

Monitor

PROTAGONIST OF TRUTH, PROMOTER OF PEACE



From left, Archbishop Socrates Villegas of Lingayen-Dagupan, Bishop Broderick Pabillo of Taytay, Bishop Bartolome Santos of Iba, Bishop Socrates Mesiona of Puerto Princesa, Bishop Daniel Presto of San Fernando, and Auxiliary Bishop Fidelis Layog of Lingayen-Dagupan.

Bishops demand gov't action to protect WPS fisherfolk

By ROY LAGARDE

CATHOLIC bishops, whose dioceses are in areas near the West Philippine Sea (WPS), urged the government to shield the fisherfolk from what they called China's "aggressive intrusions."

In a joint pastoral exhortation released on Feb. 8, the six bishops stressed the WPS is not merely a territorial issue but also concerns the lives, well-being, and the future of the local fishermen.

"The Church stands with them," the letter read.

"As shepherds from various ecclesiastical jurisdictions with fisherfolk within our pastoral

care, we stand with them and we bishops give voice to their fears and anxieties, their woes and their concerns," it added.

Among the signatories is Archbishop Socrates Villegas of Lingayen-Dagupan, who was the former president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP).

Joining him are Bishop Bartolome Santos Jr of Iba, Bishop Daniel Presto of San Fernando de La Union, Bishop Socrates Mesiona of Puerto Princesa, Bishop Broderick Pabillo of Taytay, and Auxiliary Bishop Fidelis Layog of Lingayen-Dagupan.

The bishops urged the government to intensify efforts in defending the

rights of affected Filipino fisherfolk, including seeking assistance from allies if necessary.

"All legal means must be exhausted so that what nature has so bountifully bestowed on us may be ours and may feed generations of Filipinos yet to be born and if present diplomatic endeavors do not suffice, then it is permissible morally necessary even to have recourse to the friendship of allies who can help us defend what is ours!" they said.

However, the church leaders emphasized that resorting to war cannot be considered a "moral option."

"But neither is it just for the leaders of our country to allow

our own fisherfolk to be driven out of fishing grounds over which international law recognizes our rights," the bishops said.

"We gratefully acknowledge statements of resoluteness about defending the resources God, in his munificence, has made available to us through the sea, but words are not enough," they added.

The bishops also called on the Catholic faithful to help defend the rights of the fishermen, to help save their livelihoods, and to help protect their future and of their families.

Addressing the fisherfolk, they urged them to help preserve marine life and be good stewards of the resources entrusted by God.

PASTORAL CONCERNS

B1

Through the desert God leads us to freedom

Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for Lent 2024

PEOPLE, FACTS AND PLACES

A8

Cardinal Tagle receives France's highest honor

Manila archbishop calls to 'rethink' pro-life strategy



Cardinal Jose Advincula presides over Mass for the "Walk for Life" at the University of Santo Tomas Open Grounds in Manila, Feb. 17, 2024. ROY LAGARDE

By ROY LAGARDE

IT'S time to 'rethink' the pro-life strategy, and this reevaluation must encompass new approaches that refrain from further judgment and condemnation, the head of Manila's Roman Catholic Church said.

During the Mass for this year's "Walk for Life" on Feb. 17, Cardinal Jose Advincula of Manila spoke

about the need for the Church to explore "new pathways" to better respond to the dominant values of contemporary times.

"We need to engage in more listening and dialogue. This is part of walking for life," Advincula told the congregation gathered at the open grounds of the University of Santo Tomas (UST) in Manila.

"Yes, we are clear about teachings

Pro-life / A7

Bishop urges lawmakers to withdraw support for charter change

A CATHOLIC bishop has challenged the country's lawmakers to tackle corruption and political dynasties—if only to promote economic development.

Bishop Gerardo Alminaza of San Carlos said politicians have plenty of rhetoric about social ills and stressed that now is the time for concrete action to combat these problems.

"The root cause of our problems is really corruption, and our political system bears significant responsibility to it," said Alminaza, who is also the vice president of Caritas Philippines.

He made the statement during the launch of a coalition of multi-sectoral groups against the renewed push for charter change in Manila on Feb. 14.

The bishop pleaded with lawmakers to withdraw support for the moves to revise the 1986 Constitution, saying its current push through the supposed



Fr. Antonio Labiao and Bishop Gerardo Alminaza of Caritas Philippines (fourth and fifth from left, front row) during the launching of "Koalisyon Laban sa ChaCha" in Manila on Feb. 14, 2024. CBCP NEWS

"people's initiative" was questionable from the start.

At a Senate hearing Feb. 13, it was disclosed that the group behind the controversial people's initiative efforts to revise the 1987 Constitution has no existing registration with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

"It is very consistent with what

we are saying, that the process is not transparent. If the motive is very righteous, with this, it has been betrayed since the one pushing for it is not legitimate," Alminaza said.

"The best and most decent response they (lawmakers) can have is to withdraw their support to the people's initiative," said

Charter change / A7

CBCP official lauds new catechetical journal



Bishop Daniel Presto, chairman of the CBCP Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education and Br. Raymundo Suplido, chairman of the Br. Andelino Manuel Castillio Religious Education Foundation (BAMCREF), during the launching of the journal titled "Mystagogia: A Journal of Evangelization, Catechesis, and Religious Education" at De La Salle University in Manila on Jan. 29. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

"A WORK that would guide, inspire, challenge, and elevate our catechists not only in their teaching but also in their very identity as ministers of evangelization."

This was how an official of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) described the journal titled "Mystagogia: A Journal of Evangelization, Catechesis, and Religious Education,"

which was launched at De La Salle University (DLSU) in Manila on Jan. 29.

In his speech, Bishop Daniel Presto of the CBCP Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education acknowledged the extensive collective effort behind the creation of a journal aimed at presenting grounded, research-based articles on evangelization, catechesis,

Journal / A7

Towards the JUBILEE 2025

<https://www.iubilaum2025.va>

Another Byzantine-era church in Turkey to revert to mosque

AFTER serving as a museum for more than 79 years, the Turkish government is proceeding with plans to make the Church of the Holy Savior in Istanbul a mosque.

Mirroring the 2020 reversion of the Hagia Sophia, prayers and Islamic rites will be performed once again in the ancient church, according to Fides, the information service of the Pontifical Mission Societies.

The Church of the Holy Savior, also known as Chora Church, is recognized as one of the most important Byzantine gems in the world and is adorned with many unique icons and frescoes.

Turkish media, particularly the Islamist daily *Yeni Şafak*, initially reported the mosque would reopen

for Islamic prayers on Feb. 23, 2023. However, the Turkish Directorate General of Institutions within the government's Ministry of Culture and Tourism denied the report, affirming that the opening date remains unannounced.

The museum-to-mosque conversion project began in 2020, with plans to implement it by October of that year. Restoration work delayed the project. According to Turkish media, this long-running initiative, dubbed the "Kariye Mosque," has finally come to fruition.

Sitting in the northeast of Istanbul's historic center near Adrianople Byzantine Gate, the Church of the Holy Savior was built in the 12th century

and restored in the early 14th century. After the conquest of Constantinople, the Ottomans kept the building as is until its conversion to a mosque in 1511. At that time, the magnificent frescoes and icons were completely plastered over.

At the end of World War II, archeologists and historians uncovered the long-hidden masterpieces on the walls. In 1945, the building became a museum and religious practices inside were banned.

However, in August 2020, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan reversed the 1958 decision that established the museum, paving the way for its return to an Islamic place of worship. **(ACI MENA / CNA)**

ACN: We need our priests and they need ongoing formation



Regina Lynch. VATICAN NEWS

AROUND one thousand priests, representing over sixty countries came together for a conference on ongoing priestly formation. Speaking to the Vatican News at the conclusion of the conference, Regina Lynch, Executive President of the Pontifical Foundation Aid to the Church in Need, which sponsored the event noted that "today priestly service to the faithful is even more demanding."

The conference on ongoing priest formation was held on February

6-10 with the theme "Fan into a flame the gift of God that you possess (2 Tim 1:6). The beauty of being disciples today: a singular, integral, communitarian, and missionary formation". The conference was organized by the Vatican's Dicastries for the Clergy, Evangelization, and Eastern Churches.

"Service to the faithful has always been a challenge for priests. In today's secularized Western world, it has become even more demanding.

They have to face extreme conditions, huge distances, sometimes living in war situations, living in inner cities where there is so much demand on their time. I think it is easy for priests to end up having a burnout if they do not have the proper support," noted President Lynch.

"We need our priests, and they need to be in good shape, not just physically, but also mentally and spiritually. And this is where the ongoing formation of priests is extremely important," she added.

The President of Aid to the Church in Need shared her opinion that the five-day conference gave the priests a chance to talk with other priests from all over the world about best practices. "The positive aspects of this is that they can learn what works from one another, but also share the challenges of being a priest today," she said.

Lynch underlined that there was "a great atmosphere" and added, "Now the priests will go back to their countries to be formators of ongoing formation for their fellow priests." **(Fr. Pawel Rytel-Andrianik / Vatican News)**

The drama of human trafficking in the world: 50 million are enslaved

ANY day of the year more than 50 million people are enslaved in the world according to the latest estimate published in a joint report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Labor Organization (ILO), and Walk Free, a human rights group that seeks the eradication of modern slavery in all its forms.

Many of the people affected by trafficking are in Latin America, where 90% of the victims are women, especially girls, destined for sexual exploitation and where many of the countless migrants who cross the continent are prey for human traffickers and those facilitating illegal immigration.

The Catholic Church dedicated Thursday as a Day of Prayer and Reflection against Human Trafficking.

Fifty million people in servitude means that 1 out of every 150 people in the world is enslaved. Of those, 35% are boys and girls, according to the 2022 Global Report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

The business brings in more than \$150 billion annually in 145 countries, containing 94% of the world's population. Two-thirds of profits come from sexual exploitation, according to the 2014 ILO document "Profits and Poverty: The Economics of Forced Labor."

Trafficking operates through the recruitment, transportation, transfer, and/or harboring or reception of people, under threat, use of force, or other forms of coercion, kidnapping, fraud, deception, abuse of power, taking advantage of vulnerability, to receive payment or benefits to have control over another person for the purpose of exploitation, as explained by the Palermo Protocol of 2000.

Human trafficking is a reality that occurs on all continents. In Latin America, women in particular are the victims of slavery: "More than 80% of

the victims of human trafficking in Latin America are women and girls who, for the most part, are found in countries in the same region," stated U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres on July 31, 2019, World Anti-Trafficking Day, according to Voice of America (VOA).

"According to a U.N. report, 92% of victims in South America and 75% of victims in Central America and the Caribbean are trafficked to neighboring or nearby countries," the VOA stated.

Modern-day slavery can take several forms: farm work, servile marriages, child marriages, victims forced to be hitmen or "mules" to transport drugs, children sold through catalogs for "pedophile sex tourism," and more.

According to IOM data, there are more than 600 million international tourist trips annually; 20% of travelers acknowledged that they travel looking for sex and 3% acknowledged they travel looking for sex with children, a figure that translates into 4 million people looking for pedophile sex. Several Latin American countries are the focus of this tourism.

The mechanisms of human trafficking

Among the most frequent forms of trafficking, in addition to those already mentioned, are the exploitation of people of all ages for sex and labor, using children as soldiers or for criminal activities, enslaving victims, forced begging, illegal extraction, and trafficking of human organs and fluids. For example, in Michoacán state, Mexico, the sale of corneas exported to the United States and the removal of organs from minors have been repeatedly reported.

Child sexual slavery includes the enslavement of babies as well as the production and distribution of child pornography.

During the 2019-2022 COVID-19 pandemic, according to information from the Financial Intelligence Unit (UIF) of Mexico as reported in July 2020 by the Mexican newspaper *La Jornada*, the production of child pornography grew by 117% thanks to grooming and recruitment of minors through social media and online games. In Argentina, in the same period, child porn production grew by 80%.

"Estimates indicate that situations of modern slavery are by no means transitory: Subjection to forced labor can last for years, while forced marriage, in most cases, is equivalent to a life sentence," the 2022 report from the IOM, ILO, and Walk Free stated.

Migrants and vulnerability

The situation affects thousands of children: According to the UNICEF Children in Danger report of Sept. 7, 2023, 1 in every 4 people who are migrating through Latin America and the Caribbean are children and adolescents; that is, 25% of migrants, a record number—according to this organization—compared with other regions of the world where they do not exceed 13%.

Day of Prayer and Reflection against Trafficking

Established by Pope Francis in 2015, the 10th consecutive year a Day of Prayer and Reflection against Trafficking was held Thursday coinciding with the liturgical commemoration of St. Josephine Bakhita, herself a victim of the slave trade.

With the theme "Journeying for Dignity; Listen, Dream, Act," young people belonging to different anti-trafficking organizations and from different countries held an anti-trafficking march in Rome. **(ACI Prensa / Verónica Toller)**

Vatican Briefing

Pope to Italian seminarians: The Church is a "work in progress"

"The Church is above all an open construction site" that "remains constantly on the move, open to the novelty of the Spirit, overcoming the temptation to preserve itself and its interests". Pope Francis offered that insight on Feb. 16 as he addressed seminarians and community members of the Seminary "Alessio Ascalesi" of the Archdiocese of Naples celebrating the 90th anniversary of its inauguration. In his prepared remarks he gave the group in the Clementine Hall, the Pope reflected on the ongoing nature of priestly formation needed to bring the "beauty of the Gospel" to the people of our time, listening to the Holy Spirit, and their demands. "Let us remember - he said - "that formation never ends, it lasts a lifetime, and if it stops, we do not remain where we were, but we regress." **(Vatican News)**

Pope Francis on Ash Wednesday: 'Let us return to God with all our heart'

On Ash Wednesday, Pope Francis said that Lent is a time to look inward at our true selves and to share our deepest desires, worries, and weaknesses with the Lord in prayer. In a world where "everything has to be exposed, shown off, and fed to the gossip mill of the moment," the Lord is inviting us to "remove the masks we so often wear" and to see ourselves as we truly are in the sight of God, Pope Francis said in his Ash Wednesday homily. "Precisely there, where so many fears, feelings of guilt, and sin are lurking, precisely there the Lord has descended in order to heal and cleanse you." "Let us acknowledge what we are: dust loved by God. We are dust loved by God. And thanks to him, we will be reborn from the ashes of sin to new life in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit," the pope said on Feb. 14. **(CNA)**

Pope Francis: Sloth is a 'very dangerous temptation' akin to apathy

During his Feb. 14 Wednesday general audience—which this year coincided with Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent—Pope Francis reflected on the human dimension of the vice of acedia, more commonly known as sloth, observing that it is "an effect more than a cause." Remarking that it is a "very dangerous temptation," the pope reflected on how acedia, which is a Greek word meaning "lack of care," encompasses a "psychological and a philosophical" dimension and can be linked to apathy—and even absentmindedness—which can have serious ramifications in our personal as well as our spiritual lives. "It is as though those who fall victim to it are crushed by a desire for death. They feel disgust at everything, the relationship with God becomes boring to them, and even the holiest acts, those that in the past warmed their hearts, now appear entirely useless to them," the pope observed to the faithful gathered in the Paul VI Audience Hall. **(CNA)**

Pope Francis to visit Venice Art Biennale in April

The Vatican Dicastery for Culture and Education announced on Feb. 13 that Pope Francis will visit Venice on April 28. During his one-day pastoral visit to the Italian city, the Pope will make a stop at the 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia 2024. He will take a moment to appreciate the Holy See Pavilion at the Biennale's exhibit in the Giudecca Women's Prison. Entitled "With my eyes," the pavilion is dedicated to the theme of human rights and people living on the margins of society. It is curated by Chiara Parisi and Bruno Racine, and seeks to draw the world's attention to those people who are largely ignored, while fostering a culture of encounter. **(Vatican News)**

Holy See: Education, work, support to family keys to eradicate poverty

Strong social protection systems, including those supporting the family, education, and decent work are crucial to combat poverty, and achieve integral human development, said the Holy See's Permanent Observer to the United Nations in New York on Feb. 12. Archbishop Gabriele Caccia was addressing the UN 62nd Session of the Commission for Social Development discussing social policies to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication. Recalling that poverty can be eradicated by "addressing first of all its root causes," the Vatican Observer highlighted the role played by education as a "primary vehicle of integral human development" leading to greater opportunities and better outcomes for all. He therefore reaffirmed the need for measures to ensure access to education for poor families, "so that every child, including the poorest, is nurtured and that children can fulfil their potential in accordance with their inherent dignity." **(Vatican News)**

Pope names biochemist who contributed to COVID vaccine to Pontifical Academy for Life

A Nobel-prize winning biochemist and researcher who helped develop the mRNA technology used to create the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines—Katalin Karikó—is one of the newest members of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy for Life. Pope Francis announced the appointment of Karikó, who lectures at the University of Szeged in Hungary, in a news release on Feb. 10. The pontifical academy, which St. John Paul II established in 1994, studies and provides input on the use of biomedicine in the protection of life. Karikó, who was born in Szolnok, Hungary, received the 2023 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for her work to develop mRNA technology. The Nobel Assembly at the Karolinska Institute issued a news release saying she and co-researcher Drew Weissman received the award "for their discoveries concerning nucleoside base modifications that enabled the development of effective mRNA vaccines against COVID-19." **(CNA)**

Pope Francis on Our Lady of Lourdes feast: The Church is close to all who are sick or frail

Pope Francis urged people to bring God's love to the sick and suffering through "concrete actions" in his Angelus address on the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, Feb. 11. Speaking on a rainy Sunday in Rome from the window of the Apostolic Palace to the crowd huddled under umbrellas below, the pope said that he wanted to express the closeness "of the entire Church to all those who are sick or frail." "Today, on the memorial of the Blessed Virgin of Lourdes, we celebrate World Day of the Sick, which this year draws attention to the importance of relationships in sickness," Pope Francis said. "We are all required to be a neighbor to those who suffer, to visit the sick as Jesus teaches us in the Gospel," he added. **(CNA)**

Pope Francis launches study groups to analyze Synod on Synodality's key issues

By COURTNEY MARES | CNA

THE Vatican announced Saturday that Pope Francis has launched synodal study groups to analyze key issues ahead of October's Synod on Synodality assembly.

Pope Francis has issued a chirograph asking the Dicastries of the Roman Curia to collaborate with the General Secretariat of the Synod to establish the study groups for "in-depth analysis" of some of the themes that emerged in the first Synod on Synodality assembly.

The pope did not specify in the chirograph published on Feb. 17 how many groups will be formed, what topics will be studied, or who will participate in the study groups.

The synthesis report published at the end of the first synod assembly lists 75 different "matters for consideration," including women's access to diaconal ministry, priestly celibacy, and "Eucharistic hospitality" for interfaith couples.

These "matters of consideration," which could not find a consensus in the first synod assembly, are defined as "points on which we have recognized that it is necessary to continue theological, pastoral, and canonical deepening."

In addition, the synthesis report also calls for the establishment of a "special intercontinental commission of theologians and canonists" to examine the definition and conceptual understanding of the "idea and practice of synodality" and its canonical implications, as well as the establishment of a joint commission of Eastern and Latin theologians, historians and canonists.

According to Vatican News, the study groups will require a substantial amount of time and will not "directly constitute the material



Pope Francis attends a session of the XVI General Assembly of the Synod on Synodality at the Paul VI Hall in the Vatican, Oct. 23, 2023. ROY LAGARDE

up for discussion in the next session of the Synod, which will focus on synodality itself."

The General Secretariat of the Synod, led by Cardinal Mario Grech, will coordinate the work of the study groups among the dicasteries, which will "involve experts from all continents" following a synodal process, the Vatican's state media outlet said.

The Vatican also announced on Saturday the dates for the second Synod on Synodality assembly and the appointment of six new consultants to the General Secretariat of the Synod.

The 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops's second session will take place from Oct. 2 to Oct. 27. The participants in the assembly will arrive in Rome on Sept. 29 to participate in a two-day spiritual retreat ahead of the start of the assembly.

Among the new synod consultants, Pope Francis chose three female professors.

Dr. Tricia Bruce, a sociology professor at Maryville College in Tennessee and president-elect of

the Association for the Sociology of Religion, and Dr. Maria Clara Lucchetti Bingemer, a theology professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, are both appointees.

As is Sister Dr. Birgit Weiler, a German missionary in Peru and theology professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru. Weiler is a member of the Congregation of the Medical Missionary Sisters and has lived in Peru for more than 35 years, where she works with the Episcopal Council of Latin America (CELAM) and the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM).

The other appointees are Monsignor Alphonse Borras, a Belgian canon lawyer and specialist in the theology of the diaconate; Father Gilles Routhier, a professor of religious studies at Laval University in Quebec; and Father Ormond Rush, a theology professor at Australian Catholic University. Rush addressed the first synod assembly in October with a speech that focused on Vatican II's discussion of tradition as the authority for the Synod on Synodality.

