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commitment to our

VOCATIONS

Touching on

LOVE, LIFE, AND FAMILY

Tinig Loyola

Vol. 3 No. 2, February 2002

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A Commitment of Faith

We aim in this second issue of Tinig Loyola 2001-2002 to extensively address a more serious aspect of our lives – COMMITMENT to our VOCATIONS touching on love, life, and family. A commitment to vocation in clerical or religious life, in single or married life, in a different sexual orientation, and in a different direction such as lives of priests who have left the active ministry.

It is our hope that our readers may be challenged to withhold their judgments on sensitive issues that we inevitably need to discuss in order to invoke wider perspectives and not controversial perceptions on these issues. As we transcend our personal biases and limitedness in a rejecting-punitive attitude we can achieve a compassionate stance for people with lives of a different direction or orientation from what our society dictates as normative.

However despite the diversity of our life orientations, status, and circumstances we are eventually unified in one direction that leads towards a goal of a greater commitment. This is a **commitment of faith** upholding the value of love, life, and family through our calling.

How do we begin to respond to this commitment of faith? Often this faith unfolds in many ways. This may come when a vocational crisis besets us, when we begin to seek our life's purpose, when we hope to obediently surrender ourselves to God's will; and most of all, when we hope to feel God's living presence and nearness by His indwelling love in the here and now of this life through our families.

What is faith? "Faith is the realization of what is hoped for, and evidence of things unseen." Heb. 11:1 (NAB) Faith has only two elements: belief and trust.

This faith often gives us hope that there is a better future that awaits us. What do we do when what is hoped for turns out for the worse and puts this faith to a test? We can only hope that the many twists and turns in the events of our lives which stir this faith will either strengthen or weaken us but yield a greater kind of faith. A true and soulful faith that comes when our understanding fails us and there is no other path to take except that of believing within our hearts that there is a God. When we start to believe in what is unseen, that's when we learn to trust that this God is simply God to us. This trust completes that faith in God.

A commitment of faith comes in trusting despite the fears in this life, in loving despite the hatred in this world, in giving despite the selfishness of others, in caring despite the indifference around us. Faith comes in knowing that God loves us despite our unworthiness, our brokenness, our sinfulness, and our lack of reason to be loved. True commitment of faith is inspired when we realize that God has redeemed us despite our unbelief and lack of trust.

Let us have this commitment of faith within our vocations for this is what transforms it into a gift. Our vocations stem from the Father's generosity and love for us.

We are grateful to the clerics, religious, and lay who generously shared their experiences so others may take inspiration from their own lives. A special note of gratitude to a seminarian whose way of life and commitment to his calling provided the inspiration for our theme.

I extend a heartfelt gratitude to the LST community for the opportunity to publish two issues of Tinig Loyola for this year. It has been my pleasure to work with a competent team of Tinig Loyola staff - Ari, Gwen, Rodel, Rogel, Jo and Cesar. I thank each one of you for your generosity and graciousness. ⌘

JENNY R. FERNANDEZ
Editor-in-Chief

On the Sacrament of Vocation in Christ:

Marriage



Msgr. Sabino A. Vengco, Jr.

It is the oldest sacrament of nature, i.e. human love, particularly the love between a man and a woman. It has been with humankind since the inception of consciousness. Yet it is the youngest sacrament for theology, accorded the clear status of a church sacrament only in the twelfth century. Even then marriage continues today to be in need of more clarifications and, in spite of a lot of beautiful declarations, to be handled with pastoral inadequacy.

CHRIST THE TREMENDOUS LOVER

In a major development in sacramental theology that started prior to Vatican II, the sacramentality of the humanity of Jesus has come to the fore. Semmelroth, Rahner and Schillebeeckx pioneered in theological reflections that led to the understanding that Jesus Christ is the primordial sacrament in the economy of salvation. The incarnation of the divine Logos in the humanity of Jesus means that all other Christian sacraments can only be understood in and through Jesus' sacramentality. When we therefore hear the word "marriage", we should not think immediately of the man and the woman who enter into marriage, but of *Jesus the lover*. It is Jesus who gives basis to Christian marriage and it is in Jesus that marriage finds its fullest expression. He is literally the alpha and the omega of marriage. The definition of marriage is not to be found in marriage but in Jesus as the root-sacrament.

Marriage is a state where men and women as husbands and wives are able to experience the reality of the love of Jesus and be caught up in its saving movement. Hence the most important biblical texts for our understanding of marriage are not those that refer to marriage but those that speak of the sacrificial love of Jesus and refer to the kind of love he demands from his followers. Such are his words that we are to love one another as he loves us (Jn 13,34-35); that to be first, one must be last of all and the servant of all (Mk 10,35); that we are to love God with all our being and our neighbor as we love ourselves (Lk 10, 27-28), and that to be his disciples we must be ready to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow him (Mt 16, 24-25). The context of marriage is therefore Christian discipleship, the imitation of Jesus Christ. It is vocation in Christ, a calling to follow him in the specific path of marriage.

IN THE BASIC SACRAMENT, THE CHURCH

But this following of Christ takes place concretely in the Church as the basic or fundamental sacrament of Jesus Christ. The Church as a mystery is a transcendent divine reality in the economy of salvation that evokes our faith. Jesus in the light of the world (*Lumen gentium*) and the Church as a social and communal entity is the messenger of the light, much so to say like the sun and the moon. This "lunar constitution" of the Church relativizes the Church alongside Jesus, the absolutely

basic sacrament of salvation. The Church is really Church as the symbol or sacrament of Jesus only as the Church reflects Jesus. The key to the sacramentality of the Church is communion with and fidelity to Jesus. Jesus being no longer physically present on earth is now perceived only in his sacramentality, the Church reflection of the power and the promise of the resurrection.

This evangelizing mission of the Church to all in the world becomes particularized in her sacraments. The Church as the well-spring or the ground (hence fundamental) of all the other Christian sacraments. That is why marriage as vocation in Christ is a concretization of the Church, and so it must reflect in particular always and everywhere, Jesus the lover. The man and the woman in holy matrimony precisely as members of the Church are involved with the mission of making present in their lives and in their world the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ.

AS COVENANT LOVE

Love relationship is the material marriage is concerned with. It is this pervading human reality that is transformed in Jesus Christ into a life-long commitment of total intimacy and self-giving. The paradigm for human love is the revealed love of God for humankind as it was sacramentalized to us by the incarnate Son. The creation of a lasting community amidst diversity, the formation of an "I" and a "Thou" into a "We", the enjoyment of an intimate partnership of life and love in truthful equality, the growth into a covenant love according to the divine plan and example, the growth into a process and calling known as Christian marriage.

Created in God's own image and likeness, humankind came to existence through love and is called for love. The liturgy of the Church beautifully expresses this: "Father, you created man in love to share your divine life. We see his high destiny in the love of husband and wife which bears the imprint of your own divine heaven" (Third Wedding Preface). It was only in Jesus Christ that human love could be elevated to the holiness of the sacrament of redemptive love. If in the Old Testament the covenant love of Yahweh for Israel was already normative for the people's fidelity, in the New Testament Christ's love as the Bridegroom of God's New People is the only way to the wedding feast in God's Kingdom. Transformed in Christ, the Christian spouses are to love and serve each other as Christ loves and serves us, his Church. Out of pure love and in self-denial, they are to "defer to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5,21). On the basis of their baptismal configuration with the Lord, the married people are as such to be *alter Christus* to one another and to the world.

IN COVENANTAL SPIRITUALITY

If the Church and her sacrament of holy matrimony in particular are supposed to be the lunar reflections of the light of Jesus Christ, we must admit that there is always the dark side of the moon where Christ is not. Sacraments are indeed said to reveal as well as hide the divine reality. The dizzying spirituality or life in the Spirit of Christ demanded of married couples is a vision we can only strive to realize as best as we can. But there are some non-negotiable items if we are to be authentic and credible.

Above all, the vocation in Christ to love and serve in conjugal communion which is marriage is a faith event and process. Faith is a *sine qua non* if any sacrament is to happen. A measure of faith is irreplaceable. How much of it is necessary for marriage? If we say that a marital union can be annulled on the ground of some psychological incapacity, when is a marriage null and void in the absence or inadequacy of faith? If marital capacity is so vital to marriage, is faith any less to a Christocentric, covenantal spirituality? Marriage is a sacrament of personal and communal witnessing; without real faith, it is a theological nonsense. As we made the anthropological turn in our updating and discovered the importance of psychological capacity for marriage, we need to recover the importance of faith in the face of the globalization of secularity that pushes Christianity into the diaspora.

Without real faith, marriage is theological nonsense.

Also, in connection with the same faith that definitely requires formation, the proclamation that marriage is a vocation goes hand in hand with the provision for an adequate preparation. We cannot do enough by way of preparing candidates for the Holy Orders, the other sacrament of vocation in Christ to love and to serve but we somehow manage to make do with the make-believes we call pre-matrimonial catechesis, seminars and courses. Even if we no longer say that the married life is any less a perfect state than that of the ordained or the celibate, are we still somehow prejudiced when it comes to investing time, energy, personnel and resources for the indispensable preparation and formation of the candidates to holy matrimony? We affirm more and more that the family is the real fulcrum in the transmission of the faith, but we remain fixated with the role of the ordained. It appears that we have still a long way to go before we can specifically and fully hearken to the call of the Lord to bear and share his saving love in and through the sacrament of marriage. ⌘

Most Rev. Paciano B. Aniceto, D.D.

This article is part of the speech of Bishop Aniceto at the 8th Asia - Pacific Congress on "Moving Families Forever to Love & Life".



What if a young girl who is just engaged to be married, is suddenly found to be pregnant with a child that is not even her fiance's? Imagine what her parents would say? What the neighbors would whisper to one another? And what her fiancé might decide to do against her the moment he found out about it? I know one such girl who – against all odds – chose to keep the baby, until she gave birth to it. What a big difference it would have made for the history of all humankind if she did otherwise. I am of course speaking about the girl from Nazareth, Mary, the Mother of our Savior.

I have been requested to share reflections on **Mary, our Model and Hope** as Christians, who are struggling hard to keep the integrity of **Love, Life, and Family** against the dysfunctional moral values being peddled by secular society and the post-modern culture and mass media. To do this, I am inviting you to reflect on a Scriptural scene:

Mary at the Wedding Feast at Cana
(John 2:1-11)

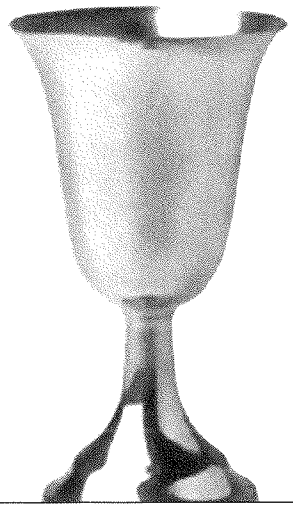
I do not think this passage is appropriate for actual wedding liturgies when couples are still starry-eyed and so much in love with one another. I recommend it instead to those who have fallen into crisis, those whose marriage is at breaking point, families that are about to fall apart and break into place because the couple is going through what – borrowing from the Cana story – I would call a "running-out of wine experience." It happens, they say even to the most seeming ideal couples, especially those entering midlife, who have yet to struggle with the psychological trauma and stress that goes with the major transition stages in their lives as individuals and as a couple, in addition to the already difficult challenges of parenting and earning a living for the family's basic needs.

