

Congregation of the Sacred Hearts
of Jesus and Mary



May 2010

21

Com-Union



***The SS.CC.
priestly ministry***

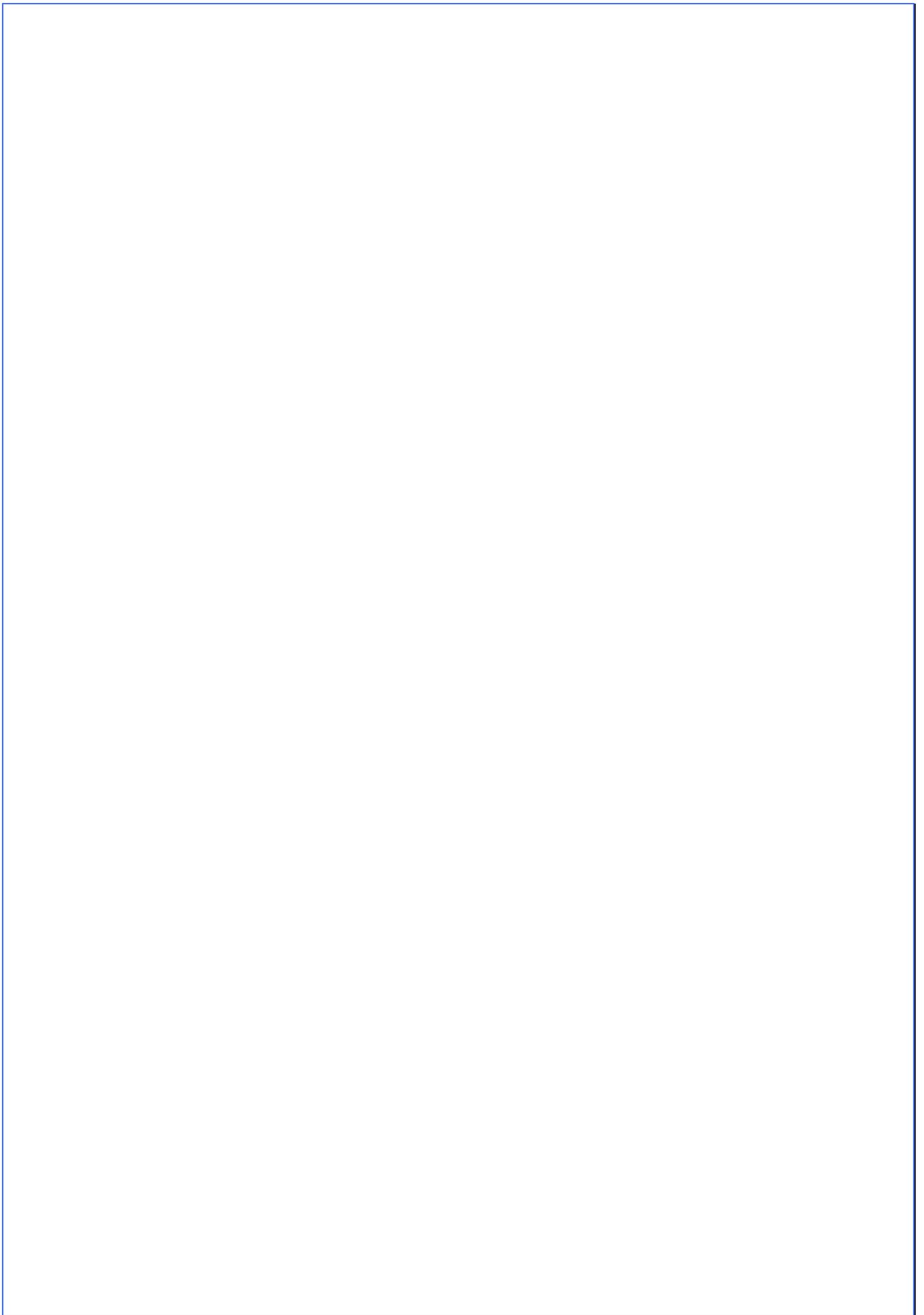


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Introduction:

SS.CC. Priestly Ministry

April 2010

Dear Sisters and Brothers;

This issue of Com-Union is dedicated to the priestly ministry, seen within our SS.CC. vocation, a calling characteristic of the brothers' branch from the foundation.

The Good Father was a priest before being founder and it was as priests that he saw the brothers when, in the Motte d'Usseau, he had his vision that we consider the inspiration of our Congregation.

While it is true that in baptism men and women are incorporated in Christ, the high priest, and we are all members of the priestly people of the new covenant and because of that all members have a common dignity and fundamental equality, the common good of all the baptized requires different services and ministries.

Those who have received the sacrament of Orders are configured to Christ through a special grace of the Holy Spirit to serve him through the preaching of the Word, the dispensation of grace in the Sacraments and the service of unity so that the Church remains united to Him who is our head.

The priestly vocation involves a call to follow Christ in a radical way. Priests are placed in the midst of the People of God as mediators of his grace, expert guides on the journey toward him and pastors called to care for the flock.

In the Congregation we have the witness of brothers who, within our ss.cc. vocation, have lived this vocation to the fullness, each with different nuances according to their personal charism: the Good Father, Father Damien, Father Eustaquio, the martyrs of the Paris Commune, the Spanish martyrs, the missionaries who spread the faith in far off lands and so many other brothers who have lived the priesthood as pastors or educators who have served and are serving the Gospel as "the cooks of Christians" – an expression of Luther – preparing the table of Bread and Word.

We are coming to the end of the year that Pope Benedict XVI has dedicated to the priesthood. This issue of Com-Union is meant to be a modest contribution to help the

brothers and sisters know more about the topic of priesthood in our Congregation and share that with others.

Affectionately in the SS.CC.,



Rosa Mª Ferreiro ss.cc.
Superior General



Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ss.cc.
Superior General



The Meaning of the Symbol for The Year for Priests



The symbolism is that of the Sacred Heart, calling to mind that the annual day for the sanctification of priests always coincides with the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In this way the theme of the specific holiness to which the sacred ministry is called comes immediately to mind.

The visibility of the radiant heart refers to the phrase of the saintly Curé of Ars who defined the priesthood as "the love of the Heart of Jesus".

The Stole with which the figure of Jesus is adorned calls to mind that he is the Supreme and Eternal High Priest, and the fact that every priest is made a continuation of that One Priest within history and in the various generations which succeed one another.

The arms held out recall the typical attitude of prayer and meditation which are proper to the priest. The wounds of the hands and the side of the figure of Christ in the logo remind us of the one redemptive sacrifice and recall the vicarious satisfaction and total self-gift typical of the priesthood. The attitude of welcome seems to say, "Come to me all you who labour and over-burdened, and I will give you rest". It is a consoling invitation to every priest who wears himself out in the daily exercise of pastoral charity, even for example in the driest and rockiest places, so that they also can in their turn show the same attitude to those who are near and to those who are distant.

Our Brother Damien of Molokai:

how he lived and expressed his priestly Ministry

Amanda María Sologuren ss.cc.



As we know, Damien, from a very young age was shaped in life with earnestness and clarity in what he wanted to be and to do and when his calling to a radical following of Jesus began to emerge, he discovered his desire to give himself for his brothers. As a religious of the SS.CC. he found a vast field where this could happen. He felt called to make of his life what Peter said: *"Shepherd the flock that God has entrusted to you, guarding it not out of obligation, but willingly for God's sake; not as one looking for a reward but with a generous heart; do not lord it over those in your care, rather be an example to your flock. Then, when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will be given a crown of unfading glory."* (1 Peter 5: 2-4).

If we look at his religious life, missionary priest and pastor, we can see that his way was always that of Jesus and his faithfulness to the teachings of the Church, as we find today in many of his documents:

In this way he lived what the Catholic Catechism says to priests:

"By his ordination, the priest receives the authority to celebrate Mass, administer the sacraments of baptism, penance, extreme unction, and also to consecrate and bless ... Jesus calls to his service young people of all nations and all classes. They must have a living faith and sincere piety, and be willing to sacrifice themselves in the service of God and work for the salvation of souls ..."

I think it is interesting to see not only how our brother realized the greatness of his ministry but also how he took so serious that one has to sacrifice oneself like the Master; also to thank God for the great gift of belonging to a simple peasant family.

When speaking of the hands that bless it is moving to think how his hands were with leprosy and how he continued to bless with them with such love and faith. At Ordination they are told: *"May what these hands bless, be blessed, what they consecrate, be consecrated and sanctified."*

And all this is characterizing the type of shepherd Damien wants to be. As the Bishop presented him when he was leaving for Molokai: *"Until now, my children you have been alone, but it will no longer be so. I present to you a priest who wants to be a father to you. He loves you so dearly that for your happiness and the salvation of your immortal souls, there is no doubt that he will be one of you and will live and die with you"* (10 May 1973).

It is strange to read these words of the Bishop, because there you realize that from the beginning Damien was willing to die for them, it was clear what he was exposed to in going to Molokai.

And in his own words in a letter: *"I, for my part, I love them, and will gladly give my life for them, as did our Saviour. Thus, I spare no effort when it comes to visiting the sick up to seven or eight miles away." "You have to get used to travelling by land or sea, on horseback or on foot ... you have to learn several languages in order to talk to all kinds of people ... "*

We find in the Aparecida Conference, held in May 2007, aspects that Damien has already said in his letters: *"Priests have been called to **'be with Jesus and to be sent out to preach'**" (Mk 3: 14). "If the priest has God as the foundation and center of his life, he will experience the joy and fruitfulness of his vocation" (Opening speech by Pope Benedict XVI).*

And in one of his letters: *"... I am still the only priest on Molokai. Fr Columban and, lately, P. Wendelis are the only brothers I have seen for 16 months. Since I have much to do, time seems very short, the joy and contentment of heart that the Sacred Hearts give me, causes me to believe that I am the happiest missionary in the world ... (And he was already a leper). So may the sacrifice of my health that God has been willing to accept may bear a little fruit to my ministry among the lepers, after all it is very light and even enjoyable, so I dare to say with S. Paul: "I am dead and my life is hidden with Christ in God."*

"The priest must be primarily a 'man of God'

- Who knows God directly,*
- Who has a deep personal friendship with Jesus,*
- Who shares with others the same sentiments as Christ.*

Only then will the priest be able to lead the people to God, made incarnate in Jesus Christ, and be the representative of his love. "

I choose the Pope's speech because here we see the greatness of the priestly vocation, but not only for the choice God made for each of them, but for the great union the priest can reach if he believes in the need to be always united with the Lord of his life. How good it is to read in his many letters, how Damien conserved this union and how he tried to use the means to do so. It is also good to see how ahead of his time he was in giving the laity the importance they have and helping them to understand and fulfill their beautiful mission.

We read in his letters: *"Without the Blessed Sacrament a situation like mine would be unbearable, but as I have a Our Lord close to me, I am always happy and content and I work with enthusiasm for the happiness of my dear lepers."*

And speaking of the children with leprosy he wrote: *"They learn the catechism well, every morning they attend Mass and the rosary in the afternoon..."* He did not do it all alone, but knew how to involve the laity in his pastoral work and provide the necessary training: *"For some time I have been giving theology courses to the most educated of my "kanakas". Their zeal is of great help to me for the religious training of new converts. As I cover 4 chapels, they teach in the places where I cannot be present ... "*

I continue with the opening speech of the Pope: *"To fulfill his noble task, the priest*

- Must have a solid spiritual structure and live his life inspired by faith, hope and charity*
- Must be like Jesus, a man who searches, through prayer, the face and the will of God..."*

And reading his letters, on the day he arrived on Molokai and in the solitude of the night, sheltered under a pandanus tree he prayed to the Father in this way: *"God knows what is best for my sanctification and with this conviction every day I say THY WILL BE DONE. I abandon myself to Providence and I find my comfort in the only companion who never leaves me: our Divine Saviour in the Eucharist."*

Throughout the world Damien is known as the great Gift for humanity and the strength of his testimony is for everyone. In the Aparecida document we read: "... *The priest can not fall into the temptation of considering himself simply as a mere delegate or just a representative of the community, but A GIFT for her by the Spirit's anointing and his special union with Christ the head ...*" (No. 193). *"The priest must be a man of prayer, mature in his choice of life for God, making use of the means of perseverance such as the sacrament of confession, devotion to the Blessed Virgin, mortification and a passionate giving to his pastoral mission"* (No. 195)

Rather than refer to his letters, I know from the film of his life, his incredible feat of confessing aloud from a boat when they would not let him board the ship where his provincial was and how he was always asking for a priest to administer this sacrament so dear to him: *"The good Fr Columban comes every 2 or 3 months to hear my confession and then returns."*

Again speaking of the "laity": he formed with them various institutions whether related to the cult of Mary or the desire to help others, we would say today, "according to his personal charisma" ... And that love for the Sacrament of Forgiveness he communicated to his beloved lepers not only administering it, but being always available when they needed it.

And we know his life was not without pain, I leave him to speak of this: *"The terrible disease threatens to prevent me from celebrating Mass and, as there is no other priest, I would be deprived even of communion and the Blessed Sacrament. This deprivation would cost me the most and make my situation untenable."*

"I hope to be eternally grateful to God for this blessing (of his illness). I think this disease will shorten a little and even make narrower the road that will lead me to our beloved country. With this hope I have accepted my illness as my special cross; I try to carry it as Simon of Cyrene, following the footsteps of our divine Master. Help me with your prayers to have the endurance to reach the summit of Calvary". "... As far as I am concerned, God knows what is best for my poor soul: I leave it to Him to decide whether my days should be longer or shorter ..."