Vatican doctrine office releases note on discerning the validity of the sacraments

By COURTNEY MARES | CNA

THE Vatican Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF) released a note on Saturday on discerning the validity of the sacraments.

The new document signed by Pope Francis and DDF Prefect Cardinal Victor Fernández is titled "Gestis Verbisque," or "Deeds and Words."

Fernández wrote in his introduction to the text that the note on the sacraments was written "to help bishops in their task as promoters and custodians of the liturgical life of the particular Churches entrusted to them"

"The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith intends to offer in this note some elements of a doctrinal nature with regard to discernment on the validity of the celebration of the sacraments, paying attention also to some disciplinary and pastoral implications," he wrote.

The 11-page text published only in Italian on Feb. 3 reiterates that for all sacraments in the Catholic Church, the "observance of both matter and form has always been required for the validity of the celebration."

"Both matter and form, summarized in the Code of Canon Law, are established in the liturgical books promulgated by the competent authority, which must therefore be faithfully observed, without adding, removing, or changing anything," it says.

The document adds that arbitrary changes to either matter or form "jeopardize the effective bestowal of sacramental grace, to the obvious detriment of the faithful" and that the "severity and invalidating force" of such changes "must be ascertained on a case-by-case basis."

"Gestis Verbisque" frequently refers to the dicastery's 2020 doctrinal note on the modification of the sacramental formula of baptism, which clarified that changing the words to "we baptize you" invalidated the baptism, requiring anyone who had been baptized with this formula to be considered as not yet having received the sacrament.

Fernández writes that in 2022 cardinals and bishops taking part in the DDF's January plenary assembly had already expressed concern about "the multiplication

of situations in which they were forced to note the invalidity of the sacraments celebrated."

Specific examples, listed by the cardinal, include using "I baptize you in the name of the Creator ..." or "In the name of your father and mother ... we baptize you," instead of the established baptismal formula.

"While in other areas of the Church's pastoral action there is ample room for creativity, such inventiveness in the context of the celebration of the sacraments turns rather into a 'manipulative will' and therefore cannot be invoked," the cardinal prefect said.

"We ministers are therefore required to have the strength to overcome the temptation to feel like owners of the Church," Fernández added.

The cardinal later commented that when the priest acts "in persona Christi capitis," it does not mean that the priest is "the boss" with the ability to exercise arbitrary power, but that Christ alone is "the head of the body, the Church," citing Colossians 1:18.

"It seems increasingly urgent to mature an art of celebrating that, keeping at a distance as much from rigid rubricism as from unbridled imagination, leads to a discipline to be respected, precisely in order to be authentic disciples," Fernández said.

Pope Francis approved the text of the DDF note during a private audience with Fernández on Jan. 31 after the note was discussed and unanimously approved by the cardinals and bishops who attended the dicastery's recent January plenary assembly.

Fernández and Monsignor Armando Matteo, the secretary for the dicastery's doctrinal section, signed the note on Feb. 2, the feast of the Presentation of the Lord.

"Precisely by constituting the Church as his mystical body, Christ makes believers partakers of his own life, uniting them to his death and resurrection in a real and mysterious way through the sacraments," the note says.

"Indeed, the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit acts in the faithful through sacramental signs, making them living stones of a spiritual edifice, founded on the cornerstone that is Christ the Lord, and constituting them as a priestly people, partakers of the one priesthood of Christ."

Cardinal Tagle celebrates Lunar New Year with Chinese in Rome



Performers showcase a traditional dragon dance to welcome the Chinese New Year at the Vatican on Feb. 2, 2024. VATICAN MEDIA

By L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO AND FIDES AGENCY

THE Church does not shine with its own light. It can only give the world the light of Christ, reflecting it on its opaque body, as the moon does with the sunlight. Cardinal Louis Antonio Tagle, Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for the Evangelization offered this powerful image, drawn from the Fathers of the Church, to explain again what is the source and the true nature of the missionary work entrusted by Christ to His Church.

The Mysterium Lunae and the mission of the Church

The Filipino Cardinal referred to what the Fathers of the Church called the Mysterium Lunae on

February 10, during the Mass he presided on the occasion of the celebration the Chinese Lunar New Year, organized by the community of Chinese Catholic students in Rome at the Pontifical College of Saint Paul.

Dozens of Chinese priests, nuns, seminarians, and deacons studying in Roman universities participated in the celebration, according to Fides agency, together with, among others, Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu and Father Samuele Sangalli, respectively Secretary and Under-Secretary of the Dicastery for Evangelization.

Separated from Jesus the moon has no light of its own

The Cardinal recalled that the moon, has "a special place" in the reflections of the early Fathers of

the Church. And it is something that has to do "with the mission of the Church, with our mission. The sun, the light is Jesus Christ, and the Church, like the moon, must depend on the light that comes from Jesus".

Separated from Jesus, Cardinal Tagle continued, the moon has no light of its own. And in any case, the moon does not keep the light it receives from the sun for itself, but refracts it towards the earth, "shares" it with the earth.

"My hope," the cardinal concluded, "is that every year, on the occasion of the Lunar New Year, we Christians can renew our 'lunar ministry': turning to Jesus, receiving the light of Jesus, and sharing the light of Christ, not our own light, with the world. Jesus is the light of the nations. We are the moon".

World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly highlights 'loneliness,' 'throwaway culture'

By MATTHEW SANTUCCI | CNA

THE theme for the fourth World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, which will be celebrated on July 28, has been chosen by Pope Francis.

According to the Holy See Press Office, this year's theme is "Do Not Cast Me Off in My Old Age," which comes from Psalm 71. The Feb. 15 press release noted that in choosing this verse it was the Holy Father's desire "to call attention to the fact that, sadly, loneliness is the bitter lot in life of many elderly persons, so often the victims of the throwaway culture."

The press release said that "by cherishing the charisms of grandparents and the elderly, and the contribution they make to the life of the Church, the World Day seeks to support the efforts of every ecclesial community to forge bonds between the generations and to combat loneliness."

It also noted that the day will also be an opportunity for the whole Church to prepare for the upcoming jubilee year of 2025.

Reflecting on the theme chosen by the pope, Cardinal Kevin Farrell — the prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life—stressed the Holy Father's call to bring awareness to the isolation that many elderly people face, saying that it is "a widespread reality" and that

"many elderly people [are] often victims of the throwaway culture and considered a burden to society."

In the Feb. 15 press release issued by the dicastery, the cardinal also noted that while "loneliness, certainly, is also an unavoidable condition of human existence," it is incumbent upon "families and the ecclesial community... to be at the forefront in promoting a culture of encounter, to create spaces for sharing, listening, to offer support and affection: thus the love of Gospel becomes concrete."

The cardinal also noted that the celebration of the fourth World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly in July will be an opportunity for intergenerational dialogue, which will help build "the broader 'we' of ecclesial communion."

"It is precisely this familiarity, rooted in the love of God, that overcomes every form of throwaway culture and loneliness."

The press release also noted that in the coming months a pastoral kit will be made available on the family dicastery's website to help individuals and communities prepare for the event.

Pope Francis established the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly in 2021. It is held on the fourth Sunday of July, which falls near the feast of Sts. Joachim and Anne, the grandparents of Jesus.



REJOICE IN THE TRUTH

CARDINAL ORLANDO B. QUEVEDO, OMI

An independent Mindanao?

SOME Mindanao politicians, especially in the Davao area, are calling for the separation of Mindanao from the Republic of the Philippines. The initial reason, as I understand it, is the underdevelopment of Mindanao due to neglect by the national government. If one of the causes of the Bangsamoro rebellion was the marginalization of the Bangsamoro due to neglect, it is also true that the rest of Mindanao has a reason to complain on the same issue.

The idea of an independent Mindanao goes back many years. Datu Udtog Matalam, former Governor of Cotabato province, established the Muslim Independence Movement and later renamed it as the Mindanao Independence Movement. But it lacked people's support. Nur Misuari and his Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) waged a rebellion in order to pursue the idea of an independent Mindanao but signed a peace agreement with President Ramos who appointed him Governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). But Hashim Salamat with his Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) continued the armed struggle. His successor, Ahod "Al Haj Murad" Ebrahim, effectively ended the struggle by signing a peace agreement with President Noyon Aquino. The peace agreement established the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), with its own Parliamentary form of government, presently called the Bangsamoro Transition Authority. The Bangsamoro Organic Law is the legal basis for these developments.

It is said that the economic reason for the independence of Mindanao is to ensure that adequate funds for the development of the southern islands are provided. But the grapevine abounds with reports that other reasons override the economic one. The first move was for federalism. With federalism, the outgoing President could remain in office as the Chief Minister, and perhaps without term limits. With Federalism out of the picture, the next move towards retention of political positions would be an independent Mindanao. Such is the Mindanao grapevine.

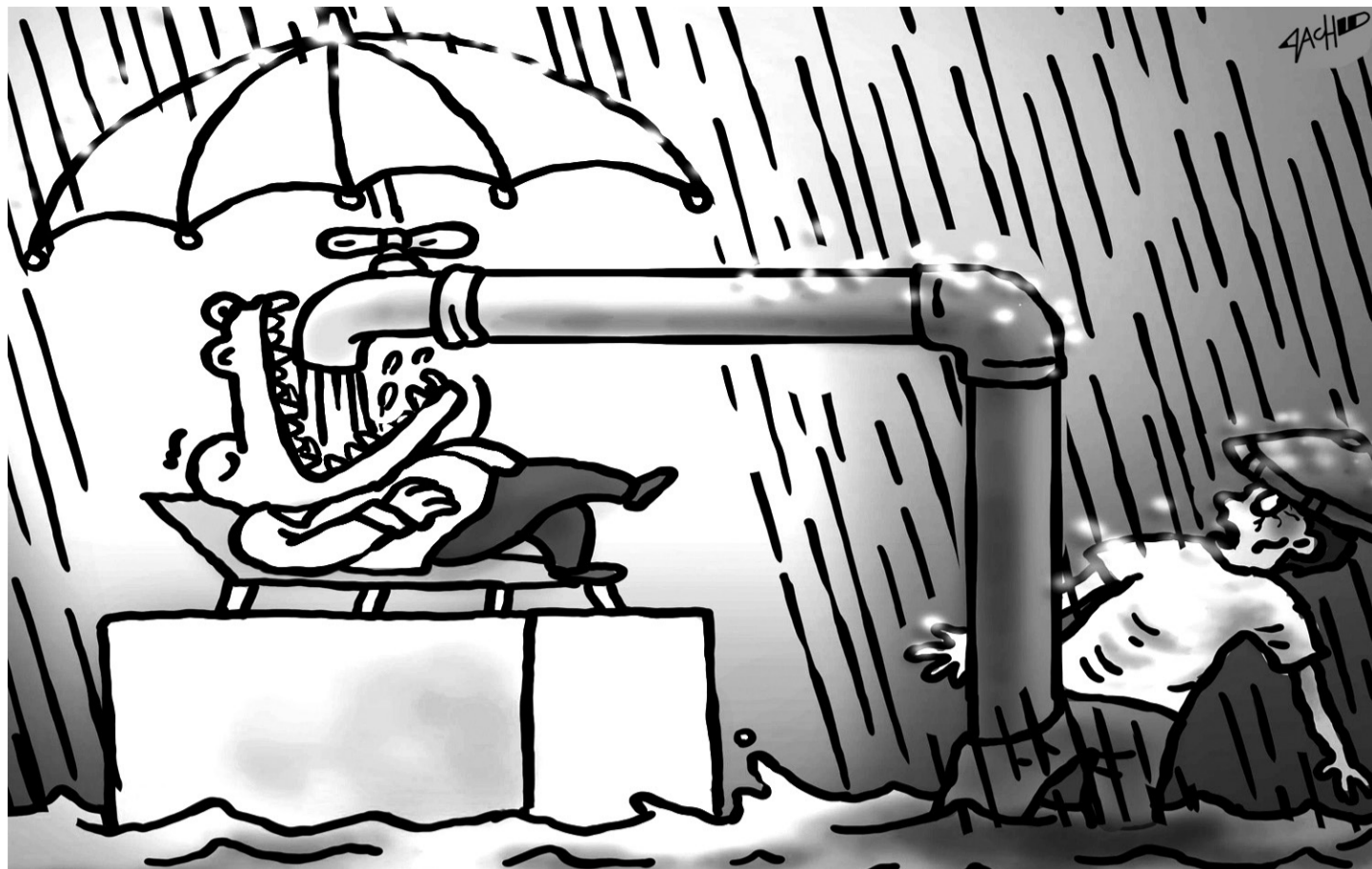
Past events work against the contention. If the reasons were economic, our former President, who is from Mindanao, could certainly have persuaded Congress to enact the laws necessary to provide development funds. Political officials from Mindanao in the House of Representatives and in the Senate could have collaborated towards this objective. That they did not do so could well mean disinterestedness or lack of prioritization.

The former President has said that an Independent Mindanao would be good for the Bangsamoro. But Chief Minister Ahod "Murad" Ebrahim of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority is of a different mind. He has now clearly supported an undivided national territorial integrity and sovereignty. A Bangsamoro territory preserved within the national territory is good for the Bangsamoro. It gets the protection of the national government. It receives assistance in economic, social, and cultural development. It does not stand alone in confronting the challenges of the environment and climate change.

What is certainly needed is for the national government to provide more funds for the economic and social development of Mindanao, especially for the Indigenous Peoples who are the most neglected. It is in Mindanao where poverty and underdevelopment are the worst. It is high time for imperial Manila to consider Mindanao as the central focus of economic development.

The Mindanao Bishops have not yet issued a consensus statement. Perhaps they think, as I do, that the idea of an independent Mindanao is insane and simply to be put aside.

While the issue is primarily political and economic, it concerns the Common Good of all, a moral and social justice issue and treated as such by the Social Teachings of the Church. It is my belief that the Common Good of all Filipinos would be served much better when the nation is preserved as one, with all regions, cultures, religious traditions, social classes, and tribes contributing to the common good, and collaborating in solidarity and unity for the good of the nation.



Editorial

Rethinking strategies in prolife advocacy

THE terse but heavily loaded homily of Manila Archbishop, Jose Cardinal Advincula, at the Mass during the Walk for Life held in the University of Santo Tomas on February 17, maybe read to be calling for a new paradigm in approaches to prolife activism.

The stunner was, "Yes, we are clear about our teachings on the different issues connected with life and the family. But we also need to rethink our approaches, methodologies and strategies. How do we deal with the dilemmas and complexities of modern families, the irregular situations in the home, the diversity in understanding identity and personhood, the wounds caused and inflicted because of polarization even in the home?"

Because, truth to tell, there is really a need "to explore new pathways to respond better to the dominant values of our contemporary times." The condemnatory, the alarmist and the judgmental may now be the most trite approach that has alienated more people all the more. And such ways may end up barking on the wrong tree simply because they are not within the ambit of these "dominant values of our contemporary times." Which is why, the good Cardinal suggests, "we need to engage in more listening and dialogue."

And if social surveys are to be given credence, one can easily infer that hackneyed approaches may not be gaining any headway at all. The Philippine Statistics Authority in its 2022 Demographic and Health Survey reports that, to quote, "the use of modern methods of family planning among married women increased from 25% in 1993 to 42% in 2022. The use of traditional methods has not changed much from 15% in 1993 to 17% in 2022." Moreover, "The public sector provides 50% of modern family planning methods in the Philippines. Slightly less than half (46%) of modern method users obtain family planning from the private medical sector and 4% of users obtain modern methods from other sources. A large majority of women using sterilization (73%) and injectables (85%), obtained these methods from the public section. In contrast, the majority of pill (70%) and male condom (72% users obtained their method from the private sector."

These figures, of course, cannot be finger-pointed on prolife activism, because there are major factors at play other than the prolife advocacy. But neither can numbers be ignored into insignificance despite the fact that cold figures do not consummate the

whole truth. Present social realities in the country and even in the world can become valid benchmarks if ever, as the good Cardinal suggest, we have to "rethink our approaches, methodologies and strategies" in prolife activism.

In the same homily, Cardinal Advincula imply the best approach—the Gospel. He said, "Jesus, in our Gospel today from St. Luke, gave us the best example of how to walk for life together. He dined and dialogued with the known sinners of His time. He called Levi, a tax collector, to follow him. He attended the banquet which Levi prepared in his house. He had no problem being on the same table with a large crowd of tax collectors! He told the scribes and pharisees who were complaining about his impertinent behavior, 'Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners.' We must have the same boldness and audacity of Jesus. If we want to talk together for life, we must learn to be all thing to all as St. Paul would say in his letter to the Corinthians."

The alarmist, the judgmental and the condemnatory is definitely not the way to prolife activism. This may be the one that needs rethinking.



IN THE FENCE OF HOPE

BISHOP GERARDO A. ALMINAZA

Faith: A fuel to the hope for a sustainable future

AS I write, news just came out on new power generating facilities in the country that are expected to begin their operations this year. I find it lamentable that a substantial part of this—nearly 2 GW in total—would come from fossil fuel power plants. Before this year ends, a massive new gas-fired power plant would be spewing methane gas into the atmosphere in Batangas; in Bataan, another coal plant is set to bring pollution and destruction. Just a month before that, the Department of Energy (DOE) also endorsed a coal-fired power plant expansion in the province of Cebu, even with a three-year-old coal moratorium already in place.

Barely two months before all this, we recall that the world—or at least all 198 parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)—agreed that we need to be "transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner, accelerating action in this critical decade." This was the first time ever in three decades of the climate talks that a decision text finally acknowledged humanity's reckless use of fossil fuels as the cause of the catastrophic climate changes we are confronting today. For the first time, it was articulated in a COP decision that the typhoons, floods, droughts, and climate chaos ravaging millions across the world did not rise out of thin air, but are the consequence of the

selfish disregard by fossil fuel backers to the plight of the most vulnerable.

One would think that reaching a consensus on the need to 'transition' away from dirty energy from coal, gas, and oil would create ripples and shifts in how countries choose to power themselves. The reality is that the world has not stopped extracting and burning fossil fuels, and has not halted the construction of new coal, gas, or oil facilities. Such is clearly the case for our country, where a new Philippine Energy Plan is expected to lay the foundation for decades more of a fossil-fueled future.

When asked, our leaders in government and corporate players supporting the fossil fuel industry would claim that we need fossil fuels for our development. But what kind of development is it that drives communities, the poorest and the vulnerable to further misery from pollution and worse climate changes, rather than uplift their quality of life?

We must understand that it is countries like ours, those who suffer the worst of the disruptions in our Earth's climate system, that would benefit the most by carving a path away from dependence on fossil fuels. By committing to the hope for a full shift to clean renewable energy at the soonest time and on a national scale, our government and the Filipino public would be guided by a common hope for change in insisting on receiving the climate finance, technical, and other

capacities owed by historical polluters for our transition. We would be empowered as a nation to find ways around barriers that we feel are blocking our path to a sustainable future, and to find solutions for the gaps in making it happen.

At least twelve nations have, in fact, proven that this is possible. Over the last few years, at least a dozen country governments have endorsed what is called a Fossil Fuel Non-proliferation Treaty - which is a proposition for a concrete, binding plan to end the expansion of new coal, oil and gas projects and manage a global transition away from fossil fuels in the international sphere. Pope Francis has himself engaged country leaders who have endorsed the Treaty, and even marked the beginning of this new year with a bold call for action to end fossil fuels.

In the aftermath of COP 28, Pope Francis's wise words deeply resonates: "the most effective solutions" in the context of climate chaos, he says, "will not come from individual efforts alone, but above all from major political decisions on the national and international level."

September 21 this year has been declared a global day of action to join the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty. It falls within the week of the Season of Creation 2024, aptly themed "To hope and act with Creation." Oh may we use this as an opportunity to live our faith and fuel the hope for a sustainable future!

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BY THE ROADSIDE

MSGR. EUTQUIO BELIZAR, JR. SThD

"Beloved, let us love one another. For love is of God and anyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God" (1 Jn 4:7).

1. I have always been fascinated by the English word 'love'. It has two consonants, namely 'l' and 'v' and two vowels, namely, 'o' and 'e'. 'L' for me stands for 'letting' for love is an act of the will that 'lets' or allows oneself to do the act of 'v' which to me stands for 'valuing'. In love there is an active action of letting oneself 'value' another and a passive action of letting oneself 'be valued' by another. Now, as for the vowels, 'o' stands for 'other', the subject-object of valuing while 'e' stands for the 'ego', the self, also the subject and object of valuing.

2. It is quite interesting how in the word love, the 'o' or 'other' precedes the 'e' or 'ego'. I find this remarkable because in the Weltanschauung or world view of true love the self or 'ego' is last and the 'other' is first. We find this perfectly portrayed by the Savior on the Cross where he literally makes himself last and us—his disciples and the world—first. This fits in favorably well with the shorter definition of love by St. Thomas Aquinas as "willing the good of another".

