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RESTING TO LISTEN: REFLECTIONS ON THE CORDILLERAN HERITAGE OF *"TE-ER"* AND THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF "REST"[1]

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Abstract. In today's busy world, rest is rare and often seen as a personal need for mental health. However, should rest always be viewed as only for individuals? Does it relate to the Church's life? What role does rest play in synodality and spreading God's Word? Our Te-Er experience in Sadanga, Mountain Province, highlighted how important rest is for deeper listening to God's message. In this contribution, an overview of the Cordilleran concept of *Te-Er* or rest will be presented and related to some of the biblical notions of rest in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

Keywords: rest, re/creation, Psalm 95, Epistle to the Hebrews, Mt 11:28

[1] This paper is an updated version of a paper (of the same title) first presented at the Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines' (CBAP) Silver Jubilee Celebration and Annual Convention, September 20, 2024; La Paz, Iloilo City. It is our initial attempt to examine this Cordilleran (Sadangan) heritage through the theological lens of biblical practices of and teachings on "rest".

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Introduction

In our fast-paced modern world, "rest" is a very expensive commodity that few people enjoy, and when availed, it is almost always viewed as individualistic, personal, and essential for keeping one's sanity amidst a highly convoluted and chaotic world. But should the need for rest always be conceived as personal? Does it always need to be for one's personal benefit? Does rest have anything to do with the life of the Church? What does rest contribute to the discussion of synodality and the proclamation of the Word of God? Our experience of the Te-Er in Sadanga, Mountain Province, was a big eye-opener as to how significant "rest" can be in making us listen (more intently) to the Word of God.

Te-Er as a Pathway to Intently Listening to God's Voice: A Cultural Awakening

A. "YBA Kami Para Sa Tanan!"

Inspired by the principle of synodality, "Youth Bible Apostolate kami para sa tanan!" was the clarion call of the Episcopal Commission on Biblical Apostolate (ECBA)'s 25th National Bible Workshop on February 19–22, 2024, held at the Mandaya Hotel, Davao City, and participated in by 268 Bible apostles from fourteen regional biblical centers. We witnessed the zeal, creativity, and talents of the youth in bringing out the power of the Word in their lives. Inspired by the youth, we went home invigorated by the faith-life experiences of the young Bible apostles.

From Davao City, I (Ebojo) returned to Luzon and joined a team of Bible translation personnel from the Philippine Bible Society (PBS)[2] and the Translators Association of the Philippines (TAP),[3] visiting Tabuk City (Kalinga Province), the Municipalities of Conner

[2] Members of the PBS Team include Rev. Marfeal Santiago (PBS Translation Supervisor), Phoebe Cantal, Charity Rulloda, and Kuya Dario Esponilla.

[3] Rev. Joseph Villaflor (TAP Director), Tony Dasalla, and Kuya Dodong.

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(Apayao Province), Sadanga (Mountain Province), and Malibcong and Boliney (Abra Province), for a 10-day language research and relationship-building mission. Before entering any diocesan jurisdiction, we paid our courtesy[4] to the bishops (Most Rev. Prudencio Andaya, Jr. CICM, D.D. [Diocese of Tabuk], Most Rev. Valentin Dimoc,[5] D.D. [Apostolic Vicariate of Bontoc-Lagawe], and Most Rev. Leopoldo Jaucian, SVD, D.D.[6] [Diocese of Bangued]) and local Evangelical and mainline protestant church leaders, and asked for their collective blessings, especially for the new translation endeavour that we would be embarking on. The blessings of the bishops and other local Church leaders are an important element of our journey in the United Bible Societies-Nida Institute's Cornerstone program for a holistic approach to translation, but with initial focus on Oral Bible Translation (OBT).[7]

B. "Inte-er taku, Kakailyan"

On February 27, from the House of the Bishop of Bontoc, we proceeded to one of the potential project sites, that is, the town of Sadanga, about an hour ride from Bontoc town (but about 500 kilometres away from Manila). The Municipality of Sadanga[8] is a fifth-

[4] Copies of translated Scriptures into Cordilleran mother tongues were presented to them, courtesy of PBS and TAP.

