinal Tagle now heads.



Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, celebrates Mass with Filipino priest-students at the Pontificio Collegio Filipino in Rome, Italy on Feb. 11, 2020. CBCPNEWS

The Pontifical University of the Holy Cross is also doing classes virtually.

Aside from the Filipino priests, the PCF is also a home to at least 15 priest-students from different countries.

Although he has his residence at the Congregation, Cardinal Tagle has been staying at the Collegio since his arrival in Rome in February. He travels to his office at Piazza Spagna daily despite the pandemic.

The cardinal also eats meals with the collegio priests and celebrates Mass with them.

Italy has eased coronavirus restrictions on May 4 after a two-month lockdown

that has seen a significant decrease in the daily death toll and hospital admissions.

But authorities have insisted that strict physical distancing measures must still be observed.

The country was the epicenter of the infection for most of March. There have been more than 30,000 deaths in Italy and 219,000 people have tested positive for coronavirus.

Public Masses and other religious services will also resume in Italy beginning May 18, under conditions set by the government officials. *(CBCPNews)*

Pope Francis praises St. John Paul II as man of prayer and justice

VATICAN— St. John Paul II was a man of prayer who was close to the people and loved justice, Pope Francis said at his morning Mass Monday.

Celebrating Mass at the saint’s tomb in St. Peter’s Basilica, the pope noted that May 18 is the 100th anniversary of John Paul II’s birth.

Quoting from the day’s responsorial psalm, which declares that “The Lord loves his people” (Psalm 149:4), he said: “And today we can say here: 100 years ago the Lord visited his people, sent a man, prepared him to be a bishop and lead the Church. In memory of St. John Paul II, we take this up again: ‘The Lord loves his people,’ the Lord visited his people, he sent a pastor.”

In his homily, Francis

focused on three qualities of St. John Paul II, who was pope from 1978 to 2005: prayer, closeness to the people, and love for justice.

He said that despite the demands on his time, the Polish pope always made prayer his first priority.

“The first task of a bishop is to pray, and he knew it. He did it,” he said.

“And he taught us that when a bishop makes an examination of conscience in the evening he must ask himself: how many hours have I prayed today?”

Francis said that John Paul II, who made 104 foreign trips during his 27-year pontificate, traveled the world “looking for his people.”

“A shepherd is close to the

people. On the contrary, if he is not a shepherd, he is a hierarch, an administrator — perhaps a good one, but he is not a shepherd. ... And St. John Paul II gave us the example of this closeness: close to the great and the small, to the near and the far, always close,” he said.

He observed that the Polish pope was “a man who wanted justice, social justice, the justice of peoples, justice that drives out wars.” But he was also a man of mercy, because mercy and justice cannot be separated.

Pope Francis recalled that John Paul II championed the message of St. Faustina Kowalska, the Polish nun who promoted the Divine Mercy devotion.

“He felt that God’s justice had this face of mercy, this

attitude of mercy. And this is a gift that he left us: justice-mercy and just mercy,” he said.

Francis, who canonized John Paul II in 2014, concluded: “Let us pray to him today that he may give all of us, especially the pastors of the Church but to everyone, the grace of prayer, the grace of closeness and the grace of just mercy.”

The Mass was concelebrated by Cardinal Angelo Comastri, the archpriest of St. Peter’s Basilica, Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner, and Archbishop Jan Romeo Pawłowski, head of the third section of the Vatican Secretariat of State, which oversees the Holy See’s diplomatic corps.

Pope Francis has



Pope Francis celebrates Mass at the tomb of St. John Paul II in St. Peter’s Basilica May 18, 2020. VATICAN MEDIA

livestreamed his daily Masses since March 9, when public liturgies were suspended throughout Italy. Today was the last papal daily Mass to be livestreamed as public Masses resume throughout the country. *(CNA)*

EDITORIAL

Violence to redress injustice?

TIME to be wary of what appears to be a trend in the Internet these days: video clips that glorify violence as a way of redressing injustice. These videos are particularly appealing to the young ones who still are more in their idealistic outlook, not yet knowing how to discern other considerations that should make their reactions more realistic, humane and Christian.

These videos usually depict extreme cases of injustice, like bullying, racism, etc., that cry to high heavens for justice. While it's true that these cases can be real, it is actually improbable that they happen. Some demonic forces should be involved there, but I imagine that is not common.

What's even more improbable is to see that many others appear to be in agreement with those who inflict these extreme forms of injustice. It makes me think whether these videos are realistic. We all know that there is always a tendency in those involved in media and entertainment to fall into sensationalism. But we should be clear about where to draw the line.

This is a dangerous trend because the young ones usually are still impressionable. Their reactions to what they see are guided more by their feelings and passions which are whetted by these extreme cases of injustice. They tend to act at the impulse of their base instincts rather than their reason enlightened by faith and charity. And so they tend to blindly follow and imitate what they just see.

The sense of justice and injustice of many of the young ones is still in the purely black-and-white model, shaped more by emotions and external factors rather than by what is truly proper to man as a person and as a child of God. The need for patience and the attitude of drowning evil with an abundance of good, following the example of Christ, are hardly inputted.

Parents, teachers and Church and civil authorities should take the initiative to express their reactions to these videos. Of course, everything has to be done in charity, without falling into bitter zeal that would just defeat the purpose.

We know that aside from peddling violence, the Internet is also rife with pornography nowadays. It's time that we openly acknowledge the reality of this very perverse trend. We just cannot keep quiet and passive in the face of this development. While we have to be most tactful, discreet and prudent in handling this very delicate issue, we also need to be active, with the activeness of charity and mercy, of truth and justice in resolving this matter.

Obviously, in doing this, we cannot expect to keep ourselves completely clean. We have to expect some bruises and cuts, some falls and failures ourselves, but we just have to learn to get up, fight and move on toward what is ideal for us. But let's start with these violent videos because they usually offer the opening for other perversions, like pornography, to come and thrive.

The Solemnity of the Ascension

NOW that we are still in various forms of quarantine, it might be timely to remind ourselves of our need to keep heaven in mind. The Solemnity of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ gives us good occasion for this consideration, actually a crucial one if we do not want to lose our proper bearing here on earth.

The simple reason is that heaven is where we all came from, since we all came from God, and where we are meant to be in our definitive state of life for all eternity. That's how God, our Creator and Father, wants it. He made us his image and likeness.

For this reason he endowed us with the capacity to know and to love, and gave us his grace so that what we cannot attain through our natural powers, not to mention the dragging effects of our sinfulness, we can still manage to attain through his supernatural power to which we have to correspond as best that we can.

That is why St. Paul tells us very clearly: "Set your hearts on heavenly things, not the things that are on earth." (Col 3) It's not that we disdain the earthly things. What is meant is that we have to learn how to relate everything to heaven, and not get entangled in our earthly and temporal affairs. Everything is meant to start and end with God who is the Creator of everything and the very foundation of reality.

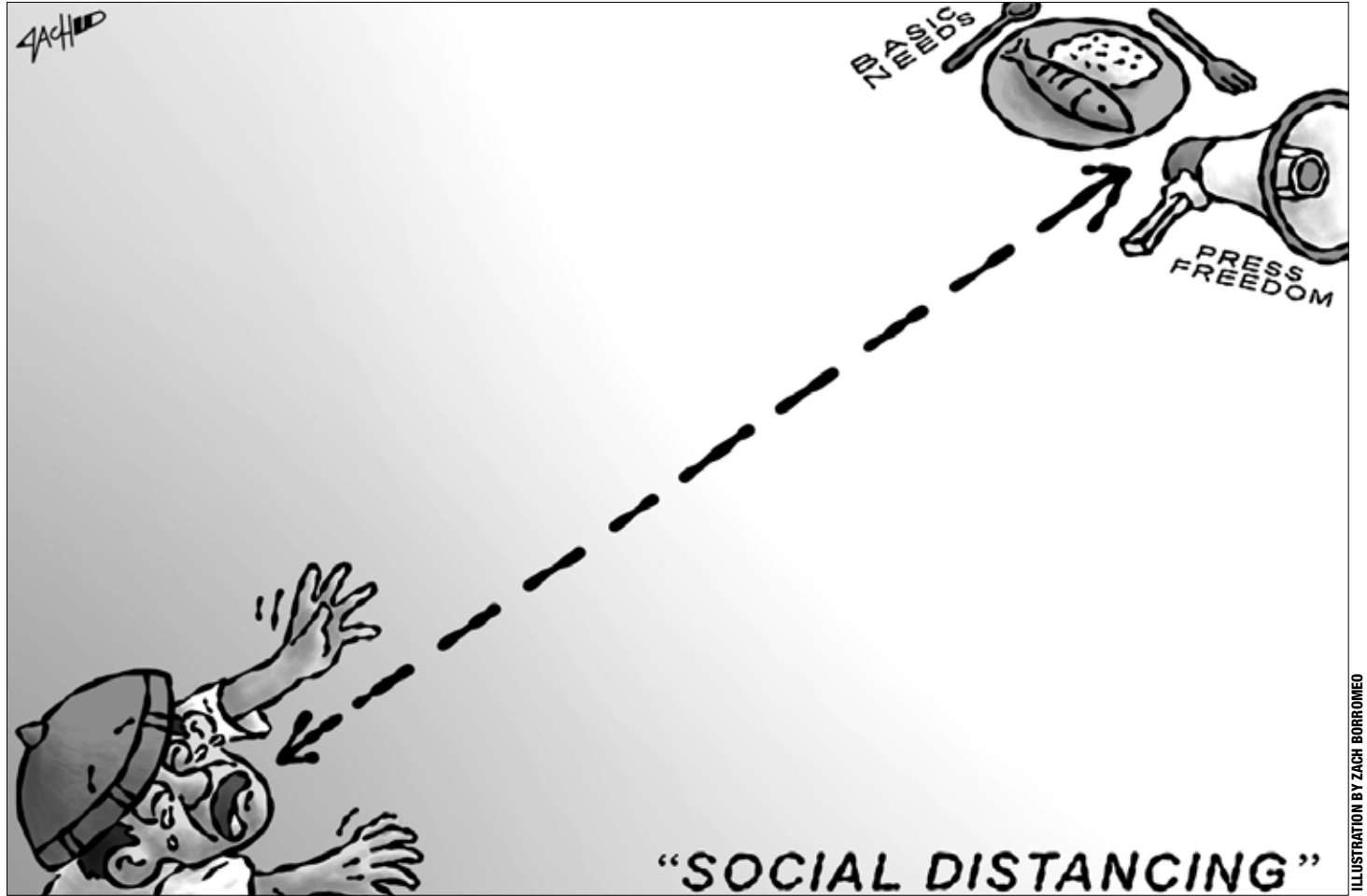
Thus, we are supposed to be always aware that we are in some kind of journey toward heaven. Our earthly sojourn is just a test to see if we also would like to be with God in heaven as he wants us to be, since he does not force us to be with him. He wants us to also choose him freely, that is, to love him. Our earthly life is actually a test of love.

St. Augustine gives us an idea of how to go about this task. It's a matter of growing in our desire for heaven while here on earth. "Such is our Christian life," he said. "By desiring heaven we exercise the powers of our soul. Now this exercise will be effective only to the extent that we free ourselves from desires leading to infatuation with this world."

How important, therefore, it is to always rectify our intentions in all our earthly and temporal affairs. That is, we should see to it that whatever we may do, even if in the end, what we do could be considered wrong or deficient in some sense, should be done out of faith and love for God and for others.

Our present condition that involves an increase of pressure, confusing knowledge overdrives, increasingly sophisticated challenges and difficulties, require that we need to seriously cultivate this virtue. There's no other way. It's either that or we get into a free-fall toward disorder, chaos and desperation.

Thus, we have to make a regular monitoring and accounting of all the developments in our life to see if we are still on track.



Panaghoy
Bp. Broderick Pabillo

MAY 15 is an important date for many farming and fishing communities all over the country. It is the feast of San Isidro Labrador, the patron of farmers. It is a day of social gathering for farmers who most of the time are alone in their isolated farms. This year, the quarantine surely has an effect on how the farmers celebrate their feast day. Poor farmers, most of the time they toil in their isolated farms, and now the one occasion for them to socialize can even be denied to them.

Yes, poor farmers! For so many years we have neglected them, especially those of us who are in the cities. We do not see them around. We do not know how they toil and strive to survive. Yet because of their labor we are fed and nourished. This quarantine experience has once more brought to the fore the essential services that the farmers render to us. For a long time we have thought that this globalized world will support our needs, even the basic ones such as food. The virus has unexpectedly and suddenly stopped international trade. How do we get our food from abroad? Fortunately, other countries where we get our food are not very much affected by the virus, such as Vietnam and Thailand where

we get our rice. If these countries stop exporting rice to us, how will we feed our people? We have not given enough support to our farmers. We prefer to import, even staple as rice. We have no food security—and yet we are an agricultural country!

Most of our people live on agriculture and fishery. These sectors do not get the budget and the services that they need. So we have the phenomenon of farmers and fisherfolks among the poorest in the country, and consequently many of them flock to the urban centers which receive the bulk of services and government attention. Hence we have rapid urbanization which bring along with it congested urban poor communities, pollution, and even lawlessness.

Now the government wants the people to go back to the provinces to ward off the danger of massive contamination in our urban centers. Thus the Balik Probinsya Balik Pag-asa (BBBP) Program is being trumpeted. There have been so many back-to-the- province programs in the past and they all have failed. The people they sent to the provinces came back to the cities after some time. Now they promise to give skills training to the

people and give them a bit of a capital for them to stay there. This is already a positive realization. People come to the cities because they have no livelihood in the provinces. But this is not enough. The government and businesses should pour massive investment in rural areas so that they get adequate human services and jobs in the provinces. There are still areas without electricity. What basic service can they get without electricity? Many areas have no health clinics, and if they happen to have, they are just empty buildings because there are no healthcare workers—no doctors and nurses, and poorly trained and supervised barangay healthcare workers. Many rural roads are impassable during rainy seasons and dusty on dry seasons. Because of the bad roads the transport system is unreliable and expensive. In a word, the development plan – and the budget—should all be aligned to give importance to the rural areas in order to develop the agricultural and fishery sectors of our society.

I hope the corona virus should be a wake up call for the government and business to pay attention to our farmers and fisher folks. They are essential to our economy and to our survival!

Hope for the best but prepare for the worst

WE are of course praying for an early end to this pandemic. We pray for the healing and recovery of those who are sick, especially those who are struggling for life in the hospitals. We long to be back to normal times as soon as possible, when we can freely move about again, when we can report regularly to our jobs, when we can pursue our respective means of livelihood. We look forward to the day when the schools open again, when we can eat snacks and dine once more in our favorite restos, or even just walk and run in the park or enjoy the beach.

We long for the day when we can attend mass again in our churches, receive the sacraments once more, or gather for our worship.

While we so hope, the nagging thought does not disappear - what if the pandemic remains, or a second wave comes?

There are indeed welcome signs of normalcy, of certain establishments opening up again, albeit gradually and varying from place to place and from country to country. However, there are also warnings of the pandemic coming back in the fall and winter, especially as no cure

or vaccine has been found as yet.

Many areas are certainly not out of the woods by any measure. Some mention months and even years before this is over. There is reputedly a document from intelligence sources that estimates 18 months before this pandemic will disappear. One benchmark we can consider is how the Vatican acts, which obtains information from many sources. Through the Pope, it has postponed major events by one year, specifically the World Youth Day and the World Meeting of Families.

Also, scientists and medical experts have indicated that a vaccine can be ready but only after one year.

Amidst these, there are posts that mention many good things that have happened because of this corona virus pandemic. Our planet earth, our common home, had a welcome breather, the air is cleaner, pollution by many measures is significantly lower, the ozone layer has been cleared in some areas. Many are rejoicing that traffic is much lighter, and the price of gas is much cheaper. Notably,

Active Faith / A7

Active Faith

Joe Tale



Candidly Speaking

Fr. Roy Cimagala

A FRIEND of mine once told me that he was a bit sad because his 4 children and the grandchildren are slowly moving out of his house to settle down in other places. Of course, he knew that he had to expect this to happen, but he could not avoid feeling sad at

seeing his house becoming an empty nest. "We are now just my wife and I," he told me.

That was when I had to explain to him, as nicely and calmly as I could, the beautiful doctrine of our faith about the communion of saints that takes place in our lives.

I told him that we can never be separated as long as we live with God who in his wisdom and power unites

us always whatever our conditions and circumstances may be. No, not distance, not even death can separate us from the others as long as we are with God. We are meant to be together. God created and designed us to be that way.

We actually are one family of God. We form one body with Christ as the head and all of us as members. As the Catechism teaches us, "Since all the faithful form one body, the good of each is communicated to the others." (CCC 947) And since Christ is the head of that body, everything in him is communicated to us, especially through the sacraments.

This truth of our faith is very useful because it can strongly motivate us to

do good always, because whatever good we do, no matter how little, will always redound to the good of others. It will also serve to deter us from doing evil, for the same reason: that whatever evil we do, no matter how little, will also badly affect the others.

