

*Asian Journal of*  
**Religious Studies**

“The Lord is truly among us.”

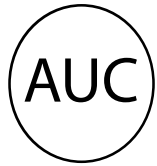
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**Editorial**

**“Repairing My House”**

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Pope Francis made a pilgrimage Friday to the hillside Italian town of Assisi, following in the footsteps of his namesake, St. Francis, the 13th-century friar who renounced a wealthy, dissolute lifestyle to embrace a life of poverty and service to the poor.

According to tradition, St. Francis was famously told by God to “repair my house.” In word and deed, the first pope to name himself after St. Francis has made clear how he wants to follow that command. Francis is trying to shape a church that is welcoming to all, but especially to the most marginalized, with a church hierarchy that is worthy of its 1.2 billion flock.

As noted by journalist Nicole Winfield, in Huffington Post, here are some of the pope’s main goals as he attempts to remake the church into the institution St. Francis would have wanted.

**A CHURCH ‘THAT IS POOR AND FOR THE POOR’**

Pope Francis met with the poor in Assisi, demanding that the faithful “strip” themselves of their worldly attachment to wealth, which he said was killing the church and its souls. He delivered that exhortation during the most evocative stop of the day, in the simple room where St. Francis stripped off his clothes, renounced his wealth and vowed to live a life of poverty. Since becoming pope in March, Francis has made it clear that one of his principal objectives is a church that is humble, looks out for the poorest and brings them hope. The “slum pope,” as he is known because of his work in Argentina’s shantytowns, recently denounced the “idolatry” of money and encouraged those without the “dignity” of work.



## A CHURCH THAT WELCOMES EVERYONE, INCLUDING NONBELIEVERS

At his first public audience after his election, Francis made an unusual exception: In recognition that not all in the room were Christians or even believers, Francis offered a blessing without the traditional Catholic formula or gesture, saying he would bless each one in silence “respecting your conscience, but knowing that each one of you is a child of God.” That respect for people of different faiths or no faith at all has become a hallmark of Francis’ papacy as he actively seeks out atheists for dialogue. Assisi is known as a place of interfaith dialogue, drawing people of all faiths — and no faith — to visit the basilica dominating the hill and its magnificent frescos by Giotto.

## A CHURCH THAT IS ‘MESSY’ AND GOES OUTSIDE THE SACRISTY

St. Francis was considered a radical disobedient for having renounced everything and given himself entirely to his faith, but that’s just the type of radical witness Pope Francis wants for today’s Catholics. Francis told Argentine pilgrims during World Youth Day in July to make a “mess” in their dioceses and shake things up, even if it meant irritating their bishops. He wanted to convey his hope the church would stop being so inward-looking, and instead go out to the peripheries to spread the faith, just like St. Francis. The pope’s first trip outside Rome was to Lampedusa, a southern Italian island closer to Africa than the Italian mainland. His eulogy for all migrants lost at sea denounced a “globalization of indifference,” a prescient message given Thursday’s shipwreck off Lampedusa that killed scores of migrants. As black ribbons hung from Assisi’s banners in mourning, Francis proclaimed Friday “a day of tears” for the dead.

Let us hope and pray that together with the Pope, Christians and people of good will can build such a Church.

*The Editor*

## A Soft Heart and a Thick Skin: The Challenge of Working with Youth

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I have often been asked the following question: “Cyril, based on your experience of working with, and among, College students and working youngsters, for over 40 years, in and around Pune, what would you say are the most important qualities for a would-be youth animator?” My answer now comes pat: “A soft heart and a tough skin.” One needs a soft heart, to be able to *feel with* youngsters the hurt, awkwardness and confusion they are going through – not to mention the shame, lack of confidence and uncertainties that they often try to cover up with a rough or macho exterior. And, at the same time, one must have a tough skin, so as not to be too easily discouraged when things don’t seem to go too well, or when some young person, in a confused welter of feelings at being misunderstood, humiliated and rejected, hits out at the very person who’s trying to befriend or help him or her, the youth animator, whom they sometimes (not very logically) identify with the oppressive Establishment. I have learned to swallow my pride and recall what I imbibed, as a JDV Theology student, in those famous Carkhuff Counselling sessions, ably chaired by Fr. Philip Terassa SJ: “Listen, not so much to the words spoken to you, but the feelings that lie behind the words and respond to *those*.” I have slowly come to listen and respond to the feelings of hurt and pain that lie behind the many rude and angry words that had been addressed to me, not letting myself be distracted into self-defensive arguments or trying to show the boy or girl that he or she that had very much exaggerated the situation. In more than a few cases,

after a few sensitive non-judgmental responses from me, a very burly and macho guy, or a bitingly sarcastic gal, was reduced to tears and began to sob out a sad tale of rejection, misunderstanding or false accusations. Only then was I able to guide the now less disturbed youth towards constructive action for self-healing.