When couples start to "get real" after many years of routinary day-to-day, week-to-week, and month-to-month rituals of family life, the time comes when they become less tolerant of each other's mistakes, when they begin to resent one another's insensitivities, when they get depressed about their

You have in Mary the image of a new Eve, no longer the woman of Genesis who whispers a selfish request that leads to sin, but rather a woman who whispers a compassionate plea that leads to an overflowing of grace.

Mary: Our Model and Hope

The "best wine" is not really the young and untested wine of romanticism. It is rather the old and aged wine of fidelity and commitment.



diminishing affection and attention for one another. They run out of the wine of intimacy and caring, patience and understanding.

The evangelist has certainly meant this narrative to be more than just a miracle story. It is a sign that points to a deeper reality. His is a message of hope for couples that are in the brink of despair and are left with nothing but a sincere and honest desire to save the marriage and the family. He brings in Mary and her son Jesus as symbols of hope. There is no need to despair – he is as it were telling us – so long as we have Mary and her son Jesus as guest in the wedding banquet. (This is probably the best Scriptural passage for the Devotion to the Two Hearts: the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.) Suddenly, you have in Mary the image of a new Eve, no longer the woman of Genesis who whispers a selfish request that leads to sin, but rather a woman who whispers a compassionate plea that leads to an overflowing of grace.

Like all Filipino mother, she is aware of the needs of her children even before they express these to her. "They have no more wine" (Jn 2:3). How can such a concern motivated compassion, be possibly ignored by compassionate One? Mary's confidence in her son is best expressed in her advice: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5). This is a one-line counsel that has saved many marriages. For they who follow the Son's word are in for something wonderful. And yet, the Son says only one thing here: "Fill up the empty jars." It is a lesson of *pagpupuno* ("bearing with").

One of the expressions for forgiveness in Tagalog is "*pagpupuno.*" A person who apologizes for his mistakes might say, "*Kayo na sana ang bahalang magpuno sa aking mga kakulangan.*" (Approximate equivalent in English: "Please bear with my shortcomings.") He teaches us the art of "pagpupuno" even when totally run out of wine, and all that is left of us is humble, wretched water. For as long as we can still offer what is left of us, i.e., our water, however tasteless, bland and ordinary; for as long as we can still "fill up" the empty jars, he will take care of the rest. For nothing escapes his compassionate touch. He will touch our humble water and so that it turns into a spirited drink, and all the guests would remark, "But you have kept the best wine until now!"

You see, the "best wine" is not really the young and untested wine of romanticism. It is rather the old and aged wine of fidelity and commitment. It is drawn from the humble jars that have been emptied and refilled, but touched and given a new spirit by the Lord of the Banquet.

In all those times that miracles happened in the lives of couples I counseled, I couldn't even dare to claim any credit. For I have merely stood as a waiter, a servant who has been told to do what the Son says. What happens afterwards is all too wonderful to even dare to claim any credit for. ⌘

GIVING PRIESTS

Bishop Socrates Villegas

My dear deacons, the Church expects a very simple task from you. We only ask you: Give us Jesus, only Jesus, always Jesus. We cannot ask for more than that because that is humanly impossible. But we cannot ask less than that because that would be a betrayal of Christ. We know it is our right to receive Jesus Christ from you. Give us Jesus, only Jesus, always Jesus. We do not need theology, we need Jesus. We do not need money, we need Jesus. We do not need a statue or a picture of Jesus, we need Jesus. We do not need rhetorics; we need Jesus. Only him and always him. My dear brothers, if only you would remember this, every time you speak, every time you move, every time you think, every time you rise up and every time you eat and go to bed, every time you study; The Church would indeed be a renewed Church. Give us Jesus. Nothing else, nobody else.



Do not ever allow anything, anybody, any dream, and any ambition to ever possess you, because you only belong to Jesus. Only to him.

But then my dear ordinands, how can you give us Jesus? You can only give us Jesus, if you have given yourself to Jesus. Do not give yourself to anybody, only to him. Do not allow anything to ever possess your heart. Your heart is only one. Never divide it. You will die. Your heart is only one because your heart belongs to the one God. Give yourselves to Jesus, not to anybody, not even to any dream; not to anything.

As your Archbishop told us three weeks ago, "Gold is tested by fire and the priest is tested with gold." How you use gold will show the kind of priest that you are. How you use money, how you use the material treasures of the Church will show the kind of Shepherd that you are. Remember you are only stewards not owners. You are only managers not proprietors. We are only caretakers, we are not the masters. The priest will be tested in gold.

Do not give yourselves to anybody. Blessed Pedro Poveda said, "If you fall in love with a woman that is bad. But if you fall in love with money that is worse." My ordinands, give yourselves to Jesus. He is the Master. You are disciples. We are disciples. Do not ever allow anything, anybody, any dream, and any ambition to ever possess you, because you only belong to Jesus. Only to him.

But you cannot see Jesus, how can you give yourselves to Jesus? Believe me, my dear future priests you can only give yourselves to Jesus, if you give yourselves to your Archbishop and his successors. There are many among us who say they are disciples of Jesus, but they do not like to be called priests of the bishop. That is a contradiction. You cannot say you love Jesus and not love your Archbishop. You cannot say you love Jesus and not love the shepherd that God has given to us. You can only give yourselves to Jesus if you have given yourselves totally, without any condition, without any hesitation, without any cowardice to the Archbishop and to his successors. Believe me, you can only give yourselves to Jesus if you give yourself to the Church.

How can you give yourselves to the Church? You can only give yourselves to the Church by giving yourselves to others. Give yourselves to others. The bread that is broken and the wine that is poured are given so that you may give yourselves to us. You can say to us, "Eat me up!" You can say to us, "Drink my blood." Only then can you claim that you have given yourselves totally! When the people come to you and you feel like they are already eating you up, do not run away. Face them, let them eat you! Let them take your time. Let them take your health. Let them take everything of you

because it is only when you have given everything to others that you can say you have given everything to Jesus.

My dear ordinands, the new name of Jesus is OTHERS. And it is only in living for others that you can prove your love for Jesus. Humans as we are, we can be very selective. We can give ourselves so easily to the powerful others, to the beautiful others, to the intelligent others, to the smart others, to the grateful others.

My last plea for you my dear future priests is that you must give yourselves to the poor. It is in giving yourselves to the poor, the poor among us, the least, the last, the lost – that others truly become Jesus.

Five things for you this morning of your ordination, Give us Jesus, only Jesus, always Jesus. How? Give yourselves to Jesus. How? Give yourselves to the Church. How? Give yourselves to the poor.

If you notice my dear ordinands, I have only used one verb. It is **GIVE**. In other words. I am only asking you to be giving priests. The secret of the priesthood is giving because the priesthood is God giving himself to you. Priests who do not give, cease to live as priests. Priests who do not give do not get rich; they die young. They die even if they are still breathing. Because the Jesus in them has been snuffed out by stinginess, by selfishness, by refusal to give. The secret of a happy and meaningful priesthood is to give. Give Jesus. Give yourselves to Jesus and Jesus will take care of everything for you. **AMEN.** ⌘

Compassion Breeds Authentic Love

Jenny R. Fernandez

After fifteen years of marriage, this vocation still remains a mystery to me. To fully understand the dynamics of marriage leaves me always mystified or, shall I admit, sometimes terrified. It is always incomprehensible to all, to the single, to the religious and clerics, and all the more, to the married who are closely involved in it's dynamics and rigors in the everyday married life.

Recently, I almost understood what it was that was lacking for me to have a deeper understanding of what this married vocation calls for. This realization even speaks of all vocations involving all aspects of our lives in life, love and family. What we need in this life is something that has always been with us through time but never easily achieved and never fully understood.

I speak of only one thing — COMPASSION. A compassion based on the way of life of Christ and nothing less. A compassion that speaks of "being in thy womb, nourishing, caring, and all embracing." A life completed in the ***imitatio dei,*** *" to be compassionate as God is compassionate".*

As we are all created in the image of God, this gift of life must be lived only in the way of life of it's giver – "in the imitation of God", if only to manifest gratitude for this life; and more so, achieve a purposeful life that is capable of authentic love bred by true compassion.

I realize that we do not have to go far to seek and to have a sense of what we need for a deeper understanding of the compassion of Jesus. We only need to look deeper into His likeness that we have within and to connect our lives to His. From here, allow the purity of one's heart rooted in Christ to be all transforming in the many lives and impurities that surround it: sickness, brokenness, corruption, biases, rejection, neglect, and all forms of abuse. Only the compassionate heart of Christ can transcend these impurities and restore these lives anew in His image and likeness.

The compassion of Christ is one that breaks all the boundaries and limitedness that we have as human beings. If we allow Christ's humanity inspired by His divinity to be our way of life, we can allow ourselves to be elevated to a higher calling in this life. Together with Christ, we can transform our vocations in marriage, in religious and clerical lives, in single-blessedness, into gifts for they are given generously through love.

"An image of the Christian life shaped by this image of Jesus would have only two focal points : a relationship to the Spirit of God, and the embodiment of compassion in the world of the everyday. It is an image of the Christian life that provides both direction and growth... life in the Spirit that begins a deepening process of internal transformation whose central quality is compassion. Indeed, growth in compassion is the sign of growth in the life of the Spirit."

In my marriage, our love has turned to joy for it is one where we are bound forever in sickness and in health, for richer and for poorer, till death do us part; where no one else will go, we will both remain because here we will find each other. This joy turns this vocation into a gift for one reason – a higher mystery called Christ. *He who brings compassion that breeds authentic love, a gift from the author and giver of life to all our vocations.*

Give love for God is love. Be compassionate as God is compassionate.

⌘

To see the face of God

Mercedes B. Abaya

"I am a believer because I have seen the face of God."

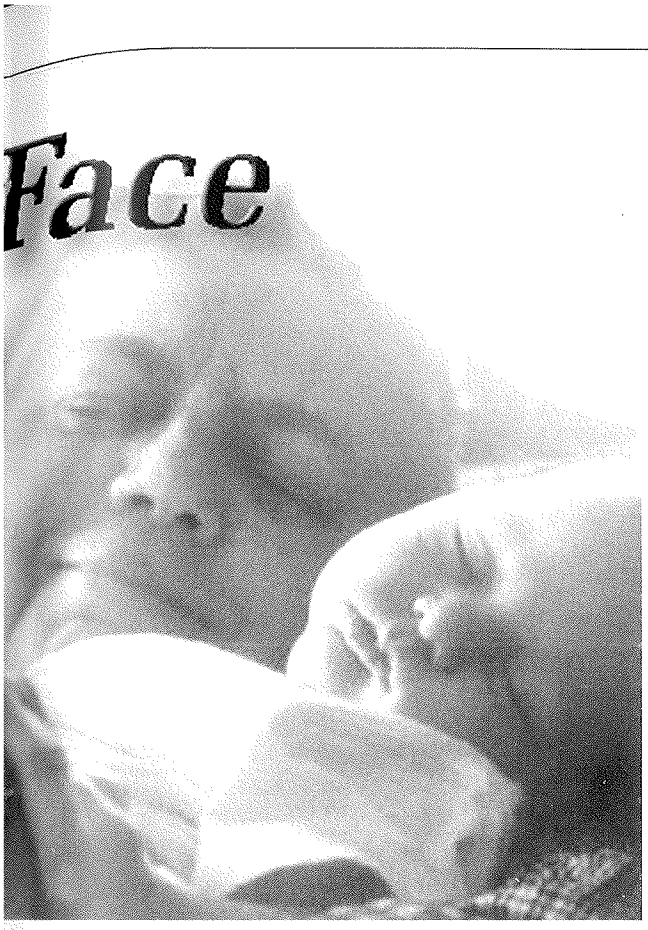
Why am I a believer? Two things come to mind right away when I ask myself this question. The first is my philosophy class under the late Professor Ariston Estrada when I was in high school at the Assumption. I felt so "mature and scholarly" then, studying syllogisms and learning to use my reasoning in ways I had never done so before. One of the highlights of that class was discovering how to logically prove the existence of God. There were, if I am not mistaken, four to five steps, beginning with a premise that logically led to the big conclusion: God exists!