"The more tired I am, on Sunday afternoon, the happier I feel, especially when one lost sheep has returned to the fold of the Lord ... I love my poor Kanakas a lot for their simplicity and I do everything I can for them." When I go into a hut I always start by offering the remedy to cure souls. However, those who reject the spiritual aid are not deprived of physical help which I give to all without distinction. So, except for a small number of obstinate heretics, all look to me as a father. "

He felt a deep devotion to Mary and it was at the Shrine of Our Lady of Monteagudo that he said goodbye to his parents, crying when he looked for the last time at the church: *"How sad, it is the last time I will see the beautiful shrine of Mary. Let me (he said to his mother) fill my eyes!"* ... And as for his love for the mission and his mortification: *"No, I would not want my healing if the price is to leave the island and leave my work ... I will stay forever with my lepers"*

He also related to his similarity with Jesus the Good Shepherd *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. Not so the hired hand or any other person who is not the shepherd and to whom the sheep do not belong. They abandon the sheep as soon as they see the wolf coming, then the wolf snatches and scatters the sheep. This is because the hired hand works for pay and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, I know my own and they know me, as my Father knows me and I know the Father. Because of this I give my life for my sheep."* (John 10: 11-15). His tenderness, dedication and love in his relationship to his lepers. And on the day he died Fr Wendelin said: *"He died without*

any effort, as if going to sleep, he went out softly, after spending 16 years in the midst of the horrors of leprosy. *The Good Shepherd has given his life for his sheep.*"

And the Aparecida Document No. 198 speaks about this today: *"The priest, in the image of the Good Shepherd, is called to be a man of mercy and compassion, close to his people and servant of all particularly those who suffer great need. Pastoral charity, the source of priestly spirituality, animates and unifies his life and ministry ... "*

And with his creativity he tried to meet the needs where they found them: *"Damien formed a band and a choir, who sewed joy in the colony of Molokai and animated the Masses, processions and funerals." "There is hardly a glimmer of hope you can recover if not through a miracle but I will not tempt the Lord, convinced as I am that His holy will is to die in the same manner and of the same disease that afflict my flock."*

"Also built houses and made the coffins for those who died penniless (it is believed there were about 1800 coffins). He even dug trenches."

He writes: *"Many families of our lepers, having more need of houses than clothes, have put their little savings into my hands ..."*

He wrote to his friend, the artist Clifford: *"When you arrive I think there will be about 1500 lepers in our sanctuary. Each boat brings them to us by the dozens. I currently have about 60 boy lepers, and they all live in the garden of our church.... "*

"Damien oversaw all aspects of the lives of his lepers: food, clothing, housing and health ... He even set up a store to sell at low prices. He made constant calls of solidarity to the world" which had a particularly impressive echo in the Protestant world, "Only a Catholic priest has entered the hell of the lepers ... He lives in the midst of these dying people, of these desperate people, to bring them the consolations of eternal life ... Travellers from all nations, who pass by the rock of Molokai, greet him!" (Said by a Protestant German traveller in a Berlin newspaper)

As to "promoting solidarity" it is not surprising that there is so much talk of this missionary who took care of every detail, not only to help but also that everyone in the world should be concerned and try to help, and spread it to others. He was very clear that it was not only his duty, but that we are all responsible.

We are confident that Damien as a religious missionary priest and pastor can say with Saint Paul: *"I have done everything for everyone so as to win all for Christ."*

Reflections on Priest in Asia

David P. Reid ss.cc.



To write about Christian priesthood in Asia is a daunting task. To write as a non Asian and with little experience of this most culturally diverse world is like the proverbial draining of the waters of the sea with a thimble. Yet there is something irresistibly inviting about the challenge.

But first I attend to the hermeneutics of rhetoric and this is especially important in the discussion of priesthood. For the Roman Catholic it is nigh impossible to discuss priesthood without recourse to the rhetoric of the single, celibate, male figure who is the ministerial priest. The image is always just that and it obscures deeper discussion of the priesthood of all the baptized linked with the functions of prophet and king. The necessary context is lost in this Hollywood-esque portrayal of priest which had been already made classic by Lacordaire but which goes back to an even earlier time.

So the discussion is freighted with centuries old baggage. It is further complicated because cross culturally the image of priest, in contrast with that of “holy man,” is one of power, possession, prestige and privilege. Were one to object that this image of priesthood is a product of the West, it would be only half true. This is the image imported into Asia, adapted here and even further complicated in India, for instance, by caste and class. Even in this *Year of the Priest*, the most ardent portrayals of what a priest should be, are weighted down by this “holiness as loneliness” image of heroism. I recall in one whole book, published in 2009, devoted to the spirituality of the priest, the author never mentioned the priesthood of the community, to say nothing of the missionary understanding of the church as priest, prophet and king for the world.

But there is hope ... in failure. The sheer failure of the New Testament to present any coherent image of the re-interpretation of priesthood through the death and resurrection of Jesus is an enormous blessing. The challenge is given to every age and every cultural situation to adequately interpret for its time and place the inexhaustible riches of the action of the Father raising Jesus to glory and appointing him priest for the world. Each situation and time must invest its own rhetoric to proclaim this marvellous truth in the re-configuration of its institutions and mores. “Whom do *you* say that I am?”

In so called non Christian Asia, whom do *we* say Jesus is, the Christ, priest, prophet and king? This is not the place to argue to the integration of functions of prophet and king into that of priest but it is the place to say that the individual known as Catholic Christian priest in Asia is only understood as ministering to the priesthood of the baptized within the triple dialog of religion, culture and poverty. The church identifies its mission in Asia in this triplet and only within that context does ministerial priesthood function. I choose to emphasize dialog which is well discussed since Paul VI and now is happily coupled with the word “salvation.” The new context is the “dialog of salvation” which embraces in the thinking of Benedict XVI the thrust for an “integrated human development.” Into this mix one may add a nuance particularly important

in Asia. While recent Roman Catholic teaching has been stressing that Jesus Christ is our only Savior, the dialog of salvation, which involves listening to other religions, would stress that God is our Savior, God who by Christians is believed to save through Jesus the Christ. The dialog with Jews is not alone in being helped by this emphasis. The inter-religious dialog is aided. So also is the dialog internal to the Christian movement, presently flourishing in the retrieval of Trinitarian faith as central to its creed. The God of us all is a God who saves!

Where in all of this is the so-called ministerial priest? He is called to be a listener, a sharer in the dialog, a facilitator. If the message is the medium, the dialog is not preparation but the actual proclamation. Dialog is about word, the dialog of salvation is about the word of God. That word is *dabar*, in biblical understanding, word and deed, no sooner spoken than done (Isaiah 55). This is not magic but presence, not superstition but relationship, not token but sacrament, not wishful thinking but hope! If at times it appears without light, then it is leaven!

The ministerial priest nurtures the dialog of salvation that permeates the functions of prophet and king. As much effort as is poured into religiosity and devotion needs to be poured into the strengthening of the skills of Christians to participate in a lively dialog of religion, culture and poverty. The homilist will engage the community in this conversation. Dialog about poverty will reveal the too facile justification and restraints on progress in the status quo of poverty, the refusal to engage in what makes for an “integrated human development.” To live the ministerial priesthood is to equip Christian to live and to trust their baptismal consecration as priest, prophet and king in the dialog of values that informs every one's daily business.

Where does this leave SS.CC. in Asia- both as religious and priests? I recall a scene in my life many years ago at a seminar on spiritual direction. The point discussed was that few of the baptized ever have the chance of spiritual direction. Yet that would be the right of a person incorporated into Christ according to the new Canon Law. The concise question was: is there provision for spiritual direction for each person baptized on any given weekend in Manila? If a religious Congregation refuses new members if it lacks formators, how can the Catholic church call so many to baptism without providing the means of nurturing the new life? For some the Charismatic Movement filled the gap but for the vast majority of Catholic Christians who struggle daily with the special challenges in Asia, there is little or no preparation for participation in the dialog of salvation.

There is much room for remedial education in the faith, the formation of consciousness, the development of Catholic imagination and awareness. In this sense the SS.CC. ministerial priest is called to the care of souls, a remedial and preventive care for battle wearied brothers and sisters, an adventure in reparative love. Together with the previous mention of homily, there needs also reflection on the precious moment in the dialog called the sacrament of reconciliation, an unique moment of relating the dialog with the lived experience of this every Catholic Christian now present. St. John Vianney surely related to this graced moment as he engaged daily in the dialog of salvation with each penitent. But the religious of the Sacred Hearts who serves as a ministerial priest cannot be a lone ranger. His ministry is to be seen within the context of the lived charism of his brothers and sisters.

If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes both brothers and sisters of the SS.CC. in their own dialog of salvation to bring persons to this refined moment of personal encounter, dialog with the Risen Lord. I return to the summary statement of the brothers and sisters in the 3rd

Mission Seminar in Asia in Bandung, Indonesia, March 2009. I am delighted to hear echoed there the concerns of this reflection on priesthood. Point #4 reads: *We commit ourselves to be a community deeply engaged in the mission of Jesus, close to the poor and the needy, reaching out in solidarity and compassion to victims of human rights violations, trained for social justice, and networking with others. We enable ourselves to empower people, especially women, the poor, the abused, and the marginalized.* I would challenge anyone to say that this statement is not both faithful to Jesus' inauguration speech in Luke 4 on the exercise of baptized and ministerial priesthood and our own commitment in reparative love to an "integrated human development." Long live the charism of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary!

The fundamental mission of the SS.CC. Priest

in a non Christian world: India



Rose Henry Reeves ss.cc.

Our SS.CC. Brothers have faithfully and diligently ministered to God's people in India in the Archdioceses of Orissa and Kolkata for the past 30 years. The Catholic population is 2% in India. The remainder of the people continues to embrace Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and other minor religions. Although the Church is only 2% of the population, the total number of Catholics is significantly large because according to the census there are approximately 1 billion people in India. Obviously, this has and continues to be a great challenge for our SS.CC. Brothers who wish to exercise their priestly ministry in a non-Christian world.

Christians in India have been persecuted, especially in Kandhamal, a district of the State of Orissa where some of our Brothers and Sisters' families live. Most of the Christians were given an opportunity to disown their faith. When they defied the fundamentalist dictate and refused to renounce their faith, the soldiers turned uglier than the Nazi Gestapo. Those who refused to give up their faith were brutally murdered: put to the sword, burnt alive, crushed with boulders and even buried alive.

Besides ministering to the faithful in the parishes of Orissa and Kolkata (West Bengal) our Brothers at Damien Social Development Institute have joined the forces of other NGO's to help alleviate the trials and sufferings of the Christians in Kandhamal and other places by distributing medicines, contributing their service and monies etc. Not all the non-Christians are fundamentalist. Therefore, our Brothers have tried to deepen their relationships with the non-Christians through their love, kindness, concern and support when and where possible, especially among the people with leprosy. As Christians we have been encouraged to show concern and interest in the non-Christian festivals, and other similar occasions. Our Brothers have extended their efforts in joining some of the Hindu weddings, festivals... always with caution by not preaching about Jesus, Mary and other Catholic teachings.

Therefore, the fundamental mission of our Sacred Hearts Brothers is living and witnessing the compassionate love of God with much love, patience, faith, respect, hope and endurance.—bringing all of our non-Christian friends to the altar of the Word and Eucharist and offering them to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

As we celebrate the Eucharist, Adoration and other prayer-services with our Brothers we notice that they conscientiously made special efforts to include a topic or article from our charism to keep us connected to our beloved Congregation. Without hesitation, our Brothers happily joined us as we celebrated together the main feasts of our Congregation—Sacred

Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Founders Day, Damien, etc. We have indeed been enriched by their love and care for us which was evidenced by their “family spirit.”

In addition to their sacramental, priestly life, our Brothers have extended their priestly ministry among the leprosy patients, poor families and other lay people through their tender love and respect – giving dignity to each person. They have offered their untiring service to the poor by offering charitable contributions, service, education – always building their friendly and respectable relationships with God’s people.

We are deeply grateful for their past efforts in sharing their priestly ministry with us and we hope that they will continue to treasure their unique vocation as priests but more especially as Sacred Hearts priests—living the compassionate love of God.

In conclusion, we wish to thank our Brothers for their witness as true disciples of Jesus and sharing their priestly ministries with us. We assure them of our love, support and prayers that they may continue to contemplate, live and proclaim the redemptive love of God.

Meaning and Implications of the SS.CC. Priestly Ministry

in Today's World

Ramón Mera García ss.cc.



First, I want to say that the title of the article seems to promise too much. Among other things, because “today’s world” is impossible to grasp or to describe simply in a way that speaks to all and even less so in three pages. What’s more, the perception that the author might have of “the meaning and implications of priestly ministry” in our Congregation is perhaps not shared by many other brothers, given their own experiences and the variety of contexts in which they carry out their mission. As a result, what follows is nothing more than a very personal appreciation of the matter at hand, one that perhaps represents the convictions and ideas of very few others. Having said that I continue.

I take for granted that our spirituality can be summed up in the well known formula “*to contemplate, live and announce to the world God’s love, which was made flesh in Jesus.*” I want to take that as my starting point in considering our topic. To begin, I believe that one aspect of our SS.CC. priestly ministry is personal prayer, of a contemplative nature, centered in Eucharistic Adoration. The real presence of Christ in the Eucharist recognized and adored constantly, will transform us into men who have a particular and a deep sense of who God is and how God acts. So if the socio-cultural context in which we exercise our ministry is increasingly secularized, as it seems to be, the life of a person affected deeply by constantly “looking toward” God will benefit others in extraordinary ministerial service.

From that contemplative prayer our lives will become conformed to the one we contemplate. What I describe is certainly nothing new but I believe that the ministerial life of a priest of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts must be characterized by: being completely “out there” in service to the Christian community and the world; working tirelessly to create among the faithful a Christian life that has deep roots, healthy communal relationships and creative commitment to the poor and those who have never heard the Gospel; giving the greatest attention to his own human and theological formation in order to better understand the world around him and to proclaim Christian truth seriously and capably.

Assuming all that, we can all admit that the closer a priest is to others, the more he is able speak to them. That seems obvious, a truism. But to be close to the people and open to their questions, needs and even their attacks and to do that with clarity of conviction is not an easy. It means being truly humble and generous. Such humility and generosity only come from the faith that allows us to live and act as did Jesus. That is the faith that reveals to us God’s love.

For that reason, to be a priest of the Sacred Hearts means loving those we encounter in ministry in a heartfelt way, maturely and fearlessly. Warmth, gentleness, kindness, joyful hospitality, mercy, tenderness and understanding are some of the characteristics of our way of exercising the ministry in imitation of the pierced Heart of the Savior.

The communal nature of our religious consecration and our so-called “family spirit” also indicate a certain characteristic, which I believe is indispensable for our priestly commitment in today’s world. The SS.CC. priest has to be a minister and a master in the creation of Christian community. He will only be able to do that if it is normal for him to live in a local community and work in a team with other religious and laity. We are ministers of the Lord and his Church not as lone rangers but planning, working and evaluating with others as members of the family in order to create family.

