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## Pope Francis: Coronavirus pandemic has 'exposed inefficiencies' in care of the sick

**Pope Francis said on Tuesday that the coronavirus pandemic had "exposed inefficiencies in the care of the sick."**

In his message for the 29th World Day of the Sick, released on Jan. 12, he argued that vulnerable people were unable to gain access to treatment amid the pandemic, which has claimed the lives of more than 1.9 million people worldwide.

"The current pandemic has exacerbated inequalities in our healthcare systems and exposed inefficiencies in the care of the sick. Elderly, weak and vulnerable people are not always granted access to care, or in an equitable manner," he said.

"This is the result of political decisions, resource management and greater or lesser commitment on the part of those holding positions of responsibility."

In the message, signed on Dec. 20, he called for greater investment in healthcare, describing it as "a priority linked to the fundamental principle that health is a primary common good."

The pope said that the coronavirus crisis had also

Inefficiencies / A3



This Nov. 12, 2017 file photo shows Pope Francis blessing a sick person in Dhaka, Bangladesh. VATICAN MEDIA

## Caritas Philippines calls for Covid-19 vaccine 'for all'



Bishop Jose Colin Bagaforo, national director of Caritas Philippines. PHOTO COURTESY OF DIOCESE OF KIDAPAWAN

THE Catholic Church's social action arm has renewed its appeal for the government to hasten the process of vaccine selection and approval.

Bishop Jose Colin Bagaforo, Caritas Philippines' national director, echoed the global call to make the Covid-19 vaccine "available for all".

The bishop issued the remarks after the controversial vaccination of President Rodrigo Duterte's security men and Cabinet officials despite the absence of an approved vaccine in the country.

He said that "it was irresponsible to allow the breach of the regulatory process" and lamented that "our government is actually tolerating such imprudent and unauthorized

Caritas / A6

## Church condemns IP killings in Panay Island

CATHOLIC officials condemned the "simultaneous killings" of farmers and indigenous peoples who were alleged communist rebels on Panay island this week.

The Capiz Archdiocesan Social Action Center (CASAC) said the killings were yet another example that could worsen an existing climate of fear and impunity in the country.

"This incident raises our concern and thus, vehemently condemn this act of violence," the CASAC said in a statement issued on Thursday.

Nine people were killed during simultaneous serving of search warrants in the upstream villages of Tapaz, Capiz and Calinog, Iloilo on Dec. 30.

Authorities alleged that the fatalities were rebels who fought back during the joint police and military operations to search for illegal firearms, ammunition and explosives.

"Sadly, some of the victims were farmers and members of the indigenous people's tribe. Some are still missing and families are grieving," the CASAC said, as it offered its condolences and prayers to the families of the victims.

The archdiocese also called on authorities to press on with their investigation so that justice will be served.

"...Show us the genuine results founded on truth and justice," it said.

The local church's social action arm also called on the public to remain steadfast with their commitment to the sanctity of life, justice, human dignity and peace.

"Together, we have to fight the root of this evil," the CASAC added.

The archdiocese also offered its condolences and prayers to the families of the victims. (CBCP News)

## Black Nazarene feast draws nearly 300k devotees— Quiapo Church

IN contrast to the millions of crowds in the past years, only around 284,000 people joined Black Nazarene feast celebration on Jan. 9, church authorities said.

Of the total, about 98 percent devotees flocked to Quiapo Church, while the remaining attended Masses at the nearby Sta. Cruz Church and San Sebastian Church.

Fifteen Masses were held at the Quiapo Church the whole day, with 6,000 or 400 persons per mass were allowed inside the church to follow health protocols amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Parishes in Metro Manila are operating under the general community quarantine restrictions, which require church services to limit capacity to 30 percent.

Large screens were also displayed outside the minor basilica so devotees



Devotees raise their hands during Mass to celebrate the Feast of the Black Nazarene at the Quiapo Church on Jan. 9, 2021. PHOTO BY ROY LAGARDE

unable to enter the church may view the services.

While some people were seen violating standard health protocols, Quiapo Church rector Msgr. Hernando Coronel said the whole day's celebrations

were generally orderly.

"We are very happy because the devotees exhibited self-discipline and there was orderliness and systematic way of entering the church," Coronel said.

Adjustments were made to this year's feast due to the pandemic such as the cancellation of the traditional kissing of the statue and procession, which usually gathers

Black Nazarene / A3

## Cebu's Sto. Niño basilica cancels public Masses due to crowd influx



Devotees attend one of the novena Masses held at the Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño in Cebu City on Jan. 11, 2021. PHOTO COURTESY OF BMSN CEBU

DUE to the increasing crowd, the Basilica Minore Del Sto. Niño De Cebu has cancelled all public Masses starting Jan. 12 until the feast of the child Jesus on Jan. 17.

In a statement released Jan. 11, the basilica's Augustinian friars said the decision was made for the "common good and benefit of all".

Human Rights / A6

# Cardinal Dolan condemns 'ugly and unlawful' defacement of St Patrick's cathedral

NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.— Cardinal Timothy Dolan has denounced the defacement of St. Patrick's Cathedral after protesters spray painted graffiti on its exterior.

Dolan said in a January 5 opinion piece in the New York Post that while he had been silent about previous defacements of the cathedral this summer, he decided it was time to speak out, at the behest of some of his parishioners.

"You may recall that a similar outrage occurred last summer amid the sad violence afflicting American cities. At that time, I let it go, figuring I needn't stoke the embers of anger that were burning throughout our country," he said.

"Not this time. As a woman from The Bronx e-mailed me to say:

'Cardinal Dolan, it's time we learn from our Jewish and Islamic neighbors. A synagogue or mosque is defaced, and they are quick to condemn it. The governor and the mayor would join in. They're right.'

"So is she. This attack on Saint Patrick's was ugly and unlawful."

The cathedral was defiled Jan. 1 by protesters affiliated with Black Lives Matter Brooklyn and Justice for George, the New York Post reported. Police found the phrase "ACAB," a derogatory phrase aimed at police, spray painted on the church. Dolan wrote that the cathedral stands for the sacredness of all lives, "as we are all made in God's image and likeness", and it also proclaims that "black lives matter" in a

dramatic way" through its many ministries that help black and minority men, women and children.

"This is more than mere lip service, as we help thousands of black and minority children leave poverty through our acclaimed inner-city schools; as we present minority women the choice of birth for their preborn babies, rather than continue the genocide of unfettered abortion; as we provide ongoing support after birth for both mother and child; as we concentrate on feeding the poor, drug-addiction recovery, assistance to those on parole and health care through our Catholic Charities and Archcare; as we bring the gift of the Sacraments and true community and sustenance to dozens of

vibrant but financially struggling parishes in our most challenged areas," Dolan wrote. The cardinal then called on protesters to instead assist those ministries or offer their thanks, rather than defiling the cathedral.

He added that he was also "honored" to be associated with the New York Police Department, who "dedicate themselves to serving all New Yorkers, often risking their own health, safety or even their lives."

Dolan compared the graffitiing protesters to the "Know-Nothings" of the 1850s, "who bragged about their hatred for Catholics, Jews, blacks and immigrants, publicly vowed to burn down what we now call 'Old Saint Patrick's Cathedral' in lower Manhattan." (CNA)

# Lebanese cardinal urges leaders to help country avoid 'total collapse'

Lebanon's Maronite patriarch has said that the country could be facing "the risk of total collapse" amid a deepening economic and political crisis.

In his homily on Jan. 3, Cardinal Bechara Boutros Rai, the leader of Lebanon's Maronite Catholics, said that Lebanon's political leaders needed to "overcome the logic of partisan interests" and form a government to help rescue the country.

Rai urged the formation of a "government with real independence, democratic and pluralistic balance, and with highly qualified ministers."

He added that Lebanon's leaders needed to make a "responsible and courageous decision" to disrupt various internal and external interventions and "set their sights on the interest of Lebanon only."

The patriarch warned officials not to "underestimate the risk of complete collapse."

It was the second time in less than a week that the Lebanese cardinal had spoken of the risk of collapse.

In his homily on New Year's Day, Rai said: "No one or any group of the political spectrum, whether directly or indirectly involved, has the right to hinder the formation of the government for the sake of current or future accounts and interests."

"Two months and 10 days have passed since the task to form the government was issued, while Lebanon is moving rapidly towards complete collapse and bankruptcy."



Cardinal Bechara Boutros Rai, head of the Maronite Church. AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED

Following the resignations of the leaders Hassan Diab in August and Mustapha Adib in September, Saad Hariri was given the task of forming a new government. This development came less than a year after Hariri himself had resigned as prime minister on Oct. 29, 2019, in the wake of mass protests.

Lebanon faced a profound economic and political crisis in 2020 which was exacerbated by the devastating explosion in Beirut's port on Aug. 4. The blast killed nearly 200 people, injured 600 others, and caused more than \$4 billion in damage.

Prior to the explosion, the country was already facing severe economic pressure.

Unemployment had soared and the national currency had lost at least 80% of its value against the U.S. dollar since 2019, according to AP.

Lebanon has one of the world's highest public debt burdens, which is 150% of its gross domestic product.

But in the face of the overlapping crises facing Lebanon, Rai's message to Maronite Catholics has remained hopeful.

"Despite all the tragedies we have experienced ... we continue to strive in the name of Jesus with the beginning of this New Year in order to build a better society and protect a safer country," he said in his first homily of 2021. (CNA)

# Catholic Bible-in-a-year podcast tops the charts

WASHINGTON, D.C.— A Catholic podcast featuring a priest reading and analyzing the Bible has been at the top of the Apple Podcast charts since Jan. 2, ahead of secular podcasts produced by such organizations as The New York Times, NBC News, and NPR.

"The Bible in a Year (With Fr. Mike Schmitz)," produced by Ascension Catholic Faith Formation, part of Ascension Press, features episodes containing two to three scriptural readings, a reflection on those readings by Fr. Mike Schmitz, and a prayer. Each episode is about 15 to 25 minutes long, and a new episode is set to be released each day of 2021.

Instead of reading the Bible from cover to cover,

the podcast follows "The Great Adventure Bible Timeline," which was developed by Jeff Cavins. Schmitz, a priest of the Diocese of Duluth, told CNA that this approach, which centers on "14 critical narrative books" interspersed with the remaining non-narrative books, helps to maintain the story structure of salvation history.

"A lot of times, what derails people is when they're reading the story of Genesis and Exodus and Numbers, and all of a sudden they read Leviticus and like, 'wait, I lost the story now,'" Schmitz told CNA in a Jan. 7 interview.

"So what we've done is we built those other books, those non-narrative books around the narrative story or on the narrative," he said.

"And so one of the things that it is doing is it keeps people connected like, 'Oh, okay, now this makes sense that here you are in the wilderness, and that's why we're reading Leviticus, because this is where God needs to give his people the law regarding the tabernacle.'"

The "timeline" approach also means that listeners will not have to wait until very late in the year to hear about Christ. "If we (read the Bible) straight through like that, we wouldn't get to the New Testament until I think November," said Schmitz. "So it was like, 'that is not good.' We've not spent 10 months not talking about Jesus very clearly."

To help remedy this, Schmitz said there will be four "messianic

checkpoints" that will introduce listeners to Christ. The first of these will occur "right around day 90," and will consist of the Gospel of John over the course of about a week.

"I'm really excited about that. Just to be able to say, in the midst of this Old Testament story, 'here is the revelation of Christ,'" said Schmitz.

Catholics in America read the Bible less often than do Protestants. Schmitz believes that this is due in part to how Catholics are accustomed to having Scripture "proclaimed" to them at Mass.

"I mean, the whole reason the New Testament is called the New Testament is because it was read at the celebration of the new covenant, the Eucharist," he said. (CNA)

## Vatican Briefing

### Benedict XVI to receive coronavirus vaccine

Pope emeritus Benedict XVI will receive the coronavirus vaccine as soon as it is available, his personal secretary said Tuesday. Archbishop Georg Gänswein told CNA Deutsch, CNA's German-language news partner, Jan. 12 that the 93-year-old former pope would be vaccinated "as soon as the vaccine is available." "I will also be vaccinated along with the whole household of the Mater Ecclesiae Monastery," said Gänswein, referring to the Vatican monastery where Benedict XVI has lived since resigning as pope in 2013. Vatican City will begin vaccinating residents and employees against COVID-19 in the second half of January. (CNA)

### Pope appoints first lay head of Roman Curia's disciplinary commission

Pope Francis appointed the first lay head of the Roman Curia's disciplinary commission. The Holy See press office announced on Jan. 8 that the pope had named Vincenzo Buonomo, rector of the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome, as president of the Disciplinary Commission of the Roman Curia. Buonomo succeeds the Italian Bishop Giorgio Corbellini, who served in the role from 2010 until his death on Nov. 13, 2019. The commission, founded in 1981, is the main disciplinary body within the curia, the administrative apparatus of the Holy See. It is responsible for determining sanctions against curial employees accused of misconduct, ranging from suspension to dismissal. (CNA)

### Pope Francis calls for a commitment to 'take care of each other' in 2021

Pope Francis warned Sunday against the temptation to ignore the suffering of others during the coronavirus pandemic and said that things will get better in the new year to the extent to which the needs of the weakest and most disadvantaged are prioritized. "We don't know what 2021 has in store for us, but what each of us and all of us together can do is to commit ourselves a little more to take care of each other and of creation, our common home," the pope said in his Angelus address Jan. 3. In the live video broadcast from the Apostolic Palace, the pope said that "things will get better to the extent that, with God's help, we work together for the common good, putting the weakest and most disadvantaged at the center." (Courtney Mares/CNA)

### Pope Francis issues law reorganizing Vatican finances

Pope Francis issued a new law Monday reorganizing Vatican finances following a series of scandals. In a document issued Dec. 28, the pope formalized the transfer of financial responsibilities from the Vatican's Secretariat of State to the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See (APSA), which functions as the Holy See's treasury and sovereign wealth manager. He first announced the shake-up in an Aug. 25 letter to Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin that was made public on Nov. 5 after the Secretariat of State was engulfed by accusations of financial mismanagement. The pope promulgated the new law in an apostolic letter issued *motu proprio* ("on his own impulse"). The text, entitled "A better organization," also set out new regulations for the oversight of Peter's Pence, an annual worldwide collection supporting the pope's mission. (CNA)

### Pope Francis to mark fifth anniversary of 'Amoris laetitia' with year dedicated to family

Pope Francis announced Sunday a special year dedicated to the family, marking the fifth anniversary of the publication of his apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia*. In his Angelus address Dec. 27, the feast of the Holy Family, the pope noted that March 19, 2021, would mark five years since the signing of *Amoris laetitia* following synods on the family in 2014 and 2015. Pope Francis released the apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* ("The Joy of Love") on April 8, 2016, though it was signed on March 19 that year. One of the longest documents in papal history, it consists of an introduction and nine chapters, reflecting on challenges to marriage and family life. (CNA)

### Pope Francis proclaims Year of St. Joseph

Pope Francis announced a Year of St. Joseph Tuesday in honor of the 150th anniversary of the saint's proclamation as patron of the Universal Church. The year begins Dec. 8, 2020, and concludes on Dec. 8, 2021, according to a decree authorized by the pope. The decree said that Francis had established a Year of St. Joseph so that "every member of the faithful, following his example, may strengthen their life of faith daily in the complete fulfillment of God's will." It added that the pope had granted special indulgences to mark the year. In addition to the decree, Francis issued an apostolic letter dedicated to the foster father of Jesus. The pope explained in the letter, entitled *Patris corde* ("With a father's heart") and dated Dec. 8, that he wanted to share some "personal reflections" on the spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary. (CNA)

### Vatican committed to net zero emissions by 2050, Pope Francis says

Pope Francis urged the adoption of a "climate of care," and said the Vatican City State is committed to reducing its net emissions to zero by 2050. Speaking in a video message during the virtual Climate Ambition Summit Dec. 12, the pope said "the time has come for a change of course. Let us not rob the new generations of hope in a better future." He also told summit participants that both climate change and the current pandemic disproportionately affect the lives of the poorest and weakest in society. In addition to the goal of net zero emissions, Francis said the Vatican is also committed to "intensifying environmental management efforts, already underway for some years, that enable the rational use of natural resources such as water and energy, energy efficiency, sustainable mobility, reforestation, and the circular economy also in waste management." (Hannah Brockhaus/CNA)

# China deemed a top religious freedom concern in 2021

CHINA remains a primary human rights concern in 2021, a federal religious freedom commissioner told CNA.

“China remains of utmost concern to USCIRF,” said Nadine Maenza, commissioner at the U.S. Commissioner on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

The country’s “mass detention of Uyghur Muslims” in Xinjiang is the chief focus of USCIRF in China, Maenza told CNA on Jan. 11. Anywhere from 900,000 to 1.8 million Uyghurs and other ethnic Muslims in the region are estimated to have been detained in more than 1,300 concentration camps there, according to USCIRF. There have been reports of forced labor, indoctrination, beatings, and forced sterilizations at the camps.

Maenza called on the United States and international businesses “to pressure China to end the horrible situation there.”

China’s recent crackdown on pro-democracy advocates in Hong Kong is also a pressing concern, she said, and added that China is “spreading its influence” around the world.

USCIRF is a bipartisan federal commission that promotes religious freedom abroad and reports on religious persecution to the State Department. Commissioners are appointed by both Republican and Democratic members of Congress.

Maenza reported some positive developments for global religious freedom in 2020.

Uzbekistan, she said, is not just promising change but has already released prisoners of conscience and is working with USCIRF and others to loosen its restrictions on religious practice that include mandatory registration of churches.

In Sudan, the interim administration of Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok has provided “real changes” in the treatment of women and ethnic minorities who “suffered tremendously under the former regime.”

As the year 2021 progresses, there are plenty of areas of concern for international religious freedom, however—including ongoing problems in Iraq and Syria where the Islamic State was defeated in 2017.

“We continue to be concerned about conditions for Christians and Yezidis in the Nineveh Plains and Sinjar,” Maenza said. “It’s remarkable that after all the years and all the money spent, it’s still not a safe place for religious minorities. And, in fact, hardly anything has changed in Sinjar.”

Christians have begun returning to their homes on the Nineveh Plain but have reported security to be of primary concern—so much so that some villages in the area have barely been resettled.

Maenza pointed out that in neighboring Northeast Syria, an autonomous administration provides the safe haven in the region for people to legally change

their religion. Yet invasions into the area in 2019 by Turkish and other forces, and the atrocities that ensued—including killings, rapes, forced conversion, destruction of religious sites—have threatened its survival.

In Nigeria, the terror groups Boko Haram and Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) are terrorizing Christians and Muslims with abductions and executions.

Elsewhere in Asia, ethno-religious nationalism is a concern in countries such as Brunei and India, Maenza said. “India continues to see the government embrace these anti-conversion laws,” she said of the country’s ruling Hindu nationalist party.

As a new administration prepares to take power in the United States, Maenza said that USCIRF commissioners “are hopeful to engage,” and are wishing that the administration “will maintain and will even expand on religious freedom.”

USCIRF also hopes for a quick appointment of the next religious freedom ambassador, she said, with a candidate who is known for working across the political aisle. Maenza also said she hopes the Biden administration will continue appointing a special advisor for international religious freedom at the National Security Council, following the Trump administration’s lead. **(Matt Hadro/CNA)**

# Filipino Dominican priest, microbiologist affirms moral liceity of coronavirus vaccine

A FILIPINO Dominican priest and biology professor has on social media encouraged people to receive a coronavirus vaccine, emphasizing his trust in modern medicine and expertise in biology.

Father Nicanor Austriaco, a Catholic author and professor of biology for Providence College in Rhode Island, issued a post on Facebook Jan. 10 stressing his belief in the COVID-19 vaccine and its benefit to society.

“To be clear, as soon as a COVID-19 vaccine becomes available for which I am eligible, whether in the USA or here in the Philippines, I intend to be vaccinated with it. Also, as soon as a vaccine becomes available for my mother here in the Philippines, I will encourage her to be vaccinated with it,” he said.

He said a COVID-19 vaccine will help save lives as well as slow social disruptions and lockdowns, which will help society return to a level of normalcy.

In regard to concerns about the vaccination and its quick development, he said the vaccines were developed in record time because scientists had unlimited funding by “desperate governments” who are seeking to resolve a global pandemic and its negative effect on every country’s economy.

Austriaco said tens of thousands of people have already gone through clinical trials and pointed to a brief history of coronavirus and vaccine research. He said mRNA vaccines, which are being used to treat this virus, were founded over 50 years ago, and RNA viruses, including the coronavirus subclass, have been studied for decades.

“I trust the scientific process that has gone into the development and testing of these vaccines,” he said.

“These vaccines rely on decades of research. It is not like scientists just woke up one morning at the beginning of the pandemic and started from scratch.”

The priest also addressed several possible concerns, such as minor side effects, major allergic reactions, medical rumors, and spiritual apprehensions.

He said the vaccine has minor side effects like a slight fever and a feeling of exhaustion, but noted that these are all signs that the process is working and the vaccine is jumpstarting the immune system. “As a Christian, I am taught that a broken world can only be redeemed by sacrifice. This is the meaning of the Cross. In my view, the few days of discomfort and downright crappiness that I expect

to experience after each dose of the COVID-19 vaccine will be my contribution to the sacrifice that heals the world (cf. Col 1:24).”

He conceded that major allergic reactions are possible and likely for a small group of individuals. He said, out of 1,893,360 vaccinations, 21 cases of severe allergic responses were recorded during the first two weeks of the U.S. vaccine campaign. He said all of the individuals with severe side effects already suffered from a history of bad allergic reactions. He further added that an EpiPen may be used to resolve these issues.

He addressed numerous rumors about the vaccine, such as false connections to infertility, death, and alterations in an individual’s DNA. While people have died after receiving the vaccine, he said, there is no evidence that the vaccination is the cause of the death. He said claims that the vaccine causes infertility or changes DNA is also unreasonable and unsupported by science.

The priest also commented on the moral concerns behind the vaccine. He said some COVID-19 vaccines were manufactured by fetal cell lines derived from a decades-old abortion. He pointed to the Church’s response and his own personal choice.

“As a priest, I know that different people have different thresholds of sensitivity to evil. Some feel evil exquisitely. Others not so much. We should therefore expect different people to reach different moral conclusions that could even be opposed to each other while both remaining virtuous responses,” he said.