All our deeds, no matter how hidden, will always have effects on everybody else, precisely because we are one body, organically united to one another, so to speak. On this point, St. Paul said: "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body Christ and individually members of it." (1 Cor 12,26-27)

Candidly Speaking / A7

CBCP Monitor

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Duc in Altum

Atty. Aurora A. Santiago

HOWEVER we call it in the Philippines—Enhanced Community Quarantine or ECQ, Modified ECQ, General Community Quarantine or GCQ or Modified GCQ, it is still a lockdown in the international parlance. In our place in Navotas City, we had another term, Extreme Enhanced Community Quarantine or EECQ which was implemented from May 6 to 11:59pm of May 15; in other words, it was strictly lockdown. Those with Quarantine Pass issued by Barangay could get out of the house only to buy foods, medicines and other essentials either MWF or TThS, depending in which Barangay one resides. Sunday was strictly Stay Home unless in case of emergency to buy medicine. It was the day to disinfect markets, groceries, public places, etc. Our City Mayor wanted to extend the EECQ due to the continuous rise in the number of covid positive individuals, however, the IATF decided against it. Hence, we are on MECQ as the other cities in NCR.

The first day of MECQ was chaotic. Everybody got out of the house, EDSA was full of vehicles, and so were other main thoroughfares. Malls were full of people, physical distancing was not observed. It is like hell broke loose. We should be worried about the

2nd wave of covid-19. Some individuals thought that since it is Modified ECQ, they can do their things already. The word modified is misleading. It appears that the people just read the topics but never the complete guidelines. Little did they know that there are two or three changes. Both under ECQ and MECQ, it is still 100% stay at home; schools still closed; no public transport, no domestic flights, limited international flights, no interisland travel, skeletal onsite work and others work from home; still with curfew from 8pm to 5am; still with liquor ban.

Some changes are: limited outdoor exercise allowed like walk, jog/run, bike but must wear masks and have 2 meters physical distancing; mass gathering is restricted to a maximum of 5 persons; controlled inbound travel for OFWs and returning Filipinos; and biking and non-motorized transport encouraged.

In our city, some business may be opened; tricycles or pedicabs may be allowed provided that it is limited to one passenger only. Compulsory wearing of mask covering the nose and mouth. Government infra structure projects, mostly flood control and school building projects, will be continued and completed.

Mass testing to stem the spread of Covid-19

Irrespective of how long the lockdown would be, it will not successfully flatten the curve. The covid positive individuals will continue to balloon if mass testing is not done. Mass testing can determine who are the covid positive so that they can immediately be isolated or quarantined and not infect others. Once testing is done by the LGUs, covid positive individuals cannot infect other individuals anymore and the spread of coronavirus will be curtailed.

Pursuant to RA 11469, out of the P246,283 Billion Heal as One Budget from a total pooled savings from discontinued programs, activities and projects, only P1.912 Billion is allotted to DOH as compared to P196,044 Billion to DSWD to cover the social amelioration cash assistance. We are battling an invisible and borderless enemy, a pandemic, and yet the DOH was given a very meager budget. Instead of putting a big chunk of funds to DSWD, Congress should have given more to DOH so that it can purchase the PPEs or Personal Protective Equipment, hazmat suits and medical supplies which are very much needed by the frontliners, especially those working or assigned

in the hospitals. The social amelioration project has become the source of corruption and many deserving individuals like the senior citizens and the PWDs or persons with disabilities still have to receive the cash assistance from DSWD.

Then the Department of Budget just released an additional P45.0 Billion to DOH for all health-related requirements for covid-19. We just hope that DOH will set aside a big percentage of the amount to purchase test kits so that mass testing can be done immediately. The experience of South Korea in flattening the curve through mass testing of its population was successful in immediately segregating covid positive from the community.

As long as there is no medicine yet to treat covid-19, as long as there is no vaccine yet to immunize the population, everybody must strictly follow the health protocol - stay at home, avoid mass gathering, observe physical distancing, wear mask properly, wash hands with soap and water or use alcohol.

Happy Birthday to my sister-in-law, Jinky Santiago, the wife of my brother Dr. Roy Santiago and mother of my nephew Rome and niece Ella.



Inside Out

Fr. Spencer Lewerenz

Time for a spiritual 'reboot'

IT'S "time to get our lives back" many people say, to "get back to normal."

No doubt we are ready to get out of the house, those of us lucky enough to have one. But are we really so eager for things to return to "normal"? Perhaps we should take a moment to stop and re-consider that "normal."

In a remarkable interview with papal biographer Austen Ivereigh, Pope Francis said:

What we are living now is a place of metanoia (conversion)... So let's not let it slip from us...

God has allowed the world to come to a stop, the Pope says, not so that we can just get back to normal. Rather, he wants us to change our approach to the world around us. The secret, he says, is in "slowing down" to rediscover the "contemplative dimension" of life.

In other words, we need a spiritual reboot.

The word "reboot" originated in the world of technology. When our electronic devices begins to malfunction or exhibit glitches, often the most effective solution is simply to restart them. Having entered the vernacular, the word "reboot" is now applied to everything from movies franchises to brands to business ventures, anything that is "malfunctioning," so-to-speak, and in need of a fresh start.

The Pope sees a world that has forgotten how to contemplate the beauty of what is around them, the world and its people, especially the ones who tend to be invisible in society, those "thrown away."

And so we have come to a "stop" for a reason. We have stopped here in order to learn how to contemplate.

What is this "contemplative dimension"? Many of us have likely been discovering it without even realizing it. Slowing down has given us more time to enjoy our families and to appreciate God's creation. But slowing down can also be difficult. Have you felt a little bit bored? Depressed? Anxious? These feelings were probably there before this all started. This time of shut-down has just allowed them to come to the surface.

A Twitter user commented:

The truth is: this isn't just "staying home and watching Netflix": It's abandonment wounds. It's attachment issues. It's relational conflict... It's existential dread. It's overwhelm of grief. It's lack of purpose. It's fear of death.

This is what happens when we stop and unplug. It is difficult, but necessary... a downtime of grace and truth.

For me, this time has allowed many truths to surface: The truth of my reliance on work and accomplishment for my sense of self-worth. The truth of my almost complete inability to unplug from TV and devices to make room for internal silence. The truth of my compensating for the uncertainty of our times by filling my head with news and opinions.

In our American culture as a whole, we are seeing the truth of how dependent we are on our "stuff"—our material wealth—and how far we are willing to go not to lose it.

Our glitch is a flight from reality, from what seems mundane and beneath us into a glitzy fantasy world where we are all stars and experts and heroes. As a church we are often guilty of turning Jesus' command to love one another into just another industry, consuming ourselves with slick productions and lofty projects and forgetting to simply make time to connect with one another.

And now, like actors without the dramatic lighting and stage makeup, we get to see the fearful truth. This is the contemplative movement, the Pope says. "Go down into the underground, and pass from the hyper-virtual, fleshless world to the suffering flesh of the poor."

In other words, in the underground of our consciousness, where we have been hiding from the truth of who we are, some others are waiting as well: The people we forgot. Maybe it is the person on the street corner. Maybe it's our kids.

Those whom the pope says were once merely "part of the landscape" become "pietas, which point towards God and towards our neighbor." The truth turns out to be terrifying, yes, but also indescribably beautiful. The suffering-yet-glorious flesh of Christ is in those people, and it's in us. We, tragically, forgot to notice. Let's not make that mistake again.

Our contemplative reboot is about stopping so that we can learn that all that stuff we thought we needed, we really don't. God thinks you are pretty cool the way you are, without all the lighting and makeup. And he wants you to see others the same way. That's a new normal worth a shutting down for.

(Connect with Fr. Spencer on Twitter @FrSpencer_CMC)



Whatever

Fr. Francis Ongkingco

ONE day, a friend showed me a video of her baby daughter on the floor playing with her toys. Suddenly, her attention was caught by the magazine that her mother had left beside on the floor.

Her eyes were captivated by the cover full of fancy colorful letters—though she couldn't still read—she grabbed the magazine with a hungry curiosity. She examined it carefully, gave it some twists and flips to see what would happen. Then she laid it carefully on the floor and gently glided her palm over the cover.

She was a bit confused when nothing happened. Once again, she glided both palms but again with no satisfying result. Disappointed and distraught she cried hopelessly to her father for some explanation, as if saying, "Why doesn't the picture change when I swipe the screeeen!!!"

That day, she learned to differentiate a tablet from a magazine!

Swiping or scrolling up, down, left and right is a very normal routine for us in our digital world. We use our mouse to scroll through infinite pages on the Web, and most of the time, we use our thumb or index finger to swipe and scroll through content in our smartphones or tablets. As much as these motions seem totally normal for us, we are actually not aware of the paradox behind every swipe

and scroll we make.

This is what we take for granted: to see the latest content on the screen we swipe up to see what is new, and to go back and read past posts or news we need to swipe down. In other words, to go down, we must swipe UP and get latest post, and to go up, or the history in the thread, we must swipe DOWN! This relationship between the swiping movement that is opposite to the content we are looking for also holds true in our spiritual life.

Jesus already taught us a similar lesson: if you want to live and be fruitful, you must fall to the ground and die like a grain of wheat, if you wish to be great and enter the kingdom of heaven you must become a little child, and He reminded His disciples that their 'greatness or success' is determined by how willing they were to become the servant of the others. This is the paradox of Christian life and fulfillment!

Thus, let us not take for granted the casual swiping up and down in our smartphone and other gadgets.

Here are some examples that may be helpful to take advantage of our swipes:

Swiping ourselves ups means:

- That everything new in our life point us upwards, that is, all graces come from above.

Swiping paradox

- Receiving new lights and guides in our spiritual life always comes from above, that is, God.

- Giving thanks to God for many blessings received personally and those we love.

- Offering up inconveniences or trials to God so that they will help us to trust in Him more.

Swipe ourselves down means:

- Everything that is old or belonging to our past life are seen when we swipe down.

- This entails examining experiences of joy and sorrow, successes and failures, healings and hurts and more.

- Swiping down reminds us to be humble and docile, to realize how God never left our side.

- The gesture will constantly remind us to give thanks, ask pardon and to serve others.

Next time you find yourself monotonously swiping up or down, pause for a bit and consider if you were going up or down. Then ponder on the possible lesson that a simple movement can actually bring about in our heart and soul. May these simple gestures help us to live in God's presence rather than simply being absorbed with manually swiping, scrolling and clicking.



By the Roadside

Fr. Eutiquio 'Euly' Belizar, Jr. SThD

"For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed" (Jn 3:20)

"Sometimes our worst enemy best mirrors us to ourselves"—Leo the Mountaineer

I WOKE up in the middle of the night recently. The pall of gloom seemed worsened by a massive blackout in Eastern Samar my province. But the real blackout, it hit me, is, right now, Covid-19. A thought crossed my mind on the Philippine and world crisis response: "TRYING TO CONTROL A VIRUS, NOW CONTROLLED BY THE VIRUS INSTEAD". It suddenly appeared to me, like a phantom of the night, how local, national and world leaders are scrambling to find ways of keeping

an unseen malevolent enemy confined within an unseen cage until they can effectively discover ways to terminate, manipulate or use it for their own ends. In the end the unseen enemy is controlling everyone's behavior, decisions and actions such that it is now the focal point of political, economic, social and cultural changes now called the "new normal".

However, as world leaders and experts work themselves into a frenzy of controlling Covid-19, there is a constant need to expose its ins and outs, no matter how unseen its nature. But in the end Covid-19 is really exposing them and all of us humans for the things that we have been actually doing to ourselves.

FACEMASKS AND PPEs. Covid-19 makes us see how we have been wearing so many masks even

before facemasks became what they are now—a worldwide craze. And a mask is a face, each one distinct from the other, depending on what the immediate environment calls for or the motive behind wearing it. We have a face for the home, one that may be more truthful or honest. We have another face for friends, probably more honest and truthful than the home face, but it also depends on how deep or shallow the friendships are. We have another face at work which is totally adjusted to the degree working relationships have either become positive or negative in relation to job security, sense of fulfillment or disillusionment etc. Still there are other faces we wear for the school, the church, our social circles and society at large; we wear them for our own ends and purposes, whatever they are.

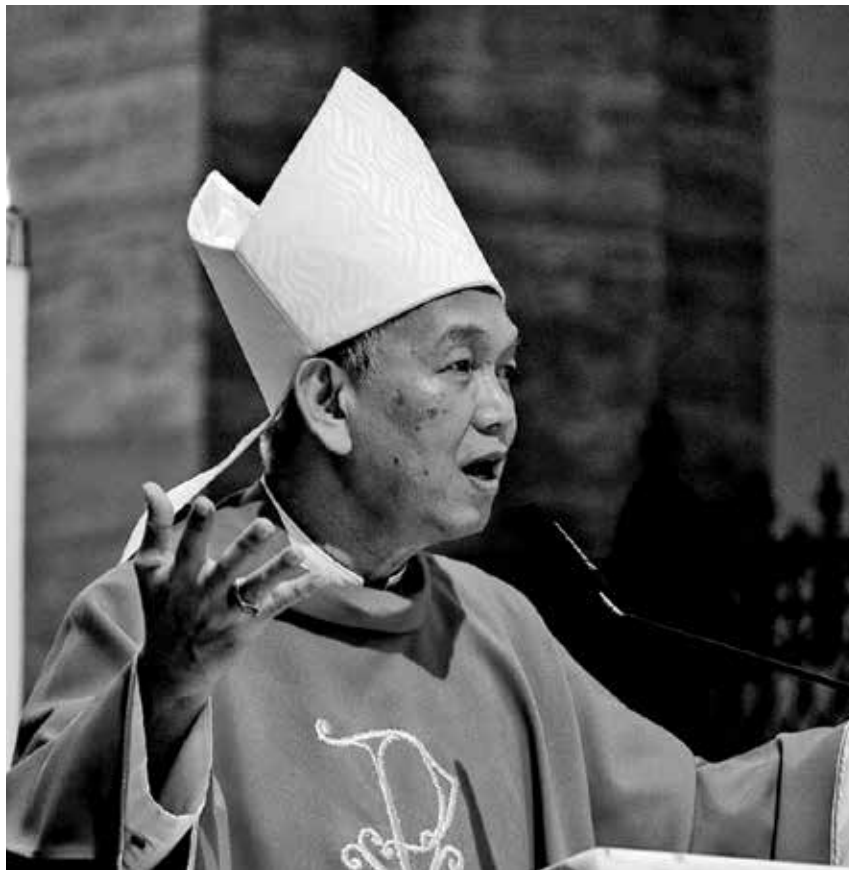
In the process of wearing so many different faces, we either serve or mangle truth and goodness, justice and right. Shakespeare once wrote: "Why, I can smile, and murder while I smile: and cry, content to that which grieves my heart; and wet my cheeks with artificial tears, and frame my face to all occasions." So Covid-19 says: "Since you actually wear different masks, why don't I make you more truthful by requiring you to wear visible ones?"

S O C I A L / P H Y S I C A L DISTANCING. Although musicians and poets may agree with Worsworth who once said that the "sweetest melodies are those that are made by distance more sweet", the distancing we now engage in has more mundane, pragmatic ends. We do (social or safe) distancing to avoid something

perceived harmful or dangerous. In fact, truck drivers got it first. They sometimes remind you by putting up a sign behind their vehicles, even before Covid-19: "DISTANCIA, AMIGO (Keep Distance, Friend)" to avoid accidents. On the other hand, that is what we have been doing with some people, groups or associations that are objects of our loathing. Many couples keep distance even from their spouses after some years of problematic marriages. Many of us are forced to keep distance from our families because we work or live outside the country or because we have inflicted wounds on one another or do not wish to inflict any on our loved ones if they discovered the kind of life we are living. Our leaders are even more distant to their opposition counterparts. Nations have been

By the Roadside / A7

More rural jobs would decongest Manila — bishop



Bishop Broderick Pabillo, Apostolic Administrator of the Archdiocese of Manila. ERIC PAUL GUANLAO/RCAM

UNLESS rural realities are taken into account, a Catholic bishop said that the revived “balik probinsya” (back to the province) program will not work any better.

Bishop Broderick Pabillo, the administrator of the Manila archdiocese, said that lessons from the past should be taken more seriously.

“In a word, the development plan—and the budget—should all be aligned to give importance to the rural areas in order to develop the agricultural and fishery sectors of our society,” he said.

President Rodrigo Duterte on May 6 institutionalized the “Balik Probinsya, Bagong Pag-asa Program,” which seeks to decongest Metro Manila and boost countryside development.

The struggle to contain the spread of coronavirus has spurred the authorities to address the massive numbers and densities of Metro Manila’s informal settlements.

The back to the province program is not new. The prelate said there have been many such programs in

the past and “they have all failed”.

He said that people who were sent to the provinces came back to cities after some time because of the need for jobs.

“Now they promise to give skills training to the people and give them a bit of a capital for them to stay there. This is already a positive realization,” Pabillo said.

But this is not enough, according to him.

The government and businesses, he stressed, “should pour massive investment” in rural areas so that they get adequate human services and jobs in the provinces.