And it is precisely these “hard nuts” or “tough cases” that we should be mainly involved with in our youth ministry. However, my common experience is that – particularly in the youth apostolate – we turn Jesus’ parable of the Good Shepherd upside down. The Master tells us how the true shepherd leaves the 99 just sheep in the fold and goes off in search of the one who has wandered. Well, today, the youth scene has changed somewhat: there is proportionately only one “good sheep” left in the fold and 99 have gone a-wandering. And where all the “good” shepherds? Not out hunting for the lost majority, but crowding round the solitary well-behaved youth who is much less of a challenge to their energy, time and ingenuity, loading him or her with the Sodality, the Legion of Mary, the Altar Boys’/Girls’ Society, while the so-called “bad boys and girls” are left “out there” somewhere, smoking, drinking . . . or worse. And I wouldn’t be surprised if the situation were more or less the same for our other apostolates.

When I set about starting the SSU (Searching and Serving in Unity, as the group was to name itself later), I was determined to reach out to those youngsters who came from broken families, bunked class, had “bad habits” – in short, never joined any youth groups of their own volition. And I was determined to welcome non-Christians and those of no particular religious persuasion also. Nor would I ever reject anyone because of his or her alleged “bad behavior” or “immoral antecedents”: someone has to reach out to the lost! My own youth had been very much of a mess and I didn’t want other youngsters to have to go through what I did, making the same foolish mistakes, which invariably rendered one all the more hurt, confused and lonely. But I also knew, from my own unhappy experiences that just about no youth would talk to an adult about his or her problems. This was partly due to prejudice and partly due to having to face hasty judgments from people who

didn’t really understand the young person’s situation at all. In such cases, young people, desperate for a listening ear or some kind of guidance, would turn to another young friend . . . who, more often than not, and with the best intentions in the world, would only complicate the setup even more with clumsy and misleading “advice” and “solutions”.

I realised that, if I wanted youngsters to confide in me so that I could “help them to help themselves”, I had to win their friendship, in the first place. I have long learned that nobody solves another’s problems; all you can do is help a person solve his or her own problems and for that you have to listen a lot and talk little. You help a person to better understand his or her own problem, by going critically, deeper into it and then you put him or her in touch with the funds of strength and ability he or she has (often without knowing it), and with which he or she can gradually work out his or her own solution.

Now, one has to *win* the friendship and trust of young people. This cannot be done by waiting for them to come to you or by sending them the non-verbal message, “I’m a very busy person. Come to me only when you have a problem, otherwise DON’T WASTE MY TIME!” We clerics have become quite adept at sending out such complex non-verbal missives! And the only way to win their trust and acceptance is by going out to them, going where they are, spending time with them, apparently “wasting time” with them, sometimes going for a movie or picnic, at other time just “freaking out” with them, exchanging jokes and banter . . . or even chatting over a beer in a pub. Seminarians who sometimes came with me to be “with the youth” would complain, “But we did NOTHING today! We just sat around in Café Naaz, told jokes and ‘talked crap’!! The whole evening was wasted!!!” Despite my comments they were not convinced that important barriers had been broken down and that, thanks to that “wasted evening” it would be a little easier for the youngsters to share with us their dreams and fears in a day not too far into the future.

That was surely the beginning!

# The Miracle and Adventure of Understanding

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“Even a common act like a persuasion which has convinced a man against his former convictions, may rightly be spoken of as a miracle. [...] Hence, in Buddhism, the miracle of teaching [...], which makes one realize the immortal Dhamma is regarded as far superior to other sorts of miracles.” (B. Buddhadasa, *Christianity and Buddhism* (Bangkok: MitrNara Printing, 1967, 101).

According to this quotation a moment, in which teaching, learning and understanding take place, in which convictions change, is on the one hand something quite ordinary and on the other hand a miracle. This short essay is following this thought and reflects its relevance for Christian theology. What does it mean to understand a religious insight and in what way can we support such processes of understanding?