I no longer remember how to prove the existence of God in this manner. I don't remember even the most essential first premise. I certainly appreciate my philosophy class, my wonderful philosophy teacher, and the self-discipline that I mastered to a great extent because of that class; but learning how to logically prove the existence of God was not what made me a believer. What does make me a believer, then?

The second thing that comes to mind when faced with this question is a line from an old pop song. The line goes: And I see your face, now I'm a believer! I doubt that the writer or the singer was thinking about God when he wrote or sang this song. But when these lines popped into my mind right after the question was posed to me, it was only God I was thinking of. I am a believer because I have seen the face of God. I have seen his face in many ways, in many places—in my moments of strength, and my moments of weakness; in the darkness of my ignorance, and the bright joy of seeing the truth; in moments of seeming powerlessness, and moments of great love; in the suffering of a family member, the love of my husband, the struggles of a friend, the birth of a baby, the wagging tail of a dog, a tree, a flower, a laugh... in everyone and everything, in all circumstances, I see the beautiful face of God.

There are, however, extremely special moments in my life that stand out, and make me feel very deeply just my belief, but my faith in this mysterious God and his unconditional love for me. Among these is the time when I experienced one of the first major crises in my life. I was 23 years old then, and I had decided to leave my loved ones, my friends, my Assumption family, and my job, in order to join the Associate Missionaries of Assumption (AMA). In the AMA volunteer program, I was assigned to a place that seemed to me like the farthest end of the universe. I was to live a life centered on prayer, community and, service, with little contact with the people I would leave behind for a year. The comforts of home were a far cry from the living conditions I was to face, and the five other volunteers I lived with were mostly from very different backgrounds and interests. Some people thought I was such a saint for joining that volunteer program – but my heart and those close to me knew that service was just one of the minor reasons for my decision. I joined the program mainly because I desperately needed to search for myself, to seek God and his will for me. I had believed for many years that God was calling me to enter the religious life, but when I tried it out a few months prior to joining AMA, it didn't work out. I was a total wreck then, utterly confused about what God wanted, extremely guilty about loving this special person whom I felt was God's "rival" (now my husband), and very much depressed with my life. Thus, I decided to leave everything behind, so I could see clearly God's will for me.

Only one word can capture how that year was for me – miracle. Everything I experienced that year was a miracle that unraveled the most beautiful parts of my person, setting me free to be who I truly am. Suffice it to say that God revealed his face and his will for me, as I had hoped, and much, much more besides! I heard deep in my heart His words of comfort, reassurance, and deep, unconditional love; how many times I cried from the sheer joy of experiencing and truly knowing his great love for me, who was so unworthy of such a grace! During moments of silence, prayer, quiet walks in nature, and even during my sleep, he was there... bringing to light the issues in my unconscious and healing the wounded child within me. That whole year, I saw God's face and heard his voice assuring me over and over again, "Do not be afraid of anything. I love you deeply, and I will love you no matter what. All I want is to love you... and what will make me happy is that you follow your heart."



It was a struggle to believe these words, given my difficult childhood and the past image of God that I had, but God won in the end. He broke through all my defenses, false beliefs, and constant "doubting." But most of all, he freed me from my fears, which gripped my soul and hindered me from living my life to the fullest. I had found my God, I had found myself; and although the road keeps winding uphill all the way, this faith and love in my heart urge me onward with joy and hope. Nothing else matters and everything else fades in light of God's wondrous love for me.

You shall cross the barren desert, but you shall not die of thirst.
You shall wander far in safety, though you do not know the way.
You shall speak your words to foreign men, and they will understand.
You shall see the face of God, and live.

I have seen the face of God. I continue to discover various facets of him, and the picture will probably never be completed until I die and see him face to face. In the meantime, I am content to see the face that he chooses to reveal to me... and live. ⌘

A THANKSGIVING FOR THE CROSS

Crucified Christ, I'm so grateful to You,
For becoming a human being, so vulnerable,
That I don't have to pretend I'm perfectly okay.
For entering our own world of fallenness,
That I will strive to understand
and listen to others and myself
For being wronged and
disapproved by others,
That I don't have to always believe
I'm right and superior from the rest.
For being a failure and poor in
anyway I can imagine,
That I don't have to struggle
to somebody in this society.



My Lord Jesus, Crucified, Thank You,
For becoming what I don't like
about myself,
So I can love others and myself
in You.
For freely accepting death for our sake,
So I can also embrace suffering with love for You.
For bearing insults with humility and love,
So I can be humble enough in suffering silently.
For being naked on the cross,
So I can never be ashamed of my own nakedness.

My dear Jesus, I can now love You,
Who by your own humanity have joined
Yourself with me right at the very moment
When I am most likely to hate myself.
You allowed yourself to be the cushion
Right at very spot where I'm going to fall.
You have healed my wounds of sufferings,
Use me then, for healing other people's wounds
By letting them know my own woundedness.

My Lord Jesus, Thank you so much,
For being crucified for us sinners,
So others and I can be free!

-Jose Ruiz Escalona, Jr.

Family

Marthy C. Marcelo

Living human life in the context of the family produces an understanding that discovers in every change the element that never changes.



I discovered that Someone out there watches our family all the time. It is within my family that I slowly discovered who God is.

My family is not extraordinary. Like any other family, we try to balance out everything that comes our way. All of us are juggling our time, trying to be present to one another, especially during occasions that we consider very important.

I was raised by a couple whom everybody in our community thought of as "friends and lovers." My siblings and I thought of them as good parents committed to their task of raising their children, dreaming that they'll be good and responsible as they grow and mature, and have a deep sense of self-esteem within ourselves. Like other parents, they also expected us to work on household chores, school projects, and assignments. Most of all, they raised us to treat every person with due respect (something I often failed at during my childhood days).

My father, a highly principled man, would always tell me to be truthful with any person. He would always explain to me the why of things and why I must embrace the same ideals too. I saw nothing inconsistent with his words and actions. Maybe that is why I admire him so much as a person.

He could also be tough. When deciding on matters that concerned our studies, he always stressed the importance of formal education. He also made sure we understood the difference between intelligence and wisdom, or the thin line that separates the men from the boys (his favorite line for me). Dad was tough, but I appreciated him for that, more so now that he has left this world.

Though he is gone, Mom continues what my father started. She stood amid the difficulties and hardships of life and carried

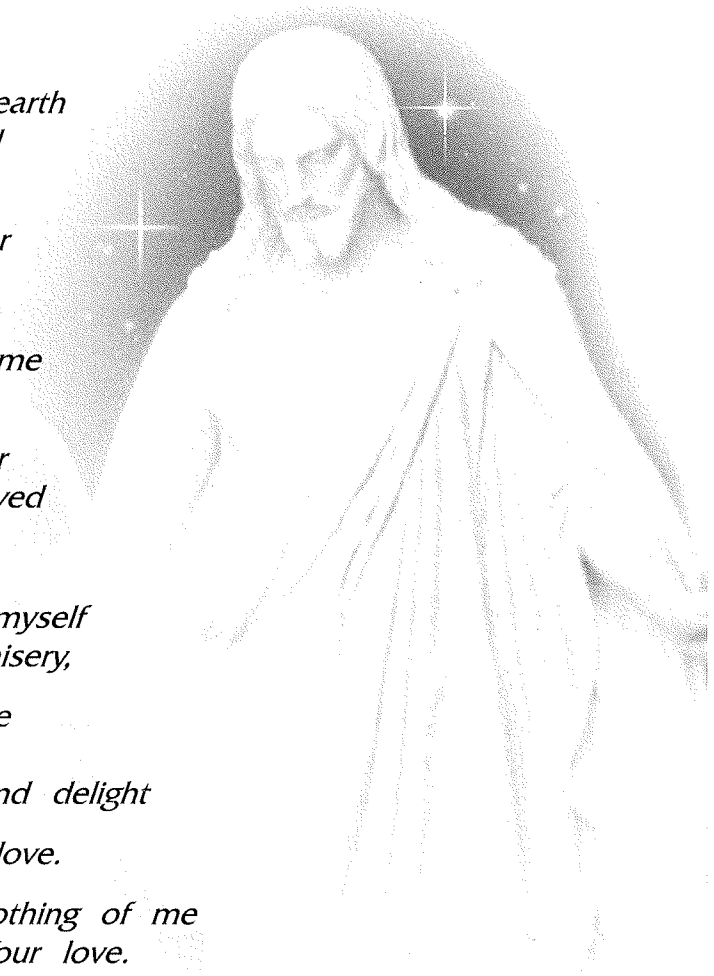
on. That's when I realized how much they loved one another. They stood for the same things because, as Mom told me, these were the same things that they were taught by their parents, our grandparents. Generation after generation, legacy after legacy, this is what they're trying to live and hand over to their children.

As I rekindle this experience, I thought of every family in this world trying to live the life that fathers and mothers vowed during their marriage rites. Marriage was only the beginning, the beginning of a new life. A new life characterized by generosity and self-giving love that transforms every detail, every action, every single happening in their daily life into a meaningful one. A life that recognizes the need for the other to give in return, that is what I have seen in my family. I have slowly become a fruit of that bond that my parents had, and they never thought they would have such a lasting impression on me. Their simple way of telling me "thank you," "keep it up," "we love you," have in some way developed in me a deep sense of affection for other people outside our family.

In the same way that my parents watched over me all the time, I discovered that Someone Out There watches our family all the time. It is within my family that I slowly discovered who God is.

I think parents are special gifts from God. They may be hard on us at times, but they are the gentlest persons we children could ever encounter. They may be misunderstood for what they do to us, but they have the capacity to understand their children when no one else seems to understand. Parents are gifts. ⌘

Lover and Beloved



I sit upon this earth
alone and naked

in Your sight
under the shelter

of Your dwelling.

You gaze upon me
with a love

that only a lover
can give a beloved

and I am loved.

But I see only myself
my pride, my misery,

while all you see
is a son of
Your fondness and delight

worthy of Your love.

Then You ask nothing of me
but to accept Your love.

