

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

THE OFFICIAL INTERDIOCESAN BULLETIN

Vol. LXXX, No. 840

January-February 2004



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(PART I)

John Paul II

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS

The Official Interdiocesan Bulletin

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BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS, the Official Interdiocesan Organ, is published bi-monthly by the University of Santo Tomas and is printed at UST Publishing House, Manila, Philippines. Entered as Second Class Mail Matter at the Manila Post Office on June 21, 1946 and Re-entered at the UST Post Office on October 23, 1996.

Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned. They will, however, be given courteous and scholarly attention. Writers are reminded that the scope of this review is ecclesiastical and broadly archival. While we wish to inform the whole Church, our readership is largely clerical and this should be borne in mind by prospective contributors. Articles herein published do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Editorial Staff. Communications of an editorial nature concerning articles, cases and review should be addressed to the Editor.

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Subscription Rates (Effective January 2003)

	<i>One Year</i>	<i>Per Copy</i>
Philippines	P600.00	P100.00
Foreign: (via Air Mail)	US\$50.00	\$15.00

Subscriptions are paid in advance. In the Philippines, payments should be made by postal order, telegraphic transfer or check with regional bank clearing only. All check and postal money order payments should be payable to UST Boletin Eclesiastico. Orders for renewal or change of address should include both old and new addresses, and go into effect fifteen days after notification.

Address all communications to:

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS

Ecclesiastical Publications Office

University of Santo Tomas

Espana Blvd., Manila 1008 Philippines

Tel. No.: (63-2) 731-3101 local 8251 Telefax: (63-2) 740-9710

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Contextualized Theology: Sources and Perspectives

VICENTE CAJILIG, OP

Last December 2003 a Consultation meeting at the Center for Contextualized Theology and Ethics (CTE), Thomas Aquinas Research Complex was held. Delegates from Japan, Nigeria, U.S.A., Australia, Germany, Rome, New Zealand, India and Philippines, a total of 9 countries attended. A summary of the said meeting is hereby published in a form of memory:

As we proceed deeper into our communal reflection, we have come to realize that the subject matter *contextualized theology* eludes single definition. Our communal discourse is characterized by its wandering and wondering attitude in search of meaning. Contextual theology is not getting any closer to a "clear and distinct" meaning to borrow the words of Rene Descartes.

At best, this communal reflection has become a discourse of who we are, what our ordinary and extraordinary expe-

riences are. In essence, it becomes a search of the presence (or the absence) of God in our socio-cultural and economic life. It is in this landscape that the discourse has provided us images, or, in the words of Peter Berger, "signals of transcendence" of what contextual theologies are.

In our search for the presence (or absence) of God, we have come face to face with, acknowledge and appreciate the realities of ourselves, our society and the world at large. These realities are so unique to one another that we should prefer talking about theologies in the plural rather than in the singular.

In a sense, the search therefore is not contextualizing theology as if theology matters more than life. Rather, the path of proceeding deeper is "how to do theology in context?" Within this light, the fundamental challenge is the Dominican spirituality. In the words of Fr. Chrys McVey, OP: "The proper context for a Dominican is living this tension, being tormented like Dominic, about what will happen to others," and if we may add, about what is actually happening to others.

Doing theology in context is to eternally live this tension, to forever open our hearts and minds to the presence (or absence) of God to the ever growing and fleeting facets of human experiences, in the light of the Gospel of Jesus: a trilogical dynamic process. This is the "disturbance" we ought to live if we have to contextualize our theology. To contextualized theology is to live the "metaphysical uneasiness" of Gabriel Marcel. This is our particularity, our way to universal brotherhood and sisterhood.

With this in view, the context of the *other* forces us to "exculturate". Exculturation is a necessary prerequisite of

inculturation, in the same manner as God made himself man in order to save mankind. Exculturation is the abdication of the I, the powerlessness of the self with the aim of empowering and elevating the other. Theology in this sense is a concrete act of restoring justice, advocacy for truth, compassion for the oppressed and the lowly and the daily appreciation of the good and beauty of creation.

The disturbance arising from the condition of the other brings us also to one of the most glaring landscape of doing contextual theology: the theology of forgiveness. Isn't it that forgiveness is the highest expression or exculturation and the beginning of inculturation? In doing so, the inner world becomes the outer, or the outer becomes the inner, hence the harmony of the world.

The desire of theology then is to journey with the other to a fruitful, meaningful and joyful union with God within the socio-cultural economic setting. This is precisely the key to success of the Diocesan Accompaniment to the Prelature of Libmanan undertaken by the Asian Social Institute.

In summary, the otherness and multiplicity of contexts create disturbances and forever openings for all of us to do theology. So that, as we close (but not end) this consultation meeting, we have come to realize that our theologizing did not bring us any closer to theology. Rather, it brought us closer to realizing our sweet and sour experiences of God. This is the context where theology is in need of a deeper discourse, action and enlightenment from theologians. As to the question whether inculturation, indiginization or contextualization should be used, the latter is preferred because of its broader implication.

The Evangelizing Role of Catholic Schools

JAMES KROEGER, M.M.

The theme selected for the 2003 National Convention of the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP) was very creatively chosen: "Making Ends Meet: Excellence, Economics, and Evangelization in Philippine Catholic Schools." There are four words that begin with the letter "E" in the theme. "Ends" refers to the goals, objectives, and purposes of the Church's involvement in education; what are these many goals and how are they achieved? Catholic education addresses Excellence (quality education), Economics (viable schools at

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affordable prices), and Evangelization (integration of Catholic faith perspectives). Qualified speakers have been invited to address each facet of this CEAP convention theme; my pleasant task is to speak on the topic of evangelization and education today.

Evangelization, for many Catholics, is a generally unfamiliar and relatively new term. The Second Vatican Council as well as recent popes have placed evangelization at the center of the Church's identity and mission. A brief, workable definition of evangelization is found in a 1975 document written by Pope Paul VI, himself a great evangelizer. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* the pope notes: "For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new" (EN 18). For the Church - concomitantly for Catholic schools - evangelization is the central mission. "Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize" (EN 14).

Note that the pope says that *all strata* of humanity are to be transformed by the light and power of the Gospel. This means that the Church today has adopted a wide and comprehensive vision of evangelization; many facets comprise the Church's evangelizing mission. One can identify several of the "principal elements" of evangelization: (1) Christian Presence and Witness of Life; (2) Service of Humanity through Development and Human "Liberation; (3) Interreligious Dialogue with the Followers of Other Faiths; (4) Explicit Gospel Proclamation and Catechesis; (5) Prayer, Contemplation, and Liturgical-Sacramental Life. In a word, the one evangelizing mission of the Church is comprised of several component

elements and authentic forms. This integral or holistic vision has emerged in the Church over the past decades, especially since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

Viewing evangelization through its five essential dimensions results in clarity, insight, and proper integration. This integral approach is a contemporary Catholic vision of evangelization. Catholic schools could certainly use this vision of holistic evangelization as both a guide to their mission and as a practical check-list of how adequately they are achieving their evangelizing role. Recall that authentic evangelization is to affect *all strata* of humanity and society.