In the first part of my article I want to show in what way we can think of a link between spirituality and epistemology, between our faith practice and our capacity to understand. The second part presents a few insights from the Buddhist world (from the Thai monk Ajahn Buddhadasa) which seem to be relevant for the chosen topic and in the third part I give a short response to these Buddhist thoughts from the side of Christian theology.

## 1. Spirituality and Epistemology

In order to open the question of the connection of spirituality and epistemology I want to share two experiences which continue to make me think. The first one happened in an academic theological research group which was working predominantly according to

the paradigm of an analytical philosophy. The discussions focussed around the question if the propositional content of the conviction “Jesus Christ is resurrected” is true or false and the group looked for (appropriate resp. inappropriate) epistemic justifications for that conviction. Personally I experienced great difficulties to follow the discussion, as the word “resurrection” provoked in me the question what we actually mean by it. Were we speaking about the same, when we used the expression “resurrection”? Were we looking for the same kind of understanding?

The second experience, which I want to share, had its origin in a simple photography, which a journalist must have taken in a Muslim country and which I encountered one morning in a newspaper. It showed an assembly of people, who held a rally and who carried banners on which one could read the slogan “Jesus Christ is not the son of God. He is a prophet of Islam.” Is this statement correct or false? Am I as Christian obliged to protest against it and to claim that Jesus Christ *is* the Son of God? Or is it first of all my life-long duty to try to understand, what the mystery of God-becoming-man can mean for me and for us?

These are just two small incidents taken from my own life, which confront me with the question of what it really means to understand religious insights. How does the process of understanding take place? What can be conducive in this process, what is an obstacle and in which way is the process of understanding related to a spiritual practice?

I start my research on the presupposition that the relationship between spirituality and epistemology does not merely indicate that spiritual practice serves as a means in order to internalize insights one has already rationally understood, but that spiritual practice itself can mean to learn how to understand.

## 2. Inspirations from the Buddhist world – Ajahn Buddhadasa (1906-1993)

As a young Thai Buddhist monk Ajahn Buddhadasa reached in 1928 for the first time and a few years later for a second time

Bangkok in order to study there the Buddhist teaching, because an academic degree was regarded as a requirement for a career in the community of monks (*sangha*). But both times he did not stay there for long, as he felt that he could not encounter the Buddhist teaching in an adequate way in the academic Bangkok milieu. Therefore in 1932 Ajahn Buddhadasa left Bangkok for good after he had experienced a deep conversion. He withdrew to a forest area in the south of Thailand close to his home town and changed his name into Buddhadasa (“servant of the Buddha”) giving the following explanation „I owe this my life and this my body to the Lord Buddha. I am a servant of Buddha, the Buddha is my master. For this reason my name is from now on ‚Buddhadasa‘. (28<sup>th</sup> August 1932)“. After several years of living there in nature and solitude a few monks joined him. Gradually the place developed into a monastery (Wat Suan Mokkhabalarama, engl.: The garden of liberation) and was visited by lay people and by people from the West. Ajahn Buddhadasa interpreted the entire Theravāda-teaching in the light of contemporary understanding and in the light of life experiences. He linked the role of a traditional forest monk who focuses on the ascetic practice with the role of a city monk who focuses on the teaching. Ajahn Buddhadasa died on the 8<sup>th</sup> July 1993.<sup>1</sup>

In the following three epistemological relevant issues which one finds in Ajahn Buddhadasa’s teaching are presented: (a) the spiritual illness and the observation of one’s own spirit, (b) people-language und *Dhamma*-language and (c) *suññatā* and the empty spirit.

### **(a) The spiritual illness and the observation of one’s own spirit**

Ajahn Buddhadasa speaks of a spiritual illness, from which all human beings are suffering. The cause of this illness are mental impurities and first of all the perception of I/my and we/ours. As a consequence people feel either attracted by something (greed, desire, craving), repelled by something (hatred) or are torn between these two mental reactions (delusion). The further

consequence is then that people see things falsely and thereafter think, speak and act falsely. So first of all this illness affects the epistemological skills of a human person. The cure of the illness comes through the *Dhamma*, which has to be received internally and not just externally.

The ways of treatment, which are recommended by Ajahn Buddhadasa, are the contemplation of the self in the light of the *Paticcasamuppada* (teaching of the conditioned arising) as well as the contemplation of sense objects and of pleasant sensations as illusion carrying the characteristics of impermanence, frustration (suffering) and not-self.