“Personally, I will choose to avoid the vaccines made with these cell lines. However, as the Vatican itself has noted, it is not immoral to avail oneself of these morally controversial vaccines, especially if no other options are available.”

Austriaco expressed gratitude for the success the vaccine has so far seen, noting that it has been a surprising gift from God.

“In the end, I believe that the unprecedented, and really, unexpected, successes we have witnessed in the production of these vaccines are a blessing from the Lord. If you had told me back during the first lockdown that we would have a handful of safe and efficacious vaccines ready to go within the first year of the pandemic, I would have shaken my head in disbelief,” he said. **(CNA)**

## Pope Francis’ doctor dies from COVID-19 complications

POPE Francis’ personal doctor, Fabrizio Soccorsi, has died from health complications related to the coronavirus, according to the Vatican.

The 78-year-old physician, who was being treated for an “oncological pathology,” died at Rome’s Gemelli Hospital, according to Vatican newspaper L’Osservatore Romano.

Pope Francis named Soccorsi his personal physician in August 2015, after not renewing the term of papal doctor Patrizio Polisca, who was also head of the Vatican’s healthcare services.

Since the pontificate of St. Pope John Paul II, the two positions had been tied together, but Pope Francis diverged from this custom by choosing Soccorsi, a doctor from outside the Vatican.

As Francis’ personal physician,

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millions of devotees each year.

Church authorities have repeatedly asked devotees not to flock to Quiapo Church for the feast and instead joined the “localized” celebrations in their parishes.

The priest also said most devotees observed all the necessary protocols, negating concern of the religious event becoming a “super spreader” of Covid-19.

“We are praying that it won’t because we are observing dutifully the protocols. Even if there were many people, they have face masks and all,” he said.

Coronel said a huge number of people also followed the celebration that was live-streamed on Facebook

Soccorsi traveled with the pope on his international trips. During his visit to Fatima, Portugal in May 2017, Pope Francis laid two bunches of white roses before the statue of the Virgin Mary for Soccorsi’s daughter, who was critically ill, and died the following month.

Soccorsi trained in medicine and surgery at Rome’s La Sapienza University. His career included both medical practice and teaching, especially in the areas of hepatology, the digestive system, and immunology.

The doctor also did consulting for the health and hygiene office of the Vatican City State and was part of the council of medical experts at the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. **(Hannah Brockhaus/CNA)**

# Ash Wednesday 2021: Vatican offers guidance on ash distribution amid COVID-19 pandemic

THE Vatican gave guidance Monday about how priests can distribute ashes on Ash Wednesday amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments published a note Jan. 12, directing priests to say the formula for distributing the ashes once to everyone present, rather than to each person.

The priest “addresses all those present and only once says the formula as it appears in the Roman Missal, applying it to all in general: ‘Repent, and believe in the Gospel,’ or ‘Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return,’” the note said.

It continued: “The priest then cleanses his hands, puts on a face mask and distributes the ashes to those who come

to him or, if appropriate, he goes to those who are standing in their places. The Priest takes the ashes and sprinkles them on the head of each one without saying anything.”

The note was signed by the congregation’s prefect, Cardinal Robert Sarah, and its secretary, Archbishop Arthur Roche.

Ash Wednesday falls on Feb. 17 this year.

In 2020, the divine worship congregation put out various instructions for priests on administering the sacraments and offering Mass during the coronavirus pandemic, including for the celebration of Easter, which occurred when many countries were in lockdown and public liturgies were not permitted. **(Hannah Brockhaus/CNA)**

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revealed the heroism of “a silent multitude of men and women” caring for coronavirus patients.

“Yet the pandemic has also highlighted the dedication and generosity of healthcare personnel, volunteers, support staff, priests, men and women religious, all of whom have helped, treated, comforted and served so many of the sick and their families with professionalism, self-giving, responsibility and love of neighbor,” he wrote.

“A silent multitude of men and women, they chose not to look the other way but to share the suffering of patients, whom they saw as neighbors and members of our one human family. Such closeness is a precious balm that provides support and consolation to the sick in their suffering.”

Pope John Paul II established the World Day of the Sick in 1992. It is marked on Feb. 11, the liturgical memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes.

The theme of this year’s observance is “You have but one teacher and you are all brothers” (Matthew 23:8), taken from a Gospel passage in which Jesus criticizes those who fail to practice what they preach.

“Jesus’ criticism of those who ‘preach but do not practice’ is helpful always and everywhere, since none of us is immune to the grave evil of hypocrisy, which prevents us from flourishing as children of the one Father, called to live universal fraternity,” the pope said.

“Before the needs of our brothers and sisters, Jesus asks us to respond in a way completely contrary to such hypocrisy. He asks us to stop and listen, to establish a direct and personal relationship with others, to feel empathy and compassion, and to let their suffering become our own as we seek to serve them.”

The 84-year-old pope has himself recently struggled with illness. He was unable to preside at the Vatican’s liturgies on New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day because of “painful sciatica” that has affected him for a number of years.

In his message for the World Day of the Sick this February, he reflected on the impact of illness.

“The experience of sickness makes us realize our own vulnerability and our innate need of others. It makes us feel all the more clearly that we are creatures dependent on God,” he wrote.

“When we are ill, fear and even bewilderment can grip our minds and hearts; we find ourselves powerless, since our health does not depend on our abilities or life’s incessant worries.”

“Sickness raises the question of life’s meaning, which we bring before God in faith. In seeking a new and deeper direction in our lives, we may not find an immediate answer. Nor are our relatives and friends always able to help us in this demanding quest.”

The pope offered the example of the biblical figure of Job, who faced the incomprehension of those around him as he struggled with a series of calamities.

Francis stressed that Job’s agony was “not a punishment or a state of separation from God,” noting that God finally answered Job’s cries and allowed him “to glimpse a new horizon.”

The pope underlined the importance of the “relational aspect” of care for the sick.

“Emphasizing this aspect can help doctors, nurses, professionals and volunteers to feel responsible for accompanying patients on a path of healing grounded in a trusting interpersonal relationship,” he wrote.

“This creates a covenant between

those in need of care and those who provide that care, a covenant based on mutual trust and respect, openness and availability.”

“This will help to overcome defensive attitudes, respect the dignity of the sick, safeguard the professionalism of healthcare workers and foster a good relationship with the families of patients.”

He said that this relationship between carer and patient can be sustained by the “charity of Christ,” pointing to “the witness of those men and women who down the millennia have grown in holiness through service to the infirm.”

“For the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection is the source of the love capable of giving full meaning to the experience of patients and caregivers alike,” the pope said.

“The Gospel frequently makes this clear by showing that Jesus heals not by magic but as the result of an encounter, an interpersonal relationship, in which God’s gift finds a response in the faith of those who accept it. As Jesus often repeats: ‘Your faith has saved you.’”

He underlined that caring for the sick is a way of honoring Jesus’ commandment of love given to his disciples.

“A society is all the more human to the degree that it cares effectively for its most frail and suffering members, in a spirit of fraternal love. Let us strive to achieve this goal, so that no one will feel alone, excluded or abandoned,” he urged.

The pope concluded his message by entrusting the sick and their carers to Mary, Mother of Mercy and Health of the Infirm.

“From the Grotto of Lourdes and her many other shrines throughout the world, may she sustain our faith and hope, and help us care for one another with fraternal love,” he wrote. **(CNA)**

## EDITORIAL

## Social concern as path to peace

CONCERN for others has been very pronounced in the social thought of Pope Francis. In his message for the World Day of Peace this year, he develops “A Culture of Care as a Path to Peace.” This more or less flows from his latest encyclical issued in October last year, “Fratelli Tutti” on fraternity and social friendship.

The culture of care is best laid out in the Catholic social teachings which, in the mind of Pope Francis, is a doctrine “offered to all people of goodwill as a precious patrimony of principles, criteria and proposals that can serve as a ‘grammar’ of care: commitment to promoting the dignity of each human person, solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, the pursuit of the common good and concern for protection of creation.” The principles of the Church’s social teaching is the basis of the culture of care.

Ironically, the social teachings of the Catholic Church has been popularly touted to be the “Church’s best secret”. Whatever that means, the fact is, it is not very popular especially among the laity even until today. In social media, the Church is still bashed rather strongly whenever, for instance, it engages in matters political. Popular theology believes that the Church should be busy only with things churchy and never about the mundane, especially social or political. Maybe this is a barometer of how much the Church has succeed, rather irksomely, in keeping this core catholic value “a secret”.

While loving one another has been an evangelical mandate from day one and the spiritual and the corporal works of mercy were at the very heart of charity practiced by the early Church, it was only in Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 that social concern was institutionalize. This and *Quadragesimo Anno* were the only formal social teachings that came before Vatican II. It is no wonder that the emergence of the social thought is still not a hardcore conviction in everyday’s catechism.

The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines found in its earlier surveys that the local Church is very sacramentalized but not evangelized. It says a mouthful about the wide distance between religiosity and social concern. Interestingly, the 500 years of Christianity may still be too short for a Church to attain a mature culture of care.

## Missio ‘ad gentes’

IN English, this Latin expression can be roughly translated as our mission toward all the people. This expression, by the way, is made by our bishops as the pastoral theme for year 2021 that culminates the preparation for and begins the celebration of the 500 years of Christianity in our country.

The expression ‘ad gentes’ comes from the words of Christ who told his disciples to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” (Mk 16,15) The Second Vatican Council adopted this expression in one of its decrees that dealt on the missionary activity of the Church.

It behooves all Christian believers to be most aware of this intention of the Church to carry out this mandate of Christ before he ascended into heaven. Everyone needs to examine himself to see if this intention is given due attention. Everyone, from the Pope to the last lay person, needs to feel as fully as possible the weight and the urgency of this duty to go forth to the whole world and proclaim the gospel, which is nothing less than presenting the living and redemptive Christ, the whole mystery of Christ to the whole world.

Being the pattern of our humanity and the redeemer of our damaged humanity, Christ is not meant only for a few people. He is not only for those who now call themselves as Christians. He is for everyone.

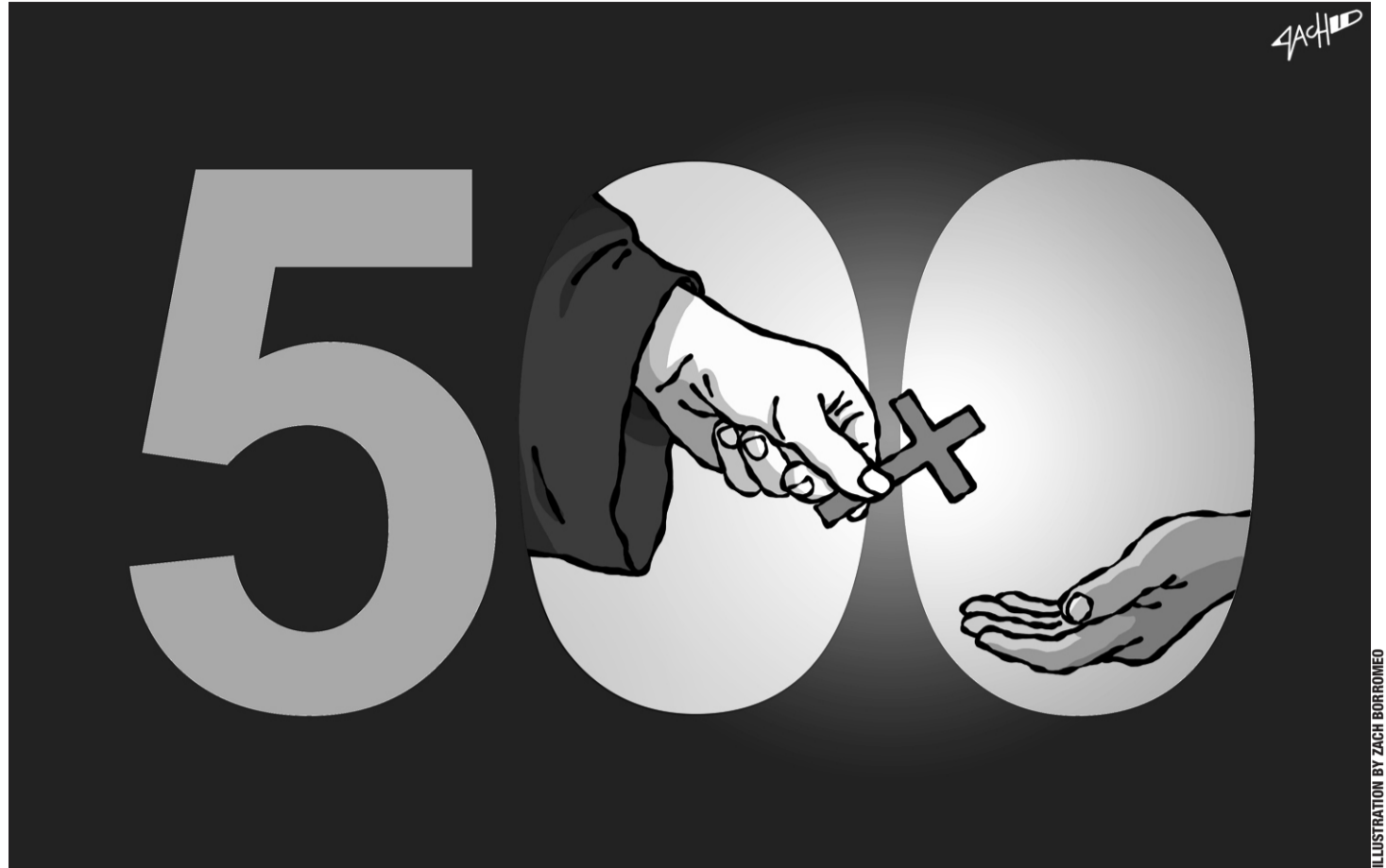
Thus, every Christian, if he is to be an authentic Christian, should feel the responsibility to be a missionary also in his own way. This is a duty that is incumbent on every Christian. It’s not optional. This can only happen if he truly identifies himself with Christ as he should, having the same mind, spirit and mission of Christ, such that as Christ himself said, whoever sees and listens to a Christian believer also sees and listens to Christ himself and to the one who sent Christ to us. (cfr. Lk 10,16)

We definitely need to realize more deeply that our being Christians essentially involves our being missionaries also. For this, we need to realize that everything in our life can and should be a material, a reason, an occasion to carry out this missionary duty. There is actually nothing in our life that cannot be made use of to carry out this duty.

After 500 years of Christianity, we should realize that Christ is meant for everyone. While this duty to proclaim Christ has to start with oneself and then to our family and our close friends, relatives and colleagues at work, we should realize that we are meant to have a universal outlook in carrying out this missionary duty.

Yes, while each one more or less has a niche or a specific place in doing apostolate and mission work, we should see to it that we are not trapped in one part of the world. Just as nowadays there is a keen interest in globalizing some economic, social, political and even ideological concerns, there should also be a more driving interest in globalizing Christ, so to speak, making him known and loved by everyone.

This definitely will require tremendous effort and discipline. Obviously, we have to continually ask for the grace of God, because only with that grace can we aspire to fulfill this mandate from Christ. And then we have to study the different ways of how we can deal with everyone. And the Church offers guidelines for this.



## Living Mission

Fr. James H. Kroeger, MM

JOYFULLY celebrating in 2021 half a millennium of Christianity (1521-2021), the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines is a major actor in this Southeast Asian island nation as well as within the wider Asian and Universal Church. While history continually unfolds, one can gain many valuable insights by examining pivotal events through the past centuries. History is a great teacher. As George Santayana noted in 1905, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” We strive to learn from history and the journey of faith made by the Philippine Church for the past five centuries, examining its successes and its failures, while always believing in the constant presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

Statistics in 2020 showed that the Philippine population has reached approximately 110 million. The five major religious bodies and their percentage of the local population are: Roman Catholicism (82.9%), Protestantism (5.2%), Islam (4.6%), Iglesia Filipina Independiente (2.6%), and Iglesia ni

Cristo (2.3%). The Philippines is the world’s third largest local Church (after Brazil and Mexico). Of Asia’s 125+ million Catholics over 60% are Filipinos. These brief, yet significant, facts invite deeper exploration of the multi-faceted Philippine Church.

**BRIEF BACKGROUND.** The Philippine archipelago is composed of 7,107 islands and islets, of which the largest are Luzon in the north and Mindanao in the south. In central Philippines there are several medium-sized islands known as the Visayan Islands. Stretching from the southwestern tip of Mindanao toward Borneo is a chain of small islands collectively known as the Sulu Archipelago. The population of southwestern Mindanao and Sulu is predominantly Muslim.

There is evidence of human settlements in the islands as early as 20,000 BC. The small black people, called Negritos by the Spaniards, were the first to arrive. Later they were driven into the mountainous interior when immigrants belonging to the brown-skinned Malay

## A beautiful journey in faith

race reached the islands. Today one finds various hill tribes such as the Aetas and Ifugao of Luzon and the Mansakas, Mandayas, and Bukidnon of Mindanao; many of these peoples still practice their traditional religions. Malay Filipinos occupy the lowlands, constitute the majority of the population, and have become Christian. They form several distinct groups; the Visayan, Tagalog, Ilokano, and Bikolano are among the most numerous.

**ARRIVAL OF SPANIARDS.** In March 1521 Ferdinand Magellan arrived in search of spices and converts for Charles I (Emperor Charles V); it was his son Prince Philip, later King Philip II, whose name was bestowed on the islands by Villalobos in 1542. Lapulapu, a native chieftain of Cebu, resisted Magellan’s claim of Spanish sovereignty, and he was mortally wounded by Lapulapu’s spear thrust. In 1565 Miguel Lopez de Legazpi established the first permanent Spanish settlement in Cebu. In 1571 Legazpi moved his headquarters to Manila, making it the capital of the colony.

Living Mission / A5

## A new dawn

MANY so ardently wish that 2021 will truly be a year so different from 2020, this year of the Covid-19 pandemic, when our lives were altered drastically compared to many other years before it, most think. Actually, however, many other years in the past affected so many lives too. The two World Wars for instance, and the different plagues and pandemics that happened before, such as the Spanish Flu, to name the well-known ones.

What makes 2020 different? Maybe because of the widespread extent of its effects. Covid-19 has affected so many more countries, big and small, developed and poor. Maybe it is also

because it is happening at this time when the world has progressed so much that the leaders think they are in control, when they believe they have the solution to any and all problems. However, what has happened is that a virus so small (you need a microscope to see it), has punctured the pride of the big and powerful and has brought them down to their knees. Everyone is vulnerable. Even the nation that claims to be the most powerful in the world has been struggling against this small virus. Just when some nations think it has solved the problem and has “flattened the curve”, new spikes occur, or a new strain develops.

So the question remains. When will this pandemic end? Will the newly developed vaccines be the solution? Will it create the hoped for “herd immunity”?

There is still so much uncertainty. And due to the deaths and sufferings it has caused and continues to cause, it is no wonder that many carry the fervent hope that this New Year will also see this pandemic end. Unfortunately, this is not in our hands. We can only pray, and continue to follow the precautions we have been asked to observe.

All should commend the efforts that are being done to find the solution to this pandemic. These efforts have

raised the hopes of many. We share that hope, as more and more friends are affected, and we pray for their healing and recovery. However, may it also be that all these efforts should likewise go to ending another cause of so many deaths in the world—that of the murder of innocent babies due to abortion. In reality, there have been so many more deaths due to abortion than all the deaths due to covid-19. This should not be lost in all the attention given to this pandemic.

Of course, we should pin our hopes on the efficacy of the vaccines that have recently been developed. It is clear, though, that whether

Active Faith / A6

## Active Faith

Joe Tale



## Candidly Speaking

Fr. Roy Cimagala

UNFORTUNATELY, we are still hearing that this COVID pandemic will still be with us for months and even for years. Let’s hope and pray that this piece of information would be proven wrong as early as possible, and that those things that are needed to end it are discovered and given to us. But even if that disturbing news holds true, we should not allow it to sour and darken our vision about this new year that has just begun.

If we have faith in God, we know that no matter how things go and develop in this new year, everything would just work out for the good. With God, we would know how to derive good even from the worst evil that can menace us this year. God is always in control, and if we are with him, we too can

have a certain degree of dominion over whatever would happen. Whatever crisis we may have would always offer us a new opening for a greater good.

We should just deepen our faith so that our hope would continue to be vibrant instead of thinning, and our charity, instead of fading, would grow stronger. With God, we are assured that not only would we survive whatever trials would come our way. We would even prosper, as we would certainly learn new things, acquire new virtues and invigorate those virtues that we already have, be purified of the remains of the sins of all men, etc.

In other words, this pandemic would give all of us an occasion to get closer to God and to cooperate more closely in the continuing divine work of human

redemption. That is how we should look at this news, so that not only would we be egged to prepare ourselves accordingly but would also lead us to see things under a very positive and meaningfully light.

We can also say that God allows these trials, challenges and difficulties to happen because he wants to remind us that we need to get closer to him. To be sure, he does not directly wish evil to happen to us, but allows the limitations of nature and the abuses of our freedom to play out because he can always derive a greater good from them.

Perhaps what we can do to help us face the new year with a very hopeful attitude is to immerse ourselves in the celebration of the 5th centenary of

Candidly Speaking / A5

## CBCP Monitor

PROTAGONIST OF TRUTH, PROMOTER OF PEACE

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## By the Roadside

Fr. Eutiquio 'Euly' Belizar, Jr. SThD

"Anyone who does not look where he came from will never reach where he wishes to be" —Filipino proverb

"And I am sure of this, that he who began this good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6)

IT'S a new year again. The old year 2020 was generally a period of gloom and doom due to Covid-19 and harmful socio-economic-political realities spawned either by the pandemic or by the dark streaks in human nature. Thankfully 2020 was not entirely bad news; towards its passing it provided some relief through the emergence of anti-Covid 19 vaccines. Now hope rings in the air. New years usually mean new beginnings to many. To the Philippine Church 2021 bears a special significance in that it culminates years of preparation for the celebration of 500 years of Christianity in the country (1521-2021). The urgent question we need to always ponder is: How far have we grown from being Christians in name to being Christians in fact?

To me this new year also reminds me of a story from a friend. He told me of a man who was once tested for Covid-19. The health worker tried to calm him down. She said, "Don't worry too much, Sir. Everything will be okay." She pointed to a poster on the wall that said: "Think positive." He retorted, "That's exactly the reason why I'm worried. I'm thinking I could be positive." Covid-19 and many other infectious diseases have made us rethink the things we once thought had clear meanings: namely, positive and negative. In the past anything positive was a good thing; now if you have tested positive with Covid-19 or HIV/AIDS, it is anything but. In the past, anything negative was considered

bad or worthy of disapproval; now being negative of Covid-19 or HIV/AIDS is something people celebrate and are happy about.