[5] Bishop Valentin Dimoc, D.D., an Ifugao priest, chairs the Episcopal Commission of Indigenous People (ECIP) of the CBCP.

[6] As Bishop Jaucian was out of town, Rev. Fr. Samuel Baruela, the Diocesan Chancellor, welcomed the team on his behalf.

[7] Out of this language research trip, four oral Bible translation teams were eventually formed: the Conner "Isneg" team (Apayao), the Abra-Kalinga "Vanao" team, the Abra "Masadiit" team, and the "Sadanga" team (Mountain Province).

[8] Sadanga had its first seat of government at Barangay Sacasacan with Bekigan, Belwang and Saclit as its barangays. Pursuant to the Provincial Board Resolution no. 592, dated October 14, 1949, of the old Mountain Province, barangays Anabel and Betwagan were added as barangays of Sacasacan. But on June 25, 1963, through the Executive Order No. 42 of then President Diosdado Macapagal, Sadanga became a regular municipality. Prior to this, however, "Sadanga" was a former sitio of Barangay Sacasacan which was then renamed to "Barangay

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class municipality under the political jurisdiction of Mountain Province, Philippines. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) 2020 census, Sadanga has a population of 8,427 people, distributed among the eight barangays.

In terms of geo-politics, Sadanga plays an important role in hosting the commencement of the peace talks between the "Cory" Government and the late Fr. Conrado Balweg and his Cordillera Peoples' Liberation Army (CPLA), that led to the creation of the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR).

It was already dark when we ascended the Sadanga mountains from the main highway and reached the plaza of the municipal building a little before 6:00 pm. Even without prior notice, we were received joyfully by Mayor Adolf Ganggangan, who was still very busy working even after office hours. We enjoyed the overflowing supply of the native hot brewed coffee as we listened attentively to his captivating stories about the uniqueness, the beauty, and the resiliency of the cultural heritage of the Sadanga people. He narrated spontaneously the brief history of the municipality, opening for us anthropological windows to better appreciate the socio-political-cultural-economic realities of his people. As we listened intently to the Mayor, he stopped abruptly upon hearing a public announcement (through the town trompa) by a male elder at 6:00 in the late afternoon:

> "*Inte-er taku asha ay matchem sina asha ay oras na a las ocho*" ("Let it be known to everyone that we will observe the Te-Er beginning tonight at 8:00 p.m.").

This announcement would forever change our appreciation of "rest." All the employees at the Mayor's office understood the message. They were ready to leave immediately after the announcement. Our team wondered what the announcement was all about, as it was given

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Poblacion" and became the seat of the newly created municipality. On July 30, 1985, through the Provincial Ordinance No. 02, Barangay Demang was created also and added to Sadanga. Hence, the Municipality of Sadanga is now comprised by eight barangays: Anabel, Bekigan, Belwang, Betwagan, Demang, Poblacion, Saclit, and Sacasacan (where our TAP team stayed for the night).

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only once. Seeing our confused faces, the Mayor must have realised our honest ignorance and wanted to salvage our honour, so he patiently explained to us the urgency of the announcement for immediate public compliance by everybody, including guests who are already in town. The three-day "*Te-Er*" was about to commence at 8:00 p.m. that evening.

The Mayor enlightened us about the protocols[9] of the Te-Er days, thus:

- At the entrance of the town, there are two signboards (fayavey) on opposite sides of the road indicating that *Te-Er* is in effect (which our Team sorely missed noticing).
- Usually, there are elderly women at the entrance of the town who make sure that no one enters the town especially "foreigners and strangers," and equally no one is allowed to leave the town during the three-day *Te-Er*.
- During *Te-Er*, no one is allowed to do manual work. One may walk sparingly only around his/her own backyard.
- Every offender against the rule of grounding, restriction of travel and movement is *punished* accordingly by the community Elders, either by making them to give in kind or in cash—the proceeds of which would be for the use of the community.

