



CBCP PASTORAL EXHORTATION

*On the Occasion of the Opening
of the 2018 Year of the Clergy and Consecrated Persons
First Sunday of Advent, 03 December 2017*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Grace and Peace to all of you!

We are on the 6th Year of our 9-year Spiritual Journey towards 2021 - the 500th Year after the arrival of Christianity to the Philippines. It was in 1521 that the Holy Mass was first celebrated and the Sacrament of Baptism was first administered in the Philippine archipelago. Then the Santo Niño devotion began in Cebu. That was the start of our Evangelization

The year 2018 is dedicated to the Clergy and Consecrated Persons. They comprise just a small portion of the Church, yet they are fulfilling a vital role in her mission. In our culture, they are greatly instrumental for the lay to become truly an evangelized and evangelizing community of disciples. Yet they are not immune to the twin errors of a dichotomy of faith and inadequate discipleship of Christ.

Renewed servant-leaders for the New Evangelization – this is the goal of our prayers and activities this year. We aim towards the integral renewal of the values, mind-sets, behavior and life-styles of the Clergy and Consecrated Persons. Following the example of the Good Shepherd, they are invited to become servant-leaders who care most especially for the least, the lost and the last. It will be a year, too, of revisiting ways of seminary and religious formation and the collaboration with the laity in the work of mission and ministry. (Cf. Pastoral Exhortation on the Era of New Evangelization)

As we embark towards a new Evangelization we have become aware of the bright lights along the way. Our priests faithfully celebrate the sacraments daily in the busy urban areas and in the distant and lonely barangays. Our men and women religious administer church institutions, teach catechism, and serve in the parishes. They bring joy to orphanages, hospitals and prisons. Some have started working for rehabilitation of drug dependents. Working without habits, but no less committed, are the members of lay institutes, promoting the Kingdom in their own humble way. They truly inspire and strengthen us, like the priest of Marawi, Fr. Teresito “Chito” Suganob, who almost lost his life caring for his parishioners caught in the crossfire’s of war. They make us hopeful for tomorrow

On the other hand, the bright lights undeniably go at times with some dismal shadows, brought about by some of our Clergy and Consecrated Persons themselves. There were occasions of frailty and scandals that sadden us. Such misconducts call for sincere reflection and humble repentance and reparation. May these faults point us to new and vast possibilities of renewal and communion with those who are weak and broken. May our Priests and Consecrated Persons, in their weakness and woundedness, continue to serve and guide fellow sinners with the joy of the Gospel that leads to the fullness of life. Jesus himself encourages us with his words: “In the world you have tribulation; but take courage, I have overcome the world.” (Jn 16:33)

Renewal of the Church requires the renewal of the Clergy and Consecrated Persons. For this, we take inspiration and example from the tender scene of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet.

JESUS IN COMMUNION WITH THE FATHER

“Fully aware that he comes from the Father...”(Jn 13:3) - Jesus never lost that unity with his heavenly Father while he lived on earth. His communion and intimacy with the Father moved him



to reach out to sinners and needy. It was the source of the impact of his words and the effectiveness of his miraculous deeds. (cf. Jn 6:38. 46; Jn 8:19, 29)

As Lay, Clergy and Consecrated persons, we are invited to share in this “communion” and “intimate relationship” between Jesus and the Father. The Clergy and Consecrated Persons are united with Christ in the Proclamation of the Word, in the celebration of the Sacraments, and in their Spiritual Leadership. That is why they are called “alagad ng Diyos,” men and women “of God” or even more accurately, “servants of God.” It is through their very ministry of sanctification that they too are sanctified (cf. CCC, 1534)

But at times, they seem far from God and from following his will. Some get entangled in their concern for material possessions, in their need for pleasures and in their desire for power. Instead of becoming servant-leaders of communion they may even lead us to confusion and disharmony. Let us pray that we may remain ever closely united to Jesus as he is in constant communion with the Father! We pray that all the Clergy and Consecrated Persons continue to abide in Jesus and become perfect disciples of the Lord for the New Evangelization. (cf St. John Paul II, Pastores Dabo Vobis III, 26)

JESUS STOOD TO HUMBLY SERVE...

“Jesus stood...” (Jn 13:4) – Jesus “rose up from the meal” to wash his disciples’ feet. His love for them moved him to serve them humbly.

With this inexhaustible strength in communion with the Father, Jesus was determined to serve and love those who were given to him, even to the point of death, death on the cross. (cf Phil 2:8) We, as members of his Church, are invited to actualize the Kingdom of God present in our midst. We are called to reach out to those in greatest need, to love and to serve those considered different and far from us. The Clergy and Consecrated Persons, given their role of leadership in our communities, and who often enjoy privileges and entitlements, should stand up from a comfortable and privileged position to generously and humbly serve. May they stand out in a world that is increasingly indifferent and even hostile to the Good News, and yet hungering for something it knows not. In the end, the Gospel will prevail, faith in Jesus will be vindicated, for as he said, “fear not, I have already conquered the world.” (Jn 16:33)

“...AND HE BEGAN TO WASH THE DISCIPLES’ FEET.”

“...and he set aside his vestments...began to wash the feet of the disciples...” (Jn 13:4-5) The Lord, kneeling at the feet of his disciples, set aside his garment of protection and put on the towel of service. Showing his example of humility, he washed their tired and soiled feet. He later admonished them to do the same to one another, “...just as I have done for you, so also should you do.” (Jn 13:15)

“How lovely are the feet of him who brings the good news!” (Is. 52:7; Rom 10:15). The Scriptures acknowledges them who come with joyful tidings, who bear the Gospel message. The task of sharing the Good News entails reaching out, and traversing distances, here in our country and in neighboring Asia. We are careful not to neglect anyone needing the joy and hope that the Gospel brings. “To the peripheries!” Let us roll up our sleeves and work! The Church is like a field hospital! “Duc in altum!”

My dear people of God, please continue to support our clergy and consecrated persons in their journey as “servants to the servants of the Gospel.” As shepherds to the Lord’s flock, may they “take on the odor of their sheep.” As vulnerable “lovely feet” of the New Evangelization, may they

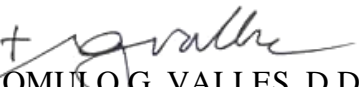


encourage others to mission by serving with humility, by loving in action, and by strengthening the poor, the hopeless, the victims of injustice and oppression (cf. Is 52:7; Rom 10:15)

Let us also pray for the young men and women in the seminaries and formation houses. As they prepare for a life of self-offering and service may their communion with Jesus be the source of their inspiration, strength and joy.

Let us all together, Lay, Clergy and Consecrated Persons, remain united with Jesus. With Mary let us proclaim the greatness of the Lord and rejoice in God our savior. May we become servants of the new evangelization to one another so that one day, God may finally and truly be all in all. (cf 1 Cor 15:28b)

From the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, December 3, 2017, First Sunday of Advent


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