Another characteristic of our SS.CC. priestly ministry, which must be present for it to be “meaningful” in our world today, is a preferential love for those who are estranged from faith in Jesus and those deprived of the goods of the earth. This means seeing our priestly consecration in terms of mission and our work as bringing justice and freedom. This will create in us the desire to bring Christ to the hearts of the people we encounter in order to tirelessly seek new disciples for Christ. It will also make us especially responsive to the needs of those who suffer in their flesh because of poverty and inequality and who are deprived of freedom and the possibility of development.

For a religious of the Sacred Hearts, being a priest also means freely using one’s energies to “repair” sin and evil in the world. This is a way he expresses his spirituality and charism, whether in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, in his way of looking at the world or in the various tasks of ministry. In love, patience and humility and with unchanging fidelity to the faith he must be ready to bear the faults and sins of others, in particular those of the Church itself. At the same time he struggles tirelessly, with all he has, to heal all that destroys God’s plan in the lives of others. He will try to incarnate the mercy and courage of Jesus even when he knows that he is not responsible for the sin around him and that will be a challenge. He will do that because he is sincerely searching for holiness in his own life. It is a search that never ends but which is a simple witness of his intimate communion with the love and suffering of Christ.

I do not want to close this brief reflection without speaking of “apostolic zeal,” which so characterized the priestly work of our Founder, the Good Father. His personal witness as an evangelizer who was persistent, hard-working, apostolic, flexible and courageous is a precious heritage. He was not a priest who was comfortable or easily intimidated. His ministry became a form of ecclesial combat in the cause of Christ and his Gospel, without fear of hostility or indifference. Something of that should be evident in our priestly commitment in the service of people today, whatever might be the social, cultural or political context in which we work.

On the other hand, and as conclusion, I believe that an SS.CC. priest should be very “normal” in all things, even in those things that do not directly affect his ministry. He should be approachable, healthy, balanced, interested in everything human, open to today’s world and capable of discerning what is happening in the world of culture, politics, economy, information and other areas. That will require that he have good ongoing formation in which the study of theology has a preeminent place.

Comments on some of the writings of the Good Mother,

Henriette Aymer, addressed to her brother priests

Paula Teck ss.cc.



A word of introduction

First, I would like to thank the organizers of ComUnion for this initiative of reflecting on the ministry of the priesthood during this year of the priest, since more than half of the members of our congregation are in Orders. It is worthwhile remembering that each and every one has his/her place, role and we are co-responsible in serving the Church and humanity in the best way possible in these unsettled times of quick, rapid and deep changes.

I am grateful to be invited to read and meditate on some of the words the G.M. addressed to her brother priests. This work of searching has challenged me and has given me encouragement to carry all my brother priests more intensely in my heart and in my prayer. I hope that in reading these writings of the G.M. many brothers, sisters and laypersons will feel urged to support them more effectively, as members of one family, all called to love the Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

Thanks also to the archivists of the Congregation who have left so many documents at our disposal. In this way, while still living in Maputo / Mozambique, I have been able to consult easily, the letters the G.M. - LEBM 1-4. There is also the "Cahiers of spirituality", especially 10a, and n.15 by Friedhelm Geller which provided me with very interesting material, and "The Good Mother – Her Life" by Hilarion Lucas. My sincere thanks to the many brothers and sisters who gave years of their lives to leave within our reach all the essential documents of the Congregation ...

Commentaries on the letters between the Good Mother and the Good Father

How could we not start with the correspondence between the G.M. and the G.F., the first priest in the congregation?

In her many notes written (at the request of the G.F.) between 1801-1803, the G.M. is really the foundress with the founder of the fledgling Congregation.

She communicated to the G.F. what she "had seen", what she had understood from God, what he must do, what they must do to advance the work of God. She encouraged him in this and expressed her union of heart...

Here is one of those significant notes:

"The Good Lord made known to me that you should not read "the duties of monastic life" at the moment because you would take on things, which, while good, are not for

you at this time and which you could not hold on to, not being accustomed to the discomforts of life in common and that you would be worried at having to renounce them."

The Good Lord has given you the precious gift of his constant presence, that is to say that in talking, walking or doing something without thinking, you think of Him. In fact, He is more present within you than you are to yourself, if I may say so. In order to respond to this special grace, he would like you go within several times a day (if only for a moment) to adore him in the depths of your heart where He has made his home and likes to be, so that the faults you may commit are never committed deliberately.

The Good Lord would like you take the time, even on days when you are very busy, to do your half hour, and on other days one hour, at two different times. By means of this fidelity to enter with the Good God into the depths of your heart, it will be easier to remain at his feet, there will be no room for boredom, for the distractions, which will tire you at times, but will be far from you and will not be detrimental to you. I can assure you that the Good Lord has the desire and intent to grant you special graces, I would even say that his heart is in need of that. "

The good God also says you worry too much when you think you have made some mistakes, the grief and sorrow you have causes you a certain irritation of which you are not the master. Then you get angry with yourself, and sometimes this has repercussions on others, which increases your pain, because then you think you have committed many deliberate mistakes, and your real offence is worrying by yourself instead of entering right away into your heart with God who would have closed the wound that the fear of making a mistake would have produced, if truly there was a wrong, and He would have poured the comforting balm of a loving pain. The good Lord also complains that you stop certain ideas, that would happen if you were not afraid. In this way you summon the temptation then you fall into confusion, worry, but you certainly have the right to be afraid."¹

Towards the middle of 1801

In her profound correspondence with him, the G.M. recounts everything she does or does not do for the Work; she asked his advice for each new step that have to be taken, for every problem regarding people, situations, money, etc. She encourages him in his ministry as priest, vicar general of a diocese, Founder. She gives him advice for the decisions he has to make. She assures her faithful prayers, her sacrifices that she offers for him, for the deep affection she has for him and for the Institute.

The G.F. held her in such high regard that he said to Gabriel de la Barre in 1803: "... *It is true that the Little Peace (GM) carries the light and I just hold the candlestick ...*"

And at the end of their life and mission, when the first tension between the Brothers and Sisters in Picpus came to light, he wrote to the young superior in Picpus, Fr. Raphael Bonamie:

¹ What freedom of tone and what soundness in the advice in this page of spiritual guidance!

"Be assured, my dear Raphael that she is the soul of two families, that her poor life hangs by a thread, she is too old and you are too young to remove the root of the trunk, the branches would soon be without vigour to produce fruit ... She is the root of the tree ... It is she who is more founder than foundress, and I know she has never ceased to be a victim for the whole family 27/01/1829.

Here are some of the many letters written to BP, which express her encouragement in his service as a priest, the assurance of her prayers and sacrifices, the expression of her devotion and affection for all: laity and Sisters...

In this letter, she sympathizes with his sufferings, the misunderstandings and gives him reasons for hope.

V.S.C.J.

I received your letter, my good father, and only have time to tell you that the one addressed to the Bishop causes us sorrow (The day before the Bishop had received the letter from Portalis refusing to appoint Father Coudrin Vicar General of Mende): the charges against you are nothing; all that will not go very far, at least I hope so. Mademoiselle Viart grieves for the trouble this causes; Do not take it to heart, my good father! The good Lord wants us to have crosses, but all will calm down amicably, I am confident of that and I am going to ask the good Lord with all my heart, to prolong my existence. Pardon me, just pray to the good God for me!

You will do much good in your turn; assure the good and venerable prelate of my affection and respect for him.

Farewell, dear Father. I have nothing satisfactory to tell you of my health: I am not however, all together sick. You say nothing of your return. I would love to see you again! In spite of myself, I am a little amazed; I am going to use every means I can to get cured: I owe my existence to you according to God, I owe you life humanly speaking. You know in part of my feelings for you. They will only end with my life. Accept this insurance as well as the profound respect I have, my very good father, Your most humble and obedient servant, Henrietta.

Mende, September 17, 1802

Extracts of letters of the Good Mother, addressed to brothers – priests

Apart from her voluminous correspondence with the superiors of the Sisters of communities, the G.M. has left fairly significant messages with the Brothers.

With Isidore DAVID, superior of the Brothers in Poitiers

Once she left Poitiers, the G.M. established an intense and regular correspondence with Gabriel (Hélène) de la Barre, superior of the Sisters and Father Isidore David, superior of the Brothers. Her letters went from one to another ... What confidence, what friendship between three people! While, the Foundress encourages, she also communicates the affairs of the Congregation, she asks forgiveness for the misunderstandings. It is to these two friends that she opens her heart with incredible ease; she shares with them her joys, her pains and

sorrows, doubts and hopes. This excerpt from a letter from the G.M. to Isidore speaks at length...

“V.S.C.J.

I intended to write to you, sir, and I confess to my shame, that laziness, I think, won on the promise that I made to you to be more exact in the correspondence that we wanted to establish between Mende and Poitiers. Thank you for your attention in writing and I beg you not to rely too much on me, because often, with good will, the general and specific occupations arising from my position do not allow me to fulfill my desires. Of course, I always have things to do which may help reduce the embarrassment, worry, difficulties you may encounter in the state of perfection that you have embraced very courageously that the good God does not give you all the means and all the special graces which you need to reach your goal, which is simply to do his holy will.

I am sorry to hear that you are somewhat sick and I hope that the Blessed Virgin will cure you, I will pray the best I can for this, but, as in the past, I do things so badly that I always fear the good Lord does not respect my prayers. Pray for me, Sir, I have great need of them, because our facility here is no small undertaking; and I have only to be happy for having done it; it seems that everyone is willing to facilitate us and God is protecting it all too visibly so that we should not expect everything ...”

Mende, August 25 1802

With Hilarion LUCAS, the secretary of the Congregation

Many times, the G.M. wrote to Hilarion regarding the affairs of the Congregation: his meetings with bishops, priests, etc..

In these small excerpts, she sympathizes with what little success he obtained in his efforts and mission in the parishes.

"I can not understand your criticism about my silence, Sir: I have written regularly except the last time. I was more than sad; I had a violent headache and could not open my eyes: your letter arrived, and you feel that (even though I had been informed of its contents by the pastor of St. Thomas) it increased my blackness. We should be rejoicing because everything proves that your friend has a distinguished place among the blessed: he will not be in the communion of martyrs...

Take courage, sir, the means of attaining eternal happiness is to have in this world only pain and tribulations. Thank God that he does not spare them, and we love those he uses to make us suffer ...”

Laval, Saturday, November 30, 1805

With Father Hippolyte LAUNAY, Superior in Cahors serving the dual community of Sisters and Brothers.

"... Your letter has greatly distressed us, dear Brother. I wrote so that you may have a good one (a new supervisor after the death of the superior of the Sisters) to run the house, and perhaps another, such as it should. If the first one I named is all right with you, as I hope, you will be all right.

Try not to let discouragement, boredom, grief, put poor Agnes in danger (sick). Be careful with this though ... We are so distressed that it would take little for our Father to decide to dissolve the house. I think it is the last thing to do. Try to keep you spirit up, and you, my dear Brother, have more than courage. May your letters not be so sad because they make us sick at heart. The good God, I hope, will come to our rescue. May He comfort you, sustain you and keep you healthy. Take care of your health and believe in the respectful sentiments with which I have the honour of being, Your most humble and obedient servant, Henriette. "

September 24 1807

Some advice from the Good Mother to the Brothers-priests

In "The Good Mother – Her spirit" by Hilarion of Lucas, we read:

To Father Regis ROUCHOUZE:

"It is at the foot of the cross that good confessors are formed."

"Do not ask for crosses when one is full of fervour because God often takes us at our word." (In 1803).

Hilarion comments:

"This soul so strong that it would have wanted to seize all the crosses of others, advising, however, not to seek crosses, but to submit to those God sends us.

Fr. Philibert VIDON responsible in 1805 for the direction of the Sisters in Le Mans, remembers well the advice of the GM: "*Listen, encourage, console.*"

In conclusion

Finally, I would remind all of us, this extract from the Petition of BP and GM, addressed to Pope Pius VII, October 24, 1814:

"The goal that it (the Congregation) proposes is primarily to recall the four ages of our Divine Saviour ...

The priests of this Congregation teach children the doctrine of faith, liberal arts and the Holy Scriptures, they form young students in ecclesial science. They preach, confess, do missions, with the consent of the bishops ... There are also brothers who are not intended to embrace the ecclesiastical state and under the same laws of obedience, engage in various works in each house.

The Sisters of the Congregation teach young girls free the first elements of faith and art unique to their gender ... "

Bishop Chabot, the Bishop of Mende, undersigned this Petition:

"We know and testify that everything recounted above is true, that this Congregation has been very beneficial to the Church and it will be even more so in the future if Your Holiness, to whom we recommend it with a respectful urgency, deigns to affirm it. "

For over 210 years, the Congregation, spread over 5 continents, continues to be beneficial to the Church by the dedication of its members, and in a special way by our brother priests. In

recent years we have had the joy of seeing recognized in a special way, the life given by our brothers, Saint Damien of Molokai, Blessed Eustaquio in Brazil. In addition, we have the Brothers who were martyred in Paris, in Indonesia, in Spain and so many others, who, in silence, have given their lives for the good of their brothers and sisters, in the places to which they were sent ...

In this same lineage of our ancestors, we continue to give our lives, always and everywhere we support this great mission that Jesus left us in this world that certainly needs to be saved...

I conclude with a word of G.M. to one of her brother-priests:

“WHEN ONE DOES ALL DONE FOR GOD, ONE HAS A LOT OF COURAGE AND MORE STRENGTH!”

Your sister in the SS.CC., Paula Teck

Esteban Gumucio ss.cc.:

Among the Blessed of Jesus

Enrique Moreno Laval ss.cc.



Esteban Gumucio is, without a doubt, the priest of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts who is most well known, most beloved and most influential socially and ecclesially in Chile. Born in Santiago on September 3, 1914, he died in the same city on May 6, 2001, when he was 86 years and 8 months old. For a year he suffered the affects of a tumour of the pancreas, which eventually ended his life. He entered the Congregation in 1932, professed his first vows the following year and was ordained to the priesthood on December 17, 1938

His Years of Priesthood

In his just more than 62 years of priesthood, Esteban did different things. First he worked in the schools of the Congregation in Valparaíso and Santiago, a connection which continued during his years as Provincial (1947-1953). Then he became Novice master in Los Perales (1955-1963). Immediately after that he founded the parish of Saints Peter and Paul in a poor area of south Santiago, where he was pastor for the first 8 years of the parish's existence (1964-1972). He continued living there when he was again named novice master for another 7 years (1977-1983) this time with residence in Santiago and at times in other places such as Concepción (Chile) and Arequipa (Peru). During all that time, he continued being involved in some way in the ministry at SS. Peter and Paul's. In 1986 he was appointed to the parish of Saint Joseph in the city of La Unión, 800 kilometres south of Santiago, where he remained until 1990. During the last ten years of his life (1991-2001) he was once again in Santiago serving in the parishes of SS. Peter and Paul and Damien of Molokai, a new parish created from the former one.