3. The 'o' in love which to me stands for 'other' also refers to the 'Great Other' (God) and the common 'other' (fellow human being or even fellow creature). I find this again to be fortunate because it somehow accommodates the late Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen's declaration that "love makes the world go round and takes it to its source (God)". Inevitably 'love' has to explain itself and in a litany of causes, to paraphrase St. Thomas Aquinas, we must arrive at the First Cause, which cannot not be God. In fact, in the Christian perspective we have the capacity to love only because God, its First Cause, loved us first. "Beloved, love consists in this: not that we have loved God but that God loved us first and has sent his Son as a propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn 4:10). What follows from this love received

is love given by us to the First Giver ("Therefore, let us love God because he first loved us" [1 Jn 4:19]). But it does not end vertically. Love must also move horizontally, to fellow humans, fellow creatures. "Beloved, if God has loved us so, then we also ought to love one another" (1 Jn 4:11).

4. Love then is at the heart of religion, especially of revealed religion. Love is inevitably, unquestionably religious. In a homily I once asked the "religious" to stand up to be recognized. This was during the Year of the Clergy and Consecrated Persons (2018). I was taken aback when I saw some "lay" women members of a church organization also rising from their seats. When they were asked why they stood up, they said matter-of-factly, "Aren't we religious too?" Indeed, save for the narrow technical understanding of the term, they had a point. Perhaps without knowing it and without meaning to, the lay 'religious' women also took the cudgels up for the men who were not as insistent on their 'religious' dimension.

5. For Jews to be religious has something to do with obedience to the Ten Commandments as expressed in 613 precepts issued by Moses. Of these 365 are negative prohibitions and 248 positive formulations. In Deuteronomy 6:3-6 Moses reminds everyone that obedience to the Commandments is essentially an expression of the love of God. Fr Mueller, a priest of the Society of the Divine Word, once said: "Moses makes clear that the love of God is the essence of the Law" (Dt 5:32-6:13).

6. Jesus himself in Mk 12:30 quotes the last part of Deut. 6:5 as the essential first commandment. Jews know this as the "Shema, Israel." which means "Listen, Israel, the Lord YHWH is the Lord alone (one God)!" It is followed by the words: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Dt 6:5). All these simply mean that we must love God totally, with all our being. There is no part of ourselves and of our lives that is not be ruled

Love beyond Valentine

by it. It was said of Rudolf Nureyev, a famous ballet dancer, that he "thought ballet, spoke ballet, breathed ballet, and even ate ballet". Ballet was his first and foremost priority to which all else was subordinate. That is how we must love God. Loving God must be our number one value and all other values must come only second. No love must come ahead of loving God. Christian Bautista once sang a song asking, "Would you be my number two?" Why only number two? I surmised that it is because true love for a believer means God is number one always. Even a spouse or BF/GF has to take only the next best place.

7. But Jesus adds another commandment to that of Dt 6:4-5 on loving God above all and with all our being: "This is the second: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' which he quotes from Lev 19:18. Jesus says this is "like the first" and that together "there is no other commandment greater than these" (Mk 12:31).

8. For Jesus the love of God cannot be separated from the love of neighbor. We cannot say we truly love God because we come to church, give our tithes, join religious organizations and communities while we mistreat our subordinates, maids, cooks, janitors, the poor. On the other hand, our love of neighbor can only be just as genuine if it is rooted in the love of God. Otherwise, as St. John Paul II used to say, we would be no different from "social workers", activists or political revolutionaries.

A story is told of a priest who was being recruited by a rebel: "Tutal, Father, pare-pareho naman ang ginagawa natin para sa sambayanan (Anyway, we are doing the same things for the people)." To that the priest answered: "Not quite. We priests and lay workers are doing what we are doing for the poor and the people because of our love for God." End of the recruitment try.

10. What sums this up is, as I earlier pointed out, Jesus on the cross and the Cross itself. Jesus offers himself totally

By the roadside / A6



TIME OUT WITH DOC JOE

JOSE S. YAMAMOTO, M.D.

NO, the signal to better life

VERY few people, if any, would want to receive a big fat NO. But not if the NO is something that is sure to positively impact on life and health. I refer to NO, the formula for nitric oxide, perhaps the most important signaling molecule produced by the cells for wide use in the body.

What are signaling molecules? These are molecules that are responsible for transmitting information between cells in your body. The size, shape and function of different types of signaling molecules can vary greatly. Some carry signals over short distances, while others transmit information over very long distances. A signaling molecule is also known as a ligand, a chemical messenger released by one cell to signal itself or a different cell. The binding results in a cellular effect, which manifests as any number of changes in that cell.

Molecules that are referred to as signaling molecules include proteins, peptides, amino acids, nucleotides, steroids, retinoids, fatty acids derivatives, and even dissolved gases such as nitric oxide and carbon monoxide. Hormones are also signaling molecules because of the notable functions of these secretions in terms of metabolism, development, growth and reproduction.

Why is NO called the most important signaling molecule? Because it acts inside and outside the cell as messenger, NO mediates diverse signaling pathways in target cells and is known to play an important role in many physiological or body processes including neuronal (brain) signaling; immune response (capacity to ward off infection or protect against autoimmune illnesses, such

as lupus, etc.); inflammatory response (inflammation, even when silent, is the root cause of many if not all diseases); modulation of ion channels (ions required in production of electrical impulses that enables muscles to contract, including heart muscles); phagocytic defense mechanisms (capacity to immobilize and digest harmful bacteria, fungi, and viruses); sexual arousal in both males and females, and cardiovascular homeostasis or balance.

NO has broad effect across all the branches of medicine—cardiovascular, immunology, neurology, gastroenterology, endocrinology, pulmonary, musculoskeletal, etc. It is surprising that this versatile and amazing molecule is underemphasized and underutilized by many clinicians. NO is not taught even in medical schools.

Of the myriad effects of NO, it is in cardiovascular medicine that it has made the most impact. It works by dilating or relaxing the walls of the blood vessels thereby increasing blood flow, reducing blood pressure, decreasing oxidative stress and inflammation, reducing vascular and cardiac smooth muscle growth, inhibiting platelet aggregation, and preventing leukocyte adhesion to the vessel endothelium (thin and fragile inner lining). It is these last two effects (platelet aggregation and leukocyte adhesion) that have direct bearing in the induction of heart attacks.

Deficiencies in the bioavailability of NO are related to hypertension, atherosclerosis or hardening of arteries, coronary heart disease, blood vessel effects of diabetes

Time out with Doc Joe / A6



FAITH JOURNEY

SR. PINKY BARRIENTOS, FSP

FOR many, the month of February is always associated with Valentine's Day, a month dedicated to love. But for us Daughters of St. Paul, February is always associated with Venerable Tecla Merlo, our co-foundress. February is her birth month, birth on earth and birth into eternal life. She was born February 20, 1894, and died February 5, 1964.

Tecla Merlo is a woman for our time. Simple and unassuming, she lived a life totally dedicated to God and to the proclamation of the gospel using the instruments of social communication. It was a ministry that was unheard of in her time, but she embraced it with all her heart and mind, notwithstanding her ill health, lack of preparation and expertise. The love for souls that burned in her heart pushed her to say yes to the call of God, and gave her the necessary impetus and strength to overcome whatever difficulties that came her way.

Tecla Merlo was born Teresa and was the only girl among four siblings. As a young woman, it was her dream to become a nun, but poor health became a hindrance. However, as the gospel would attest, God does not call the equipped, rather he equips whom he calls. This adage fits Teresa to a T. Although she did not have a high academic education, she was quick-witted and possessed practical intelligence that served her well. People were drawn to her because of her simplicity and natural piety.

Fr. James Alberione, who had just started a typographical school for young boys, (which later developed to become the congregation of the Society of St. Paul) was looking for a young woman of good character

who could collaborate with him in forming young women who can work in the press, as well as teach catechism in the parish. Teresa's brother, who was in the seminary at that time, told Fr. Alberione about her sister Teresa, who wanted to become a nun but was unable to do so because of poor health. Teresa, with her mother in tow, met with Fr. Alberione and agreed to work with him. That fateful meeting led to Teresa joining the group of girls already working with Fr. Alberione. But her mother only gave her 15 days to try it out. Understandably, because of poor health, she got sick right away, to the dismay of her companions. However, she soon recovered and afterward, never got sick again despite the hardships and other deprivations the group of young women experienced in the early years.

On July 22, 1922, Teresa made her private perpetual profession of vows as a Daughter of St. Paul together with some companions. She took the name Tecla as her religious name in honor of St. Tecla, a female disciple of St. Paul. On this occasion, Fr. Alberione also appointed Tecla as Superior General of the fledgling congregation. She remained in this capacity until she died due to illness on February 5, 1964. The congregation was established and had spread overseas under the watch and motherly guidance of Mother Tecla.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Gaudium, Pope Francis speaks of the idea of a Church that looks outward, and 'goes forth' to bring the gospel to the 'peripheries', a concept that was not foreign

Venerable Tecla Merlo, a woman for our time

to Fr. Alberione even as a young seminarian. In fact, the Pauline Family, which constitutes five religious congregations (of which the Daughters of St. Paul is one), four aggregated Institutes and one lay association of Cooperators, was founded exactly with that outlook - a vision of universality that included everyone and everything. At a time when it was not yet the custom for Sisters to be out in the streets, Fr. Alberione already sent them out two by two to visit families and factories to bring the word of God, in imitation of the apostles (thus shocking the conservatives and those opposed to his initiatives).

Mother Tecla was Fr. Alberione's ardent supporter in his various undertakings that concerned the foundations and development of various Institutes in the Pauline family. He himself confided to the Daughters of St. Paul that he "owed [Mother Tecla] a lot because she has enlightened and directed [him] in happy and sad circumstances, and has consoled [him] in the difficulties that have been obstacles on [his] path."

Prima Maestra (meaning First Teacher), as we Daughters of St. Paul fondly address her, was a teacher and a mother in the truest sense of the word. She did not only teach us with words of counsel, but most importantly by her witness of life. She was a pioneer in using the means of social communication in proclaiming the gospel. It was her heartfelt wish that she might possess a thousand lives to proclaim the gospel in every corner of the world using the modern means of communication. Surely,

Faith Journey / A6



THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW

FR. ELIAS "ELI" L. AYUBAN, JR., CMF

Being synodal in formation

I WAS invited by the leadership of the Association of Women Formators of the Philippines (AWFP) to reflect on the theme: Being Synodal in Formation, on the occasion of their 40th National Convention, at St. Paul Renewal Center, in Alfonso, Cavite, on Feb. 7, 2024. Below are some key points of my sharing.

A synodal formation treats the formands as friends and involves them in the decision-making processes. Friendship can be a good model of religious formation in a synodal Church. Jesus' self-gift was an act of friendship, "I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends..." (Jn 15:15). The Lord demonstrated to His disciples that genuine service is rooted in the love of friendship where we are fully conscious of our being co-equal.

In a synodal formation, all become members of the same family, each gifted differently, with equal opportunities to grow. There is no place for exclusion, segregation or discrimination. The work of formation is the fruit of the collaboration between those responsible for formation and their disciples. It should not be a unidirectional or top-bottom approach. There is a need to empower the formands and allow them to be part of the discernment process.

The FABC synthesis paper on synodal formation emphasizes a Christ-centered and learner-centered formation for both

formators and formands. Thus, the first requirement of being synodal in formation is to be convinced that both the formators and the formands play an important role in formation work. In this type of process, the formators and formands need to walk together.

Clericalism is the worst enemy of a synodal Church. As such, it needs to be challenged from the earliest stages of formation. But one does not need to be a cleric to be clerical. Clericalism is an aristocracy or elitism that is present in other forms of life (cf. Pope Francis, The Strength of Vocation). Religious who live with the attitude of segregation, with their nose up in the air are also "clerical" in the wider sense of the word.

A synodal formation feels and acts with the Church. Formation is carried on in communion with the Church. It is, therefore, necessary to develop among religious "a manner of thinking" not only "with" but, as St. Ignatius of Loyola also says, "within" the Church. This sense of the Church consists in being aware that one belongs to a people on a journey.

Pope Francis uses the term "ecclesial insertion." We cannot go parallel with the Church because consecrated life is born in the womb of the Church. We must look at the past with gratitude, but not as if we were looking at a museum piece, as an artifact. Our founders are holy people, but they are not Jesus Christ. They have opened us to a great path to follow. They are our

The Spirit of the Law / A6

National Youth Day to be held in July 2025

AFTER three years of deferment, the national gathering of Catholic youth in Naga City will finally take place in July 2025, the Caceres Youth Commission said.

Hosted by the Archdiocese of Caceres for the first time, the National Youth Day (NYD) is expected to draw thousands of young pilgrims from across the nation.

The announcement was made by CYC Director Fr. Daniel R. Vegas during a Mass at the Naga Metropolitan Cathedral on Feb. 4.

The liturgy was attended by CYC representatives and members of

the Youth Ministry of the cathedral parish.

In a video message shown during the announcement, Archbishop Rolando Tria Tirona of Caceres asked the faithful to pray and work together for the success of the event.

“Let us be glad, help, pray, contribute for the success and be proud that the Archdiocese of Caceres is hosting the National Youth Day 2025,” Tirona said.

The NYD was supposed to be held in 2021 on the occasion of the 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines. However, it was postponed due to the

Covid-19 pandemic.

In 1986, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines declared every December 16 as National Youth Day.

Starting in 1987, NYD celebrations at the national level were held in Manila. From 1991 to 1997, the events took place locally in dioceses and parishes.

Since 1998, national celebrations of NYD have been held every two or three years.

The most recent NYD was held in Cebu City in April 2019, attracting over 20,000 delegates. **(CBCP News)**



Young people carry the Caceres Archdiocesan Youth Cross during Mass at the Caceres Cathedral on Feb. 4, 2024. cccom

Caritas Philippines seeks aid for Mindanao flood victims



The Coast Guard District Southeastern Mindanao joins flood relief efforts in Davao region. cgdsem

CARITAS Philippines is appealing aid for families and communities adversely affected by massive flooding across Mindanao.

The Church's humanitarian arm took to social media to appeal for donations for flood victims

in Northern Mindanao, Davao Region, Soccsksargen, Caraga, and the Bangsamoro.

“The Philippines has been hit by massive flooding in recent weeks, and the people of Mindanao are in desperate need of help,” the

national Caritas said on Feb. 5.

“Every little bit helps. Even a small donation can make a big difference in the lives of those affected by the floods,” it said.

Caritas Philippines said donations would support emergency relief efforts, including providing food packs, sleeping kits, hygiene kits, kitchen wares, and emergency shelter kits to displaced families.

In recent days, a low pressure area caused heavy rains in Mindanao, leading to widespread flooding and landslides.

An estimated 214,000 families or 812,000 persons across five regions, have been affected by the calamity.

Caritas Philippines said donations may be sent via bank deposits, particularly in Metrobank (632-7-632-02847-0); BDO (00450803419-2); and BPI (4951-0092-24). **(CBCP News)**

By the roadside / A5

to the Father (vertical pole) but also totally gives his whole life to us and for our salvation (horizontal pole). Jesus the high priest is precisely different from the Jewish high priests of the OT not simply because his priesthood is eternal and he offered his sacrifice “once and for all” for the forgiveness of sins, but especially because what he does is an act of true love: forgetting himself and offering his

very self instead to God and to us sinners. A friend of mine once said: “Some people can give without love; but no one can love without giving. The highest form of giving is self-giving.”

So the next time we are confronted with the question of whether or not our love is true, let us ask ourselves if our love has these two loves inseparably intertwined in everything we say

and do. St. Therese of Lisieux once said: “Let us love for that is what our hearts are made for.” St. Teresa of Jesus, OCD would agree. She taught: “It is not essential to think much as to love much.” Or take the words of St. Anthony Mary Claret on the Word of God: “If it is spoken by someone who is filled with the fire of charity—the fire of love of God and neighbor—it will work wonders.”

Faith Journey / A5

had she been alive today, she would have regarded the progress in digital technology and the development of artificial intelligence as a welcome challenge to go out of our comfort zones and seize the opportunity to use a new paradigm of proclaiming the gospel.

St. John Paul II proclaimed Tecla Merlo venerable on January 22, 1991. We commemorate this year the 60th year of her birth to eternal life. While still alive, she would always counsel that our main preoccupation should be to live a holy life and teach others to do the

same. May the deepest desire in her heart become a reality in the life of all Daughters of St. Paul and of the people whom we are called to minister with through our apostolic mission.

Venerable Tecla Merlo, intercede for us!

The Spirit of the Law / A5

roots and to go to our roots is to drink from there, as in a fountain, and to be able to respond to them adequately.

A synodal formation takes place in a synodal community. Formation depends to a great extent on the quality of the community. Modeling is the best way to form the formands. A community is formative to the extent that it permits each one of its members to grow in fidelity to the Lord according to the charism of her institute. The positive influence of a joyful veteran missionary, aging gracefully, is worth more than all our classes on evangelical counsels combined. We call them saints-next-door in our religious houses.

The formation community can also refer to the world outside our religious community, especially the poor in our apostolate areas. They are not only recipients of our charitable works. They are our true evangelizers. Formation is nothing but for mission. If not integrated with mission, it will be disoriented.

A synodal formation gives importance to ongoing formation. Formation is a continuous journey of conversion. Formators can be result-oriented, instead of being

patient and discerning. Ideally, the role of formators is not to look for some immediate result, but to form progressively the candidates. For this, formators should be sufficiently prepared so as not to be deceived or to deceive regarding a presumed consistency and maturity of the formand. As Fr. Amadeo Cencini observes, “We are called to remain novices throughout life; to mature progressively in us the attitude of the disciple, always listening to the teacher, and of the pilgrim, always following in the right direction.” Indeed, formation never ends. To follow Christ means that one is always on the road.

Ongoing formation, however, is also applicable to formators. Major Superiors should offer the formators programs and opportunities which assure the necessary theological and pedagogical formation, spiritual formation, competence in the human sciences, and specific training for the tasks to be carried out on the journey of formation. The Post-Synodal Exhortation, Vita Consecrata, reminds us of the importance of the training of suitable directors of formation,

who will fulfill their task in a spirit of communion with the whole Church (VC 66).

A synodal formation acknowledges the importance of collaboration with other congregations. A concrete expression of collaboration and solidarity among religious families is the initiative, now spread in various contexts, of creating inter-institute centers of formation and common formation programs for the various stages of initial and ongoing formation, especially where individual institutes do not have sufficient means to offer a complete formation to their members. (cf. CICLSAL, Inter-Institute Collaboration for Formation, nn. 7 ff.)

St. Pope John Paul II spoke about this collaboration in an audience granted to the International Union of Superiors General, saying, “The essential thing is that on the part of religious families, there should be absolute cooperation in forming their members in a total, sincere and joyous love for Jesus Christ, who is deeply known, followed and obeyed.” (St. PJP II, Address to UISG, 18 May 1995)

mellitus, dyslipidemia or imbalances in blood stream fats, and stroke (brain strokes, resulting in death or paralysis). By ensuring the continuing production of NO, the three finite responses to cardiovascular disease: inflammation, oxidative stress and vascular immune dysfunction are mitigated.

Because NO is a gas that is short lived, there is no direct test that measures its blood level unlike many other substances. However, there are blood tests that correlate well with its bioavailability and noninvasive vascular tests that determine blood vessel elasticity and compliance. These are sufficient information to enable the clinician to gain a good understanding of the cardiovascular system.

If an ordinary person wants to stay healthy and needs to be assured of steady availability of NO, what must one do? First, it is important to understand that majority of NO is produced naturally in the innermost layer of the human blood vessel, the endothelium, through the action of an enzyme called, eNOS (endothelial nitric oxide synthase). Other counterpart NOS are produced for the brain (nNOS) and the (immune system (iNOS). Production of NO via the eNOS is age-dependent—it peaks at about age 20-30 and decreases by about 10 percent for every decade thereafter. By age 60, the NO production is down to about 50-60 percent.

While not much can be done to bolster the eNOS production of NO, there is another pathway that is dependent on what we eat and the interaction with the naturally occurring bacteria in the mouth. This is the pathway that all of us can benefit from. This is called the Oral Nitrate-Nitrite- Nitric Oxide pathway.

To understand fully and therefore be able to leverage its daily application, the oral nitrate-nitrite pathway depends on the daily intake of green leafy vegetables and certain fruits that interact with saliva in the mouth. Vegetables and fruits contain dietary nitrates which are the building blocks of nitrite that

ultimately are broken down to nitric oxide in the stomach. Humans do not have the natural enzymes that can break down the nitrates but the commensal bacteria in the mouth can. These classes of bacteria are generally harmless and live symbiotically with the human host.