On the other hand, apart from infectious and deadly diseases, the ordinary meanings of positive and negative remain.

The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (what we simply call in the local Church lingo as PCP II) looked into our faith life in 1991 and came up with four aspects of our national reality, with both lights (positive elements) and shadows (negative elements). Let me repeat that the analysis was done in 1991. But if any unbiased rereading of the same assessment were done today, one would be surprised to find that very few indicators seem to have changed in our national situation.

For instance, the positive elements in the aspect of our evangelization (faith as a uniting factor, Filipino rebellion against the sword [Spanish colonization] did not reject the cross [Christianity], appropriation in the Filipino culture of the values of compassion, forgiveness, caring, piety) still persist today in our society in varying degrees. But so do the negative factors (presence of superstitions, centering on folk rites instead of the liturgy, unchurched ignorance, violence, corruption, abuse of power and other social ills) [PCP II 8-16] also still exist even as I write about them now. The need for the new evangelization is as critical as in no other time.

To my mind we can, again, bring up the same observation on the other aspects PCP II looked into. Both positives and negatives, pluses and minuses still persist in our day and age. For instance, in our socio-cultural context, the positives (multi-culturalism, family-values orientation) still exist with negatives

## At the crest of 500: Looking back to look forward

(narrow particularistic factionalism, lack of concern for the common good affecting the wider community or nation) [PCP II 13-22]. Although Covid-19 has tempered regionalistic or particularistic tendencies among Filipinos, they remain a constant challenge. Lately local governments seem to regress to narrow particularism in procuring vaccines, for instance.

In our economic and political context the negatives seem to have the upper hand (elitism, the reign of political dynasties, massive poverty, inequality) because very little has changed; positively there are more aggragations today that reject the harmful traditional eco-political realities and form NGOs and POs (Non-Governmental Organizations and Peoples' Organizations) that advocate care for creation and continually advance other social justice concerns, such as respect for human life and human rights [PCP II 23-27]. On the other hand, the spate of drug-related, political (red-tagged-or-dissent-related) killings executed regularly with impunity as well as litigations meant to silence or punish political enemies are present evils plaguing the country like resurrected virulent viruses infecting the practice of the Christian faith in our recent history.

Our religious context is an especially significant consideration. Its negative realities (lack of adequate number of the clergy and direction, lack of religious witness, lack of the laity's perception of what present circumstances require) also persist in various degrees. But there also have been more progress in enhancing our rich faith heritage, more evangelized and evangelizing ecclesial communities, developing resiliency especially in crisis and emergency situations as well as the continuing

By the Roadside / A6



## Inside Out

Fr. Spencer Lewerenz

## A kingdom top-down or from below?

WHILE the world has been going through the dark valley of Covid together, the U.S. has been experiencing some added excitement this Advent with a contentious and divisive election. Jesus had to continually remind his followers that his Kingdom is not of this world and will not come about through political power or some other force of will (Jn 18:36). When I get too preoccupied with the latest news, I often have to remind myself of the same thing. Christ the King deconstructs our "top-down" power propensity by insisting on taking the lowest place (Lk 14:10). In connection with the Solemnity of Christ the King, I often see paintings of Christ with a golden tiara and staff and luxuriant flowing robes, as one would depict a worldly ruler. In scripture, Jesus' kingship is depicted in being stripped of robes, beaten with a staff, and crowned with thorns.

The culture warrior in me, the "Christianizing" impulse, wants to take Jesus away like the crowds wanted to and put a crown of gold on his head (Jn 6:15). But he keeps insisting on keeping the thorny one he already has. In truth, it is I who want the crown. My fears are always telling me to dominate, to assert control, while Jesus insists I surrender in His love. His kingdom will dawn gently like a baby in a manger, not by the sword (Lk 1:78).

Some years ago, before I entered seminary, I began helping with an annual procession on the feast of Christ the King. Imagine the excitement of Catholics coming to process through the streets of Hollywood for this feast day. It was probably not too different from that crowd in John 6:15. It was easy to slip into that old "top-down" tendency, even when praying the rosary. Some of the more exuberant would even bring their own mode of personal amplification (ie megaphones).

On our little pilgrimage, we would pass through those parts of the city where people seek to numb themselves from their pain and commiserate with those who, like themselves, feel thrown away by society. The sights, sounds, and smells of these parts of the city would sometimes evoke a counter-reaction within our group. Our rosary would grow louder, more forceful, more desperate, vying for predominance over the noise and activity in the street. It was fear. "What am I so afraid of?" I would ask myself. Perhaps Jesus was inviting us to confront our fears and find a deeper security in that "perfect love" which "casts out all fear" (1 Jn 4:18).

The "us vs. them" fear dynamic drives our power struggle to be "on top." It can be hard to surrender when it feels like Christianity is sliding down a cultural cliff, having lost its foothold, and much of what is happening in the world threatens to push us over the edge. We can become desperate and cling more desperately for some kind of worldly stature.

I attended a Catholic liberal arts college where I eagerly absorbed the beauty, truth and goodness of (predominantly Western) Christian culture. As a result, I have often felt like a product of a foregone era. It can seem like a tragedy that Christian culture is losing its relevance, that great works of creativity and intellect are only recognized in such outposts, like the monasteries of the Dark Ages. To some degree it probably is tragic. Like our little procession in Hollywood, however, we can tend to want to band together out of fear of what lies outside, and even to seek to "re-Christianize" it from the top down.

Christianity, however, is not the same as Christian culture. Or to be more precise, Christ is not a culture. A culture is the product of human activity. To "Christianize" a culture is a human activity. But, as St. Paul put it, "Adam was a human soul; Christ became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:45). The

Inside Out / A7

Living Mission / A4

By the end of the century, most of the lowlands were under Spanish rule, except for some southern islands which remained Muslim.

Islam had been introduced in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century. It gradually exercised a strong influence and helped develop a type of sophisticated political organization, semifederal and predatory, in Mindanao and Sulu and initially in Manila. When the Spaniards encountered Muslims in the Philippines, their hostile attitudes based on Muslim-Christian encounters in Europe (the struggle for independence from Moorish rule in the Iberian Peninsula) colored their outlook and relations; these very negative attitudes were

also transmitted to non-Muslim Filipinos.

EARLY MISSION EFFORTS. An organized program of evangelization of the Philippines was begun in 1565 by the Augustinians who accompanied Legaspi's expedition. They were followed by Franciscans (1578), Jesuits (1581), Dominicans (1587), and Augustinian Recollects (1606) from both Spain and Mexico. Manila became a bishopric in 1579 and an archbishopric in 1595. Truly, we admire the deep faith and self-sacrificing generosity of these early missionary groups; and, by God's grace they all continue to serve our local Church today! Our hearts are filled with profound gratitude for the gift of faith they brought!

Candidly Speaking / A4

Christianity in our country, which is also made more meaningful since 2021 is also the Year of St. Joseph, a most faithful man of God who can help us in strengthening our relation with God.

I believe that is a very practical and helpful way of living out this new year that strikes us now to be challenging. Instead of worrying and brooding, letting ourselves to be dominated by fears and anxieties, we would put

ourselves in a pro-active, optimistic mode, doing a lot of good, the possibilities of which are actually endless.

With this celebration of the 5th centennial of our Christianity and the Year of St. Joseph, we are given a perfect occasion to learn more about our faith and to develop a more solid life of piety where we would know how to abandon ourselves in the loving providence of God even as we do our part as productively as possible!



## Duc in Altum

Atty. Aurora A. Santiago

DUE to the wide spread of the pandemic covid-19, the governments all over the world required their respective scientists to experiment and produce the much-needed medicine and vaccines to prevent if not cure covid-19. Finally, by December last year, two vaccines were approved by the respective Food and Drug Administration of the United Kingdom and the United States. The first vaccine that was released and approved by the UK and US are Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine and Moderna, respectively. The Food and Drug Administration issued on December 11, 2020 the Emergency Use Authorization or EUA for the use of Pfizer in 2 doses to 16 years old and above and health care personnel and long term facility residents while the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices or ACIP issued on December 13, 2020 the use of Pfizer for the prevention of covid-19. On December 18, 2020, the FDA issued an EUA for the

use of Moderna covid-19 vaccine external icon for use of Moderna to 18 years old and above while ACIP issued on December 20, 2020 for the use of Moderna for the prevention of covid-19. Those who have severe allergic reaction and immediate allergic reaction should not be vaccinated. Pfizer requires ultra-cold storage and boxes using dry ice and are given in 2 doses with 2 to 3-weeks interval while Moderna is administered as 2 doses 28 days apart. Both vaccines have 95% to 96% efficacy.

In the Philippines, the government should give priority to medical frontliners who are at risk to covid-19 because of their close contact to the covid patients. Proper donning and doffing of personal protective equipment or PPE must be observed and followed to avoid contamination and infection. Physical distancing, use of face mask and face shield and use of alcohol if handwashing is not available, are a must.

The government should

provide free covid-19 vaccines to the poor and the vulnerable, especially those who cannot afford to pay the cost of vaccines. Businessmen are encouraged to donate for the purchase of vaccines. The population should be vaccinated and immunized from covid as soon as the vaccines are available in the country. Above all, each and every individual must be given the freedom to choose whether or not they want to be vaccinated, and to choose which vaccines should be administered to them. As it is, majority of the population favor Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. It is No-No to Sinovac or vaccine from China and Russia. For the government to spend millions of pesos to buy vaccines from China and Russia will be a waste of tax-payers money if the majority of the population would not avail themselves of the vaccine.

Thus, it is very anomalous that vaccines were already administered to the soldiers and members of Presidential Security Group. How come

that those vaccines entered the country, when the Bureau of Customs itself stated that no vaccine passed through the Bureau, meaning those are smuggled vaccines. Likewise, the FDA and the DOH have not yet approved any anti covid-19 vaccines, meaning those vaccines may endanger the health of the individuals to whom they would be administered.

Studies also show that some of the covid-19 vaccines used cells from the remains of aborted female fetus. The Catholic teachings disapproved abortion, more so the use of such fetus. The Catholic Church admonishes the use of fetus in the manufacture of vaccines. The Vatican, however, explained that "when ethically irreproachable covid-19 vaccines are not available (e.g. in countries where vaccines without ethical problems are not made available to physicians and patients, or where their distribution is more difficult due to special storage and

Duc in Altum / A6



## Whatever

Fr. Francis Ongkingco

WHAT is it in this world that can satisfy the human heart? The heart is an enigmatic part of man that knows of no boundaries and depths when it comes to its deepest longings.

Man's restless heart is best explained by St. Augustine's realization when praying to God: "Lord, our heart are restless, until it rests in you!"

It seems that God has mysteriously inflamed man's heart with His own burning love, and man's burning desires will never find rest until it is finally consumed by the eternal flame of God's heart.

When one strives to dampen this inner restlessness with other things other than God's love, that is, when he prefers to create idols out of wealth,

fame, power and lust, his restlessness is only temporarily relieved but will once again blaze into greater conflagration of frustration from where he will gather ashes of despair.

This is especially true of the young who are striving to discover and acquire their identity within the family and society. Sometimes, due to a misunderstood autonomy, they isolate themselves from their parental roots. Once torn from home and customs they feel they will be able to find their identity and inner peace

Their 'rootlessness', however, doesn't do anything but to aggravate their uneasiness. In our present time, it is so easy for many of the young to seek solace by surfing for their fame and identity

over the vicious waves of the Internet. Ronald Rolheiser makes an interesting observation on how this connectivity tool in fact, breeds greater alienation from society and even of one's own identity. He says:

"Today information technology has made it possible for a young person to have a sense of being connected to the whole world (...) While that sense of connection to virtually everything that is important is making for a highly informed young person, it is also habitually overstimulating that person's restlessness, akin to the restlessness we often feel at big parties and gala events where everyone is present to everyone and yet we feel present to nobody. (...)

Whatever / A6

## Our restless connectivity

## Bishops question timing of Cha-cha bid

SOME Catholic bishops raised concern over fresh moves to amend the 1987 Constitution at the height of the coronavirus pandemic.

Bishop Broderick Pabillo of Manila said that what is suspicious is that proponents are using “all kinds of reasons” for Charter change.

“Before it was for economic reasons and to reform the party list laws... and now the coronavirus,” Pabillo said. “This is very suspect.”

He said the ongoing Charter revision effort will only rouse suspicion that several politicians only want term extension.

“At this time, to push for Cha-cha is to extend or avoid election or avoid accountability of their misgovernance,” Pabillo said.

Retired Bishop Teodoro Bacani of Novaliches also expressed reservation on the latest campaign

to change the Charter with less than two years remaining in the Duterte administration.

“If they did say that they want to amend the Constitution to address the coronavirus epidemic, ask them to tell that to the marines,” Bacani said.

For his part, retired Bishop Arturo Bastes of Sorsogon also questioned the timing of the renewed talks for Charter change in Congress.

“No need for a change just because of a pandemic, which has no real effect on our present Constitution. I oppose this renewed push for Charter change,” he said.

The House of Representatives earlier said it would resume deliberations on constitutional change to ease economic provisions during the pandemic. **(CBCP News)**

By the Roadside / A5

presence of vocations, even the late ones [PCP II 28-33].

Why do we need to reread PCP II's analysis of our total situation vis-a-vis our faith? Because doing so helps us see whether they are still at play and how in our personal, family and community lives and whether or not they help or obstruct our living out an authentic Christian life. Isaiah the prophet makes us see the dream of God for a world where all peoples are called to his house. “For my house,” says the prophet, “shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Is 56:7). This alone is enough reason for people of faith to reject any form of myopia, such as racism, social inequity or narrow regionalistic particularism.

Apart from that Jesus challenges us in the Gospel of Matthew to be like him: not only in speaking or preaching words but also in doing works that give witness to him and to the Father. “For I have a greater testimony than that of John: the works that the Father has given me, that I may complete them, also give testimony to me: that I was sent by the Father” (Jn 6:7). In a word, to not simply talk the talk but to also walk the walk is always at the heart of Christian life. In the words of St. Francis of Assisi: “Preach the Gospel at all

times and, when necessary, use words.”

All this only points to the ever vital need for the continuous conversion and reform of the Filipino nation, especially those who call themselves Filipino and Catholic. After all, the Church of the Risen Lord is called by Vatican II “ecclesia semper reformanda” or a “Church always in need of reform”. A song entitled “Man in the Mirror” by the late Michael Jackson (despite his alleged indiscretions or maybe because of them) hit the nail right on the head by its refrain that says: “I’m starting with the man in the mirror/ I’m asking him to change his ways/ No message could have been any clearer/ If you want to make the world a better place, take a look at yourself and then make a change...”

Each Filipino Catholic Christian, nay, the whole Filipino nation gifted by God with the grace of faith is the Man in the Mirror, ever constantly challenged to “change our ways” if we want our witnessing to better actualize the ways of the Gospel and usher in the Kingdom. We must collectively discern and decide on the objectives and means to help make us grow from being Christians in name to being Christians in fact. For this alone we ought to always “make a change”!

Duc in Altum / A5

transport conditions, or when various types of vaccines are distributed in the same country but health authorities do not allow citizens to choose the vaccine with which to be inoculated, it is morally acceptable to receive Covid-19 vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process.”

The CBCP, on the other hand, stated that they “thank our scientists who have once more applied their expertise to the welfare of human beings and to their protection from the dreaded scourge of disease. We know that the study and work that precede the production of a vaccine are arduous. We commend our brothers and sisters who have perished to the love of God, and

we raise a common prayer of thanksgiving for our health workers and other front liners who served most gallantly in these terrible months that have gone by. May St. Joseph, who saved the Child Jesus and his Mother, from the deadly designs of a king continue to protect us. May Mary, Health of Sick and Help of Christians, pray for us.

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January is the birth month and month of passing on of my father Benito Espiritu Santiago, Sr. and also the Wedding Anniversary of my father and mother Gloria Angeles Santiago. Eternal rest grant unto them oh Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace.

Whatever / A5

The way information technology connects us to all that is happening in our world and its overabundance of life often triggers that same kind of depression within young people, and, most often, this will be felt as painful restlessness. (in Sacred Fire)

He concludes that the overall effect of this overstimulated restlessness “makes choice and commitment very difficult for many young people today, particularly in the areas of marriage and fidelity.”

How can the young and the not-so-young, especially in our tense COVID confinement, be helped to address their overstimulated restlessness?

In the first place, we must learn to grow in inner connectivity. This is through daily prayer and meditation. In prayer we learn to balance the external stimuli bombarding our senses and imagination. Thus, we awaken our sensitivity to the indwelling presence of Someone who wants to connect with us.

Second, family mighty-bonding.

This is not only in the external moments spent together in work, rest and pious customs. It has deeper roots when each one personally strives to identify and appreciate each of his family members: for who they are, their gifts, compassion for their limitations, and having a sincere desire to journey with them towards self-integration and improvement.

Third, interior oblation. The external manifestation of service and availability is the natural result of an inner sacrifice. For example, stepping on our pride, setting aside preferences and whims and sacrificing them for the sake of the others. This inner sacrifice or oblation only has God as our witness and Who delights in our hearts.

In these points we will properly contain our restlessness. They too and help us embody St. Augustine's wisdom that even though our hearts may be restless, at least its un-ease is offered within the confines of a more restless heart: Jesus' Sacred Heart.

## Papal nuncio reminds clergy: Service, not self-interest



Archbishop Charles John Brown, Apostolic Nuncio to the Philippines, visits Radio Veritas in Quezon City on Jan. 11, 2021. PHOTO COURTESY OF RADIO VERITAS

THE papal nuncio to the Philippines reminded priests their mission is always to serve and urged them to put aside self-interest.

Speaking over Radio Veritas on Jan. 11, Archbishop Charles John Brown said that bishops, priests and the religious are called to “highest standards” of service.

“We should never ever use our priesthood to our own benefit. A priesthood is service,” Brown said.

“We shouldn't be using the priesthood for our own glorification, for our own ends, but for the

kingdom of God,” he said.

The nuncio made a pastoral visit to the radio station in Quezon City on Monday and guested on its morning program “Barangay Simbayanan”.

In the interview, he admitted being ‘blown away’ by the religiosity of Filipinos, which according to him, have “a great worldwide influence”.

“I was just blown away by the faith of the people. Such a devout deeply religious people, which was, for me, a great joy to see,” Brown said.

The Vatican ambassador

celebrated Mass in Quiapo Church on Sunday, a day after the celebration of the Black Nazarene feast.

A few days before last Christmas, he also celebrated public Masses and was “pleasantly surprised” at the brand of faith being shown by Filipinos.

He said that in many parts of the world, Catholic faith “maybe is being practiced less intensely than it once was.”

“But here in the Philippines, when you go to places, it's still really deeply felt here and that's beautiful,” he added. **(CBCP News)**

## Online petition launched to oppose condo project behind historic San Sebastian Church

AN online petition was launched to oppose the construction of a 31-storey condominium right behind the country's iconic and only all-steel church.

The high-rise building has been opposed since the plans were first announced but it was given green light by the authorities last year.

Those who oppose the residential project have been continuing in their efforts to save the San Sebastian Church, a national historical landmark.

“Our goal for this petition is to raise 400,000 signatures by this August 2021,” said the petitioner San Sebastian Basilica Conservation and

Development Foundation, Inc.

The number of target signatures also aims to symbolize the 400th year anniversary of the very first San Sebastian Church.

“The signatures from this general petition will be recorded to show the public there is a community of people who care about the basilica and the neighborhood,” it said.

The present structure, which dates back to 1891, is the only all-steel church in Asia and the only prefabricated steel church in the world.

The petitioner asked the public to help in raising awareness about the San Sebastian Church, also known as the Minor



San Sebastian Church in Manila. FILE PHOTO

Basilica of San Sebastian, and why it must be protected.

“We strongly believe in the power of a united community, and so beyond this petition, we invite everyone to connect

with us and collaborate,” it added.

As of Jan. 12 or five days since the campaign was launched, the petition already has around 7,200 signatures. **(CBCP News)**

Caritas / A1

action, even if PSG is saying the vaccines were donated.”

Duterte earlier said that his goal was to provide a free vaccine to all 113 million Filipinos.

However, the Department of Finance said that they are still to source out 73.2 billion pesos to pay for the vaccination of 60 million population.

Fr. Antonio Labiao Jr., Caritas Philippines' executive secretary, urged the authorities “to speed up all regulatory processes so that vaccines will be available to us soonest.”

He also stressed that “while

we agree on the list of priority sectors to be vaccinated first, it is imperative for the government to ensure that majority of the Filipinos will have access to the vaccines when its already available for mass use.”

“In this time of pandemic, we must strive to do away with selfish interests,” Labiao said.

Caritas Philippines, he also said, will also exert all efforts available to assist the government in easing the burden being experienced, especially in the most marginalized communities.

Since March, the country's social

action network has been able to provide more than P1 billion worth of assistance through its national partners, and Caritas Internationalis.

“Our goal has always been to prioritize aid corresponding to the needs of the vulnerable Filipinos,” Bagaforo said.

“We will continue to be vigilant, especially of government actions, to ensure that the rights, welfare and dignity of the Filipino people prevail over political machinations, vested interests, and greed for power,” he added. **(CBCP News)**

Human Rights / A1

Fr. Pacifico Nohara Jr., prior and rector of the centuries-old basilica, said the situation calls them to action to prevent coronavirus transmission.

For the past four days of the novena Masses, thousands of devotees flocked to the basilica despite threats of the Covid-19.

“The situation has called us to rise above the situation and to choose this course of action for the common good and benefit of all,” Nohara said.

According to him, protecting the health and well-being of the people is a matter of “Christian morals”.

“We ask for your great understanding and hoping that, with our hearts and minds attuned to God's mercy to deliver us from the scourge of the pandemic, we can celebrate the entirety of the Fiesta Señor in God's perfect time,” he said.

The priest invited

devotees to join in the remaining novena masses and the feast day online through the church's Facebook page and YouTube channel.

However, the friars said the basilica and its compound would remain open for devotees who would want to visit. **(CBCP News)**

Active Faith / A4

this is the solution everybody is waiting for, still remains to be seen.

So, I am again led to the words of Jesus, whose birth we just celebrated, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” As we observe God's righteousness

first, the other results we seek and desire will follow.