There were two activities that he was involved with along with his other priestly ministry. In 1974 he became advisor to Marriage Encounter and over the course of his life he produced an abundant literary output. The *Fundación Coudrin* of Santiago, has already published 8 volumes of his life and his work.²

The Impact of His Life

Within the SS.CC. community, Esteban Gumucio is considered the father of many generations of brothers, either because he was our formator or because we have felt his constant influence, always warm and close, intelligent and creative, attentive and helpful and

² Under the following titles: *Conversaciones con Esteban Gumucio* (Conversation with Esteban Gumucio), *Poemas* (Poems), *Cartas a Jesús* (Letters to Jesus), *Bienaventurados los Viejos* (Blessed are the Old), *Los tiempos del verbo Amar* (The Times of the Word to Love), *Fijos los ojos en Jesús* (Eyes Fixed on Jesus), *Las manos heridas* (Wounded Hands), *Esteban Gumucio en la memoria de los suyos* (His Own Remember Esteban Gumucio).

above all, rooted firmly in his unconditional love for Jesus and his Gospel. Esteban was a model of brotherhood in community, of fatherly authority when he had to be, of simple poverty, of ready obedience and of chastity developed in celibate love from day to day. He continues to be a reference for each brother and for all those who come to the Congregation.

Those who came to know him through his pastoral ministry also experienced the impact of Esteban's witness as a priest who reflected Jesus' closeness to people, his ability to understand and show compassion and his courage to confront difficult situations that led him to give himself completely to the struggle for human dignity and social justice. There is a key date in the priestly life of Esteban, December 1963 to March 1964.

During that Chilean summer Esteban, according to his own words, did the most "daring" thing in his life. With three young priests he moved into a very poor neighborhood on the periphery of Santiago to begin a mission that the Congregation continues today. As part of what was called the "General Mission of Santiago" at the time, they took the first steps that would eventually result in the creation of a network of communities that today are the parishes of SS. Peter and Paul and Saint Damien of Molokai. For Esteban, living among the people he was serving changed his life. It brought out the best in this man who was a pastor and who journeyed with individuals and communities.

A Model Pastor

When you ask the people who shared the most with Esteban what they remember about his way of being a priest, they say things like: his simple way of being close to you, his affable welcome, his continual availability, his attentive way of listening, his wise counsel, his sensitivity toward the poor, his courage in defending human dignity and his creative preaching that always touched on real life. But what people remember most was his life entirely centered in Jesus.

In his numerous writings that he left as a record of his conferences, retreats, and talks to priests, Father Esteban offered the model of the priest that he always wanted to be and that in great measure he was.. The majority of those texts are published in the book *Fijos los ojos en Jesús – Palabras a sacerdotes*.³ The title, taken from Hebrews (12:2), a text that Esteban loved, reflects what he always wanted to live. With his gaze glued to Him, he learned to see in the faces of so many men and women the very face of Jesus. He acquired a way of seeing reality as Jesus did. He loved the Church as Jesus did. With his eyes fixed on Jesus, he saw the Father of Jesus and he welcomed the Spirit that Jesus gives. Are we all witness of this?

The Service of the Word

Esteban Gumucio had the precious gift of be able to use verbal language well to express what his heart experienced in his face to face encounter with his God and in his daily encounter with others. That was the source of songs like *El peregrino de Emaús*, *La Oración* and *El Ángelus* and so many others which will stand the test of time. At the difficult moment of the military dictatorship in Chile he came up with the emblematic *Cantata de los Derechos Humanos*. And there were all those poems so filled with humanity, so many letters to Jesus, so many writings for children, youth, married couples and old folk. Esteban left many informal writings, written by chance and collected by those who want to preserve and make known his legacy.

³ Ediciones Fundación Coudrin, Santiago de Chile, Diciembre 2008.

Esteban himself said on one occasion, "I do not consider myself an author because I have always been involved with direct pastoral ministry. I really like to write. I am an amateur writer and I have too much respect for real poets and writers to attribute the title undeservedly to myself. My writings are short and occasional, inspired by the life of the people that I have tried to serve as a priest." All of that has done and continues to do so much good.

The Recognition of the Church

The impact of Esteban Gumucio's life on the Chilean Church has been extensive and profound. In spite of the fact that most of his ministry was in Santiago, his person, his writings and songs have affected the life of the Church throughout the country. His involvement in Marriage Encounter, allowed him also to travel to various dioceses in Chile and Latin America where he also left his mark.

In recent years the Archbishop of Santiago, Cardinal Francisco Javier Errázuriz has expressed his great desire that the figure of Father Esteban be recognized officially by the Church as a model of holiness. On his own initiative he proposed that the Chilean province transfer Esteban's body from the mausoleum of the Congregation in the Catholic cemetery in Santiago to the parish church of SS. Peter and Paul that Esteban himself had founded. That took place on September 27, 2008. Before that in a celebration of thanksgiving in honor of Father Esteban on June 24, 2008, the Cardinal said, *"It was always a great joy for me to see how he would speak so clearly of all that Jesus desired of us. On the one hand, you sense that he had the soul of a mystic but he was also deeply committed to his people, a prophet, a fighter, a good Samaritan, a good shepherd. In the end we can say that in some way it was Jesus himself who walked the streets of our city. We could touch in him all the breadth of the beatitudes. It was something extraordinary. In my life, God has given me the grace of knowing many people whom the Church will one day beatify and canonize. It is a grace that not everyone has but that I have had because of my work in Rome. I have an intuition that Father Esteban must one day be included in that gallery."*

The day that his body was transferred, in the presence of 3 or 4 thousand people, the Cardinal ended his homily during the Eucharist saying, *"I finish with these works, aware that there is much more to say and to learn. But we will have time in the days, the mornings and the afternoons ahead, when we stand by Father Esteban's tomb and we remember his presence and his life. Today we come here to place in the earth the seed of a great sewer, hoping that the Lord will make it bear fruit for the good of the Christian people. We do it with the hope and the intuition that today we are in the presence of an authentic blessed. The final word we leave lovingly to God and his beloved Church with the prayer that beginning today we will say in remembering Esteban, If it is your will, Lord, let your Church recognize him among the blessed of Jesus, along with Mary, 'mother of the weary' and all the saints of all time. Amen."*

In October of 2009 the Congregation officially requested the Cardinal Archbishop of Santiago to introduce the cause of beatification and canonization of our brother, Father Esteban Gumucio.

The mission of the SS.CC. Priest in a non Christian world:

Indonesia

Renni Magdalena Nahampun ss.cc.



Indonesia is a country where the majority of the people are Muslim. How do SS.CC. priests accomplish their mission in this country? The call to be a priest is a call to serve the people by creating a better world. Each human being has a mission, is "sent" by God with a specific task. Each disciple is sent, as Jesus was "sent," and our SS.CC. mission, our vocation, is a participation in His mission. Jesus' mission was to do His Father will, to reconcile all people to the Father. Jesus' mission is accomplished not only around the altar, celebrating the Eucharist; it is living the Eucharist 24 hours a day. In a Christian country it is easy to speak openly about Jesus and the Gospel, but how can this be done in a non Christian country? In Bandung, West Java, Indonesia, where all are Muslims, it is even difficult to build a church; special permission is needed from the government.

The Catholic Church in Indonesia is still quite conservative; most priests center their mission mostly on the sacraments. The presence of SS.CC. priest brings diversity to God's mission in a non Christian world. Their mission is to bring the presence of God to our world where there is so much suffering, violence and injustice, to promote the dignity of the human person and the unity of all peoples regardless of their religion. The SS.CC. priests center their mission "in the Eucharist as a source of the Church's mission". The celebration of the Eucharist inspires them to open themselves to others. They introduce various programs in the parish which touch the lives of all people. These programs, organized by parishioners or other informal organizations, make visible the presence of God and bring the Good News to a non Christian World through works that improve the human condition.

In our SS.CC. parish, they started a **health program** by opening a Clinic, **Klinik Gandarusa**, that offers services to all people in the neighborhood, especially to the poor regardless their religion.

Beside this program there are also informal organizations in the parish: **Kelompok Warga Sumber sari Dian Permai** that work to **promote the unity** of the people in the Church's area and among the religions. Among their activities is the distribution of *sembako* (rice, cooking oil, sugar, clothes etc.) at special times, such as Eid ul-Fitr (End of the month of Ramadan for the Muslims), Easter and Christmas. They also attend and celebrate the Muslim's Day of Peace in order to promote unity among the different religions.

There is the group of WKRI: *Wanita Katolik Republik Indonesia* (group of Catholic women) that **promotes a program of good nutrition for the children** under five years old. This

program is called ***Posyandu*** and services the people once a month. And there are many other like activities going on in the parish where our SS.CC. priests are working.

The SS.CC. Sisters support our Brothers in the parish, and they are involved in the different programs besides catechesis. Together the Sisters and Brothers try to spread the SS.CC. mission from the Altar to the Society. We are still in the process of living out fully our SS.CC. mission: To Live, Contemplate and Announce God's Redeeming Love to everybody, regardless of their religion.

At the Heart of Priesthood:

Reflections on SS.CC. Priesthood



Michael Ruddy ss.cc.

A few years ago one of our priests is absent from our annual Mass and barbeque we have to celebrate the *Feast of the Assumption*. Some investigations are made and it is discovered that the priest has chosen to sit with a family by the shores of a lake. Their son and Brother has been drowned, and a major search is underway to locate the body. Our Brother leads the family and neighbours in prayer, prepares and organizes food but most of the time entails just “*being with*” them in their hours of need. Such compassion for those in need is no coincidence, and it is hoped to show in this article that such concern flow from our charism, spirituality and understanding of priesthood.

We are not the only Congregation in the world to have been founded by a Priest. However, given the particular circumstances surrounding the vision in the granary, the place of Eucharist and Adoration, and the relationship and graces that come from our founders, we do view the priesthood through quite unique lenses.

The famous icon of the Trinity by *Rublev*, is a powerful insight into the mystery at the heart of God. If one looks carefully at the chalice in the centre, it contains the head of a sacrificed animal. This reminds us of the sacrificial love at the heart of the Trinity. The cross then, isn’t just something that appears for the first time on Calvary but rather something that defines both God and creation. As Lev Gillet says quite prosaically: ‘*There was a cross in the heart of God, before there was one planted outside Jerusalem.*’⁴ Examples of such dying to bring forth new life, are evident throughout nature and creation, from the most distant star to the demise and growth of individual cells. Jesus describes many such instances, most notably the grain of wheat in John 12:24, chosen as our theme for our last *General Chapter*. In all of the “*I am ..*” statements in John’s Gospel, there is this sense of sacrifice from the light that must be consumed to give off light, to the gate of the sheepfold. In nomadic shepherding cultures like Palestine, the sheep fold did not possess a gate, and the shepherd at night literally laid down in the gap to protect his flock.

In light of this understanding of self-giving love at the heart of the Trinity, we can see that Jesus in setting his face for Jerusalem was not blindly following the dictates of a despotic and blood seeking Father. Rather he was struggling with the growing realisation that his divinity and relationship within the Trinity entailed a further emptying and sacrifice. We can revisit such

⁴ Kallistos, *The Human Person as the Icon of the Trinity*, *Sobornost* 8.2, (1986) 20

passages where Jesus is 'fulfilling' the scriptures and see in them not some blind adherence to the '*Law and the Prophets*' but rather a reinterpretation of scripture in the light of his self-identity. This journey comes to a climax in the *garden* (Biblically a place where lovers meet e.g. *Eden*) of *Gethsemane* (meaning olive press, another food like wheat that has to be crushed to give life) with the sweating of blood prefiguring the blood and water that would flow from the cross: "*the fountain of sacramental life in the Church.*" (*Preface of the Sacred Heart.*) When The Risen Christ says to the disciples on the Road to Emmaus: '*was it not ordained/necessary that the Christ such suffer and so enter into his glory,*' (Luke 24:26) the '*ordained*' can be understood in terms of one consequence of being true to Trinitarian love. For Jesus, following his Father's will (his 'food' John 4:34) was no diminution of his own freedom and dignity, but paradoxically became the way where He (and us) realised his true identity (Mark 15:39.)

The Eucharist as constituted by Jesus at the Last Supper, is inseparably linked to the Pascal Mystery and therefore also to the Trinity. On Holy Thursday, Jesus was quite clear that the Bread he was breaking and the Cup he was sharing was the broken body and the spilled blood of Good Friday. Our participation in the Eucharist therefore becomes a participation in the life of the Trinity. The Gospels struggle to convey the seismic events on Calvary by describing earthquakes, darkened sun and the veil of the temple being torn in two.

The *Pascal Mystery* is where eternity breaks into time in an unprecedented way, giving us access to the Godhead and to self-giving Trinitarian love. The Eucharist then makes present the 'power' (grace, love, Spirit) of the Pascal event that naturally flows when there is submission to self-emptying and self-sacrificing love. The Eucharist then is participation in the sacrifice of the Pascal Mystery; a call and reminder to live such self-sacrificing love and sustenance for our own Christian journey. Through the rhythm of the liturgy that should reflect the movement of divine love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, our own lives are challenged by this love, and with all creation we are caught up in an act of praise and thanksgiving.

When a priest extends his hands during the Eucharist in the form of a cross and when the congregation kneels and then rises, these and other such actions remind us of the suffering, dying and rising celebrated in the Sacrament. As *Sacred Hearts* our history, heritage and charism allows us to identify in a powerful way with Eucharistic self-sacrificing love, thus becoming a potent symbol of that which transfuses all creation. The cross on our intertwining hearts symbol weaving with the flame of love, balances sacrifice and mercy. Speaking at a general audience in *Castel Gandolfo* last summer, Pope Benedict uses a central aspect of our spirituality to remind how "... *a priest must be a witness and apostle of the love of the Heart of Christ and of Mary,*" Concluding his address the pontiff quoted St. John Eudes, who encouraged priests to: "*Give yourselves to Jesus to enter into the immensity of his great Heart, which contains the Heart of his Holy Mother and of all the saints, and to lose yourselves in this abyss of love, of charity, of mercy, of humility, of purity, of patience, of submission and of holiness.*" How uniquely placed we are to draw life and bear fruit from such a meditation.