The bishop also said that the pandemic should serve as a “wake up call” for the government to pay attention to the “neglected” sector of agriculture.

The quarantine period, he said, has once more brought to the fore the essential services that the farmers and fisher folk render to the public.

“They are essential to our economy and to our survival,” he said. **(CBCP News)**

Consecration / A1

of the Lord to end the pandemic of coronavirus,” he said.

The prayer service was streamed on different Catholic media platforms as dioceses across the country are under strict quarantine protocol.

The consecration, which coincided with the 103rd anniversary of the apparition of Our Lady of Fatima, reaffirmed the bishops’ previous consecrations of the Philippines to Mary.

In March 1984, the Filipino prelates joined Pope John Paul II with other bishops around the globe in the worldwide consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Rome.

The following year, the Church also begged the Blessed Mother’s intercession to bring the country to “true freedom and peace”

during the Marcos dictatorship.

The Church again renewed the nation’s consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and his Mother’s Immaculate Heart “as a form of joyous thanksgiving” in 1987.

Most recently, in 2013, the bishops approved the yearly national consecration of the country to the Immaculate Heart of Mary during its memorial every June 8, in preparation for the celebration of the 5th centenary of the Christianization of the Philippines.

But these “extraordinary times”, Valles added, calls on the Church to do the national consecration with a “sense of urgency”.

“This is an opportune time to reflect on the current situation that the world is experiencing right now,” he said.

Formation / A1

too. It is an integrated formation that takes place in the context of community accompaniment,” Villegas said in the Guidelines for Seminary Formation during the pandemic.

In “extreme conditions”, the seminary body said that academic deans “may study prudently” which minor subjects may be delivered online.

“The major subjects are best taught with physical presence of the teacher and with interaction among the seminarians,” Villegas said.

According to him, formators may even consider offering more subjects than they used to teach.

“In fraternal charity, we must consider the situation of extern seminarians enrolled who may really need to take their classes online,” he said.

Schools everywhere have been upended by the pandemic and seminaries are no exception.

When classes resume in August, the usual seminary life may never be the same again.

A limited free time outside

seminary premises. No personal contact with visitors. A restricted exposure and interaction with seminary staff.

These are among the new measures that await seminarians when they return to their seminaries.

“The seminary administration under the direction of the diocesan bishop must adhere to the instructions of the civil authorities regarding proper conduct during this pandemic,” Villegas said.

He said this include the basic safety protocols such as social distancing, wearing face masks, and hygiene practices.

The archbishop also stressed the need for seminaries to employ the regular services of counselor psychologists and mental health experts.

He said such move is necessary so that “the rapid changes our seminarians and formators are going through may be processed professionally”.

“To ignore the changes now can harm the future,” Villegas said. **(Roy Lagarde / CBCP News)**

CBCP head calls for cooperation with gov’t on religious services guidelines

THE head of the Catholic bishops’ leadership asked church leaders to take lead in showing “calmness” and “cooperation” with the government as the nation grapples with coronavirus.

Archbishop Romulo Valles, president of the episcopal conference, stressed the need for understanding and “open communication” with authorities whatever concerns the Church.

The archbishop made the statement May 18

after the government’s guidelines on the conduct of religious services triggered mixed reactions even from within the Church.

The Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infection Diseases (IATF-EID) on May 16 allowed the holding of religious gatherings in areas placed under modified enhanced community quarantine (MECQ) and general community quarantine (GCQ).

Under its guidelines,

religious gatherings in areas under MECQ would be highly restricted and limited to five persons only, and a maximum of 10 in GCQ areas.

One of those first to react was Bishop Broderick Pabillo of Manila, who asked for clarification on the national guidelines.

Bishop Pabillo also said that there are also confusion as to whom they could talk with regarding regulated church gatherings.

Even Archbishop Valles

described the guidelines as “impractical and without sense”.

He, however, asked his fellow bishops to seek clarification in the spirit of dialogue.

“It is good to remind ourselves that these guidelines are meant not only for the Catholic Church but for all men and women and communities of faith who practice different modes of worship and prayer,” Archbishop Valles said. **(CBCP News)**

Bishop voices solidarity with typhoon victims



Typhoon Ambo leaves Jipapad town in Eastern Samar inundated May 15. PHILIP RAYMOND BOTE/DIOCESE OF BORONGAN

A CATHOLIC bishop expressed his closeness to those who were affected by the strong typhoon that devastated parts of Eastern Samar province.

Bishop Crispin Varquez of Borongan said he was “deeply saddened” by the destruction caused by typhoon “Ambo” that struck the province on May 14.

“We join in the suffering that you’re all going through and the diocese

is giving our support and prayers to all of you,” Varquez said.

Ambo, the first tropical cyclone to hit the country this year, left a trail of destruction in the northern part of the province, with hundreds of families made homeless.

The storm also left two persons dead in San Policarpo town, where Ambo made its first landfall.

In the nearby town of Arteche, the roof of a

parish church was ripped off completely.

The typhoon’s heavy downpour also submerged the upstream town of Jipapad.

Fr. Guido Ditalo, Jr., parish priest of Arteche, described Ambo like a “super typhoon”.

Eastern Samar Gov. Ben Evardone said that the damage by Ambo in terms of infrastructure and agriculture is comparable to super

typhoon Yolanda in 2013.

He added that the typhoon destroyed some evacuation centers transformed into Covid-19 isolation areas.

Bishop Varquez also exhorted the victims to keep their faith and never lose hope, as he asked God to give them strength.

“Let us always remember that in the midst of our suffering, God will never abandon us,” he said. **(CBCP News)**

IATF / A1



A worker disinfects the National Shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in Baclaran, Parañaque City on May 18. PHOTO FROM BACLARAN CHURCH

a “one-size-fits-all” directive was “laughable” if applied to big churches like the Baclaran church or Manila Cathedral.

“Why not give instead the instruction that there be one meter or two-meter distance between persons in a church?” he said.

Pabillo said there was no consultation with the religious sector prior to Malacañan Palace’s release of the omnibus guidelines on quarantine restrictions on May 16.

“This is a problem with the government. They make arbitrary decisions without proper

consultation with the sectors involved. So they come out with unreasonable directives!” the prelate said.

Pabillo earlier sent a proposal on social distancing guidelines for church activities to the Department of Health.

The proposals included holding Masses on weekdays to spread the number of attendees, hour-long gaps between Masses, foot baths at entrances, and prohibitions against touching and kissing images.

Palace spokesman Harry Roque said home religious services were

allowed under the modified ECQ prevailing over Metro Manila, Laguna and several central Luzon provinces.

“Puwede na rin pong magbigay ng home religious services. Pansinin ninyo po, ‘home religious services,’ ang mga pastor, mga pari, mga imam, mga rabbi at iba pang religious ministers provided mayroon pong proper health protocols gaya ng pagsuot ng mask at saka social distancing, temperature check at iba pa po,” he said in a briefing broadcast on state television. **(PressONE.PH)**

New Jolo prelate to keep up work for peace

COTABATO City— The new prelate of Jolo, an island in the country's south long plagued by instability, recognized proactive peace-building as one of his pastoral priorities.

Just like his predecessors, Bishop Charlie Inzon said he stand committed to do everything to realize an end to armed conflict and violence in Sulu province.

"The focus would be on peace-making and peace-building to mitigate group-level violent encounters that affect other levels of peace," he said.

He made the statement in a recent interview published by The Mindanao Cross, a Cotabato city-based newspaper run by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI).

Pope Francis on April 4 appointed Inzon as the sixth apostolic vicar of Jolo.

The vicariate, which also covers Tawi-Tawi province, has been without a bishop since November 2018 after Angelito Lampon was named archbishop of Cotabato.

Jolo is a stronghold of the Abu Sayyaf, a militant group that has pledged allegiance to Islamic State and is notorious for its bombings and kidnapping.

The group was also tagged in the twin bombing of the

Jolo cathedral in 2019 that killed at least 20 people, mostly churchgoers.

While the Philippines is predominantly Catholic, Christians are a minority in Jolo and nearby provinces that are majority Muslim.

Having spent most of his missionary life in Jolo, Inzon said that its people are "very religious, friendly, affectionate and sincere".

"I would say that on the relational, personal, and interpersonal aspects, things are not bad as some people outside Sulu would think about it," he said.

"Admittedly, this reality is disrupted by structural violence including persistent military and Abu Sayyaf battles, violent encounters among clans and intermittent kidnapping and threats within towns," he added.

Having been out of the vicariate for more than six years now, Inzon also admitted the need for him to be "acquainted" again with the people of Jolo.

"It is important for me to rekindle that friendships that I already have, to begin with," he said.

Since 2018, Inzon has been serving as OMI's provincial superior before becoming a bishop.



Bishop Charlie Inzon of Jolo. OMI PHILIPPINES

As ahead of the OMI mission, Inzon said that dialogue and consultation helped him frame his leadership approaches.

"I think I would the same

when I go back as shepherd this time of the vicariate – visit, consult, and draw up context and evidence-based projects," he said. (CBCPNews)

'It's logical,' bishop says on women's role in seminary formation



Theology seminarians attend Mass during the "Kapatiran" at the St. Augustine Parish Church in Baliwag, Bulacan, Feb. 10, 2018. COURTESY OF EUGENE PARAYADAN

A PHILIPPINE Catholic bishop has echoed a Vatican official's call for more women involvement in priestly formation in seminaries.

Bishop Gerardo Alminaza of San Carlos said that having more women on seminarian formation team has always been "necessary".

"For me it is most logical and important for a more integral human formation," said Alminaza, who formerly chaired the Episcopal Commission on Seminaries (ECS).

A former formator himself for nearly two decades, he said the practice of having women and laypeople in seminaries has been done in dioceses that he served.

Alminaza served as seminary formator in the Diocese of Bacolod for 13 years and in the Jaro archdiocese for five years.

"I had couples (husband and wife) serving as lay companions of seminarians in college seminary, as professors and counselors, and as facilitators in our human formation programs," he said.

When he was head of the ECS, Alminaza also sent some women counselors in Jaro's regional seminary to join the Assisted Intense Renewal for Seminary Formators.

"Here in San Carlos, we now have a woman belonging

to a secular institute who had prior training in this field as in charge of our human formation program," he said.

Cardinal Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Congregation of Bishops, earlier said that the Church needs more women involved directly in priestly formation in seminaries.

In an interview with the Vatican's women's magazine, Ouellet believes that "the experience of collaborating with women on an equal level helps the candidate [for priesthood] to envisage his future ministry and how he will respect and collaborate with them."

Fr. Gregory Gaston, Rector at the Pontifical Filipino College in Rome, also stressed the important role women play in seminary formation.

He said that Jesus himself, "the high priest and our model", involved women in his work.

"So I think this has to be present in the priestly formation in the seminaries with this idea that women are not only our collaborators but we can also learn a lot from them," Gaston told EWTN News on May 13.

He said that women should not just be treated as an "additional" but are vital to seminary formation "because of the complimentary roles and characteristics of men and women". (CBCPNews)

Online classes? So much to be done, says bishop

DAET, Camarines Norte— Much has yet to be done in making virtual learning accessible to students when classes start in August amid coronavirus concerns, a Catholic bishop said.

As of the moment, Bishop Rex Andrew Alarcon of Daet said that school administrators and teachers are doing their best to adjust.

"However, many are not prepared financially, technologically, pedagogically," said Alarcon, who also chairs the bishops' youth ministry. "The capability of our providers is another concern."

The Department of Education has earlier announced that coming academic year will open on Aug. 24.

The agency also said that the flexible learning system may be conducted physically or online depending on the state of the pandemic by then.

For private schools planning to open in June, online classes are also advised.

Alarcon, a Catholic educator before becoming a prelate, agreed that if congregating together continues to



Bishop Rex Andrew Alarcon of Daet. DIOCESE OF DAET

become a risk, online classes would be a "safe mode".

He stressed the need for immediate measures on the part of schools to ensure readiness for online classes.

"It has started actually but not big

steps yet," he added. "There is much to be done."

"But education as a human activity, would not be complete without personal encounter, certainly," Alarcon said. (CBCPNews)

By the Roadside / A5

keeping distances between themselves: superpowers in their toxic rivalries with fellow superpowers worsen this distance between nations, superpowers also add to the distance between them and weaker nations by bullying them or exploiting their poverty and underdevelopment to advance their hegemonic and other ends. So Covid-19 decided: "You have been cultivating varying degrees of artificial distances between one another. Why don't I make it official?"

I S O L A T I O N / Q U A R A N T I N E / LOCKDOWN. Covid-19 has exposed the many different types of self-absorption we are given to. There is the self-absorption of a Sartrean kind born of a conviction that "hell is other people" when we refuse to see others as other selves for whom we need to settle or accept differences. There is the self-absorption that makes us mind only our own interests or those of our family or its extensions, that is, our relatives, barkadas, province, region or just preferred human company. There is likewise the self-absorption in the excessive love of one's own race, culture and nationality

that makes people either look down on those of others or kowtow to highly favored ones out of a sense of self-perceived or self-assigned inferiority. And here comes Covid-19 telling us: "You have asked it upon yourselves. I have no choice but to give in. So here you are, isolate yourselves in a lockdown courtesy of your ECQ."

TESTING. Tests are used to measure performances or to determine patterns, behavior and causes of diseases or the success and bad performance of products or goods. But because of the varying degrees of difficulty tests are associated with, including the fear of failure or, worse, loss of career or life, tests are often dreaded and even avoided. Covid-19, for its part, has exposed us to the need for testing so as to identify the virus carriers, trace their contacts and eventually treat them. But governments balk at the high costs of testing and would rather pursue goals that make people believe they are doing enough testing when their concept of enough actually does not measure up at least to people's expectations. Then we forget the hard truth—

that testing also lies in the varying degrees of difficulty we put up in the necessary effort to understand and relate with one another. We test one another's patience by our professed hardnosed professionalism when the reality we unabashedly exhibit is a hard-headed arrogance. We test our hard-earned harmonious relationship by insisting on what we consider the right view of things when all that we show is hubris. We test our ability to trust by acts of betrayal, our ability to hope by perpetual preoccupation with bad or fake news, our sense of charity by a proclivity to curse and malign others. And here comes Covid-19 saying: "You factually are addicted to testing. So I'll make you think of the need to be tested, even of the need for mass testing."

FREQUENT HAND-WASHING. Covid-19 has exposed our culpable abandonment of our responsibilities to our families, communities and societies. We refuse to correct our children's mistakes for fear of alienating them or losing their love. We leave to others the responsibility of feeding, teaching and

exemplifying before them proper manners or even a sense of morality in an increasingly morality-unfriendly world. We turn our backs on the poor and the environment except when their cries already disturb our social pleasures, entitlements or our well-groomed, well-oiled, callous consciences. In our ordinary day-to-day lives we often sell ourselves as either faithful worshippers or truthful followers of the Messiah; but most of the time we do a Pilate. So thus speaks Covid-19: "I hear you loud and clear. You want yourselves to be clean of your responsibilities. Be my guests. I'll make you indulge your source of pleasure—do frequent hand-washing. In the guise of keeping a virus away, enjoy the splash of water and the thrill of escape from responsibility."

Covid-19, in short, is today's "THECEL"—"You have been weighed in a balance-scale and have come up short" (Dn 5:27).

It is also today's teaser to Jesus' open invitation in the Gospel: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Good News" (Mk1:15).

Candidly Speaking / A4

Even the Hindus and the Buddhists have something similar to this truth of our Christian faith. It is called "karma," which in their beliefs "is the sum of a person's actions in this and previous states of existence, viewed as deciding their fate in future existences."

This is so because we have been created in God's image and likeness, and as such are endowed with the intelligence and will that would enable us to enter into an abiding relationship with everybody else. Our intelligence and will are spiritual faculties that can transcend the limitations of space and time. They enable us to connect with others no matter how distant they are or even if the others are already in the afterlife.

Of course, that is the ideal, though in practice we often fall short of it due to

our limitations, let alone, our sins that tend to cut us off from God and from the others. But we can always try and try again to pursue that ideal, enlivening our faith and purifying ourselves after our every fall. Where we are limited by our own powers, God always gives us the grace that enables us to do what is impossible for us to do.

Let's remember that we are living stones built into a spiritual house with Christ as the cornerstone. As such, who Christ is and how he is, is also who we are supposed to be and how we are supposed to be. We share the very life of Christ. We are supposed to be 'alter Christus,' 'ipse Christus.'

Let's help one another in the effort to develop this sense of communion among ourselves, especially during these times.=

Active Faith / A4

people have generally realized what is really important, what really matters. Families have become closer, parents have time for their children. All churches may be closed, but many homes have become small churches. People have become kinder. Even lay groups have adapted to the new situation—worship, meetings and conferences are now online. There is no substitute for actual meetings, but these online meetings have turned out to be advantageous in many respects—reduced trips, no expense for food, no cost for venues, and so forth. These are real benefits too.

Thus, some think it should

not be that bad even if this pandemic continues a bit more, for as long as jobs and means of livelihood can continue and are protected. This is really what is key, that the economy holds.

What would be prudent therefore is for people to welcome an end to the pandemic but also prepare for a continuing period of modified lockdown and quarantine. Hope for the best but prepare for the worst.