For Paul VI, *Christian Presence and Witness of Life* form the "initial act of evangelization" (EN 21). Daily activities, living together in harmony, lives as individuals of integrity, duties in the community - all these are to be a basic "faith-witness" that demonstrates how Christian living is shaped by Christian faith and values. For those in the apostolate of Catholic education, this means completing all those very ordinary works (administration, classroom teaching, correction of examinations, accomplishment of reports) with genuine dedication and professionalism. This wordless witness gives people - especially students - a clear and powerful example of faith and integrity. And, in today's world, people desire and respect authentic witnesses; as Pope Paul VI noted: "Modern people listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if they listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (EN 41; cf. EA42; RM11.42).

You, dear women and men in the education apostolate, are already achieving your evangelizing task both inside and outside the school by the very manner in which you live your

lives. Yes, we teachers must *be models* of the Christian life. We should also *propose models* to the youth: parents who are faithful fathers and mothers of families; people of integrity like former President Aquino or Chief Justice Davide. I think also of young people like Ritchie Fernando, a Jesuit scholastic who gave his life in 1996 in a rehabilitation center in Cambodia while trying to save the lives of other students from a grenade attack. Here in Asia, the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta (declared "Blessed" on October 19, 2003), known for her loving and selfless care of the poorest of the poor, is an "icon" of Christian presence, life, and service (EA7d).

Permit me to tell you about some very, influential witnesses during my basic education period. I grew up in a small farming community. Yet, our rural parish had its own Catholic elementary school of eight grades. The school had two rooms and two full-time teachers. Grades one to four were in one classroom; grades five to eight were in another. Each of the two dedicated School Sisters-of Notre Dame taught four grades; there were about forty-five students in each room. A third elderly nun kept the convent for the sisters' community; in her spare time she would tutor some slower students. Does it sound impossible? It certainly was a challenge, but dedication and competence produced quality results. The students from Saint Mary's were usually among the better students in the local high school. Frequently, I recall with gratitude those dedicated nuns and their marvelous witness of life.

A second dimension of an integral vision of evangelization is centered on commitment to *Service of Humanity through Development and Human Liberation*, to genuine service of neighbor. This means serving the most unfortunate, witnessing

to justice, defending the integrity of creation; this dimension of evangelization includes the whole area of social concerns, ranging from peace-building, education and health services, to promoting family life and good government. This area of human development or human promotion is a vast area of the Church's evangelizing mission (cf. EA 32-41; EN 18-19, 29-33; RM 58-60). Love must be put into concrete actions; faith without good works is dead.

An important question must be asked: Is the local Church's commitment to social involvement and transformation on the *decline* today in the Philippines? Several analysts and commentators think that there is an unfortunate *lessening* of the Church's social engagement. How can schools reverse this apparent trend? A recent newspaper headline of a story about the retirement of Jaime Cardinal Sin read: "Politics to leave pulpit as Cardinal Sin retires," implying that the Church's role is in the sanctuary, not in public life (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, September 18, 2003: A6). Evangelization definitely includes bringing the Gospel into all levels of human life - including politics, economics, and social-cultural realities.

Catholic schools need to educate students concerning the social teachings of the Church. Schools also should integrate into their curriculum concrete outreach activities and exposure programs that alert students to the realities of street children, poverty, ecological degradation, corruption in government. Can a wide variety of volunteer programs be designed that will engage students in some kind of social involvement? How can students be guided to find Christ in the marginalized and forgotten people of society?

Turning to a third aspect of integral evangelization, one notes that all the Church's many evangelizing activities are necessarily to be inserted into the local context; particularly in Asia, these activities naturally assume an interreligious dimension. Thus, the Church in the Philippines, similar to most places in the world of today, accomplishes her mission in a pluralistic culture and in an interreligious milieu; she enters into *Interreligious Dialogue with the Followers of Other Faiths*, cooperating with the believers of the great religious traditions. Philippine society has changed significantly in recent decades; it has become a more pluralistic society, where one frequently meets Muslims, Buddhists, the indigenous (*lumads*) as well as a wide variety of diverse languages and regional cultures.

The challenge for Catholic education is to form citizens who are authentically appreciative and respectful of "the other." Do our schools help to break down prejudices and affirm the values in other faith traditions? What kind of attitudes do our graduates have regarding the Muslims, the Chinese Buddhists, the native religions of indigenous peoples? Do we educate people who will become peace-builders and promoters of non-violence as adults?

Interreligious dialogue takes many forms; there are the dialogues of daily life, deeds of service, religious experts, and faith experience, as well as other forms. John Paul II asserts: "Interreligious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission" (RM 55). This dialogue emerges from one's faith convictions. In contemporary circumstances, dialogue with religions and cultures is a truly appropriate Christian response (cf. EA 29-31; EN 20, 53; RM 52-54, 55-57). Where does interreligious dialogue find its place in the curriculum of your

school? Recall once again the example of Mother Teresa; most of her work was with Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists - persons who did not believe in Christianity.

Fourthly, in evangelization today one affirms the role of *Explicit Gospel Proclamation and Catechesis*. This dimension of evangelization includes preaching and teaching, catechesis on Christian life, communicating the content of the faith; in a word, this means "telling the story of Jesus and the Church." As the Holy Spirit opens the door and the time is opportune, Christians do tell the Jesus story, giving explicit witness and testimony to the faith. This is a continued challenge for Catholic schools in the Philippines, where "religious ignorance" of the general population seems to be on the increase. Schools need well-prepared religion teachers and good textbooks. Laity need training in Scripture and Church teaching to become effective transmitters of the faith. Remember that the faith is both "taught and caught" through both classroom lessons and witness of life.

Students need to comprehend the intimate connection between Christian faith and daily life. Too often there is a "dis-connect" between religious faith and life issues. Christian living demands a comprehension of the core essentials and content of the faith. Students are invited to follow, to come to know Jesus. Christians need solid instruction in their faith; only in this way will the Christian faith be communicated to future generations, making them true believers (cf. EA 19-20, 23; EN 22, 27, 42; RM 44-51).

Finally, integral evangelization will necessarily include *Prayer, Contemplation, and Liturgical-Sacramental Life*. No one can effectively be engaged in the Church's mission with-

out a strong faith and prayer-life. Evangelization in Catholic schools needs holy men and women who are themselves on fire with the love of Christ. Spreading the fire of the Gospel will be accomplished only by those already burning with an experience of Christ; a fire can only be lit by something that is itself on fire (EA 18c, 19a, 23b). Holiness is an irreplaceable condition for evangelizers. I am pleased to know that following this presentation Bo Sanchez will speak on "Rekindling Our Passion for Holiness." Our "God-experience" achieved in prayer and contemplation, in sacramental and liturgical life, should illumine and transform all other dimensions of evangelization (cf. EA 23; EN 23, 43-44, 47; RM 46-49, 87-92).

Some sharp, probing questions need asking: Do students leave our schools with a deep and authentic "God-experience"? Do they really know how to pray and see the value of prayer - especially in our media-bombarded world? What is the value of the Scripture and the Sacraments for them? Does your school have an effective campus ministry program - with an appropriate budget? Are there retreat and recollection days systematically provided for all students? Do young people see Mother Mary as a woman of faith, prayer, and dedicated service?

Friends, this presentation on evangelization in Catholic schools today has portrayed the comprehensive task before us - if we hope to achieve the mission we have set for ourselves. It is obvious that these five dimensions of an integral understanding of evangelization complement and reinforce each other. In speaking of the complexity of the Church's evangelizing action, Paul VI gave a timely admonition: "Any partial and fragmentary definition which attempts to render the reality

of evangelization in all its richness, complexity and dynamism does so only at the risk of impoverishing it and even of distorting it." He continued: "It is impossible to grasp the concept of evangelization unless one tries to keep in view all its essential elements" (EN 17). And, I may add: Do concrete programs exist in your school that promote *all five dimensions* of integral evangelization? I trust our schools genuinely strive for excellence, not only excellence in academic matters, but also excellence in evangelization.