Ajahn Buddhadasa interprets the *Paticcasamuppada* as an innerpsychic process, which takes place repeatedly during one life and even during one single day. The spiritual illness means being a captive of that process, whereas the liberation from the spiritual illness means to interrupt this process, which is possible between the *Paticcasamuppada*-link *phasa* (contact) and the link *vedana* (sensation) or between the link *vedana* (sensation) and the link *tanha* (thirst resp. craving). Although according to Ajahn Buddhadasa originally the human mind is pure, it is subjected to a strong tendency to become entangled in the dynamics of the *Paticcasamuppada* and as a consequence to think only within one’s own sensations. Therefore the human mind has to be purified, the mental impurities have to be swept like one sweeps the floor with a broom. The observation and development of the mind is done systematically through the training according the four tetrads. The first three tetrads (observation of the body, the sensations and of the mind) are seen as preparation of the mind, so that it becomes soft enough to examine the *Dhamma* in the fourth tetrad. On the basis of this training even intellectual studies can be taken up meaningfully again.<sup>2</sup>

### **(b) People-language and *Dhamma*-language**

Ajahn Buddhadasa’s approach is based on what he calls the two worlds of perception, of knowledge and of language. Besides a colloquial language, a „people language“ or „everyday language“,

which we need in order to communicate about mundane experiences, Ajahn Buddhadasa speaks of a language of religion, the „Dhamma language“ or „dharmic language“, which allows the communication about not tangible things and which presupposes a mental development. On the basis of this theory on language Ajahn Buddhadasa is able to interpret several central Buddhist ideas in a new and surprising way.

According to Ajahn Buddhadasa it is through the *Dhamma*-language that theoretical knowledge and practical skills meet. Just within the boundaries of rational understanding this kind of language cannot be spoken or understood. But even the *Dhamma*-language cannot capture the true *Dhamma*, it can only indicate the path, which leads to it.

According to the *Dhamma*-language knowledge or understanding does not mean having studied particular topics. As long as studies remain external studies, which are equated with the picking up of information, that kind of knowledge remains incomplete knowledge. Whereas in everyday language knowing and understanding is often associated with reading, listening, thinking or judging rationally, in *Dhamma*-language understanding refers to the internal realization of that which shall be understood in one's own mental process. Ajahn Buddhadasa shows this by using the example of „knowing *suññatā*“. In order to know or understand *suññatā*, this reality has to manifest itself in the human mind.

In Ajahn Buddhadasa's thinking these two languages correspond to two different ways of learning, the external and the internal learning. Ajahn Buddhadasa opts for the internal learning, for the learning from the living body and the living mind and not for the learning exclusively from books or ceremonies.<sup>3</sup>

### (c) *Suññatā* and the empty spirit

*Suññatā*, *nibbāna* und *anattā* are three expressions which are called the heart or the essence of Buddhism by Ajahn Buddhadasa. They are closely interrelated resp. their meanings overlap. On the one hand *suññatā* can mean the fundamental nature of all things

and on the other hand it refers to the quality of an advanced human mind, which has overcome craving and grasping. In the end it is only that kind of mind, which is capable of understanding *suññatā*. The quality of the mind is a necessary presupposition for the process of understanding.

*Nibbāna* means being cooled in the sense of not being heated up by I- and my-identifications (or we- and our-identifications).

Die teaching of *anattā* finally wants to articulate that in our consciousness no unchangeable entity which thinks and feels can be found, but that our consciousness has to be perceived as a continually changing phenomenon. Therefore it is not justified to attach to inappropriate ideas of a self.

“Nothing whatsoever should be clung to as ‚I‘ or ‚mine‘.” (B. Buddhadasa, Heartwood, 29). Instead of this one has to develop an empty mind or – expressed more precisely – one has to realize the emptiness of the mind which actually is the basis of each human mind.

It is that kind of mind, the one, who has overcome self-centeredness, the one, who has realized – at least to a certain extent – *suññatā*, *nibbāna* und *anattā*, that is capable of deep and sharp thinking and of stress-relieved working. The empty mind is at the same time the way to understand *suññatā* and the realization of *suññatā*. Knowledge and self-knowledge are deeply linked with each other. As long as the human mind is filled with craving and attachment, the real potential of the mind is not available, the mind is being misled. In the end one has to realize what Ajahn Buddhadasa calls „doer-less doing“ or „walker-less walking“.