It is no coincidence that in many of our parishes and in the way SS.CC. priesthood is lived, our parishioners feel a real sense of welcome, family and community. Formed as we are in a balanced love of Jesus and Mary and likewise in the inheritance we have received from our co-founders, some of the more demanding aspects of religion are lived with joy, compassion and a trust in providence. *Religion* (re-ligio, in Latin) literally means the re-tying of ligaments that have been torn, bonds that connect us with others, with our own true self, and with God. We are no

longer lonely and solitary; we belong. Damien of course is the example *par excellence* of one whose priesthood re-tied the broken bodies and souls of his beloved lepers, and it was from the Eucharist he gained the grace to persevere. One of the benefits of such an approach, lies in the emphasis of the priesthood of all the baptised, the three roles of priest, prophet and king given to us at Baptism. Without denying the graces and functions of the ministerial priesthood, our laity can be encouraged and empowered to live their own vocation. The existence and growth of our *Lay Associations* in many provinces can have a crucial part to play in such empowerment.

In John 1:18, in an image that was dear to *the Good Father*, Jesus reminds us that he is “close to the Father’s heart.” Later on in the same Gospel at the last supper, he shares this same closeness with the beloved disciple (and with us) who leans close to Jesus’ heart: (13:23.) Such a posture of “*being with*” and close to the saviour’s heart is faithfully followed through to the foot of the Cross 19:26. It is only this sense can we be missionary: “to **be with him**, and to be sent out to proclaim the message.” (Mark 3:14) In the words of Pope Benedict: “*Priestly ordination means: being immersed in the Truth, that Truth which is not simply a concept or a whole of ideas to transmit and assimilate, but which is the Person of Christ, with which, by which and in which to live... Only this awareness of a Truth made Person in the incarnation of the Son justifies the missionary mandate: ‘Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature’ (Mark 16:15). Only if it is the Truth is it destined to every creature, it is not an imposition of something, but the opening of the heart to that for which it is created.*”⁵ It is such an understanding that makes for a more enlightened understanding of mission, where we don’t impose something new, but enable and empower the realisation of something already present: the “*tender mercy*” (Luke 1:78) at the heart of our God.

Only by being with our people can such “missionary activity” be achieved. Like Damien our hope would be that if others would love the priest they would also come to love God. Such identification continues to happen throughout the Congregation, from inner city parishes in the developed world to remote villages in developing cultures. We may not be the best liturgists in the world nor the best preachers, but by *being with* our people we share something even more precious. Ultimately, it is this God’s people remember and appreciate, like the family at the shore of the lake, waiting for news of their son.

⁵ Homily for the Chrism Mass, April 9, 2009

My experience as an SS.CC. lay person

accompanied by the SS.CC. brothers

Claudia Metz



I will try to resume in these few pages my experience as an SS.CC. lay person accompanied by the brothers of the Congregation.

It is important to begin by telling you what my journey of faith has been and how I came to know the SS.CC. Congregation. I come from a family of Jewish origin. Although my parents were not practicing Jews, they gave me full freedom to choose my own way. That is why at 22 years of age I felt the call of Jesus to look towards Him and to follow his way. A few months later I was baptised and thus began a beautiful journey of growth and drawing near Our Lord, receiving the sacraments of forgiveness, communion, confirmation and marriage.

As part of this journey, I went personally, or together with my husband to see priests from the diocese and different congregations. I began a search for my place within the Church, a place where I could contribute something and be committed in a more personal and ongoing way to the following of Jesus in my life as a lay person.

Until this moment in my life I did not know the congregation of the ss.cc. except for having been present a few times at masses celebrated in the chapel of the SS.CC. school in Manquehue. When we were choosing a school to educate our eldest daughter, we wanted a catholic school, which would give importance to the formation of values and one that was mixed. A couple of blocks from where we lived was the SS.CC. school of Manquehue, which met the requirements that we sought. We did not need to go further than this. There was a special mark and characteristic in some people we knew who had been there.

That is how we came to know one of the works of the congregation, and where we have been for 13 years. The school is in line with the SS.CC. charism, and there is direct accompaniment by the SS.CC. brothers who live in a community near the school. This has been reflected in the formation that our children have received, with the person of Jesus being very present and a very strong social sensitivity. My husband and I began to get involved little by little, first in the ministry involving parents and then actively in activities in the Pastoral Centre where we participate as servers in the Eucharist. Here also I found a place of formation through courses, workshops, and retreats and to celebrate and experience actively faith in community as a big family. All this accompanied always by the brothers of the Congregation, in whom I found much more than priests, but excellent spiritual directors, teachers and friends.

A couple of years ago and with the help of a great friend, Guillermo Rosas, who invited us, my husband and I with other people close to the congregation, we formed a Lay Branch

Community. This was about 3 years ago, and today it is a living community, consisting of 7 people, 4 of whom made their first commitment on December 26 last year. Within the SS.CC. Secular Branch, I feel that I have at last found what for a long time I have been looking for, my place within the Church. Currently I am working in the National co-ordination team, where I am the representative of the Santiago area that today has 2 active communities and 13 committed people. Through the Secular Branch and the different activities I have come to know other SS.CC. brothers, serving in various locations in Santiago and others areas where the SS.CC. are present in Chile. We even had the opportunity to share with and to know the General, Javier Álvarez-Ossorio when he visited Chile a few months ago. Here, too, we have the possibility of meeting and sharing with the branch of sisters, finding in them the same charism, which fits so well with my way of understanding and living faith.

Something that is particularly striking is that, despite the great diversity of personalities and different characters of the brothers, I have come to know some who are very wise, some who are very good friends, some who are very jovial, others who are artists, others who have experienced the Gospel to the extreme, giving their lives for the needy; all have something special that unites them. Listening to their sermons, to their advice, their availability, their closeness, their way of living and celebrating the faith, in all this the SS.CC. charism is manifested strongly, they contemplate, live and proclaim the mercy of God, made flesh in the Sacred Heart Jesus, holding the hand of our Mother Mary. They show a Gospel that is put into practice daily, they are close, friends. They walk and work side by side with us lay people, where each has his/her place, no one is excluded, being clear that we are all Church and have a particular role to play within it, which another brother and friend, Martin Königstein ss.cc., says, the laity are not "mini-monks" or "mini-priests," but people who must show the love and mercy of God through our lives, in the world, in whatever we are doing (work, community, family), the love and mercy of God.

Experiences of the Priestly Ministry

as a Member of the SS.CC. Congregation

Peter Egenolf ss.cc.



A few months ago, in a meeting of priests, we were speaking about Eucharistic concelebration. Some diocesan priests said that they did not like to concelebrate. One even said that he does not allow others to concelebrate. Sometimes there is a theological liturgical basis to such an attitude: there can only be one president of the community acting “in persona Christi capitis” (representing Christ the head), just as there is one Christ who gathers, inspires, teaches and nourishes the Church.

Acting in Community

As an SS.CC. religious I have always participated in concelebrated Eucharists and I also see an important meaning in that: we represent Christ not only as individuals but as brothers. Jesus sent the disciples two by two to proclaim the Reign of God, to heal the sick and to bring peace (cf. Mk. 6:7 and Lk. 10:1). As his witnesses, we are related to one another in order to complement one another and act as a community. This is expressed in concelebration. As religious, we also try to realize that in our daily life, our preaching and our ministry. That is not always as easy as a liturgical rite, with its clear organization. We have to struggle against rivalries and competitiveness, misunderstandings and differences of character. Some like to be the boss; others flee any position of responsibility. However, I believe that the love of Christ that impels us (2 Cor. 5:14) is a love that finds expression in brotherhood.

In my community, we are four priests and we try to share all the different areas of ministry. No one has only his own area but everyone tries to collaborate with the others. In the parish, one is principally responsible but another brother works with him full time and the other two are part time. In the work with the pilgrimages and care for visitors, one is the responsible and the other three collaborate with him. This only works if there is good communication among all and dialogue before making decisions. It requires time and patience. It would be simpler if each one had his own area, his parish or his work, in which he worked alone and of which he was the undisputed boss. The model of shared responsibility is much more complicated and there are always difficulties but perhaps it helps us have a better awareness of our mission, which is to give a common witness.

The Eucharist as Center

Working in community forces us to come together as a community to pray and celebrate the Eucharist. The Eucharist, celebrated in common, and adoration makes us aware that we do not

live and work in this place and this area because we find it beautiful or interesting or because we get along well or because we have common interests. That is not a sufficient basis and we experience that whenever we have conflicts and difficulties. We are here because we have accepted a work in the name of the Congregation, because we know that we are called, brought together and sent by Christ. He is the center of our community and the energy for our work. That is expressed nowhere more clearly than in the Eucharist, we listen together to the Word, we share our concerns, we present our gifts, we allow ourselves to receive his presence and we accept the mission he gives us once more. In that way the Eucharist is the source and summit of our priestly life. (Cf. Const. 5)

A Changing Church

There is another reason that is very important for me. In Germany we live in a changing Church. Communities are getting older and diminishing. Youth and young adults have some spiritual interest but they feel alienated from communal forms and the atmosphere of the parish. As the number of priests is also diminishing, various communities are led by the same priests or they are grouped together in a larger parish. In all the diocese of Germany at present parish structures are being transformed in the direction of forming larger structures.

In such circumstances a priest who seeks his identity as the head of a traditional community has some difficulty. It's what I see among our brothers in the diocesan clergy. They yearn for the older style of community and experience the structural changes underway as a huge burden. They hardly have the energy to go beyond groups and communities considered Catholic, to contact those who do not feel comfortable in the Church. However, it will be more and more important to discover and develop the missionary power of the Gospel. I believe that to the extent that we find our priestly identity in the Eucharist and not in certain forms of ecclesial life, the more we will be able to work as missionary and go beyond usual church settings. I am helped in doing that by my priestly vocation consecrated to the Sacred Hearts.

Society Changing (Umbruch) – People Shattering (Bruch)⁶

Changes in the Church are an expression of much deeper changes going on in society and are part of those societal processes. Demands of the economy and the world of work weigh on families, groups and communities. There are more and more people who experience breakdown and failure in marriage, family and profession. I rarely deal with that in confession because in Germany the sacrament is almost unheard of. But I do hear of it when the mother without husband brings her child to be baptized, when committed collaborators cannot be hired by the Church because they are divorced and remarried, when there is no one present from the family at a funeral, when I visit homes for the elderly or hospitals and I listen to their life stories, when there are children that can hardly participate in church activities because they have to spend some days with their dad and others with their mom, who are separated.

I listen to so many people who suffer because relationships and trust have broken down or they are about to. As a priest at times like that I am challenged to make my own the reparative attitude of Jesus (Const. 4). However often I do not know how to repair and often enough the

⁶ The German author writing in Spanish was not able to reproduce the German play on words in Spanish. No hope of reproducing it in the English translation of the Spanish!

Church offers little help. I see my task as standing with people, accompanying them and putting up with and expressing uncomfortable truths. At times all I can do is witness, by my presence, to the God who listens to the complaints of his people, who sees their misery and knows their suffering (Ex. 3:7) At times I can also point the way to reconciliation, but often I cannot do even that. In those cases, like Moses, I can only trust as and lift up my hands to God, while others had to struggle and suffer. And that is often very tiring (cf. Ex 17:8-13).

To Be with Jesus

Before Jesus sent his disciples, he called them to be with him (Mk. 3:14). That is important for priestly ministry: to be with Jesus, to listen to his Word, to contemplate what he did, to learn not to be served but to serve (Mk 10:45). At the last supper he linked the institution of the Eucharist and the priesthood. The account of the washing of the feet makes clear what must be the attitude of the disciples of the Lord: the attitude of one who serves.

Jesus is not only the Master. The one who teaches is also the model. He is also friend, "*I no longer call you slaves...I have called you friends*" (Jn. 15:15). "*It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you.*" Our witness as priests comes from the certainty that Christ has chosen us, beyond any merit of ours and in spite of all our limitations and faults. When we think of priestly ministry, we often think of all the work we do. But what is most important is not what we do but what Jesus does in us. Priests are not the ones who save the world. Christ saves the world and he saves each priest. The first thing Jesus taught when he washed feet is service, his gift of himself for his friends. The first thing the priest, like Peter, must accept and allow is to be loved by Jesus, to be welcomed and saved by him. Jesus gives himself to the point of death for him. "*Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me.*" (Jn. 13:8)

This intense friendship with Jesus, which Peter experienced with its high and low points, is the foundation which sustains our priestly ministry. For us, priests of the Sacred Hearts, Mary is naturally the one who opens the way toward this relationship with Jesus. Consecrated to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, friendship with Jesus is the center of our vocation and our mission in the service of God's people.

SS.CC. Priestly Ministry in Africa

Thérèse Kabina Nyindu ss.cc.



Thank you for the opportunity offered to me through the invitation to talk about the priestly ministry of our brothers here in Africa. Although I cannot speak for all my sisters, I think they will certainly agree with me on several points. I personally feel proud to belong to a religious family of brothers. It is a grace and gift of God not only for us but for the whole Church and for the world.

Looking at the service our brother priests render, I see there a great help. They are for us and for the people of God, the communicating channel and vessel of the love of God. They are a sign of his presence. I see how our brothers devote themselves diligently to this task of evangelization bringing souls to God by restoring meaning to their lives and giving comfort by preaching, administering sacraments and the various activities related to their priesthood. I think they are real « zealators » of the love of God. We see it in their sermons because they frequently refer to the Word read and meditated on and in particular the desire to retain only the essential. They celebrate the liturgy with enthusiasm, helping the people to give thanks to God for the wonders of creation.

Although they are priests, our brothers are primarily religious. The religious commitment enriches their ministry. The living of the evangelical counsels strengthens their lives. Our brothers are marked by the spirit of our Founders who made of them shepherds of reference for our people, this people who sometimes calls them "ba papa ya molimo" fathers of souls. Their presence in the areas of insertion, with prisoners, with the sick as well as the healthy, who by their simplicity make themselves available to everyone, making them witnesses in the midst of men and women in the service for which they are sent. Some testimonies allow us to say that despite their limitations, they live their ministry with zeal and courage.