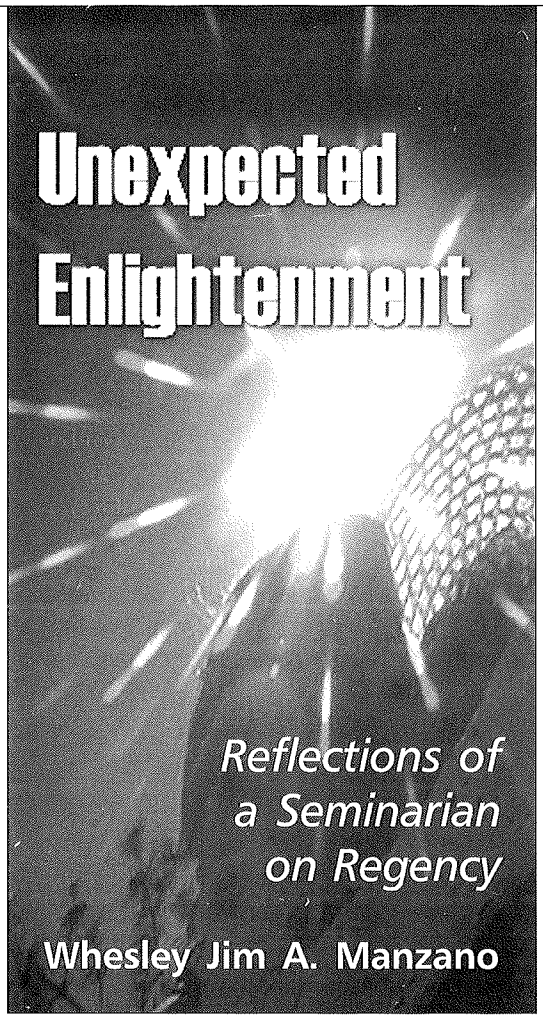
Drain me then of
my overflowing selfishness
that I may be empty and
You may fill me with Your love.

Then do with me as You please
accomplish in me what You will

and in my joy,
my God,

I can only be grateful.

-Ian Shelley Alabanza, CMF



"A book comes to you with flesh on its bare bones and clothes over its flesh. It is dressed up. You do not have to undress it or tear the flesh off its limbs to get at the firm structure that underlies the soft surface. But you must read the book with X-ray eyes, for it is an essential part of your apprehension of any book to grasp its structure."

- Mortimer Adler

Sometimes I could not understand my life. Not that I was always living like hell, but I looked for answers and still could not find them. I entered the seminary when I was twelve. While most kids of my age were discovering puberty in the "natural" way (as some would say), mine was a different case. I learned to live apart from my family, learned to be independent at a tender age, basically discovered my maturity at a different circumstance. I am not complaining of entering the high school seminary. In fact, I am grateful for the years I've lived there. But I do have regrets. At the back of my mind, I have those *"what if"* questions where I ask myself whether my life could have been different if I hadn't entered the seminary at an early age.

Putting that nonsense aside, however, assuming that they were just petit misconceptions, I still pursued a college degree in the seminary. But as time went by and after a handful of experiences, there came a point where I seriously started to question the direction I was taking. A feeling of doubt, fear and even hesitation arose when I suddenly reflected on the life I was pursuing. Of course some may feel excited to end their seminary formation but in my case, I felt incapable of the challenge. Thus, being aware of this incapacity, I told God that I needed more knowledge about LIFE so that I can be more ready to answer His call. So, after months of discernment, I decided to leave the seminary after college to discover what life was all about.

The problem with praying is that God always answers. I received an answer different from what I expected and yet the same. An answer that enlightened me so much, I accepted it as my own. I had my own plans after college. I was planning to finish an M.A. degree, get a decent job and probably earn some money, anything that would not involve being a seminarian. For me, that was LIFE. Looking at the present, I didn't achieve any of those. But the weird thing is that I have no regrets. I don't regret living with my family everyday, studying at CEFAM twice a week, attending church activities now and then, and most of the time just meeting other people. Time flies. The regrets I had before give congruence to the life I live now. This wasn't part of my plan...but I love it. In some mysterious way, I am happy. Looking back, perhaps this is the life God wanted me to see: A definition of life at its crudest. When I prayed that I wanted to discover what life was all about, God agreed. And in the most astonishing way, He replied, *"This is it, This is LIFE. This is what I want you to see."* True enough, it was what I wanted.

There were instances when I looked for the true meaning of life. But there is more to life than everything I can see and touch. Sometimes I realize those that are intangible give meaning to my life. Things like love. Love done at its crudest way like helping other people, talking to them and listening in return, sharing experiences and laughter with them, and sometimes even by knowing and remembering their names mean a lot. Love done at its crudest brings all of us together, establishes bonds and thus makes us realize that we are all brothers and sisters to one another. Beyond the material wealth we all try to live for is a realization, a satisfaction even, that when I look at a brother/sister, I see a person that I will live with as I continue living. And once we have realized this point of togetherness grounded on love, then we have found LIFE; Life that sees myself, my family, my friends, my community, everybody, including God, as important. Come to think of it, life is indeed like a book. It is dressed up but to undress it entirely would be unnecessary. What we need are *"X-ray eyes"* to unravel the firm structure that underlies the soft surface. I am slowly discovering what life is all about. Discovering it fills me more and yet boggles my mind for what it would reveal may not be to my liking. But I am reminded that if ever it happens, I have a Faithful Companion who will journey, suffer, struggle, and survive with me. Thus, I am not alone for we shall unfold life together. ⌘

Unity in the midst of LST's Diversity

Ut unum sint. This phrase taken from John 17:22 rings true today at LST as it ends the academic year with the oldies and the newbies. LST has been a haven of different charisms from different communities, all with a common vision of serving the Church.

Let us look at the different communities represented this academic year at LST:

The Society of Jesus (SJ)

The Jesuits belong to the religious order founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola. They are men who seek to be contemplatives-in-action formed and inspired by the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. Going where there is greatest need for the service of God and his people, the Jesuits are engaged in a wide variety of ministries.

The Loyola School of Theology is an apostolate of the Society of Jesus providing theological formation to religious, diocesan, and lay people. Most, if not all Jesuits of the Philippine Province are sent to LST for their studies in theology. They are joined by many of their brothers from other countries but most especially from the neighboring countries of Asia and Oceania

The Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (ACI)

The Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is an international Congregation whose Mission is Reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus through twofold means: Daily Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Evangelizing Education. The foundresses St. Raphaela Mary and her sister Dolores Porras responded to the Christian Educational needs of the poor girls in Cordova, Spain in 1887. Today, the ACI Sisters continue the work of their foundresses responding to the human and spiritual needs of the people wherever they may be.

The ACI sisters study at LST for their theological training in order to prepare them for the missions.

Hijas de Jesus (FI)

The religious order of the Hijas de Jesus founded by Blessed Candida Maria de Jesus Cipitria y Barriola in Salamanca, Spain is dedicated to the apostolate of education and the commitment to social justice. The sisters' spirituality based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola is the guiding force of the congregation's charism to do everything for "the Glory of God".

The sisters of the Hijas de Jesus take their theological studies at LST in order to prepare themselves to become apt instruments for the educative mission of the Congregation. They see LST as a school that is capable of equipping them with a solid foundation for the realization of their missionary undertaking in the future.

Sons of Divine Providence (FdP)

Blessed Luigi Orione founded the Congregation of the Little Work of the Sons of the Divine Providence at the turn of the 20th century in Italy. The congregation aimed at bringing the Pope's message to the people and the people to Jesus Christ through works of charity is present in the countries of Europe, Latin America, and Africa. Since 1991, the congregation has been present in the Philippines: a parish in Payatas, the novitiate, the formation houses, and the house for disabled children in Montalban.

The congregation is present at LST for the theological studies of its candidates for the priesthood.

LST has been a haven of different charisms from different communities, all with a common vision of serving the Church.

The Society of Jesus (SJ)

The Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (ACI)

Hijas de Jesus (FI)

Sons of Divine Providence (FdP)

The Congregation of the Passion (CP)

Congregation of the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CMF)

The Sisters of St. Paul of Chartres (SPC)

The Order of St. Camillus (OSC)

The Diocesan Seminarians of San Jose Seminary

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI)

The Oblates of Notre Dame (OND)

The Daughters of Saint Paul (FSP)

The Society of St. Paul (SSP)

Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC)

The Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the "Sacro Costato" and of the Sorrowful Mother (MSC)

Seminarians of Foreign Dioceses



The Diocesan Seminarians of San Jose Seminary



The Society of St. Paul



The Congregation of the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary



The Daughters
of Saint Paul



The Sisters of St. Paul of Chartres



The Society of Jesus

The Congregation of the Passion (CP)

The Congregation of the Passion is a community of priests, brothers, and nuns who are dedicated to live the message of the Cross. The Passionists as they are called were founded in the middle of the 18th century by Saint Paul of the Cross in Italy. The founder was a man of deep contemplation for the Passion of Christ which moved him to suffer and labor tirelessly for others. His followers, the Passionists of today, are called to contemplate especially the mystery of the sufferings and death of Christ, and then to share the fruit of this contemplation by an active apostolate in the service of others.

The Passionist seminarians are present in LST for their theological studies for the priesthood.

Congregation of the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CMF)

The Congregation of the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary also known as the Claretian Missionaries was founded by St. Anthony Ma. Claret in the town of Sallent in Spain in December 25, 1807. He was ordained a priest of the Diocese of Vich on June 13, 1835 and spent several years after his ordination preaching to the people throughout the Catalonian region, including the Canary Islands. In July 16, 1849 Claret founded together with five other priests the Congregation of the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. A few years later, he became the Archbishop of Cuba. He later returned to Spain and was the confessor of the Queen and of the Royal Family. He died in France on October 24, 1870.

The charism of the congregation he founded is that of being "servants of the Word" in the Church. The congregation takes as its mission the task of proclaiming the word through means that are timely, urgent, and effective. This charism is geared towards the realization of the congregation's aim which is to seek in all things the glory of God, the sanctification of their members, and the salvation of people throughout the world. The Congregation's 3000 members present in more than 50 countries live out the charism and aim of the Claretian Congregation worldwide.

The Sisters of St. Paul of Chartres (SPC)

The Sisters of St. Paul were founded in 1696 by Fr. Louis Chauvet, parish priest of a little French village, Levesville-La-Chenard. Their first mission consisted in working to improve the human and spiritual level of the villagers by educating girls and visiting the poor and the sick. The main charism of the congregation is to respond to the needs of the people and of the times for integral evangelization as compassionate teachers, healers, and pastoral ministers. They undertake this as they let themselves be guided by their vision of becoming a community rooted in Jesus Christ, authentically living their religious commitment as women of prayer, solitude, communion, and service.

The sisters are enrolled for one-year audit courses at LST in order to prepare themselves for their future ministry of educating the young.

The Order of St. Camillus (OSC)

The Order of St. Camillus (the members are known as Camillians) is a group of religious health care workers committed to the apostolate of caring for the sick. Founded in 1581 and erected into an Order in 1591, the Camillian Order has been of service to the least advantaged in 28 countries from 5 continents. The Order seeks to serve as a reflection of God's love for the sick through its various ministries in health institutions, refugee camps, slum and squatter areas, prisons, homes for the aged, chaplaincies, and parishes. It has been present in the Philippines since 1975 and from then on, has been involved in providing much needed health care and pastoral services through its chaplaincies, polyclinics and parochial commitment.

The Oblates chose LST for the very solid theological formation it gives to its students. It has been the practice of the congregation from the time of its first recruitments in Philippine soil to send its seminarians to study under the tutelage of the Jesuits.

In their desire to broaden their horizon in the realm of theology, the Camillians chose Loyola School of Theology because of its high quality standard on theological and pastoral educational training so that they may respond effectively to the actual needs of the people they are serving

The Diocesan Seminarians of San Jose Seminary

Founded in 1601, the then Collegio de San Jose was a multi-diocesan seminary run by the Society of Jesus. Today, the seminary community is composed of diocesan seminarians from

all over the country. They are formed for their future ministry as diocesan priests to serve the Church in the Philippines.