Permit some additional remarks regarding a comprehensive understanding of the Church's evangelizing mission. I trust you - as Catholic educators - will see that, in adopting this integral vision, the Church has set aside an older concept of her mission. No longer are the elements of social justice, interfaith dialogue, peace-building, education and health care, life-witness, ecology, etc. simply "preparatory" to evangelization [*praeparatio evangelica*]; all five "principal elements" presented here are constitutive of a holistic and integral understanding. Paul VI and John Paul II have expanded the horizons of evangelization; the more restrictive view, which held that only explicit Gospel proclamation as well as prayer and sacramental life constituted evangelization, has been superceded.

Concomitant with this expanded vision of evangelization, one finds a renewed emphasis on the missionary nature of the *entire* Church (cf. AG 2). Every baptized member of the Church is an evangelizer, whether layperson, ordained, or religious. Previously, when evangelization was linked more exclusively with explicit Gospel proclamation and sacramental life, laity often found it difficult to appreciate how they were to be evangelizers. Today, Catholic evangelization engages

the entire Church (from top to bottom; especially, all the local churches and communities), all states of life (lay, religious, ordained, married, single), all apostolic activities and forms of witness (the five principal elements). Yes, the totality of Christian evangelization embraces all these aspects. I trust this is the vision of the CEAP and that it commits itself to assisting the hundreds of its member Catholic schools to implement such a vision throughout the entire country.

This brief piece presents a panoramic overview of a Catholic vision of evangelization - a vision that can guide Catholic schools today. When many words have been uttered, when much ink has been spilt, when definitions and categories have been clarified, and when one more presentation has been completed, Catholic Christian educators (*tayong lahat*) must step back and radically affirm that: *All mission and evangelization is God's project. The Holy Spirit is always the principal agent of evangelization.* For evangelizers, missionaries, catechists, educators and administrators, religious and laity alike, the mission of evangelization necessarily means trying to find out what God wills and what he is doing. Then, the authentic evangelizer bends his/her will to God's will, joyfully surrenders to God's loving plan, and expends all efforts and energy to become a worthy instrument that enables God's design to unfold - in and through our Catholic schools. Evangelization, at heart and center, is an issue of faith (cf. RM 11). For a Christian, to live is to evangelize!

Abbreviations:

- EA - *Ecclesia in Asia* (John Paul II - November 6, 1999)
- EN - *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Paul VI - December 8, 1975)
- RM - *Redemptoris Missio* (John Paul II - December 7, 1990)

Important Educational-Catechetical Resources

(Published in the Philippines):

Tell the World: Catechetical Modules for Mission Animation. CBCP Mission Office / Claretian Publications, 2000.

Telling God's Story CBCP Mission Office / Claretian Publications, 2001.

Following Christ in Mission Paulines, 1996.

The Future of the Asian Churches: The Asian Synod and Ecclesia in Asia Claretian Publications, 2002.

Becoming Local Church Claretian Publications, 2003.

A Suggested Model for a One-Day Training of Lectors*

VIRGILIO T.J. SUERTE-FELIPE

Introduction

This module for a one-day formation of lectors has been designed in a such a way that the participants are provided with the theological, biblical, liturgical, practical, and spiritual training. The formation is quite intensive since it is limited to only one day. It is important that the basic information and skills are provided in this one-day formation so that lectors may have an overall picture of their ministry and appreciate their service in the liturgy of the Church. By doing so, it will whet their appetite to deepen their formation and sharpen their skills inspiring them to ask for a follow up or an ongoing formation.

To have a panoramic view of the whole activity, a schedule is given. Subsequent pages will briefly discuss the basic contents of the talks and the practicum.

•Originally submitted as a project to the Graduate School of Liturgy, San Beda College, 2nd Trimester, 2002-2003.

8:00 a.m. - 8:30 a.m.	Registration
8:30 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.	1 st talk: Ministry of Lectorate
9:30 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.	Open Forum
10:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.	Break
10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.	2 nd Talk: The Liturgy and The Role of Lectors
11:30 a.m. - 12:00 nn.	Open Forum
12:00 nn. - 1:00 p.m..	Lunch
1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.	Practicum (Group Activity)
2:30 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Plenary Assembly
3:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.	Break
3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.	3 rd Talk: Spirituality of Lectors
4:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Open FORum/Evaluation
5:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.	Eucharist

/s' TALK: MINISTRY OF LECTORATE

Being foundational, this first talk discusses the theological, biblical, and ecclesiological bases of the ministry of lectorate: that it is Christ who is the source of the ministry, that baptism empowers the lectors to exercise this ministry in the Church, and that the ministry of lectorate is distinguished from the ministry of the ordained.

1. Christ is the Source of the Ministry of Lectorate.

Jesus Christ calls and chooses his disciples and ministers (*Acts* 20: 24; *Rom.* 1:5; *Eph.* 4:11-14) and he gives the helps (charisms) they need to carry out worthily the ministry entrusted to them. The model of this calling is the choice of the Twelve and the gift of the Spirit on Pentecost. The speaker may develop this point by citing Peter (for men lectors) and Mary Magda-

lene (for women lectors). Both were called by Jesus personally and both boldly proclaimed the Word after Christ breathed into them the Spirit.

2. Baptism Justifies the Ministry of Lectorate.

Because Filipinos have been used to infant baptism, it seems that this sacrament ceases to have influence on the youth and adult life of Filipinos. For this reason, the *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* deliberately focuses on Baptism of adults. "In keeping with the Church's sacramental renewal, our exposition of Baptism shall focus on the *Baptism of adults* (cf CCC 1247)."¹

This one-day formation of lectors is an opportune time to show the importance of baptism in our adult Christian life and more importantly to root the ministry of lectorate in baptism. By accepting Christ in baptism, all Christians share in the three offices of Christ: King, Priest, and Prophet.

Focusing on the priestly office, the speaker should stress that it is baptism that empowers Christians to exercise the many functions and ministries in the Church, one of which is the ministry of lectorate.

3. Ministry of Lectorate is different from the ministry of the ordained.

The priesthood conferred on all Christians with their baptism is what is referred to as *common priesthood* as dis-

¹ Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (Manila: ECCCE and Word & Life Publications, 1997), n. 1595, 455 (bold letters in the original).

tinguished from the *ministerial* or *ordained priesthood*. As early as the third century, the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus already made the distinction between *keirotonia* and *katastasis*, the former for the ordained ministers and the latter for the lay ministers.

The ministry of lectorate does not imply a greater sacramentality but simply the exercise of that priestly dignity which properly inheres in each of the baptized, which the post-baptismal anointing symbolizes and guarantees.

Like the other ministries in the Church, the ministry of lectorate belongs to the "instituted" ministries. This is not only to distinguish it from those who are "ordained" ministers but also from the innumerable spontaneous forms of service, worship and catechesis and charity in which the Church is gifted by the Holy Spirit. The institution is the official Church recognition of the gift of God to his own people. However, since *Ministeria Quaedam* limits the "institution" of lectorate to men, "commissioning" is done instead for men and women.

It is good to conclude this talk with the reading from 1 Corinthians 12:4-21.