In the end, we simply place all these in the hands of the Lord. Mankind will do its best, confident that God will do the rest. We pray for what He thinks is best for us. He knows, and he loves us. We put our full trust in Him.

Pandemic didn't stop new bishop's ordination

THE coronavirus pandemic did not stop his consecration to the episcopacy but with only 10 people in attendance.

In a nearly empty church, Charlie Inzon was ordained bishop by Archbishop Angelito Lampon of Cotabato on May 21, but live streaming allowed his family, friends, and the local community to join virtually.

Due to strict quarantine protocols, participation in the Mass at the city's Immaculate Conception Cathedral was very limited.

The government only allows a maximum of 10 people to attend religious services in areas under general community quarantine such as Cotabato.

The small congregation included retired Cardinal Orlando Quevedo of Cotabato, Bishop Jose Colin Bagaforo of Kidapawan, 3 priests, and a few choir members.

While the pews were almost empty, Inzon said he knew many friends and loved ones would be watching the livestream and praying from afar.

He said the gathering may be "rare and unprecedented" but its simplicity still made "the Lord at the center of the celebration".

"(Nothing) can stop us from celebrating God's gift and grace,"

Inzon said.

During the homily, Cardinal Quevedo said a bishop has to be a "model" of outstanding faith and good morals.

As shepherd, a bishop is also called "to be holy" because "he is called to guide his people to holiness".

"This task is truly challenging," Quevedo said, adding that a bishop must also lead his flock "to the path of truth and justice".

Pope Francis has appointed Inzon on April 4 as the new and sixth prelate of the apostolic vicariate of Jolo, the capital of Sulu province in southern Philippines.

Upon his appointment, the 54-year-old bishop was serving as the provincial superior of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the country.

He succeeded Archbishop Lampon who was transferred to the Archdiocese of Cotabato in late 2018.

An apostolic vicariate is a local Church in missionary regions which do not have a diocese. Its administration is assigned to the apostolic vicar who governs it in the name of the pope.

A native of Sorsogon province, Inzon entered the OMI in 1982 and made his perpetual profession on



Bishop Charlie Inzon was ordained in an empty cathedral on Thursday, but watched online by family and friends. SCREENSHOT/OMI PHILIPPINES FB PAGE

Sept. 8, 1990.

He studied Philosophy at Notre Dame University in Cotabato City and Theology at the Loyola School of Theology (LST) of the Ateneo De Manila University (ADMU).

He was ordained a priest on April

24, 1993 in Coloocan City.

The bishop also holds a master's degree in theology from LST and a doctorate in psychology from the ADMU.

In the days leading up to the ordination, he said, "I rejoice in the mercy of God and trust in

his assurance of strength and consolation as I take up this ministry of service in the Church in the Vicariate of Jolo".

Inzon will be formally installed as Jolo prelate in the vicariate's Mt. Carmel Cathedral on May 28. (CBCPNews)

Pope Francis postpones World Youth Day and Meeting of Families due to coronavirus



Pope Francis at the World Youth Day in Panama in January, 2019. VATICAN MEDIA

VATICAN— Pope Francis has decided to postpone by one year World Youth Day and the World Meeting of Families, according to the Vatican. The events were expected to take place during the summers of 2022 and 2021.

World Youth Day, programmed for Lisbon, Portugal in August 2022, will now take place in August 2023, according to an April 20 statement from Matteo Bruni, Holy See press office director.

The World Meeting of Families, previously scheduled to be held in Rome in June 2021, will now happen in June 2022.

Both events usually

include the presence of the pope and gather at least tens of thousands of people.

Bruni said Pope Francis' decision to move the dates of the global gatherings was "due to the current health situation and its consequences on the movement and aggregation of young people and families."

The pope made the decision together with the Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life, which is responsible for organizing the events.

World Youth Day, which is typically held every three years, last took place in Panama in January 2019, drawing

an estimated 700,000 young Catholics. The youth gathering was started by St. Pope John Paul II in 1985. At some past World Youth Days attendance has reached into the millions.

The theme of World Youth Day in Lisbon in 2023 is "Mary arose and went with haste."

The bishops' local organizing committee for World Youth Day in Portugal put out a statement April 20 saying it welcomes the pope's decision to postpone the event.

The committee said it shares "with the Holy Father the call that, in the current context

and in the coming time, the focus of everyone's attention is on caring for the most vulnerable, families, and all who, for very different reasons, suffer from the effects of the pandemic caused by COVID-19."

In 1994, St. Pope John Paul II established the World Meeting of Families, which also takes place every three years in a different country. The most recent meeting was held in Dublin, Ireland in 2018.

The event, now moved to June 2022, has the theme: "Family Love: a vocation and a path to holiness." (Hannah Brockhaus/CNA)

Caritas Philippines releases guidebook on 'greening communities'



A staff of the Social Action Center in the Diocese of Borongan takes a picture of plants in the diocese's Farmer's Learning Center in this photo taken in 2019. MARK SALUDES/LICAS.NEWS

CARITAS Philippines has released on May 20 a guidebook for local communities to promote "concrete ecological actions" based on Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment Laudato si.

The book is a compilation of illustrated reflections and guidelines on how to live the spirit of the pope's teaching.

The Catholic Church marks this week the fifth anniversary of the encyclical.

Bishop Jose Colin Bagaforo, head of Caritas Philippines, said the Church celebrates Laudato si' Week not just to remember the document but "to articulate its achievements and challenges."

He said people should realize that the spread of infectious diseases "is very much related to the destruction of the habitat in our ecosystems."

Bishop Bagaforo said Catholics have to continue initiatives and accomplish action points "to protect our common home."

The book aims to help readers examine the personal, leadership, and communitarian "witnessing dimension of our environmental concerns."

Father Edwin Gariguez, executive secretary of Caritas Philippines, said

the publication will "help us look at ourselves if we are contributing to the problem or not."

The priest said the booklet is a reminder to communities of the "small things that we can do" to save the environment and promote "activities that advance ecological awareness."

The booklet indicated household-level initiatives, such as waste management, recycling, and planting that can be done on a larger scale or at the community level.

It also provided readers with a summary of Pope Francis' concern on the care of the environment and a synopsis of the pope's "ecological pathways."

Jing Rey Henderson, communication and advocacy officer of Caritas Philippines, meanwhile, called on dioceses and parishes to document their best practices on "greening communities."

Henderson said there are dioceses that have succeeded and are continuing their practices that can be replicated in other places.

On May 17, Caritas Philippines initiated a year-long program called "Green Initiatives" that aims to ensure food security in communities after the coronavirus pandemic. (LICAS.news)

Former head of world's Jesuits, who lived in Manila, dies at 84

TOKYO— Fr. Adolfo Nicolás, the 30th superior general of the Society of Jesus, died Wednesday in Tokyo, Japan, at the age of 84.

The Spanish priest led the Jesuits, the world's largest men's religious order, from 2008 to 2016.

In a condolence message May 20, his successor, Fr. Arturo Sosa, said that Nicolás' time as Superior General was marked by "his sense of humor, his courage, his humility and his close relationship with Pope Francis," the first

Jesuit pope.

"All of us here at the Jesuit General Curia mourn him and a special Mass will be offered here in Rome as soon as we can organize it. Because of travel restrictions just now, I cannot travel to Japan for the funeral but I assure all his many friends there of my closeness, my compassion and my condolences," he said.

Nicolás, who had been ill for some time, met with Pope Francis for a final time on Nov. 26, 2019, during the papal visit to Japan.

In 2008, he was elected Superior General of the Jesuits in the second round of voting, succeeding Fr. Peter Hans Kolvenbach.

In an interview that year, Nicolás described his approach to leadership.

"For everything—whether it is spirituality or social apostolate, whatever it might be—there is no shortcut. There is always a long way; real change and real insights come through a long process. The first step in all of them is contact—contact with persons,

contact with situations," he said.

Nicolás was born in Palencia, northern Spain, on April 29, 1936. After entering the Jesuits in 1953, he volunteered for the foreign missions and was sent to Japan. He was ordained to the priesthood in Tokyo in 1967.

After further studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome from 1968 to 1971, he returned to Japan, where he served as a professor of systematic theology at Sophia

University.

From 1978 to 1984, he was director of the East Asian Pastoral Institute at the Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines. Later he served as rector of the scholasticate (house of formation) in Tokyo.

In 1993, Nicolás became Provincial of the Jesuit Province of Japan. At the end of his six-year term, he devoted four years to serving poor immigrants in Tokyo.

The Jesuits in Britain website quoted a prayer

that Nicolás had composed during his annual retreat in 2011.

"Enlighten our minds and our hearts, and do not forget to make us smile when things do not go as we wished. At the end of the day, of each one of our days, make us feel more united with you and better able to perceive and discover around us greater joy and greater hope," the prayer concluded.

A memorial website has been created to celebrate Nicolás' life. (CNA)



Pope Francis at the Wednesday General Audience May 13. VATICAN MEDIA

Life becomes history

“That you may tell your children and grandchildren” (Ex 10:2)
 Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 54th World Communications Day

I WOULD like to devote this year’s Message to the theme of storytelling, because I believe that, so as not to lose our bearings, we need to make our own the truth contained in good stories. Stories that build up, not tear down; stories that help us rediscover our roots and the strength needed to move forward together. Amid the cacophony of voices and messages that surround us, we need a human story that can speak of ourselves and of the beauty all around us. A narrative that can regard our world and its happenings with a tender gaze. A narrative that can tell us that we are part of a living and interconnected tapestry. A narrative that can reveal the interweaving of the threads which connect us to one another.

1. Weaving stories

Human beings are storytellers. From childhood we hunger for stories just as we hunger for food. Stories influence our lives, whether in the form of fairy tales, novels, films, songs, news, even if we do not always realize it. Often we decide what is right or wrong based on characters and stories we have made our own. Stories leave their mark on us; they shape our convictions and our behaviour. They can help us understand and communicate who we are.

We are not just the only beings who need clothing to cover our vulnerability (cf. Gen 3: 21); we are also the only ones who need to be “clothed” with stories to protect our lives. We weave not only clothing, but also stories: indeed, the human capacity to “weave” (Latin *texere*) gives us not only the word textile but also text. The stories of different ages all have a common “loom”: the thread of their narrative involves “heroes”, including everyday heroes, who in following a dream confront difficult situations and combat evil, driven by a force that makes them courageous, the force of love. By

immersing ourselves in stories, we can find reasons to heroically face the challenges of life.

Human beings are storytellers because we are engaged in a process of constant growth, discovering ourselves and becoming enriched in the tapestry of the days of our life. Yet since the very beginning, our story has been threatened: evil snakes its way through history.

2. Not all stories are good stories

“When you eat of it ... you will be like God” (cf. Gen 3:4): the temptation of the serpent introduces into the fabric of history a knot difficult to undo. “If you possess, you will become, you will achieve...” This is the message whispered by those who even today use storytelling for purposes of exploitation. How many stories serve to lull us, convincing us that to be happy we continually need to gain, possess and consume. We may not even realize how greedy we have become for chatter and gossip, or how much violence and falsehood we are consuming. Often on communication platforms, instead of constructive stories which serve to strengthen social ties and the cultural fabric, we find destructive and provocative stories that wear down and break the fragile threads binding us together as a society. By patching together bits of unverified information, repeating banal and deceptively persuasive arguments, sending strident and hateful messages, we do not help to weave human history, but instead strip others of their dignity.

But whereas the stories employed for exploitation and power have a short lifespan, a good story can transcend the confines of space and time. Centuries later, it remains timely, for it nourishes life.

In an age when falsification is increasingly sophisticated, reaching exponential levels (as in deepfake), we need wisdom to be able to

welcome and create beautiful, true and good stories. We need courage to reject false and evil stories. We need patience and discernment to rediscover stories that help us not to lose the thread amid today’s many troubles. We need stories that reveal who we truly are, also in the untold heroism of everyday life.

3. The Story of stories

Sacred Scripture is a Story of stories. How many events, peoples and individuals it sets before us! It shows us from the very beginning a God who is both creator and narrator. Indeed, God speaks his word and things come into existence (cf. Gen 1). As narrator, God calls things into life, culminating in the creation of man and woman as his free dialogue partners, who make history alongside him. In one of the Psalms, the creature tells the creator: “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made ... My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth” (139:13-15). We are not born complete, but need to be constantly “woven”, “knitted together”. Life is given to us as an invitation to continue to weave the “wonderful” mystery that we are.

The Bible is thus the great love story between God and humanity. At its centre stands Jesus, whose own story brings to fulfilment both God’s love for us and our love for God. Henceforth, in every generation, men and women are called to recount and commit to memory the most significant episodes of this Story of stories, those that best communicate its meaning.

The title of this year’s Message is drawn from the Book of Exodus, a primordial biblical story in which God intervenes in the history of his people. When the enslaved children

of Israel cry out to Him, God listens and remembers: “God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew” (Ex 2: 24-25). God’s memory brings liberation from oppression through a series of signs and wonders. The Lord then reveals to Moses the meaning of all these signs: “that you may tell in the hearing of your children and grandchildren... what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the Lord” (Ex 10:2). The Exodus experience teaches us that knowledge of the Lord is handed down from generation to generation mainly by telling the story of how he continues to make himself present. The God of life communicates with us through the story of life.

Jesus spoke of God not with abstract concepts, but with parables, brief stories taken from everyday life. At this point life becomes story and then, for the listener, story becomes life: the story becomes part of the life of those who listen to it, and it changes them.

The Gospels are also stories, and not by chance. While they tell us about Jesus, they are “performative”[1]; they conform us to Jesus. The Gospel asks the reader to share in the same faith in order to share in the same life. The Gospel of John tells us that the quintessential storyteller—the Word—himself becomes the story: “God’s only Son, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (Jn 1: 18). The original verb, *exegésato*, can be translated both as “revealed” and “recounted”. God has become personally woven into our humanity, and so has given us a new way of weaving our stories.

4. An ever renewed story

The history of Christ is not a legacy from the past; it is our story, and always timely. It shows us that God was so deeply concerned for mankind, for our flesh and our

history, to the point that he became man, flesh and history. It also tells us that no human stories are insignificant or paltry. Since God became story, every human story is, in a certain sense, a divine story. In the history of every person, the Father sees again the story of his Son who came down to earth. Every human story has an irrepressible dignity. Consequently, humanity deserves stories that are worthy of it, worthy of that dizzying and fascinating height to which Jesus elevated it.

“You”—Saint Paul wrote—“are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Cor 3:3). The Holy Spirit, the love of God, writes within us. And as he writes within us, he establishes goodness in us and constantly reminds us of it. Indeed, to “re-mind” means to bring to mind, to “write” on the heart. By the power of the Holy Spirit, every story, even the most forgotten one, even the one that seems to be written with the most crooked lines, can become inspired, can be reborn as a masterpiece, and become an appendix to the Gospel. Like the Confessions of Augustine. Like A Pilgrim’s Journey of Ignatius. Like The Story of a Soul of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus. Like The Betrothed, like The Brothers Karamazov. Like countless other stories, which have admirably scripted the encounter between God’s freedom and that of man. Each of us knows different stories that have the fragrance of the Gospel, that have borne witness to the Love that transforms life. These stories cry out to be shared, recounted and brought to life in every age, in every language, in every medium.

5. A story that renews us

The corona wedding

Marriage in times of general community quarantine (Part 1)

By Jaime B. Achacoso, JCD

OUR readers would be expecting the concluding part of an article started in the previous issue of CBCP Monitor, entitled *Liturgical Law in Times of the Coronavirus Pandemic*. However, a more pressing matter has cropped up that requires immediate attention, given the anxiety that it is causing in many people and, unfortunately, even leading to wrong choices out of a seeming lack of legitimate options. This is the matter of how to proceed with the weddings that had been planned for this year, now that the Corona Community Quarantine has placed us all in a veritable lockdown. The matter is urgent, because quite a number of couples have been resorting to civil marriages, thinking that a canonical one is simply impossible to do in the foreseeable future. To these couples, and their Catholic shepherds, this two-part article is addressed. In fact, the Law of the Church gives them options in order to proceed with what I have called a *Corona Wedding*. This article is divided into two parts: (1) the requirements and preparatory steps for the wedding, and (2) the actual wedding.

Civil law requirements for a canonical wedding: A case where bishops can dispense

Despite the distinction between Church and State as far as law is concerned, c.1071, § 2° states the following prohibition to priests: *Except in the case of necessity, no one is to assist without the permission of the Local Ordinary at a marriage which cannot be recognized or celebrated in accord with the norm of civil law.*

This means that Canon Law prescribes that no marriage should be celebrated canonically if the civil marriage is not celebrated simultaneously, unless such civil marriage had been previously celebrated, or—with permission of the Local Ordinary—a purely canonical marriage is celebrated. In effect, a church wedding will have civil law pre-requisites—i.e., those requirements that civil law has in order to issue a marriage license, which are totally dependent on civil regulation, even during the Coronavirus pandemic. Ordinarily, such requirements have to be complied with for any Church wedding to take place.