The production of NO through this pathway takes into consideration the following steps- green leafy vegetables and/or fruits like beets, pomegranates, noni fruits, etc are chewed in the mouth and as admixing is achieved, the salivary bacteria produce enzymes that split the nitrate molecules to nitrites. When swallowed, the partially-digested vegetables and the nitrites are acted upon by the acid in the stomach. The acid reaction catalyzes the conversion of nitrites to nitric oxide, the active gas that is rapidly absorbed into the bloodstream. NO acts on the lining of the vessels, penetrating its walls to relax the underlying muscles of the blood vessels. The relaxation of the blood vessels results in modulation of the blood pressure and produces other benefits to the vessel lining such as ‘cooling’ inflammation.

It is also important to heed the following reminders: 1. Regular use of antiseptic mouthwash degrades the capacity to produce NO because the antiseptic kills the majority of commensal bacteria that are responsible for the breakdown of nitrates to nitrites. 2. Long-term use of proton pump inhibitors such as pantoprazole or omeprazole for some GI problems removes the production of stomach acid, thereby preventing the conversion of nitrites to nitric oxide. 3. Use of supplements in liquid drops, lozenges or capsules that provide the precursors or building blocks for NO production help ensure a steady supply of the active gas.

Treat our body as a vast and complex eco-system that requires balanced interaction of the various natural stakeholders to achieve synergy. After all, life is about maintaining balance, in the same way that nature thrives by maintaining balance with the environment.

Bishops back renewable energy campaign in NegOcc

THE three Catholic bishops in Negros Occidental have praised the provincial campaign on clean energy transition.

Bishops Patricio Buzon of Bacolod, Louie Galbines of Kabankalan and Gerardo Alminaza of San Carlos said the "SecuRE Negros" program is "a significant step" in creating a renewable energy for the province.

With its focus on sustainable and renewable energy sources, they said the campaign "aligns with our call to care for creation and to live out our faith in action."

"By supporting the SecuRE Program, we are advocating for policies that prioritize the common good, respect for human dignity, and the promotion of a more equitable society," the bishops said.

During the Feb. 5 launch of SecuRE Negros, Gov. Eugenio Jose Lacson highlighted the crucial role of renewable energy in guaranteeing power security.

The campaign prioritizes establishing dependable energy systems, aiming for accessibility, affordability, sustainability, and resilience against global challenges.

The bishops called on the public to support the program and work together for a "just energy transition that respects our common home."

"In the spirit of solidarity and cooperation, we pledge to work alongside the provincial government, local communities, and all stakeholders in the implementation of the SecuRE Negros program," they said. **(CBCP News)**

Vatican grants pontifical coronation to Marikina's Our Lady of Fatima image



The image Nuestra Señora de Fatima de Marikina. DIOCESAN SHRINE AND PARISH OF ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS

POPE Francis has granted canonical coronation to the image of Our Lady of Fatima, enshrined in the Diocesan Shrine and Parish of Saint Paul of the Cross in Marikina City.

The Diocese of Antipolo, where the parish belongs, said it received the news from the Vatican's Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of Sacraments on Feb. 14.

A canonical crowning is a pious institutional act in which the pope, through a bull, designates a crown or stellar halo to be added to a Marian image under a specific devotional title in a particular area or diocese.

Its bishop, Ruperto Santos, said the "enormous and symbolic gift" from the pope "will surely deepen our devotion to the Mother of our Lord Jesus, who is also our mother."

"It is with grateful hearts that we, in the diocese, share and offer this tremendous blessing after blessing to all of you," Santos said.

There are now six images of

the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Diocese of Antipolo that have been granted the privilege of pontifical coronation.

The five others are:

Nuestra Señora Dela Paz y Buenviaje from the International Shrine of Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage in Antipolo

Nuestra Señora de los Desamparados from the Diocesan Shrine of Our Lady of the Abandoned in Marikina

Nuestra Señora de Aranzazu from the Diocesan Shrine - Parish of Nuestra Señora de Aranzazu in San Mateo

Nuestra Señora de la Lumen from the Diocesan Shrine and Parish of Our Lady of Light in Cainta

Nuestra Señora del Santísimo Rosario from Diocesan Shrine of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary in Cardona

The bishop said the rite of canonical coronation of the image of Nuestra Señora de Fatima de Marikina will be held during Mass at 9 a.m. on May 12. **(CBCP News)**

Journal / A1

and religious education in the Philippines and Asia.

He also hoped the journal would attract a broad readership, particularly among bishops, clergy, religious, consecrated individuals, and all involved in the catechetical apostolate, given that "evangelization is a great work—a challenge for each of us."

Meanwhile, Dr. Lysander Rivera, editor-in-chief of Mystagogia and Director of the Lasallian Catechetical Center, said the journal aims to become a "mystagogue"—guiding others into the mystery of Jesus Christ within the beauty of Christian life.

Aside from Bishop Presto, the launching was also attended by members of the De La Salle Brothers community including Br. Raymundo Suplido, former DLSU President and current chairman of the Br. Anselino Manuel Castillio Religious Education Foundation (BAMCREF).

Also in attendance were Fr. Jason Laguerta of the Archdiocese of

Manila's Office for the Promotion of New Evangelization, and some of the members of the Mystagogia Advisory Board: Msgr. Gerry Santos, Fr. Renato de Guzman, SDB, Sr. Rhea Castillo, OP, and Br. Michael Valenzuela, FSC.

Mystagogia, published biannually by the Lasallian Catechetical Center in collaboration with various Catholic educational institutions and catechetical formations in the country, envisions itself as a premier journal on evangelization, catechesis, and other areas of pastoral ministry. It focuses particularly on Philippine and Asian contexts, values, and history."

For its next issue, Mystagogia will feature papers on evangelization and catechesis in light of the Church's direction towards synodality. Interested contributors and subscribers may contact the Lasallian Catechetical Center at catechetics@dlsu.edu.ph. **(CBCP News)**

Synodality takes spotlight in Gumaca diocese's 39th anniversary

PRIESTS, religious, and laypeople of the Diocese of Gumaca gathered over the weekend to celebrate 39th founding anniversary of the youngest of the three dioceses in the province of Quezon today.

With the theme, "Diyosis ng Gumaca: Napakikinggan, Nararamdaman, Natutugunan", the celebration gathered delegates from the diocese's 29 parishes and four mission stations at the San Diego de Alcalá Cathedral in Gumaca town on Feb. 3.

The event featured a talk on the "Synodal Church" by Dr. Estela Padilla, a lay theologian and one of the delegates at the Synod on Synodality in Rome.

Representatives from different sectors such as laborers, farmers, vendors, indigenous people, solo parents, women, government employees, businessmen, political leaders, OFWs, youth, LGBTQ+, and senior citizens also participated in group sharing.

The results of each group sharing were collated and relayed to all the



The Diocese of Gumaca celebrates its 39th founding anniversary on Feb. 3, 2024. CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

attendees before the Eucharistic celebration presided over by Fr. Ramon Uriarte, diocesan administrator of Gumaca.

"Our shared vision, active participation to our programs, and deep faith in God define our being as a synodal Church," Uriarte said in his homily.

"Sincere listening, enlarging our tents, and being servant-leaders

are what we need as a local church journeying towards our 50th anniversary," he added.

The exact anniversary of the Diocese of Gumaca is January 29. Its celebration is moved annually to the first Saturday of February.

The diocese has been "sede vacante" since March 2023 after the passing of Bishop Victor Ocampo. **(CBCP News)**

Pro-life / A1

on the different issues connected with life and family but we also need to rethink our approaches, methodologies and strategies," he said.

The cardinal particularly called for better ways of dealing with, among other issues, the dilemmas and complexities of modern families, irregular situations in the home, and what he termed "the diversity in understanding identity and personhood."

He also emphasized that families today, especially the young people, need accompaniment in their journey.

"They don't need more judgments and condemnations," Advincula added. "To lead people to the truth, we must do so in love, truth in charity, walking together for life, this is where the holy spirit is leading us today."

Organized by the Council of the

Laity of the Philippines, participants walked along España Boulevard from Welcome Rotonda in Quezon City to UST.

According to organizers, the event brought together more than 3,000 people from various religious and lay organizations, aiming to demonstrate solidarity in upholding the dignity of human life.

The concelebrants of the Mass include Bishop Pablo Virgilio David of Kalookan, who is the president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, and Bishop Severo Caermare of Dipolog and chairman of the CBCP Episcopal Commission on the Laity.

Caermare said that this year's Walk for Life also raised important family and life issues and opposed attempts to revive the death penalty, divorce and same-sex unions in the Philippines.

"Our participation, our presence today is a demonstration of how we value the sacredness of life," he said.

Advincula enjoined the faithful to work together to defend the sacredness of life "in a rapidly changing world that is oftentimes more welcoming to a civilization of death and so hostile to a civilization of life and love".

"I encourage you to continue to be passionate in your ministry. Do not be disheartened if sometimes you feel if what you have been doing is not even noticed or ends up in an apparent failure. Take courage. You are not alone," he said.

"Our society today needs teachers that can lead others to the right path and to the right choices. We must not abandon this mission of being teachers and catechists of the Gospel of life," he also said.

Charter change / A1

Alminaza.

Dubbed as "Koalisyon Laban sa ChaCha," the group, composed of various religious groups and civil society organizations, asserted that charter change is not the solution to the country's problems.

"The country is sick not because of the Constitution but because of bad self-serving governance and social injustice," it said.

"Our Constitution is robust but not fully implemented and completed with the necessary implementing laws," the coalition also said.

'Clear deception'

Earlier, an association of Catholic schools, colleges and universities has joined in opposing the move to tweak the Constitution.

Echoing the stance of the bishops' conference, the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP)

said that the efforts to amend the charter lack transparency.

It deplored the "surreptitious" signature campaign allegedly involving bribery and other illegal activities as a means to pursue charter change.

"This so-called 'People's Initiative' is a clear deception against the Filipino people and a brazen insult to the bedrock of our democracy," CEAP said.

"CEAP vehemently opposes any initiative to change the constitution for self-preservation and perpetuation of political leaders," it added.

Instead of revising the 1987 Constitution, the association called on lawmakers to implement it if only to solve the economic and social ills of the country.

"We did not vote for them to change the Constitution but to uphold it," said CEAP.

It also believes that charter change is unnecessary since the country's problems, particularly on corruption, cannot be blamed on the Constitution.

"We should not get distracted by what corrupt political leaders want us to believe," CEAP stressed.

"They may employ euphemisms and sugarcoat their statements, but the truth will not be denied: they are the beneficiaries of the proposed Charter Change and never the Filipino citizens," it added.

Catholic bishops earlier warned the public against falling for the "deceptive" attempts for charter change.

The CEAP also assured it would help guide the public on the matter as part of its mission and advocacy.

"We cannot remain passive when the common good and the foundations of our democracy are in jeopardy," it said.

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Cardinal Tagle receives France's highest honor

CARDINAL Luis Antonio Tagle was bestowed on Feb. 15 with France's highest distinction for being a "remarkable man of the Church at the service of the common good."

France's ambassador to the Holy See, Florence Mangin, presented the title of officer in the country's Legion of Honor to Tagle during a ceremony in Rome, attended by various dignitaries and special guests.

In her speech, the envoy recognized the cardinal's intellectual and pastoral journeys, which continue in the Vatican as the pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization.

"But more than that, your career has been marked by a concern for the poorest people," said Mangin, citing the cardinal's social projects

and advocacies, particularly during his time of service in the Philippines.

"It is this journey, these commitments of yours, these qualities of soul and heart that the French Republic wishes to salute and honour by elevating you to the rank of Officer of the Legion of Honour," she said.

The ambassador mentioned, among other things, Tagle's programs for victims of violence and drug addiction, as well as his commitment to migrants and victims of natural disasters.

"You were noticed for your closeness to the humblest of people and to young people," she said. "In Rome, you don't forget your country and even less those who suffer there."

In his response to the ambassador, the cardinal said

he views the award not as a recognition of his personal work but an affirmation of the Church's mission of evangelization.

"This recognition impels us to consistently and joyfully share Jesus and His gospel to all peoples through word, prayer, and the service of charity and human development," Tagle said.

"I accept this recognition in the name of the countless men and women who have served and continue to serve the evangelizing mission of the Church. They are legion!" he added.

He also took the opportunity to recognize what he called "our greatest evangelizers" — the poor, the migrants, and the refugees "who bear the face of

Jesus, calling us to justice, truth, love and peace."

"They also teach us the Gospel of hope and joy. They share the Gospel through their patience, perseverance and sweet smiles. They are mostly hidden but they are real. There are many of them. They are Legion, Legion of Honor," he said.

Among those present at the ceremony were the Philippine Ambassador to the Holy See, Myla Grace Macahilig, and Father Gregory Ramon Gaston, Rector of the Pontificio Collegio Filipino.

Founded by Napoleon in 1802, France's Legion of Honour is a distinction awarded to individuals across a wide range of fields for their significant contributions to society. **(CBCP News)**



Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle receives his Legion of Honor medal from Florence Mangin, France's ambassador to the Holy See, during an awarding ceremony in Rome on Feb. 15, 2024. PHOTO COURTESY OF FR. GREG GASTON

Celebrating 40 years: Mati diocese commemorates milestone



Bishop Guillermo Afable of Digos, Bishop Abel Apigo of Mati, Papal nuncio Archbishop Charles Brown, and Archbishop Romulo Valles of Davao after the Mass for the 40th anniversary of the Diocese of Mati at the San Nicolas de Tolentino Cathedral. **DIocese of MATI**

PAPAL nuncio Archbishop Charles Brown led the 40th anniversary celebration of the southern Philippine diocese of Mati on Feb. 16, exhorting the clergy, consecrated persons and lay faithful to 'live your vocation to the full'.

Speaking during Mass at the Mati Cathedral, he emphasized that Catholics — whether called to the

priesthood, religious life, or lay ministry — have different vocations to fulfil.

"Our responsibility is to live our vocation to the full," Brown said. "Do your vocation the way God wants you to do."

Reflecting on the ongoing synodal process, the archbishop stressed that this is what the Church is about: to

respect everyone's vocation and to value your vocation."

The celebration's theme is, "Diocese of Mati: Four Decades of Synodal Journey in Faith, in Gratitude, and in Mission."

In moving forward with the mission, Brown encouraged the faithful to remember the early missionaries and Catholics who lived before them.

"Imitate their faith... that means walking in their footsteps. That is what the synodal path of the Church is all about," he added.

The diocese was established on Feb. 16, 1984, with the late Bishop Patricio Alo as its first shepherd. It comprises the province of Davao Oriental, the easternmost part of Mindanao's bustling Davao region.

Currently, the ecclesiastical territory has 19 parishes and 2 quasi-parishes, overseen by approximately 48 diocesan priests. Over the years, the diocese has also established 10 Catholic schools.

Its current bishop, Abel Apigo, has been shepherding the diocese since 2018. **(CBCP News)**

Daughters of St. Paul launches restyled publishing trademark, new institutional logo

THE Daughters of St. Paul has launched a restyled publishing trademark and a new institutional logo during a Mass at Queen of Apostles Sanctuary in Pasay City on Feb. 5.

The occasion coincided with the commemoration of the 60th death anniversary of their co-foundress Sr. Tecla Merlo, and the 30th anniversary of the Paulines trademark.

The launch occurred on the same date, albeit in different time zones, wherever the Daughters of St. Paul are present worldwide.

According to the congregation, the rapidly changing context of today's technology prompted them to update their visual identity "to meet the needs of modern times and to communicate in a more effective and coordinated way."

A modernized visual identity has been introduced for both the Daughters of Saint Paul and Paulines Publishing, aligning with their renewed commitment to proclaim the Gospel as "innovators by vocation."

Restyled publishing trademark

The latest version of the publishing trademark is a restyling of the Paulines trademark launched in 1994, which aims to continue to respond to its mission: "to speak to the men and women of today in a language that is up-to-date, simple, immediate and essential."

The stylized ellipse represents the world in which Paulines are called to proclaim the Gospel. Retaining the essence of the 1994 design, it now features an open and inclusive line.

The blue color, in tandem with the elliptical movement, on the other hand, invokes the digital realm and electromagnetic waves, symbolizing



Sr. Delia Abian, FSP provincial superior (extreme right), along with Sr. Carmen Billones (from left), Sr. Noemi Vinoya, and Sr. Catherine Bacay unveil the restyled publishing trademark and the new institutional logo of the Daughters of St. Paul during a Mass commemorating the 30th anniversary of the publishing trademark during Mass at Queen of Apostles Sanctuary in Pasay City on Feb. 5, 2024. The occasion also marked the 60th anniversary of the death of Venerable Tecla Merlo, co-foundress of the Daughters of St. Paul. **CONTRIBUTED PHOTO**

the aspiration to be apostles of the 21st century.

The letter "P" sporting the same distinctive red color as in 1994, represents the pastoral zeal of Paul—the congregation's model for living a life in Christ and the inspiration for its mission.

"Additionally, in certain languages, P represents Parola, Palabra, Palavra ... meaning Word, the Word of God to be disseminated globally," the congregation said.

The inscription Paulines, positioned beneath the P, signifies the foundation and steadfastness, akin to the roots of a towering tree. "This secure base allows the P of Paul and the Word of God to ascend, reaching out to the entire world," it added.

The institutional logo

The institutional logo with the name "Daughters of St. Paul" encapsulates

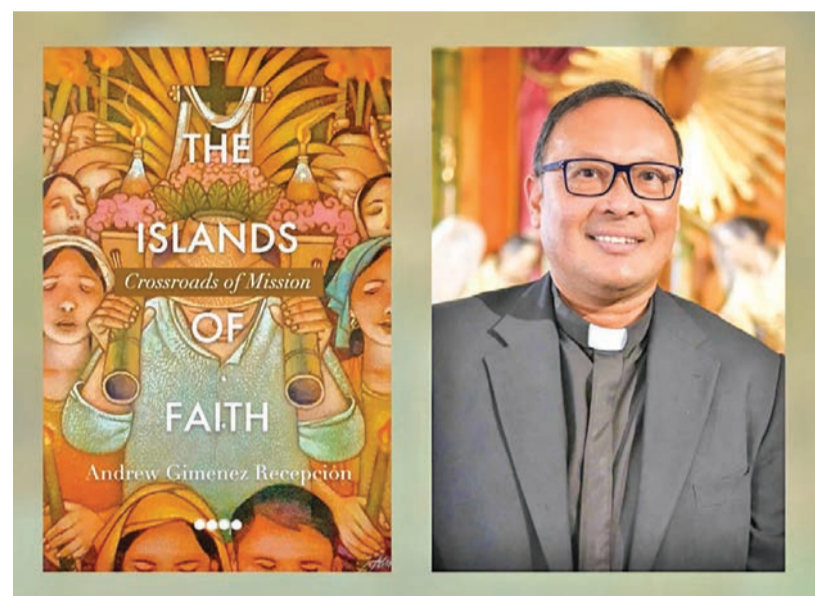
the deep connection that binds them to the Apostle of the Gentiles, so much so that they are in many parts of the world.

However, the name resonates in various forms across diverse regions and languages, inspiring the depiction of the congregation through a logo inspired by its emblem.

The ellipse, shared with the Pauline trademark, represents the congregation and its mission of evangelization. Deliberately open and inclusive, it embraces the Cross-Book, which evokes the emblem of the Daughters of St. Paul, St. Paul the Apostle of the Gentiles, and the Word to be proclaimed.

Following the official launch, all websites and social media profiles of the Daughters of St. Paul and Paulines Publishing all over the world now carry the new institutional logo and stylized trademark. **(CBCP News)**

Bicol priest wins National Book Award



ATENE DE NAGA UNIVERSITY PRESS

MISSIONOLOGIST Fr. Andrew Reception of the Archdiocese of Caceres is scheduled to receive a National Book Award for his second book, "The Islands of Faith: Crossroads of Mission."

Published by the Ateneo de Naga University Press, the book is the sole finalist and the winner for the Best Book in Theology and Spirituality.

The book features nine essays written for different occasions and gatherings and dwells on various topics relevant to the life and mission of the Catholic Church.

This volume highlights the author's key points on the Philippine experience and its responses to globalization, migrant issues, and the ecumenical and environmental challenges addressed in the recent papal encyclical, *Laudato Si'*.

In a press statement, the award-giving body lauds the book as "well-written, infused with the faith of a prophet, the hope of a professor and the compassion of a credible pastor."

Now in its 41st year, the award is administered by the Manila

Critics Circle and the National Book Development Board.

Reception was honored alongside different Filipino authors, translators, book designers and publishers on February 24, 2024, at the Ateneo de Manila University in Quezon City.

First launched during the first Saeculum Arts Colloquium in December 2022 in Naga City, the book was again presented on Feb. 23 at the Divine Word Institute of Mission Studies in Tagaytay City.

Reception is a professor in missiology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and also serves as a spiritual formator at the Pontificio Collegio Filipino.