The Josefinos are inevitably linked to LST. With the creation of the Loyola House of Studies and the School of Theology in 1965, the seminarians of San Jose Seminary with their Jesuit counterparts were the first students of LST. San Jose Seminary in fulfillment of its responsibility to direct and supervise the academic formation of its future priests, sends its seminarians to Loyola School of Theology.

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI)

The congregation of the Missionary Oblates of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary was founded in Aix-en-Provence by St. Charles Joseph Eugene de Mazenod in the aftermath of the French Revolution. On February 17, 1826, the Congregation was formally approved by Pope Leo XIII. The Oblate Congregation which was originally dedicated to the preaching of parish missions for the poor of France's countryside was from its very start dedicated to the evangelization of the poor and the most abandoned. Today this group of men spread all over the vast cold wastes of the North Pole and in the jungles of Africa, among the poor of Latin America, Asia and Oceania, and in the countries of Europe and North America, are engaged in a variety of ministries that serve the needs of the world's poor and the most abandoned. Here in the Philippines, the Oblates are present in the difficult island missions of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, in the mountains of Cotabato and Sultan Kudarat, and in the parishes of Grace Park and Bagong Barrio in Caloocan City.

The Oblates chose LST for the very solid theological formation it gives to its students. It has been the practice of the congregation from the time of its first recruitments in Philippine soil to send its seminarians to study under the tutelage of the Jesuits.

The Oblates of Notre Dame (OND)

The Sisters of the Pontifical Society of the Oblates of Notre Dame (OND) was founded in the mission lands of Cotabato by two Oblate pioneering missionaries - Bishop (later, Archbishop of Cotabato) Gerard Mongeau, OMI and Fr. (later Bishop of Jolo) George Dion, OMI. These two set out a new vision for a religious life fitted for Asian women and responsive to the needs of the Church in the mission lands of Cotabato and Sulu.

Today the Sisters are engaged in various ministries in parishes, schools, mass media, and social justice. They also have missions in Texas, USA and in the islands of Papua New Guinea and the Solomons.

The Daughters of Saint Paul (FSP)

The congregation of the Daughters of Saint Paul was founded by Fr. James Alberione, in Alba, Italy, on June 15, 1915. The Daughters of Saint Paul aim to bring Jesus to all people, using the fastest and most efficacious means, the Media of Social Communication. Together with other institutes (religious, secular, aggregate) founded by Fr. James Alberione, the Daughters of Saint Paul live the Gospel integrally in the spirit of Saint Paul and under the guidance of Mary, Queen of the Apostles. At present, the congregation is spread all over the five continents. In the Philippines, they have 15 book centers which cater to the spiritual needs of the people. The Daughters publish books, produce VHS, audiocassettes, CDs and other media materials. They also produce radio programs and dramas which are aired in the provinces and in Greater Manila Area. In addition, they produce seasonal TV spots and weekly Sunday masses on television. A few sisters are engaged in film education and the giving of media awareness seminars in schools, offices and parishes.

The congregation's mission calls for apostolic and spiritual preparation. Through higher theological studies, they aim to become the loudspeakers and transmitters of the Good News. Thus the sisters come to LST because of its holistic program - to become academically competent, spiritually well grounded, apostolically motivated communicators and disciples in facing the challenges of the new millennium.

The Society of St. Paul (SSP)

The Society of St. Paul is a religious congregation of brothers and priests with communities in 27 countries in five continents. Founded by the Venerable Fr. James Alberione on August 20, 1914 in Alba, Italy, the Society has a unique spiritual focus and a distinctive apostolic mission. The Pauline spirituality is centered on Jesus, Master/Shepherd, the Way-Truth-Life, Mary Queen of Apostles, and St. Paul the Apostle. The primary Pauline mission is to bring the whole Christ to the whole person - mind, body, and soul through the social communication media.

Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC)

The Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is a religious congregation of priests and lay brothers with the object of promoting the knowledge and practice of devotion to the Heart of Jesus as embodied in the revelations of Our Lord to Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque, and of offering personal reparation to the Divine Heart. The society's motto is, "Ametur ubique

terrarum Cor Jesu Sacratissimum" (May the most Sacred Heart of Jesus be loved everywhere). It was founded at Issoudun, in the Archdiocese of Bourges, France, by the Abbe Jules Chevalier. The origin of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart is closely connected with the Papal definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the means to lay their foundation being the outcome of special prayers addressed to the Mother of God during the nine days preceding the great religious event of 8 Dec., 1854. The founder had pledged himself to honor the Blessed Virgin in a special manner. He redeemed his promise the following year by erecting a shrine dedicated to the honor of the Blessed Virgin under the title of "Our Lady of the Sacred Heart".

For the past quarter of a century the efforts of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart have been expended chiefly in foreign mission fields. Today the priests and brothers are also doing missionary work in diverse islands and archipelagoes of the South Pacific among them, the island of Mindanao in Southern Philippines.

The Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the "Sacro Costato" and of the Sorrowful Mother (MSC)

The Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the "Sacro Costato" and of the Sorrowful Mother, originally called "Daughters of the Sacro Costato" (Sacred Side) was founded by a diocesan priest, Fr. Eustachio Montemurro on May 1, 1908 in Gravina, Italy. The charism of the Congregation is rooted in the Gospel of St. John (Jn 19: 34): "...one soldier thrust a lance into his side and immediately, blood and water flowed out." Thus, contemplating the deep meaning and symbolism of the Pierced Side of Christ, the sisters are moved to lift up their personal sufferings, trials, joys and all Sacred Hearts offerings to God in reparation not just for their sins, but for the sins of all, particularly for consecrated persons. From the contemplation of the Pierced Side of Christ flows out the apostolic work of the congregation which includes: the education of children and the youth, giving catechetical instructions and parish assistance, the Spiritual Exercises (of St. Ignatius of Loyola) and the Apostleship of Prayer, foreign missions, spiritual and material assistance to the poor, the sick and other works of charity.

The congregation's devotion to the Sorrowful Mother was inherited from their Fr. Founder, whose own family had a special love for the Blessed Mother Mary standing at the foot of the Cross, being one with her Son in suffering for the salvation of all. The sisters strive to remain faithful to the Ignatian Spirituality which was originally conveyed to us by Fr. Gennaro Bracale, S.J., the Spiritual Director of Fr. Montemurro and of the first "Daughters of the Sacred Side." From its origins in Gravina, Italy, the Congregation has sent out missionaries and established communities in six other countries namely: Taiwan, United States of America, Philippines, Ecuador, Albania, and Brazil. In the Philippines, they now have four (4) religious communities which are in:1.Manila (1981) a. Retreat House Community b. Formation House Community, 2.Masbate (1990), 3.Kalibo (1994)

Seminarians of Foreign Dioceses

Believe it or not, we have diocesan seminarians of foreign dioceses who are studying here at LST. According to them, quality of theological training is the main reason for their choice of studying at the Loyola School of Theology. ⌘

- Compiled by

Rodel Lopez, OMI



By John the Beloved

(Ed.'s Note: The Editors attest to the authenticity of this piece, written by a student at LST. He is using a pseudonym for obvious reasons.)



DOES GOD MAKE MISTAKES?

A Gay Seminarian Speaks

Does God make mistakes? Does God play favorites? Would God exclude any one?

If you answer no to any of these questions then you will agree with me that Christ calls even gay people to the religious and priestly life. Yes Virginia, there are homosexuals in the religious life and I am proud to be one of them. I too desire to serve Christ and His people by becoming a priest.

The truth of the matter is that after I acceded to share my vocation story as a gay religious and went into deeper musing, I realized that there is really no major difference between my vocation story as a gay person from that of the so-called straights'. Our stories have a similar story line. We all heard from one Caller and we all heeded in faith to our Master Jesus Christ.

I almost shrugged away the opportunity of sharing my vocation story if not for a little insight brought about by my crush in our theology class. He is straight, at least as far as I know. I just enjoy watching him suavely trek his way to the beautiful females (nuns included) in our class as he relates with them. He confidently and effortlessly exudes overwhelming masculine power. The truth of the matter is that nobody cares. Nobody seems to notice. It looks as if it is the most natural thing for him to do in this world. But if I were to do likewise and gracefully glide my way to him as my knight in shining armor, how would people react?

Ay, there's the rub. Even if society nowadays is more tolerant of guys like me, yet it can only be tolerant to the point that gays conform to its norms. Society may appear to be accepting of homosexuals but if that is the case, then why are there still so many gays who are not comfortable with their own sexual orientation?

The sad truth is it is not easy to be gay. More so if one is a religious. Why then, am I here in the seminary still willing to become a priest?

A little touch of history...

Like most of the religious, I also inherited much of my faith from my parents. It was also from them that I learned the value of attending Mass, going to confession, praying the rosary, joining church activities, etc. Just before I graduated from grade school, I already desired to become a priest. But I did not enter the seminary until 15 years later for back then I was already a little worried.

I always felt different. I always felt I did not belong. When most of my male peers were frantically raving about the *Reyna Elenas* in the Sta. Cruzan, I busied myself ranting in silence about their escorts. When most of my friends played toy guns and ran about the backyard, I stayed in my room clandestinely combing the hair and changing the dress of my sister's Barbie doll. When most of my friends were so fond of the karate movies of Jackie Chan and Jet Li, I adored beauty contests even to the point of fantasizing about myself as one of the contestants sashaying her way across the ramp.

Christ became my refuge at a very young age.

My secret did not remain one forever. My father noticed my uniqueness, or queerness? He felt that he had to do something about it. And he did. I remember how my father forced me to play basketball with my brothers and cousins. Oh! I never felt

so embarrassed and awkward in my life than when I tried to dribble the ball and shoot it into the ring. The ball did not even touch the board. How I wished the earth would swallow me at that moment and forever bury me in its deepest pits.

But life went on for me. It continued rolling despite my pleadings against it. My own person gradually unfolded before my very eyes. As I tried to wrestle against my own personal tendencies in order to satisfy the whims of society, there was someone who never cared whether I conformed or not, whether I belonged or not. He simply accepted me for what I was, for who I was. That person was Christ.

Christ became my refuge at a very young age. He was the only one who knew and understood me completely. With him, it was not necessary for me to put on masks. He loved me: my uniqueness, my gayness, my queerness, the whole of me. He loved me just the way I was.

My relationship with him became more intimate because he stood by me as the years went by. He became my father, mother, brother, friend, lover. He was everything to me. It was at that moment that my desire to become a priest was revived. I felt that I received so much love from Him that I had to share this love with others so they too may be blessed. And it is because of this love that I willingly submitted myself to certain societal norms in order to become a more effective disciple of Christ even if in His eyes, I need not do anything to please Him.

A more complicated scenario happens when a seminarian falls in love with a fellow seminarian.

A little of life in the seminary...

Contrary to my expectations, I was accepted in the seminary. The novitiate proved to be an essential melting pot for me as I grew in formation. It was there that I slowly embraced my giftedness as well as my shadows. It was there that my relationship with God was cultivated, nurtured and strengthened. It was there that I realized how vital my sexuality was in the living out of my religious life, especially the commitment to poverty, chastity and obedience. I realized that I could only be truly effective as a servant of God if I fully embraced my whole self, including my sexual orientation. I realized that my interaction with others, the way I carry myself in the apostolate and bring the gospel to others, will always be affected by my sexuality. In other words, I bring Christ to others through my gayness.