Liberation, redemption and understanding are connected according to Ajahn Buddhadasa. With regard to fundamental teachings which aim at the overcoming of *dukkha* (frustration) understanding and realization go hand in hand. Understanding Buddhist teaching means overcoming I- and mine-identifications. In order to come to know the real Buddha, the real *Dhamma* and the real *sangha* it is necessary to come to know one's own mind;

otherwise one is only in touch with „Parrot Triple Gems“. When Ajahn Buddhadasa speaks of the Buddha he refers first of all not to the physical body or to a historical person but to the pure, clear and calm condition of the mind of the true Buddha. Based on this approach one can claim the omnipresence of the Buddha.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Resonance from Christian Theology

In what way can the contributions of Ajahn Buddhadasa be meaningful for Christian theology? In what way can these ideas make us theologians think anew about the gaining of Christian theological knowledge, about the theory of theological knowledge and about what is called spiritual theology? I want to name briefly three points, which surely have to be elaborated further but which also draw our attention into interesting directions.

Craving and attachment as epistemological problems or the development of the skill of understanding: The Buddhist testimonies show that the human mind might not be by itself – without being trained – capable of perceiving, discerning and understanding appropriately but that there might be a tendency or even a probability of being deceived. This skeptical attitude is linked to a great attention for the observation of mental processes and leads to the development of strategies and ways of discipline, which are supposed to guide people closer to the skill of perceiving and understanding. Especially mental processes, which from the Buddhist perspective originate in an inappropriate understanding of I – like craving or attachment – are not only seen as moral problems, but are identified first of all as epistemological problems. This seems to me a thought worthy of consideration in the development of a Christian theological style which calls itself “Spiritual Theology”.

Way out and actual practice: The second point refers to the way out of the described unlucky situation of not-understanding and to the actual practice instructions. The Buddhist reflections which have an epistemological significance do not stay abstract theory but are combined with concrete requests to enter into the practice and with instructions how this could be done. What be-

comes visible is a great attention for the movements of the mind and not just for the content with which the mind is busy. In what way would it transform a Christian (spiritual) theology if the balance between content (“fides quae”) and the process (“fides qua”) would be adjusted in a way that the primary focus does not go – in an unbalanced way – to the content anymore?

Connection of knowledge, self-knowledge and liberation/redemption: Understanding in the way this expression is used in the given Buddhist approach cannot remain external. Understanding does not mean neutral knowledge, but implies an inner involvement and realization. Understanding of Buddhist insights is necessarily linked to self-discovery, self-knowledge and to questions of liberation and redemption from a state of frustration. In this sense epistemological questions are relevant for soteriological enquiries.

The phenomenon of understanding which seems to happen so commonly can be perceived as a mystery and a miracle if we have a closer look at it. Understanding religious insights or beliefs to which we might have become so accustomed that they do not look inspiring to us anymore become much more challenging through this perspective, but at the same time understanding becomes a personal adventure and theology an existential journey and quest.

### Endnotes

1. Cf. *Hans-Bernd Zöllner*, *Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: Buddhismus im Garten der Befreiung* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 2006), 17- 39; cf. *Peter A. Jackson*, *Buddhadāsa: Theravāda Buddhism and modernist reform in Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003), 9-16 and 275-298.
2. Cf. *Bhikkhu Buddhadasa*, *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree: The Buddha’s Teaching on Voidness* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1994), 9-11 and 79-88; cf. *Bhikkhu Buddhadasa*, *I and Mine* (Bangkok: Thammasapa, 2007), 307-313; cf. *Bhikkhu Buddhadasa*, *Anāpānāsati: Die sanfte Heilung der spirituellen Krankheit* (München: Buddhistische Gesellschaft, 2002), 49-101; cf. *Bhikkhu Buddhadasa*, *Paticcasamuppada: Practical Dependent Origination* (Bangkok: Thammasapa, 2002), 1-31 and 65-66.



3. Cf. *Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, Zwei Arten von Sprache: Eine Analyse von Begriffen der Wirklichkeit* (Surat Thani: Dhammadana Foundation 2002), 15-18; cf. *B. Buddhadasa*, Heartwood, 57-64.
4. Cf. *B. Buddhadasa*, Heartwood, 4, 59-65 and 94-95; *B. Buddhadasa, Anāpānāsati*, 110-113; cf. *B. Buddhadasa, I and Mine*, 39-43; cf. *Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, The Buddha's doctrine of Anattā: A Comparative Study of Self and Not Self in Buddhism, Hinduism and Western Philosophy* (Surat Thani: Dhammadana Foundation, 2002), 50-61; cf. *Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, Doing all Kinds of Work with an Empty-Free Mind*, [http://www.suanmokkh.org/archive/pdf/12\\_VoidMind.pdf](http://www.suanmokkh.org/archive/pdf/12_VoidMind.pdf) (status: 31. Juli 2013); cf. *Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, The three Wishes of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu* (Bangkok: Thammasapa, 2005), 143.