However, all SS.CC. priests have as a challenge to animate the people so that they can work for their own development. Today it is difficult to find work as charlatanism is becoming increasingly widespread, and our priests have to ensure that their sheep are more responsive to the social situation of their brothers and sisters and to their environment. Poverty is the greatest challenge with which we are faced: it enslaves our people. The priest is the way out, hence the need for better orientation so that it is not just a question of reaching out. Our brothers in their ministry are best placed to raise people's awareness of the danger that lurks: that of religious prostitution such as the politics that are used for their own purposes.

Moreover, being a priest in our African context, gives them a social status that elevates them above the people they serve. The people, trusting in their pastor, very often follow what he says, sometimes without a critical sense. The latter is sometimes abused by demands made through homilies that humiliate the people or they are talked down to or are treated as people

who know nothing. Sometimes members of the parish council are like "puppets" because the priest believes he knows everything! This situation is the result of their exposure to excessive credulity that the people give them. We all need to watch out for the risk of believing themselves to be above the people they serve, hence the importance of "recharging regularly" to move away from the inefficiency that causes activism.

The Good Father as Priest, an Example for SS.CC.s in Living the Priesthood

José Luis Pérez Castañeda ss.cc.



I want to offer a reflection on the ministry of the Good Father or how his way of living the ministry can serve as inspiration for us who are SS.CC. priests. First I have to say that the “here and now” I refer to is “my here and now.” Even though some situations are universal, the reader will understand that he has to apply this to his own reality. I encourage you to do so.

First, I will look at how Pierre Coudrin saw himself deeply identified with his ministry. His sense of himself developed as his priesthood developed. He did not work as a priest, he *was* a priest. Secondly, we will see how our Founder integrated being a priest with being a religious of the Sacred Hearts. I see that as having repercussions on our discussions and on the direction of our apostolate today. Chronologically speaking, he was a priest before he made the choice for religious life. In conclusion, it would help to ask ourselves what was the Good Father’s intention in becoming a priest and how did that intention translate in his life. That can lead us to examine our own motivations and their consequences.

A Priest of the Heart

One of the most important questions that we human beings ask ourselves is, *Who am I?* We do not answer the question of identity by doing philosophy but by living. At some point in our life we feel the need to throw off the labels and names that others have given us, even those that we are used to and comfortable with, in order to set about the adventure of answering this primordial question. Asking the question means taking ourselves apart, in a sense. It is a question that leads us on paths unknown. As the poet Pedro Salinas said to his beloved, *“Get rid of the dresses/gestures, the portraits/ I don’t love you like that/dressed up like someone else/always the daughter of someone/I love you pure, free/irreducible: you.”* In such simplicity we answer the question of our identity. Paradoxically, it is an outside force that makes it possible for us to authentically answer the question “who am I?” Only God can tell us who we are (Cf. 1 Cor. 13:12). Faith tells us that in Baptism we receive a new identity. We are given a name *“which no one knows except the one who receives it.”* (Rev. 2:17)

That was the Good Father’s frame of mind when he was in the loft of the Motte d’Usseau. After his recent ordination, which he had prepared for and desired for such a long time, political and social circumstances in his homeland caused him to make a voyage to the depths of his

life, to the center of his heart in an improvised cell of only a few meters. Celebration and adoration of the Eucharist and reading church history were the daily fare of the young priest's mystagogic journey. *Who was this young priest? Who was Pierre? Who was he choosing to be? Who did God say he was?* On the feast of Saint Caprasius he found the living answer to those questions, "I am a pastor." Pierre discerned in his priesthood, in offering his life for a people, the best way to explain himself to himself as a human being, as a baptized Christian, as a member of the Church. Coming face to face with himself he also discovered the project that God would give him as a gift (*"I saw then, what we are now."*): a community of men and woman at the service of the Church.

From time to time we hear it said that a vocation is very fragile during the first years of the priesthood. Although we know that identity crises do not respect age and that every once in a while – if not daily - we are called to rethink what we are about in fidelity to the call to priestly ministry. The socio-political circumstances in which the Good Father found himself, his retreat to his inner room, his confrontation with holiness in the Church and especially with the Holiness of Jesus Christ shaped in him a priestly spirituality that was both strong and dynamic. Those who write of the period would tell us of the Good Father, *"He drew from his heart the words his spoke to his faithful."* Pierre could not ignore the need to develop the sense of himself in a deep way and to do that from a profound appreciation of the spirituality of the shepherd who gives his life for the sheep. When I listen to priests speak about priests, I believe that in trying to strengthen our inner selves we encounter some temptations. There is the religious who lives the priesthood as an appendix to his vocation or as something only skin-deep. As a result the priesthood is colorless and not something that gives consistency to one's life. (This is more an affliction of the generation that was around at the time of the Council). And vice-versa, there are priests whose religious vocation is only on the outside, experiencing the same consequences as the previous group. Then there are priests who find themselves by clinging to an identity that is merely external, ministering more to fulfill their own and others expectations, in the midst of the horde of contradictory and superficial messages about life, belief and the ordained ministry (that can be the temptation of my generation). Thanks be to God, there are others who as pastors offer themselves for God's people in complete fidelity to the call of the Good Shepherd. They express their ministry in a way that is integrated with other dimensions of their identity as a believer, as Pierre Coudrin was able to do. We are able to find good examples in every generation. The Good Father reminds us that nothing or no one can take the place of Christ, the priest, as foundation of our identity. The Good Father calls us to find everything in Jesus, including our very selves.

The Spiritual Journey of the Good Father

We have to remember that the Good Father's journey was the inverse of the journey that most of us have taken. It was only after ordination that he heard the call to form a community with a certain charism. For most of us, first we enter the community and *after*, when we have become priests, we do that as those who have already been living religious life. This particularity of Pierre Coudrin makes it easier to answer the question, *how does our SS.CC. identity become part of the ordained ministry?* I believe that is a much more vital question, given the much talked about danger of clericalism and the "parochialization" of our life, than how the priesthood can become part of our SS.CC. charism, which was more problematic at other times.

Perhaps the Good Father can help us to find a way. First, the problem is a problem of our time. The natural way in which Pierre integrated his ministry and his religious life is a pleasant surprise. Possibly he and his community were faced with a reality that helped get beyond that kind of tension. They could get beyond it because they had to answer the very basic question, *to whom are we consecrated in SS.CC. religious life and in the ordained ministry?* The manner in which the Good Father lived his ministry and the way in which the Good Mother practiced Adoration lead me to look at the world and the Church of their time and to see in the response of our Founders, specifically, that of Pierre the priest, the way to integrate the call to religious consecration and the call to priestly consecration. Certainly I believe that his *"I offer my life"* at the foot of the oak tree when he left the Motte, was not a theory or just a good intention. The Good Father, with his life up for grabs, discovered the spiritual resources to sustain his ministry in things as diverse as the hymns of the people of Montbernage, so deeply marked by the theology of the Heart of Jesus and his zealous love for humanity, the group of pious women who secretly kept watch before the Blessed Sacrament, his contact with others, mostly priests, who risked and lost their lives in the service of the Gospel, pressed by the needs of a deteriorating society in need of reparation. All of that was given him in the measure in which he gave his life (in the spirit of the parable of the talents). The Good Father was shaped as an SS.CC. religious as he exercised his ministry with passion. The Holy Spirit impelled Pierre the priest to be an SS.CC., doing that in him as he went about his ministry.

Can the priesthood, lived in love for God's people whose pastors we are, be more than something juxtaposed to our religious vocation or a mere complement to it? Can it be a way to deepen our religious commitment as it was for the Good Father? A priest I know told me that his pastoral ministry, preaching and sanctifying the people of God through the sacraments, helped him have a more personal appreciation of his SS.CC. identity. The words Eucharist, adoration, reparation and zeal, so much a part of our congregation's patrimony, can be given deeper meaning through the sacrament of Holy Orders. When those elements of our vocation are incarnated by SS.CC. brothers who are priests (also SS.CC. bishops), they are a gift for the men and women of our community. If it is true that we run the risk of clericalization and parochialization, it is also true that those tendencies tell us that we are being called to live the ministry as did the Good Father, as a way to grow in knowledge and love of our SS.CC. religious consecration.

To Serve God is to Die for Him

"I became a priest with the intention of suffering everything, of sacrificing myself for God and of dying if necessary in order to serve him." (Good Father) These words reveal Pierre's intention with respect to his priesthood: to serve God. That took concrete form in various ways given the historical context: to suffer, to sacrifice himself and to die. It was very much like what his Master suffered. In this year of the priesthood, perhaps we can be inspired by his intention to serve God and ask ourselves what consequences being a priest of the Sacred Hearts has in our cultural and historical context.

Suffering, sacrificing oneself and dying is a much more everyday reality than seems so at first. For the Good Father two things were very clearly immediate consequences of his ministry. The first was that he had to give his time in service of others. *"In the exercise of my ministry, I*

have the responsibility of directing forty priests, to get some others to retract⁷, to direct more than nine hundred people, without the means to study, and however almost never have I forgotten my principles.” We see that the overload of pastoral work is not just a problem of our time. Looking at the Good Father, we see that perhaps the problem is not the overload but the lack of “principles” and so fatigue and anxiety gives rise to complaining and withdrawal rather than finding reason for giving thanks to God. The second thing that is clear, already contained in the first, is that Pierre knew that a vocation does not bear fruit by studying a lot but by sinking ones roots in prayer. *“He did not have time to prepare before preaching. He just prayed and the Lord inspired him with what he was to say.”* So then we should not prepare homilies! Of course we have to prepare, but we also have to be well aware of the sources of our activity and our preaching. They do not come from ourselves but from what God says to us in the silence of prayer.

Conclusion

I believe that Pierre Coudrin can shed light on our priesthood in our “here and now” in three aspects. First, he invites us to strengthen our priestly identity from that place where we say “I”, our heart. Secondly, he inspires us to live our ministry as a place to know and love ourselves more deeply as SS.CC. religious. Finally, the Good Father encourages us to clarify our real motivations and to identify ourselves with his service to God and his People.

⁷ “Retract” refers to those who had taken the oath of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy.

A Thirty-eight Year relationship with the SS.CC. Fathers:

Witness of Juan Borea Odría – Peru ⁸

Juan Borea Odría

Writing this means looking back over a large part of my life and seeing it from a perspective that would never have occurred to me. I realize there are limits but it is also an opportunity. The main limit is that this is going to be a personal witness, set in Peru and its history these past forty years and so it is not something that can be generalized. At the same time this is an opportunity to speak frankly of what I have been able to share so deeply with SS.CC. priests.⁹ I can also make comparison, as my profession and my life of faith have given me the opportunity to interact with both diocesan and religious priests.¹⁰

I first got to know the Congregation when I was 19. I was studying at the Catholic University and I coached the football team at the school where Héctor¹¹ was chaplain. Without even knowing one another, he came up to me and asked me to help him lead a retreat. And so I arrived at the house that he shared in Calle Ramón Zavala 243 with Gastón Garatea, José Luis González and some brothers in formation. After I got to know various priests who visited the house or whose work we were involved in. The group started to grow as other young people became involved in different ministries. We discussed politics and theology and we started to become a community, without being aware of it. The growth of the group forced the brothers in formation to move to another house. Héctor was alone and I went to live with him. Along with my studies, I began to teach secondary school and was an active member (later national director) of a leftist political party. In 1980 Héctor died of cancer. After his death a group of us decided to continue as a community with the help of José Luis Ramírez, a priest who while older had the youngest spirit and style of anyone I have ever known. Both Héctor and José Luis¹² helped us shape a community that had its own autonomy, was “lay” and not tied to a

⁸ Even though this is a personal witness, the article was revised and added to by Adrián Revilla, a member of the secular branch who has been in relationship with priests of the Congregation for 39 years.

⁹ I have known many SS.CC. priests, but those that I have known better as regards time and experiences shared are: Héctor de Cárdenas, Gastón Garatea, José Luis González, Juan Luis Schuester, Hilario Huanca, Marcos Le Page, Paul Earts, José Luis Ramírez, Hubert Lanssiers, José Serrand, Raúl Pariamachi, Juan Scheepens, Francisco D'Ynglemare, Nicolás Castel, Alberto Chero, Rafael Sánchez Concha, Germán Le Baut, Stanislaw Kasprzak.

¹⁰ I use the term “priest” so as to be understood by readers. Ordinarily I do not use the word but rather “presbyter” or “ordained minister.” I respect how others use the word and I do not want differences over the term to hinder the understanding of this article. But for personal coherence I have to express my position. I do not use the term “priest” for various reasons:

a) In most cultures the “priest” has been understood as an intermediary between God and the common folk and the term has been used to refer to earthly power.

b) In our faith there are no intermediaries, since God became flesh in Jesus Christ.

c) Jesus of Nazareth was in continual confrontation with priests and in the first Christian communities those who presided at the Eucharist were not called priests.

d) Language evolves and priesthood has become identified with “clerical.” Clericalism is a distortion of our Church. It is something we have to be freed from without delay.

¹¹ When I refer to Hector I am speaking of Héctor de Cárdenas SS CC, a Peruvian member of the Congregation who died in 1980.

¹² Gastón Garatea has always been present, who has faithfully accompanied our community.

parish, centered in Jesus and committed to the poor. It continues until the present.¹³ I worked two years in the SS.CC. Colegio Recoleta. In 1984 I founded a private school which is called “Héctor de Cárdenas” to perpetuate the message of the one we consider our “master”. The school known in educational circles as “el Héctor,” has existed now for 27 years. I have been part of what is called the lay branch since its inception and I continue to belong. For the last several years I have been a member of the administrative team of the SS.CC. Colegio Recoleta. This brief overview will help the reader understand the experience I am going to share.

The first thing that I want to highlight is that SS.CC. priests have always looked upon and treated other people as brothers, without showing any sense of superiority derived from their ordination. My relationship and that of other laity with them had been person to person. We have never been made to feel either more or less because we had different vocations or ministries. We have never felt like “sacristans”, employees or anything like that. This goes along with the idea of service that pervades the ordained ministry in the Congregation and the simplicity with which the priests live it. I have never seen the SS.CC.’s brandish their priesthood as an honor or as a claim to privilege but I have seen them use it as a way of being the first to be of service.¹⁴

The SS.CC. priests that I have known have never seemed to be concerned about being on the good side of those with either political or economic power. They are as they are. They say what needs to be said. They do not go after power, even with the excuse of “acquiring it in order to do good.”