A little complication...

The public pronouncement of the vows does not automatically make one a true servant of Christ. What is more fundamental is how one lives out his vows in his daily life. As one continues to journey in formation to become more for Christ, he expectedly also has to hurdle several trials and temptations along the way.

I have had my share of falls and stumbles too. One particular area of difficulty for me is the area of chastity. Even as I made a vow to direct my heart fully to my Master, Jesus Christ, I cannot deny the fact that I am simply attracted to people of my gender. Oftentimes this makes my living out of the vows more challenging – but real and exciting too.

Allow me to clarify this point for the straights and gays alike. Will the heterosexual, male or female, please imagine living in a dormitory with common showers and jakes and everything that comes with the species of the opposite sex? Being at the height of one's sexual prowess, would it not be great if one were free or uncommitted? But what if one is a religious who faithfully tries to live a chaste life, would not one have bouts of fainting spells trying to keep his urges to himself?

Mind you, this is what gay religious have to deal with in their community life. The good thing about it though is that after a while, one gets used to it and it is no longer as bothersome as in the beginning. Call it contempt from familiarity, or call it grace.

A more complicated scenario happens when a seminarian falls in love with a fellow seminarian. I believe that this is one of the most trying moments in a gay religious' life, especially if the loved one gets to know about his sexual orientation and decides to stay away from the gay, as if he is sick with some contagious disease. Boy! This can be very painful especially if both live in the same community.

A little example of real frustrations...

But as I grow older in formation, one thing that really frustrates me is the apparent absence of living gay religious heroes whom I can look up to. No one is brave enough to openly express his gayness and still remain faithful to the vows he has professed. It seems to me that to these seasoned and very effective gay priests, the public acceptance of their sexual orientation is like a kiss of death to their apostolic ministry, even to their own person. Is this really the matter? I always wonder why this is so. If God uses our whole being in drawing people closer to Him, why then are we gays so afraid of the truth to be known publicly?

These are some of the questions that I have to wrestle with, perhaps until the day I die if I, just like some if not most of my

elder gays, would also hide in the comforts of societal norms, fearing that the admission of my sexual orientation would mean the end of my vocation.

A little relief...

Don't get me wrong. Being a gay religious is not that bad. I have affirmed that being gay is not easy. True! But it has its consolations too.

I believe that perhaps the experiences of pain and rejection that a gay person has gone through in his life makes him deeply sensitive to the suffering and pain of others. I believe that the struggles that started early in a gay's life make him tenaciously strong in weathering the storms in his life. I believe that the very make-up of a gay, which is a toss between the masculine and feminine inclinations, produces in him a deeper insight into the worlds of both sexes. With the qualities mentioned above together with the gay's inherent talents, which we all know as countless, a gay indeed has the potential to be one of the most effective servants of Christ.

Despite the absence of gay heroes in our community, God sends little sparks in that dimly lit area of my life. I saw hope in that martyred Franciscan priest who tried to minister to the victims in the midst of the rubble of the collapsed Twin Towers in New York. He was hit by a falling object, which turned out to be a falling human being. That priest was openly gay.

I also derive much consolation in the living out of my commitment through daily life in the seminary. Deep and healthy friendships with my brothers and with people from both sexes are very enriching and gratifying. Accepting and open-minded superiors and brothers are concrete manifestations of the love and care of Christ. People in the apostolate who give me one of the greatest gifts in my life by allowing me to serve them in my own special way never cease to inspire me to keep on journeying to my dream of becoming a priest someday.

But most importantly, my greatest consolation is my personal relationship with my Lord, Christ, my real hero. I am deeply aware that without him everything is nonsense. It is Christ who gives meaning to my life as a gay religious.

In my retreat last summer, Christ once again confirmed to me that God made me just the way I am. In a very real sense, he validated my sexual orientation as a gift, a grace from God. In other words, God did not commit a mistake in making me gay for He wants me to serve him in my own unique way, to use my gayness in bringing others closer to Him. ⌘

BELOVED, NEVER BE AWAY

Never go away...
my life's astray when
you're far away.

Never be a moment's away...
my passions wither when you're
a time away.

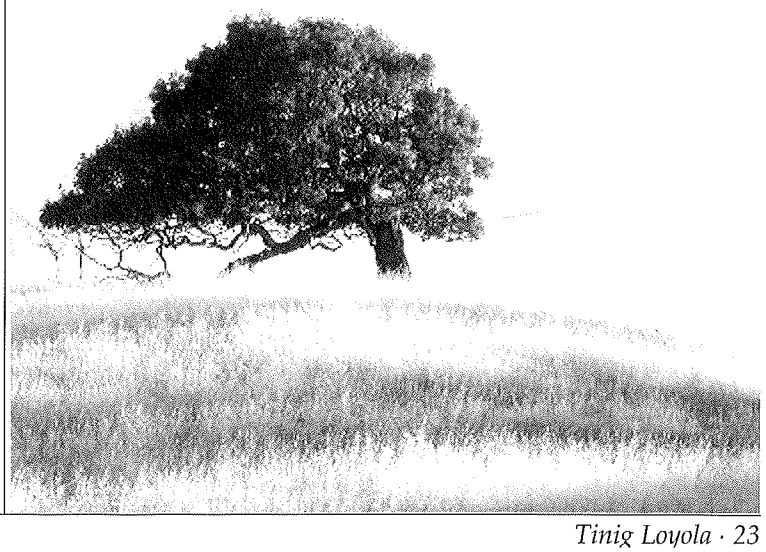
Never be a gaze away ...
my sight blinds when you're
a vision away.

Never be a breath away...
my spirit dies when you're
a distance away.

Never be a heartbeat away...
my hope leaves when you're
a love away.

Beloved Christ, Never Be Away...
my being is in Your presence.

- Jenny Fernandez



Eleazar Solas talks to several religious about their struggles as religious, while **Gwen Barde** does the same with some priests.

While Life is Meaningful

Eleazar D. Solas, CMF

My heart was heavy as I sailed for Iloilo last December for my vacation. I brought with me some of my friends' stories which candidly outline the undeniable hardships and continuous struggles they painstakingly carry and trustfully shared with me. Their stories did not only affect me by provoking my empathy but also led me to recall my own worries that made my life tiresome and exhausting.

Beset with trials, it is easier to think of quitting, retreating, and escaping rather than praying for enlightenment and serenity. I feel more comfortable to distance myself from the difficulties in the seminary and hide instead in the security of our home, and fantasize about not coming back again. It is very tempting to stay where I feel happy, secure and comfortable. After all, many say that the criterion for life is happiness.

Struggle to live the commitment

In one deep conversation with a friend, Andrian, we shared some of our dreams and the possible circumstances that would possibly hinder its actuality. "Failure to control our passion and discipline ourselves," he said, "is one of the factors that impedes our growth in our vocation. Academic pressure, though tough, is not the greatest object of our struggle but the fading fondness for prayer and for the Eucharist." While projecting the future is an easy task to do, little but constant demands in our daily life prove to be too difficult to carry out faithfully and hence, compromises at times set in.

It is a responsibility and concern of every member of the community to nurture, support and take care of the vocation of each member.

I felt privileged also to listen as a temporarily professed sister shared her thoughts. "Living in a community with members having different backgrounds and ideas, wounds and brokenness in various degrees, different gifts and talents, is quite a big challenge for me. Living poverty in the midst of abundance is a struggle, too." To know that good-natured people like her also do experience struggles brings me to a more realistic view of religious life. Problems and trials respect no one.

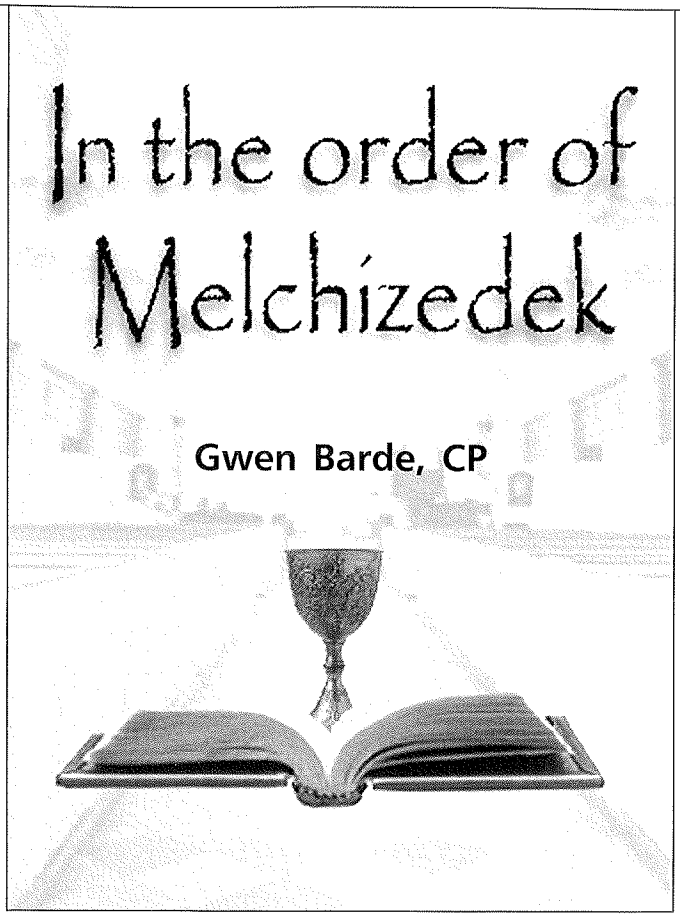
"As a consecrated woman, I am also confronted with concerns about my sexuality," she concluded. And indeed, Bro. Daniel, cmf, a candidate for perpetual profession supported this last statement by saying that intimacy, relationship and romantic love are the issues most religious seminarians are struggling to integrate.

Collating the data from the sharing of the seminarians and sisters that I talked with, their struggles can be generally categorized into five basic concerns: difficulty in coping with academic demands, dispersion in prayer, unfaithfulness to apostolate, relational problems in the community, and unfaithfulness to the vows. These concerns, however trivial for some, are altogether threatening to the religious calling one has received. If I have to summarize these in a phrase, I may say that the struggles every religious-in-formation goes through is a struggle to live his/her commitment in relation to his/her vocation. However varied the areas that each struggle touches, they are nevertheless alarming against the basic call, the vocation to love: "I give you a new commandment: love one another." (Jn. 13:34)

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In the order of Melchizedek

Gwen Barde, CP



One of the most sentimental legacies that my mother handed to me is her diversion- *writing a travelogue.* In all my travels, I get ready with the classic questions for travel writers. *How far is the destination from a more known locale like Manila, Cebu, or Davao? Which entry point is being used in getting into the destination? What are the means to get there? What are the common activities of the populace? When is the best time to be there? What can make you stay there for long?* All these and other questions convey certain degrees of curiosity on my part as a traveler, more likely when I am still in the journey towards the place. When I am already in the destination, my plans for the travel often go somewhere else. All those questions may still make sense, but the destination would often counter each question with deeper ones generating a rhapsody of curiosities. Many times I would end up throwing away my mother's questionnaire and allow the place to speak for itself. Eventually, those curiosities become not mere curiosities; they become responses to the destination's "mysteries unleashed" that either push me to journey more or pull me to call off the travel.