Under this restrictive context, the Mayor wisely advised us to leave the place discreetly very early in the morning, the following day. Then he bowed his head and requested our blessing and prayers, especially for peace ("*kapiya*") to end boundary disputes in the three barangays

[9] We would later learn that the enforcement of the *Te-Er* begins with a meeting of the Council of Elders within the center of the town. The Council negotiates with its members on whether they should close the village or not, and when. Once a collective decision has been reached, the Elders will drink their traditional wine and one of the Elders will announce the decision via public statement, which can be heard throughout the village valley. The tradition is made so that for a period of time, the Sadanga townsfolk can rest from their daily routine work, and deliberately have the opportunity to converse and strengthen their bonds with each other through public engagement with their neighbors and with the spirits.

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of the town. After our prayer, everyone hurried to move out of the *Municipio* (municipal office) to be home before 8:00 p.m.

C. An Evening of Revelation

From the *Municipio*, we walked slowly down the pathway leading to the Parish Convent and Church of Our Lady of the Assumption, where some of our team members would take shelter for the evening. As the parish priest, Rev. Fr. Ferdie Fulatao, was in Bontoc City that day, three local lady volunteers generously prepared our dinner and beddings for the night. But looking back, these women[10] did more than just "waiting" for us; they in fact further opened our hearts to the Te-Er tradition.

We listened carefully to Linda, Carmelita, and Juanita as they genuinely explained from their hearts their *Te-Er* culture. *Te-Er* is a practice that some of us have sporadically heard before this encounter, but this unique Sadangan tradition had not sunk deep into the cultural psyche. In turn, the women explained that *Te-Er* is a restful invocation of blessings for good harvest and good relationships in the community, and that Te-Er has different types:[11]

Te-Er si Khaat: This is the preparatory phase which involves the cleaning of the pathways in the village by household members.

[10] Accordingly, the information in this section was augmented further by the later sharing of the three other women from Sadanga, who became members of the Sadanga Cornerstone-Oral Bible Translation, namely Norma Coriaen, Raymunda Sabong, and Rosa Wacnag.

[11] As the observance of *Te-Er* is also practiced elsewhere in the Cordillera (some call it *"teng-ao"*), the types of *Te-Er* may not be limited to the ones mentioned here. Due to the limited time in Sadanga, no attempt has been made to document these other types; see the "Community Management Plan for the Sadanga, Mountain Province, updated April 2019," accessed September 2024, https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/project-documents/41220/41220-013-ipp-en_26.pdf. For a comparison with the Central Bontoc's practice of *Te-Er,* see Magdalena Collod, *Og-ocod Ad Sangad-om Ya Adwan: Stories of Long Ago and Today* (Quezon City: Summer Institute of Linguistics – Philippines, Inc., 1975). The main difference between Sadanga and Central Bontoc's celebrations is the number of days; whereas the latter has two days, the former has three.

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Te-Er si Chawis (chao-es): The following evening after *Khaat*, the elders would put six sticks with small pieces of grilled pork blessed (soaked) in rice wine at the entrance of the village community. They would proceed with the *Te-er Proper* if the "sign" is good, as indicated by the absence of insects (spiders) on the sticks. Or else they will repeat the ritual until the signs are favourable. The *Chawis Te-Er* signals the preparation of the rice fields and farms (cleaning, ploughing, fixing the water canals, etc.), usually done from September to December.

Te-Er si Rapu (December, January, February): After the 3-day rest, the farmer who planted the first seedling will be the first to plant in their rice fields, starting from the fields far from the community (*payew si ad-adawi*), moving to the fields near the houses (*payew si vavarey*). After everyone is finished with planting (harvesting), the *Ap-apoy* rite is performed in the fields. People bring cooked rice and enjoy the chicken or "*inasinan*" in the "*agamang*" (rice granary). This is a thanksgiving offering to God after work. In the evening of the same day, each household prepares a dinner with boiled chicken and invites neighbours/relatives to dine with the family for the *hung-up* meal – a rite asking for welfare and blessings for the family.