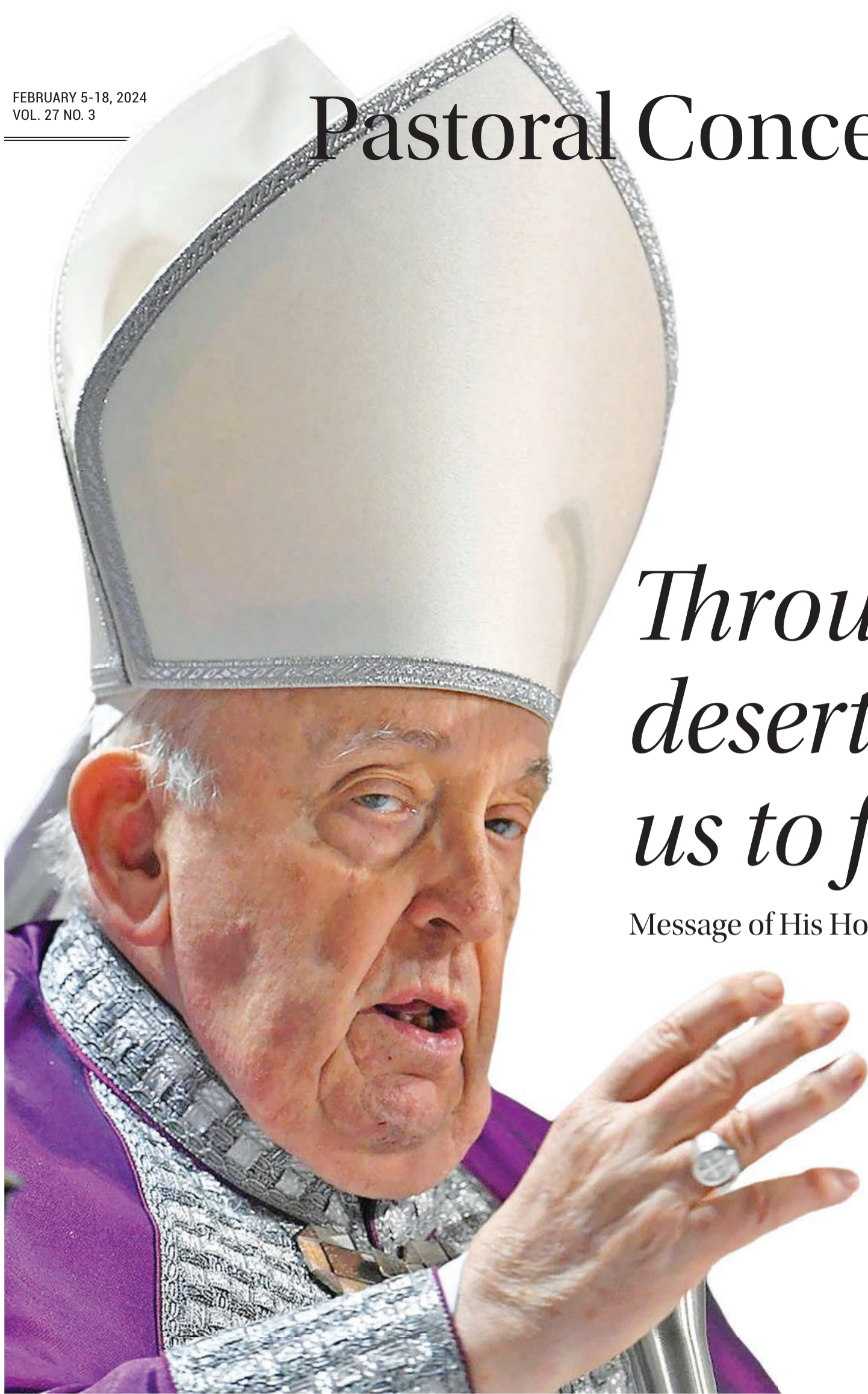
His first book, "God's Global Household," was a finalist for the National Book Award in 2013. He is also a published poet.

To order a copy of the book, visit Savage Mind: Arts, Books, Cinema, an independent bookshop in Naga. It is also available at Solidaridad Bookshop, Mt. Cloud in Baguio and in Vita Catolica in Legazpi City. **(CBCP News)**

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Through the desert God leads us to freedom

Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for Lent 2024

Pope Francis during Ash Wednesday Mass at the Basilica of Santa Sabina in Rome on Feb. 14, 2024. VATICAN MEDIA

DEAR brothers and sisters!

When our God reveals himself, his message is always one of freedom: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Ex 20:2). These are the first words of the Decalogue given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Those who heard them were quite familiar with the exodus of which God spoke: the experience of their bondage still weighed heavily upon them. In the desert, they received the "Ten Words" as a thoroughfare to freedom. We call them "commandments", in order to emphasize the strength of the love by which God shapes his people. The call to freedom is a demanding one. It is not answered straightaway; it has to mature as part of a journey. Just as Israel in the desert still clung to Egypt – often longing for the past and grumbling against the Lord and Moses – today too, God's people can cling to an oppressive bondage that it is called to leave behind. We realize how true this is at those moments when we feel hopeless, wandering through life like a desert and lacking a promised land as our destination. Lent is the season of grace in which the desert can become once more – in the words of the prophet Hosea – the place of our first love (cf. Hos 2:16-17). God shapes his people, he enables us to leave our slavery behind and experience a Passover from death to life. Like a bridegroom, the Lord draws us once more to himself, whispering words of love to our hearts.

The exodus from slavery to freedom is no abstract journey. If our celebration of Lent is to be concrete, the first step is to desire to open our eyes to reality. When the Lord calls out to Moses from the burning bush, he immediately shows that he is a God who sees and, above all, hears: "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex 3:7-8). Today too, the cry of so many of our oppressed brothers and sisters rises to heaven. Let us ask ourselves: Do we hear that cry? Does it trouble us? Does it move us? All too many things keep us apart from each other, denying the fraternity that, from the beginning, binds us to one another.

During my visit to Lampedusa, as a way of countering the globalization of indifference, I asked two questions, which have become more and more pressing: "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9) and "Where is your brother?" (Gen 4:9). Our Lenten journey will be concrete if, by listening once more to those two questions, we realize that even today we remain under the rule of Pharaoh. A rule that makes us weary and indifferent. A model of growth that divides and robs us of a future. Earth, air and water are polluted, but so are our souls. True, Baptism has begun our process of liberation, yet there remains in us an inexplicable longing for slavery. A kind of attraction to the security of familiar things, to the detriment of our freedom.

In the Exodus account, there is a significant detail: it is God who sees, is moved and brings freedom; Israel does not ask for this. Pharaoh stifles dreams, blocks the view of heaven, makes it appear that this world, in which human dignity is trampled upon and authentic bonds are denied, can never change. He put everything in bondage to himself. Let us ask: Do I want a new world? Am I ready to leave behind my compromises with the old? The witness of many of my brother bishops and a great number of those who work for peace and justice has increasingly convinced me that we need to combat a deficit of hope that stifles dreams and the silent cry that reaches to heaven and moves the heart of God. This "deficit of hope" is not unlike the nostalgia for slavery that paralyzed Israel in the desert and prevented it from moving forward. An exodus can be interrupted: how else can we explain the fact that humanity has arrived at the threshold of universal fraternity and at levels of scientific, technical, cultural, and juridical development capable of guaranteeing dignity to all, yet gropes about in the darkness of inequality and conflict.

God has not grown weary of us. Let us welcome Lent as the great season in which he reminds us: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Ex 20:2). Lent is a season of conversion, a time of freedom. Jesus himself, as we recall each year on the first Sunday of Lent, was driven into the desert by the Spirit in order to be tempted in freedom. For forty days, he will stand before us and with us: the incarnate Son.

Unlike Pharaoh, God does not want subjects, but sons and daughters. The desert is the place where our freedom can mature in a personal decision not to fall back into slavery. In Lent, we find new criteria of justice and a community with which we can press forward on a road not yet taken.

This, however, entails a struggle, as the book of Exodus and the temptations of Jesus in the desert make clear to us. The voice of God, who says, "You are my Son, the Beloved" (Mk 1:11), and "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex 20:3) is opposed by the enemy and his lies. Even more to be feared than Pharaoh are the idols that we set up for ourselves; we can consider them as his voice speaking within us. To be all-powerful, to be looked up to by all, to domineer over others: every human being is aware of how deeply seductive that lie can be. It is a road well-travelled. We can become attached to money, to certain projects, ideas or goals, to our position, to a tradition, even to certain individuals. Instead of making us move forward, they paralyze us. Instead of encounter, they create conflict. Yet there is also a new humanity, a people of the little ones and of the humble who have not yielded to the allure of the lie. Whereas those who serve idols become like them, mute, blind, deaf and immobile (cf. Ps 114:4), the poor of spirit are open and ready: a silent force of good that heals and sustains the world.

It is time to act, and in Lent, to act also means to pause. To pause in prayer, in order to receive the word of God, to pause like the Samaritan in the presence of a wounded brother or sister. Love of God and love of neighbour are one love. Not to have other gods is to pause in the presence of God beside the flesh of our neighbour. For this reason, prayer, almsgiving and fasting are not three unrelated acts, but a single movement of openness and self-emptying, in which we cast out the idols that weigh us down, the attachments that imprison us. Then the atrophied and isolated heart will revive. Slow down, then, and pause! The contemplative dimension of life that Lent helps us to rediscover will release new energies. In the presence of God, we become brothers and sisters, more sensitive to one another: in place of threats and enemies, we discover companions and fellow travelers. This is God's dream, the promised land to which

we journey once we have left our slavery behind.

The Church's synodal form, which in these years we are rediscovering and cultivating, suggests that Lent is also a time of communitarian decisions, of decisions, small and large, that are countercurrent. Decisions capable of altering the daily lives of individuals and entire neighborhoods, such as the ways we acquire goods, care for creation, and strive to include those who go unseen or are looked down upon. I invite every Christian community to do just this: to offer its members moments set aside to rethink their lifestyles, times to examine their presence in society and the contribution they make to its betterment. Woe to us if our Christian penance were to resemble the kind of penance that so dismayed Jesus. To us too, he says: "Whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting" (Mt 6:16). Instead, let others see joyful faces, catch the scent of freedom and experience the love that makes all things new, beginning with the smallest and those nearest to us. This can happen in every one of our Christian communities.

To the extent that this Lent becomes a time of conversion, an anxious humanity will notice a burst of creativity, a flash of new hope. Allow me to repeat what I told the young people whom I met in Lisbon last summer: "Keep seeking and be ready to take risks. At this moment in time, we face enormous risks; we hear the painful plea of so many people. Indeed, we are experiencing a third world war fought piecemeal. Yet let us find the courage to see our world, not as being in its death throes but in a process of giving birth, not at the end but at the beginning of a great new chapter of history. We need courage to think like this" (Address to University Students, 3 August 2023). Such is the courage of conversion, born of coming up from slavery. For faith and charity take hope, this small child, by the hand. They teach her to walk, and at the same time, she leads them forward.¹

I bless all of you and your Lenten journey.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 3 December 2023, First Sunday of Advent.

FRANCIS

Establishing a new cause for beatification and canonization

Opportunities for Beatification and Canonization
after the Corona Pandemic: Revisiting Pope Francis' Motu Proprio

Maiorem hac dilectionem (11.VII.2017)

By FR. JAIME B. ACHACOSO, J.C.D.

A little known Apostolic Letter

On 11 July 2017, Pope Francis issued *motu proprio* the encyclical *Maiorem hac dilectionem*, by which he established a new cause for the beatification of a Christian faithful. This was in addition to the well-known causes of (1) voluntary martyrdom of blood and (2) exercise of the Christian virtues to a heroic degree. Together with the establishment of the new cause, the opportune norms for the required judicial process were also established and opportune modifications made in the existing ones.

With all the excitement over the Corona Pandemic—mostly in terms of just coping with the challenges—little attention had been given to an aspect of this crisis, which is yet another application of the oft-quoted Pauline doctrine: *Diligentibus Deum, omnia cooperantur in bonum!* Or in its short form: *Omnia in bonum!* For those who love God, everything works together unto good. There are no parentheses in God's project of salvation: absolutely every circumstance and every moment are opportunities for sanctification, which—if properly recognized and corresponded to, by those who love God's will—can work towards a person's sanctification and that of his fellowmen. The present pandemic is no exception.

Hence, let us revisit this little-known Apostolic Letter, which was dealt with in this column towards the end of the year of its promulgation. With the specific *bias* of the pandemic, I invite my readers to go over the provisions that will follow with the reality of the so-called front-liners (not only health personnel but also priests and religious who have been involved in the pastoral care of the sick) who have been exposing their lives to contagion heroically all these months.

Statement of the new cause

“Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (Jn 15:13).”

Worthy of special consideration and honor are those Christians who, following more than closely the footsteps and teachings of the Lord Jesus, have voluntarily and freely offered their life for others and persevered with this determination unto death.

Certainly, the heroic offering of life, inspired and sustained by charity, expresses a true, complete and exemplary imitation of Christ, and thus is deserving of that admiration that the community of faithful customarily reserves to those who have voluntarily accepted the martyrdom of blood or have exercised Christian virtues to a heroic degree.

With the support of the favorable opinion expressed by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints which, in its Plenary Session on 27 September 2016, carefully studied whether these Christians are deserving of beatification, I establish that the following norms be observed.”

With the above preamble, Pope Francis established the third cause for the beatification and eventual canonization of a Servant of God in the following terms:

“Art.1. The *offer of life* is a new cause for the beatification and canonization *procedure*, distinct from the causes based on *martyrdom* and on *the heroism of virtues.*”

Criteria for the new cause

The *motu proprio* enumerated the criteria for a Servant of God to qualify for this cause for beatification and eventual canonization.

“Art.2. The offer of life, in order that it be valid and effective for the beatification of a Servant of God, must respond to the following criteria:”

a) “A free and voluntary offer of life and heroic acceptance *propter caritatem* of a certain and untimely death.” This is a *subjective* and *formal* component of the cause, stating that in the mind of the servant of God there must exist a certainty of an untimely death as a result of the act of charity that he is undertaking and a heroic acceptance of it. In other words, what makes the offer of life an act of heroic charity befitting of beatification and eventual canonization is the will to accept an untimely death as a consequence of such an offer of one's life.

b) “A nexus between the offer of life and premature death.” This is an *objective* component, requiring the existence of a real connection between the act of charity being



Statues of saints atop the colonnade of St. Peter's Square in the Vatican. VATICAN MEDIA

undertaken and the untimely demise of the Servant of God, and not just his subjective perception of such.

c) “The exercise, at least as ordinarily possible, of Christian virtues before the offer of life and, then, unto death.” Herein lies the real practical novelty of this new cause: in effect, the other two causes hitherto available required heroism—either *instantaneously* by facing a bloody or violent death as an act of charity, or *habitually* by living all the Christian virtues to a heroic degree—on the part of the Servant of God. This new cause only requires a habitual exercise of *ordinary* Christian virtues before the offer of life of the Servant of God.

d) “The existence of a reputation of holiness and of signs, at least after death.” This is the *ecclesial* component of the cause—i.e., that in fact there is a reputation amongst the faithful of a certain holiness and of signs of such (holiness) on the part of the Servant of God. This has always been a pre-condition even for the opening of the cause of beatification, by which a certain faithful becomes a *Servant of God*.

e) “The necessity of a miracle for beatification, occurring after the death of the Servant of God and through his or her intercession.” This does not present a novelty either, as this has always been the praxis.

Procedural norms for the instruction of the cause

The short *motu proprio* outlined a series of procedural norms:

“Art.3. The celebration of the diocesan or eparchial Inquest and the relative *Positio* are regulated by the Apostolic Constitution *Divinus perfectionis Magister* of 25 January 1983, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. LXXV(1983, 349-355), and by the *Normae servandae in inquisitionibus ab Episcopis facendis in Causis Sanctorum* of 7 February of the same year, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. LXXV (1983, 396-403), except as follows:

“Art.4. The *Positio* on the offer of life must respond to the *dubium: An constet de heroica oblatione vitae usque ad mortem propter caritatem necnon de virtutibus christianis, saltem in gradu ordinario, in casu et ad effectum de quo agitur.*”

In other words, the final judgment of the cause for the beatification on this new ground must answer the question: *Whether it is proven with moral certainty that the Servant of God had heroically offered his/her life unto death for the sake of love, and that he/she had lived the Christian virtues at least in ordinary grade, in the case and to the effect under consideration.*

Finally, the *motu proprio* established the opportune modifications in the aforementioned Apostolic Constitution, to

align the existing procedures to the present legislation:

“Art.5. The following articles of the said Apostolic Constitution are thus modified:”

Art.1: “It is the right of diocesan Bishops or Bishops of the Eastern Rite and others who have the same powers in law, within the limits of their own jurisdiction, either *ex officio* or upon the request of individual members of the faithful or of legitimate groups and their representatives, to inquire about the life, virtues, *the offer of life* or martyrdom and reputation of sanctity, *of the offer of life* or martyrdom, alleged miracles, as well as, if it be the case, ancient cult of the Servant of God, whose canonization is sought”.

Art.2.5: “The inquiry into alleged miracles is to be conducted separately from the inquiry into virtues, *the offer of life* or martyrdom”.

Art.7.1: “To study the causes entrusted to them, together with collaborators from outside the Congregation, and to prepare the Positions on virtues, *on the offer of life* or on martyrdom”.

Art.13.2: “If the meeting judges that the cause was conducted according to the norms of law, it decides to which Relator the cause is to be assigned; the Relator, then, together with a collaborator from outside the Congregation, will prepare the Position on virtues, *on the offer of life* or on martyrdom according to the rules of critical hagiography”.

“Art.6. The following Articles of the said *Normae servandae in inquisitionibus ab Episcopis facendis in Causis Sanctorum* are thus modified:

Art. 7: A cause can be recent or ancient; it is called recent if the martyrdom or virtues or *the offer of life* of the Servant of God can be proved through the oral depositions of eye witnesses; it is ancient, however, when the proofs for martyrdom or virtues can be brought to light only from written sources”.

Art. 10.1: In both recent and ancient causes, a biography of any historical import of the Servant of God, should such exist, or otherwise an accurate, chronologically arranged report on the life and deeds of the Servant of God, on his virtues or *on his offer of life* or martyrdom, on his reputation of sanctity and of signs. Nor should anything be omitted which seems to be contrary or less favorable to the cause”.

Art. 10.3: In recent causes only, a list of persons who can help bring to light the truth about the virtues or *the offer of life* or the martyrdom of the Servant of God, and about his reputation of sanctity or of signs. Those with contrary opinions must also be included”.

Art. 15.a: Once the report has been accepted, the Bishop is to hand over to the promotor of justice or to another expert everything gathered up to that point so that

he might formulate the interrogatories most effective in searching out and discovering the truth about the life of the Servant of God, his virtues, *his offer of life* or martyrdom, his reputation of holiness, *of the offer of life* or of martyrdom”.

Art. 15.b: In ancient causes, however, the interrogatories are only to consider the reputation of sanctity, *of the offer of life* or martyrdom existing until the present as well as, if it be the case, the cult given to the Servant of God in more recent times”.

Art. 19: In order to prove the martyrdom or the practice of virtues or *the offer of life* and the reputation of signs of the Servant of God who belonged to any institute of consecrated life, a significant number of the proposed witnesses must be from outside the Institute unless, on account of the particular life of the Servant of God, this should prove impossible”.

Art. 32: The inquiry on miracles is to be instructed separately from the inquiry on virtues or *the offer of life* or martyrdom and is to be conducted according to the norms which follow”.

Art. 36: Any solemn celebrations or panegyric speeches about Servants of God whose sanctity of life is still being legitimately examined are prohibited in Churches. Furthermore, one must also refrain, even outside of Church, from any acts which could mislead the faithful into thinking that the inquiry conducted by the Bishop into the life of the Servant of God and his virtues or martyrdom or *offer of life* carries with it the certitude that the Servant of God will be one day canonized”.

Conclusion

By adding this new cause for beatification, Pope Francis has made it possible for the most ordinary life—offered to the end with heroic charity—to be declared worthy of Sainthood. This may open the doors for the opening of such processes for many men and women of recent memory, who can be shining beacons for our troubled times. They can include many of our own countrymen, who may have given their lives in the service of their fellowmen during the present pandemic. The only thing that may be lacking could be the offering of such sacrifice as an act of love of God and fellowmen, and having lived relatively virtuous lives.

When Jesus Christ asked he paralytic at the Pool of Siloe why he had not taken advantage of the miraculous cure there, the poor paralytic replied: *Hominem non habeo!* “I have no one to let me into the pool.” Could it be that many possible causes for beatification, on the occasion of the sacrifices unto death due to the Corona Pandemic, are being stymied for lack of spiritual guidance of those people who are sacrificing themselves!