As brothers we have lived a brotherhood based in faith and friendship. When you meet an SS.CC. priest you immediately feel something, his concern for how you are doing. A special time for that is when sharing a meal. It does not matter whether the food is abundant or scarce, sharing the meal is almost automatic and the conversation that flows is rich and deep.

Another characteristic is their open mindedness, far from the dogmatism that unfortunately characterizes many clerics. When we do not agree on an idea, we discuss it at length and with intensity always seeking the truth. Very few times have I noted any narrowness and when I have seen it , it has been more a personal characteristic than a distorted sense of their ministry. Life and concrete reality are reference points in the world view of SS.CC. priests. They are references just as important as doctrine. When there is a conflict between life and doctrine, they always put life first. I do not mean by that they that are heretical or lax in their moral guidance but I do think that they take as a starting point the teaching of Jesus, “the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.” This is important for personalities that are more solid but it does not appeal to those who look for dogmatic answers that will offer them the security that they lack.¹⁵

Their manner of administering the sacraments is also something characteristic. While they respect the norms (which our church really needs to review) they fulfill them with openness to

¹³ More information on these two giants of the faith can be found in two books: *Desde la Vida* and *El Vigilante*.

¹⁴ This includes the two SS.CC. bishops that I have known (Metzinger and Dalle) who were very far from the stereotypical bishop that we see in our Church.

¹⁵ In our day, congregations and groups who offer the security of dogmatism usually have more followers than those who promote the “freedom of the children of God” as criterion for moral choice.

signs which express the feelings of the people. They promote the responsible participation of the community in the liturgy. When they preside at the Eucharist or at a marriage, the liturgy becomes a celebration and not just a repetitive rite. I have been celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation with SS.CC. priests for the last 38 years. I have always felt that I was confessing to Jesus. When you go to confession, they welcome you listen to you, make you understand your human weakness and give you some direction for moving forward.

From the outside there is one thing that I notice and I am going to take the risk of saying it. They struggle with community life. Perhaps because of the burden of pastoral ministry and being used to a lot of autonomy, they find sharing in community to be difficult. Many times they do not give sufficient time for it. They give priority to other groups that are more politically, socially or ecclesially attractive or they live community in a certain tension. I understand that living together can be difficult but I believe that is something that they could work on.

Another characteristic is their resistance to proselytism. Some would consider that a virtue and others a defect. Distinct from other congregations they are not usually frantic about incorporating members into their ranks. When you get to know them you do not feel that there is a hook behind what they are saying. That creates a deeper trust.

Lastly, I would like to say that when I am with SS.CC. priests, I feel like I am with normal people, flesh and bone, who bear their own crosses and weaknesses, but who also know joy, love life and are able to make their own choices. There is nothing affected about them or any false sense of dignity afforded by "the cassock," nor do they try to appear perfect. I feel like I am sharing with Christians who have chosen to live a religious vocation and an ordained ministry, without denying the human condition.

And then there comes the question that I often ask myself and that I imagine many of my religious friends must also ask themselves. Why if they are so human and so close to Jesus, is their vocation not more attractive to the young? Why are there less and less candidates to take the place of those who are dying? I think it is the time not only for the congregation but also the whole church to rethink the religious life and the ordained ministry in terms of the Gospel and the signs of the times. From that reflection perhaps new, creative and provocative possibilities will arise that will renew our outlook and indicate new directions.

Fr. Mateo's Understanding of Priesthood

Jan Forma ss.cc.

To reflect on the priesthood as a gift and a vocation in the lives of those who have gone before us is a valuable undertaking, as it is a way of writing an illustrious history of our Congregation. This also has value for those of us who have received a call to priesthood and for those who are served by this gift of God's heart.

I have been asked to reflect on the priesthood of Father Mateo, who died just one year before I was born. I will consult his writings to draw a picture, admittedly incomplete, of someone who added to the glory of our Congregation but who unfortunately is often forgotten and whose writings gather dust on our bookshelves.

Through his life and in his proclamation of God's word, we see that Fr. Mateo understood the priesthood as an unambiguous call and a call to holiness. He wrote about this in his reflections for priests¹⁶, noting that "the one called to be a priest, is called to holiness. The words 'Christ' and 'holy' are synonymous, and a priest is the true Christ."

Hence we see that Fr. Mateo had a great and even a holy respect for the priesthood, which he saw as an intimate invitation to participate in the life and mission of Christ. In his understanding a priest was, after Mary, a divine masterpiece of grace, magnitude and power. This means that the priest must have a transforming and absorbing love for God, which results in a priest's hunger and love for prayer, understood as a personal encounter with the beloved God. A priest has to constantly seek holiness through his experience of being loved by God and trying to return that love.

Therefore, Fr. Mateo would say that "our call to priesthood is to love, because we have to be holy and Apostles." Saying this, however, Fr. Mateo makes a very important distinction. He draws our attention to see, that "one thing is 'to believe', and another, completely different is 'to love.'" "We cannot love without believing, but unfortunately we can believe without loving. Faith is a supernatural light: love is a gift of the heart, of the will." Being a priest, means loving with an immense love, what one believes with proven faith. Following this line of thought, Fr. Mateo saw the priest as a person who loves Christ passionately.

Reading the countless testimonies that came in from all over the world to the General Secretariat of the Enthronement, it is not difficult to see that the life and activity of Fr. Mateo, especially after his experience of Paray-le-Monial, were characterized by an existential experience of love. God touched him with his love in order to send him forth to give unceasing witness to that love and to call others to accept the One, whom he himself had discovered as the true King of Love.

¹⁶ Fr. Mateo, *Viens... Suis-Moi !*, Rex Amoris (38)1959, Nr. 1, pp.11-17.

In this growth toward holiness of life, the period of preparation is undoubtedly very important. Speaking of priestly formation, Fr. Mateo wrote: you can sum it up in five points: solid piety — humility in any situation - spirit of mortification – an angelic purity – and an absorbing zeal. In this he is echoing St. Clement, when he said that a priest is '*terrenus deus*' - a kind of earthly God, an intermediary between God and humans.¹⁷

Whilst addressing Japanese Seminarians¹⁸, Fr. Mateo shared with them his experience of priesthood. He gave a profile of a priest in these words, "He not only is the speaker, who utters the sacred words, but above all he is a 'man of prayer.'" These words of Fr. Mateo find their fulfillment in his own life. He was a man of prayer and preaching. Speaking about the qualities that should mark the life of a priest, he is clear that the priest has to be educated, diligent, persevering, and pious. He has to have a deep love for prayer, always being simple and avoiding eccentricity. Further, the priest should radiate joy, be grateful for God's gifts, disciplined, open, and athirst for wise counsel. The priest in his relationship with God demonstrates nobleness and gentleness.

For Fr. Mateo¹⁹, living daily the gift of priesthood obliged him to cultivate a deep spiritual life, nourished by prayer, by the spirit and love of prayer as well as by a regular use of sacrament of reconciliation. This deep inner life was the foundation of his zeal and holiness. He always emphasized the importance of prayer, meaning not the mere recitation of prayers, but a God-given taste for prayer, feeling the need for prayer, until it became like a second supernatural nature. Fr. Mateo stressed that activity without deep prayer is simply a 'sounding cymbal' and may even be a great danger for a priest and for those who were entrusted to his care. Further, in his *Retreats for Priests*²⁰, he states that by praying a priest is immersed in the endless abyss of God's Heart and he and his priestly life are renewed. The priest must really become a man of the "great prayer." His prayer will be characterized by great ease and confidence.

The priest must also be a man of profound humility²¹. This humility will bear fruits of inner peace. Humility of spirit and heart is indispensable in the spiritual life of a priest.

As other virtues needed by a priest, Fr. Mateo names love of sacrifice, a priest as a friend of Christ must love the cross, and confidence, a spontaneous enthusiastic response of the priestly heart toward Jesus. Indeed, confidence is a proof of a priestly ministry exercised in love. Love and confidence are synonyms in a priest's relationship with God; love is measured by confidence. This gave birth to that amazing zeal that was so evident in Fr. Mateo's life. Experiencing God's love, he was burning with zeal to conquer the whole world for the reign of the God's heart. We cannot forget his filial devotion to Mary and his trust in her especially in the mystery of her Immaculate Heart. In many of his conferences and in his life, Fr. Mateo witnessed to the necessity of a healthy Marian piety always based on sound doctrine and love for the Blessed Trinity. Such solid piety then allows and helps the priest to feel with the Church – '*sentire cum Ecclesia*'.²²

¹⁷ Fr. Mateo, *Viens... Suis-Moi !*, Rex Amoris (38) 1959, Nr. 3, pp.76-80

¹⁸ Fr. Mateo, *To the Japanese Seminarians*, Manuscript, General Archives of the Enthronement, Rome

¹⁹ Ibid., p.7ff; Fr. Mateo, *In the Footsteps of Francis Xavier*, in: Writings, 1943 or 1942, Gen.Arch.65-31, p.2

²⁰ Fr. Mateo, *Retreats for Priests*, Rome 1956

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

Without any doubt, the source of Fr. Mateo's holiness and fruitful ministry was the Eucharist. He used to say that the way the Eucharist is celebrated tells us about the priest who celebrates it. He writes about this in the *Retreats for Priests* and strongly accentuates it in his *Hymn of Glory for the Holy Trinity*,²³ where he praised the majesty of the Holy Mass. In his understanding, the priesthood begins and ends at the Altar. The Mass has a particular meaning in the priestly vocation. In a sense, the priest is the Mass. Only at the altar can he be fully a priest.

Whilst addressing seminarians, he used to say: "before you will be priests for people and for their salvation you will be priests for the glory of Holy Trinity.". Thus, celebration of the Eucharist is the highest and noblest glory of the priest. Holy Mass is also contains grace upon grace for the sanctification of the priest himself. There the priest also learns the meaning and the immense power of accepting suffering. In the truest sense, after the Eucharist suffering has true apostolic omnipotence.

Fr. Mateo understood his priestly life and ministry in terms of total service for the Kingdom of God's Heart. For him, to be a priest meant becoming a servant of God's mercy, like Christ himself bending down over human weakness and insufficiency. The priest is also a mediator of God's preference for the poor, sick, abandoned and rejected.

Fr. Mateo was a priest of God's Heart. He dedicated his whole priestly life to spreading the glory of the Sacred Heart and establishing its universal reign in human hearts. There he saw the true source for his own and others sanctification. The fruitfulness of his world-wide ministry was drawn from the depths of God's Heart.²⁴ He deeply believed that holiness is the only apostolate and that he had a responsibility for that. To be holy is possible at any stage of life and in any circumstance. He spoke quite often about a great desire for holiness as a very effective means of sanctification. The spiritual fruitfulness of Fr. Mateo stemmed from his love for prayer, from his soul brimful with faith, his heart full of apostolic zeal, and from his deep spiritual life, which was rooted in God through prayer.

In conclusion we can say that Fr. Mateo's priestly life was based on a solid and deeply spiritual life, a life of faith and prayer. This allowed him to discover the greatest Mystery with its richness: *till the end I have loved you... Take and eat... take and drink... It is I... until the end of the world*. Miraculously healed by the touch of God's love, he knew no rest in his preaching ministry. Only one thought and desire dwelt in his heart: that the whole world will know Him, the King of Love. In this way this man, who for Christ, the King of Love, wanted to conquer all human hearts was formed in holiness. Was this holiness was only valid for Mateo's time? Is the message of his life no longer relevant? Father Mateo was a priest-religious in the service of the Sacred Hearts.

²³ Fr. Mateo, *Hymn of Glory for the Holy Trinity*.

²⁴ Fr. Mateo, *Retreats for Priests*, Rome 1956

How is priesthood seen from the different cultures?



Inés Gil Antuñano Vizcaino ss.cc.

I sit down to write about my vision of the ordained ministry in Asia, but I first need to clarify that my vision is surely conditioned by who I am, a 38 year old woman, brought up and educated in the post Vatican II council; and from where I come from, Spain, a lay society and a Church that has lost its social relevance. I have spent the past 8 years in the Philippines in Manila. During my years of formation I learnt that the ordained ministry within the Church is a service in the communion of the People of God, where there are many and varied ministries, all of them with the same value and importance. I also learnt that we are all priests through the baptism and that this priestly function consists in the transformation of the reality, each one from the place where s/he stands in the society and the Church. The ordained priest through the sacrament of order, in the Body of Christ that is the Church, through the sacraments is a channel of the Grace, the life of God that transforms the world; but all of us are channels of the same Grace and we are called to transform the reality through other many sacraments of life. In the Congregation I also learnt from my brothers about closeness and humanity, to be just one more among many others like Jesus, my brothers that are ordained priests and become part of the people, channels of mercy and compassion, sometimes coated as a priests and/or more often just in the relationships, in the listening, in the daily work, in the options, or even simply in the presence among the little ones.

Arriving in Asia, and more concretely in the Philippines meant for me the need to open myself to a new concept of who the priest is and his role in the community, a new way I was not familiar with and that many times I dislike. Philippines is a society with deep catholic roots, and even though the percentage of Sunday practice is early the same as in Spain, because of the population, the catholics are many more and more influential. It is a very structured and hierarchical Church and society. I feel the christian community has a tendency to consider the priest as the only and primary representative of Christ, identified necessarily with a male, with more authority because he is "father" and that needs to receive honour and recognition, and a kind of respect different to the other members of the community. The priest is cared for and flattered, as a figure of power and decision, as separated, different and special. The priest in the role of preacher, in the filipino society, has to be an expert in entertainment, he is expected to be interesting and funny with animation qualities. The content being important for some, in many cases falls into a second position and what is remembered are the jokes told during the homily. Much in the christian community is expected and referred to the priest, he is excemted from other civic duties, he needs to live in superior conditions to the rest of the people in order to keep the "priestly" dignity. Because of his role, his word and counsel are searched for and he is put as judge in situations in which, because of lack of experience, his word can be at times out of context. But he is also in relation with many people and many of them influential, the priest becomes a center of help and benefits that he often channels towards the poor.

I often miss in my reality in Manila, the priest that works in something different that administering sacraments, that speaks less and shows more through the actions of the kingdom of God. The priest that renounces to privileges, even though around him people wish to offer them or even impose them on him. I am missing the priest that knows how to accompany process of faith growth with vision and projects, more than the priest that “says” many masses. I am missing the priest that identifies himself with the people of God, feels a brother especially of the poorest and identifies with them and their suffering, committed to the transformation of the reality. I am missing the christian community that recognizes Christ not primarily in the priest but simply in each human being, especially in the suffering one.