2nd TALK: LITURGY AND THE ROLE OF LECTORS

Since the function of lectors is to proclaim the Word of God during the liturgical celebration of the Church, it is necessary that they should have a good grasp of the meaning of the liturgy and their role as lectors in the official celebration of the Paschal Mystery of the Christ. The speaker may begin with

the biblical account in which Christ serves as lector in the synagogue (*Luke 4:16-22*).

The following points could be developed from this reading which have direct bearing on the nature of the liturgy and the ministry of lectorate:

1. The Church owes its Liturgy of the Word from the Jewish practice of the Service of the Word in their synagogues. In connection with this, the speaker may also mention that the Christian Bible consists of the *Old* and New Testaments and that the *First Reading* in our liturgy today is always taken from the Old Testament, except during Easter season.

2. Liturgy is primarily "an action of Christ the Priest and of his Body, which is the Church."² Christ's presence in the liturgy surpasses all other activities of the Church. "*He is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church.*"³ This is the very dignity of the ministry of lectors. They are instruments of Christ in our time. Christ continues to speak to us just as he proclaims the God's message of salvation in the synagogue.

3. The very nature of the liturgy demands that it is only the Word of God that is to be proclaimed in the liturgy. No other writings, no matter how beautifully written, should substitute the holy scriptures.

² *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 7.

³ *Ibid.* (Italics and bold letters supplied)

PRACTICUM

The practicum has a twofold purpose: it keeps the participants awake during this period of the day which is conducive to sleep and it is an opportune time to discuss the practical aspects of proclaiming the Word.

It is suggested that participants be divided into small groups. The number of each group will depend on the total number of participants. It is ideal that each group should not exceed ten (10) participants. Each group has a facilitator who could be a priest, a seminarian, or a catechist who must have undergone a training in the liturgy especially the formation of lectorate.

The facilitator of each group will acquaint all the members with the contents and use of the two liturgical books used in the Liturgy of the Word, namely, *the lectionary* and the *Gospel book*. Each facilitator should see to it that each member of the group is able to see, touch and read from the lectionary. Each participant should be able to practice proclaiming the Word while other members listen. If time permits, they should also practice how to hold the Gospel book during procession.

PLENARY ASSEMBLY

When all groups have gathered as one assembly, questions may be entertained by the person in charge of the formation of lectors of the local Church, namely, the Director of Liturgy of the Diocese or Archdiocese. Or, an actual demonstration from entrance procession to the recessional part of the Mass may be done here if this has not been practiced in small groups because of lack of time.

3rd TALK: SPIRITUALITY OF LECTORS

In order to further motivate and inspire the lectors in their ministry, this topic "Spirituality of Lectors" is suggested as the last talk which is also a good preparation for the culminating activity of the one-day formation, namely, the Eucharist. The speaker may develop the topic from the very role of lectors: to proclaim the Word of God in the liturgy.

A lector does not only proclaim the Word in words but, just as the Word became flesh, lectors are also called to put flesh in their proclamation by living out and practicing what they proclaim. Effective proclamation includes living out what is proclaimed. The Word of God, by its very nature, requires understanding, personal reflection, and internalization. Lectors themselves should know it, listen to it, and proclaim it boldly in word and deed.

Cases and Inquiries

REGINO CORTES, OP ~~'

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION ON SPOUSES' SEPARATION

Mr. X is sincerely convinced, through circumstantial evidences and analyzing the family background of his wife, that his wife, Ms. Y has been unfaithful to him. He accused her of having had sex with another man. His wife, Ms. Y wants a reconciliation insisting on her innocence and arguing that her husband has become very jealous and suspicious.

I had a long talk with Mr. X who says he has forgiven his wife but refuse to reconcile with her citing the scriptures: "If a man divorces his wife for any cause other than her unfaithfulness, then he is guilty of making her commit adultery if she marries again." (Mt. 5:32)

Mr. X believes that he would go against the Biblical mandate if he accepts his wife again, because of what he perceives through circumstantial evidences and her family background that his wife has been UNFAITHFUL.

Is Mr. X correct in his judgment? He is a Churchgoer - basically a good man. He does not intend to marry again and he says he will devote his life to serve other people. His children and grandchildren are upset and nobody seems to be able to convince Mr. X to reconcile again because of his continuing citing of Mt. 5:32.

Questions:

- 1. What is the right interpretation of Mt. 5:32?*
- 2. Is Mr. X justified in his determination to live separately from his wife due to this circumstantial evidence and on **the** allegations that the mother of his wife was herself **unfaithful**?*

An Archbishop

* *

Two questions are being asked by the petitioner to be resolved: 1) What is the right interpretation of Mt. 5:32? And 2) Is Mr. X justified in his determination to live separately from his wife due to this circumstantial evidence and on the allegations that the mother of his wife was herself unfaithful?

The first question is, definitely, of a biblical character and concerns the interpretation of a particular passage in St. Matthew. The second question is related to the resolution of the first since the reason why Mr. X does not want to take his wife again is that he would be going against the mandate of Mt. 5:32 in his perception, although based only on circumstantial evidence and family background (that the mother of his wife was herself unfaithful), that his wife was also unfaithful.

Ij order to interpret Mt. 5:32 we have to look at the whole biblical context about divorce and not only rely on this text. We have also to examine the different English translations of the specific text of Matthew and parallel texts in Mark, Luke, and 1 Corinthians since they definitely vary. The text of Matthew 5:32 as quoted by Mr. X is questionable.

We shall just take three principal Catholic biblical translations which are easily obtainable: *The New Jerusalem Bible*, *the New American Bible*, and *the Community Christian Bible*.

New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)

Mt. 5:32 - Everyone who divorces his wife, except for the case of an illicit marriage, makes her an adulteress, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Mt. 19:9 - Anyone who divorces his wife - I am not speaking of an illicit marriage - and marries another is guilty of adultery.

Mt. 10:11-12 - Whoever divorces his wife and marries another is guilty of adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another she is guilty of adultery too.

Lk. 16:18 - Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another is guilty of adultery, and the man who marries a woman divorced by her husband commits adultery.

1 Cor. 7:10-11 - To the married I give this ruling, and this is not mine but the Lord's: a wife must not be separated from her husband - or if she has already left him, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband - and a husband must not divorce his wife.

New American Bible (NAB)

Mt. 5:32 - What I can say to you is, everyone who divorces his wife, - lewd conduct is a separate case - forces her to commit adultery. The man who marries a divorced woman likewise commits adultery.

19:9 - Whoever divorces his wife (lewd conduct is a separate case) and marries another, commits adultery.

Mk. 10:11-12 - Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and the woman divorced by her husband and marries another also commits adultery.

Lk. 16:18 - Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery. The man who marries a woman divorced from her husband likewise commits adultery.

1 Cor. 7:10-11 - To those now married, however, I give this command (though it is not mine, it is the Lord's); a wife must not separate from her husband. If she does separate, she must either remain single or become reconciled to him again. Similarly, a husband must not divorce his wife.

Christian Community Bible (CCB)

Mt. 5:32 - If a man divorces his wife except in the case of unlawful union, he causes her to commit adultery. And the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

19:9 - Whoever divorces his wife, unless it be for infidelity, and marries another, commits adultery.

Mk. 10:11-12 - Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against his wife, and the woman

who divorces her husband and marries another also commits adultery.

Lk. 16:18 - Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries a woman divorced by her husband also commits adultery.