Bishop Honesto Pacana, SJ— Honest and one

By Archbishop-Emeritus Antonio J. Ledesma, SJ

THIS month, we mourn the passing away of two of the first native-born bishops of Mindanao: Bishop Honesto Pacana of Malaybalay and Bishop Nereo Odchimar of Tandag, both from the sub-region of CABUSTAM. They have been bishops of dioceses created from the mother archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro -- in Bukidnon, for a long time the only inland province of Mindanao, and in Surigao del Sur along the rugged Pacific coastline of Mindanao.

The last time I saw Bishop Onie was with Archbishop Joe Cabantan three weeks ago when we took early breakfast with him at the MCM House where he was well taken care of by the Sisters. We were proceeding to Davao for the funeral Mass of Archbishop Fernando Capalla. At that time, he was glad to point out to me the newly-completed infirmary building of the MCM sisters. He also asked me to get more details about the Sumilao farmers' long march in 2007 to reclaim their ancestral land, because he intended to include this in his memoirs about the diocese.

How then do we summarize Bishop Onie's full life of service to the Church? He himself has said, "My first assignment was here in Malaybalay and I have been here for more than 50 years now." One of his priests has associated his name, Honesto, with the kind of selfless service he manifested throughout his life—literally, an honest man, or what in Scriptures would be called a just man, a man of dedication and joy.

I - Honest and just

Bishop Onie Pacana was born in Cagayan de Oro on January 22, 1933, coincidentally only two days after the creation of the Diocese of Cagayan by Pope Pius XI on January 20, 1933. So we can say that his whole lifetime was devoted to the building up of the mother archdiocese. He finished High School at the Ateneo de Cagayan and entered the Society of Jesus in 1951. He completed his Bachelor's degree in Sacred Theology at Woodstock College in Maryland, USA, in 1966, and a Master's degree in Religious Education in 1969 at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. He was ordained a priest in

1965 at Fordham University Chapel by Cardinal Francis Spellman.

Upon his return to the Philippines in 1969, he became the Founding Director of the Bukidnon Institute of Catechetics (BIC), helped as Assistant Formator of the Missionary Congregation of Mary (MCM), and taught at San Isidro College from 1970-76. He took on various responsibilities in the parishes of Malaybalay, Maramag, and San Agustin Institute of Technology in Valencia. He also conducted retreats at the Jesuit Retreat House. He became Superior of the Bukidnon Mission District of the Jesuits in 1982-91. In 1991-94, he became Rector of St. John Vianney Theological Seminary, tasked in forming future diocesan priests for northern as well as the rest of Mindanao. And in 1994-2010, he served as the third bishop of Malaybalay.

During his 16 years at the helm of the diocese, Bishop Onie focused on Family Catechesis, the formation of Lay Leaders in the parishes, and the strengthening of Basic Ecclesial Communities. He improved the operation of the diocese's 24 Catholic Schools under the Bukidnon Association of Catholic Schools (BUACS).

For the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Bishop Onie served as Chair of the Commission on Culture and a member of the Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education. He strengthened the operations of the St. John XXIII Pre-College and College Seminaries and approved the creation of the Seminary Benefactors Association in 2000. He also implemented the New Diocesan Financial Accounting and Reporting System in 2006. In 2009, he led the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the founding of what was then the Prelature of Malaybalay. He was also present at the golden anniversary celebration of the diocese in 2019.

II. Catechesis and homilies

Upon his retirement, Bishop Onie remained in Malaybalay, resuming his ministry in facilitating retreats. With the help of some priest-secretaries, he has published five volumes of his homilies. As catechist par excellence, his homilies stand out for

their simple language, yet with relevant Scripture passages and theological insights that relate the Word of God to the hearers' context today.

For instance, he points out the difference between a theoretical and practical atheist: "A practical atheist is one who believes that God exists but does not live according to his belief."

He relates equality to human dignity: "From God's point of view, equality means having the same dignity that stems from God's love for man without any condition...Sinner or saint, Muslim or Christian, we have the same Father -- and we are all brothers and sisters of and in Christ." Does this not resonate with Pope Francis' call today for Human Fraternity in his joint statement with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, representing the Muslim community?

"True freedom," for Bishop Onie, "ultimately means to do what God wants us to do, to be what God wants us to be. He wants us to be totally free for others and for Him." He relates this to the image of the potter molding the clay. However there is a big difference: "Unlike man, the clay has no freedom. Hence it is possible that man will resist being shaped because he has the freedom to do so."

In another homily, Bishop Onie touches on the "puzzlement of Jesus who is fully human, fully divine." He concludes: "God's revelation is not something to be solved or discussed, but a mystery to be believed, because he who reveals it cannot deceive; neither will he deceive." In a gathering of Jesuit missionaries from ten countries working in Cambodia, I recall how they applied this mystery to their own endeavors as "a little more human, a little more divine."

III. One and whole

Judge Romeo Almajar, former Assistant Director of the Bukidnon Institute of Catechetics in the early years, points out another dimension in Bishop Onie's name: "The root word of the name 'Honesto' is ONE... Bishop Pacana is ONE with himself, with others, and with God. He is an integrated whole—body, mind, spirit—from which the English word 'holy' is derived."

Indeed, Bishop Onie, in grouping some of his homilies,

has focused on "Oneness in God ... From Broken Oneness to Wholeness in Christ ... Communion as One Human Family." He states, "All things were made in Christ and the movement towards unification of all things and all peoples in Christ is in process."

He points out that the conflicts in the early Church—between Jewish Christians and Gentiles—turned Christians—were resolved through dialogue. He recalls the maxim attributed to St. Augustine which could well be applied to our conflict situations within the Church today: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

In another homily, Bishop Onie dwells on the "most radical mandate" in the Gospel. He first recalls the kidnapping in 1998 of Msgr. Desmond Hartford, a Columban missionary and Apostolic Administrator of Marawi Prelature. Msgr. Hartford confessed that it was hard for him to forgive the Muslim couple, close friends of his, who handed him over to the MILF. Bishop Onie observes: "One of the most difficult commandments given to us by the Lord is to love our enemies: people beyond the boundaries of our nation, culture, or our way of life."

Nonetheless, citing the four marks of the Church as "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic," Bishop Onie observes that "the Church is holy despite the sinfulness and weaknesses of its members and leadership because it is the mystical Body of Christ."

Fondly called the "Father of Catechesis" in the diocese, Bishop Onie has admirably carried out his humble role as priest-catechist for the thousands of families that have come to find their home, like himself, in the rolling hills and plains of Bukidnon. May his legacy continue to grow in the Church's synodal process of walking together and discerning the Spirit of the Lord in our daily lives today—following his episcopal motto: Dominus Fortitudo Mea (The Lord is my Strength).*

(The homily of Archbishop-Emeritus Antonio J. Ledesma, SJ, at the funeral of Bishop Honesto Pacana, SJ, Malaybalay Cathedral, 8 February 2024).

The ecological ministry of Bishop Honesto Pacana in Bukidnon

By FR. REYNALDO D. RALUTO

On February 8, we laid to rest a bishop who has served the Church faithfully. I would like to remember him as a bishop who courageously led the local church of Bukidnon at the crucial period of its ecological struggle.

Let me review the narrative of the people's ecological struggles in the Diocese of Malaybalay that started in the time of Bishop Gaudencio Rosales (1984-1993) and was continued by Bishop Honesto Pacana (1994-2010).

With the transfer of Bishop Rosales to the Archdiocese of Lipa in 1993, the clergy of Bukidnon pursued his ecological legacy with the leadership of his worthy successor, Bishop Honesto Ch. Pacana, SJ, whom we fondly called Bishop Onie. With him, the clergy of the Diocese of Malaybalay firmly believed that their priesthood called them to defend the integrity



Bishop Emeritus Honesto Pacana of the Diocese of Malaybalay. SCREENSHOT FROM ATENEO DE CAGAYAN VIDEO

of creation. They wanted to extend their ecological advocacy beyond political and geographical boundaries.

It can be recalled that it was during the episcopal ministry of Bishop Onie Pacana in the Diocese

of Malaybalay when environmental activism reached its peak, triggered by the irresistible church-based ecological struggle in Wao, a municipality that belongs politically to the province of Lanao del Sur but ecclesiastically to the Diocese of

Malaybalay.

Being part of the ARMM, Wao was not covered by the logging moratorium of Bukidnon declared in 1990 by the DENR. The conflict emerged because the adjacent Municipality of Kalilangan—the last municipality of the southwestern part of Bukidnon—frequently suffered from the plague of heavy floods due to the surrounding bald mountains.

The Kalilangan residents were aware of the increasing deforestation in the Calaga Range of the Province of Lanao del Sur due to the logging operations of Timber Industries of the Philippines, Inc. (TIPI). They could easily see the connection between the deforestation in the Calaga Range and their experience of frequent floods in their low-lying municipality.

It was reported that TIPI's massive logging operations in the Calaga Range had been damaging the watershed area of Lake Lanao that maintained a hydroelectric

power plant, which supplied about 70 percent of Mindanao's electric needs. Thus, it could be said that the bad ecological effects of TIPI operations were issues that concerned the larger part of the Mindanao region.

Aware of the broader ecological damage caused by TIPI's operations, many concerned residents of Wao were the first to sound the alarm. They initially called for the cancellation of TIPI's TLA in the Calaga Range and for the possible declaration of a total log ban in the ARMM. To do this, they had to send a series of church-based petition letters signed by the then Bishop of Malaybalay, Honesto Pacana.

First, on November 29, 1995, the delegates of the Priests and Religious Assembly of the Diocese of Malaybalay sent a petition letter to then DENR Secretary Victor Ramos. Second, on December 25, 1998, another petition letter, together with the 7,153 signatures of

‘Go to your room, return to your heart’

Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis during the Holy Mass,
Blessing and Imposition of the Ashes
Ash Wednesday, 14 February 2024, Basilica of Santa Sabina

WHEN you give alms, or pray or fast, take care to do these things *in secret*, for your Father sees in secret (cf. *Mt 6:4*). “Go to your room”: this is the invitation that Jesus addresses to each of us at the beginning of the Lenten journey.

Going to your room means returning to the *heart*, as the prophet Joel admonishes (cf. *Joel 2:12*). It means journeying from without to within, so that our whole life, including our relationship with God, is not reduced to mere outward show, a frame without a picture, a draping of the soul, but is born from within and reflects the movements of our heart, our deepest desires, our thoughts, our feelings, the very core of our person.

Lent, then, immerses us in a bath of purification and of self-spoilation: it helps us to remove all the cosmetics that we use in order to appear presentable, better than we really are. To return to the heart means to go back to our true self and to present it just as it is, naked and defenseless, in the sight of God. It means looking within ourselves and acknowledging our real identity, removing the masks we so often wear, slowing the frantic pace of our lives and embracing life and the truth of who we are. Life is not a play; Lent invites us to come down from the stage and return to the heart, to the reality of who we are: a return to the heart and the truth.

That is why this evening, in a spirit of prayer and humility, we receive ashes on our head. This gesture is meant to remind us of the ultimate reality of our lives: that we are dust and our life passes away like a breath (cf. *Ps 39:6; 144:4*). Yet the Lord—he and he alone—does not allow it to vanish; he gathers and shapes the dust that we are, lest it be swept away by the winds of life or sink into the abyss of death.

The ashes placed on our head invite us to rediscover the secret of life. They tell us that as long as we continue to shield our hearts and hide ourselves behind a mask, to appear invincible, we will be empty and arid within. When, on the other hand, we have the courage to bow our heads in order to look within, we will discover the presence of God who loves us and has always loved us. At last those shields you have built for yourself will be shattered and you will be able to feel yourself loved with an eternal love.

Sister, brother, I, you, each of us, is loved with an eternal love. We are ashes on which God has breathed his breath of life, we are the earth which he has shaped with his own hands (cf. *Gen 2:7; Ps 119:73*), dust from which we will rise for a life without end prepared for us from all eternity (cf. *Is 26:9*). And if, in the ashes that we are, the fire of the love of God burns, then we will discover that we have indeed been shaped by that love and called to love others in turn. To love the brothers and sisters all around us, to be considerate to others, to feel compassion, to show mercy, to share all that we are and all that we have with those in need. Almsgiving, prayer and fasting are not mere external practices; they are paths that lead to the heart, to the core of the Christian life. They make us realize that we are ashes loved by God, and they enable us to spread that love on the “ashes” of so many situations in our daily lives, so that in them hope, trust and joy may be reborn.

Saint Anselm of Aosta has left us these words of encouragement that this evening we can make our own: “Escape from your everyday business for a short while, hide for a moment from your restless thoughts. Break off from your cares and troubles and be less concerned about your tasks and labours. Make a little time for God and rest a while in him. Enter into your mind’s inner chamber. Shut out everything but God and whatever helps you to seek him; and when you have shut the door, look for him. Speak now to God and say with your whole heart: I seek your face; your face, O Lord, I desire” (*Proslogion*, 1).

Let us listen then, throughout this Lent, to the voice of the Lord who does not tire of repeating: *go to your room*, return to your heart. It is a salutary invitation for us, who so often live on the surface of things, who are so concerned to be noticed, who constantly need to be admired and appreciated. Without realizing it, we find ourselves no longer having an “inner chamber” in which we can stop and care for ourselves, immersed as we are in a world in which everything, including our emotions and deepest feelings, has to become “social” – but how can something be “social” that does not come from the *heart*? Even the most tragic and painful experiences risk not having a quiet place where they can be kept. Everything has to be exposed, shown off, fed to the gossip-mill of the moment. But the Lord says to us: *Enter into the secret*, return to the center of yourself. Precisely there, where so many fears, feelings of guilt and sin are lurking, precisely there the Lord has descended in order to heal and cleanse you. Let us enter into our inner chamber: there the Lord dwells, there our frailty is accepted and we are loved unconditionally.

Let us return, brothers and sisters. Let us return to God with all our heart. During these weeks of Lent, let us make space for the prayer of silent adoration, in which we experience the presence of the Lord, like Moses, like Elijah, like Mary, like Jesus. Have we noticed that we have lost the sense of worship? Let us return to worship. Let us lend the ear of our hearts to the One who, in silence, wants to say to us: “I am your God – the God of mercy and compassion, the God of pardon and love, the God of tenderness and care... Do not judge yourself. Do not condemn yourself. Do not reject yourself. Let my love touch the deepest, most hidden corners of your heart and reveal to you your own beauty, a beauty that you have lost sight of, but will become visible to you again in the light of my mercy.” The Lord is calling us: “Come, let me wipe your tears, and let my mouth come close to your ear and say to you: I love you, I love you, I love you” (H. NOUWEN, *The Road to Daybreak*, New York, 1988, 157-158). Do we believe that the Lord loves us, that the Lord loves *me*?

Brothers and sisters, let us not be afraid to strip ourselves of worldly trappings and return to the heart, returning to what is essential. Let us think of Saint Francis, who after stripping himself embraced with his entire being the Father in heaven. Let us acknowledge what we are: dust loved by God, called to be dust in love with God. Thanks to him, we will be reborn from the ashes of sin to new life in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit.

An open letter of reflection: Love, lent, and our collective stewardship



Bishop Gerardo Alminaza. CBCP NEWS

To the faithful and the wider community,

On this day, as we enter the solemnity of Lent with the observance of Ash Wednesday, we are also embraced by the universal celebration of Valentine’s Day, a time dedicated to expressing love and affection. The convergence of these observances offers us a profound moment to reflect on the nature of love—not just the romantic love we often associate with Valentine’s Day, but the agape love that Christ teaches us: unconditional, sacrificial, and encompassing all creation.

In light of this, I wish to bring our

attention to a matter that deeply concerns both our hearts and our shared future—the joint venture agreement (JVA) between Central Negros Electric Cooperative (CENECO) and MORE Power. This agreement, while a matter of governance and economics, also touches upon the core values we hold dear during this Lenten season: sacrifice, care for our neighbors, and stewardship of God’s creation.

The concerns raised by many—that this agreement might lead to increased electricity rates, jeopardize the job security of CENECO workers, and potentially consolidate power in ways that could harm the common good—are not just economic or political issues. They are moral challenges that call us to reflect on our responsibility to each other and to the vulnerable among us.

As we embark on our Lenten journey, a time for introspection and renewal, we are reminded of the sacrifices made out of love for us. This season challenges us to consider what sacrifices we are called to make for the welfare of our neighbors and for the integrity of our community.

Moreover, today’s dual observance invites us to ponder

the meaning of true love—a love that seeks the good of the other, that acts justly, and that serves without counting the cost. How does this definition of love inform our approach to communal challenges, such as the one posed by the CENECO-MORE Power JVA?

In the spirit of Valentine’s Day, let us renew our commitment to love not only in words but in deeds and in truth. Let this love inspire us to advocate for decisions that reflect our collective commitment to the common good, to economic justice, and to the care of our common home.

And so, as we wear our ashes and as some of us exchange tokens of affection, let us remember that we are called to a love that sacrifices, that shares, and that safeguards the welfare of all, especially the least among us. May this Lenten season be a time of meaningful reflection, heartfelt conversion, and a rekindled commitment to live out the radical, self-giving love that Christ himself has shown us.

In Christ’s Peace and Love,

MOST REV. GERARDO A. ALMINAZA, DD
Bishop of San Carlos



Members of the Dumagat-Remontado indigenous group join a protest rally against Charter Change in Manila on Feb. 22, 2024. ROY LAGARDE

Let us dance with the indigenous peoples

We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn. (Matthew 11:17)

THE Lord calls us to listen to our indigenous brothers and sisters, who are also members of the family of God, and to respond to their aspirations as members of our society. Twenty-six years (26) have passed since the promulgation of the 1997 Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA), yet we still find millions of Indigenous Peoples or their community leaders begging the Government for the full implementation of the IPRA.

The 15 million hectares of ancestral domains of Indigenous Peoples (IPs), as estimated by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), are mostly forests and fewer agricultural lands. The forest is part of their spiritual life, their source of food, medicines, and other important ecological services for their survival. They have an IP culture that supports the simplicity of life, a low carbon footprint, and sustainable living. Such a culture is beneficial for our society, and we should dance with them and allow ourselves to be taught by their IP wisdom.

As of 2019, there were 245 Certificate of Ancestral Domain Titles (CADTs) approved by NCIP, covering a total area of 5,735,893 hectares. The Government’s accomplishment through the work of NCIP, after 26 years, is not even half of what had been envisioned in terms of issued CADTs.

However, the dark clouds of a looming legislative typhoon are on the horizon. In December 2023, we heard of elected legislators who introduced House Bill No. 9608. According to the explanatory note of HB No. 9608, “The bill seeks to rationalize the ancestral lands administration and adjudication process, amending for the purpose Republic Act (RA) No. 8371, otherwise known as “The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997.” In response to this legislative proposal, we listened to lawyers who care for the rights of IPs. During the colloquium on IP Rights and HB No. 9608, lawyers from various organizations or institutions were invited to share their written stance. The following were invited: Legal Assistance Center for Indigenous Filipinos (PANLIPI), Legal Rights and Natural Resource Center (LRC), and Philippine Misereor Partners, Inc. (PMPI). The colloquium was attended by leaders of Indigenous Communities and other individual and organizational partners of the Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples (ECIP) of the CBCP. Based on the presentations, HB No. 9608 appears to attempt to further weaken the NCIP and water down the full implementation of IPRA.

A greater threat to the common good of IPs is the push for Charter Change (“Cha-cha”) or amending the basic law of the Philippines, the Constitution, specifically the economic provision. It will open up untitled ancestral domains of IPs to monocropping plantations and other kinds of development aggressions. In the past, DENR had been issuing logging permits, mining permits, and other permits within their legal competence to businesses within the ancestral domains of IPs that negatively impacted the sustainability of their lives and the succeeding generations. The IPs are always vulnerable to development aggressions because they do not have CADT for their protection. If the government cannot even give what is due to the historically poorest and powerless sector in our society, how can Filipino voters be assured that economic progress is the primary motive for changing the Constitution and that preventing fraudulent claims is the purpose of changing the IPRA? We affirm that CADT with its accompanying process of Free and Prior Informed Consent (FPIC)

to any proposed development project within ancestral domains is the corrective measure to historical socio-economic and political injustice.

To ensure the sustainable life of indigenous people who are gentle and living simple and eco-friendly lifestyles, and to guarantee the sustainability of ecological services that we all enjoy, the IPs are to be protected by having their ancestral domains covered by CADT.

What is good for IPs? IPRA and NCIP are good for IPs because they gave birth to 245 CADTs. More support and respect for the independence of NCIP is needed to grant more CADTs to the remaining vulnerable ancestral domains. The Constitution is good for IPs because it does not contradict IP Rights. The preamble of the 1987 Philippine Constitution affirms what the IPs aspire for: “We, the sovereign Filipino people, imploring the aid of Almighty God, in order to build a just and humane society, and establish a government that shall embody our ideals and aspirations, promote the common good, conserve and develop our patrimony, and secure to ourselves and our posterity, the blessings of independence and democracy under the rule of law and a regime of truth, justice, freedom, love, equality, and peace, do ordain and promulgate this constitution.”