Te-Er si Sarakmut - *Te-Er di Erdad* (3 days): Celebrated before milling the sugarcane to produce sugar/wine/vinegar. During every *Te-er*, a team of men and women takes turns checking the houses (*Rapat*). If no one is at home, they get items like basins, buckets, etc., from the household as a penalty for leaving their houses. However, the elderly men get the items back by bartering with chickens, which are offered to *"Lumawig"* (the greatest of all spirits) at the *"papattayan"* space (sanctuary).

Te-Er si Pisik: A three-day rest before the start of the harvest. A ritual called *Wadey* is performed within three days before the harvest period. The ritual includes the erection of scarecrows in the rice fields that would indicate the "closure" of all passages of pests and diseases in the rice paddies. When the grains start to ripen, the "*serchang*" ritual is observed in anticipation of a good and fruitful harvest, usually falling in June and July. On the fourth day, the farmers (both men and

women) begin the most awaited harvest season. In case the harvest is not good, the community celebrates the *Fegnash*. Usually, pigs are butchered and prepared for meals. Each unit of the *"Ato"* (ceremonial platform) neighbourhood prepares lunch, supper, and breakfast for people to celebrate.

After the three-day of this *Te-er*, the people as a community go together either to plant or harvest in the fields/farms, starting from the farthest end of the land moving closer towards the fields near the community, according to the communitarian work ethic *"ub-ufu"* (or the equivalent of lowlanders' "*bayanihan*").

Te-Er di Far-in / Te-Er di Sherdey: This type of *Te-Er* is done for the prevention of the spread of diseases. This *Te-Er* was observed faithfully during the Covid-19 pandemic period as a customary method of quarantine. Everyone gives contributions either in kind or in cash to buy pigs, chickens, rice, and others to be cooked for distribution to all the homes in the community.

But what is the whole point of the *Te-Er*? The women explained the meaning of the celebration of the *Te-Er* tradition as a solemn celebration for the Mother Earth, to give her time to relax and rest, even for a while, to be able to re-energize and breathe again freely without being disturbed by anything or by anyone. This way, Mother Earth is deliberately afforded the needed space to regain her health and re-gather strength for a much-needed energy before the planting or harvesting seasons. The *Te-Er* days are periods of rejuvenation for Mother Earth. While Mother Earth is at rest, the farmers (women and men) are in effect communicating in sincere dialogue with the animals and pests, appealing to them not to destroy and infest their crops for the year—a scenario that ensures sustenance for the coming rainy season.

During *Te-Er*, the Sadanga people whisper intercessory prayers to the Creator God to order all the pests (e.g., destructive insects [as locusts, grasshoppers, etc.] and animals [rats, etc.]) not to infest or damage their plants and harvests. It is also a period of asking God, the Lord of the planting/harvesting seasons, the Giver of good harvest, to prevent infestation, to spare them from drought, and to drive away

bad weather that could tragically destroy their crops. In the same way, the *Te-Er* days enable the farmers to equally re-gather their strength and conserve their energy for the coming planting and harvesting tasks.

The *Te-Er* days are moments of communal contemplation of the goodness of the Creator, a period of deep conversation with the One who generously causes the seeds to delicately germinate and eventually grow into a robust and healthy plant, especially palay or rice grains, to ensure a continuing food supply for the community.

When the *Te-Er* ritual is not observed, the harvest becomes bad, with harmful insects and angry rats badly infesting the farms and fields. In effect, when the Te-Er is desecrated, the community's harvest is also desecrated. When this violation happens, food security becomes a threatening communal problem, resulting in a lack of food and widespread unhealthy living in the community. The environment becomes unproductive, causing unrest and anxiety among the members of the community. With the practice of *Te-Er*, Mother Earth can rest and become more receptive to nourishing the plants that would result in a healthy and abundant harvest, leading to a jubilant celebration of the people.

D. Rinebwangmi na Te-Er ("We broke the Te-Er")

The *Te-Er* observance, however, is cancelled or postponed ("*maribwang na Te-Er sina erdad*") when it is desecrated ("*gapu ta madimek din Te-Er*"). Some of the reasons for cancellation include birth of a child, death in the community, "*no waday tilag*" (when a rainbow appears in the sky), and the unacceptable entry of foreigners/visitors into the community.