1 Cor. 7:10-11 - I command married couples - that the wife should not separate from her husband. If she separates from him, let her marry again, or let her make peace with her husband. Similarly the husband should not divorce his wife.

The texts of St. Mark, St. Luke and St. Paul are definitely against absolute divorce, that means, they uphold the absolute indissolubility of true marriages even non-sacramental or the so-called natural marriages. The problem is in the interpretation of the "exceptive clause" in St. Matthew. *Me epi porneias* (5:32) or *parektos logou porneias* in 19:9. *Logos porneias* in the Greek text is the exact translation of the *erwat dabar* in Jewish jurisprudence which may be literally translated as "a thing of shame." But there was a controversy between two rabbinic schools about the exact interpretation of *erwat dabar*. The school of Hillel interprets it to mean "for any cause whatsoever" or "any shameful thing whatsoever," which can be a cause for divorce. In fact there is a whole tractate in the Talmud called *4he gettim* or "bill of divorce." This document could have contained the formula of divorce as given in Hosea 2:4: "She is not my wife and I am not her husband." Can a man then divorce his wife "for any cause whatsoever" (Hillel) or only for the cause of *porneias*ll (Shammai). *Porneias* is here translated as "infidelity," "illicit union," "unfaithfulness". But it should rather be translated "illegitimate concubinage" (NJB) referring to Lev. 18:17-18. This is the meaning given by

St. Paul in 1 Cor 5:1. Hence for the school of Shammai this would be the only cause for divorce. For the school of Hillel any "shameful thing" could be a cause for divorce.

The better context to understand the divorce *logion* of Jesus in St. Matthew would be his controversy against the Pharisees in Mt. 19 when the Pharisees asked him whether he favors the school of Hillel (for any cause whatsoever) or the school of Shammai (only because of illegitimate concubinage, [*porneia*]). In his reply Jesus set aside the controversy. Therefore that exceptive clause in St. Matthew does not modify the verb "put away one's wife" but the whole sentence. Hence it is translated by the New Jerusalem Bible and the New American Bible and some other Bibles as a kind of parenthesis. "I am not speaking about logos porneas," avoiding the squabbles of the Rabbis but affirming the prohibition of absolute divorce as in Mark, Luke, and Paul. There is, then, no contradiction between these different texts.

1. In answer then to the first question: it is clear that Jesus taught the absolute indissolubility of marriage even in this text of St. Matthew 5:32. The exceptive clause there should not be taken as a modifier of the verb "divorce," as if Jesus favored the school of Shammai (except in the case of unfaithfulness), but, in fact, a kind of parenthesis to the sentence. Hence that exceptive clause is omitted in Mark, Luke and Paul. This is clear in the translations of the New Jerusalem Bible and of the New American Bible.

2. Mr. X, therefore, is still legitimately married to his wife and he is not transgressing any Gospel mandate if he takes her back. But if he does not want to take her back he should not invoke the text of St. Matthew 5:32 as a reason

because definitely that would be a wrong interpretation. The wife would be committing adultery if she marries another man. The Lord undoubtedly prohibits absolute divorce without any exception.

These answers are in line with the current legislation of the Church, reflected in the Code of Canon Law. Since adultery is an offense against the Christian dignity of the spouses and of the sacrament of marriage as well as an offense against the right to fidelity which is enjoyed by husband and wife, the Code considers it as possible ground for legal separation while the bond of marriage remains. Canon 1132 states that in case of adultery by one of the spouses the other party "has the right to severe conjugal living, unless he or she consented to the adultery gave cause for it, or likewise, committed adultery." However, aware that conjugal life can be saved by forgiveness, the code "earnestly recommends" that the innocent spouse not refuse to pardon the adulterous partner (cf. c. 1152 §1). In any case, the endurance of conjugal bond incapacitates the spouses to contract a new marriage.

Homiletic and Bibliarasal Pointers 2004 (March-April)

EFREN RIVERA, OP

March 7, 2004



Second Sunday of Lent

Readings (C): Gn 15:5-12; Phil 3:17-4:1 or 3:20-4:1; Lk 9:28-36

1. SUMMARY OF THE GOSPEL TEACHING (*Supplement to Bibliarasal Step Three*). Every year the Second Sunday of Lent recalls the Transfiguration of Christ. Christians have perceived it as an episode in the life of Christ that anticipated his Resurrection. If only the disciples paid more attention to its message, they would not have been so unprepared for the glory of Jesus that shone on his Resurrection day.

Luke alone among the Gospel writers tells us that prayer was the reason for Jesus' ascent to the mountain (unnamed in the story, but traditionally identified as Mt. Tabor). Similarly, Luke alone tells us that Moses and Elijah, joining the transfigured Jesus, spoke of his "passing" or "exodus" that will be accomplished in Jerusalem.

In Luke's Gospel the Transfiguration is the beginning of Jesus' Journey to Jerusalem, a special section that shows a theological insight distinct from that of Matthew and Mark. Adopting his viewpoint, from this Sunday until Holy Week, we should undertake a spiritual journey with Jesus, using Luke 9:51-18:14 as our guide.

2. VALUES THAT WE CAN PICK FROM THE PASSAGE (*Bibliarasal Step Three*).

V. 28a, "(Jesus) took Peter, John and James and went up unto a high mountain..." - Value of having companions (or not being alone: *hindi mag-iisa*).

V.28b, "... to pray." - Value of prayer. For Luke, mountains are specially conducive to prayer.

V. 29, "his face changed in appearance and his clothes became dazzlingly white." - Value of being changed to something glorious.

V 31, "They appeared in glory and spoke of his passage (Greek *exodon*)..." Value of the irony joining glory with Christ's passion and death.

3. POINTS FOR SHARING (*Bibliarasal Step Five*).

- Have you experienced spiritual uplift through mountain climbing?

- Have you experienced any kind of transformation in your life?

4. WHAT THE LORD WANTS US TO DO (*Bibliarasal Step Six*).

a) In relation to Philippine Church Life Today. - The transformation of the Church in the Philippines was one of

the goals of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP-II) held in 1991. Ten years later, in 2001 a National Consultation on Church Renewal was held to assess the progress of the transformation. It seems that we have to do more and act faster to achieve the transformation.

b) In relation to the Socio-Economic, Political and Cultural Life of Filipinos Today - Pope John Paul II has said: "The transformation of the world and the building up of the Christian kingdom of justice and peace can only be effected by grace and the power of God's love in us. Only love can transform hearts, and without love there can be no adequate reform of structures in society." We urge people to pray the Divine Mercy three o'clock prayer for the transformation of Philippine society.

c) In relation to Spiritual and Personal Life. Let us train ourselves in the values pointed out above (n. 2).

EMPOWERMENT

The Transfiguration of Christ, which is recalled every year on the Second Sunday of Lent, invites us to reflect on empowerment. A person is empowered, first of all, when he is given the *potential* to do something great. The humanity of Jesus Christ was empowered at the moment of his Incarnation because it was "hypostatically" joined to the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity. This gave the humanity of Christ the power to do divine things. In the case of ordinary humans, they are empowered when God gives them an immortal soul. That soul gives to the human being "the image and likeness of God."

Jesus was also empowered when he was baptized at the Jordan river. The Holy Spirit came upon him as the Power that will lead him to accomplish miracles and other mighty things during his public ministry. In the case of baptized Christians, there is an empowerment, an *actualization* of potentials, when they put their charisms into play.