Let us also heed the Social Teachings of our Catholic Church on the common good: “Underlying the principle of the common good is respect for the human person as such, endowed with basic and inalienable rights ordered to his or her integral development” (Laudato Si’, no. 157). Let us not forget the integral development of people, especially our left-out indigenous brothers and sisters who were victims of historical injustices. It is always the right time to work together and support IP communities to have their CADT and journey with them in their long-time aspiration for self-determination.

Let us journey together and dance with the IP communities—not the “cha-cha” or any strange music—but with the serene and comforting sounds of gongs, echoing in the mountains from where the life-giving waters flow to the sea.

No to HB 9608! No to Charter Change! Yes to CADT and to self-determination of IP communities!

May God bless our efforts and make them fruitful for the common good and profit us of eternal life.

MOST REV. VALENTIN C. DIMOC, D.D.
Apostolic Vicar of Bontoc-Lagawe & ECIP Chairperson

MOST REV. SEVERO C. CAERMARE, D.D.
Bishop of Dipolog and ECIP Vice-Chairperson

MOST REV. JOSE A. CABANTAN, D.D.
Archbishop of Cagayan de Oro and ECIP Member

MOST REV. PRUDENCIO P. ANDAYA, JR., CICM, D.D.
Apostolic Vicar of Tabuk and ECIP Member

MOST REV. JOSE CORAZON TALA-OC, D.D.
Bishop of Kalibo and ECIP Member

MOST REV. BRODERICK S. PABILLO, D.D.
Apostolic Vicar of Taytay and ECIP Member

MOST REV. BERNARDO C. CORTEZ, D.D.
Prelate of Infanta and ECIP Member

Religions are for peace

(Joint statement of the BARMM Darul-ifta' and Catholic bishops)

ON January 16-17, in the Bangsamoro Government Center, Cotabato City, we Muslim and Christian religious leaders gather together to reflect and share our views on the tragic terroristic bombing during a Catholic Mass on December 3, 2023 at the Marawi Mindanao State University (MSU) gymnasium. This barbaric act resulted in the killing of four and wounding of several others.

The terroristic bombing and killing in MSU-Marawi are truly deplorable, as they occurred almost five years after Pope Francis and Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, signed a joint Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living together (Abu Dhabi, 04 February 2019).

We are comforted and inspired by the mutual assistance of Muslims and Christians given to the victims in the aftermath of the bombing, a sign of continuing fraternity amidst violence. We pray that such assistance, given especially by the national and local governments, would significantly contribute to the complete healing of the trauma suffered by the victims and their families.

We also gather to honor the legacy of the late Wali of the Bangsamoro, His Eminence, Sheikh Khalifa U. Nando, the late Bangsamoro Mufti, His Eminence, Sheikh Abuhuraira A. Udasan (Allahu yarhamhuma), for their religious contribution to the peace process. Likewise, we honor the co-convenors of the Bishops Ulama Conference (BUC) the late Archbishop Fernando R. Capalla, Archbishop Emeritus of Davao, the late Governor Dr. Mahid M. Mutilan, and Bishop Hilario M. Gomez, Jr.

We, Muslims and Christian religious leaders, are one in declaring:

1. That the bombing in Marawi at the Holy Mass, the holiest Catholic

religious worship, on 03 December, is a heinous sacrilegious act;

2. That the killing of innocent civilians by terrorists under the guise of religion is a condemnable and cruel irreligious act that defiantly contradicts both Muslim and Christian beliefs;

3. That the killing of innocent civilians and religious believers are demonic acts, condemned by the teachings of every religion in the world.

In the light of the above undisputed reasons, we have collectively decided:

1. That, as religious leaders, we need to be pro-active against similar terroristic acts by imparting to our constituents the true teachings of our religious traditions and sacred scriptures, the Glorious Qur'an and the Holy Bible;

2. That we commit ourselves to the principles and objectives of the Peace Process between the Bangsamoro and the Government of the Philippines, fostering a sense of collective responsibility and renewed dedication to achieving enduring peace;

3. That the way of inter-religious dialogue is one of the most effective ways of establishing a Culture of Peace, mutual respect and understanding among peoples of different faiths in the Bangsamoro and the whole country in general;

4. That injustice and oppression are the main causes of underdevelopment, divisions, conflicts, and marginalization; and hence, various ways to promote social justice, cultural, religious, and economic development would substantially take away the ground for terrorism and armed-conflict; and

5. In line with the principles of transitional justice, as embedded in the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), we call on the commitment of the



Ulama from the Bangsamoro Darul Ifta' and some Catholic bishops during a dialogue in Cotabato City on Jan. 16 to 17, 2024. SCREENSHOT FROM OPAPRU VIDEO

National Government and the Bangsamoro Regional Government to provide comprehensive programs and mechanism for its full implementation.

We express our deep gratitude:

- to Secretary Carlito G. Galvez, Jr., of the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, reconciliation and Unity (OPAPRU), for actively building bridges of peace in BARMM and for presenting to us the peace programs and current peace activities of OPAPRU;
- to Honorable Governor Nadzir Ebil, Islamic Jurist of the Bangsamoro Darul-ifta', for his very informative presentation of Islamic teachings on justice and peace; to Most Rev. Edwin de la Peña, M.S.P., Bishop of the Prelature of Marawi, for his moving personal story of the present scenario of Marawi, a month and a half after the bombing;
- to the Bangsamoro Planning and Development Authority (BDPA), BARMM for allowing us to conduct our two-day Mindanao Ulama-Bishop

Dialogue Meeting; and

- our heartfelt thanks especially to the Heavenly Culture, World Peace, Restoration of Light (HWPL), for generously supporting and facilitating our dialogue. Our assembly is a concrete expression of the objectives of HWPL through its Religious Peace Academy (RPA) to promote inter-religious dialogue towards harmony and peace by means of quality scripture education, rooted in the teachings of the Glorious Qur'an and the Holy Bible.

Signed:

For the Officers and Members of Durul-ifta' BARMM

DR. MUHAMMAD NADZIR S. EBIL
Islamic Jurist, Bangsamoro Durul-ifta'

EMRAN G. MOHAMAD
Executive Director, Bangsamoro Darul-ifta'

For the Christian Religious

Leaders

HIS IMINENCE ORLANDO B. CARDINAL QUEVEDO, O.M.I.
Archbishop Emeritus of the Archdiocese of Cotabato

MOST REV. ANGELITO R. LAMPON, O.M.I.
Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Cotabato

MOST. REV. EDIN A. DE LA PEÑA, M.S.P.
Bishop of the Prelature of Marawi

MOST REV. ANTONIO J. LEDESMA, S.J.
Archbishop Emeritus of the Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro

PASTOR BRAYAN P. SAGUBAN
River of God/ Evangelical Denominations

For the Academic Institutions

DATU MUSSOLINI S. LIDASAN
Executive Director of Al Qalam Institute for Islamic Identities and Dialogue in Southeast Asia
Ateneo de Davao University

Children, have you caught anything to eat? (Jn 21,5)

Joint pastoral exhortation on the plight of our fisher folk and the West Philippine Sea dispute

MY dear brothers and sisters in Christ: It was a question of concern—one that stirred the hearts of his disciples and eventually led to the recognition: "It is the Lord!". As shepherds of a people whose lives depend on considerable measure on the sea, the rivers and their gifts, we would like God's People not only in our Church jurisdictions but throughout Luzon to recognize the Lord in the concern of the Church for the well-being of our poor fisher folk.

It is no secret that the aggressive incursions of the Chinese into our maritime zones, resulting in the widespread destruction of coral reefs, marine sanctuaries and the habitat of fish and sea-dwelling animals has wrought havoc on the lives of our fisherfolk.

Before the forcible occupation of our maritime zones, fishermen did not have to go very far to be able to harvest the riches of the sea that provided for their needs and those of the members of their families.

Now, they have to venture far into the open sea and tremendous risk to their safety to be able to make a catch—and then still face the threat of being bullied by Chinese fishing and naval vessels that, by their size and power, can easily outmaneuver and frighten our fishermen in their bangkas and lampitaws.

This is not only an issue about fish and aquatic resources but about the lives, the well-being and the future of one of the marginal but populous sectors of our society—the fisherfolk.

The Church stands with them, and as shepherd from various ecclesiastical jurisdictions with fisherfolk within our pastoral care, we stand with them and we bishops give voice to their fears and anxieties, their woes and their concerns.

A policy of appeasing the Chinese



Fishermen at the West Philippine Sea in Masinloc town of Zambales on Sept. 16, 2023. NIKKO BALBEDINA

aggressors is worsening the situation of our poor fisher folk. This same policy of appeasing the aggressors has also emboldened them to make tall tale claims. Said Desmond Tutu, "If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality".

It has only emboldened it, as it makes more inroads into our marine sanctuaries and maritime zones, displacing our own fisherfolk from fishing grounds from which they have traditionally harvested the wealth that the sea then had to offer.

We seek peace, and it cannot be a moral option to wage war.

But neither is it just for the leaders of our country to allow our own fisherfolk to be driven out of fishing grounds over which international

law recognizes our rights. We gratefully acknowledge statements of resoluteness about defending the resources God, in his munificence, has made available to us through the sea, but words are NOT enough.

All legal means must be exhausted so that what nature has so bountifully bestowed on us may be ours and may feed generations of Filipinos yet to be born and if present diplomatic endeavors do not suffice, then it is permissible—morally necessary even—to have recourse to the friendship of allies who can help us defend what is ours!

Pangunahin ang mga mangingisda sa mga dukha at salat na salat sa tulong ng pamahalaan. Nananawagan po ako sa mga kapatid sa pananampalataya na ipagtanggol ang karapatan ng mga

duhang mangingisda, sakloloan ang kanilang buhay at kabuhayan at itaguyod ang kinabukasan ng mga mangingisda at kanilang mag-anak.

Mga kapatid na maliliit na mangingisda, panindigan po natin ang ating karapatan at palaisdaan. Hindi tayo busabos ng mga banyagang magnanakaw ng ating huling yaman dagat. Huwag tayong mangisda sa pamamagitan ng paraang nakakasira ng buhay marina. May sariling buhay ang ating karapatan at kaisdaan. Igalang natin ang likas dagat at maging mabubuting katiwala ng yamang ipanagkatiwala sa atin ng Diyos na Lumikha. May sagutin tayo sa mga susunod pang kaapu apuhan na mayroon pa rin silang mahuhuli mula sa dagat at maipapakain sa kanilang mga anak sa kinabukasan.

Sa magandang bayan ng Santo Tomas sa La Union may isang imahen ng birhen na ang ngalan ay Virgen del Mar Cautiva na "nahuli" ng mga mangingisda sa parehong karagatan na inaangkin ng mga Tsino. Si Maria ay nasa ating karagatan. Birheng Ina ng karagatan, sakloloan ninyo kami at yakapin ang inaaping mangingisda anak mo.

We issue this pastoral exhortation together on this Memorial of Saint Josephine Bakhita, February 8, 2024.

From the Cathedral of Saint John the Evangelist, Dagupan City

From the Cathedral of Saint Augustin, Iba, Zambales

From the Cathedral of Saint William, San Fernando de La Union

From the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Puerto Princesa

From the Cathedral of Saint Joseph the Worker, Taytay, Palawan

+ SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS
Archbishop of Lingayen Dagupan

+BARTOLOME G. SANTOS Jr
Bishop of Iba

+DANIEL O. PRESTO
Bishop of San Fernando de La Union

+SOCRATES MESIONA
Apostolic Vicar of Puerto Princesa

+BRODERICK PABILLO
Apostolic Vicar of Taytay

+FIDELIS LAYOG
Auxiliary Bishop of Lingayen Dagupan

EVERYDAY JESUS

By ARCHBISHOP SOCRATES VILLEGAS

www.fathersoc.com

Why do you give?

WHY do people give? Why do people do good things for other people? Unfortunately, our motivations are not always clear and good. Unfortunately also, we are not always aware of the impurity of our motives. Why do people give and why do people do good things for other people?

The first motivation, unexpressed but very often unadmitted, is self-interest. We want to give because we want to get something in return. Investment, so to speak. We give something because we know that we will get something even more in return. It can come in business. Sometimes, it can also come in Church, in prayer. We say, "I will spend 30 minutes at Mass every day, and I know that I will receive blessings more than that, anyway."

Another reason for doing things for other people is duty. We do it out of duty, without any fervor, without any tenderness. We just do it out of duty, as paid people.

Still another reason for doing good things for other people is superiority. This one is very bad because the beneficiary of the goodness ends up feeling so low, so destroyed because the giver wants to

feel superior over the other. We can give but we can diminish humanity. We can give and we can say bad words. We can give and we can say nasty things. We can give and we can expect so much utang na loob from those who benefit from our "goodness."

Why do we give? Some of our bad and impure reasons are unexpressed, sometimes difficult to admit. But today the Lord says to us that we must be generous recklessly. That's the key word. Many of us can be generous but with generosity that is measured—generosity that makes sure that your cash balance is okay. But it is generosity that is reckless that is the example of Jesus Himself. Who is that British playwright who said, "With reckless generosity, the pauper can live like a prince?" In other words, the key to a happy, contented life is reckless generosity—generosity that throws its cares and concerns to the wind and allows God to provide for us, generosity that doesn't care about how we could live, generosity that is careless, that is carefree, that is reckless. And we can live like princes because we can live without fear, and we can live in happiness.

Compassion

LET us visualize this. There is a criminal—a woman caught in adultery. There are accusers and they are holding rocks to stone the woman. Figuratively and even literally, they have engraved the sin of the woman on the stone. We know how heavy a stone is. It is solid. We know how hard a stone is yet they have chiseled the word "adultery" on the stone which they hold in their hands ready to throw it at that sinful woman.

On the other side is the Lord. Jesus does not deny that this woman did something criminal. Jesus recognizes that. But what was Jesus writing on the ground? Jesus, like the accusers carrying rocks, also writes "adultery" on the ground. Having written adultery on the ground, Jesus stands up. And when Jesus stands up, He does not have rocks in His hands. What does He have in His hands? Dust. He has dust in his hands because if one starts to write on the soil, one's hands get dusty.

Now visualize this. Here is the sinful woman. Here are the people who have engraved the sin of adultery on rock. And here is Jesus. He has engraved the sin of

the woman on the ground. Here is Jesus offering dust to throw at the woman, whereas the people offer to throw rocks at her. The lesson is very simple. Unforgiveness is heavy. Revenge is hard. Condemnation is difficult. We will need some muscle energy to carry the rock. We will need some muscle energy to engrave on that rock. Why do we have to do that if we have better things to do?

In the case of the Lord, He only had dust, so small, so minute, so tiny that with a gust of wind, the hand will be free from the dust. Such is the mercy of God.

The essence of Christianity is compassion. Crime does not pay. Unforgiveness does not pay also. Resentment, revenge, condemnation are heavy things to do. Today, the Lord says to us, "When somebody has done us wrong, we must write it on dust and carry it in our hands. We must not carry rocks to condemn. Instead, carry dust which we will allow the wind of God's mercy to erase. Let the holy water in the Church wash away that condemning attitude."

Thoughts to live by

Reflections on Ash Wednesday, February 14, 2024

By CARDINAL ORLANDO B. QUEVEDO



Catholics receive ashes on their foreheads during Ash Wednesday Mass at the Baclaran Church, Feb. 14, 2024. Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent, a religious season of fasting, penance and reflection. MICHAEL DALOGDOG

1. Some Notes on Lent—Lent, a 40 day season of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, begins on Ash Wednesday and ends at sundown on Holy Thursday. It is a period of preparation to celebrate the Lord's Resurrection at Easter. During Lent, we are called to a true inner conversion of heart, as we seek to follow Christ more faithfully. We seek the Lord in praying with the Scriptures every day, serving the poor by giving alms, and practicing self-control by fasting.

2. Ash Wednesday is a universal day of fasting and abstinence. Fasting is required from ages 18-60, and abstinence from meat is required from age 14 (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1252). A period of preparation and fasting was formalized by the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. It was a time of preparation of candidates for Baptism and a time of penance for grievous sinners who were excluded from receiving Holy Communion and were preparing for their restoration. As a sign of their penance, they wore sackcloth and were sprinkled with ashes. This form of public penance began to die out in the 9th century. Today, only Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are kept as Lenten fast days.

3. On Ash Wednesday, the faithful receive ashes either on their heads or, in the form of a cross, on their foreheads, with the formula: "Repent and believe in the Gospel" or "Remember that you are dust and to dust you will return." This "memento mori" is a sign of our own mortality. We are encouraged to give up simple pleasures such as alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, sweets, and social media in order to foster

simplicity and self-control. This is in keeping with self-purification that Lent calls for.

4. 1st Reading, Jl. 2: 12-18—Ca. 5th century BC, the prophet Joel warns the people about the destruction of Israel. He calls them to conversion. "Return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting in punishment" (vv. 12-13). "Blow the horn in Zion! Proclaim a fast, call an assembly!" (v. 5). Gather the people, the elderly, children and infants. Let the ministers of the Lord weep and ask the Lord to spare his people! (vv. 14-17). Then the Lord "took pity on his people" (v. 18). Our 1st Reading expresses perfectly the whole idea of Lent as a call to repentance, conversion, self-sacrifice.

5. Resp. Ps. 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14, 17—David's Psalm of Repentance for his sin with Bathsheba. "Have mercy on me, God, in accord with your merciful love; in your abundant compassion blot out my transgressions. Thoroughly wash away my guilt; and from my sin cleanse me" (v. 4). "Against you, you alone have I sinned" (v. 6). "A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit" (vv. 12-13). "Restore to me the gladness of your salvation; uphold me with a willing spirit" (v. 14). "Lord you will open my lips; and my mouth will proclaim" (v.17). David's prayer for God's mercy expresses his plea for mercy and forgiveness, his humble admission of sin, his

desire for a clean and pure heart.

6. 2nd Reading, 2 Cor. 5:20-6:2—The Ministry of Reconciliation. "So we are ambassadors for Christ... we implore you on behalf of Christ, to be reconciled to God" (vv. 19-20). God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin, "so that, in him, we become the righteousness of God (v. 21). Paul appeals to the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God in vain, for "behold, now is the day of salvation" (vv. 6:1-2).

7. Gospel, Mt. 6:1-6, 16-18—In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks against hypocrisy. Do not perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them. God does not reward you for this. Give alms without announcing it to people, as the hypocrites do. Do not stand and pray in the synagogue and on street corners, in order to be seen, as the hypocrites do. Their showing off is their reward. Rather, go and pray in your room in secret, and the Father will reward you (vv. 1-6). Do not look gloomy when you fast in order to be seen, but "anoint your head and wash your face," and the Father will reward you for your fasting (vv. 16-18).

8. Our Readings call for conversion from sin, a renewal towards an authentic Christian life. Authenticity should be the mark of our works of mercy, self-discipline, purification, and conversion during these 40 days of Lent.

9. Prayer—Father in heaven, protect us in our struggle against evil. As we begin the discipline of Lent, make this season holy by our self-denial. Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Collect of Ash Wednesday Mass).

May we all have a grace-filled season of Lent! God bless!

True light from true light

Reflection on Lk 2:22-40, Feast of the Lord's Presentation, 02 February 2024, World Day for Consecrated Persons

By BISHOP PABLO VIRGILIO DAVID

TODAY'S Feast is traditionally called CANDLEMAS, or the Feast of the Holy Encounter.

In his story of the presentation of the child Jesus, aside from the Holy Family, St Luke has two other important characters—two elderly people: Simeon and Anna. Upon encountering the Holy child, both Simeon and Anna speak prophetically about the mission of Jesus, how his own life will be presented as a sacrificial offering for the redemption, not just of Israel but of all humankind.

The prophecy of Simeon has become known by its Latin title, NUNC DIMITTIS because it says, "Now Master, you may dismiss your servant (meaning, you may let your servant die in peace) because you have allowed me to see with my own eyes what I have been waiting for: 'a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel.'"

St. Luke is borrowing these words from two other oracles in Isaiah 42 and 49 about the redeeming mission of the Suffering Servant. Both are speaking

about the mission of the "Servant of the Lord" to serve as "light to the nations," through which God's grace of salvation would reach the ends of the earth—meaning, all humankind.

That should explain to you why the lighted candle has become our symbol for the presentation. In the midst of so much suffering and evil in this world, we are often tempted to give in to despair. Our faith teaches us to stubbornly hold on to the light of God's love and truth, God's mercy and forgiveness, especially when we are so disheartened by the toxicity of hatred and resentment, helplessness and hopelessness.