On this dawning of the year 2021 therefore, my New Year's wish and prayer, in addition to my many personal prayers, is for the world to regain its “sense of the sacred”. May this pandemic lead the world

to realize that notwithstanding all the scientific progress, not everything is under human control. That there is a God above and beyond us all.

With this realization, we can truly look forward to a new dawn like no other.

## Homonhon as site of 'first Mass' in PH remains an 'academic discussion' — NHCP



The newly built St. John the Baptist Parish Church on the historic Homonhon Island in Guiuan, Eastern Samar. PHOTO BY FR. CHRISTIAN OFILAN

BORONGAN City— It remains an 'academic discussion' whether or not the "first Mass in the Philippines" took place on Homonhon Island off Eastern Samar province, a government agency said.

The National Historical Commission of the Philippines said it has refrained from using the "trivial and debatable phase" so as not to preempt other claims on the historic Mass.

"This not to preempt the possible Christian celebration conducted in the Philippine territory prior to the one in Limasawa, such as this claim in Homonhon," said NHCP chair Rene Escalante.

The official was responding to a position paper by Fr. Neil Tenebrancia, chancellor of the Diocese of Borongan, on the supposed first Mass on Homonhon.

In his 15-page paper, the priest argued for the logical possibility of at least four unrecorded Masses on Homonhon based on the pre-Tridentine liturgical calendar in use during 1521.

"Nevertheless, the case of Homonhon shall remain an academic discussion," Escalante said.

"In actively advancing this claim, the Diocese of Borongan has to guarantee that the public must appreciate it methodologically," he added.

## Priest appeals to stop black sand mining in Leyte town

PALO, Leyte— A Catholic priest has appealed to the government to stop black sand mining operations in the town of McArthur in Leyte province.

Taking a cue from the recent flooding in Cagayan Valley region, Fr. Amadeo Alvero of St. Isidore Parish in McArthur urged the authorities to implement environmental laws to prevent similar disasters in the future.

"I am pleading with my bended knees to stop the Black Sand Mining here in MacArthur," Alvero said.

"If we protect the environment from destruction, the environment will protect us from destruction," he said.

To drum up their campaign against mining, Alvero on Dec. 7 led a motorcade in the town, which

Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan and his crew including an Augustinian missionary reached the Philippines nearly 500 years ago.

The expedition first landed on March 16, 1521 in Homonhon, where they stayed for eight days before heading to Limasawa Island in Southern Leyte province.

The NHCP has earlier affirmed that the "First Easter Sunday Mass" was held in Limasawa on March 31, 1521.

The week prior to March 31 was a Holy Week, wherein Catholics commemorate the suffering and death of Jesus Christ.

Some theorists claim that the first Mass may have been celebrated in Homonhon, where Magellan and his men took a weeklong respite.

The Catholic Church in the Philippines is celebrating the fifth centenary of the arrival of the Christian faith in the country in 2021.

Fr. Christian Ofilan of St. John the Baptist Parish in Homonhon, expressed hope that the site of the first Mass in the country may finally be resolved.

"It is our hope and prayer that the historical recognition that the island of Homonhon rightfully deserves may finally be accorded to her," Ofilan said. (CBCP News)

is endowed with rich fertile lands and a lake.

"Help us stop this black sand mining... for the sake of those who will suffer and die in the future if we do not protect our environment," Alvero said.

About 2,000 hectares of mining claims was reportedly granted by the government to the McArthur Iron Projects Corp., which runs the local operation of Strong Built Mining Development Corp.

The mining project reportedly covers the towns of McArthur, Abuyog and Javier.

Black sand is an additive in concrete and steel production, as well as for the manufacture of jewelry and cosmetics. (CBCP News)

life-giving fruitfulness of the Holy Trinity does not originate in a human activity. When we abide in God and God abides in us, a new life and fruitfulness are infused into the soul and God's ways become ours (John 15). This comes not through being on top, but being on the bottom.

The top-down, us vs. them approach is through power. The interior approach works through the powerlessness of the Cross. The top-down approach has been the temptation for the 1700 years Christians have held political power. Like the Pharisees, we have often tried to impose an exterior, formal religiosity on "them" that lacks the life Christ said could only be received as a gift by the simple and the childlike. We have laid heavy burdens of moralism, intellectualism, and aestheticism upon others, transcendentals without the transcendence of the inner

life. At times Christian culture has resembled a fantasy world, a fearful bubble from the outside world or a narcissistic Disneyland that is more in our image than God's. In truth, we fear "them" because "they" are the "us" we are afraid to confront. "They" are the ugliness of Christ which the Cross reveals to be true beauty.

In 1531 Mother Mary appeared in the Americas, which, like Asia, had resisted colonial attempts at Christianization. She appeared as la morena, unveiling the dark beauty of Christ that was already "below" in the suffering people. Like the Son of Man lifted up, she revealed the Christ in them: "Am I not here, I who am your mother." No effort at Christianizing could have done what Mother Mary did. She revealed that her heart is so united with her Son's in the historical pains

of the native peoples that she took on their appearance, not by means of the culture that was hers by birth but by her Son's Spirit, the grace of the Immaculate Conception. This broke the spell of colonial shaming to unlock divine fruit from within the people as they were freed to see not just the dignity, but the divine glory in their own painful humility.

The turn to power inherent in the top-down approach is at its heart an attempt to suppress or escape the fearful reality the "uncivilized" represent to our fragile psyches: the painful history of our own interiority. Man's insecurity with the woundedness of his own humanity makes it imperative that he control his environment to marginalize and "otherize" any reminder of it, pushing it into the dark "below." Meanwhile, our own brokenness lies painfully

unacknowledged and secretly at work. Pharisaic false religion keeps us "white washed tombs" unable to approach the leper or Samaritan much less address our own inner rot or "clean the inside of the cup."

Christ has already reconciled our interior to God and to one another "from below." He did what was impossible for us; he assumed our broken humanity and exposed it on the Cross (2 Cor 5:21, Gal 3:13). This so that we could find God dwelling within us in what would seem the most unlikely of places, the "below"—our sense of being accursed, guilty, excluded, all the things we've kept in the dark out of fear. In Christ we are reconciled with God, with ourselves, and find a new point of departure for our social relations (Eph 2:16). No longer afraid of Christ dwelling within us, we are free to approach him in

our neighbor, not in order to "Christianize," but to allow ourselves to be transformed by God's love together. We approach with "shoes off" acknowledging the sacredness of Christ dwelling in the neighbor (Ex 3:5)

In her words "Am I not here?", Mother Mary invited Juan Diego not to fear the dark, but to embrace it through an abiding trust in grace. Through her invitation, our Christ the King procession has been transformed over the years into a more authentic representation of Christ's kingdom. Today, we allow God's abiding love to draw us through our fear and into the darkness inside of us and outside of us, into our wounds and towards the wounded. We encounter the people on the street "from below," not as "us vs. them" but us as one of them. We are all transformed in the

process.

Nowhere is the need for this kind of approach more urgent than in our relationships with young people. The rate of young people disaffiliating from the Church is reminiscent of the refusal of native peoples to embrace colonial Christianization. To be sure, what our young people are going through is scary. But what they need is not a more fervent, programmed effort to push cultural Christianity. What they need is "la morena," a Church that, through embracing the live-giving fruitfulness of its interior spirituality, becomes the beautiful, humble dark one that is "below" inside of them. We can make Christianity into an endless human project or we can follow Christ the King and the infant Jesus into the darkness where our young people are waiting.

## Pandemic must not stop concern for social justice— bishop



Bishop Raul Dael of Tandag. COURTESY OF DENNIS REY ORTOJAN/DIOCESE OF TANDAG

TANDAG, Surigao del Sur— A Catholic bishop in the southern Philippines urged the public to be more vigilant on social issues even amidst the coronavirus pandemic.

In a recent pastoral letter, Bishop Raul Dael of Tandag said people must continue to fight for their rights and practice social justice while social distancing.

"Let us continue to be vigilant even as we struggle with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic," Dael said.

"Let us not allow ourselves to be complacent regarding social realities and political issues," he said.

The bishop particularly warned of the dangers of the contentious anti-terror law, which faces legal challenges at the Supreme Court.

The Church and the people of good will, he said abhor terrorism and want a law that truly provides order, security and wellbeing of the nation.

But such counter-terrorism measure that is "vague and contrary to the Constitution," he said, should be opposed or struck down.

"This is what we are hoping that our Justices in the Supreme Court will do," Dael said.

"If anyone innocent becomes a victim of this Anti-Terrorism Law,

the Church cannot remain a mere observer but an active witness for the pursuit of truth and justice," he added.

Critics condemned the new law, which took effect last July 18, as a weapon to target opponents and stifle free speech.

The bishop urged the government not to regard dissenting opinions as a threat but an opportunity to find better and more integral solutions for lasting peace.

"A healthy and stable government allows dissent because dissent purifies opinion and guides leadership," he said. (CBCP News)

## NHCP opposes construction of Masonic obelisk in front of Dumaguete cathedral

DUMAGUETE City— The country's heritage agency is not in favor of the planned construction of a Masonic obelisk at a historic public plaza, right across a Catholic cathedral.

The National Historical Commission of the Philippines said the Quezon Park is not the appropriate place for the project.

"NHCP has declared all Spanish and American colonial period plazas and public squares in the country as national historical sites," said Dr. Rene Escalante, NHCP chairman.

The NHCP official's statement was contained in a letter response dated Dec. 17 to city mayor Felipe Antonio Remollo and the Dumaguete Cathedral's Parish Pastoral Council.

The parish council has earlier petitioned

the NHCP to disallow the construction of the 18-storey "tower".

Escalante said the NHCP Board of Commissioners "are not in favor" of the project anywhere "within the public plaza of Dumaguete City."

"NHCP is not against the project per se but it should be constructed in an alternative site with a zoning classification that is more appropriate for the intended project," he said.

Bishop Julito Cortes of Dumaguete welcomed the NHCP decision "with great joy and gratitude".

"This is truly a wonderful Christmas gift to all of us," Cortes said.

"May we continue to pursue the path of dialogue and unity, always open to the invitations of the Spirit of God and ready to reach out in solidarity and respect," he added.



A perspective of the 18-storey Masonic obelisk that will be constructed in front of the cathedral in Dumaguete City. COURTESY OF DUMAGUETE CITY GOVT

In late November, the city government broke ground on the "Dumaguete Tower" project or Masonic obelisk to be funded by a private donor who is a well-known Freemason.

He has pledged P50 million for the project he hopes to finish before his assumption as a high-ranking official of the organization. (Ryan Christopher J. Sorote/CBCP News)

# Pope gives new Filipino cardinal Vatican assignment

POPE Francis has given Cardinal Jose Advincula of Capiz his first Vatican assignment since becoming a cardinal.

The pope on Dec. 18 appointed the Filipino cardinal as among the newest members of the Congregation for the Clergy.

Advincula was joined by Cardinal Cornelius Sin of Brunei as part of the dicastery responsible for the formation, ministry and life of priests and deacons.

As members, they will closely work with Italian Cardinal Benjamin Stella, who has been heading the office since 2013.

Advincula and Sin are among the 13 new cardinals created by the pope in late November. Only nine of them are under 80 who were given new tasks in addition to their

primary ministries.

Before becoming a bishop in 2001, Advincula spent most of his priestly life as seminary formator.

After his ordination as priest for the Capiz archdiocese in 1976, he served as spiritual director of the St. Pius X Seminary, where he was also professor and dean of education.

In 1984, he was sent to study at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, also known as the Angelicum, where he obtained a licentiate in canon law.

Returning to the country in 1990, he was assigned as professor, spiritual director, and dean of studies of the Immaculate Conception School of Theology, the regional seminary of northern Luzon, in Vigan, Ilocos Sur.

After serving the Vigan archdiocese for three years, he became professor and spiritual director of St. Joseph Regional Seminary of the Archdiocese of Jaro.

In 1995, he went back to his home archdiocese and was appointed rector of St. Pius X Seminary.

Advincula also became the first rector of Sancta Mater et Regina Seminarium when it formally opened in 1999.

In 2000, he received his first and only pastoral assignment as parish priest of Sto. Tomas de Villanueva in Capiz's Dao town.

A year later, he was appointed bishop of San Carlos in Negros Occidental. He was transferred to Capiz as archbishop in 2011. **(CBCP News)**



Pope Francis appoints Cardinal Jose Advincula of Capiz as member of the Congregation for the Clergy. PHOTO COURTESY OF CASAC

## Our Lady of Mercy declared 'Mother of Novaliches'

BISHOP Roberto Gaa of Novaliches has declared Our Lady of Mercy as the second patroness of the 18-year-old diocese.

The official declaration was held during Mass to celebrate the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God on Jan. 1 at the Diocesan Shrine and Parish of Our Lady of Mercy in Quezon City's Novaliches district.

The move stemmed from a petition filed by parish rector Fr. Peregrino Tomas, seeking to proclaim Mary under the said title as the "Mother of Novaliches".

Citing part of the petition, Gaa said that 165 years ago, the shrine was the only parish in Novaliches.

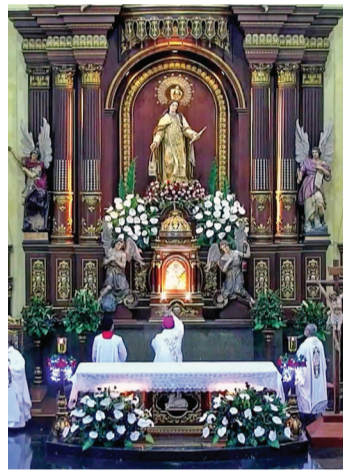
"And from her sprung so many offspring and rightly so, she is Ina," according to the bishop. "She is a mother. The mother of many parishes and the Mother of Novaliches."

"This is why when we received the petition, when we examined it, we deemed it worthy to start the process of formally taking on the name 'Ina ng Novaliches,'" he said.

Fr. Tomas cited at least three points why the Our Lady of Mercy is the mother of Novaliches: historical, geographical, and devotional.

Aside from being the diocese's first parish, he said that the devotion to Our Lady of Mercy has grown faster with devotees coming from in and outside the diocese.

"It may be noisy here, but here is where people pray. Here is where they talk and



Bishop Roberto Gaa uses incense as he venerates an image of Our Lady of Mercy during a Mass at the Diocesan Shrine and Parish of Our Lady of Mercy in Novaliches, Quezon City on Jan. 1, 2021. SCREENSHOT/DSPOLM

pour out their hearts to 'Ina ng Awa'. Our mother is here, 'Ina ng Novaliches,'" he said.

The parish actually houses three old images of Our Lady of Mercy: the "Primera" or the original image brought by the Augustinians in 1856 and kept in her own retablo at the shrine's second floor, the "Segunda" or the image usually used in processions and pilgrimages, and the "Tercera" or the life-sized image enshrined in the church's altar.

A motorcade procession of the images of the "Mother of Novaliches" was held across the diocese.

Novaliches was erected a diocese in December 2002, with Christ, the Good Shepherd as its principal patron. **(Minnie Agdeppa/CBCP News)**

## Philippine Dominicans elect new head

FATHER Filemon Dela Cruz was elected new prior provincial of the Philippine Province of the Order of Preachers, also known as Dominicans.

The election of the 57-year-old priest came during their 12th Provincial Chapter in Nasugbu, Batangas on Jan. 17.

Fr. Gerard Francisco Timoner, the master general of the worldwide religious order founded by St. Dominic de Guzman, confirmed his election on Jan. 18.

With his acceptance, Fr. Dela Cruz will lead the Dominican community for the next four years.

He replaced Fr. Napoleon Sipalay, who ended his term after serving the post since October 2016.

As prior provincial, Fr. Dela Cruz will also serve as the Chair of the University of Sto. Tomas' Board of Trustees.

Born in Manila, he entered the Dominican pre-novitiate in 1980 and was vested with the habit of the Order in 1983. He made his simple profession in 1984 and his solemn profession in 1987.

Fr. Dela Cruz took his philosophy at the Philippine Dominican Center of Institutional Studies, and theology at the UST.

He was ordained to the priesthood by the late Bishop Camilo Gregorio, who was then bishop of the Bacolod diocese in October 1992.

In 2006, he finished his masteral degree in theology from the UST.

Among his previous ministries were Master of Students in 1992-1996; Master of Novices in 1996-2000; Promoter of the Dominican Clerical Fraternity in 2012-2014; Provincial Councilor in 2012-2016; and Socius of the Prior Provincial in 2014-2016.

He also served in many ministries in the UST from 2001 to 2017 and was superior of the Dominican community of the Rumah Santo Tomas in Surabaya, Indonesia, from 2017 to 2020.

Prior to his election, he was a newly assigned priest to the House of Saint Lorenzo Ruiz and Companion Martyrs in Navotas City. **(CBCP News)**

## Pope reappoints Bishop Mesiona to Vatican evangelization office

POPE Francis has reappointed Bishop Socrates Mesiona of Puerto Princesa one of the new members of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

The appointment was relayed to the bishop in a letter last November from Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, who heads the dicastery.

He will serve for a five-year term.

"I am humbled and honored to be appointed for a second term as a member of the Congregation," Mesiona said.

Also known as Propaganda Fide, the office is responsible for the Church's missionary

works and related activities.

One of the largest curial departments, it is also responsible for the episcopal nominations in mission lands.

Mesiona, a known missiologist, is currently the chairman of the Commission on Mission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.

He also served as national director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in the Philippines before becoming a bishop in 2016.

From 2014 to 2019, he served as a member of the Vatican department for evangelization. **(Katya A. Santos/CBCP News)**



Bishop Socrates Mesiona of Puerto Princesa. COURTESY OF PMS PHILIPPINES

## Asian bishops launch online courses for pastoral communicators



VERITAS ASIA INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

THE Office of Social Communication (OSC) of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) launched three online courses for the formation of pastoral personnel in the region this week.

"Our God is a communicating God, and communication is central to the mission of the Church," said Bishop Roberto Mallari, chairman of the FABC-OSC, in a message during the launch on January 6.

He said the online program, which will be managed by the Veritas Asia Institute of Social Communication (VAISCOM), will instill "dynamism among pastoral leaders in Asia."

FABC-OSC established earlier established the VAISCOM to help uplift the skills of pastoral personnel for effective ministry in the Church.

The online courses are found on the institute's website that was also

inaugurated on January 6.

Father George Plathottam, SDB, said the institute is "committed to form personnel for various communication ministries" for the Church in Asia through online, in-campus and in loco programs.

He said the institute will offer training support, support research, and follow up programs for pastoral communicators.

"The current online mode of learning, although planned long before the pandemic, has become a timely and common platform of learning," said Father Plathottam.

He said the program is a response to the need to equip church leaders to meet the challenges presented by new media and the diverse pastoral contexts in Asia.

Initially, three online programs—Basic, Advanced, and Diploma—are offered to students who can access video

lessons, study notes, and other resource materials on the website.

Maryknoll Father William LaRousse, FABC assistant secretary general, said the new program is "timely and hugely beneficial" to the Church in Asia, especially as the federation celebrates its golden jubilee this year.

"Communication presents us new opportunities," said the priest.

The online course titled "Communication for Pastoral Leadership" is set to begin in July 2021 although applications for admissions are already being accepted.

The courses were prepared by a team from the Salesian congregation under Father Plathottam with technical support from the Delhi-based Manna Media Hub, Manila's Asia Pacific Consortium of Educational Research, and Radio Veritas Asia. **(Joe Torres/LiCas News)**

## Nun praying rosary in iconic 1986 EDSA revolt photo dies at 63

SISTER Porferia "Pingping" Ocariza, one of the icons of the 1986 people power revolution, died on Dec. 22.

Sr. Ocariza, a member of the Daughters of St. Paul, passed away after a long battle with cancer.

She was 63.

News of her passing was announced on her congregation's Facebook page on Dec. 23.

On the front line of the barricades, Sr. Ocariza was among the nuns who led the praying of the rosary amid a volatile national crisis.

A photo of her and Sr. Teresita Burias praying the rosary in front of soldiers has since become an iconic



Sister Porferia "Pingping" Ocariza, FSP. PHOTO FROM SR. OCARIZA'S FACEBOOK ACCOUNT

photograph of the revolution. Her confrere Sr. Rose

Agarap described the nun as a "brave soldier of Christ"

who "fought for the people's freedom and spread the Good News tirelessly".

"And until the end, you witnessed to the power of prayer, perseverance and in caring for the nature," Sr. Agarap said.

In an interview with the Catholic News Service in 2016, Sr. Ocariza said her experience in the uprising had a huge impact on her faith and vocation.

"Because for me at that time when we were facing the tanks, I believed heavily that God was there," she said. "God was there as if the seed [of democracy] was being planted." **(CBCP News)**





Pope Francis leads the Angelus from the Library in the Apostolic Palace on January 1, 2021. VATICAN MEDIA

# A Culture of Care as a Path to Peace

Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the celebration of the 54th World Day of Peace, 1 January 2021

1. At the dawn of a new year, I extend cordial greetings to Heads of State and Government, leaders of International Organizations, spiritual leaders and followers of the different religions, and to men and women of good will. To all I offer my best wishes that the coming year will enable humanity to advance on the path of fraternity, justice and peace between individuals, communities, peoples and nations.

The year 2020 was marked by the massive Covid-19 health crisis, which became a global phenomenon cutting across boundaries, aggravating deeply interrelated crises like those of the climate, food, the economy and migration, and causing great suffering and hardship. I think especially of all those who lost family members or loved ones, and all who lost their jobs. I think too of physicians and nurses, pharmacists, researchers, volunteers, chaplains and the personnel of hospitals and healthcare centers. They have made, and are continuing to make, great sacrifices to be present to the sick, to alleviate their sufferings and to save their lives; indeed, many of them have died in the process. In paying tribute to them, I renew my appeal to political leaders and the private sector to spare no effort to ensure access to Covid-19 vaccines and to the essential technologies needed to care for the sick, the poor and those who are most vulnerable. [1]

Sad to say, alongside all these testimonies of love and solidarity, we have also seen a surge in various forms of nationalism, racism and xenophobia, and wars and conflicts that bring only death and destruction in their wake.

These and other events that marked humanity's path this past year have taught us how important it is to care for one another and for creation in our efforts to build a more fraternal society. That is why I have chosen as the title of this year's Message, *A Culture of Care as a Path to Peace*. A culture of care as a way to combat the culture of indifference, waste and confrontation so prevalent in our time.