## The Abiding Significance Of Vatican II

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It is a little more than fifty years since the Second Vatican Council began. May be it is time to assess the lasting significance of the Council. I have been reading and studying the documents of Vatican II for more than four decades. In the light of this study, I shall now highlight some of the insights of the Council which are likely to have an impact on the life of the Catholic faithful for a long time.

1. Vatican II taught us to look at God in a new way. God meets the deepest longings of the human heart and provides an adequate answer to our deepest questions.<sup>1</sup> Further, when God is forgotten created things become unitellible.<sup>2</sup> In fact “all believers of whatever religion have always heard His revealing voice in the discourse of creatures”.<sup>3</sup> God is present and active in the world, and human beings can decipher His presence and purposes in the events, needs and desires of people today.<sup>4</sup> He is always present in the lives of humans. Whatever truth or grace are to be found among the nations is a sort of secret presence of God.<sup>5</sup>

The Council has a sympathetic approach to atheism. From the Council's perspective some atheists “laud the human being so extravagantly that their faith in God lapses into a kind of anaemia, though they seem more to affirm the human being than to deny God”.<sup>6</sup> Others stretch “the idea of human independence to such a point that they find difficulties with any kind of dependence on God”.<sup>7</sup> While discussing the causes of the rise of atheism Vatican II points out that believers have a lot to do with the birth and growth of atheism. “To the extent that they neglect their own training in

their faith, or teach erroneous doctrine, or are deficient in their religious, moral or social life, they must be said to conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion”.<sup>8</sup> In response to atheism the Council asserts “that the recognition of God is in no way hostile to human dignity since this dignity is rooted and perfected in God”. It also maintains that hope related to the end time does not diminish the importance of temporal duties, “but rather undergirds the acquittal of them with fresh incentives. By contrast, when a divine sub-structure and the hope of life eternal are wanting, human dignity is most grievously lacerated, as current events often attest. The riddles of life and death, of guilt and of grief go unsolved, with the frequent result that humans succumb to despair”.<sup>9</sup>

It is highly significant that Vatican II makes this statement: “Nor does divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to His grace”.<sup>10</sup> The Council is here speaking of atheists who are sincere and searching.

**2.** Vatican II has made a powerful affirmation of the human. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World is centred on the human person: “The pivotal point of our total presentation will be the human being himself/herself, whole and entire, body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will”.<sup>11</sup> The human person is meant to be the centre and crown of all things on the face of the earth.<sup>12</sup> The Council points out: “Whoever follows Christ, the perfect man, becomes more of a human being”.<sup>13</sup> To follow Christ is to become increasingly more human. After having stated that all the faithful of Christ are called to the fullness of the Christian life and the perfection of charity, Vatican II asks us to strive for the kind of holiness that will promote “a more human way of life even in this earthly city”.<sup>14</sup> Candidates for the priesthood are exhorted to cultivate such human qualities as “sincerity of heart, a constant concern for justice, fidelity to one’s word, courtesy of manner, restraint and kindness of speech”.<sup>15</sup> And priests are told that they have to be good human beings in order

to be effective priests.<sup>16</sup>

Vatican II is convinced that the humanization of the world is part of the Church’s mission and believes that ‘through her individual members and her whole community she can contribute to making the human family and its history more human’.<sup>17</sup> The Council is glad that “we are witnesses of the birth of a new humanism, one in which the human being is defined first of all by his/her responsibility toward his/her brothers and sisters and toward history”.<sup>18</sup>

**3.** One of the most remarkable achievements of Vatican II was the rediscovery of the Holy Spirit and her role in the life of the Church. For centuries the Holy Spirit was a forgotten God. The Council looks upon the Holy Spirit as the Church’s life principle:

The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful as in a temple (cf. 2 Cor 3:16; 6:19). In them He prays and bears witness to the fact that they are adopted sons (cf. Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15-16 and 26). The Spirit guides the Church into the fullness of truth (cf. Jn 15:6:13) and gives her a unity of fellowship and service. He furnishes and directs her with various gifts, both hierarchical and charismatic, and adorns her with the fruits of His grace (cf. Eph 4:11-12; 1 Cor 12:4; Gal 5:22). By the power of the gospel He makes the Church grow, perpetually renews her and leads her to perfect union with her Spouse.<sup>19</sup>

The Church is thus a Spirit-filled and Spirit-led community.