Accordingly, after we had our dinner (at exactly 8:00 p.m.), another public announcement was made through the town *trompa* (loudspeaker), "*Maipakaammo as Kakailyan ay adi matuloy na Te-Er asha ay rabi. As wakas na kasin taku ente-eran*" ("Let it be known to everyone that the observance of *Te-Er* will not push through tonight, but tomorrow evening"). We were so relieved with the new announcement, as to our unsuspecting mind, with the postponement of the *Te-Er* our TAP Team

could then freely stay in one of the *barrios* (i.e., Barangay Sacasacan) where limited movement was allowed, and our PBS team could move out freely to our next destination—the province of Abra.

But here's the embarrassing twist: We were politely made to understand that the postponement was actually caused by our non-observance of the NO-ENTRY rule during the newly announced *Te-Er* observance. The community Elders discovered that foreigners/strangers/outsiders entered the town without any prior notice. In our naiveté, our team desecrated the *Te-Er* ("*narebwangmi din erdad*" ["we desecrated the rest"]) because we were unconsciously ignorant of the cultural protocols in operation.

The evening was a difficult and hurtful revelation that we insensitively (albeit unintentionally) entered and violated the "sacred space and time" of a people who are sincerely listening to the voice of the Creator God in their communal silence and solitude during the *Te-Er* days. The evening was a good mix of restless and restful, feeling very tired and embarrassed by our ignorance of a tradition that is sacred to the Sadanga people. Nevertheless, the important lesson it left in us is the need to "listen." And we can only hear well when we are rested: WE NEEDED THE TE-ER!

Te-Er as Hearing the Voice of God: A Biblical Reflection

In the New Testament, no other invitation to "rest" is more profound than what Jesus Christ uttered in Matthew 11:28-29:[12]

> "Come to me, all you (plural) that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Put my yoke upon you (plural), and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you (plural) will find rest for your (plural) souls."[13]

[12] Hebrew and Greek texts used in this paper are from the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia,* 4th rev. ed., the common text of UBS *Greek New Testament,* 5th ed., and the *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece,* 28th ed.

[13] Matt 11:28–29 "Δεῦτε πρός με πάντες οἱ κοπιῶντες καὶ πεφορτισμένοι, κἀγὼ ἀναπαύσω ὑμᾶς. 11:29 ἄρατε τὸν ζυγόν μου ἐφ' ὑμᾶς καὶ μάθετε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, ὅτι πραΰς

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This invitation is one of the most beloved Bible passages by Filipinos,[14] conveying the intimate message of finding rest in the loving and protective arms of Jesus, which does not necessarily immediately require technical expertise to decipher its meaning and its significance for oneself.

Yet, in this context, Jesus used the Greek term ἀναπαυσις.[15] The term usually connotes being physically refreshed after ceasing from activity or work, with focus on the "restorative character of rest" rather than mere cessation of activity. Whilst the language and imagery of this passage are physical at first look, its reception history tends to focus more on its psycho-spiritual significance: Jesus' unconditional invitation to have a restful "soul" in his affectionate and caring arms. However, what needs to be noted emphatically here is that this invitation was never meant to be an individualistic call, but a collective invitation for the community (note the plural forms) to enjoy the rest Jesus offers—it's a call to communal rest!

In Jesus, the call to enjoy communal rest is an invitation for the whole community to "come" to him as "fellow learners" ("put my yoke on you and learn from me" [ἄρατε τὸν ζυγόν μου ἐφ' ὑμᾶς καὶ μάθετε]), hence as his "disciples" (μαθηται) learning the ways and the will of God. Accordingly, becoming a disciple who enjoys the restorative effect of rest and confidently resting in the arms of Jesus recurringly involves one very important "work"—listening intently and obediently to the voice of the Master or the Rabbi. This listening immediately connects the invitation to "rest" as a call to "listen intently" to the words of Jesus, with a firm resolve to obey wholeheartedly.

εἰμι καὶ ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ, καὶ εὑρήσετε ἀνάπαυσιν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν"; unless otherwise stated, translations of biblical passages are ours.