However, this is one case where the Local Ordinaries may choose to relax the requirements during the Coronavirus pandemic, if needed: should the civil requirements be difficult to secure due to the shutting down of certain government offices, the Local Ordinary can give the permission for the canonical marriage to proceed without the marriage license from the civil authorities—i.e., it will be a *purely canonical marriage*, perfectly licit in the eyes of God and of the Church, with the civil marriage to follow later when the circumstances allow its proper processing.

This is a better solution than what quite a number of couples are already doing as mentioned in the introduction above—i.e., getting married civilly now and leaving the canonical marriage for after the coronavirus quarantine, with the subsequent cohabitation outside of marriage that this implies.

Canonical requirements for a church wedding: The pre-cana seminar, canonical interview, marriage banns

Before anything else, it is good to establish a principle in Canon Law, with deep Christian anthropological roots: the *ius connubii*—i.e., the right to get married. Because marriage is a natural institution, every normal human being—in

principle—is apt for marriage, marriage being the institutional expression of conjugal love, which is the natural vocation of a human person, unless called to a higher vocation of committed celibacy (in the priesthood, consecrated life or lay apostolate). So natural is marriage that canon law has constituted it into a right, which—however—is subject to regulation (limitation) by Canon Law based on very specific situations or circumstances. Such juridic situations or circumstances incapacitate a person from getting married. These are the so-called impediments—i.e., a set of 12 situations that Church Law has established—that render a person incapable of validly getting married, as juridic protections of the *tria bona* or the three goods of marriage (in the language of St. Augustine). In other words, in order to safeguard the intended goods of the marriage institution, these 12 conditions have been identified as the minimum requirements so that marriage may attain its ends, such that the presence of any of these impediments at the moment of contracting marriage—i.e., the absence of any of those requirements—would invalidate that marriage from the start. Among them is the minimum age requirement (in the Philippines 18 years for both man and woman), or the presence of any of three bonds (bond of existing marriage, bond of Holy Orders, bond of perpetual vows in an Institute of Consecrated Life), or the impediment of a certain degree of consanguinity between the prospective spouses. On top of these 12 impediments is the so-called psychological incapacity (c.1095, 3°), which incapacitates a person from contracting marriage due to his/her incapacity to assume the serious obligations thereof.

Only the Supreme Legislator can establish additional impediments for the baptized (c.1075, §2). Hence, all other so-called requirements—the so-called *Pre-Cana Seminar*, the canonical interview, the publication of the marriage banns—are all pastoral measures, which—even through highly desirable—cannot be constituted as requirements *sine qua non* for marriage. Doing so would be tantamount to establishing another set of impediments—aside from the 13 established in the Code of Canon Law—like the impediment of non-attendance to the Pre-Cana Seminar, or the impediment of non-fulfillment of the canonical interview in the form established by the parish.

With this principle established, it is easier to understand the latitude permitted the Local Ordinaries and the parish priests as regards these canonical requirements.

A. The pre-cana seminar (Cana 101): A webinar

The Code of Canon Law does not establish a specific way of administering such a seminar: the terminology itself may be quite unique to the Philippine setting. What Canon Law has established in c.1063 is the obligation of parish priests to see to it that *their own ecclesial community furnishes the Christian faithful assistance so that the matrimonial state is maintained in a Christian spirit and makes progress toward perfection. This assistance is especially to be furnished through:*

1° *preaching, catechesis adapted to minors, youth and adults, and even the use of the media of social communication so that through these means the Christian faithful may be instructed concerning the meaning of Christian marriage and the duty of Christian spouses and parents;*

2° *personal preparation for*

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1. MARRIAGE TODAY
2. LOVE IS A DECISION
3. COMMUNICATION IN LOVE PART 1

MAY 23 10AM-12NN -- LATE ENROLLEES WILL MAKE UP.

4. LET'S GET REAL
5. TEMPERAMENTS

MAY 30 10AM-1PM -- LATE ENROLLEES WILL MAKE UP.

6. UNITY AND INDISSOLUBILITY OF MARRIAGE

JUNE 6 9AM-12NN

7. GOD'S DESIGN / SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

JUNE 13 9AM -12NN

8. OPENNESS TO LIFE, A COURSE ON SEX & MARRIAGE

JUNE 20 10AM -1PM

9. THE MARRIAGE RITE, WEDDING & HONEYMOON

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT SUPPLEMENTARY COURSES (NOT REQUIRED BUT NEEDED FOR GOOD MARRIAGE)

JUNE 27 10AM-12NN

- COMMUNICATION IN LOVE PART II

JULY 4 10AM-12NN

- CORONA WEDDINGS - DOWNSCALING WEDDINGS

JULY 11 10AM-12NN

- PREPARING FOR THE EARLY YEARS OF MARRIAGE: HOW TO RESOLVE CONFLICT

JULY 18 10AM-12NN

- DEALING WITH IN-LAWS

JULY 25 10AM-12NN

- MANAGING FAMILY FINANCES

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entering marriage so that through such preparation the parties may be predisposed toward the holiness and duties of their new state.

Can. 1064 adds: *It is up to the Local Ordinary to make provisions that such assistance is duly organized, even after consulting men and women of proven experience and skill, if it seems appropriate.*

With the constraints to mobility occasioned by the quarantine—whether MECQ or GCQ and hopefully later even MGCQ—such constraints will remain, making attendance to the usual Pre-Cana Seminars organized by the parishes very difficult. Add to this the provisions on physical distancing and one understands why many parishes are hard put to organize their Pre-Cana or Cana 101 Seminars in the accustomed manner.

Here is where Pope Francis' principle of reaching out to the peripheries comes in, or what the old saying affirms: *If the mountain does not come to Mohamad, let Mohamad go to the mountain.* If the engaged couple cannot go to the parish for a Pre-Cana Seminar, then let the seminar go to the prospective couples, as provided for by c.1063, 1° quoted above. This was actually the rationale behind a webinar organized by the *Asian Institute for Marriage and Family (AIMFAM)*, adapting a Pre-Cana Seminar that they had been conducting four times a year at the St. Alphonsus Ma. Ligouri Parish in Magallanes Village for the last eight years. Using the

Zoom platform, this group of young couples are conducting what they have called the *Before I Do* Webinar, on six consecutive Saturdays at 10:00am-12:00pm, starting last May 16 and running through to June 20. Originally offered to a reduced base of friends, the webinar has become so popular that the number of registrants have exceeded the comfortable level for the Zoom platform, such that a second group has been organized, with the encouragement of the Chairman of the Episcopal Commission on Family Life, Abp. Gilbert Garcera.

B. Canonical investigation of the parties: personal Messenger, Viber, Zoom or Facetime

The next hurdle to be overcome in this period of very limited public transportation is the so-called canonical investigation—i.e., the personal interview by the parish priest of the prospective couple, for the former to ascertain that they are ready for marriage and that nothing stands in the way of its valid and licit celebration (c.1066). Can. 1067 of the Codex puts the responsibility on the Episcopal Conference (CBCP) to issue norms as regards:

- (1) *the examination of the parties,*
- (2) *the marriage banns or other appropriate means for carrying out the necessary inquiries that are to precede marriage.*

Here indeed is another area for the CBCP to reach out to the peripheries and facilitate the conduct of the canonical interview to be more

responsive to the times of the Covid Quarantine, for example:

The examination of the parties by the parish priest can be carried out through the means of mobile social communication—e.g., platforms as *Personal Messenger, Viber, Zoom or Facetime*. If even the Holy Mass can be attended through these means, there is no reason why the canonical investigation prior to marriage cannot.

The system of posting the Marriage banns in the parish church is pre-medieval: the same inquiries can be accomplished in a much more efficient and faster way through mobile platforms—e.g., *Facebook*. The Code does not specify any system for the publication of the marriage banns.

Additionally, the submission of other documentary requirements can also be facilitated by accepting a digital facsimile of the same—even just a photograph—transmitted through a mobile platform (e.g., *Viber or Messenger*), with the actual physical documents to follow even on the day of the marriage celebration itself. If the corporate world accepts such digital documents—with billions of dollars at stake sometimes—there is no reason why the canonical investigation cannot do the same. (To be concluded.)

(Eds. Note: Due to the urgency of the topic taken up by this article, we are continuing the Second Part of "Liturgical Law in Times of Corona Pandemic" in subsequent issues.)



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I plead on you—
never, ever give up on hope,
never doubt, never tire, and
never become discouraged.

Be Not Afraid.

SAINT JOHN PAUL II

Recommendations and Guidelines for the Liturgical Celebration in ‘New Normal’ Condition

WE need the Lord—the Bread of Life—in the Holy Eucharist! The Holy Eucharist is central and essential to the life of the Church and to the life of each individual believer. It is in this context that we understand our people’s desire to return to the parishes, participate in the liturgy, and receive the Eucharist, which up to now we are not able to do because of the current restrictions to address the coronavirus pandemic.

However, we tell ourselves that when the time comes and we are able to gather and celebrate the Eucharist, we will approach this next phase, in the context of the pandemic, with prudence, patience and loving and charitable mindset.

We offer you then some guidelines in view of the possibility, in the gradual return to the new normal that we will be allowed to celebrate the Sacraments with the people in attendance, especially the Holy Eucharist.

The main content of these guidelines was drawn up by Fr. Genaro Diwa, Executive Secretary of our CBCP Episcopal Commission on Liturgy. We thank him for his patience and kind assistance.

During the days of the suspension of the public celebration of Masses, our parishes have creatively continued to minister and accompany our faithful as they journey through this COVID-19 crisis. These creative ways prove our pastoral sense and love for our flock.

There are two ways, which have emerged and become effective ministerial channels during the ECQ:

1. The Use of Social Media: Liturgy Livestreamed and Televised. The social distancing so needed to stem the spread of the virus has taught all of us to maximize the potentials of the Social Media. Through this particular form of communication, our Sunday, Holy Week and daily Masses, spiritual conferences and preaching have reached many of our faithful as well as our young people. This has become a powerful tool for evangelization and catechesis. Social media has brought us together in spite of the social distancing we imposed on ourselves.

2. Liturgy with the Faithful in Attendance. A good and clear understanding, however, must be taught between virtual participation and the full participation of the people in our liturgical celebrations. Pope Francis reminded us: “The Church, the sacraments and the people of God are concrete. The virtual participation of the liturgy cannot be the “status quo”. “This is the Church in difficult situation that the Lord is allowing, but the ideal of the Church is always with people and with the sacraments.”

3. The Rediscovery of the Domestic (Family) Church. During the ECQ, families have come together to pray. This is the foundation of our Church’s life and growth. We grow in genuine prayer with the Church because we have learned and have been taught to pray with our family.

We are eagerly awaiting the possibility of resuming public Masses, and when the time comes, we offer these following recommendations:

A. Mass and Adaptations

1. The Elderly and the Sick, the Young and the Children: We urge the elderly and the sick, the young and the children to stay home and not to attend Mass. Every parish needs to take extra precaution that our elderly and the sick will not be exposed to occasions for the infection of the virus. It is advisable that they be dispensed from the obligation to attend Mass during this time when the vaccine is not yet available and the threat of the virus is still widespread.

The IATF-EID clearly mandates that under GCQ:

“Any person below twenty-one (21) years old, those who are sixty (60) years old and above, those with immunodeficiency, comorbidities, or other health risks, and pregnant women, including any person who resides with the aforementioned, shall be required to remain in their residences at all times, except when indispensable under



Screenshot of online Mass presided over by Archbishop Romulo Valles of Davao May 21.

the circumstances for obtaining essential goods and services or for work in permitted industries and offices.” [Section 2, No. 3]

There are also those who are taking serious caution not to be contaminated by the virus and therefore avoid gatherings of people even in Church.

As circumstances allow, a visit from a priest, a deacon or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to bring them the Eucharist is highly recommended.

2. The Use of Social Media. It is still strongly recommended to continue to livestream or televise our Masses, especially for the above-mentioned people in no. 1.

As we maximize the use of social media in this regard, we are also reminded to observe the proper way of celebrating the Holy Mass. Those who prepare for this need to follow the General Instructions of the Roman Missal. The special character of the Holy Mass, our highest form of prayer as Catholics, is compromised by mindless and arbitrary accommodations inserted into the celebration, oftentimes foreign or contrary to the nature of the Eucharist. The celebration of the Holy Mass, televised or livestreamed, is seen not only by Catholics but also by non-Catholics.

3. Priests and Lay Ministers who take part and assist in the celebrations:

a. Should wash and sanitize their hands properly before and after each celebration.

b. Should wear face masks when they are not to speak to lead in prayer, give instructions or proclaim the Word of God to the assembly. But the priest celebrant should not wear masks or globes during the celebration of the Mass. Instead, he should remain more than 1 meter from the congregation during the Mass. In such circumstances, there is no substantial risk of infection.

c. Should practice social distancing in the sanctuary. Therefore, only a minimal number of altar servers and lectors need to be in the sanctuary.

d. The number of choir members who will sing during the celebrations need to be reduced in order to keep social distancing. It may even be advisable to have only a cantor who will lead the assembly in the singing.

4. The faithful attending the Mass should all wear face masks.

5. Markers on Pews. Put markers on the benches/pews inside our churches to indicate where the faithful could go and sit while inside the church. These markers will help

strictly observe social distancing.

6. Anticipated Masses. The anticipated or vigil Mass shall be reckoned beginning any time after 12 noon on Saturday; a faithful who attends any Mass after midday of Saturday shall be in fulfillment of Sunday obligation (cf. Raymond Browne, Letter & Spirit (1995), 702, Commentary on CIC Canon 1248, §1); all evening Masses from Wednesday to Friday, using Sunday Liturgy, may be deemed anticipated Sunday Mass satisfying the Sunday obligation therefor (cf. CIC Canon 85, i.e. merely ecclesiastical law in a particular case can be granted with dispensation).

The new schedule of Masses should be circulated well.

7. Entrances and Exits. Specific entrances and exits of the church could be planned and well indicated to help maintain social distancing during the entrance and departure of Mass goers. Station ushers at entrances of the church to help “direct traffic”, to ensure that the faithful keep 1 meter from each other while entering and exiting the Church.

a. **Thermal scanners** are to be used for temperature check. Ushers will handle this at the entrances of the church (This is a requirement of the DOH).

b. **Foot baths** [1:10 bleach solution; 1 liter bleach mixed with 9 liters of clean water] are to be set up in all entrances of the church (This is a requirement of the DOH).

c. **Hand sanitizers** should be made available at the entrances of the church. See and note on this in the next section.

8. “Ushers and Collectors” will have to be retrained to equip them to guide the assembly how to sanitize [this presumes that hand sanitizers are provided] before they enter the church, where to sit in the church, when to come to the communion line during Holy Communion, and when and where to enter and to exit the church.

9. Offertory and Preparation of the Gifts. The Offertory procession (presentation of the gifts) should be omitted.

A deacon (if present) or a server may bring the missal, chalice, paten/ciborium, and cruets of wine and water to the altar, while the priest remains at the chair. (Alternatively, the priest could do this himself.) After the deacon or servers move away, the priest could come to the altar and arrange the items on the altar.

The lavabo should be done by the

priest alone, without assistance, at the credence table near the altar.

Special provision should be made for the collection. Baskets should not be passed from person to person. Long-handled baskets could be acceptable if the ushers can remain at a suitable distance from others. There can also be designated boxes or collection points where the faithful can place their contributions.

If hosts for the communion of the faithful are to be consecrated, they should be placed on a second corporal on the side of the altar. This allows the priest to say the words of consecration directly over the host that he will consume, while the other hosts on the altar are not directly in front of the priest as he speaks the Eucharistic Prayer.

10. Holy Communion will still be distributed only on the hand. The ministers of Holy Communion (both priests and lay ministers) need to wear face masks and sanitize their hands before and after the distribution of Holy Communion. In areas where the faithful might stand in line to receive Holy Communion, place tape on the floor, to indicate proper spacing between persons. The faithful are also lead to the line by pews.

11. Sign of Peace and The Our Father. No holding of hands during the singing/praying of the “Our Father” and shaking of hands during the Sign of Peace (CBCP Circular No. 20-05, dated January 29, 2020).

12. We need to train younger Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. Many of our EMHCs are elderly and therefore are the ones vulnerable to the virus. Care is to be exercised in this regard not to expose them to the infection of the virus.

13. Holy Communion Outside Mass. Parishes should also distribute Holy Communion outside of the Mass for the sick and those who are taking serious caution not to be contaminated by the virus and therefore avoid gatherings of people even in Church. This is again in reference to people mentioned in no. 1 of this section.

14. Regular General Disinfection should be done for the entire place of worship. City or Municipal Governments may possibly assist us on this.

B. Baptisms

1. The celebration of Baptism is allowed but restricted to the immediate family members and to one or a pair of godparents. They

need to wear face masks and observe social distancing.

2. The baptismal water to be used should be clean and blessed for that celebration.

3. The Holy Oils should be applied, using cotton, on the one baptized. The cotton with holy oils should be burned after the celebration.

C. Sacrament of Confirmation

We can forego mass confirmations this year. Those who are to be baptized as adults or who are getting married can be confirmed by the parish priest as church discipline dictates.