Today's Gospel passage tells us that Jesus was trans-figured - empowered once more - at Mount Tabor. What was that empowerment? It was his *obedience*, his acceptance of undergoing his passion and death to attain Resurrection and Glorification. In our case too, we get empowered by obedience to God's law of LOVE. It is when we obey this law that our hearts are transformed and we can set about reforming the structures of society for its eventual transformation into the "city of God."

Spiritual and Personal Values: see above, n. 2.

March 14,2004



Third Sunday of Lent

Readings (C): Ex 3:1-8,13-15; 1 Cor 10:16, 10-12; Lk 13:1-9

1. SUMMARY OF THE GOSPEL TEACHING (*Supplement to Bibliarasal Step Three*). Depending on the Cycle being followed, the Third Sunday of Lent develops different Lenten < themes. In Cycle A we have the story of the Samaritan woman, and the theme that it develops is Chrsi's compassion. In Cycle B we have the story of the Cleansing of the Temple, and the theme developed i-r Christ's zeal for the Father's glory and his being a prophet in words and specially deeds. In Cycte C, which we are following this year, we have two action

parables - the Galileans killed by Pilate and the Falling Tower of Siloam - and one image pa'able, that of the Unfruitful Fig Tree. The theme being developed is that, in spite of apparent normalcy, not everything is well with people who have not listened to Christ's call for conversion. Unless you reform, you will become victims of violence. It is reform - or the bearing of fruit-that will bring peace to society.

2. VALUES THAT WE CAN PICK FROM THE PASSAGE (*Bibliarasal Step Three*).

V. 1-5, The violent deaths of Galileans killed by Pilate and of people at the Tower of Siloam - The value of learning something for one's good from calamities that befall others. The value of learning from DABAR or Word-Events, that is, from happenings in one's life or in the life of society, which have a message when seen from God's viewpoint, for which the Bible is a good source.

V. 7b "Cut it down. Why should it clutter up the ground?" - Value of putting land or things (or time, or one's self) into good use.

V 8 "hoe around (the unfruitful fig tree) and manure it." - Value of using more-than-ordinary-measures (or "fertilizers") to obtain a yield of fruits.

3. POINTS FOR SHARING (*Bibliarasal Step Five*).

- Are you a wasteful person? Have you wasted time, talent and treasure?

- Have you experienced getting a kind of "fertilizer" in your life?

4. WHAT THE LORD WANTS US TO DO (*Bibliarasal Step Six*).

a) In relation to Philippine Church Life Today - The church is *ecclesia semper reformanda* - a church that is to be reformed at all times. Let us continue doing our best to live up to the reforms of Vatican II and PCP-II. For example, let us continue trying to be a church *for the poor, with the poor and taught by the poor*.

b) In relation to the Socio-Economic, Political and Cultural Life of Filipinos Today - Let us keep abreast of developments that, will help us solve global problems like unwanted growth of population, lack of water, depletion of fishes and other marine life, etc.

c) In relation to Spiritual and Personal Life. Let us train ourselves in the values pointed out above (n. 2).

LEARN FROM WORD-EVENTS

At a certain time in Jesus' life, recalled by the Gospel Reading today, people were abuzz with two tragic happenings that were given a popular interpretation, namely, that the people who died were being punished for some great sin they have done. Jesus rejects this interpretation, but not the idea of learning something from an event that everybody is talking about. For him, the way to learn something good from a bad happening is to see it in the light of God's plan of salvation. That plan of salvation is set forth for us in the Bible. So, for us today, the way to learn something good from a calamity in the headlines, is to relate it to God's message of salvation in the Bible. This is what we mean when we say that we should look at such happenings as Word-Events.

In one word, the message of the Bible is MERCY. Newspaper headlines become Word-Events when we relate them to God's mercy.

Spiritual and Personal Values: see above, n. 2.

March 21, 2004



Fourth Sunday of Lent

Readings (C): Jos 5:10-12; 2 Cor 5:17-21; Lk 15:1-3, 11-32

1. SUMMARY OF THE GOSPEL TEACHING (*Supplement to Bibliarasal Step Three*). The "Parable of the Prodigal Son" is the traditional title of today's Gospel Reading. Since it is in the literary context of the Parable of the Lost and Found Sheep and the Parable of the Lost and Found Coin, it could be called the Parable of the Lost and Found Son. Strictly speaking, "prodigal" means being excessive in the use of one's resources for one's self-gratification (including sexual gratification). But if we restrict the meaning of prodigal to that of doing something excessively, then we can call the story the Parable of the Prodigal Father. The father in this story is excessive in his love for his son. He is the real hero of the story.

2. VALUES THAT WE CAN PICK FROM THE PASSAGE (*Bibliarasal Step Three*).

V 2, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."
- Value of giving one's attention to the outcasts of society. Jesus was the number one model of this value, which has put him far above other religious reformers.

V. 12b, "The father divided up the property." - Value of parents giving an inheritance to their children.

V. 17, "Coming to his senses at last." - Value of making a wise decision after learning humility.

V. 23b-24, "Let us celebrate because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life." - Value of celebrating the homecoming of an erring son (or daughter). <> Value of a liturgical celebration of reconciliation in the Church.

3. POINTS FOR SHARING (*Bibliarasal Step Five*).

- Have your parents shown you love in spite of your mistakes and ingratitude?

- Has the Sacrament of Reconciliation helped you experience coming back to life after moral death?

4. WHAT THE LORD WANTS US TO DO (*Bibliarasal Step Six*).

a) In relation to Philippine Church Life Today - Let us improve the image of the Church as being *for and with the poor and the outcasts, just as Jesus was for and with the outcast of Jewish society*.

b) In relation to the Socio-Economic, Political and Cultural Life of Filipinos Today - Let us not be prodigal with material things, that is, let us not waste our meager resources for excessive self-gratification. Instead, let us use our resources for the total human development of people.

c) In relation to Spiritual and Personal Life. Let us train ourselves in the values pointed out above (n. 2).

DIVINE MERCY

If one can summarize the Gospel in one sentence (see Jn 3:16), one can even go further and summarize the message

of the Bible - Old Testament and New Testament - in just two words, namely, *DIVINE MERCY*. This message has been very aptly illustrated by the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

One of the characteristics of our time is that we have a pope who is a great Apostle of Divine Mercy. He is the one who has declared the Second Sunday of Easter as the Feast of Divine Mercy. He made that declaration on April 30, 2000, at the ceremony of the canonization of St. Faustina Kowalska, whom Jesus himself has called the Secretary and Dispenser of his Divine Mercy.

Going to something practical, this writer recommends that we Filipinos pray the Three O'clock prayer for the healing of our society. Let us also pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy for the physical, psychological and spiritual healing of people and for the salvation of the dying. St. Faustina led the way in these practices.

Spiritual and Personal Values: see above, n. 2.

March 28, 2004



Fifth Sunday of Lent

Readings (C): Is 43:16-21; Phil 3:8-14; Jn 8:1-11

1. SUMMARY OF THE GOSPEL TEACHING (*Supplement to Bibliarasal Step Three*). Although the Gospel according to Luke is the book usually followed for the Gospel Readings of Year C, there are exceptions, and the Fifth Sunday of Lent is one of them. We turn to the Gospel according to John for the story of the woman caught in adultery, whom Jesus defended from those who were over-zealous for the Law of Moses. Jesus, however, does not condone adultery, since at the end of the story he says, "from now on, avoid this sin."