[14] See Mariana Albuquerque. "Philippines' Ten Most Searched Bible Verses," *Christianity Today,* January 16, 2024, accessed September 19, 2024, https://www.christianitytoday.com/2024/01/philippines-popular-10-bible-verses-john-1-1/.

[15] Matthew (11:28–29) and Mark used the same root term for rest, i.e., Mark 6:31 καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· δεῦτε ὑμεῖς αὐτοὶ κατ' ἰδίαν εἰς ἔρημον τόπον καὶ ἀναπαύσασθε ὀλίγον. ἦσαν γὰρ οἱ ἐρχόμενοι καὶ οἱ ὑπάγοντες πολλοί, καὶ οὐδὲ φαγεῖν εὐκαίρουν.

The Epistle to the Hebrews equally mentions something about collective rest. Interestingly, its reference to "rest" is also connected intricately with the divine "voice." Hence, the negative portrayal in 3:11 that,

> "Therefore, I swore in my anger,
> 'They will never enter into my rest.'"
>
> (ὡς ὤμοσα ἐν τῇ ὀργῇ μου·
> εἰ εἰσελεύσονται εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσίν μου.)

was predicated by the prophylactic warning in vv. 7-8 (and repeated in v.15 and in 4:7)[16]

> Today, if you (plural) hear his (God's) voice,
> do not harden your (plural) hearts as at the rebellion
>
> (Σήμερον ἐὰν τῆς φωνῆς αὐτοῦ ἀκούσητε,
> μὴ σκληρύνητε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν ὡς ἐν τῷ παραπικρασμῷ)

In this context, enjoying (i.e., "entering into") God's rest necessitates listening to and the actualisation of ("obedience to") the assertions, commands, and mandates of the "voice of God" (the "Word" of God).

Although this has not been highlighted in most studies of the passage, it is also observable that what follows this recurring and striking motif of "resting and listening" in chapters 3 and 4 in Hebrews must have been very important for its author. After the sermon on "rest and listening," the author writes in 4:12-13:

[16] Note, however, that Hebrews 4:7 does not contain the phrase "as at the rebellion" (ὡς ἐν τῷ παραπικρασμῷ). The phrase echoes Psalm 95:11. On the use of the psalm in the Epistle to the Hebrew, see J. Michael McKay Jr., "'If They Will Enter My Rest': The Impact of the Greek Translation Technique of Psalm 95 for the Argument of Hebrews 3 and 4," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 44, no. 3 (2022): 390–410, https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X211049173; José Adriano Filho, "Hebrews and the Scriptures: The use of Ps 95:7b-11 and Genesis 2:2b in Hebrews 3–4," *Reflexus: Revista Semestral de Teologia e Ciências das Religiões* 12, no. 19 (2018): 299–315, https://doi.org/10.20890/reflexus.v12i19.558; Peter E Enns, "Creation and Re-Creation: Psalm 95 and Its Interpretation in Hebrews 3:1–4:13," *Westminster Theological Journal* 55 (1993): 255–80.

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> "[12]Indeed, *the word of God is living and active*. Sharper than any two-edged sword, it pierces to the point where it divides soul and spirit, joints, and marrow; it judges the thoughts and the intentions of the heart.[13] Nothing in creation is hidden from his sight. Everything is uncovered and exposed to the eyes of the one to whom we must all render an account."[17]
>
> Ζῶν γὰρ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐνεργὴς καὶ τομώτερος ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν μάχαιραν δίστομον καὶ διϊκνούμενος ἄχρι μερισμοῦ ψυχῆς καὶ πνεύματος, ἁρμῶν τε καὶ μυελῶν, καὶ κριτικὸς ἐνθυμήσεων καὶ ἐννοιῶν καρδίας· καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν κτίσις ἀφανὴς ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, πάντα δὲ γυμνὰ καὶ τετραχηλισμένα τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῦ, πρὸς ὃν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος.