D. Celebration of Weddings

The Wedding Rites prescribed in the liturgical book have to be followed. But, due to the demand of social distancing, wedding celebrations this year will have to be simpler than the usual. We have to forego all of the secondary elements of the normal wedding ceremonies, e.g., the wedding entourage (abays). Only the bride and the groom, the parents of the couple, and one set of sponsors are to be present in the ceremony.

E. Funerals

Attendance is restricted to the immediate family and all must wear face masks and all should observe social distancing.

F. Confessions

1. The sacramental nature of confession requires that it must be done in person; however, it is advisable not to use the confessionals in the church. Although confessions may be heard in the parish office, it is preferable that they be heard outdoors, where there is better circulation of air and additional space for safe distance between the confessor and the penitent.

2. When hearing confessions, the confessor always wears a face mask. The penitent also wears a face mask.

3. Priests are reminded not to hear Confessions via telephone or Zoom teleconferencing, though they may use these methods to offer the penitents spiritual counsel.

4. Act of Perfect Contrition. When the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not possible, for example, to a patient who is isolated or in quarantine, he/she can make an Act of Perfect Contrition. The Act of Perfect Contrition always has been a part of our Catholic tradition. God is always present to us, even when the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not possible. While a priest cannot give absolution over the phone, he can use the phone to give a blessing and even guide a person to make an Act of Perfect Contrition. This



Hundreds of major seminarians attend the opening Mass of the "Kapatiran" at the UST Chapel in Manila, March 4, 2017. ROY LAGARDE

Guidelines for seminary formation during the COVID-19 pandemic

Come to me... I will give you rest (Mt 11:28)

POPE Francis expressed on our behalf the anxieties of the world in these words, "We find ourselves afraid and lost. Like the disciples we were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm.

We have realized that we are in the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other. On this boat... are all of us.

Just like those disciples, who spoke anxiously with one voice, saying 'We are perishing', so we too have realized that we cannot go on thinking of ourselves, but only together can we do this." (*Urbi et Orbi, March 27, 2020*)

This unexpected tempest called COVID-19 also makes it necessary for us to revisit our program of seminary formation, prayerfully attentive to the signs of the times yet relentlessly faithful to the mind and heart of the Church.

Some Basic Principles:

1. Seminary formation is the intense following of Christ in all aspects of a seminarian's personality. The intellectual formation is not the only factor for consideration in seminary formation. The seminarians need to be accompanied in their pastoral, spiritual and human formation too. It is an integrated formation that takes place in the context of community accompaniment.

2. Insofar as the seminary is recognized by the government as an institution of education, the seminary must comply with the prescribed academic requirements including the prescribed opening of the academic year. On the matter of prescribed norms laid down by the Church regarding seminary formation, the diocesan Bishop enjoys autonomy and full jurisdiction.

3. The current situation of the country under the threat of a life threatening sickness whose vaccine and treatment is still being studied by scientific experts, makes it imperative for the diocesan Bishop to comply with the health norms laid down by the civil authorities. The bishop is as concerned with the health and well-being of seminarians as civil authorities are; in fact even more, for his care is that of a shepherd.

4. The seminary administration under the direction of the

diocesan Bishop must adhere to the instructions of the civil authorities regarding proper conduct during this pandemic. The three elements that stand out are SOCIAL DISTANCING, PUBLIC and PERSONAL HYGIENE and WEARING of FACE MASKS. The revised seminary discipline during the pandemic must include the scrupulous observance of hygiene through frequent handwashing, wearing face masks and social distancing in all seminary activities.

5. We are stewards of God and our bodies are gifts from the Creator. The fifth commandment not only forbids us to murder but also obliges us not to tempt God with our recklessness and imprudence. We must not endanger the lives of our seminarian sons through our negligence. It is a Christian obligation to obey the quarantine and scrupulously observe hygiene.

Some Practical Considerations:

1. The suggested online classes NORMALLY cannot apply to seminary formation due to the other pillars of priestly formation requiring personal accompaniment in the context of community. The seminary community is a family, and it is as a family that we will go through this pandemic.

2. However, in extreme conditions, the academic deans may study prudently which MINOR subjects may be delivered online. The MAJOR subjects are best taught with physical presence of the teacher and with interaction among the seminarians. The resident formators need to be more hands-on and to even consider to teach more subjects than they used to teach. In fraternal charity, we must consider the situation of extern seminarians enrolled who may really need to take their classes online.

3. The seminaries may consider scheduling the return of their seminarians by batches. Mandatory self-quarantine will be observed. They must be "cleared" by available doctors. Only then shall they be integrated into the community. Once they have been integrated into the community, they shall become like a household; there is no need for a mask. But for those allowed to leave the premises for marketing, errands and the like, they shall exercise extreme caution and strictly follow the protocols.

4. The seminary will make

available physicians and nurses who will see that each seminarian is free from symptoms of the virus or of any other contagious disease. When symptoms are found, the seminarian will receive proper medical attention and care, and, if necessary, according to the discernment of the Rector, may be given time to recuperate. When he has recovered completely, he will be invited to rejoin the seminary community.

5. In the observance of social distancing it is recommended that the seminarians be assigned permanent places in the chapel, refectory, classrooms and library. The places can be marked so that the seminarians are not left to just estimate their distances from one another.

6. If the chapel and refectory are not spacious enough to accommodate social distancing, the seminary can explore two batches for Masses, prayers and meals.

7. The wearing of face masks being mandatory under the Enhanced Community Quarantine and General Community Quarantine guidelines, it shall also be mandatory in the seminary when seminarians gather in groups more than five persons socially distanced. When a seminarian is in his individual room (for those who have individual rooms) he need not wear the face mask.

8. For the sake of hygiene, it is advisable to assign particular bath cubicles and toilet bowls to each seminarian in the event that contact tracing may be required. Seminary authorities shall also see to it that all kitchen utensils are properly disinfected and that commonly handled surfaces such as doorknobs, toilet flushers and similar must be wiped clean with proper disinfectants. Even sacred vessels such as the paten and the ciboria must be properly disinfected, with due regard for the consecrated nature of these vessels. For the moment, there will be no participation in the precious Blood. Concelebrants are to partake of the precious Blood through intinction only.

9. It may be necessary to limit to the minimum the availability of free time for the seminarians to go out of seminary premises in order to minimize exposure or contamination. Visitors must not be allowed personal contact with the seminarians. Items shall be left in designated areas. The visitors are

to be disinfected before they enter the premises but only until the areas designated to drop off their items. Even exposure and interaction with seminary staff need to be prudently restricted.

10. The norms laid down by the Episcopal Commission on Liturgy with regard to the celebration and reception of the sacraments must be observed.

11. The areas where the community daily gathers must be disinfected daily according to the standards laid down by the Department of Health.

12. Individual confessions and spiritual directions may be done with both confessor/director and seminarian wearing face masks. It is preferred that the Sacrament of Penance be administered in such wise as to avoid the use of the confessional or confession box, with the seats of confessor and penitent parallel to each other, but facing in opposite directions, observing the proper distance.

13. Human formation counselors may do their regular accompaniment with the seminarians virtually, one-on-one sessions without physical contact, by making available a consultation room with strong wifi-connection, with proper observance of counseling protocols. The room and equipment must be disinfected every after use.

New Outlook

1. The seminary formators are advised to contextualize the spiritual conferences, theological and philosophical convocations, pastoral talks and homilies within the current situation of the world. COVID-19 has been metaphorically called a doorway leading to a new rupture in the world. The seminarians will be the future priests on whose shoulders will be laid the task to lead our flock into that new world.

2. Seminary formation during COVID will probably have more the flavor of "propaedeutic" and "vocational synthesis" stages. While we ensure that it is integral, the dimensions of human and spiritual formation will be highlighted and pastoral formation necessarily will have a "shift". Apostolate will be an "inside" experience but for the "outside."

3. Due to the unprecedented situation that the world is going through, the seminarians and formators should be organized to form small circles of discernment to look at the situation from the

divine perspective and to respond to the condition with a pastoral heart. The seminarians must be constantly reminded *sentire cum ecclesia* and all formation for ministry must be *pro vita mundi*.

4. This is an opportune time to revisit and readjust existing customary community gestures and practices, such as fraternal expressions of physical affirmation, playing contact sports, the customary fraternal abrazos, etc.

5. Although the vision to be a church of the poor has been repeatedly taught in the past, the current condition of the world necessitates a formation in deeper simplicity and poverty of lifestyle among seminarians in communion and in solidarity with the increasing number of poor people. The engagement of the seminarians in alleviating the sufferings of the poor such as providing food relief bags, coming from their personal sacrifices according to their age and situation, must be encouraged.

6. More than ever, due to the rapidly changing situation of the world, it is even more necessary that the seminary employ the regular services of counselor psychologists and mental health experts so that the rapid changes our seminarians and formators are going through may be processed professionally. To ignore the changes now can harm the future.

Through the centuries, the firm point of the seminarians' daily life and the foundation of his spiritual and human structure is his deep personal friendship with the Lord. From this intimacy with the Lord, may he live a life that is fully human in the celibate state, with a joyful zeal to share in the mission of the Lord for the salvation of the world!

May Mary Help of Christians and Mother of Priests protect her seminarian sons and help them to become like her Son.

Submitted by the CBCP Episcopal Commission for Seminaries for Adaptation and Approval by the Archbishops and Bishops for the seminaries within their jurisdiction.

May 15, 2020, Memorial of San Isidro Labrador

+SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS
Archbishop of Lingayen Dagupan
Chairman, Episcopal Commission for Seminaries

Anticipating to celebrate our liturgy in the 'new normal' condition

WE eagerly await the time in the "New Normal" condition when we will be allowed to celebrate our liturgy, especially the Holy Eucharist, with our faithful in attendance. We approach this phase of our life as church with the wise thought of our Holy Father who said "At this time, when indications have been given to start coming out of quarantine, we pray that the Lord will grant to His people, to all of us, the grace of prudence and obedience to these indications, so that the pandemic will not return" (Pope Francis' Homily at Casa Santa Marta, April 28, 2020).

Indeed, we need the Lord – the Bread of Life – in the Holy Eucharist! The Holy Eucharist is central and essential to the life of the Church and to the life of each individual believer. It is in this context that we understand our people's desire to return to the parishes, participate in the liturgy, and receive the Eucharist.

In anticipation of that time, the CBCP has recently released on May 16, 2020, a new set of Recommendations and Guidelines for the Liturgical Celebration in "New Normal" Condition. This is the official set of guidelines proposed to all bishops as they make their own particular pastoral decisions and course of action for their respective dioceses.

During these days, we may hear of some guidelines from the government and health authorities regarding our conduct of worship. They may at first come across as impractical or without sense to us. In this scenario, I believe that the way forward is to patiently ask and seek clarification from the source of these guidelines. It is good to remind ourselves that these guidelines are meant not only for the Catholic Church but for all men and women and communities of faith who practice different modes of worship and prayer.

My sincere thought is, may we try to take the lead in showing the spirit of patience, calmness, understanding, open communication and cooperation in these very trying times as we continue to patiently present our particular concerns to the proper authorities. Again, we take to heart what Pope Francis said "At this time, when indications have been given to start coming out of quarantine, we pray that the Lord will grant to His people, to all of us, the grace of prudence and obedience to these indications, so that the pandemic will not return".

May our Blessed Mother, the Mother of the Church, continue to accompany us as we fervently pray for each other, for our nation, and for the world.

+ROMULO G. VALLES, D.D.
Archbishop of Davao
CBCP President
18 May 2020

Pastoral reminder about 'venomous virus' preying on our youth during pandemic



Bishop Ruperto Santos of Balanga, Vice Chairman of the CBCP Episcopal Commission for Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People.

THERE is a more dangerous and extremely deadly virus lurking around us aside from Covid-19. They prey on our young people that are restricted to their homes due to coronavirus lockdowns. They take advantage of the situation, with our youth who are preoccupied with the Internet at home. These predators are heartless, motivated by insatiable greed and addiction to their craving of flesh trades.

These are the human traffickers and sexual offenders, the worst and venomous virus on earth, taking every opportunity to raven our youth and even young children who are bored at home and have nothing to do but navigate the internet. These young people wanting to belong or get attention, fall into their cunning and empty promises. Our youths who are either just curious, in crisis, or in search for affirmation get trapped by their sugar coated enticements and false illusions.

They are the viruses of our society who use the physical vulnerability and poverty to lure and victimize our people.

We should do everything to protect our children, our youth from these evil doers. Everyone should be vigilant to prevent our children from being unwilling victims. At home, always be observant of your children, especially with the use of the Internet. Be aware of what they are doing. Have time limits with the use of their gadgets. Also, with this stay at home order, stay physically present with the members of the family. Talk to them consistently, have conversations about their friends or what they are undergoing. At home, do something together to develop or discover each other's talents such as baking, painting or making designs. Introduce to your children your childhood games such as dama, chess or sungka.

To protect the family and to

strengthen the society is to safeguard our children, our young people. They are the hope. They are our future. Human trafficking and online sexual exploitation are evil deeds and criminal acts which ruin their future. Their lives are destroyed, and can even lead to a violent death. So it is a call for all of us to protect our children, our youth and prevent them from being victimized.

We should condemn the viruses of human trafficking and online sexual exploitation, do what is necessary to eradicate this worst endemic traffickers and sexual offenders. Be brave enough to report, and to bear witness to these evil deeds. It is only then we can make sure that our youth, our children, are not only socially distant from those human viruses of trafficking and exploitation but we must contain these perpetrators. We must exhaust all legal means to investigate, prosecute and punish them.

Our Church is a mother. A mother speaks and stands for her children, especially for the vulnerable and voiceless children. She speaks to comfort, to console, and to confront those who make them suffer. Our Church as a mother, defends and protects her flock; ensuring to make right what is wrong and to correct them by doing what is best and beneficial to her children. She must see to it that they are truly safe at home.

We will never end up victims but victors over the viruses of trafficking and online sexual exploitation.

Thank you so much and be safe always.

+RUPERTO CRUZ SANTOS, D.D.
Bishop of Balanga
Vice Chairman, CBCP Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ECMI)
May 25, 2020

Benevolence, compassion and charity

THE Sangguniang Laiko ng Pilipinas, stands together with the various respectable and concerned people and organizations, against the Cease and Desist Order of the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) prompting ABS-CBN to sign-off last May 5, 2020. ABS-CBN is the largest broadcasting entity in terms of coverage and audience; thus, locking down 42 television stations, including the flagship Channel 2, 10 digital broadcast channels, 18 FM stations, 5 AM stations, together with the "Malayang Mamamayan" DZMM radio station, is a palpable demonstration of power that undermines freedom of speech and

the public's right to information.

The NTC's Order is inconsistent with its declaration in March 2020, that the broadcasting company could remain on air while the license renewal is pending in Congress. Likewise, it ignored the advice of the Department of Justice, that it is within NTC's mandate to allow the network to operate until the bill renewing its franchise is passed. But the legislative body like ours, dominated by President Duterte's loyalists, sat on the issue and the calculated delay of action cost the livelihood of thousands of Filipinos who have families to feed. Will President Duterte stand up and take

responsibility for the lives of 11,000 ABS-CBN employees who lost their jobs, in the same manner that he publicly assured the thousands of returning OFWs, of his personal protection?

ABS-CBN is most needed now and the NTC's decision to put it off the air is ill-timed. The network has provided the DOH, the IATF and other government agencies with substantial air time that kept the nation informed about the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in further knowledge about the virus and its preventive measures; the curve status of those infected; the impact of the lockdown in the

CBCP Statement on the closure of ABS-CBN



Employees of ABS-CBN hold a rally outside the network's compound in Quezon City on February 21, 2020.

MY first thought in the currently much talked-about closure of ABS-CBN is our people—our people who are in these extremely difficult and trying times because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Because of the closure of this broadcast station, our people have lost one of our country's major sources of information which is crucial to our people in this present situation. If I may add, they also have lost a source of entertainment and diversion during these days of confinement in their homes for more than two months already due to the lockdown measures.

These days our people truly need

more than ever broadcast services that would bring them the much-needed information in this time of crisis.

With this consideration, I sincerely hope and pray that our government, especially our Congress, will work together to resolve the issue so that ABS-CBN may be allowed to resume its broadcast the soonest to the benefit of our people who really need as many as possible sources of good and reliable information in this time of suffering and distress.

+ROMULO G. VALLES, D.D.
Archbishop of Davao
CBCP President

Statement of the CBCP Episcopal Commission on Social Communications on the shutting down of ABS-CBN

THE Peace of our Lord be to all!

The CBCP Episcopal Commission on Social Communications is aware of the sentiments of our people regarding the lapse of the franchise of ABS CBN and the cease and desist order imposed upon them by the NTC. We recognize the importance of the role of the same corporation in the Philippine democratic landscape, as they, together with all other Philippine media entities represent the voice of the freedom of the press. They are part of the many media channels that contribute to the timely, objective and truthful dissemination of news and information bringing guidance and support to our people especially during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. We are aware of the fact that their closure also jeopardizes the livelihood of more than 11,000 employees, their families, and those whose businesses are directly or indirectly connected and are dependent on the continuous operation of the same media network.