I have long considered priesthood as a destination. As a seminarian, I have been storing a number of important questions, guides, and kits on being a priest. About a hundred books sketching, accounting, and recounting the dynamics of committed priesthood have passed my hands. With all these resources, I am often tempted to say that I am ready to become a priest. I even have the guts to promise to myself that I will be a "priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

A Traveler

But Fr. Art, a priest for twenty three years, would say that the resources I have now is less than half of what he had before he was ordained. His commitment to his ordination has always been challenged, and he often felt he was on the verge of collapsing; all those tools that he had in his seminary days could hardly help at all. For him, priesthood is not just a destination. It is also a journey. The traveler may have with him a truckload of useful equipments for the obstacles and demands of his destination but what is most valuable is his very self – his determination, his focus, and his faith – in order to commune well with where he is going.

It is easy to say that the priest is a priest forever, a blessing from God, made holy in the Truth, all things to all men, and a martyr. It is easy to demand that priests must be true evangelizers, priests of the poor, builders of communities devoted to the Vicar of Christ. It is easy to expect priests to be men of great generosity, who will be truly *operaii in vinea domini* (workers in the Lord's vineyards), man of the Church, man of the Kingdom. All these assertions, demands, and expectations are contained in a single word that every priest promises and wants to hold dear- *commitment.* Unfortunately, hardly any priest would ever give a straight testimony that priestly commitment is readily provided during ordination, or is conveniently upheld at the glitter of the stole and the alb. Priestly commitment is not something worn or vested. It is nourished and lived; a nourishing and living that are in a sojourn forever, a sojourn that leans on the determination, the focus, and the faith of the priest, the traveler.

On-going Discernment

Fr. Godo was ordained in 1979. In the eyes of many, he was the most zealous in his batch. The truth was he was not that fully decided to pursue the priesthood on the day of his ordination. *"I was not really sure if I was called to become a priest, though it seemed so easy to get ordained. My parishioners would often tell me that I deserve to become a bishop. What they did not know was that I did not even feel fit to become a priest. I am sure there are a lot of other priests who, like me, appear so engrossed with the vocation, but when they go to their rooms alone, they feel the confrontation, harsh confrontation. Kulang na lang sabihin sa 'yo, 'Ang kapal mo, hindi naman talaga kita tinatawag!'"*

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*(**WHILE LIFE**... continued from page 24)*

Commitment entails consigning, entrusting and devoting oneself unreservedly to the calling one has received, that is, a life of total and loving dedication to God. From the outset, I would like to establish that religious people are called not because of their utter excellent performance or defined worthiness, but due to the abundance of God's love for humankind. He/she remains vulnerable to alluring lies of the mundane passions, so the struggle continues to linger within one's deepest self.

Sr. Rica beautifully explains, "A call to religious life is a gift freely given by God. In response to this gift, the one called gives and commits himself/herself to God freely and totally. Through the three evangelical vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, the religious is helped and guided to live his/her life faithfully and fruitfully. Yet, these do not spare the religious from experiencing pains and struggles in this life."

The culture of fragmentation

Recent statistics in most seminaries show a declining level of commitment among its formands. While internal factors within the formation centers and personal dynamics of the formands contribute to this phenomenon, the current culture of postmodernism may also have an influence. In today's generation, there is a visible trend where personal life seems to have forgotten its inner and constitutive unity, as well as its holistic externalization and orientation. Rather, people seem to be driven by impulses of dispersion, fragmentation and alienation.

Characteristic of a postmodern person is hyper-individualism – "what he/ she holds are privacy, desires, immediate satisfactions, personal psycho-spiritual well being. He/she simply wants to live the present, without a project of personal realization based on fundamental, enduring and binding values, without commitment to any historical project, without affiliation to any binding tradition. Thus, he/she fears anything definitive and requiring maximum commitment. This is the new individual: a citizen who strives to be happy, narcissistic, skeptic, excessively concerned with the psychic and the affective; interiorly, he/she is not 'one', but a kaleidoscope of a thousand fragments, motivated by diverse desires; incoherent, incapable of an enduring project of life." (J. Alday, "La frammentarietadei valori," La Vita Consecrata nella Postmodernita, p. 96)

However hyper-individualistic a postmodern person may be, the basic human desire to be with others is still so strong that one cannot ignore the hungering for communion. Individualism and communitarianism become the two tendencies that create tension within the person of postmodern times. Thus, he/she seeks to fulfill this need by joining groups that provide temporary communal shelters, without imposing commitment. For a postmodern, commitment and stability are to be avoided for they are so scary and suffocating. Therefore, what matters is only 'getting along' and not 'getting involved' for involvement leads to commitment and stability. Perhaps, this explains why the formands easily fall into acts of compromises and unfaithfulness against their formation ideals. To the extent that when the seminary no longer responds to their needs, they hop from one congregation to another, or from one state of life to another.

Primacy of prayer

The struggle to be faithful to one's commitment should not be taken as a hopeless case, that one has to be resigned to fate and is helpless to escape from its influence. Though we maintain that struggles are indeed too difficult to handle, they are also not impossible to resolve. God will not give people a cross that they cannot carry. We are with problems but likewise, are equipped with necessary weapons to combat them. Our hardships bear no beauty in themselves outside the grace and compassion that surround them.

Undoubtedly, prayer holds its uncontested primacy with regard to its effectiveness in taming our raging struggles. Among all others, we can go back to no one but God in times of trouble. "To whom shall we go?" (Jn. 6:68) God will always be our refuge and stronghold. God can solve our problems and help us carry our crosses. His invitation is reassuring: "Come to me all of you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Mt. 11:28-29) Consoling also is the thought that before we suffer, Jesus had already suffered for us. He had cried many tears, and died many deaths long before we received the little grains of suffering we are having now.

However, as Carlos G. Valles, SJ, wrote in his book, *Living Together*, "He does not do that all the time, in fact he does not do that most of the time. The philosophers' expression for it is that God normally chooses to work through 'secondary causes', that is, in practice, through others; and our daily practice also conforms to that principle." He cited as an example the healing of the sick by God through a human instrument, the doctor. "God works through men," he adds. "And so similarly in this most important matter, God loves through men. Jesus, my best friend, makes me feel and experience his love through the men and women he has put round me in my family, in my life, and very specially in the religious group with whom I work, pray and hope together all the days of my life." Some abstract but essential ideas need to have a face.

A community that loves

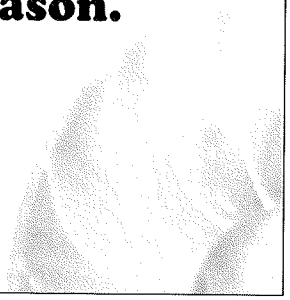
The religious community where a formand belongs is a channel of God's incessant assistance and constant guidance. The community serves a significant purpose that is vital for a struggling companion to outgrow his/her difficulties and advance in his/her vocation. Bro. Jones, osc bears witness to this. "I believe that the community is the real source of my strength. It gives inspiration and encouragement especially in times of trials that surface along my formation-journey. My religious community guides, molds and forms my being, giving deeper meaning to and a better understanding of religious life, by living a life of service, commitment and love towards God and neighbor," he stresses.

Community life demands that every member has to live in love but not depend on others. Illustrating it in an analogy, if we lean on one another, when one falls, others consequently follow. Instead, the ideal of community life says that when one falls, another should be

ready to support him/her and lift him/her up again. "How good and pleasant it is to live together like brothers." (Ps. 133.1)

Although vocation is a personal thing, it has communitarian implications as well. It is a responsibility and concern of every member of the community to nurture, support and take care of the vocation of each member. Thus, as a member of a religious community of the Daughters of St. Paul, I asked Sr. Joyce how she could help her sister who is struggling with problems. "All I can give to my sister is a listening ear, an attentive presence, a shoulder to cry on, and perhaps, offer some consoling words that would lift her spirit up. But most especially, I would encourage her to bring all these concerns to prayer and find enlightenment before the Blessed Sacrament," was her reply.

If we are to advise others, we must learn to listen. We must learn to discover how these others reason.



Listening, in fact, is very important and helpful. Fr. J. Keenan, sj in his article, *On Giving Moral Advice* says, "If we are to advise others, we must learn to listen. We must learn to discover how these others reason. We learn this from the people we serve. As we learn to listen, we will grow in competence. Most of us will spend our lives acquiring competency as advisors."

Bro. Martin, a Son of Divine Providence from Argentina said, "By promoting true friendship and confidence between my Superior and myself, we have established a place to dialogue in confidence, talk about problems and to look with firmness and sincerity for solutions." Fr. Valles supports this idea by saying that friends help us in knowing ourselves, accepting our strengths and limitations, and giving strength and support. The quality of our life is measured in terms of how much we have touched the lives of others. In partaking of the struggles of our fellows, we are also enriched as we enrich other people's lives.

Knowing that we do not bear our problems by ourselves, we come to a new perspective of our struggles. We no longer accentuate the burden of having trials. Instead, we focus on the beauty of the grace of the Lord and of the support that the community gives. By this, we cannot see anymore the ugly face of our struggles because the beauty of love that surrounds us is too abundant and overflowing. Hence, growth and redemption, forgiveness and peace, solace and freedom are not too hard to achieve. It is now clearer to see life's meaningfulness amidst the struggles.

Shared responsibility

Yet help is only possible in the presence of openness and trust on the part of the one who is struggling. Sr. Joyce comments, "I would not have any way of knowing what's going on with my sister unless she is trustful and transparent enough to open up her inner dilemma to me." Revealing oneself is risky but also necessary for growth. As in friendships, members in a community need to know and be known. In fact, relationship grows as each gets to know one another deeper. "This opens new horizons, elicits greater awareness, deepens feelings and adds meaning to life. Because of the deep self-disclosure in a friendship, it is imperative that friends be loyal. The revelation of personal intimacies is a sacred trust. This trust must never be betrayed. It is given in confidence and must be guarded with loyalty." (A. Nimeth, ofm, *I Like You Just Because*, p. 59) When one starts opening himself/herself, we have nothing much to offer but the assurance to take care of the trust he/she has invested, although this is the greatest of what we can give. Once trust is betrayed, it cannot be regained again.

Tensions and individual differences are inevitable in communities. The community is established and endures, not because its members find that they are happy together due to an affinity in thought, character or options, but because the Lord has brought them together and unites them by a common consecration. We are invited to continue our journey together keeping always in mind Peter's exhortation: "have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind. Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary, bless." (1Pet. 3:8-9)

Life is meaningful, beautiful

Indeed, life does not always consist of fun-filled moments to enjoy. Accompanying the glorious events in our life are also situations of hardship, depression, and continuous struggles - struggles that at times lure us to despair, but once triumphed over, these make us stronger and more mature. Because of the struggles we have, life is painful but becomes meaningful, and thus, worth living. The stories of continuous struggles of my friends, and my own hardships brought me to the realization that happiness should not always be the criterion for life, but meaningfulness.

As the semester progresses, I am again struggling to survive, struggling to be faithful, struggling to love. I will hear again the litany of laments of my friends. But now I know that behind these struggles is the beauty of love and grace, that these struggles make life more meaningful.