2. *God the Creator, the source of our human vocation to care*

Many religious traditions have accounts of the origin of human

beings and their relationship with the Creator, with nature and with their fellow men and women. In the Bible, the Book of Genesis shows from its very first pages the importance of *care* or *protection* in God's plan for humanity. It highlights the relationship between man (*adam*) and the earth (*adamah*), and among ourselves as brothers and sisters. In the biblical account of creation, God entrusts the garden "planted in Eden" (cf. *Gen* 2:8) to Adam's care, to "till it and keep it" (*Gen* 2:15). This entails making the earth productive, while at the same time protecting it and preserving its capacity to support life. [2] The verbs "till" and "keep" describe Adam's relationship to his garden home, but also the trust God placed in him by making him master and guardian of all creation.

The birth of Cain and Abel begins a history of brothers and sisters, whose relationship is understood—even by Cain, however mistakenly—in terms of *protection* or "keeping". After killing his brother Abel, Cain answers God's question by saying: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (*Gen* 4:9). [3] Cain, like all of us, was called to be "his brother's keeper". "These ancient stories, full of symbolism, bear witness to a conviction which we today share, that everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationship with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others". [4]

3. *God the Creator, a model of care*

Sacred Scripture presents God not only as Creator, but also as one who cares for his creatures, especially Adam, Eve and their offspring. Albeit cursed for the crime he committed, Cain was given a *mark of protection* by the Creator, so that his life could be spared (cf. *Gen* 4:15). While confirming the *inviolable dignity* of the person created in God's image and likeness, this was also a sign of God's plan to preserve the harmony of his creation, since "peace and violence cannot dwell together". [5]

Care for creation was at the heart of the institution of the *Sabbath*, which, in addition to ordering divine worship, aimed at the restoration of the social order and concern for

the poor (cf. *Gen* 1:1-3; *Lev* 25:4). The celebration of the Jubilee every seventh sabbatical year provided a respite for the land, for slaves and for those in debt. In that year of grace, those in greatest need were cared for and given a new chance in life, so that there would be no poor among the people (cf. *Deut* 15:4).

In the prophetic tradition, the biblical understanding of justice found its highest expression in the way a community treats its weakest members. Amos (cf. 2:6-8; 8) and Isaiah (cf. 58), in particular, insistently demand justice for the poor, who, in their vulnerability and powerlessness, cry out and are heard by God, who watches over them (cf. *Ps* 34:7; 113:7-8).

4. *Care in the ministry of Jesus*

Jesus' life and ministry represent the supreme revelation of the Father's love for humanity (cf. *Jn* 3:16). In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus showed himself to be the one consecrated by the Lord and "sent to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed" (*Lk* 4:18). These messianic actions, associated with the Jubilee year, bear eloquent witness to the mission he received from the Father. In his compassion, Christ drew near to the sick in body and spirit, and brought them healing; he pardoned sinners and gave them new life. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who cares for his sheep (cf. *Jn* 10:11-18; *Ezek* 34:1-31). He is the Good Samaritan who stoops to help the injured man, binds his wounds and cares for him (cf. *Lk* 10:30-37).

At the culmination of his mission, Jesus gave the ultimate proof of his care for us by offering himself on the cross to set us free from the slavery of sin and death. By the sacrificial gift of his life, he opened for us the path of love. To each of us he says, "Follow me; go and do likewise" (cf. *Lk* 10:37).

5. *A culture of care in the life of Jesus' followers*

The spiritual and corporal works of mercy were at the heart of charity as practiced by the early Church. The first generation of Christians shared what they had, so that no one among them would be in need

(cf. *Acts* 4:34-35). They strove to make their community a welcoming home, concerned for every human need and ready to care for those most in need. It became customary to make voluntary offerings in order to feed the poor, bury the dead and care for orphans, the elderly and victims of disasters like shipwrecks. In later times, when the generosity of Christians had lost its initial fervor, some Fathers of the Church insisted that property was meant by God for the common good. For Saint Ambrose, "nature poured out all things for the common use of all... and thus produced a common right for all, but greed has made it a right for only a few". [6] After the persecutions of the first centuries, the Church used her newfound freedom to inspire society and its culture. "The needs of the times called forth new efforts in the service of Christian charity. History records innumerable examples of practical works of mercy... The Church's work among the poor was to a great extent highly organized. There arose many institutions for the relief of every human need: hospitals, poor houses, orphanages, foundling homes, shelters for travelers..." [7]

6. *The principles of the Church's social doctrine as the basis for a culture of care*

The *diakonia* of the Church's origins, enriched by the reflection of the Fathers and enlivened over the centuries by the active charity of many luminous witnesses to the faith, became the beating heart of the Church's social doctrine. This doctrine is offered to all people of good will as a precious patrimony of principles, criteria and proposals that can serve as a "grammar" of care: commitment to promoting the dignity of each human person, solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, the pursuit of the common good and concern for protection of creation.

*Care as promotion of the dignity and rights of each person*

"The very concept of the person, which originated and developed in Christianity, fosters the pursuit of a fully human development. Person always signifies relationship, not individualism; it affirms inclusion, not exclusion, unique and inviolable dignity, not exploitation". [8] Each human person is an end

in himself or herself, and never simply a means to be valued only for his or her usefulness. Persons are created to live together in families, communities and societies, where all are equal in dignity. Human rights derive from this dignity, as do human duties, like the responsibility to welcome and assist the poor, the sick, the excluded, every one of our "neighbours, near or far in space and time" [9]

*Care for the common good*

Every aspect of social, political and economic life achieves its fullest end when placed at the service of the common good, in other words, "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily". [10] Consequently, our plans and projects should always take into account their effects on the entire human family, and consider their consequences for the present and for coming generations. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us the truth and timeliness of this fact. In the face of the pandemic, "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", [11] since "no one reaches salvation by themselves" [12] and no state can ensure the common good of its population if it remains isolated. [13]

*Care through solidarity*

Solidarity concretely expresses our love for others, not as a vague sentiment but as a "firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all". [14] Solidarity helps us to regard others – whether as individuals or, more broadly, as peoples or nations – as a means to be used and then discarded once no longer useful, but as our neighbours, companions on our journey, called like ourselves to partake of the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God.

*Care and protection of creation*

The Encyclical *Laudato Si'* is fully aware that all creation is interconnected. It also highlights our need to listen to the cry of the poor and, at the same time, to the cry

# Admission of Women to Lay Ministries of Lector and Acolyte

## Understanding the Nuances of the M.P. *Spiritus Domini*

By Jaime B. Achacoso, JCD

Another Novelty from Pope Francis?

“With a *Motu proprio* released last Monday (11.I.2021), Pope Francis established that from now on the ministries of Lector and Acolyte are to be open to women, in a stable and institutionalized form through a specific mandate.” Thus began the Vatican News release of 12 January 2021—which had immediately been picked up and—as expected—misunderstood by the secular press to mean that women can now proclaim the Gospel at Holy Mass (perhaps even give the homily), a step closer to the ordination of women.

However, the next paragraph of the Vatican News release doused any such misplaced pretensions, when it clearly stated: “There is nothing new about women proclaiming the Word of God during liturgical celebrations or carrying out a service at the altar as altar servers or as Eucharistic ministers. In many communities throughout the world these practices are already authorized by local bishops.”

What then is new in this *Motu proprio*? The Vatican News release explained it briefly: “Up to this point, this has occurred without a true and proper institutional mandate, as an exception to what Pope St Paul VI had established when, in 1972, even while abolishing the so-called *minor orders*, he decided to maintain that access to these ministries be granted only to men because both were considered to be preparatory to the eventual admission to holy orders. Now, in the wake of the discernment which has emerged from the last Synods of Bishops, Pope Francis wanted to formalize and institutionalize the presence of women at the altar.”

Let us try to understand the novelty of the new *Motu proprio*, by quoting extensively from a much older one from Pope St. Paul VI, to which this new one refers.

The Existing Legislation:

Pope Paul VI’s M.P. *Ministeria Quaedam* (15.VIII.1972)

Towards the end of his pontificate Pope Paul VI issued the *Motu proprio Ministeria Quaedam* (15.VIII.1972), in which he briefly examined “certain ministries (that) were established by the Church even in the most ancient times for the purpose of suitably giving worship to God and for offering service to the people of God according to their needs. The conferring of these functions often took place by a special rite, in which (...) a Christian was established in a special class or rank for the fulfillment of some ecclesiastical function.”

“Some of these functions, which were more closely connected with the liturgical celebration, slowly came to be considered as a training in preparation for the reception of sacred orders. As a result, the offices of *porter*, *reader*, *exorcist*, and *acolyte* were called *minor orders* in the Latin Church in relation to the *subdiaconate*, *diaconate*, and *priesthood*, which were called *major orders*. Generally, though not everywhere, these minor orders were reserved to those who received them as steps toward the priesthood.” We can note, therefore, that traditionally, those minor orders were considered as preparatory and connected to the ordained or ministerial priesthood.

The novelty introduced by Paul VI was the recognition that “since the minor orders have not always been the same and many functions connected with them, as at present, have also been exercised by the laity, it seems fitting to re-examine this practice and to adapt it to contemporary needs. What is obsolete in these offices will thus be removed and what is useful retained.”

Among the particular offices that were preserved and adapted to contemporary needs were “those that are in a special way more closely connected with the ministries of the word and of the altar and that in the Latin Church are called the offices of *reader* (*lector*) and *acolyte* and the *subdiaconate*. It is fitting to preserve and adapt these in such a way, that from this time on there will be two offices: that of *lector* and that of *acolyte*, which will include the functions of the *subdiaconate*.” Furthermore, the *Motu proprio* established that: “It is in accordance with the reality itself and with the contemporary outlook that the above-mentioned ministries should no longer be called *minor orders*; their conferral will not be called *ordination*, but *institution*. Only those who have received the diaconate, however, will be clerics in the true sense and will be so regarded. This arrangement will bring out more clearly the distinction between clergy and laity, between what is proper and reserved to the clergy and what can be entrusted to the laity.”

In effect, what Paul VI did with *Ministeria quaedam* could be reduced to two: (1) abolish the so-called *minor orders*, reducing them to the two ministries of *lector* and *acolyte*, which would be stably conferred by *institution* (not *ordination*) through an adequate liturgical rite; and (2) establish a clear distinction between the *lay ministries* (lector and acolyte) that are founded on the royal priesthood of the laity by virtue of sacrament of Baptism, and the ordained or sacred ministries (diaconate and



Girls assist at a Mass at the Baclaran Church in Parañaque City. PHOTO FROM BACLARAN CHURCH

priesthood) that are founded on the ministerial priesthood by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders.

The Ministry of Lector (Reader)

*Ministeria quaedam* clearly stated the functions of the *lector* as follows: “The reader is appointed for a function proper to him, that of reading the word of God in the liturgical assembly. Accordingly:

“he is to proclaim the readings from sacred Scripture, *except for the gospel*, in the Mass and other sacred celebrations;

“he is to recite the psalm between the readings when there is no psalmist;

“he is to present the intentions for the general intercessions in the absence of a deacon or cantor;

“he is to direct the singing and the participation by the faithful;

“he is to instruct the faithful for the worthy reception of the sacraments.

“He may also, insofar as may be necessary, take care of preparing other faithful who are appointed on a temporary basis to read the Scriptures in liturgical celebrations.”

On the other hand, the same document expressed the duties of the lector to form himself adequately for the fulfillment of the above functions: “Aware of the office he has undertaken, the reader is to make every effort and employ suitable means to acquire that increasingly warm and living love and knowledge of Scripture that will make him a more perfect disciple of the Lord.”

The Ministry of Acolyte (Not to be confused with Altar Boy or Altar Girl)

The *Motu proprio* of Paul VI also clearly stated the content of the ministry of acolyte as follows:

“The acolyte is appointed to aid the deacon and to minister to the priest. It is his duty therefore:

“to attend to the service of the altar and to assist the deacon and the priest in liturgical celebrations, especially in the celebration of Mass;

“he is also to distribute communion as a special minister when the ministers spoken of in the *Codex Iuris Canonici* can. 845 are not available or are prevented by ill health, age, or another pastoral ministry from performing this function, or when the number of communicants is so great that the celebration of Mass would be unduly prolonged.

“In the same extraordinary circumstances an acolyte may be entrusted with publicly exposing the blessed sacrament for adoration by the faithful and afterward replacing it, *but not with blessing the people*.

“He may also, to the extent needed, take care of instructing other faithful who on a temporary basis are appointed to assist the priest or deacon in liturgical celebrations by carrying the missal, cross, candles, etc., or by performing other such duties.”

On the other hand, the same document expressed the duty of the acolyte to form himself for the ministry in which he has been instituted:

“He will perform these functions more worthily if he participates in the holy eucharist with increasingly fervent devotion, receives nourishment from it, and deepens his knowledge about it;

“the acolyte should learn all matters concerning public divine worship and strive to grasp their inner spiritual meaning;

“in that way he will be able each day to offer himself entirely to God, be an example to all by his gravity and reverence in church, and have a sincere love for the Mystical Body of Christ, the people of God, especially for the weak and the sick.”

Limitations of the Ministry of Acolyte and Lector

Established by *Ministeria quaedam* The *Motu proprio* of Paul VI laid down two basic limitations:

(1) “In accordance with the ancient tradition of the Church, institution to the ministries of reader and acolyte is reserved to men.” This is understandable given the traditional notion of these ministries as preparation for the priesthood.

(2) “The conferring of ministries does not bring with it the right to support or remuneration from the Church.” This is a norm that had to do with economics—i.e., the Church just could not afford to remunerate such ministries; on the other hand, the minimal dedication required by such ministries also precluded the need to remunerate those who exercised them.

Novelty and Nuances of Pope Francis’ M.P. *Spiritus Domini*

One realizes that all of the above functions of the lector and acolyte are already being done in most parishes. However, especially in the case of the functions of the acolyte, they are being done for the most part not by way of institution in a stable ministry but by way of exceptions to the general norm laid down by Paul VI, by authority of the Local Ordinary. In the case of acolytes, the function has been carried out mostly by what are commonly known as altar servers: traditionally known as altar boys but of late also altar girls.

The novelty now introduced by Pope Francis is to open to women the stable lay ministries of lector and acolyte, such that they can receive—by way of *institution* and through a proper liturgical *rite*—these lay ministries. The reason is stated clearly by the new *Motu proprio*: “[These] ministries instituted by the Church are based on the common condition of being baptized and the royal priesthood received in the Sacrament of Baptism; they are essentially distinct from the ordained ministry received in the Sacrament of Orders. A consolidated practice in the Latin Church has also confirmed, in fact, that these lay ministries, since they are based on the Sacrament of Baptism, may be entrusted to all suitable faithful, whether

male or female, in accordance with what is already implicitly provided for by Canon 230, §2.”

Having established that norm, the Pope proceeded to codify it by modifying the existing can. 230, §1 of the Code of Canon Law as follows: “*Lay persons of suitable age and with the gifts determined by decree of the Episcopal Conference may be permanently assigned, by means of the established liturgical rite, to the ministries of lectors and acolytes; however, the conferment of such a role does not entitle them to support or remuneration from the Church*”.

In perfect juridic technique, the Pope further “order the amendment of the other provisions having the force of law which refer to this canon.”

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, let me point out a couple of nuances that I think are important in the reading of the this new norm:

1<sup>st</sup>, that as laid down by c.8, §1, the modified can. 230, §1 shall take effect after a *vacatio legis* of three months after the publication of the new *Motu proprio* in *L’Osservatore Romano* and subsequently in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*—i.e., after 10 April 2021.

2<sup>nd</sup>, the norm laid down—of admitting women to the stable lay ministries of lector and acolyte—should not be taken in conjunction with the praxis for altar boys, which are not a matter of stable lay ministries but are quite transitory and even informal. The traditional praxis of altar knights or altar boys have always been a rich seedbed for vocations to the priesthood; many priests (the author included) first felt their calling to a life of dedication to God in the context of serving Mass as children. It is my humble opinion that allowing altar girls—who tend to be more responsible than boys at that age—may discourage many young boys from joining the group, thereby doing away with an age-old seedbed for vocations for the seminary.

3<sup>rd</sup> Most importantly, the *Motu proprio* cannot be taken as a step closer to the ordination of women. As the text clearly stated, these ministries—of lector and acolyte—are essentially distinct from the ordained ministry received in the Sacrament of Orders.” Furthermore, in a letter to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith accompanying the new *Motu proprio*, dated 11.I.2021, the Pope reiterated St. John Paul II’s magisterium closing the door on ordination of women: “A clearer distinction between the attributions of what are today called *non-ordained* (or *lay*) *ministries* and *ordained ministries* makes it possible to dissolve the reservation of the former to men alone. If, with regard to ordained ministries, the Church ‘does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination’ (cf. St. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, 22.V.1994), for non-ordained ministries it is possible, and today it seems opportune, to overcome this reservation.”

# Fratelli Tutti: an overview and commentary

By Fr. Amado L. Picardal, CSSR, STD

ON October 3, 2020—a day before the feast of St. Francis of Assisi—Pope Francis signed the new social encyclical at the altar of the basilica of St. Francis. What is this document all about and what is its connection to *Laudato Si* which addresses the ecological crisis? This is encyclical written five years after *Laudato Si* and also inspired by St. Francis of Assisi is a significant document that offers an alternative vision to a fragmented world that is in the midst of a pandemic and going through global economic, social, political and geopolitical crises and unable to come up with a global coordinated response. It is a long document—43,000 words—and it is so rich and substantial that an article is not enough to adequately explain its content in depth. It needs to be read, studied more deeply and above all it needs to be lived and applied in various aspects of our life—social, economic, political, cultural, etc.

What I have to offer is an overview and my commentary as a theologian. My presentation has two parts: (1) overview of the document (highlighting significant texts) and (2) a commentary that focuses on the theological theme or framework that I believe is key to understanding its continuity with *Laudato Si*.

## Overview

The introduction clearly affirms the inspiration of St. Francis in this encyclical. *Fratelli Tutti* translated as “brothers all” was how St. Francis addressed his confreres as he proposed how they should live the gospel. Pope Francis focuses on one of the important counsels: “a love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance.” The pope acknowledges St. Francis’ inspiration on his previous encyclical *Laudato Si*. According to Pope Francis, St. Francis recognized his closeness with the whole of creation and regarded all creatures as brothers and sisters and yet was even closer to his fellow human beings. This prompted Pope Francis to devote this encyclical on human fraternity and social friendship. He also mentions taking up some of the themes found in the document on fraternity which he signed with the grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb in Abu Dhabi in 2019.

The encyclical has eight chapters: Ch 1: Dark clouds over a closed world; Ch 2: A stranger on the road; Ch 3: Envisaging and engendering an open world; Ch 4: A heart open to the whole world; Ch 5: A better kind of politics; Ch 6: Dialogue and friendship in society; Ch 7: Paths of renewed encounter; Ch 8: Religions at the service of fraternity in our world

Following the See-Judge-Act framework, this can be divided into three sections:

**I. The Global Context/Situation** (chapter. 1), **II. The Christian Vision/Message** (chapters.2-3), **III. The Concrete Response/Action** (chapters 4-8).

### The Global Context

Like other encyclicals *Fratelli Tutti* begins with the human condition or experience which the Church finds herself in as she proclaims the appropriate Christian message—the Good News. This requires reading the signs of the times. This is the starting point of the SEE-JUDGE-ACT method.

The following are among the concerns that are discussed in the first chapter entitled “Dark Clouds Over a Closed World”:

A fragmented, divided world despite previous efforts to integrate nations (weakness of international and regional institutions)

Individualism and narrow nationalism

Populism - popular & national unity influenced by various ideologies is creating new forms of selfishness and a loss of the social sense under the guise of defending national interests

Globalization of indifference, throw-away culture (abortion, euthanasia, neglect of the elderly, discrimination against women, modern-day slavery/ human trafficking), racism,

lack of respect for human dignity and human rights.

Continuing violent conflicts and wars



Pope Francis at an inter-faith meeting in Bangkok, Thailand on November 22, 2019. VATICAN MEDIA

Closed borders to migrants fleeing poverty, wars, climate change, etc.

Hyperconnected digital communication that promotes hatred, division, violence, addiction, and that fails to promote genuine friendship and community.

Lack of global approach/plan to address global crisis/problems (pandemic, economic, ecological, etc) abetted by politics without vision and motivated by narrow self-interest.

Extremism and polarization as political tools that promote perpetual confrontation.

Behind all the division, inequality, poverty, violence and other related problems is neoliberalism that makes us “more alone than ever in an increasing massified world that promotes individual interests and weakens the communitarian dimensions of life” (FT 12). This is indeed a prophetic critique of this dominant global economic system and culture.

Amidst this bleak landscape, Pope Francis ends this chapter by pointing to a sign of hope in the time of the pandemic: “lives are interwoven with and sustained by ordinary people valiantly shaping the decisive events of our shared history: doctors, nurses, pharmacists, storekeepers and supermarket workers, cleaning personnel, caretakers, transport workers, men and women working to provide essential services and public safety, volunteers, priests and religious... They understood that no one is saved alone.” (FT 54).

## 2. The Christian Vision: Love that impels us towards Universal Communion

The second section offers an alternative vision that is needed based on the Christian message of the primacy of love that impels us to universal communion—expressed in fraternity and social friendship. Chapter 2, entitled “The stranger on the road” is a reflection on the parable of the Good Samaritan. The question that is posed: which of the character can we identify with? Are we preoccupied with our own concerns and obligations—including our religious duties—that we fail to respond to their needs?

We are challenged to examine our own response to the plight of others that we encounter. Like the good Samaritan, we cannot be blind and indifferent to the suffering of others. We are called to care for others, to become neighbors to one another moved by love that is universal, that overcomes prejudices, personal interests and cultural barriers.

Heeding the command of Jesus at the end of the parable: “go and do likewise” we are called to follow the example of the Good Samaritan:

Today we have a great opportunity to express our innate sense of fraternity, to be Good Samaritans who bear the pain of other people’s troubles rather than fomenting greater hatred and resentment. Like the chance traveler in the parable, we need only have a pure and simple desire to be a people, a community, constant and tireless in the effort to include, integrate and lift up the fallen.” (FT 77)

Our response should not only be as individuals but as communities, starting from below, at the local level and expanding beyond our borders. The theme of common response to the plight of others motivated by love is further developed in chapter 3—“Envisaging and engendering

an open world”. This vision which is the alternative to the “closed world” exhorts us to go outside of ourselves and be open to others in love that “creates bonds and expands existence, for it draws people out of themselves and towards others.” (FT 88).” This is the love that moves us to universal communion:

Love also impels us towards universal communion. No one can mature or find fulfilment by withdrawing from others. By its very nature, love calls for growth in openness and the ability to accept others as part of a continuing adventure that makes every periphery converge in a greater sense of mutual belonging.” (FT 95).