We humbly implore and call upon the lawmakers in congress to act expeditiously and judiciously on their application, pending since 2016, in accordance to the merits and demerits of the same. We entreat them to consider the immediate resolution of the application of ABS CBN for the possibility of their going back on-air and back to operation at the soonest possible time as we need all support that we can get from all sectors of society during this time of crisis. And we hope that the lawmakers do the

same on all the other franchise applications of other media networks already on their desk for passing and renewal. We value and uphold press freedom, and thus believe that the delay of renewal and the closure of any recognized media channel jeopardize this same freedom and deprive our people of their right to access news and information. It is also our hope that they do not forget that this is not only about a corporate giant's renewal application, but that it is too about the livelihood and sustenance of the thousands of people and their loved ones who depend on it. It is also about the many Filipinos who also consider ABS CBN a vital source of information and their temporary escape from the daily grind of their ordinary lives. And it is foremost about being united as a nation overcoming our differences for the common good, as we confront a common adversary, which is the crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We trust in the good judgment of those who are entrusted to serve the good of our people. And we hope for the expeditious solution to this situation that affects many Filipinos if not all.

We pray for the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, to guard all our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus! (Phil 4:7)

+MARCELINO ANTONIO MARAL-IT, JR., D.D.
Chairman, CBCP Episcopal Commission on Social Communications
May 9, 2020

economy; and the guidelines issued on the government's aid to help the poor and the jobless. It is through ABS-CBN that diverse and effective ways of aid distribution is monitored and its irregularities, brought to the fore.

Therefore, in solidarity with the thousands of jobless employees, we urge Congress to take this matter seriously for the common good. Loftier than regulatory compliance and constitutional rectitude is the primacy of compassion, especially towards the needy during these distressful and uncertain times.

We are calling on all LAIKO members to rally in prayer calling

on God, who is benevolent and full of compassion, to intervene. Now more than ever, let us join hands and help each other through this crisis.

In the meantime, we encourage ABS-CBN to persist. Despite being silenced, we marvel at how creatively you are using the social and digital media to pursue your slogan 'in the service of the Filipino people.' We are at your side! Resist! This too shall pass.

For the Sangguniang Laiko ng Pilipinas Board,

ROUQUELA PONTE
President, May 8, 2020

The Church of the Risen Lord

Feast of Ascension, Year A, (Mt 28:16-20)
May 24, 2020

By Msgr. Lope C. Robredillo, SThD



ONE time, I happened to meet a man in his 50s who has gone to various Christian denominations and sects. In the end, he settled for a born-again community that he felt answered his affective needs. I recalled that he believed all religions were the same, and so it did not matter to him which religion was true. What was important for him was that the particular sect he had chosen assured him that he was saved. This line of thought that all religions are the same—this is rather common even among the educated. Of course, when one

scans the spectrum of religions, he may observe that they appear to be all the same—they teach about God (under different names) and good behavior, they observe certain rites, and call everyone to conversion. No wonder, some people would advocate pluralism in religion. They would tell us that all religions are of equal value, and are ways to salvation, and what is decisive is that one follows the religion he professes. Indeed, others go even as far as saying that what one believes does not matter; what is decisive is what he does.

It would seem, however, that today's Gospel does not accept that line of thinking. From a Christian point of view, the most decisive act of God in history is his revelation in Jesus. As we noted in the previous Sundays, that revelation was unfortunately rejected. Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom of God and his demand of conversion fell on deaf ears; in fact, his enemies crucified him, and they thought that was he end of him. But God was with him. The Father raised him from the dead. His cause—the Kingdom of God—was entirely correct, and the resurrection vindicated him. Hence, the mission he began must be continued. That is why, in today's Gospel, Jesus gives his disciples the so-called Great Commission: "Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth; go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you" (Matt 28:18b-20a). Since Jesus could no longer personally continue his mission, because he has already ascended to the Father, the Christian community where his Spirit lives on must carry on the cause. The disciples must proclaim the Gospel, and those who accepted it have to be brought to the community through faith and baptism. That is why the Church continues to send missionaries to bring people to the fold.

Does this mean that we will have to reject other religions? There is no question about it—today we are in the age of inter-religious dialogue. We can no longer go back to the time when Christians had almost nothing good to say of other religions. Nowadays, we seek dialogue, trying as we do to explore areas where we can agree with

Church / B7

A mission and a presence that last till the end of time

Feast of Ascension, Year A, (Mt 28:16-20)
54th World Communications Sunday
May 24, 2020

By Fr. Sal Putzu, SDB

IT was bound to happen: *the triumph of the Resurrection had to find its completion in the exaltation of Christ "at the right hand of the Father."* Now, Jesus' human nature belongs to another dimension of existence—the fuller dimension of the glorified state. We rejoice and share in his exaltation.

According to God's design, Christ's mission has to be carried on by the Church, under the visible leadership of the Apostles and their successors, empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit. *The mystery of mankind's Redemption continues in and through the Church, the Mediatrix/Channel of all grace.* In her, the mystery of an omnipotent God, who solicits the cooperation of frail creatures in order to realize His plan, is restated and re-enacted in a new, even more disconcerting manner.

This "style" started with eleven fearful "nobodies," mustered from among fishermen, tax collectors, and zealots. They were sent by Jesus into an immense, unfriendly world to sow in it the "mustard seed" of the Kingdom.

The mission of the Eleven was daunting and unprecedented. In the past, the Lord God had assigned prophets to convey His messages to some individual or group, in a well defined area and within specific historical circumstances. The Old Testament is replete with such cases. But *the mandate given by Jesus to the Apostles was absolutely unlimited in space, scope, and time.* He sent them to the whole world. They were to proclaim the Gospel to all nations, teaching them to observe all that he had commanded them during his apostolic life in Palestine.

The mission was simply overwhelming. *Those poor and mostly illiterate men were expected*

to become the TEACHERS of all nations. And that was not all. Those frail men, full of defects and wrong priorities were *expected to be WITNESSES to Jesus and the Gospel they were sent to proclaim!* (See today's First Reading, v. 8.) And this mission was to be carried out "to the ends of the earth" and "until the end of time"! By all standards, it looked and was a *MISSION IMPOSSIBLE!*

What made all the difference and assured a complete final success (despite all obstacles and "ups and downs") *was the unfailing and powerful presence of the HOLY SPIRIT.* Repeatedly promised by Jesus and eventually sent by the Father and him on Pentecost day, *the Holy Spirit transformed that apprehensive band of not-qualified people into heroes and saints. He did and will continue doing the same with their successors till the end of time.*

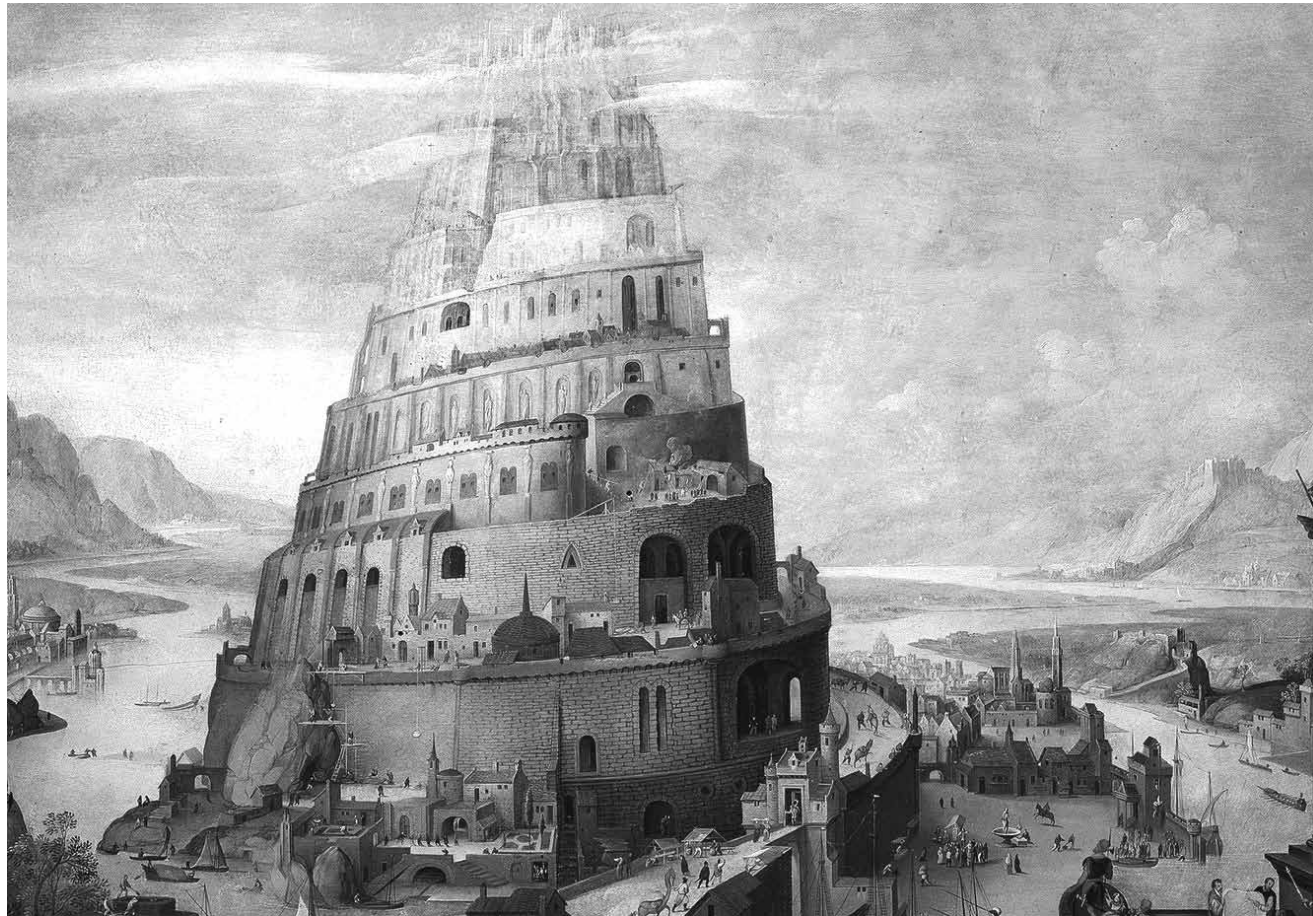
And through it all, *the glorified Jesus* will not watch the vicissitudes of his Church "from a distance." Though invisible, *he will still be very much fully involved in the life of his Church* for he has become and "remains for ever Emmanuel"—"God with" us! (See the conclusion of today's Gospel passage.)

This mystery of God saving people through people continues through the centuries. It will go on till the end of time, in spite of all opposition from outside the Church, and the limitations, defects and failures in the leaders and other members of the Church. Such is the "strategy" adopted by God. We have no alternative. And *it is simply fascinating to reflect on the fact that God should hold us in such a high esteem as to make us His associates in the fulfillment of His plan of salvation.*

The Tower of Babel

Pentecost Sunday, Year A, (John 20:19-23)
May 31, 2020

By Msgr. Lope C. Robredillo, SThD



TODAY, we celebrate the feast of Pentecost. For Christians, it is not simply the 50th day after the Lord's resurrection; rather, it is also the time when the Church, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, received its mission to bring all people to God. Thus, in the Gospel, Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to the early Church: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven them. If you hold them bound, they are held bound" (John 20:21,23). Pentecost signifies that the risen Lord is active in the world, reconciling all men to God and to one another. Thus, one of the theological meanings of the event is that Pentecost is a time of reconciliation and communion. Indeed, from linguistic evidence, there is no doubt that the account in the First Reading (Acts 2:1-11) is meant to reverse the experience of Babel. Luke says that the Jews who came from every nation under heaven and were staying in

Jerusalem witnessed the outpouring of the Spirit on the apostles, "they were much *confused* because each one heard these men speaking his own language. The whole occurrence astonished them" (Acts 2:6). If in the story of the tower of Babel, people were confused because of their different languages, here the Jews who came from every nation on earth were confused because each one heard the apostles speaking in his own particular language. Thus, Pentecost overcomes the division of men at Babel. That is why Luke uses tongues as of fire (v 3) to convey this signification. This means that through the tongue of the Spirit, which is ultimately charity, all men will be reconciled. Pentecost is thus a time of reconciliation and fraternal communion.

A Christian always expects that the Church be a community of reconciliation and communion. And precisely because the Spirit that was poured out at Pentecost is active in the Church, such a community

could be promoted if Christians are to be informed with a spirituality of communion. According to John Paul II in his *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, this spirituality means that we are able to think of our brothers and sisters in the faith within the profound unity of the mystical body; it means sharing their joys and sufferings; it implies the ability to see what is positive in others; it means knowing how to make room for others, bearing their burdens, and resisting temptations that constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy; and above all, it means our contemplation of the Trinity dwelling in us. If people can see this spirituality shining on our faces, they will certainly recognize the miracle of Pentecost working in the Church and, who knows, our political structure and system could be affected in the long run. And the Babel among our political parties will be transformed into reconciliation and communion.

The transforming and unifying role of the Holy Spirit

Pentecost Sunday, Year A, (John 20:19-23)
May 31, 2020

By Fr. Sal Putzu, SDB



JESUS freed us from sin through all that he was and deed, but especially through his passion, death, and resurrection. Thanks to him, salvation is made available and offered to all human beings. But this does not mean that we are all herded into heaven. Christ destroyed sin, but not our freedom. It can still happen that we say once again "No!" to God.

As long as we live on earth, sin remains a "possible accident" caused by a number of factors, the main ones of which are the devil's temptations, the negative influence of the environment in which we live, and especially the moral weakness of our wounded nature. *Experience shows that sin remains a sad reality to this very day, both in ourselves and around us.*

Jesus knew it would be so. That is why he repeatedly promised and eventually gave the Holy Spirit to the Church that she might continue his healing mission in the power of the Source of all unity, wholeness, and holiness.

Thus, *Jesus completed his redemptive work by commissioning the Church to carry on the struggle against all that divides mankind, all that makes us selfish, proud, aggressive, and oppressive.*

And *this is what the Church has been doing in her 2000 years of existence, in spite of all the limitations and weaknesses that come to her from her "human component."* The Holy Spirit, present in her as her "soul," is the divine Power that

keeps the Church alive, constantly renews her, guides her into an ever greater appreciation of the truths of revelation, sanctifies her, and strengthens her against all dangers and oppositions.

And *so the mystery of the Incarnation continues—God saving men through men,* not just through the all-holy Jesus, but also through the ministry of frail and defective people, sanctified and strengthened by the Spirit of love, unity, and holiness.

We will never be able to fully appreciate the importance of the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in each of us. Without him, the Church would be just a human institution, destined to perish like all other institutions, empires and civilizations. But the Church will last until the end of time only because the Holy Spirit, the Lord of Life, animates her.

Thanks to the presence of the Spirit, the gift of salvation and all other gifts of the Risen Christ are channeled to people, through the Church, the "Universal Sacrament of Salvation" (CFC, 1416). The Church fulfills this role through all that she is and does, but especially through those sacred acts that we call "sacraments." In particular, the forgiving love of God becomes a reality for us, today, through the sacrament of Reconciliation, which enables us to rise after every fall, purified and strengthened by God's forgiving love.

The three great catastrophes facing mankind

By Fr. Shay Cullen

THERE are three deadly catastrophic events engulfing the world as you read this. None of us can ignore these realities without suffering the dire consequences. Should we do so, we will be less human, less responsible and become more self-centered and even devoid of the great virtues and values that make good people better. The first is the pandemic coronavirus (covid-19). The second is global warming and the dangerous climate change it is bringing to the planet and each one of us. The third is the age-old human evil of child slavery and child sexual abuse. For all three, we need to respond with a vigorous determination and global unity. Each is an evil, a disaster, a catastrophe that is happening now.

The coronavirus is attacking the children in jail where they are cramped, squeezed, and forced to live in tiny government cells, in grave danger of the virus where they are likely waiting to die. We appeal to the Philippine public, judges, the Public Attorney's Office, Office and mayors to act to save the children. I previously exposed the truth of children in jails and the heinous crimes of sexual, physical and psychological abuse against the smaller children by the older inmates. View this on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_96Du7MWaE.

The coronavirus has locked-down families and some have continued sexually exploiting their own children or the children of others on the internet using cellphones and tablets. They are screening their naked children and some abusing them in front of the camera for foreign customers who pay them by money transfer. Only a tiny fraction of the abuse is discovered by international police forces and Interpol. The streaming of child sexual abuse is banned by law in the Philippines. The National Telecommunications Commission is mandated under RA 9775 (section 9) to enforce the law that mandates all Internet Server Providers to install software to block and filter child pornography and live streaming. But they don't enforce the law and thousands of children are being

sexually abused online and many more in danger of online cyber-sex abuse.