In this context, the earlier mention of "resting and listening" becomes a hermeneutical signpost for understanding what the author meant when he asserted "the word of God is living and active" (Ζῶν γὰρ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐνεργὴς). As such, it becomes clearer that experiencing the power and life-giving benefits of God's Word necessitates resting and that rest can only materialise as the community listens to his voice and heeds what it says.

The people Moses led out of Egypt did not enter "God's rest" because even though they heard God's voice, they refused to heed it (Heb 3:19; 4:6, 11). Nevertheless, the good news is that the invitation to this communal rest continues. With a warning, the author would assert in 4:1:

> "Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it."
>
> Φοβηθῶμεν οὖν, μήποτε καταλειπομένης ἐπαγγελίας εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσιν αὐτοῦ δοκῇ τις ἐξ ὑμῶν ὑστερηκέναι.

The author would then reassert in 4:11:

> "Therefore, let us make every effort to enter into that rest, so that no one may fall by following that example of refusing to believe."
>
> σπουδάσωμεν οὖν εἰσελθεῖν εἰς ἐκείνην τὴν κατάπαυσιν, ἵνα μὴ ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ τις ὑποδείγματι πέσῃ τῆς ἀπειθείας.

[17] *New Catholic Bible*, emphasis added.

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It is noteworthy that the writer of Hebrews mentions that the theological basis for enjoying rest was because "God rested on the seventh day from all his works" (Heb 4:4). Clearly, the intertextual resonance of the Sabbath rest in the Old Testament is in view here.

Accordingly, one of the stipulations of the Decalogue (Exo 20:8, 10) declares:

> *"Remember to keep the day of Sabbath holy!"*
> (אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ זָכוֹר)

and in the observance of Sabbath, the Israelites were mandated,

> "… you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter"
> (לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂה כָל־מְלָאכָה אַתָּה| וּבִנְךָ־וּבִתֶּךָ).

However, the scope of this prohibitive command was not limited to the Israelites, but extended to the different groups within their cohort,

> "your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements" (וַאֲמָתְךָ וּבְהֶמְתֶּךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁעָרֶיךָ עַבְדְּךָ).

In short, even at the time of its institutionalisation, it is the whole community that was mandated to observe the special meaning of "rest."

The instruction to keep the day of Sabbath holy (that is, "dedicated") is reminiscent of God's own initiative to enjoy the benefits of resting from his creative tasks (Genesis 1:3-2:4a)—enjoying the "very good-ness" (טוֹב מְאֹד [Genesis 1:31[18]]) of his creation, which came into being through his effectual "word" ("And God said, 'Let there be… and there was'" (וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי וַיְהִי]).

In this creation context, the voice of the Lord was at its clearest and most potent, materialising what it proclaims, and resulting eventually in the resting of the hard-working Divine. However, in the Genesis context, God rested not because he needed to rest out of

[18] Gen 1:31: יַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה־טוֹב מְאֹד ("And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good…").

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necessity, or out of physical exhaustion, or the lack of strength and energy. God rested because he witnessed the "ultimate perfection" of his own creation (טוֹב מְאֹד)!

What this context teaches is this: In his resting, God's creation also rested. It was not simply a passive cessation of God's activity, but a deliberate celebration of the "very good-ness" (טוֹב מְאֹד)) of what God had created. Yet God was not alone in this stupendous celebration. It was a "commune-nity" of the Creator and the created order, that is, the Almighty God, his creation, and his creatures. The communality was reciprocal, but the end is god-ward: rest leads to worship and adoration. This worship reminds us of the declaration of the Psalmist, "The heavens declare the glory of the Lord, and the sky proclaims his handiwork" (19:1).[19]

In the Exodus context, the "resting" (נוח)[20] of God and the voice of God are inseparably connected. God is the benefactor of rest, while the Israelites (and everyone with them) were its beneficiaries. It was not just a legal stipulation. Whilst its proclamation bears all the features of a legal narrative, the rationale for such a command was more than a superficial legal gobbledegook. It was meant deliberately for the benefit of the whole created community.