Pope Francis observes that “the seeds of a vocation to form a community composed of brothers and sisters who accept and care for one another (FT 96)” has been sown in the, various ethnic groups, societies and culture throughout history. He associates social friendship with love that transcends borders which “makes true universal openness possible.” (FT 99). Universal communion is linked with fraternity and social friendship. This is also associated with solidarity which is first experienced within the family: “families are the first place where the values of love and fraternity, togetherness and sharing, concern and care for others are lived out and handed on.” (FT 114). This solidarity also exists among the poor and those who suffer and does not merely involve “sporadic acts of generosity” but “thinking and acting in terms of community” FT 116).

Thus, the appropriate Christian vision can be summed up as love that impels us towards universal communion – that enables us to become aware that we are brothers and sisters belonging to a universal family called to promote fraternity and social friendship. This is the vision that is needed in the midst of a divided and fragmented world in order to address the common problems and crises that we face. The primacy of love that impels all to universal communion is the framework for dialogue and in developing a world that is open and interconnected. This is the alternative to neoliberalism that is grounded on selfishness, individualism, separateness, inequality, exploitation of the weak by the strong and which abets violence.

## 3. Call to Action

This vision of love and universal communion that is at the heart of fraternity and social friendship is the framework for addressing the problems and concerns related to: migration, politics, the financial and economic system, in promoting peace, the role of religions in addressing these. Chapters 4-8 contains the concrete application of this vision to these concerns.

Chapter 4 which is entitled “A Heart Open to the World” addresses the problem of migration and the closing of borders to migrants fleeing persecution, poverty, armed conflict, climate change. Pope Francis affirms that “our response to the arrival of migrating persons can be summarized by four words: welcome, protect, promote and integrate.” (FT 129). This chapter also addresses the relation between the local and the global where the vision of universal communion is applied:

“For a healthy relationship

between love of one’s native land and a sound sense of belonging to our larger human family, it is helpful to keep in mind that global society is not the sum total of different countries, but rather the communion that exists among them. The mutual sense of belonging is prior to the emergence of individual groups. Each particular group becomes part of the fabric of universal communion and there discovers its own beauty.” (FT 149)

The application of love, fraternity and social friendship at the service of common good is discussed in chapter 5 which is entitled “A better kind of politics”:

“The development of a global community of fraternity based on the practice of social friendship on the part of peoples and nations calls for a better kind of politics, one truly at the service of the common good.” (FT 154)

Criticizing the failure of neoliberalism to address poverty and inequality, Pope Francis asserts that a better kind of politics can oversee the reform and renewal of the economic system directed to the common good:

“Global society is suffering from grave structural deficiencies that cannot be resolved by piecemeal solutions or quick fixes. Much needs to change, through fundamental reform and major renewal. Only a healthy politics, involving the most diverse sectors and skills, is capable of overseeing this process. An economy that is an integral part of a political, social, cultural and popular programme directed to the common good could pave the way for “different possibilities which do not involve stifling human creativity and its ideals of progress, but rather directing that energy along new channels”. (FT 179)

The love that impels towards universal communion is applied in the political sphere when Pope Francis speaks about political love: “For whereas individuals can help others in need, when they join together in initiating social processes of fraternity and justice for all, they enter the “field of charity at its most vast, namely political charity”. This entails working for a social and political order whose soul is social charity”. (FT 180)

When talking about love, Pope Francis insists that it should go beyond the intimate interpersonal level and find expression in “macro relationships: social, economic and political” (FT 181). This kind of love can be expressed in “those acts of charity that spur people to create more sound institutions, more just regulations, more supportive structures” and that “strive to organize and structure society so that one’s neighbor will not find himself in poverty” (FT 186).

In chapter 6 Pope Francis highlight the importance of dialogue in society which should be carried out in the spirit of fraternity and friendship. Dialogue requires encounter with others, respecting each other’s point of view and legitimate interests, human dignity and accompanied by kindness.

Chapter 7 (Paths to encounter) focuses on the promotion of peace which is connected to justice, mercy and forgiveness. Pope Francis expresses the “need for peacemakers, men and women prepared to work boldly and creatively to initiate processes of healing and renewed encounter” (FT 225). While affirming the centrality

of reconciliation and forgiveness he warns that an “inadequate understanding and presentation of these profound convictions can lead to fatalism, apathy and injustice, or even intolerance and violence” (FT 237). Forgiveness does not mean “renouncing our own rights, confronting corrupt officials, criminals or those who would debase our dignity” or allowing the oppressor to “keep oppressing us, or letting him think that what he does is acceptable”. True love for the oppressor means “seeking ways to make him cease his oppression; it means stripping him of a power that he does not know how to use, and that diminishes his own humanity and that of others.” (FT 241). Forgiveness does not mean impunity nor denying the right of the victims of oppression to seek redress of grievances and justice. Thus, while appealing for forgiveness and reconciliation, the right of the victims of oppression to seek redress of grievances and justice is affirmed: Forgiveness is precisely what enables us to pursue justice without falling into a spiral of revenge or the injustice of forgetting.” (FT 252)

In this chapter Pope Francis reaffirms the Church’s opposition to war and questions the possibility of a just war theory in today’s complex circumstances and the development of nuclear arms:

“We can no longer think of war as a solution, because its risks will probably always be greater than its supposed benefits... In view of this, it is very difficult nowadays to invoke the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak of the possibility of a “just war”. Never again war! (FT 258)

He also restates the opposition to capital punishment pointing out that this has been imposed due to judicial error in many cases or used by totalitarian and dictatorial regimes to suppress dissent. He makes this appeal: “All Christians and people of good will are today called to work not only for the abolition of the death penalty, legal or illegal, in all its forms, but also to work for the improvement of prison conditions, out of respect for the human dignity of persons deprived of their freedom. (FT 268)

The final chapter focuses on religions at the service of fraternity in the world and their role in promoting peace. The role and mission of the Church in the public sphere is asserted: “she cannot and must not remain on the sideline in the building of a better world, or fail to “reawaken the spiritual energy” that can contribute to the betterment of society (FT 276).” Pope Francis asserts that: “the wellspring of human dignity and fraternity is in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. From it, there arises, “for Christian thought and for the action of the Church, the primacy given to relationship, to the encounter with the sacred mystery of the other, to universal communion with the entire human family, as a vocation of all. (FT 277)

Echoing some of the themes in the “Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together” signed in Abu Dhabi with Imam Al-Tayyeb, Pope Francis emphasizes that religious leaders have an important role in building peace: “At times fundamentalist violence is unleashed in some groups, of whatever religion, by the rashness of their leaders. Yet, “the commandment of peace is inscribed in the depths of the religious traditions that we represent... As religious leaders, we are called to be true ‘people of dialogue’, to cooperate in building peace not as intermediaries but as authentic mediators... Each one of us is called to be an artisan of peace, by uniting and not dividing, by extinguishing hatred and not holding on to it, by opening paths of dialogue and not by constructing new walls”. (FT 284)

In the last part of the encyclical the Pope pays homage to persons whom he considers as inspiration and models of universal fraternity: St. Francis of Assisi, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Blessed Charles de Foucauld.

*Fratelli Tutti* ends with two prayers—interreligious and ecumenical. In the second prayer

# Yabang 2020: Walking with Faith through the Darkness into Light

Pastoral Exhortation on the Second Year of Preparation for the 50th Anniversary of the Archdiocese of Lipa

*“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” (Isaiah 9:2)*

My dearly beloved People of God in the Archdiocese of Lipa:

## Introduction

The year 2020 is the Year of YABANG and the Year of Faith in the Archdiocese of Lipa in preparation for our Golden Jubilee as an archdiocese in 2022. Together with all Filipino Catholics, we thank the Lord for the seed of Christ's Gospel sown among our ancestors almost 500 years ago. The year 2019 was the Year of YABONG and the Year of Hope when we looked back and thanked the Lord for the growth and “*pagyabong*” of faith in what is now the Archdiocese of Lipa. In this year 2020, we look at the fruits of our “*faith working through love*” (Galatians 5:6). Our “*pagyayabang*” is rooted in the grace of God: “*Let those who boast, boast of this: that in their prudence they know Me, know that I, the Lord, act with fidelity, justice and integrity on earth*” (Jeremiah 9:23). In our celebrations, we look at the story of our individual and communal encounters with the Lord, and we continue to share the message of the story of our faith. We surveyed some of our faithful – young and old from different sectors – and listened to their faith-experiences and spiritual insights. Through this pastoral exhortation, I wish to offer a summary reflection as we end the Year of YABANG and give pastoral direction as we look forward and continue this providential and fruitful journey of living our faith with charity.

OUR JOURNEY OF FAITH: “*Jesus went in to stay with them.*” (Luke 24:29)

The Year of Yabang started with a bang! As the Philippine Church was celebrating the Solemnity of the Baptism of the Lord on January 12, 2020, Taal Volcano grumbled and spewed smoke and ashes. Thereafter came the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exposed our false securities, our fragmentation and our inability to work together (cfr. Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti no. 7). Because of the two crises and the “*storms in life*”, we found “*ourselves afraid and lost...we were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm. We have realized that we are on 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*” (Pope Francis, Urbi et Orbi, March 2020). Our journey of faith as a people of God maybe likened to that of the two disciples walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). They walked looking downcast, with broken hearts, dashed hope, shattered dreams, stalled plans with unsure steps towards an uncertain future. They were heading home, but it seemed they were going nowhere. But then, not all was lost. Jesus drew near to walk with the disciples, visibly present as their Companion on the way. He asked, and then listened to their story. And as the Risen Lord spoke, He provided them with His glorious light that broke through the darkness of their life. He broke open to them God's word, causing their hearts to burn inside them. Jesus broke bread with them at table, and then their eyes were opened, and they were able to perceive and recognize Him. Immediately, they joyfully returned to Jerusalem and broke the Good News to their fellow disciples, proclaiming that Jesus was alive. Their lives were never the same. Clothed with Power on high at Pentecost, they became witnesses of the Lord's mercy, beginning from Jerusalem and spreading outward to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). In fact, the story of the disciples is also our story—our own story of faith as we walk through the darkness into the light.

PRESENCE: “*The Lord is with you.*” (Luke 1:28b)

Like the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, we also felt the presence of the Lord, our Good Shepherd, who never really left us. The Lord is with us...He is always with us! We heard His comforting voice, we recognized His loving face, and we felt His



Archbishop Gilbert Garcera of Lipa speaks to the parishioners of San Nicolas de Tolentino Parish in San Nicolas, Batangas. PHOTO FROM THE ARCHDIOCESE OF LIPA

warm embrace in and through one another. There were no public religious gatherings, but virtual Masses were celebrated and online prayers recited which were viewed and followed in the domestic churches—in the homes of Batangueño families here and abroad. There were restrictions to in-person gatherings, but online meetings and group chats have become real encounters which made connection and coordination possible.

One parish initiative was KUBID, meaning, Kumustahan, Ug-nayan, Balitaan, Interaksyon, at Damayan. A lay pastoral leader remarked, “Nang ang ECQ ay nagsimula, ang mga Misa sa mga simbahan ay nawala. Ngunit ang Panginoon at ang Simbahan ay hindi nawala, na sa patuloy na pagsamba at damayan ay kitangkita ng madla.” All these personal and collective experiences of saving encounter with the Lord simply illustrate what I said in my Pastoral Letter at the re-opening of churches for public gatherings: “*Di man nakapasok sa gusaling simbahan ay ramdam naman natin ang presensya at pangangalaga ng Panginoon.*” Amidst those challenging dark moments when we were in grief and in fear, deprived and searching, the witness of faith and love shone out most brightly. Our shared faith-experiences - when divine mercy and human misery met - confirm what we profess: that the Lord is the Emmanuel, God-with-us, who gives direction, meaning and purpose to our journey. He is with us always to gracefully meet our deepest needs.

PROVISION: “*My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*” (Luke 1:47)

The Lord Jesus fed the disciples with the bread of His word and the living bread of His Body, broken and shared. Like them, we, too, experienced how true what Scripture proclaims: “*The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack*” (Psalm 23:1). He has provided us not just with food and material goods but with His word that has been our constant guide and a sure source of strength. There were many “*lamp-bearers*” in the archdiocese. As the saying goes, “*If there's a will, there's a way.*” And so find ways our faithful did. God's word was read and homilies were given in online Masses. On their own initiative, though surely inspired by the Spirit of God, countless people also shared God's word and spiritual reflections through various social media platforms. One parish has ISKol which is “*I-Share Ko Lang*” while others host online Talk Shows and air radio programs. In some other parishes, there is SALITANGLAW. Our lay

pastoral leaders can surely relate to what one Pastoral Coordinator said: “*The parish has communicated the message of the compassion of the Lord and of the Church through the WWW of words, worship and works.*” God's word has been served and shared not just through the spoken and written word but also, very importantly, by concrete works of mercy and generosity: “*Nang pumutok ang bulkan, sumabog ang bayanihan; nang ang pandemya ay kumalat, ang pagdadamayan ay lumaganap.*” The Lipa Archdiocese Social Action Commission (LASAC) spearheaded and directed relief operations and social services in the archdiocese in coordination with parishes, religious organizations and movements, and Catholic Schools as well as individuals, families and institutions. With the assistance of countless volunteers that included the youth, “*the Lord's hands and feet of providence, even if wounded, have reached out and stretched forth to those who need it most*” (Addendum to the Ministry on Social Services Pastoral Exhortation). Our words and works of love are our response to the Lord's Eucharistic challenge: “*Do this in memory of Me.*” As we love one another as Jesus loved us (cfr. John 13:34), we show that, indeed, the Lord who guides also provides (cfr. Isaiah 58:11). Because of this, “*a smile comes to us from within, because we see hope*” (Pope Francis, General Audience, December 7, 2016).

PERCEPTION: “*Let us go... to see what the Lord has made known to us.*” (Luke 2:15b)

Our bodily eyes shed tears because of our pain and suffering; by God's grace, it cleansed our eyes of faith as well. Thus, we were able to see His loving presence and saving intervention in us and through us – divine provision in sync with human cooperation by which Jesus is “*born*” and revealed in our midst. Despite all the crises, we have been able to perceive and see “*the many new paths of hope, for God continues to sow abundant seeds of goodness in our human family*” (Fratelli Tutti, no. 54). Our young people experienced the comforting and uplifting love of the Lord. One shared an inspiring insight regarding this: “*Naiparamdam ko sa iba ang presensya at pangangalaga ng Panginoon at ng Simbahan sa pamamagitan ng pagbabahagi ng Salita ng Diyos na aking nababasa at naririnig sa paraan na mas makakagaan ng pakiramdam upang maibsan ang takot at pangamba. Mas napapatibay nito ang paniniwala, pananalig at pag-asa na ang Diyos ay kumikilos sa ibat ibang paraan...*” It was much the same with the disciples of

Emmaus who found light to see and hope to move forward because Jesus warmed their hearts. Pope Francis once asked: “*Are we still a Church capable of warming hearts?*” We say “*Yes*” because our words and actions of love warm the hearts, especially of those whose hope is flickering and whose faith is failing. We say “*Yes*” because we find ways to be Good Samaritans who “*bend down to touch and heal the wounds of others.... and help another to get up*” (Fratelli Tutti, no. 70). We say “*Yes*” because we proclaim love in word and in deed.

PROCLAMATION: “*They made known the message that had been told them...*” (Luke 2:17)

Love heard and felt engendered in the disciples of Emmaus a burning transformative love that urged them to tell others about their encounter with the Risen Lord, and how it changed their life. They strongly felt what Saint Paul later wrote: “*The love of Christ impels us*” (2 Corinthians 5:14). That missionary impulse to proclaim the Good News, inspired and sustained by the Holy Spirit, started from the city of Jerusalem and then moved outward to the ends of the world. We have seen the same spiritual and missionary movement of the faithful of this province of Batangas as they shared the blessing of their faith, showing a similar “*ripple-effect*” – from their own families and then to their neighborhoods, from acquaintances to strangers, from churches to workplaces. We know we need to do more in view of spreading the Good News to the wider community outside our comfort zone. For this reason, let us keep love burning in our grateful hearts, which moves us to speak and to share. Pope Francis said: “*The joy of evangelizing always arises from grateful remembrance: it is a grace which we constantly need to implore. The apostles never forgot the moment when Jesus touched their hearts. The believer is essentially 'one who remembers.'*” (Evangelii Gaudium, no. 13). We reiterate this truth which is also a challenge for each of us—it is gratitude and love in the heart that will always inspire people to share and to serve, again and again, without end.

PENTECOST: “*They were overjoyed at seeing the star.*” (Matthew 2:10)

As we leave painful memories of 2020 behind, but treasuring the gems of lessons learned, we begin again! “*Let us take an active part in healing and renewing our troubled societies... Let us foster what is good and place ourselves at its service*” (Fratelli Tutti, no. 77). The world has changed and continues to change towards the new normal. With this

development, we must keep up or else we fall behind and become less and less responsive and relevant to the lives of our people. Very encouraging in relation to this is what one Parish Pastoral Coordinator shared: “*We will continue to challenge ourselves to come up with different breakthroughs, and further innovate and improve the programs which will keep us relevant and effective to our parishioners, to the community, and to the Church.*” This is “*courageous creativity*” as we harness our Archdiocesan Planned Pastoral Strategies (APPS) to respond to changing circumstances. “*Pope Francis recalled the importance of 'creativity', meaning thereby 'seeking new ways', that is 'seeking how best to proclaim the Gospel'*” (Instruction on the Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community, no. 1). We will always remember and treasure, we will serve and share our “*giftedness*” in the Spirit, which “*must also enflame the hearts of all of us today to engage in mission*” (CBCP Pastoral Letter for 2021 Year of *Missio Ad Gentes*).

## Conclusion

We have gone a long way, but our journey of faith as Batangueños through the darkness into even brighter light is still continuing. As we end this pastoral exhortation, we find inspiration, guidance and strength from the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Caysasay, and from St. Joseph, the Patron of our Archdiocese. They had their own story and journey of faith, which is part of the Mystery of Christmas. At the announcement, they realized that the Lord was present in their lives. At the visitation, Mary joyfully proclaimed the greatness of God who provides and saves. At the birth of Jesus, the shepherds saw the Child in a manger and perceived the Savior, Messiah and Lord as the angel told them. They then proclaimed to others what they had seen and heard. And the magi from the East, who searched and traveled to adore the new-born King, returned home still inwardly inspired by the heavenly light. The story of Christmas and Emmaus is constantly played out in our own archdiocesan story and journey of faith whereby we receive and then we give the blessings of Presence, Provision, Perception, Proclamation and Pentecost, with or without crisis, “*in season and out of season*” (2 Timothy 4:2). We commit ourselves to treasure and to share these blessings, hopeful that the seed of faith, implanted by missionaries centuries ago, may continue to bear fruit more abundantly. Let us live as we believe, so that, sustained by hope, our faith will always work through charity (cfr. Galatians 5:6).

I would like to thank all our priests, the religious, and the laity, including the youth, our Catholic Schools and the different religious organizations and movements in our archdiocese as well as to the LGUs and frontliners for their conscientious and concerted efforts to be involved in the eight ministries of the archdiocese. In particular, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to Rev. Fr. Jayson Siapco, the Chairman of the ad hoc Committee on the Pastoral Response to COVID 19, and to acknowledge the efforts of Lipa Archdiocesan Social Action Commission (LASAC), Inc. and its Malasakit Para sa Batangas program in the planning and implementation of our activities this year, 2020. May I thank also Rev. Fr. Fruto Nepomuceno and all those who worked with him for the celebration of the Year of Ecumenism and Inter-Religious Dialogue and Indigenous Peoples this year.

Let me end this Pastoral Exhortation by imparting to everyone my blessing with this message of confident and joyful hope: “*Light always prevails over darkness!*”

+ GILBERT A. GARCERA, D.D.  
Archbishop of Lipa  
Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

December 8, 2020

# Pastoral statement on potential Covid-19 vaccines in the Philippines

AFTER almost a year of suffering the ravages of the pandemic—both in terms of lost lives and a devastated economy—it is only right that we thank God for the news that scientists have developed vaccines to immunize persons against COVID-19. We therefore support the efforts of our national government to procure and to deploy these vaccines in our country, and we thank the private organizations who have come forward to help acquire them. We urge our government and the private organizations who have helped fund the procurement of the COVID-19 vaccines to commit themselves to a single vaccine distribution plan that prioritizes medical frontliners and those who are most at risk for COVID-19. It would be a moral tragedy if young, healthy company employees who are at low risk for the disease are immunized before our doctors, nurses, and other frontliners, and before our senior citizens who are at higher risk for illness.

We especially commend our national government for considering the poor in our national vaccination program. The poor are beloved of the Lord. They should be especially protected because their poverty makes them vulnerable to infection and severe disease. The COVID-19 vaccines will only be able to end the pandemic in our country if enough Filipinos are vaccinated so we urge all of our people to be immunized when the vaccines arrive in the Philippines. Nonetheless, as the

Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: “Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions. He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience” (§1782). We therefore recognize that each individual person should be left free to decide to choose to be vaccinated or not according to his or her conscience with full awareness of the obligation to protect oneself from being an instrument of contagion and the farther spread of the virus.

As pastors, we have to call attention to one ethical concern. We have learned that some of the COVID-19 vaccines were manufactured using cells obtained from the remains of an aborted female fetus who was killed in 1973. The perennial teaching of the Church must be repeated: Deliberately procuring abortion, even if it is for the purpose of obtaining material for vaccines, is morally unacceptable. The end does not justify the means; otherwise, the most inhuman and inhumane acts would be permissible in order to attain supposedly “worthwhile” ends.

In our October 17, 2020, CBCP guidelines, we said that “if there are several available vaccines we urge the national government to prioritize vaccines that were developed without the use of the morally controversial cell lines derived from the remains of an aborted child.”