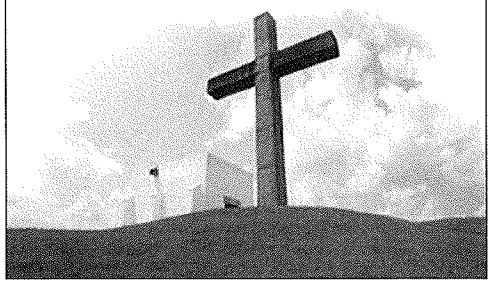
I am back to tell my friends of the beauty that their struggles bear, with a light heart! ⌘

(IN THE ORDER... continued from page 25)

In 1991, Fr. Godo applied for excardination from his diocese and since then he has been inactive. He is currently working with an NGO, which, for him, has very slight difference from his pastoral work before. Yet, he feels at ease in his present career. He firmly believes that *discernment*, a classic vocation term, is necessary for a genuine priestly commitment. *"Of course, you can ignore it and deceive it with your external antics but you will be haunted by it wherever you go."*

Many senior priests affirmed that discernment is fundamental for a dedicated priesthood. But most of them confessed that discernment does not 'actually' guarantee a perfect and one-shot decision. It gives one a better light, but it generates another call for discernment, which usually makes the whole thing doubly difficult. Hence, discernment is an unending process. Fr. Fruto, a long time novice director in his congregation, shared, *"Once you receive a light for the things you made subject for discernment, you are called back to begin another cycle of discerning."*

"We are so busy with the work of Christ that we forget the Christ of our work."



The most necessary requirement for discernment is silence and inactivity. And these are very expensive for priests working in the parishes and other ministries that demand full-time attention. Three young priests admitted to me that they have not touched their breviaries for months. They set up so many priorities that they have no more time for themselves. However, it often enters into their wishes that they win a time to reexamine themselves, to go deeper into the inner purpose of their vocation. One of them, Fr. Abet, would quip, *"It is not that I am discounting pastoral ministry, but I do feel it is unjustly eating so much from my priesthood."* Fr. Maning misses his seminary days when he had ample time to reflect on his mission and destiny as a priest-to-be. In his recent assignments, he oftentimes regretted having set aside the necessity of on-going discernment.

Many priests may have run away from the priesthood amid being deprived of self-recollection by their hectic occupation, but most of them cannot strongly argue against on-going discernment, which remains a must for an enduring priestly commitment.

Back to Christ

"We are so busy with the work of Christ that we forget the Christ of our work." Many would consider this a worn-out statement. But Fr. Redentor, who just celebrated his golden anniversary as priest, takes this to be widely true. Being a long-time confessor of priests and seminarians, he finds this tendency-forgetting Christ-the prevalent reason why a number of priests falter in their commitments. At least five priests under his spiritual direction left the priesthood with almost the same parting words: *"I've lost the meaning of being here."* Fr. Redentor reads those words as: *"I've lost Christ."* One of the five priests had this to say: *"I just cannot understand why we are not allowed to marry."* His confessor interprets that as: *"I just can't understand why Christ did not marry."*

Fr. Redentor does not want to raise a voice over the issue of married priests. He is merely concerned about the sad fact that Christ has often been overlooked and scrapped out of the limelight of many a priest's lives. *"Many circumstances would trap us and each circumstance readily provides various arguments to defend itself. We fail to give way to Christ defending our priesthood in him. Tapos sasabihin nating 'Wala na akong naiintindihan sa kalagayan kong ito, wala na akong nakitang kahulugan.' We just do not realize that we have forgotten the very person who is the be-all and end-all of our priesthood, si Kristo 'yon."*

Fr. Hilarion, the oldest priest in my congregation, often speaks of "wearing Christ everyday." If only a priest would constantly give a gaze at Christ's solitary life, his homelessness, his being deserted, his being mocked, and his being crucified, every priest would readily find consolation in all the *angst* he experiences. And Fr. Hilarion is speaking from his experiences. His priesthood has not been smooth-sailing. He also experienced what many priests would call "spiritual backdowns", but he can only grope for Christ – embracing him intimately, retrieving him into their relationship, giving him back the center.

The rest will follow. Humility, openness, oneness with the people, all the classic suggestions for a priest to stand by his commitment are supposed to be the offspring of that perduring company with Christ.

Still a mystery

Unfortunately, there is a big problem with that company – it is never an easy life, much less a readily intelligible one. There is always the dead end, the *aporia*-the mystery. The more difficult thing is that only the individual priest, in his unique self and priesthood, can give the greatest embrace to that mystery. That makes Fr. Fruto call priesthood a "goddamn" kind of life.

Lately, I remember my mother's warning in writing a travelogue:*"never start writing your travelogue if you have not reached the place yet."* This made me throw away my words about my readiness to become a priest and the confidence of becoming a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. You really do not know until you are there. Some would not know either, even if they were already there. ⌘



Anonymous

Come to think of it, "former priest" is not a theologically accurate term. The person may be called "fallen priest," "defrocked priest," or "laicized priest," but nevertheless a priest, a priest forever. This seems very clear to me now as it is very clear to me how I denied this basic theological truth, at least in my case, for the last 25 years. It was only recently when a priest-friend and counselor finally brought me to my senses and helped me to reclaim my priesthood.

It also helped to have come across a portion of a published homily given by my theology professor of old, Fr. C.G. Arevalo, SJ, on the occasion of his 25th year in the priesthood in 1979. Fr. Arevalo talks about a Mexican Jesuit friend in the States who in turn told him about an old Jesuit priest in Mexico who had spent many years ministering to laicized priests, fallen priests, or defrocked priests at their deathbeds. This old priest told his friend once: I do not believe in the Church's teaching on the priestly character because the Council of Trent teaches it. Not only for that reason. But even more because I have seen that it is true, in dealing with so many "fallen priests." For me it is simply that the choice of God is an irrevocable choice, and in his faithfulness He never takes it back. Even when they have left the ministry, even when they try to turn away from Him, He never leaves them. That is it, you see, He never leaves them alone. Like a tenacious dog which has put its teeth into a bone; it just won't let go. That's what the priestly character is, it is God's hand laying hold of a man and never letting go again.

I have just recently claimed back my gift of priesthood

Fr. Arevalo goes on to say, "But for me, it has helped me to understand once again that the priesthood is from Him, that it is His gift. A gift of mercy without conditions, of gentleness without wearying, of undeserved and wholly gratuitous love. The gifts of the Lord are without repentance. Because He is God. Because He is Father, Loving Father, Faithful Father..."

And if I may add: Compassionate Father. What consoling words for me! As a result of this realization, I have just recently claimed back my gift of priesthood, symbolically that is, by obtaining and keeping in my car a priest's stole, holy water, holy oil, and a ritual which I can use to anoint people and hear confessions in cases of emergency.

I rediscovered how much God has blessed me all these years despite the hurts I suffered at the beginning of my new lay lifestyle. He gave me a wonderful woman to be my wife and four gifted children I can be proud of. He led me to a socially meaningful job of nourishing, caring for, and giving life to the shattered hopes of Indo-Chinese refugees in Palawan and Bataan. And when that job ended, He provided us a business to sustain our family needs, and time for myself and for my family. I am sure He also led me to this course at CEFAM where I am now starting to heal my wounded past so that I can become a healer myself in the future. I know that even at my age, I have just started to find a new route in my ongoing journey, beyond my comforts and past my fears. Life moves on. ⌘

KEEP ME THERE, BELOVED

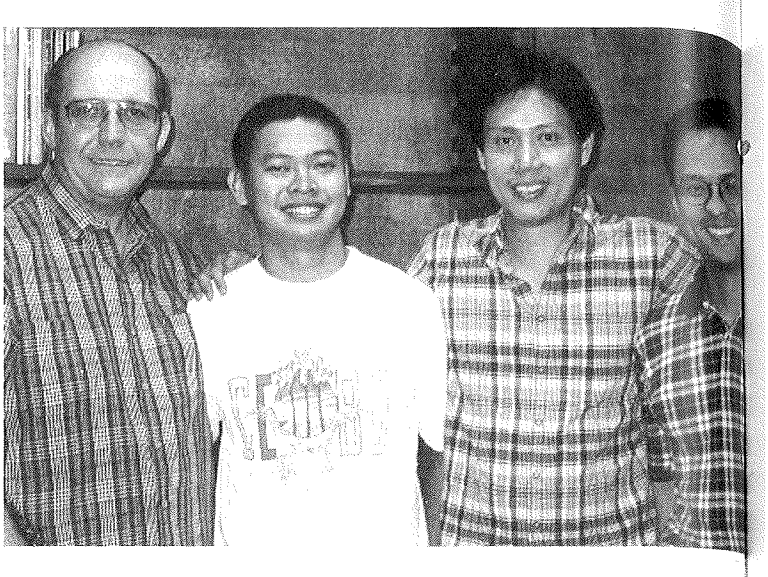
As I close my eyes...
that's when I see
your most beautiful face,
that's when I gaze
at your gentlest eyes.

As I empty my heart...
that's when I feel
the touch of your hand on my face,
that's when I feel your warmth
inflamed in so much love.

As I am in Your embrace...
that's when I hope
where there will be no more,
just as
never to part
as You
Keep me there, Beloved.

- Jenny Fernandez





Staff members of ***Landas***, the Journal of the Loyola School of Theology: (left to right)
James H. Kroeger, MM,
Circulation-Business Manager
Venusto Fullente Suarez, *Circulation Assistant*
Miguel B. Lambino, SJ, *Editor in Chief*
Vernon R. Totanes, *Assistant Editor*
Both issues of Volume 15 (2001) have been published.
Work has begun on the first issue of Volume 16 (2002).

CONGRATULATIONS TO

Bishop Luis Antonio "Chito" Tagle
on his Episcopal ordination
12 December 2001

Fr. Daniel Patrick L. Huang, SJ
who pronounced his final
vows as a Jesuit 11 February 2002

8TH ASIA-PACIFIC CONGRESS ON LIFE, LOVE AND FAMILY



LST representatives to the congress

I expected the 8th Asia-Pacific Congress on Life, Love, and Family to be a CEFAM-like way of presenting crucial issues. Not many new things came out but emphasis was placed on the conventional – the traditional approach to life, love, and family which I should say still brought out some truth and wisdom. The focus was on the sanctity of life and the dignity of the family, i.e. in the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life.

The congress reminded me of moral values that need to be perpetually upheld, preserved and transmitted to new and younger generations who are most exposed to a society that has become very permissive and tolerant. I came to an increasing awareness of what has partly but overwhelmingly become of our culture today – a culture of death where abortion, violence, oppression, injustice, exploitation, corruption, and marital separation have prevailed. A number of related issues were thoroughly discussed so that I found myself not only becoming more pro-life, but desiring to be more pro-active, i.e. to enter into the chaos of others.

As someone whose consciousness has gradually deepened through God's grace and CEFAM's help, I struggled with some views presented at the congress that seemed so rigid. Truth was treated absolutely in some cases where I felt compassion should have had a place.

At LST where most are formators, evangelists and caregivers or are preparing to become one of these, what could prove most useful and helpful for one's growth and ministry is attaining balance between two approaches to life: love and family.

⌘

- Ma. Lourdes M. Jimenez

One Shepherd
One Fold

Father, of old you told us through your prophet Ezekiel that you, yourself, would shepherd your flock. You sent your Son as the Good Shepherd, willing to lay down his life for the sheep.

Smile upon all of those whom you have chosen to lead us in the ways of your Son. Fill their hearts with love and their lives with faith.

We are not an easy people to lead. So often, we are like sheep who have gone astray. Help your shepherds to know when to be strong, when to be gentle, when to say "no" and to say "yes".

Thank you for the gift of the leadership of service in your Church. May all who have received it always show forth your face and speak with your voice. **Amen.**