At a time when the Church is calling for synodality, we, the faithful, ought to listen more intently with undivided resolve to obey what God is saying to us and the humility to unconditionally embrace the "others" outside the comforts of our "self." The call for synodality is a clarion call to solidarity and communality of "rest". As the author of Hebrews exhorted: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts"!

"*Minte-Er Tako!*": Concluding Reflection

Our Sadanga experience of ***their*** *Te-Er* became an affirmation of our own journey to go ahead with the Cornerstone-Oral Bible

[19] Ps 19:1: הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד־אֵל וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו מַגִּיד הָרָקִיעַ.

[20] In Genesis 2:2, the writer used וַיִּשְׁבֹּת for "he (God) rested" instead of וַיָּנַח.

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Translation program in Asia-Pacific and allow the Word of God to be spoken ("proclaimed") in the mother tongue to understand the Good News that is innate among the people like the *Te-Er*. Indeed, the Word of God is for all.... "*para sa tanan*"—"*Minte-er tako, Kakailyan!*" "Let us rest, *mga kababayan!*"

⌘

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HOMILY: THE FEAST OF ST. MATTHEW AND CBAP'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY

EPH 4:1–7.11–13; MT 9:9–13

21 SEPTEMBER 2024

Most Rev. Broderick S. Pabillo, D.D.

How time flies! The Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines (CBAP) is already 25 years old! Happy Anniversary to all of us! It feels like just yesterday when a small group of biblical scholars and teachers came together to establish CBAP in 1999. I well remember that year when Fr. James Swetnam, God rest his soul, came over to the country to help us start CBAP. That year was also meaningful for me, for it was the year that I left formal teaching in the academe and started my life as a parish priest in laid-back St. Ezekiel Moreno Parish in Macarascas, Palawan. Since that year, I left formation work in the seminary. I was able to teach some courses in the Bible time and again after that year, but no longer as a full-time teacher. I was able to give some courses in San Jose Seminary in Puerto Princesa, in San Carlos Seminary, and in Don Bosco School of Theology before I came as bishop in Taytay, Palawan, in the year 2021.

A lot has changed in 25 years. Now the membership of the CBAP has grown. Some of the old guards have gone to the Father of us All, and many young people, most of whom I no longer personally know, have enlivened the group. CBAP has indeed changed and grown these 25 years!

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Thank you for inviting me to be part of this silver anniversary, especially for asking me to preside at this mass. It is providential that today is the feast of St. Matthew, an apostle and an evangelist. As an apostle, he reminds us of our call to follow the Lord. The succinct call of Jesus to Matthew, "Follow me!" is addressed to all of us. Our various engagements in the service of the Word of God—as professors, as writers, as scholars and researchers, as Bible animators, as translators, and what not—these are all different expressions of our effort to live in a manner worthy of the call we have each received to follow the Lord Jesus. I believe that I will not be far from the truth in affirming that each of us tries to be faithful to the Word of God and to spread the Word in various ways, through our teaching, through print media, through electronic media, and our preaching. These are the engagements of an apostle and an evangelist: to be faithful to the Word and to spread the Good News. Because of this fidelity and this going out to preach, the message goes out through all the earth. We continue the mission to let the message of the good news reach all the earth.

"Reach all the earth"—this is a tall order. In the year 2033, nine years from now, we will be celebrating the 2,000th anniversary of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus and the great missionary mandate of preaching to the ends of the earth. But after 2000 years, only around two billion of the eight billion inhabitants of the earth have accepted Christ, and that in various levels—some deeply, but many superficially. I wonder how many of the more than six billion non-Christians have at least heard of Jesus Christ, have heard the message that God loves them so much that he sent his only Son to die for them so that they may have the fullness of life.

Our theme for this anniversary celebration is: "'SPEAK, LORD!' (1 Sam 3:9): 25 Years of Listening and Responding to God's Word for a World in Crisis." We believe that God continues to speak to the world even in this world of crisis that we are in. He is not absent from our problems. He has something to say in our crisis. We are grateful to believe in this. At the same time, we feel the weight of the responsibility of listening and responding to His Word, and resounding it to our world. How to do this?