We ritualize this at baptism through the gesture of candle lighting. The priest lights a candle from the Paschal candle which symbolizes Christ and gives it to the parents and godparents of those who are being baptized and says, RECEIVE THE LIGHT OF CHRIST. And then his instruction follows; he says, "This light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly. This child of yours has been enlightened by

Christ. He (she) is to walk always as a child of the light."

The candle's light is supposed to be a symbol of new life in Christ, the true "Light of the World," a light that should never be extinguished; a light that should never be hidden under a bushel basket, but rather made to shine out in order to drive away the darkness of evil in this world. But the original idea of the redeeming death of the sacrificial lamb is not lost on the symbolic lighted candle that burns to give light. In short, anyone who becomes part of the Redeemer's mission of giving light, must be ready to endure burning, down to the last drop.

We also refer to today's Feast of the Lights as the Feast of the Lord's Presentation. "Present" is the opposite of absent. Right? Not always. Some people can be physically present but spiritually absent. True presence is about being a PRESENT, meaning—a gift to the world. Why is Jesus being presented in the temple? As part of a Jewish family, his parents Joseph and

Mary did this to ritualize his whole life's meaning and purpose: to be a gift, not a liability to the world.

The Feast of the Presentation is also celebrated by the Church as the World Day of Consecrated Persons. That is why we have with us today our partners in mission, our consecrated brothers and sisters from the religious congregations and societies of apostolic life—who have vowed themselves to the Lord, perpetually. Their whole life's vocation is symbolized by the lighted Candle. We pray with them that they may live their vocation to a radical form of discipleship, a life lived in utmost generosity, silently witnessing to the generosity of our Lord Jesus Christ, who came, "not to be served but to serve, and to give his whole life as a ransom for the many." They do this by living a life of poverty in order to proclaim Christ as their only wealth. They do this by living a life of chastity in order to proclaim their total commitment to Love of God above all and of neighbor as

oneself. They do this by living a life of obedience in order to witness to a life that fully embraces God's will as their own.

St. Paul once said, "And I live, no, not I, but Christ who lives in me. I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and has given up his life for me." That is what it means to celebrate the Feast of Lord's Presentation. It is remind ourselves that we are called to be like a candle that has been brought near to the Great Light who is Christ, ready to be burned and totally consumed in order to give light to the world and drive away the darkness. There is one song that summarizes well the meaning of Consecrated Life; it is entitled ONE LITTLE CANDLE.

It says, "It is better to light just one little candle than to stumble in the dark. Better far that you light just one little candle all you need is a tiny spark. If we all say a prayer that the world will be free, a wonderful dawn of a new day we'd see. And if everyone lit just one little candle what a bright world it would be!

Caritas Chronicles



February 14, 2024—CARITAS Philippines and the Diocese of Mati conducted an assessment in Davao Oriental following heavy rains that caused rivers to double or triple in size. This resulted in the displacement of communities living near the affected areas, where houses and infrastructure such as roads and bridges were washed away. Displaced residents are currently staying with relatives or in evacuation centers.

Immediate needs identified include sleeping kits, cooking/kitchen sets, hygiene/sanitation kits, and shelter.



February 7, 2024—THE First Stakeholders Industry Forum of Alay Kapwa Community Schooling (AKCS) at Microtel, UP Technohub, in Diliman, Quezon City. This event is organized by Caritas Philippines, Unilab Foundation, the Center for Integrated STEM Education (CISTEM), and Magna Anima Teachers College.

AKCS is the out-of-school youth and young adults' education program of Caritas Philippines as part of its Alay Kapwa Seven Legacy Programs. It provides opportunities to those who wish to complete their basic education. Together with the Alternative Learning System of the Department of Education, it is a training, formation, and mentoring program that will improve the learners' chances for better and more meaningful employment.

The First Stakeholders Industry Forum of #AKCS is designed to bridge the gap between education/training programs and the critical needs of our industry partners. The forum aims to align training programs with market demands through collaborative dialogue, ultimately enhancing employment opportunities for individuals seeking meaningful work.



February 13, 2024—THE Diocese of Kidapawan held a seminar-orientation on the Alay Kapwa Expanded Campaign Program today at Marian Hall, Guadalupe Compound, Barangay Balindog, Kidapawan City. 64 attendees, including service coordinators, social action coordinators, cashier/bookkeepers, and pastoral coordinators from each parish, participated.

Fr. Rey Salvador, the designated diocesan priest in charge, facilitated the session. He provided a comprehensive overview of the program's mechanics and implementation, addressing questions and concerns for further clarity. The active participation of attendees fostered a collaborative environment, paving the way for concerted efforts towards achieving the program's objectives and positively impacting the lives of marginalized and vulnerable communities.



February 13, 2024—EMPOWERING Communities through Technology: KOBO Toolbox Training in San Carlos!

Last week, we held a successful KOBO Toolbox Training and Pilot Testing at the Bishops Home Compound in San Carlos City, Negros Occidental. This activity brought together Community Forest Managers, Lunhaw Volunteers, Project Coordinators, and even the Caritas Bamboo Forest Manager and team!

The goal? To equip participants with the knowledge and skills to use Kobo Toolbox for efficient data collection. This powerful tool will play a crucial role in monitoring biodiversity, shaping reforestation initiatives, and empowering communities across the country.

Through hands-on training and pilot testing, participants gained valuable insights into Kobo's functionalities and its potential for their work. This innovation promises to revolutionize data collection, making it faster, more accurate, and more accessible than ever before.



February 12, 2024—THE Caritas Philippines Humanitarian Team and The Roman Catholic of the Diocese of Mati continue their assessment in Davao Oriental, focusing on the hardest-hit municipalities of Caraga and Manay.

Barangays remain washed out, with houses still submerged in mud. Displaced families are taking shelter in various evacuation centers, including covered courts and church chapels, while others participate in the "Adopt an IDP Family" program. Several bridges are impassable, isolating communities. Immediate needs include sleeping kits, thermal kits, and cooking sets.

The parish team received a brief orientation on establishing an Emergency Operation Center (EOC).



February 9, 2024—CARITASC Philippines and Diocese of Tagum - Ditascom conducted a Rapid Needs Assessment in Davao de Oro, focusing on Maco (Incident Command Center for the Masara landslide), Monkayo, and Compostela.

Immediate needs identified include food packs and non-food items (NFIs) such as thermal/sleeping kits, kitchenware, and hygiene/sanitation kits.

Lifeline updates: Electricity has been restored in some areas; Potable water supplies are being rationed in some areas; Roads are passable, with clearing operations ongoing.

The Caritas Team will continue its assessment in Davao del Norte today.

Bishop Honesto / B3

Wao concerned citizens, was sent to then President Joseph Estrada. And third, on February 25, 1999, Bishop Pacana wrote a follow-up petition letter to President Estrada on behalf of the 250 delegates of the Diocesan Pastoral General Assembly.

The series of petition letters eventually pressured Antonio Cerilles, successor to DENR Secretary Ramos, to issue a memorandum letter to the DENR Regional Directors of ARMM on April 14, 1999 that put in place a temporary logging moratorium on the ARMM territory. This was, however, revoked on June 11, 1999.

But the ecological struggle continued. In fact, their protest movement actually turned into a

multisectoral struggle for ecology. Given the complexity of the ecological issue, it dawned on them that a church-based advocacy may no longer be sufficient. The Church needed the competence of other disciplines and people's movements to effectively deal with complex ecological issues. Thus, SAC-Wao's tactical alliance with the civil society group of environmental advocates dramatically strengthened its ecological struggle. This networking was the path that led them to collaborate with the Task Force Macajalar (TFM) and the People's Alliance for Change (PEACE).

Eventually, this initial coalition of environmental advocates

continuously gained strength on the local level by inviting other sectors—from the church people, Muslims, students, legal experts, indigenous peoples, local government units, and other Bukidnon stakeholders—to participate in the ecological struggle.

To cut the story short, the legal case between TIPI and the civil society barrickers reached up to the Supreme Court, which finally ruled in favor of the protesters. This victory proved the power of a united struggle for ecology.

The foregoing scenarios of ecological struggle have taught us many good things. According to Bishop Onie, they teach us that, in a civil society-led protest movement,

the gravity of leadership is no longer centered on the clergy but devolves to more competent lay people. In this new model of protest, church organizations should not look at themselves as above the civil society groups but as equal members of the "civil society actors. This attitude is in line with the Vatican II thrust of strengthening the lay people's participation in society and of encouraging the ad extra church apostolates. In this new ecclesiology, the various ministries of the Church should be encouraged to engage with the world and find their proper place in the network of civil society's struggle for ecology.

Furthermore, in this new

configuration, the clergy and the institutional Church would learn to assume a supportive role to enable competent lay people to perform their proper and inherent political tasks. In short, the Wao experience has taught the local church institution and religious organizations to work with other stakeholders in protecting the natural environment.

(Fr. Reynaldo D. Raluto is a Roman Catholic priest of the Diocese of Malaybalay. He is currently the parish priest of Jesus Nazareno Parish in Libona, Bukidnon. He also serves as chair of the Integral Ecology Ministry of his diocese since June 2022.)

CBCP CINEMA

Movie Reviews



Gomburza

Technical assessment: 3.5
Moral assessment: 3.5
MTRCB rating: PG
CINEMA rating: PG

DIRECTOR: Pepe Diokno;
LEAD CAST: Cedric Juan, Piolo Pascual, Dante Rivero, Enchong Dee, Ketchup Eusebio;
PRODUCED BY: Jescom Films, MQuest;
SCREENPLAY: Pepe Diokno at Rody Vera; based on the WRITINGS of Philippine historians;
MUSIC: Teresa Barrozo;
CINEMATOGRAPHY: Carlo Canlas Mendoza;
EDITING: Ben Tolentino,
GENRE: Historical, Biopic;
COUNTRY: Philippines;
LANGUAGE: Filipino — Spanish;
DISTRIBUTED BY: Signal Entertainment;
RUNNING TIME: 112 minutes

SINA Mariano Gomez (Dante Rivero), Jose Burgos (Cedric Juan) at Jacinto Zamora (Enchong Dee) ay mga Pilipinong pari noong panahon ng pagsakop ng Espanya sa Pilipinas. Bagamat may mangilan-ngilan Kastilang pari na kumikilala sa pagkakaroon ng pantay na karapatan ang mga tubong Pilipinas bilang mga mamamayan ng Espanya, laganap pa rin ang diskriminasyon at pagmamalabis. Si Padre Pedro Pelaez (Piolo Pascual), ang masigasig na kritiko ng mapang-aping Kastila ay kaibigan ni Padre Gomez at guro ni Padre Burgos. Kaya't hindi nakakapagtaka na ang mga ideya ni Pelaez ay masasalooob din ng dalawa.

Kasabay ng malakas na impluwensiya ng mga paring Pilipino ito, at ang desisyon ng Espanya na bawasan na ang awtoridad ng mga prayle na makiaalam sa pamamahala at pagpapatakbo ng mga paaralan, naging mainit ang mga paring sekular. Sa kasamaang palad, natabunan si Pelaez ng gumuhong Manila Cathedral sa lindol noong 1863. Ipinagpatuloy naman ni Burgos ang paghubog sa mga kabataan sa mga ideyang liberal para sa mga tubong Pilipinas. Sa kabilang dako, binubuo naman ng mga “ilustrado” ang pagsuporta sa isang pag-aalsa laban sa mga Kastila dahil sa pagtanggap ng kanilang mga pribelehiyo. Ito ang Pag-aalsa ng Kabite (Cavite Mutiny). Hindi nagtagumpay ang pag-aalsa dahil sa ilang kapalpakan sa pagpapatupad nito. Ginamit naman ng Gobernador-Heneral ang pagkakataon upang sugpuin ang namumuong simpatiya para sa mga klerikong pari. Sa pagtatraydor ni Francisco Zaldua (Eusebio), nadiin sina Gomez, Burgos, at Zamora bilang mga nagpasimula ng pag-aalsa, bagama't wala silang kinalaman ditto. Ang kamatayan ng tatlong pari ang ningas na nagpaalab sa apoy ng nasyonalismo at adhikain ng rebolusyon noong 1898.

Naging tapat ang pelikula sa kasaysayan, at ang anumang malikhaing laya na ginamit ng direktor (Pepe Diokno) ay matibay namang naihabi sa mga katotohanang naganap. Kapansin-pansin ang kahusayang biswal nito — mula sa tono ng kulay, paglalaro ng liwanag at anino, at pati ang disenyong pansining. Hindi biro ang gumawa ng isang pelikulang naglalarawan ng kasaysayan, lalo sa panahon ng naglalakihang ambag mula sa Hollywood. Nakakataba ng puso na ang isang pelikula mula sa produksyong hindi naman “mainstream” ay kayang makipagsabayan hanggang dulo. Pinili ni Diokno na mabigyang diin ang pagiging tao ng mga pari kaysa sa bigyang diin ang malalaking eksena ng digmaan, lindol, at garote. Bagama't hahanapin ito dahil sa nakasanayan, naging matalino ang pagpiling ito, dahil naipakita nito na sa katahimikan ng kaluluwa sa gitna ng kaguluhan, nasasalamatin natin ang kirot, pakikibaka, at pagtanggap na siya namang naging sinag ng pag-asa sa pagpapatuloy ng laban. Maraming “close-ups” at “tight shots” ang pelikula. Kapansin-pansin din ang madalas na pagburog sa likuran. Muli, isa na namang matalinong pagpili dahil sa limitasyon ng “set”.

Mapapansin na ang mga eksena ay kinunan sa mga pamilyar na lugar, kung saan mahirap iwasan ng camera ang mga modernong

elementong makakasira sa kabuuan nito. Isa sa mga nagustuhan ng CINEMA ay ang pagbalanse nina Diokno at Vera ng kwento. Bagamat may kiling sa nakasanayang pananaw sa mga prayle ay ipinakita na hindi itim at puti ang mga tauhan. Sa ilang eksena ay ipinakita na hindi lahat ng prayle ay sumang ayon na maliitin ang mga sekular na pari at ang parusang ipinataw sa kanila. (Matutuwa kaya ang mga Agustino sa pagkakaganap sa kanila?).

Madamdamin ang pagganap ng mga aktor, lalo si Dee, kahit maliit lamang ang kanyang oras sa puting tabing, at si Juan sa kanyang unang “starring role”. Hindi malilimutan ang eksena bago magarote ang tatlo — hindi lamang ang matahimik na pagtanggap ni Gomez, ang nag-uumapaw na protesta ni Burgos, at ang pagkasira ng damdamin ni Zamora, kundi ang nabuong pagsasalin sa mga biswal na elemento nina Diokno at Mendoza. Ang GOMBURZA ay isang natatanging pelikulang dapat lamang na ginawa at lalong dapat na panoorin.

Ang tinataguriang “mga di sinasadayang bayani” — dapat ba silang dakilain bilang mga bayani o nadamay lamang ba sila sa pagtatala ng kasaysayan? Ito marahil ang isang magiging tanong matapos mapanuod ang pelikula. Ayon sa pelikula — at patin na rin sa kasaysayan — walang tuwirang kinalaman ang tatlo sa pag-aalsa sa Cavite, sa nabubuong damdamin ng mga naaping indio, at pati sa plano ng mga ilustrado. May pagka personal sa kalagayan ng mga paring sekular ang pinaninindigan nina Gomez at Burgos at hindi ang nag-aalab na makabayang damdamin na ipinaglaban ng mga bayani ng rebolusyon. Karapat-dapat bang kilalanin sila na nagpa-alab ng puso ng pagka-Pilipino?

Ang usapin ng sekularisasyon ay isang madilim subalit mahalagang yugto sa pananampalataya ng Pilipino. Matatandaan na dahil sa Patronato Real, ang simbahan Katoliko, sa pamamagitan ng mga dayuhang prayle, ay kasamang bumuo sa mga lipunang ng mga pamayanang sinakop ng Espanya. Bagamat hindi maikakaila ang mga pagmamalabis, hindi naman maitatangi ang mga naiambag ng Simbahang Katoliko para mabuo ang Pilipinas. Umusbong ang pagmamahal sa Diyos at ang pagnanais na maging bahagi ng pagpapalaganap nito at pagpapayaman sa buhay Kristyano. Sa mata nina Pelaez at ng Gomburza, ang paanyaya na maging manggagawa ng simbahan ay para sa lahat, anuman ang kulay o lahi. Hindi nila itinaguyod ang pag-aarmas o karahasan — bagkus, diskurso at pangangatwiran ang isinulong nila, dalawang paraan na naging higit na mabisa at mapanghimok, dalawang gawi na higit na kinatakutan dahil sa layo at lawak ng mga isipan at damdaming mabubuksan nito. Totoo, hindi sinasadya na sila Gomez, Burgos at Zamora ay makapagsimula ng ningas ng pagkamakabayan, subalit hindi maikukubli ang alab ng apoy na sumiklab sa mga damdaming Pilipino — pagka't Pilipino ang pinarusahan, pagka't pari ang hinatulan. — **PMF**

CINEMA thinks viewing the following documentary might help one to better appreciate the film.



Rewind

Technical assessment: 3.5
Moral assessment: 4
MTRCB rating: PG
CINEMA rating: V14 (Viewers 14 years old and above)

DIRECTOR: Mae Czarina Cruz;
LEAD CAST: Dingdong Dantes, Marian Rivera, Jordan Lim, Pepe Herrera, Joross Gamboa;
PRODUCED BY: ABS-CBN Productions;
SCREENPLAY: Joel Mercado, Enrico Santos;
ART: Carmi Raymundo;
EDITING: Marya Ignacio;
GENRE: Family Drama;
COUNTRY: Philippines;
LANGUAGE: Filipino;
DISTRIBUTED BY: Star Cinema;
RUNNING TIME: 112 minutes

Mary (Marian Rivera) is an exemplary wife to John (Dingdong Dantes) and a caring mother to Austin (Jordan Lim). In order to be a simple homemaker, she turned her back on her budding profession as a chef. However, it seems that John doesn't appreciate the sacrifices of his wife. John has a hot temper, is selfish, and always wants to be in control, making it difficult for Mary to express a decision that could change her life. While on the way to a program featuring Austin, the couple had a heated argument, leading to an accident that resulted in Mary's sudden death. In the depths of grief and regret, John encounters Lodz (Pepe Herrera) in the form of Mang Jess. (Austin named the Christ image he talks to "Lodz.") Lodz informs John that he will be given another day to rectify his wrongs before the accident. However, someone needs to take Mary's place in death. John agrees to sacrifice himself. When John is returned to the designated day, he corrects all his mistakes to avoid having a hot temper and being selfish — until he learns Mary's hidden decision.

The flow of the story is easy to understand and follow. The dialogue is realistic, and the scenes can be relatable to many. The audience's emotions are easily touched because the story resonates with real-life situations. Due to the genuine connection between Dantes and Rivera in real life, their chemistry in their roles comes naturally. Herrera's timing is also excellent, both in his light and serious scenes. Lim's performance, on the other hand, is quite raw; it would be better if his dialogues were reduced to avoid revealing his struggle with speaking. Under Cruz's gentle direction, the couple's conflicts and Lodz's sensitive character penetrate the heart. There may be scenes that could have been shortened as the message is already conveyed, but it seems to be a formula in Filipino films to milk each scene until it dries up and the viewer is satisfied. Overall, Rewind should be watched by those who are

struggling with faith in relationships, in others, and in God.

Conservative Catholics might frown upon how the film portrayed Jesus in the form of Lodz. The traditional image of Jesus — handsome, expressive eyes, eloquent speech, and seemingly floating in the clouds — is more popular, while Lodz is not handsome, is just an ordinary person, streetwise, and humorous. But both delivered the same message: not all prayers are answered, people need to learn so some things are withheld, and God patiently waits for a person who has fallen into mistakes to rise again.

The film strongly conveys its message in two aspects. First, for married couples. Marriage is not a fairytale where happiness continues after the wedding; instead, it is the beginning of trials because hidden traits surface in daily companionship. And it's not always beautiful. The challenge is whether you can understand, love, and fill the shortcomings of your spouse. It also says that in a relationship, it's not right for one to step on the other so that one can soar. One need not remain in the shadows while the other alone enjoys sunlight. Both should remain in the light together. They should lean on and strengthen each other.

Secondly, for believers: that this is not like a fairytale that is unreachable and far from real life. Jesus became human, and we should know Him as a friend, support, and guide who is always with us. It states that Jesus is with us, and we can reach Him in the ordinary flow of life. True believers discern the truth in Lodz's statement: "It's good that you offered wine and not flowers and candles."

The MTRCB rating of the film is G — for all viewers, but due to the unique portrayal of Jesus and the issue of married couples, CINEMA decided that only those aged 14 and above should watch it to avoid potential confusion that may arise in young minds.



We're here to answer your questions about life, faith, and love. We'll explore a variety of topics, including our purpose, how to grow in our faith, or even finding true love.

ang daming tanong

PODCAST