At the same time the Vatican has



The Vatican is administering the coronavirus vaccine in the atrium of the Paul VI Audience Hall. VATICAN MEDIA

recently explained, “when ethically irreproachable Covid-19 vaccines are not available (e.g. in countries where vaccines without ethical problems are not made available to physicians and patients, or where their distribution is more difficult due to special storage and transport conditions, or when various types of vaccines are distributed in the same country but health authorities do not allow citizens to choose the vaccine with which to be inoculated) it is morally acceptable to receive Covid-19 vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their

research and production process.”

We thank our scientists who have once more applied their expertise to the welfare of human beings and to their protection from the dreaded scourge of disease. We know that the study and work that precede the production of a vaccine are arduous. We commend our brothers and sisters who have perished to the love of God, and we raise a common prayer of thanksgiving for our health workers and other front liners who served most gallantly in these terrible months that have gone by. May St. Joseph, who saved the

Child Jesus and his Mother, from the deadly designs of a king continue to protect us. May Mary, Health of the Sick and Help of Christians, pray for us.

+RICARDO L. BACCAY, D.D.  
Chairman, Office on Bioethics  
January 8, 2021

Endorsed:

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

## Spiritus Domini

Apostolic Letter Issued “Motu Proprio” by the Supreme Pontiff Francis modifying Canon 230 §1 of the Code of Canon Law Regarding Access of Women to the Ministries of Lector and Acolyte



A lay woman reads at Mass in the Casa Santa Marta on February 4, 2020. VATICAN MEDIA

THE Spirit of the Lord Jesus, the perennial source of the Church’s life and mission, distributes to the members of the People of God the gifts that enable each one, in a different way, to contribute to the building up of the Church and to the proclamation of the Gospel. These

charisms, called ministries because they are publicly recognized and instituted by the Church, are made available to the community and its mission in a stable form.

In some cases this ministerial contribution has its origin in a specific sacrament, Holy Orders.

Other tasks, throughout history, have been instituted in the Church and entrusted through a non-sacramental liturgical rite to individual members of the faithful, by virtue of a particular form of exercise of the baptismal priesthood, and in aid of the specific ministry of bishops, priests and deacons.

Following a venerable tradition, the reception of “lay ministries”, which Saint Paul VI regulated in the Motu Proprio Ministeria quaedam (17 August 1972), preceded in a preparatory manner the reception of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, although such ministries were conferred on other suitable male faithful.

A number of Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops have highlighted the need to deepen the subject doctrinally, so that it may respond to the nature of the aforementioned charisms and the needs of the times, offering appropriate support to the role of evangelization that is incumbent upon the ecclesial community.

Accepting these recommendations, a doctrinal development has taken place in recent years which has highlighted how certain ministries instituted by the Church are based on the common condition of being baptized and the regal priesthood received in the Sacrament of Baptism; they are essentially distinct from the ordained ministry received in the Sacrament of Orders. A consolidated practice in the Latin Church has also confirmed, in fact, that these lay ministries, since they are based on the Sacrament of Baptism, may be entrusted to all suitable faithful, whether male or female, in accordance with what is already implicitly provided for by Canon 230 § 2.

Consequently, after having heard the opinion of the competent Dicasteries, I have decided to modify canon 230 § 1 of the Code of Canon Law. I therefore decree that canon 230 § 1 of the Code of Canon Law shall in future have the following wording:

“Lay persons of suitable age and

with the gifts determined by decree of the Episcopal Conference may be permanently assigned, by means of the established liturgical rite, to the ministries of lectors and acolytes; however, the conferment of such a role does not entitle them to support or remuneration from the Church”.

I also order the amendment of the other provisions having the force of law which refer to this canon.

I order that the provisions of this Apostolic Letter in the form of a Motu Proprio have firm and stable effect, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, even if worthy of special mention, and to be promulgated by publication in L’Osservatore Romano, coming into force on the same day, and then published in the official commentary of the Acta Apostolicae Sedis.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter’s, on the tenth day of January in the year 2021, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, the ninth of my Pontificate.

Francis

Fratelli / B3

Pope Francis affirms that the basis for the love that impels us towards universal communion is the Triune of God—the Trinity of love:

O God, Trinity of love, / from the profound communion of your divine life, / pour out upon us a torrent of fraternal love. / Grant us the love reflected in the actions of Jesus, / in his family of Nazareth, / and in the early Christian community.

### Commentary

Fratelli Tutti can be seen as a sequel of his previous encyclical Laudato Si. There is a common theological framework that links them. The link is the vision of universal communion which is the basis for integral ecology: we are all interconnected—we are all brothers and sisters to each other and to the rest of creation. This is the vision of St. Francis that Pope Francis shares.

Laudato Si affirms that we were created to be in loving communion with God, with one another and with creation/nature. We all belong to the universal family created by God whom we call father and we are all brothers and sisters to one another and also to the rest of creation. Fratelli Tutti focuses on communion with one another as brothers, sisters and friends. It is grounded on “love that impels us towards universal communion.” Thus, Universal Communion is a key theological theme for understanding Laudato Si and Fratelli Tutti. What

does communion mean and imply and how did St. Francis and Pope Francis expand its reach?

Communion—Koinonia (Greek), Communio (Latin)—connotes having something in common and associated with fellowship, kinship, friendship, unity, solidarity, partnership, participation and sharing. Koinonia refers both to the act of sharing or participating and the relationship that results from having something in common, sharing something with another, participating in something, or partnership. A popular Greek adage which is quoted by Aristotle in Nicomachean Ethics states: “Friends are of one heart and mind and they share everything in common”. We find this echoed in the Acts of the Apostles: “The community of believers were of one heart and mind and they shared everything in common.” From St. Luke’s idealized picture of the early Christian community in Acts (2:42-47, 4:32-35) we can deduce that the Church is called to be a community of disciples and friends whose members live in communion—united by a common faith, celebrated in table fellowship and expressed in the sharing of goods where no one is in need (communion of goods).

The ecclesiology of communion was the earliest model of the Church but was later eclipsed by the institutional model. This was retrieved in Vatican II and became dominant ever since. Ecclesial

communion reflects Trinitarian communion. “A people made one by the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” Communion is realized at the levels of the universal Church, the local Church, the parish. Later, the parish came to be seen as a communion of communities (BECs). This also became the goal of ecumenical dialogue (full communion). St. John Paul II in Familiaris Consortio asserts that communion is to be experienced in the family—the domestic Church—in the relationship between husband and wife and between parents and children. In Vita Consecrata, St. John Paul II affirms that communion is at the heart of religious life. Thus, the theology of communion is usually viewed within the confines of the Church—ad intra—but not applied to interreligious dialogue or to our relationship with nature.

St. Francis’ vision of communion is universal rather than strictly ecclesial. Although he did not explicitly use the term “communion” this vision is reflected not only in his Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister Moon or his letters to his Franciscan confreres but above all in how he lived his life and how he related with everyone. Among these were: his solidarity and identification with the poor, his embrace and care for the lepers who were excluded from society, his intimacy with Clare and her companions, his dialogue with the Muslim ruler Sultan Al-Kimal at the time of the crusades, his taming

of the wolf, preaching to birds—relating to everyone as brothers and sisters and as friends—including the rest of creation. The awareness of this fraternity and friendship is grounded on the recognition of the creator and source of all—God. If God created all of us and everything else, then we His creatures are all brothers and sisters. His whole life was lived in communion: with God, with human beings, with living creatures and with nature. He was in communion with everyone and with everything. Of course, he was in communion with the Church and with those who led it. From this communion flowed his love for the poor and the excluded. This is the basis for commitment to dialogue and peace even with those belonging to other religions (Islam). This also is reflected in his harmony with nature and care for creation—especially his love for animals.

St. Francis’ vision of universal communion is a source of inspiration of Pope Francis in Laudato Si and in Fratelli Tutti. Universal communion is the basis for integral ecology and the assertion that we are all interconnected. Human beings are made in the image and likeness of the triune God—a perfect communion of the three divine persons. From this flows our human dignity and our social nature. No one exists in isolation. Everything that God made is interconnected and reflects the nature of God. In Laudato Si, Pope Francis view human maturity as the

capacity to live in communion:

“The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationship, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures. In this way, they make their own that Trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them when they were created. Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity” (LS 240)

Thus, since God is communion, we human beings are created to be in communion with God, with one another and with creation. This is part of our nature which has been marred by human sinfulness—by selfishness and greed which results in division, violence, inequality, injustice and the destruction of the environment. As Pope Francis writes:

“Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself... These three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. This in turn distorted the mandate to “have dominion”

Fratelli / B6

# The new social order that Jesus began to establish for his people

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B (Mark 1:14-20)  
National Bible Sunday, January 24, 2021

By Msgr. Lope C. Robredillo, SThD



TODAY'S Gospel is about Jesus' proclamation of a new social order: the Kingdom of God. In the Old Testament, this order is captured, among others, by the symbol of a new Jerusalem where God tenders a banquet: "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines" (Isa 25:5). And Jesus sometimes used the same picture for the Kingdom: "And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves cast out. And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13:28-29). This image embodies what all of us hope for—love, brotherhood, forgiveness, peace and happiness among men in the community. This was the center of Jesus' preaching, his life and even his death. But this new social order was not just a dream; it was a reality that began to be realized in Jesus, in his life and ministry. Moreover, it was not simply an otherworldly reality. On the contrary, Jesus made it clear that the Kingdom was to be experienced in this world, in the here and now. And he invited us to be part of this social order.

But what are we to do in response to the invitation? To be part of it, we have to pay the price. Though it has broken through in Jesus, it will not spill over to us unless we take two steps: first, we need to repent, and second, we have to believe in Jesus and his Kingdom. Like Jonah who—according to the 1st Reading—preached repentance to the inhabitants of Nineveh (Jonah 3:4-5), Jesus required us to repent: "This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Repentance is more than just being sorry for our sins. The Greek word, "metanoein", literally means "to change one's mind," but as in the New Testament, it is close to the Hebrew "shubh", which means to turn about, to return to Yahweh, and this presupposes a deep understanding of the nature of sin (Joel 2:12-13). It is a 180 degrees turn-around: "Wash yourselves clean! Put away your misdeeds from before my eyes; cease doing evil, learn to do good. Make justice your aim; redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow" (Isa 1:16-17).

Repentance, therefore, means the setting aside of the past and the embracing of a new life. To embrace a new life means to embrace a community life in discipleship. That

is how we express our faith in Jesus. Discipleship of the community is the translation of our faith into deeds. The Kingdom of God will come if we respond to his invitation (Mark 1:17), and follow the requirements of discipleship: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34). In communal discipleship, our concern is the Kingdom of God and its values: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you besides: (Matt 6:33).

This demands reordering of our heart and affection, our purposes and goals, our priorities and loyalties in the community. Only if we are willing to pay the price can we participate in this new social order, in which people experience the positive in community life—love, brotherhood, forgiveness, justice and peace, as Jesus so promised: "Amen I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come" (Mark 10:28-30).

# The Word of Jesus—laden with power and authority

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B (Mark 1:21-28)  
Pro-Life Sunday, January 31, 2021

By Msgr. Lope C. Robredillo, SThD

IT is God's will that all be saved from evil and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). For this reason, he raised prophets to speak his word. Because they speak for God, their words have authority. These are powerful. The Bible characterizes these words as having "exousia", which means authority and power. The prophet Isaiah compares the word of God with the rain and its effects: "For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down, and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to him who sows and bread to him who eats, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it" (Isa 55:10-11). Thus, the word of the prophet Ahijah about Jeroboam (1 Kgs 14:10) was fulfilled: the entire house of Jeroboam was utterly killed off, "according to the warning which the Lord had pronounced through his servant, Ahijah, the Shilonite" (1 Kgs 15:29). Because the word of God has authority and power, it can destroy, as Jeremiah says (Jer 1:10), but it can also save: "the word that has been planted in you... is able to save your souls" (Jas 1:21).

In the century before the time of Jesus, it seemed to the Jews that God has stopped communicating his powerful word: "There had not been such great distress in Israel since the time prophets ceased to appear among the people" (1 Macc 9:27). The Jews were dependent on scribes who were experts of the Law of Moses and were called rabbis. They extracted rules and principles from the Torah for daily living, taught and transmitted the Law and its development, and gave judgment. Nevertheless, the Jews kept hoping that God would send his prophet again: "The Jewish people and their priest have made the following decisions: Simon shall be their permanent leader and high priest until a true prophet arises..." (1 Macc 14:41). After all they were

assured—the 1st Reading tells us—of God's promise to send a prophet: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kinsmen, and will put words into his mouth; he shall tell them all I have commanded him" (Deut 18:18).

In today's Gospel, Mark would have us understand that by his coming, Jesus fulfilled this prophecy in Deuteronomy and the Jewish expectation. And elsewhere in the New Testament, we are told that God has finally spoken to us through his Son (Heb 1:1). In Jesus the Word, therefore, we have an infallible guide for human thinking and living, and a power to salvation. The Gospel tells us how Jesus spoke: "The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes... All were amazed and asked one another, 'What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him'" (Mark 1:27).

This poses the question: now that Jesus is taken up to the heavens, through whom does God speak with authority to us? God speaks his authoritative word through the Scriptures: "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16). The Gospel remains powerful, as is shown in Thessalonica, where it came to the people in power and in the holy spirit, and they became imitators of Paul and Jesus himself (1 Thess 1:5-9). That is why the Bible is important to us. Also, God speaks through the ministers of the Church, who have been charged to preach the Gospel (2 Tim 4:2-5) to move us. And, according to the 2nd Reading, he likewise speaks to us through those persons, married or unmarried, who by their lives prophesy here and now the possibilities of the life to come (1 Cor 7:35).

Fratelli / B5

over the earth. As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual (cf. Gen 3:17-19). (The harmony which St. Francis of Assisi experienced with all creatures was seen as a healing of that rupture). Sin is manifest in all its destructive power in wars, the various forms of violence and abuse, the abandonment of the most vulnerable and attacks of nature. (66 (LS 66))

Sin, therefore, is the rupture of communion with God, with our fellow human beings and with nature. According to St. Augustine, sin is characterized by the human being turning inward on himself/herself (being closed) – ruled by selfishness, greed and pride – alienated from God, others, and creation. Yet in spite of this, there remains what Augustine calls "vestigial Trinitatis" or traces of the Trinity within each one—the inclination and longing towards communion, friendship, fellowship, community. This is what salvation is all about – to be freed from the power of sin, selfishness and greed and the restoration of communion and friendship with God, with one another and with nature. This is the redemption that Christ brought into this world—"that they may be one as you and I are one." This is what kingdom of God is all about—the victory over sin and the attainment of universal communion. This is what we continue to strive for and to live in our own lives.

Pope Francis declares that: "as part of the universe, called into being by

one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect." (LS 89). Fraternity and friendship among all God's creatures flow from universal communion. We are all interconnected. We should treat one another as brothers and sisters and as friends belonging to a single family and community. In Fratelli Tutti, Pope Francis focuses his attention on horizontal communion – on how human beings are to relate to one another: as brothers and sisters and as friends. Human fraternity and social friendship are based on love that impels all towards universal communion.

Thus, this encyclical makes us more aware that we are brothers and sisters belonging to one universal family called to communion with one another—a global fraternity, motivated by love and kindness, constantly nurturing our social friendship that transcends borders, gender, race, religious affiliation, classes. Communion spurs us to partnership, sharing, solidarity, collaboration, participation and ongoing dialogue. Communion promotes a communitarian vision which is the alternative to the neoliberal ideology that is based on an individualistic view of the human person motivated by selfishness and greed who is indifferent to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth. Motivated by love that impels all toward universal communion, we are all called to work together as one family and community to

address the crises and problems that we face—the pandemic, poverty, war, migration, trafficking, various forms of inequality—whether racial, gender, economic. This is the basis for our work for integral development, justice, peace and integrity of creation.

Before the release of the encyclical, there were objections raised about the title "Fratelli Tutti". It was criticized as not being inclusive. The same can be said about "fraternity" which is synonymous with "brotherhood." One can immediately say that both refers to men and women, just as the word "man" traditionally refers to both the masculine and feminine gender.

Why not just add "sorelli"? If the intention of Pope Francis is to echo St. Francis who in his letters to his confreres urged them to live as brothers (Fratelli tutti), then it would be appropriate to stick to this. Anyway, in the document itself Pope Francis talks about "brothers and sisters." What about "fraternity" which is part of the subtitle of the encyclical? Why not add "sorority"? The problem is not just the language. It is also the terminology and images to express the key theological idea of love beyond borders and universal communion.

Being brothers and sisters does not automatically connote communion. Nor does being members of one family. The experience of being members of a family is not always positive. There can be inequality and division within the family. In many cultures, families are often patriarchal and hierarchical—with

the father at the top, followed by the mother, then the elder brothers/sisters. Oftentimes what is emphasized is obedience to parents and those who are older. Love does not automatically reign in the family. There can be sibling rivalry or violence. We can see this in story of Cain and Abel. This is also seen in the story of Joseph who was sold into slavery by his elder brothers. It is not surprising that brothers can take unfair advantage of each other or fight over family inheritance. "Am I my brother's keeper?" is the question that has echoed through the centuries. To many, to regard each other as brothers and sisters does not mean much. Often, we are closer to our friends than to our siblings unless we develop friendship with them which does not always happen.

Thus, the family by itself is not automatically associated with communion. The same is true with "fraternity." In many countries, like the Philippines, there are college fraternity initiation rites that have resulted in physical injury and deaths. Other "fraternal" organizations are just social clubs without deep connection and care for one another.

Religious orders have often used the model of fraternity to describe themselves. This is the case for the Franciscans. This remains true today in many congregations—brotherhood for men's congregation who regard each other as confreres, sisterhood for women's congregation who call each other as sisters. However, this does not automatically imply an experience of communion

and friendship. Social friendship is not presumed among religious nor is it expected. In the past this has even been frowned on and even discouraged referring to it as particular friendship.

Thus, theologically, the image of family or fraternity is not ideal for describing our relationship with one another. What should be emphasized is community—the communitarian dimension rather than the family-orientation. The family is called to be a community where communion is to be experienced. In religious/consecrated life, it is more appropriate to talk about religious community rather than religious family. This is true for the Church—the Church as communion and community rather than family. This is true for society. In my opinion an alternative title would be "community and social friendship" which is a concrete expression of the love that impels us towards universal communion. We are called to be a universal community of friends—friends of God, friends to one another, friends of all created beings and nature. There is a need to deepen the meaning and implication of social friendship.

Thus, Fratelli Tutti is not just about being a fraternity—relating to each other as siblings—or simply about social friendship. It is about the primacy of love that enables us to go beyond ourselves and impels us towards universal communion and to recognize that we are children of God called to live as community of friends from the local to the universal level.

# The New Year of hope and freedom

By Fr. Shay Cullen

THE New Year is upon us and there is great, vibrant hope with the arrival of various vaccines that the deadly killer Covid-19 might be defeated in time. It may take a year or so if political leaders really lead and act with moral conscience and competence. We can defeat Covid-19. A vaccine will not eliminate the virus. It will still be there but we can be protected from it. In the Philippines, a vaccine is urgently needed without delay. For sure, the economy has to keep rolling on and total lockdowns are not going to be applied anytime soon but the infections and death are increasing at a rapid pace.

It is really good riddance to the traumatic 2020 where millions of people have been killed by the Covid-19. Who doesn't know that? Well, many hundreds of thousands around the world appear not to know it or believe it. In developed western nations, many don't seem to know or acknowledge that humanity is under attack by a deadly unseen enemy that could kill them in a few weeks of getting infected.

These people go on living their daily life and protesting and demonstrating at the government restrictions on social distancing, wearing masks and hand washing frequently. To them, the virus is fake news or at least is not real to them. Perhaps, they don't read, listen or watch the news. They ignore warnings and go partying and socially mixing and seem ignorant about the threat to life that the virus poses. It is only when they have the painful debilitating sickness do they ask themselves, "How did I get this?"

These are the people who do not realize that they are a danger to others. They may be pre-symptomatic or asymptomatic, carrying the virus but yet not showing flu-like symptoms. Lucky for them but not for their friends and neighbors whom they could infect and unknowingly kill. That is why effective testing is crucial in controlling the spread. When a positive result from testing is found, then tracing of the people that have been in close contact with the infected person must be conducted and they must be tested also. This has worked very well in Taiwan, New Zealand and now in China where the virus was first detected. In these countries, it is under tight control. South Korea was a winner for a while but a new outbreak has been detected. The same is true with Thailand. Perhaps complacency set in and people lowered their guard and cast-off protective measures.

When people are tested positive, all must isolate and when very sick, go to a hospital. The increasing number of infected people is alarming and exceedingly serious. New records are set every day. The UK ambulance services are overwhelmed with callouts. Hospitals



Devotees observe physical distancing to attend Mass on a street near Quiapo Church in Manila on Jan. 9, the Feast of the Black Nazarene. PHOTO BY ROY LAGARDE

everywhere are short of beds and ICU facilities. Patients are parked in hospital corridors, chapels, canteens and offices. That is the result of irresponsible social contact that has helped the virus to spread. The United States is one of the worst hit with massive new infections daily. Much of this is due to irresponsible lack of coordinated response and control fueled by ignorance, denial and inaction among immoral political leaders devoid of intelligence and compassion. Care for and love of neighbor is not on their agenda. President-elect Joe Biden may be just in time to save millions more Americans getting infected and dying.

This invisible deadly enemy will not be defeated quickly with the advent of vaccines, produced in astonishing fast time. There will be some shared Nobel Prizes and other awards to be handed out to the brilliant scientists and their teams that invented an effective vaccine for sure. There must also be awards to the medical personnel, doctors, nurses and orderlies that have carried the burden of caring for the sick.

This novel coronavirus is no ordinary virus,

here for a while and gone. No, it is here to stay and it has one mission it seems: to transmit itself more effectively and infect and kill as many people as it can. It is a non-living organism but can evolve and mutate in a matter of months into a new, more deadly killer virus. We witness at present a new strain these days with the new more virulent mutated virus that is spreading with even quicker and with more lethal effect as you read this.

Vaccines will take many months to be available to all people. Everyone must take every precaution while the vaccine is being administered. It will take a year before the world population is partially protected. I say partially because the experts tell us continually that there is no known evidence as to how long the vaccine will provide a person with immunity from further infection. The vaccine does not kill the virus but powers up the human immune system to fight and kill it in the body. We must continue the precautions and protective measures for at least another year at most before there will be partial protection.