2. VALUES THAT WE CAN PICK FROM THE PASSAGE (*Bibliarasal Step Three*).

V. 2, "(Jesus) began to teach" the people who came to him. - Value of teaching with words and actions. The oral teaching of Jesus was interrupted by the people who brought to him the woman caught in adultery. Jesus grabs the occasion to teach by his example of showing compassion to the woman and rescuing her from death by stoning.

V. 7b, "Let the man among you who has no sin be the first to cast a stone at her." - The prospective stoners were sinners like the woman herself. They should have shown her some *empathy*. They should have asked themselves: How does it feel to be publicly accused of sin? How does it feel to be helpless and at the point of death? What they lacked, let us develop in ourselves.

V. 11b, "Nor do I condemn you." Even when Jesus was not a sinner, he does not condemn the woman, but gives her a chance. Give people a chance to reform instead of immediately condemning them. Let us pick up this value.

3. POINTS FOR SHARING (*Bibliarasal Step Five*).

- Have you experienced teaching not only with words but also with example?

- Have you ever helped someone by showing empathy?

4. WHAT THE LORD WANTS US TO DO (*Bibliarasal Step Six*).

a) In relation to Philippine Church Life Today - Let us remember that the teaching of the Church on sexual morality

is not only the prohibition of artificial methods of birth control. The Church also teaches that priest confessors are to show *compassion* to the erring faithful.

b) In relation to the Socio-Economic, Political and Cultural Life of Filipinos Today - Let us remember that sexual sins are not the worst. They are not even mentioned in the list of sins for which people will be condemned in Mt. 25:41-43. Allowing people, through indifference, to go naked, hungry and homeless, is worse than allowing lovebirds to kiss in public.

c) In relation to Spiritual and Personal Life. We have to train ourselves in the values pointed out above (n. 2).

SCANDALS

Say, "What a scandal!" and the knee-jerk reaction of people is to think of an affair between a public figure (a politician, an actor or actress, a priest) and a partner in the realm of illegal or immoral sex. It is only in more recent times that the word "scandal" has been associated with the illegal amassment of wealth.

A glaring failure of Christians to follow Christ's Law of Love is hardly ever called a scandal. Squatter colonies right next to subdivisions of the wealthy don't seem to be shocking enough to be called scandals.

Yet, a scandal is any stumbling block. It is anything that causes a follower of Christ to stumble and stop following him. Anything that prevents us from being Christ-like should rightfully be called a scandal.

The challenge of today's Gospel is for us to stand with Christ in defending the weak and helpless. To do less than that is a scandal.

Spiritual and Personal Values: see above, n. 2.

April 4, 2004 ◇ Palm Sunday ◇ Procession: Lk 19:28-40

Readings (C): Is 50:4-7; Phil 2:6-11; Lk 22:14-23:56 (or Lk 23:1-49)

1. SUMMARY OF THE GOSPEL TEACHING (*Supplement to Bibliarasal Step Three*). Luke's narrative of the Triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem has its peculiarities compared to Matthew and Mark. Strikingly, there is no "Hosanna" here, in contrast to Mt 21:9 and Mk 11:9-10. Instead, in Luke we read: "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest." This is reminiscent of the angelic praise in Lk 2:14, when Christ was born, except for a twist. There, the peace is "on earth" but here it is "in heaven!" Luke alone mentions the exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees. They said, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He replied, "If they were to keep silence, I tell you the very stones would cry out." In this episode, Jesus still has the upper hand. What will turn the tide against him will be his capture by the Jewish authorities (22:47-53) and the weakness of the Roman governor, Pilate, to do what is right (23:1-25).

2. VALUES THAT WE CAN PICK FROM THE PASSAGE (*Bibliarasal Step Three*).

V 31, "The Master has need of it." - Value of having need of only few and humble things.

V. 37b, "the entire crowd of disciples began to rejoice and praise God loudly for the display of power they had

seen." For Luke, the Triumphal entry into Jerusalem was Jesus' reward for the mighty works, the miracles, he had done for people. - Value of doing one's mighty works not for oneself but as a service to others.

3. POINTS FOR SHARING (*Bibliarasal Step Five*).

- Have you experienced having need of only few and humble things?

- Have you experienced any reversal of fortune - one day being acclaimed by people and then another day soon being, condemned by them?

4. WHAT THE LORD WANTS US TO DO (*Bibliarasal Step Six*).

- a) In relation to Philippine Church Life Today - Let Church authorities avoid the pitfalls that led to the decision of the Jewish authorities to kill Jesus.

- b) In relation to the Socio-Economic, Political and Cultural Life of Filipinos Today - Let us counteract the mentality constantly promoted by advertisements that we are in need of so many things. Life would be simpler and happier if we just attend to our truly basic needs.

- c) In relation to Spiritual and Personal Life. We have to train ourselves in the values pointed out above (n. 2).

WHO CRUCIFIED JESUS?

There was a time when Christian children were taught to hate the Jews because they crucified Christ. This bigoted view became so strong in the popular mind that even the

Roman soldiers, in the popular imagination, were turned into cruel Jews.

Vatican II reminds us that the real cause of Christ's crucifixion and death was the redemption of the sins of the whole human race, to which we belong. It is because of *us* that Jesus died on the cross. If anyone is to be blamed, blame yourself first.

Spiritual and Personal Values: see above, n. 2.

April 11,2004



Easter Sunday

Readings (C): Acts 10:34-43; Col 3:1-4 or 1 Cor 5:6-8; Jn 20:1-9 or Mt 28:1-10

1. SUMMARY OF THE GOSPEL TEACHING (*Supplement to Bibliarasal Step Three*). Jn 20:1-9 tells us the roles of Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter, and "the disciple Jesus loved" - probably John, in proclaiming the good news of Christ's Resurrection. The clear Gospel tradition is that women (see Mt 28:1, "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary"; Mk 16:1 "Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James,, and Salome;" Lk 23:10 "Mary of Magdala, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James," and others) were the first to see the empty tomb of Christ on Easter day. They were to tell the good news "to his disciples and Peter" (Mk 16:7). Jesus also first appeared to the women (Mt 28:9), or at least to Mary Magdalene (Mk 16:9; Jn 20:14-18). Simon Peter and the disciple Jesus loved were the first Apostles to hear the good news from Maiy Magdalene (Jn 20:2) and they were the first to see the wrappings (the Shroud of Turin?) and the head covering of the buried Jesus. The beloved disciple was the first to "believe" (Jn 20:8b).

2. VALUES THAT WE CAN PICK FROM THE PASSAGE
(*Bibliarasal Step Three*).

V 1, "Early in the morning." - Value of doing things early.

V. 4, "They were running side by side...." - Value of running or hurrying to verify good news.

V. 8b, "He saw and believed" - Value of seeing external proof (signs) and believing the hidden mystery.

3. POINTS FOR SHARING (*Bibliarasal Step Five*).

- Have you experienced running because you have good news to share?

- Have you experienced getting a sign of a mystery you have been wondering about?

4. WHAT THE LORD WANTS US TO DO
(*Bibliarasal Step Six*).

a) In relation to Philippine Church Life Today - Let us make our Christian life more and more a witness to the Resurrection of Christ.

b) In relation to the Socio-Economic, Political and Cultural Life of Filipinos Today - Let us strive for TOTAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT - HAPPINESS ON EARTH - for which the sign is JUSTICE AND PEACE.

c) In relation to Spiritual and Personal Life. We have to train ourselves in the values pointed out above' (n. 2).