More concretely, in the Congregation I wish to find more brothers, many of whom are also ordained, but that identify themselves primarily as religious of the Sacred Hearts not as priests. In Asia, for the first time in my short life in the Congregation I heard speak of three groups of religious: priests, brothers and sisters. And we often continue to identify ourselves in this way, losing, in my perspective the inspiration of Jesus that did not belong to any estate and considered all equal independent of their role or function.

In my asian brothers I value their humanity, closeness and their capacity to connect with the life of the people, with their suffering; their desire to serve, and their work often tireless for the christian community. In the countries where christians are a minority, mainly in India and Indonesia, our brothers have shown, in many occasions the value to stand for and strive for communion and reconciliation, in situations of persecution and conflict. On the other hand I feel that the clericalism and patriarcalism, inborn in the Asian Church, bring our brothers sometimes to take a more defensive position towards their estate and a less free and open position to search. I feel the christian community, taught since long ago, puts them higher than others in a position of privilege and power. I feel in some the fear to be different, to break with expectations and stereotypes being first religious and then priests and priests with the Gospel of Jesus as their first rule. Finally I feel that their institutional ties hold them to take the risk to become more audacious in responding to the reality and encourages them to comply more with what is expected from them. In any case I continue to believe in our journey together as brothers and sisters, trying to put more emphasis in the mission and communion among us, and this is worth while.

The Priestly Ministry in a Non-Christian Environment

like Japan

Nelson S. de Souza, ss.cc.



Known as “the land of the Rising Sun” in the great continent of Asia, Japan is one of the richest and most technologically advanced countries of the world. The Japanese are listed among the populations who read the most and who spend most time working. However they might also be the most agnostic nation; even though they have the traditions of Buddhism and Shinto.

I have been living here in Japan for a little over two years and have had the opportunity to experience what it means to be part of a religious group that is a minority. That is the reality of a Christian living in a country such as this.

The religious history of Japan is a long process of one religious tradition influencing another. That contrasts with what happened in other places, where Christianity took the place of the local traditions, which then were considered pagan.

The native religion of Japan is Shinto. It has its roots in the animism of the ancient Japanese and eventually became a religious system with local shrines to different families of gods and protectors. Shinto has preserved its spirit over the years but has no recognized founder, nor scriptures nor official doctrine.

Of Chinese origin, Shinto recognizes a sacred power, the “kami”, whose nature cannot be explained in words. However it is possible to encounter it in the natural world in the form of sun, moon, storm and many other natural phenomena. The spirits of the ancestors are also considered gods, who protect the family or country. That explains why funeral rites have such importance.

Buddhism was born around 500BC and came to Japan from Korea in the sixth century, through information passed from the King of the Kudara (Koreas) to the sovereign of Mara. He told him of Buddhism and its principles and he requested help in his struggle with the neighboring king of Silla. In the process of transmission, he sent a group of educated Buddhist monks, who brought to Japan various scrolls of sacred scriptures written in Chinese, an image of the Buddha in bronze and others in wood and various other objects of worship. And so Buddhism officially entered Japan.

However, conversion to the new faith was not universal or quick. Only a few local clans adhered to Buddhism, others were strongly opposed and so two parties formed. There began a series of disputes, which led to the weakening of a country that had already been affected by

internal struggles between clans. The struggle only ended in 587 when the Court converted to Buddhism. The major driving force in the conversion was the son of the emperor Yomei, Shotoku Taishi, who recommended the veneration of Buddha in his constitution. And so the construction of temples to house the image of Buddha proliferated. Over time, there was mass conversion to the new Japanese religion, Different sects sprung up, especially in Nara toward the beginning of the seventh century.

Buddhism teaches that illumination is the destiny of all creatures. One day, all will reach the goal. The doctrine is based in the “the path of the mean”, the seeking of moderation in all that one does.

Confucianism and Taoism are other religions that have come to Japan and have played an important role in Japanese society over more than two thousand years. Introduced in Japan in the sixth century, Confucianism had a great impact on the thought and behavior of the Japanese, but its influence waned after the Second World War. The Japanese recognize Confucianism as a code of moral precepts more than as a religion.

Christianity came to Japan through the Jesuit missionary Saint Francis Xavier in 1549. It spread rapidly in the second half of that century, a period of wars and inner upheaval. It was well received by those who needed new spiritual symbols, as well as by those who wanted contacts with the west for commercial reasons or who were seeking new technology, especially fire arms. However after the unification of the country at the end of the sixteenth century, the authorities wanted to eliminate the possibility of further change and Christianity was prohibited because it was seen to be a religion that subverted the established order. It remained prohibited until the mid nineteenth century, when Japan opened its doors to the world. It is believed that some 30,000 Japanese suffered for their faith during that period. Last year, the Church beatified 188 martyrs, mostly laity, who were tortured to death.

According to recent statistics on religious identification in Japan, Shinto has 51.3%, Buddhism 38.3%, Christianity 1.2% and other religions 9.2%. Among Japanese Christians, at present Protestants outnumber Catholics.

In spite of the great numeric difference, it can be said that there is peaceful coexistence between the different religions. The Japanese Constitution, which speaks of religious liberty for all, guarantees it. Article 20 states that, “No religious organization will receive privileges from the State nor exercise political authority. No one will be obliged to take part in religious acts, celebrations, rites or practices of any kind. The State and its organism will abstain from intervening in religious education and any other activity of that kind.”

The Congregation of the Sacred Hearts has an active presence in various cities of Ibaraki prefecture, where there are different faith communities. We are a small presence of witnesses that proclaims the Gospel through parish work, care for children (nursery school/school) and groups of evangelization. Even though we are few, there is good participation of the Japanese and people of other nationalities. I believe that little by little the prejudice that Christianity is a foreign religion is falling away as its more positive aspects seem to attract people.

Our mission on this large continent is an enormous challenge. To proclaim that Jesus Christ is the center is key to evangelization in a society full of gods and superstitions. Here in Asia that

proclamation involves first, giving witness to the fundamental values of the Reign of God. It is a proclamation done by one's conduct and Christian witness. Proclaiming the Gospel basically means having an attitude of respect toward other beliefs, acting with the power of grace.

Even though I am here just a short time, I can see that there is a great field for evangelization in Japan. Being a minority just serves to remind us that the harvest is great and what we have to do here is "the work of God."

The Present Dark Night of the Church

as an Opportunity for Redemption

Arley Guarín Sosa ss.cc.



*“The joy of our hearts has ceased,
our dance has turned into mourning;
The garlands have fallen from our heads:
Woe to us, for we have sinned!
That Mount Zion should be desolate
with jackals roaming there.
You, O Lord, are enthroned forever;
Your throne stands from age to age.”
(Lam, 5, 15 -16.18-19)*

In this year of the priest I have been asked to write something about the challenges that we face as SS.CC. religious in the exercise of the priestly ministry in our world today. I minister in a country “consecrated to the Heart of Jesus” that has suffered armed conflict for some 60 years. The conflict has left thousands dead and the countryside devastated. There is an ever increasing distance between the rich and the poor, political corruption that permeates the structures of government and polarization created by illegal armed groups such as the paramilitary and the guerillas.

Ecclesially, among the countries of Latin America, Colombia is one of the most conservative or stagnant with respect to evangelization. This conservatism is seen primarily in a form of clericalism that considers the laity as minors who are only to be given orders to be carried out. It is also seen in ministry focused in the buying and selling of the sacraments, which occupies the greater part of the minister’s time. To this rather discouraging picture we have to add the scandal of child abuse in the church and the intentional cover-up of those crimes. We are going through a period when the church is losing prestige in society. It is a time of pastoral diaspora and personal fragmentation. And all of that is proper to post-modernity. This situation challenges our way of being religious today. In this context I ask myself, what are the main challenges that religious of the Sacred Hearts face in exercising the ministry today?

To accept the eviction of God

To put it very simply, in some countries believing in God is seen as something bad. As De Lubac said, “the predominant culture is characterized by leaving God ‘respectfully to the side.’” In some contexts it’s not done too respectfully. One form is laicism that violently rejects any religious expression quite independently of the group professing it. There are also some attitudes, we could call them existential, that lead to the fragmentation of human life. We have a culture that promotes sexual liberation understood as the dissociation between sexual expression and love; sexual relations are divorced from commitment. Hand in hand with that

there is a pervading eroticism that is not only aimed at stimulating the sexual drive but also concentrates a large part of psychic energy around the sex drive thereby diminishing one's social potential and concern for the other. We have gone from rigorism and taboo to permissiveness that places no limits on desire. Thinking of God in such a context is even more complex because the conditions that make that possible are progressively weakened.

This situation has repercussions in the life of a priest in different ways. One is that he gets used to "double meaning" language as a form of humor within the community or in informal conversation. Or he comes to believe that celibate chastity is something bad or impossible to live and so some brothers who are priests leave the Congregation because "they found that they have a vocation to marriage." And then there is another group of brothers who, in spite of the aggressive message coming from society, live celibacy generously. They have been able to establish a solid spirituality that enables them to center their life on the search for God while serving others. As Jon Sobrino says, "*One cannot be celibate without living the ministry passionately.*" Pedro Casaldáliga adds, "*It will be an armed struggle for the Kingdom.*"

Another consequence of the eviction of God from postmodern society is increasing individualism. One of the achievements of modernity was the autonomy of the subject. A human being is not a number. He is a being of unrepeatable singularity. As Viktor Frankel stated, "*With each child that is born, there arises in the world a new being.*" This indivisibility of the person has been recovered and that is an important realization. However a danger that we have to face is going from the recognition and appreciation of the individuality of the person to the idolatry of the individual. The subject then becomes self-centered, incapable of going out of himself and recognizing the other and the Other. He rejects everything that is not of value to him, not useful to him, not to his liking and not in keeping with his sense of what is good and beautiful. The individualism from which we suffer today comes from the human being who killed the Father in order to seek his freedom and now finds himself suffering from a loneliness that is consuming him. A society without fathers that has infinite electronic possibilities is incapable of communicating, relating and forming community.

And so given all this we have to ask ourselves, how do we come to terms with this eviction of God and its consequences in everyday life?

Journey to the center: "*He dismissed the crowds. After doing so, he went up the mountain by himself to pray.*"(Mt. 14: 2-23). Given the context in which the Church finds herself at present, the worse thing we could do would be to become depressed or gloomy. Essential to redemption is accepting the world's poverty and our own poverty and seeing there the possibilities of God that are deeper than our own. To do that it is necessary to go within because our inner space, which we call the deep I, the heart or the soul, is the most universal. It is the sacred place par excellence where we can once again "see God." It is there that he speaks, where everything is realized, where poetry arises in the midst of tragedy. It is there that the song is sung in the midst of the ruins and it is possible to listen. "*That Mount Zion should be desolate with jackals roaming there. You, O Lord, are enthroned forever; Your throne stands from age to age.*" These words of the Book of Lamentation are profoundly beautiful. They proclaim that, in the final analysis, God is more than the temple, more than Mount Zion, more than Jerusalem, more than any earthly reign because all of that can collapse, all of that can end, but there is something that lasts: God reigns. (An aunt who was a religious said to me, "*Everything falls apart sooner or later but there is one that never fails and it is He that you have to seek.*" She said that to me as she was dying of cancer. It was the moment that I sensed a vocation to the religious life.) Israel is experiencing a deep rupture and it is then that it has the possibility of returning to its deepest center and discovering there its destiny in the world.

If the priest today does not go up to the mountain after the multitudes leave, his life will crumble. He will be incapable of discovering that, in spite of the desolation of the mountain, God reveals his transcendence. If he does journey to the center and on the street someone shouts at him “pedophile priests,” he will be able to peacefully respond, “and...yet the Lord reigns.” In spite of the atrocities of some clerics God continues to be life’s redemptive hope. If he goes to the center he will be able to respond to entrenched secularism that our loneliness has been conquered because we are seeking the One whom we have “etched in our hearts,” as the Spanish mystic sings. That is where our deepest truth is revealed, in accepting fragility without evasion and it is there that we taste the mystery that goes beyond us.

To be passionate for wounded humanity

When we speak of the crisis in religious life, naturally we bring up the statistics. For example, we say that religious are getting fewer and older. The young who enter are much fewer than those dying. However we usually do not speak about how religious life has adapted itself to the prevailing system, to the way the neoliberal system functions.

Let me mention just one example. No one raises a question about religious being responsible for the formation of the great economic elites who are the big business leaders in our countries. In Colombia, for example, the most corrupt presidents have been educated by religious. In other words religious are giving themselves to the formation of the higher classes of the large cities of the world. We accommodate ourselves to an unjust system where education and health are merchandise of varying quality. The better is for the rich. Can it be that religious cease being on the margins of society and go to live with and as the privileged elite?

In the description of the crisis in religious life there is usually greater concern and worry about the problems of institutes and their interior organization than about the real dramas of the human family.

This is I believe the principal challenge for the religious priest today. What should keep us up at night, what should occupy our energy, intelligence and possessions is the suffering, the hunger, the nakedness, the death before its time, the kidnapping and the loneliness of so many human beings who live on the periphery of our world. Many of our brothers and sisters struggle between life and death and have no one to embrace them, to support them and to bless them when life takes them to the limit. Our great challenge is to take a fresh look at what we consider important. In other words, the religious should not be recognized by his clothing, by the social class of which he is a part, by the power to command or direct that he has in his institute or by the possessions of the Congregation that he has to administer “conscious of the religious vow of obedience,” but by his profound humanity.

Think of sharing with someone, even if only for a few moments, and he discovers in us something that he cannot explain but that makes his heart burn like the disciples of Emmaus. When that happens, the religious life overcomes its crisis and becomes a proclamation of the Gospel. At a time like that the religious life is like a liberating force, a call to renewal, a source of dreaming and new creation and also a source of restlessness, something that raises questions.

What has happened in recent months in the Church, has been good for us in a way because it shows that in everyday life religious experience the same tensions, contradictions and injustices as anyone. This heals us because it places us in a position inferior to the successful institutions of the world of business. Accepting this poverty means recognizing that

in the depth of the dark night appears a redeeming light that enlightens us. The mystery continues to be bigger than us, even if it is a mystery of night. In our sickness is our cure. To get into it, to accept it and to get a glimpse of the Mystery that appears, that is our great challenge in the present crisis that we are experiencing in the church and the world.

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