The newly UK-approved, Oxford-AstraZen-

eca vaccine is one of the best because it can be stored at ordinary refrigeration temperature so doctors and clinics can store and give it easily. It also costs much lower. It is most effective after the second jab 21 days after the first injection. However, it is 62 to 90 percent efficacy rate depending on the patient. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine has to be stored at -70 degrees Celsius. It, as well as the Moderna vaccine, has a 95 percent efficacy rate. The Russian vaccine, Gamaleya (Sputnik V) has a 92 percent efficacy rate.

Restrictions should be mandated by law making a certificate of having been vaccinated mandatory for job applications or other public services such as a birth certificate is required for most occasions- job applications, school enrollment and so on. Refusal to get vaccinated is endangering the public and is like passing a death sentence to others. Vaccines do work and will protect many people from the virus. Then we can start, in time, to get back to a non-virus dominated life and the emotional and economic recovery can begin. It can't come soon enough.

Culture / B7

of creation. Constant and attentive listening leads in turn to effective care for the earth, our common home, and for our brothers and sisters in need. Here I would once again point out that "a sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be authentic if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings".[15] "Peace, justice and care for creation are three inherently connected questions, which cannot be separated in such a way as to be treated individually, lest we fall back into reductionism".[16]

## 7. A compass pointing to a common path

At a time dominated by a culture of waste, faced with growing inequalities both within and between nations,[17] I urge government leaders and those of international organizations, business leaders, scientists, communicators and educators, to take up these principles as a "compass" capable of pointing out a *common direction* and ensuring "a more humane future"[18] in the process of globalization. This will enable us to esteem the value and dignity of every person, to act together in solidarity for the common good, and to bring relief to those suffering from poverty, disease, slavery, armed conflicts, and discrimination. I ask everyone to take this compass in hand and to become a prophetic witness of the culture of care, working to overcome the many existing social inequalities. This can only come about through a widespread and meaningful involvement on the part of women, in the family and in every social, political and institutional sphere.

The *compass* of these social principles, so essential for the growth of a culture of care, also points to the need for relationships between nations to be inspired by fraternity, mutual respect, solidarity and the observance of international law. In this regard, we must recognize the need to

defend and promote fundamental human rights, which are inalienable, universal and indivisible.[19]

Likewise urgent is the need to respect humanitarian law, especially at this time when conflicts and wars continue uninterrupted. Tragically, many regions and communities can no longer remember a time when they dwelt in security and peace. Numerous cities have become epicentres of insecurity: citizens struggle to maintain their normal routine in the face of indiscriminate attacks by explosives, artillery and small arms. Children are unable to study. Men and women cannot work to support their families. Famine is spreading in places where it was previously unknown. People are being forced to take flight, leaving behind not only their homes but also their family history and their cultural roots.

While such conflicts have many causes, the result is always the same: destruction and humanitarian crises. We need to stop and ask ourselves what has led our world to see conflict as something normal, and how our hearts can be converted and our ways of thinking changed, in order to work for true peace in solidarity and fraternity.

How many resources are spent on weaponry, especially nuclear weapons,[20] that could be used for more significant priorities such as ensuring the safety of individuals, the promotion of peace and integral human development, the fight against poverty, and the provision of health care. Global problems like the present Covid-19 pandemic and climate change have only made these challenges all the more evident. What a courageous decision it would be to "establish a 'Global Fund' with the money spent on weapons and other military expenditures, in order to permanently eliminate hunger and contribute to the development of the poorest countries!"[21]

## 8. Educating for a culture of care

Promoting a culture of care calls for a *process of education*. The

"compass" of social principles can prove useful and reliable in a variety of interrelated contexts. Let me offer a few examples:

- Educating people to care begins in the *family*, the natural and fundamental nucleus of society, in which we learn how to live and relate to others in a spirit of mutual respect. Yet families need to be empowered to carry out this vital and indispensable task.

- Together with the family, *schools and universities*—and, in some respects, the *communications media*—are also responsible for education.[22] They are called to pass on a system of values based on the recognition of the dignity of each person, each linguistic, ethnic and religious community and each people, as well as the fundamental rights arising from that recognition. Education is one of the pillars of a more just and fraternal society.

- Religions in general, and religious *leaders* in particular, can play an indispensable role in handing on to their followers, and to society at large, the values of solidarity, respect for differences, and concern for our brothers and sisters in need. Here I think of the words spoken in 1969 by **Pope Paul VI to the Ugandan Parliament**: "Have no fear of the Church; she honors you, she educates honest and loyal citizens for you, she does not foment rivalries and divisions, she seeks to promote healthy liberty, social justice, and peace. If she has any preference at all, it is for the poor, for the education of little ones and of the people, for the care of the suffering and abandoned".[23]

- Once more I encourage all those engaged in public service and in international organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, and all those others who in various ways are involved in the areas of education and research, to work towards the goal of a "more open and inclusive education, involving patient listening, constructive dialogue and better mutual understanding".[24] It is

my hope that this appeal, made in the context of the *Global Compact on Education*, will be broadly acknowledged and accepted.

## 9. There can be no peace without a culture of care

The *culture of care* thus calls for a common, supportive and inclusive commitment to protecting and promoting the dignity and good of all, a willingness to show care and compassion, to work for reconciliation and healing, and to advance mutual respect and acceptance. As such, it represents a privileged path to peace. "In many parts of the world, there is a need for paths of peace to heal open wounds. There is also a need for peacemakers, men and women prepared to work boldly and creatively to initiate processes of healing and renewed encounter".[25]

At a time like this, when the barque of humanity, tossed by the storm of the current crisis, struggles to advance towards a calmer and more serene horizon, the "rudder" of human dignity and the "compass" of fundamental social principles can enable us together to steer a sure course. As Christians, we should always look to Our Lady, Star of the Sea and Mother of Hope. May we work together to advance towards a new horizon of love and peace, of fraternity and solidarity, of mutual support and acceptance. May we never yield to the temptation to disregard others, especially those in greatest need, and to look the other way;[26] instead, may we strive daily, in concrete and practical ways, "to form a community composed of brothers and sisters who accept and care for one another".[27]

From the Vatican, 8 December 2020

FRANCISCUS

[1] Cf. *Video Message to the Seventy-fifth Meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations*, 25 September 2020.

[2] Cf. Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (24 May 2015), 67.

[3] Cf. "Fraternity, the Foundation and Pathway to Peace", *Message for the 2014*

*World Day of Peace* (8 December 2013), 2.

[4] Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (24 May 2015), 70.

[5] PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, No. 488.

[6] *De Officiis*, 1, 28, 132: PL 16, 67.

[7] K. BIHLMEYER-H. TÜCHLE, *Church History*, vol. 1, Westminster, The Newman Press, 1958, pp. 373, 374.

[8] *Address to Participants in the Conference organized by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development to mark the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Encyclical Populorum Progressio* (4 April 2017).

[9] *Message for the Twenty-second Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP22)*, 10 November 2016. Cf. INTERDIOCESEAN ROUNDTABLE OF THE HOLY SEE ON INTEGRAL ECOLOGY, *Journeying Towards Care for Our Common Home: Five Years after Laudato Si'*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 31 May 2020.

[10] SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 26.

[11] *Extraordinary Moment of Prayer in Time of Epidemic*, 27 March 2020.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] Cf. Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), 8: 153.

[14] SAINT JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), 38.

[15] Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (24 May 2015), 91.

[16] EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, Pastoral Letter *Sobre la relación del hombre con la naturaleza* (21 January 1987); cf. Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (24 May 2015), 92.

[17] Cf. Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), 125.

[18] *Ibid.*, 29.

[19] Cf. *Message to Participants in the International Conference "Human Rights in the Contemporary World: Achievements, Omissions, Negations"*, Rome, 10-11 December 2018.

[20] Cf. *Message to the United Nations Conference to Negotiate a Legally Binding Instrument to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons, Leading Towards their Total Elimination*, 23 March 2017.

[21] *Video Message for the 2020 World Food Day* (16 October 2020).

[22] Cf. BENEDICT XVI, "Educating Young People in Justice and Peace", *Message for the 2012 World Day of Peace*, (8 December 2011), 2; "Overcome Indifference and Win Peace", *Message for the 2016 World Day of Peace*, (8 December 2015), 6.


[23] *Address to the Parliament of Uganda*, Kampala, 1 August 1969.

[24] *Message for the Launch of the Global Compact on Education*, 12 September 2019.

[25] Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), 225.

[26] Cf. *ibid.*, 64.

[27] *Ibid.*, 96; cf. "Fraternity, the Foundation and Pathway to Peace", *Message for the 2014 World Day of Peace* (8 December 2013), 1.



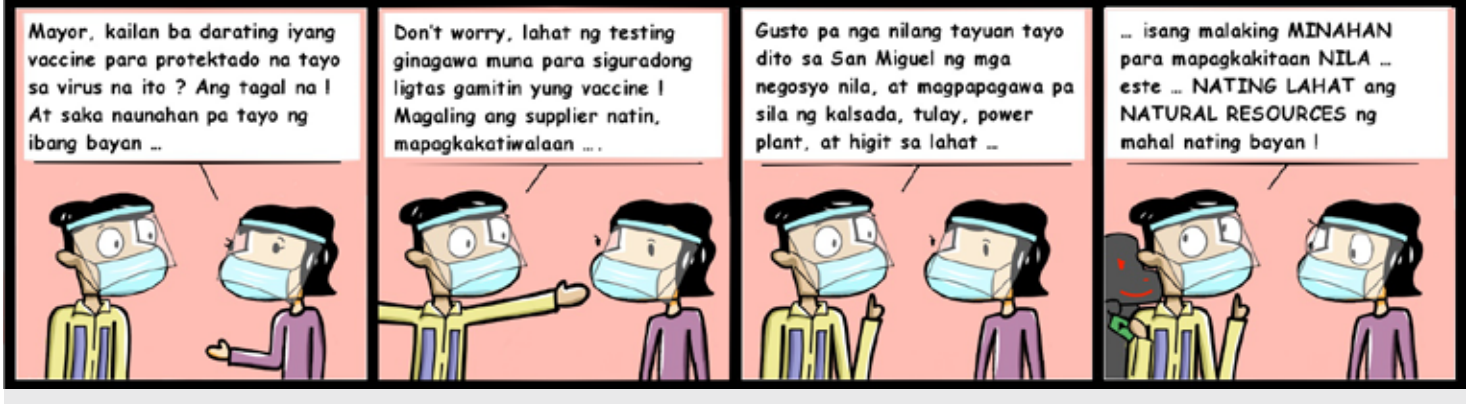
**TECHNICAL ASSESSMENT**      **MORAL ASSESSMENT**

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

# Buhay San Miguel



Mayor, kailan ba darating iyang vaccine para protektado na tayo sa virus na ito? Ang tagal na! At saka naunahan pa tayo ng ibang bayan ...

Don't worry, lahat ng testing ginagawa muna para siguradong ligtas gamitin yung vaccine! Magaling ang supplier natin, mapagkakatiwalaan ...

Gusto pa nga nilang tayuan tayo dito sa San Miguel ng mga negosyo nila, at magpapagawa pa sila ng kalsada, tulay, power plant, at higit sa lahat ...

... isang malaking MINAHAN para mapagkakitaan NILA ... este ... NATING LAHAT ang NATURAL RESOURCES ng mahal nating bayan!

# SUAREZ (The Healing Priest)



**DIRECTOR:** Joven Tan;  
**LEAD CAST:** John Arcilla, Dante Rivero, Troy Montero, Alice Dixon, Noel Trinidad, Joonee Gamboa, Leo Martinez, Jon Achaval, etc) ;  
**STORY AND SCREENPLAY:** Bernard Factor-Cañaberal;  
**GENRE:** Biopic Drama; **COUNTRY:** Philippines; **LANGUAGE:** Filipino; **DISTRIBUTED BY:** Star Cinema;  
**RUNNING TIME:** 94 minute

**Technical assessment: 2.5**      **Moral assessment: 3.5**  
**CINEMA rating: V 14**      **MTRCB rating: PG**

Si Fr. Fernando Suarez (Arcilla) ay isang paring Pilipino na nakilala sa kanyang natatanging kakayahang magpagaling.

mga tagasunod at tagasuporta ay ang kabi-kabilang kontrobersiya. Gayunpaman, patuloy ang kanyang pagsasagawa ng mga healing masses kung saan maraming mayayaman at sikat na tao ang kanyang natulungan at naging kaibigan. Maging ang mga obispo (Martinez, Trinidad, Achaval, Gamboa) ay hati sa kanilang pananaw kay Fr. Suarez at ilan ang nagbawal sa kanya na magdiwang ng misa sa kanilang Diyosesis. Tanging si Bishop Antonio Palang (Rivero) ang naging kakampi at tagapagtanggol ni Suarez sa kabi-kabilang pagtuligsa sa kanya. Sa pagsasaliksik ni Alice Marcelino (Dixon) para sa kanyang TV Show na Truth Be Told, mababalikan ang kwento ng buhay hanggang sa panayam kay Suarez.

Para sa mga Katolikong naghahanap ng inspirasyon mula sa munting kabutihan, malasakit sa kapwa at pagtitimpi sa harap ng pag-uusig. Lalo sa mga tagasunod o nakakilala kay Fr. Suarez, isang matagumpay na pagsampal ang pelikula para sa mga hindi tumangkil sa kanya. Nakakaaliw din ang makita ang mga pamilyar na mukha ng mga dating sikat na artista na sinubukang bigyang buhay ang mga iniatang na gampanin sa kanila. Hind matatawaran ang ganda ng mga tanawin sa Batangas na masining na kinuhanan. Kaya lang, ang pagkakasulat nito ay tila bagang isang religious show sa radyo at hindi isang tunay na pelikula. Hilaw ang drama—tila may

kulang. Iisa ang dimensyon ng mga tauhan kaya't hindi nito nagawang himukin ang manonood na magkaroon ng tunay na simpatiya kina Suarez at Palang. Wika nga ng isang pahayagang sumuri sa pelikula, masyado itong naging defensive. Hindi nakatulong ang paglitaw ni Suarez sa dulo dahil nagmistula itong propaganda sa halip na maging pag-usisa sa pagganyak ng mga sumusuporta at kumukontra sa kanya. At dahil dito, matatapos mo ang pelikula na tila na hampas ka ng hangin galing sa rumaragasang motor. Maingay, maamoy pero hindi nakatitnag.

Kapayapaan ng loob sa gitna nang paratang. Pagpapatawad sa harap ng pagtuligsa. Ito ang mga katangiang ipinamalas ni Suarez sa kwento. Kahit kaya niya lumaban at makipagmatigasan ay nanitili siyang mapagkumbaba at masunurin sa mga nakatataas sa kanya. Kahanga-hanga rin ang taglay niyang hinahon at di matinag na tiwala sa kalooban ng Diyos. Bilang tauhan sa isang kwento, nakapagbibigay inspirasyon ang pagharap ni Suarez sa hamong dumarating. Nakalulungkot din isipin na ang mismong kalban ni Suarez ay ang mga kaparian at obispo ng Simbahang kanyang pinaglilingkuran. Sa ganang ito, isang huwaran si Suarez ng tunay na alagad. Subalit mainam na alalaanin na ito ay isang kwento isinalaysay sa pananaw ng isang panig.

## 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.

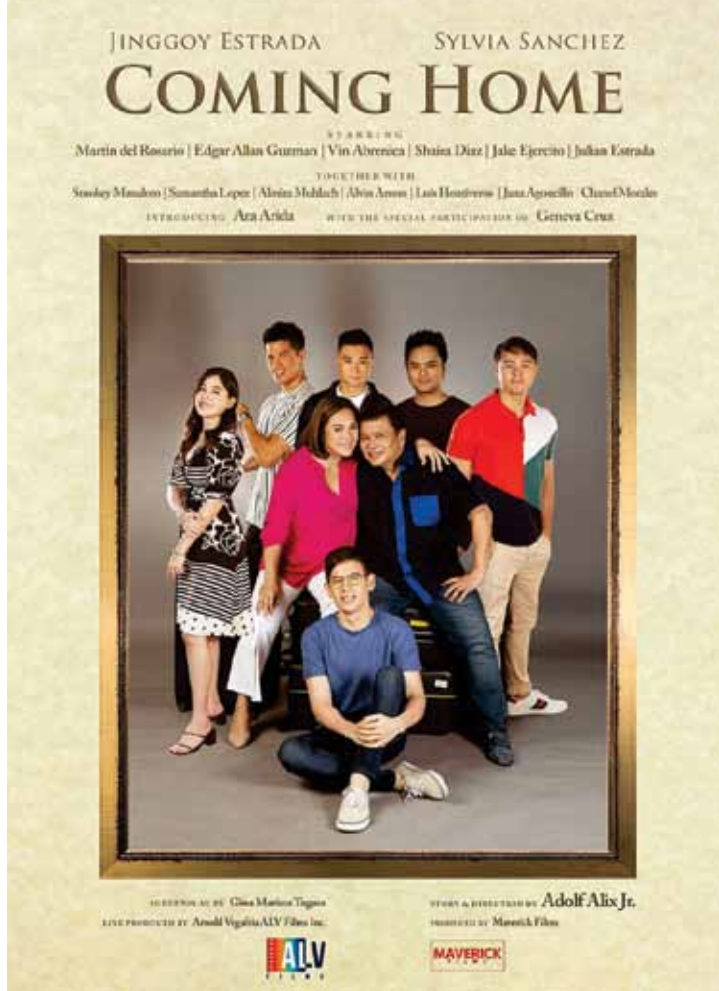
We pray for those afflicted  
May they be restored to health soon.

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.

# Coming Home



**TITLE:** Coming Home      **DIRECTOR:** Adolfo Alix, Jr.  
**LEAD CAST:** Jinggoy Estrada, Sylvia Sanchez, Martin del Rosario, Edgar Allan Guzman, Vin Abrenica, Shaira Diaz, Jake Ejercito, Julian Estrada & Ariella Arida  
**SCREENWRITER:** Gina Marissa Tagasa  
**PRODUCER:** Maverick films      **EDITOR:** Mai Dionisio  
**GENRE:** Drama      **DISTRIBUTOR:** ALV Films  
**LOCATION:** Philippines  
**RUNNING TIME:** 214 minutes

**Technical assessment: 3**      **Moral assessment: 3**  
**CINEMA rating: R 16**

Pag-uwi. Kinasasabikan. Pinaghandaan. Pinakahihintay. Madalas makaranas nito ang sinumang mawalay sa tahanan, matagal man o maikli ang panahon ng paglayo. Ngunit minsan, nakagugulantang ang pagbabalik sa mga iniwanan, lalo na kung hindi ito inaasahan.

Itong huli ang naging karanasan ni Salve Librada (Sylvia Sanchez) at ng mga anak niya sa Coming Home. Pagkatapos ng kasal ng unica

hija niyang si Sally (Shaira Diaz), natagpuan nilang nakahandusay sa harapan ng kanilang bahay si Benedicto 'Benny' Librada (Jinggoy Estrada) na bumagsak mula sa wheelchair. Overseas Filipino Worker sa Qatar si Benny at si Salve ang nag-alaga at nag-asikaso sa anim nilang anak sa Pilipinas, nang mahumaling si Benny kay Mercy Dunga (Ariella Arida), isang Pilipinang nurse sa Qatar. Tuluyang iniwanan at pinabayaan ni Benny ang pamilya kaya't mag-isang itinaguyod ni Salve ang kanyang mga anak na gayo'y malalaki na.

Nang magkasakit si Benny, isinauli siya ni Mercy kay Salve. Buong-pusong pinatawad at tinanggap ni Salve ang asawa, inalagaan ito hanggang gumaling—bagay na ikinagalit ng mga anak nila. Pinilit ni Salve na magkasundo ang pamilya sa kabila ng iba't ibang pasanin ng bawat isa. Magtatagumpay ba siya kung masama ang loob at sugatan ang damdamin ng bawat miyembro ng pamilyang tinalikuran ng ama? Mabubuo pa ba ito kung giba na ang mismong

haliging kinatatayuan ng tahanan nila?

Walang bago sa storyline ng Coming Home. Maraming pelikula at telenovela na ang tumalakay sa tema at mga problema ng pamilyang Librada. Halos lahat ng pamilyang Pilipino ay may magulang, kapatid, pinsan o kamag-anak na OFW. Pero hindi naging maayos ang daloy ng Coming Home. Nakakalito ang mga flashbacks, mahina ang character development at pilit ang naging katapusan ng pelikula. Mahusay ang pagganap ni Sylvia Sanchez bilang Salve at kapani-paniwala rin si Edgar Allan Guzman bilang Neb (maliban sa peluka nito), ngunit hindi nila kinayang dalhin ang kwento dahil parang tuod na walang kabuhay-buhay si Jinggoy Estrada bilang Benny. Hindi niya naipahayag ang angkop na emosyon lalo na sa maiigting na eksena, at monotone ang pananalita niya. Hindi tuloy sila naging kapani-paniwala bilang isang pamilya kaya hindi makarelate ang manonood sa kwento.

Ayon kay direk Alix, ang Coming Home isang tribute

sa pamilyang Pilipino at mga OFWs. Magandang layunin, di po ba? Ipinakita nito na nang pagmamahal at pagpapatawad ang bubuo sa tahanan. Pagmamahal na tatanggap sa bawat isa hindi lang kapag siya'y malakas at mabait, kundi kahit siya'y mahina at makasalan. Pagmamahal na kayang ipagpaliban ang sarili alang-alang sa minamahal at pamilya. Isinabuhay ito ni Salve sa biyaya ng Diyos, at hinimok niya ang kanyang mga anak na igalang at tanggapin ang kanilang ama, ang kanilang mga kapatid, at ang kanilang sarili.

May isang munting bagay lamang po ang dumapo sa isipan namin habang nanonood kami ng Coming Home at nalaman namin na ang Producer pala nito ay si Estrada. Si direk Alix naman po ay siyang direktor din ng pelikula ni Bato de la Rosa. Mangyaring alamin ng mga manonood na ang medium ng pelikula ay ginagamit din ng mga pulitiko upang pabanguhin ang kanilang pangalan at imahe sa madla—hindi lamang sa Pilipinas kundi sa buong mundo—pagka't ang pelikula ay isang powerful influencer ng pag-iisip ng tao. Kaya, ingat lang sa panonood, ano po? Manalangin tayo para sa tinatawag na "discernment" upang sa ating panonood, matalino nating mapaghiwalay ang artista at ang pulitiko, ang katotohanan at ang kathang-isip.



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