SEE SIGNS, BELIEVE THE MYSTERY

The Resurrection of Christ has historical dimensions, but it is essentially a Mystery of Faith. It is futile to seek proofs.

A mystery of faith cannot be proven. But we can ask for signs.

For the women who went to the tomb of Jesus, the sign of the Resurrection was the empty tomb. For Mary Magdalene, another sign was the apparition of Christ to her. For Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple, an additional sign were the wrappings of Christ's body left in the tomb. Most probably the main piece of these wrappings are what we now call the Holy Shroud of Turin. When you look at this cloth with your naked eye what you will see are just a few brownish stains. But if you take a picture (don't use a digital camera!) your film negative will show the face and full-length body of Jesus.

Today, for the world, the happy life of Christians is the best sign of the Resurrection of Christ. Be happy - truly happy. That means, be a totally developed human, person with all your needs satisfied whether they be physical, psychological or spiritual. That way you give a sign that your Lord Jesus Christ is alive and glorious.

Spiritual and Personal Values: see above, n. 2.

April 18,2004



**Second Sunday of Easter, now
DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY**

Readings (C): Acts 5:12-16; Rv 1:9-13. 17-19; Jn 20:19-31

1. SUMMARY OF THE GOSPEL TEACHING (*Supplement to Bibliarasal Step Three*). The benefits of the New Creation inaugurated by the Resurrection of Christ start to be shared with chosen persons. These benefits can be called the outpourings of Divine Mercy, and so it is most appropriate that the Second Sunday of Easter has been designated by Pope

John Paul II as Divine Mercy Sunday. The women, Simon Peter, the other disciples and in particular Thomas, all needed Divine Mercy and this was shown to them by the Risen Christ.

2. VALUES THAT WE CAN PICK FROM THE PASSAGE
(*Bibliarasal Step Three*).

V. 19a, "first day of the week" - Value of observing Sunday as the day of Christian worship. Observe that in most calendars, Sunday is the first day of the week.

V. 19b, "Peace be with you." - Value of biblical peace, "SHALOM," and specially CHRISTIAN PEACE which has the dimension of DIVINE MERCY.

V. 20a, "He showed them his hands and his side." - The Resurrection of Christ should normally have healed his wounds, but God has wanted the wounds in his hands (and feet?) and his side - pierced with a lance that opened his HEART from which flowed water and blood - to remain forever. Whereas the Sacred Heart image refers to the piercing of Jesus' heart on Good Friday as well as the eternal permanence of that wound and the wounds in his hands, the Divine Mercy image painted under the direction of St. Faustina Kowalska, shows red and white rays of light coming from the breast of Jesus. This later image refers to the resurrected figure of Jesus Christ. - Value of devotion to the Sacred Heart and to the image of Divine Mercy.

V. 20b, "the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord."
- Value, of Christian rejoicing.

3. POINTS FOR SHARING (*Bibliarasal Step Five*).

- Have you experienced the Divine Mercy of Jesus?

- Have you experienced transformation through devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus? This is something that the Philippine Bishops want to happen in the year 2004.

4. WHAT THE LORD WANTS US TO DO (*Bibliarasal Step Six*).

a) In relation to Philippine Church Life Today - The Bishops have wanted the transformation of Philippine society through the adoption of universal values and the values of the Christian. They have wanted this to become more palpable through increased devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. They also support the building of more shrines, churches and chapels to proclaim to all the message of Divine Mercy. This proclamation is also being done by Divine Mercy Channel which can be accessed through Global-Destiny Cable TV, Channel 77 particularly in Metro Manila, and nationwide through local TV channels that are serviced by Dream Satellite Channel 7.

b) In relation to the Socio-Economic, Political and Cultural Life of Filipinos Today - Let us promote the socio-cultural dimension of Divine Mercy by working for the abolition of the death penalty in our land.

c) In relation to Spiritual and Personal Life. We have to train ourselves in the values pointed out above (n. 2).

MERCY FOR ALL

The woman disciples, Simon Peter, the other disciples and in particular Thomas, all needed Divine Mercy and they received it either on Resurrection Sunday or, in the case of

Thomas, one week after. The offer of mercy was done through the apparition of the Risen Jesus. The response of the disciples was the belief that Jesus is alive. St. Thomas went one step further by proclaiming Jesus to be HIS PERSONAL LORD AND HIS PERSONAL GOD.

Today we're urged to say, "JESUS, I TRUST IN YOU." This is what St. Faustina Kowalska calls the "signature" of the Divine Mercy image painted under her direction. This also has the dimension of that, PERSONAL FAITH that we find in the Apostle Thomas.

Spiritual and Personal Values: see above, n. 2.

April 25, 2004



Third Sunday of Easter

Readings (C): Acts 5:27-32, 40-41; Rv 5:11-14; Jn 21:1-19 or Jn 21:1-14

1. SUMMARY OF THE GOSPEL TEACHING (*Supplement to Bibliarasal Step Three*). The Gospel Reading, short form, tells us of the Lord's First Breakfast with Seven Disciples after the Resurrection. It was actually, as John puts it, "the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead. The breakfast was preceded by a miraculous catch of fish. The long form gives us the restoration of Peter to his primacy among the apostles after he professed his love for Jesus three times, prodded by the Lord.

2. VALUES THAT WE CAN PICK FROM THE PASSAGE (*Bibliarasal Step Three*).

V. 1, "Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples..."
- Value of the revelation that shows Jesus as having risen

from the dead. One of the most important reasons why the Gospel of John was written.

V. 5, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" - Value of designating the Christian faithful as "children" of Jesus Christ. Devotees at Quiapo call the Black Nazarene "*Nuestro Padre Jesus Nazareno*."

V. 12, "Come, have breakfast." - Value of a shared meal at the beginning of the day. In the Philippines this is traditionally done by farmers in the field where they do their work

3. POINTS FOR SHARING (*Bibliarasal Step Five*).

- Has your knowledge of the Risen Christ come to you like a "revelation?"
- Have you ever shared a meal with your fellow workers in Christian ministry?

4. WHAT THE LORD WANTS US TO DO (*Bibliarasal Step Six*).

a) In relation to Philippine Church Life Today - Let us promote "bonding" among ministers of the Good News by more frequent *agape* meals.

b) In relation to the Socio-Economic, Political and Cultural Life of Filipinos Today - A bond of unity among workers in the same factory, employees at the same office, etc. could be promoted by shared meals. In any case, unity among people doing the same work is a much desired good.

c) In relation to Spiritual and Personal Life. We have to train ourselves in the values pointed out above (n. 2).

BONDING MY MEANS OF MEALS

Jesus sought bonding with his disciples at the Last Supper - a bonding that is now sacramentally fostered in the celebration of the Eucharist. He again sought bonding with at least seven of them at his First Breakfast after the Resurrection, by the sea of Tiberias. It would seem that the breakfast was not eucharistic because there is no mention of wine and there is mention of fish. But it was a quasi-sacramental meal because by that time Jesus' body no longer needed earthly food, and the fish was caught miraculously. In fact, we can say, in a manner of speaking, that the "Miraculous Fish" eaten at that breakfast was Jesus himself!

What we need to do today is to promote the bond of unity and love among all the faithful people of God, clergy, religious and laity. This is of course done best through Mass and the Eucharist. But it is also of great help for us to have more fraternal meals that in Tagalog we call *salo-salo*.

Spiritual and Personal Values: see above, n. 2.