The latest victims of this gross government neglect were rescued from cyber-sex abuse and were admitted to the Preda home for sexually abused girls last week. Two of them, Jane, 14 and Charmie, 11, and six-year old Patricia (not real names) had been used by their own stepmother in online sexual abuse and were in the process of contacting another customer from Australia when they were rescued by operatives of the National Bureau of Investigation's Anti-Human Trafficking Division (NBI-AHTRAD) and the Philippine National Police Women and Children Protection Center (PNP-WCPC) from a 34-year old female suspect. She was forcing the children to perform sexual acts live on webcam for paying customers. She has been arrested.

When admitted to the Preda home they were given care, comfort, encouragement and affirmation. They were warmly welcomed and reassured they are good children, innocent and had done no wrong. They were assured that they will find safety and new friends at the Preda home. They were given tasty meals, new clothes, toys and a special apartment and Preda caregivers. The next day they were smiling and talking to the Preda social workers and telling openly what they had endured.

Just in case they were exposed to Covid-19, the Preda staff called in medical personnel to administer a rapid diagnostic test for Covid-19. They happily proved negative but will stay in the special apartment for 14 days to be sure. Then, they can join the community of fifty children that are healing and recovering from child rape and human slavery and trafficking.

They endured much abuse. The eldest, Jane, 14, told Preda social workers that she was nine years old when she was first brought to the Wild Orchid Hotel by her mother together with her sister, Rose 16 years old. Jane was allegedly sexually abused by two Australian men, one named Daniel



and another William Allen Corley in Clarkton Hotel in Angeles City. The men allegedly videotaped and photographed the sex abuse of the children. William Corley, 63, from West Ryde in Sydney was arrested recently in Australia and released on bail in April this year. He is charged with crimes related to sending payments to the Philippines to pay for online child sex abuse and being in possession of child pornography.

The Australian Federal Police can now charge him for allegedly sexually abusing and endangering Jane, Charmie and Patricia. The children will soon be healing, recovering and empowered to testify against Corley and his friend Daniel. The Australian police will soon identify him. The pictures of the three children are likely to be in Corley's collection of child porn seized by Australian police. They can contact us at shaycullen@gmail.com or +63 9228768621.

The most recent episode of abuse was in their small house in Angeles City. The stepmother pimp was in contact with another Australian man that lives in Melbourne and he has been identified by the children and the pimp. He was waiting for the sex abuse to begin when the police arrived and rescued the children and arrested the pimp.

Charmie, now 11- years old, was abandoned by her mother and her father's new live-in partner brought her to hotels all around Angeles City when she was ten. Child sex abuse, child pornography and cyber-sex is allegedly a common business in the hotels and hopefully not totally ignored by local police and politicians.

Charmie was forced to participate in live internet cyber-sex shows. After each show, they gave her money. Six-year old Princess was also brought to the hotels and she has not yet spoken about what abuse

was done to her on camera or by the pedophiles.

This is just one of thousands of acts of child sex abuse in the Philippines and millions more in every country on the world. It is a global disaster for our children and a catastrophe for the world. Humans are the only species who do this to their offspring. The majority of the perpetrators of child abuse are the biological fathers and live-in partners followed by pedophiles helped by women pimps. Most of it is covered up and hidden and children hide it all their lives.

To choose to remain silent, hide away and do nothing is allowing child abuse to spread like another pandemic. Preda Foundation saves hundreds of children and wins as many as twenty convictions against child rapists every year. Help the work with advocacy and support. Stand up and speak out for the child victims.

Life / B1

Our own story becomes part of every great story. As we read the Scriptures, the stories of the saints, and also those texts that have shed light on the human heart and its beauty, the Holy Spirit is free to write in our hearts, reviving our memory of what we are in God's eyes. When we remember the love that created and saved us, when we make love a part of our daily stories, when we weave the tapestry of our days with mercy, we are turning another page. We no longer remain tied to regrets and sadness, bound to an unhealthy memory that burdens our hearts; rather, by opening ourselves to others, we open ourselves to the same vision

of the great storyteller. Telling God our story is never useless: even if the record of events remains the same, the meaning and perspective are always changing. To tell our story to the Lord is to enter into his gaze of compassionate love for us and for others. We can recount to him the stories we live, bringing to him the people and the situations that fill our lives. With him we can re-weave the fabric of life, darning its rips and tears. How much we, all of us, need to do exactly this!

With the gaze of the great storyteller—the only one who has the ultimate point of view—we can then approach the other characters, our brothers and sisters, who are

with us as actors in today's story. For no one is an extra on the world stage, and everyone's story is open to possible change. Even when we tell of evil, we can learn to leave room for redemption; in the midst of evil, we can also recognize the working of goodness and give it space.

So it is not a matter of simply telling stories as such, or of advertising ourselves, but rather of remembering who and what we are in God's eyes, bearing witness to what the Spirit writes in our hearts and revealing to everyone that his or her story contains marvellous things. In order to do this, let us entrust ourselves to a woman who knit together in her womb the

humanity of God and, the Gospel tells us, wove together the events of her life. For the Virgin Mary "treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Lk 2: 19). Let us ask for help from her, who knew how to untie the knots of life with the gentle strength of love:

O Mary, woman and mother, you wove the divine Word in your womb, you recounted by your life the magnificent works of God. Listen to our stories, hold them in your heart and make your own the stories that no one wants to hear. Teach us to recognize the good thread that runs through history. Look at the tangled knots in our life that paralyze our memory. By your gentle hands,

every knot can be untied. Woman of the Spirit, mother of trust, inspire us too. Help us build stories of peace, stories that point to the future. And show us the way to live them together.

Rome, at Saint John Lateran, 24 January 2020, the Memorial of Saint Francis de Sales

Franciscus

[1] Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, 2: "The Christian message was not only 'informative' but 'performative'. That means: the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known—it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing".

Guidelines / B3

can be done provided the person expresses faith in and love of God above all things and resolves to make a sacramental Confession as soon as possible. All his/her sins, even mortal sins, are forgiven.

G. Anointing of the Sick

The recommendations we have outlined in the previous circular on the Pastoral Care of the Sick during the pandemic are relevant even during the GCQ. We refer you to the same document.

H. The "Mass in Time of Pandemic" [Recently provided by the Holy See] and the *Oratio Imperata*.

1. This Mass can be celebrated, according to the rubrics given for Masses and Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions, on any day except Solemnities, the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and Easter, days within the Octave of Easter, the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls' Day), Ash Wednesday and the days of Holy Week. Please see again the communication from the Holy See regarding the text and the use of this Mass.

2. We continue to pray the *Oratio Imperata* during the Mass, after the Prayer after Communion and also

every 8:00 P.M. daily.

I. May, Devotion to the Blessed Mother

Pope Francis has asked Catholics around the world to pray the Rosary, asking Mary's intercession to stop the Covid-19 pandemic. He has offered us also two prayers that can be recited at the end of the Rosary.

Conclusion

There will no doubt be challenges and frustrations. Our parishes need to learn new ways to cope with the "new normal" after the ECQ, when we begin to celebrate the liturgy, especially the Holy Eucharist, with the faithful in attendance. But we believe that following these guidelines is a reasonable sacrifice. For the interest of the common good, and ultimately to best serve our own community, we want to contribute to solve this crisis and soon be freed from the threat of the pandemic.

For the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines

+ROMULO G. VALLES
Archbishop of Davao
President, CBCP
May 16, 2020

Church / B6

believers of other faiths, mindful as we are that God can speak, too, through other religions. Of course, in the practical level alone, dialogue is important. For us, Filipinos, dialogue with our Muslim brothers is of paramount significance. In the words of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP-II), "(1) our history as a Christian people has pitted us against them in a long series of religious conflicts, and lowland Filipinos still suffer today from its psychological and cultural effects. And (2) we are part of the Asian region and Asia contains the bulk of the world's Islamic countries. We need, therefore, to take a closer look at inter-religious dialogue as an imperative of mission." Part of this dialogue that has to be encouraged is the dialogue of life. The PCP II was happy to note that "in the areas of Mindanao and Sulu where Muslims and Christians live and work together, a dialogue of life is taking place. In daily life they witness to each other to their own religious values and both contribute to the building of a just society."

But inter-religious dialogue cannot mean a compromise of the Christian uniqueness and the command of Jesus to carry on his work. As the Declaration of the

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Dominus Iesus* (On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church) says, "it would be contrary to the faith to consider the Church as one way of salvation alongside those constituted by the other religions, seen as complementary to the Church or substantially equivalent to her, even if these are said to be converging with the Church toward the eschatological kingdom of God." xxx "With the coming of the Savior Jesus Christ, God has willed that the Church founded by him to be the instrument for the salvation of all humanity (cf Acts 17:30-31). This truth of faith does not lessen the sincere respect which the Church has for the religions of the world, but at the same time, it rules out, in a radical way, that mentality of indifferentism "characterized by a religious relativism which leads to the belief that 'one religion is as good as another'" If it is true that the followers of other religions can receive divine grace, it is also certain that objectively speaking, they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation."

Therefore, even as the Church advocates inter-religious dialogue,

she cannot surrender the mandate that Jesus gave to the Church in today's Gospel. She must preach the Gospel to all nations, and those who accept it must be baptized and admitted to the historical embodiment of the Kingdom of God. "Following the Lord's command (cf Matt 28:19-20) and as a requirement of her love for all people, the Church 'proclaims and is in duty bound to proclaim without faith Christ who is the way, the truth and the lie (John 14:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (cf 2 Cor 5:18-19), men find the fullness of their religious life.'" Says the Declaration: "Indeed, the Church, guided by charity and respect for freedom, must be primarily committed to proclaiming to all people the truth definitively revealed by the Lord, and to announcing the necessity of conversion to Jesus Christ and of adherence to the Church through Baptism and the other sacraments, in order to participate fully in communion with God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thus, the certainty of the universal salvific will of God does not diminish but rather increases the duty and urgency of the proclamation of salvation and of conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ."*

CINEMA
Catholic Initiative for Enlightened Movie Appreciation

TECHNICAL ASSESSMENT MORAL ASSESSMENT

5: Excellent
4: Above Average
3: Average
2: Below Average
1: Poor

CINEMA RATING

VA: For all ages
V13: Ages 13 below, Parental Guidance
V14: Ages 14+
V18: Ages 18+
NPV: Not for Public Viewing

Miss Americana

DIRECTOR: Lana Wilson
LEAD CAST: Taylor Swift (as herself)
MUSIC: Taylor Swift, Alex Somers
CINEMATOGRAPHY: Emily Topper
EDITING: Paul Marchand, Greg O'Toole, Lee Rosch
GENRE: Documentary COUNTRY: USA
LANGUAGE: English DISTRIBUTED BY: Netflix
RUNNING TIME: 86 minutes

Technical assessment: 4
Moral assessment: 3
CINEMA rating: V13

Miss Americana follows the journey of Taylor Swift as an artist. Her song-writing genius paired with her angelic persona easily catapults her into a well-loved country singer at the age of 14. She becomes the youngest of everything in the music industry until she crosses over to pop in her late teens. Taylor's motivation graduates from needing approval and adulation to standing firm on the ground as her own artist to finding her voice to fight for what she believes is right. Each phase triggered by an incident challenging her resolve, forming her character and inspiring her songwriting. As she turns 30, Swift seemingly finds comfort that she rediscovers her self worth and uses her music not merely to tell her narratives but also to effect change.

The documentary brilliantly looks at some of the most controversial moments of Taylor's life (i.e. her initial exclusion from the Grammy nominees, the Kanye West MTV Music Awards nomination, the sexual harassment case against David Mueller and the never-ending contempt and judgement of media) as existential turning points and formative experiences. Wilson presents them in the obligatory superstar angst — "it is lonely at the top, nobody sees the real me". But what Wilson does so delicately is interweave these emotional challenges in Taylor's own self-realization and growth as an artist. Beneath her saccharine-laden packaging, we find the bittersweet struggles of growing up and growing older of a real person. How Wilson



captured the right materials to fit the narrative sometimes raises doubts on the sincerity of the storytelling.

A documentary's real strength lies in the seamless editing to create a dynamic story. An editing tight enough for cohesiveness but invisible enough to forget that the footages come from different times and intentions. Miss Americana achieves this. As a whole it will make you appreciate Taylor's songs better and understand her deeper.

Miss Americana emphasizes the role celebrities should play in society. They are not just perfectly packaged versions of everyone's fantasy life but also amplifiers of what is true,

good, and beautiful. Most of the time, personalities get intoxicated with the adulation and the monetary success that come with popularity, forgetting that all these do not make them better persons or artists. Fans forget, the industry moves on, and as Swift mentioned, entertainments treat female artists like white elephants when they reach 35. However, when the celebrities discover to use their voices, their stardom, their network to fight for something, to effect change, to make this world a little better for us. Taylor saw this and finally embraced this responsibility as she peacefully sang "Only the Young".

ORATIO IMPERATA

PRAYER FOR PROTECTION against the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19)

God our Father,
We come to you in our need
To ask your protection against the Coronavirus (COVID-19),
That has claimed lives
And has affected many.

We pray for your grace
For the people tasked with studying the nature and cause
Of this virus and its disease
And of stemming the tide of its transmission.

Guide the hands and minds of medical experts
That they may minister to the sick
With competence and compassion.

And of those governments and private agencies
That must find cure and solution to this epidemic.

We pray for those afflicted
May they be restored to health soon.

Grant us the grace
To work for the good of all
And to help those in need.

Grant this through our Lord,
Jesus Christ, your Son,
Who lives and reigns with You,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, forever and ever. Amen.

Mary Help of all Christians, pray for us.
St. Raphael the Archangel, pray for us.
St. Rock, pray for us.
St. Lorenzo Ruiz, pray for us.
St. Pedro Calungsod, pray for us.

Extraction



DIRECTOR: Sam Hargrave
LEAD CAST: Chris Hemsworth, Rudhraksh Jaiswal, Randeep Hooda, Golshifteh Farahani
SCREENWRITER: Joe Russo
PRODUCER: Anthony Russo, Joe Russo, Chris Hemsworth, Mike Larocca, Eric Gitter, Peter Schwern
EDITOR: Peter B. Ellis & Ruthie Aslan
MUSICAL DIRECTOR: Henry Jackman & Alex Belcher
GENRE: Action, Thriller
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Newton Thomas Sigel
DISTRIBUTOR: Netflix
LOCATION: Bangladesh and India
RUNNING TIME: 116 mins

Technical assessment: 2.5
Moral assessment: 2
CINEMA rating: V18
Netflix Rating: 18+

Tyler Rake (Chris Hemsworth) is a former Australian soldier turned mercenary and is hired by Nik Khan (Golshifteh Farahani) a fellow mercenary to find and

extricate a kidnapped boy from India, Ovi Mahajan Jr. (Rudhraksh Jaiswal) — son of a powerful but imprisoned drug lord. Ovi is abducted for ransom by Amir Asif

Buhay San Miguel



FAITH WATCH
- Your Catholic Channel -

<https://www.youtube.com/faithwatch>

(Priyanshu Painyuli), a rival drug lord in Bangladesh. Tyler succeeds in finding Ovi in Dhaka — killing all his Bangladeshi kidnappers. However, the mission gets messed up — Khan informs Rake that the client has not yet turned over the payment and that Saju (Randeep Hooda), the chief aide of Ovi's father, is hiring his own mercenaries to do the job himself. Rake's team is double crossed and he is instructed to abandon Ovi when his team comes to Dhaka for him. But Tyler refuses to leave the kidnapped kid behind no matter how dangerous it is to escape alive.

Extraction made waves during its Netflix premiere mainly because of Hemsworth — a.k.a. Thor — as its major attraction and the much

anticipated 12-minute single take action sequence. It is utterly successful in those respects but the entire picture appears to be quite a disappointment given its flat storyline and character development. The Russo brothers who wrote and produced the project apparently are only after the blood porn — and really not interested themselves in telling a compelling story. There's blood, violence, explosions and lots of senseless killings here and there — nothing much to see other than. The film is devoid of logic in so many ways and has only kept Hemsworth in his stereotyped Thor image.

The film depicts evil and violence to the core — up to the point of its hopeless cycle with very little regard for

hope. It's painful to watch a film of evil against evil, as if the audience has to root for a lesser evil that does not seem to exist. The hero-anti-hero in Rake reflects moral decay and how messed up human values have become. Deciding to rescue home the kidnapped kid for sentimental reason does not seem light enough for the darkness of the film. The portrayal of race in Extraction is also problematic: Rake as the "white savior" and the Asians, particularly the Indians and Bangladeshis as criminals, make up for an Orientalism narrative that places once again the westerners at the center of the universe. The seed of hate and violence being implanted in the children's minds through the young gangster characters is really disturbing. It is

baffling at first how evil characters deliver words of wisdom in the film but it gets really troubling when they get their redemption in the end — poetic justice gone really wrong. Although the film clearly is about the underworld and how evil the black market is — and amidst all these there is Rake who is haunted by a past regret, and a drug lord's son longing for love — it still lacks conviction in its ethical and moral choices. In the end, the film leaves disturbing images that numb and desensitize the audience to violence rather than urge them to reflect on how humans turn into savages. For its graphic portrayal of violence and blood, CINEMA deems the film as fit only for mature viewers aged 18 and above.