But the Spirit is also present among other Christians and their churches, bestowing on them his interior gifts.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the Spirit calls all humans to Christ by the seeds of the Word and the preaching of the Gospel.<sup>21</sup> He plays a decisive role in the mission of the Church. “Sometimes he visibly anticipates the apostles’ action, just as he unceasingly accompanies and directs it in different ways”.<sup>22</sup> Finally, it is the Holy Spirit who “with a marvellous providence directs the unfolding of time and renews the face of the Church”.<sup>23</sup>

The Council’s teaching that the Holy Spirit is present and active throughout the world is highly significant.

4. Equally significant is the Council's teaching on the universal availability of grace. Vatican II looks upon grace as God's gift, as God's self-communication to humans. The Council is convinced that grace is present both among the Catholics and the non-Catholic Christians.<sup>24</sup> God also imparts his grace to non-Christians, both to those who sincerely seek God and to those who have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God.<sup>25</sup> In fact, grace is constantly at work in the hearts of all humans of good will.<sup>26</sup>

Karl Rahner believes that the teaching that grace is offered to all humans is based on "the hope that clearly emerged in the Council of a really universal salvation of the whole world".<sup>27</sup> In unmistakable terms, Vatican II declared that "all humans are called to salvation by the grace of God" Several times it cited or alluded to 1 Timothy 2:4 which says that "God desires everyone to be saved". According to Rahner:

*Universal hope is a lasting gift from the Council; it is both a solace and a summons... That hope embraces all persons, all Christian communities, all non-Christian religions, so that it may gradually dawn on us how Christ has really died for us and how the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation for the whole world.<sup>28</sup>*

5. There is some freshness in the way Vatican II understands Jesus. It affirms the centrality of Jesus Christ in the Christian scheme of things.

*For God's Word, by whom all things were made, was himself made fresh so that as perfect man He might save all men and women and sum up all things in himself. The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the longings of history and of civilization, the centre of the human race, the joy of every heart, and the answer to all its yearnings.<sup>29</sup>*

The Council lays stress on Jesus' humanity. In unmistakable terms it declares:

*For by his incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind, acted by human choice, and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin.<sup>30</sup>*

Jesus has by his suffering and death "blazed a trail and if

we follow it life and death are made holy and take on a new meaning".<sup>31</sup> By his own life and death Jesus has revealed that death leading to newness of life is the law human existence. As the Council affirms:

*For it is only by putting to death what is old that we are able to come to a newness of life. This fact applies first of all to persons, but it holds also for the various goods of this world, which bear the mark both of humans' sin and of God's blessing.<sup>32</sup>*

6. The Council has altogether a new approach to the Church. First of all the Church is God's Church. It is not a mere association of human beings. God is at work in the Church. Hence we can speak of "the divine origin, maintenance and destiny of the Church."<sup>33</sup> This is what Vatican II means when it speaks of the Church as a mystery. Mystery in St. Paul is God's plan for the salvation of humankind. It was the Heavenly Father's plan to offer to every one the possibility of salvation and to assemble in the Church all who would believe in his Son. This plan was realised in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What was once achieved in Christ is now being effected in the lives of the faithful through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Church is thus seen as part and parcel of God's Plan to save all humankind in Christ Jesus.<sup>34</sup>

Further, the Church is people's Church. For the Council the 'people of God' was the principal paradigm of the Church, and it includes all the faithful – the pope, the bishops, the priest and the ordinary believers. That is why the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church has a whole chapter on the People of God before it deals with the various categories of people in the Church. While there are functional differences in the Church, and the pastors have their rightful place, "all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ".<sup>35</sup>

By describing the Church as the people of God, the Council stresses the element of life over against the juridical and the sac-

ramental. It also points out that the Church is not primarily an institution but a people – the pilgrim of people of God.

Besides, the Council has made two significant assertions about the structure of the Church. First, the episcopate is a sacrament.<sup>36</sup> A person becomes a member of the college of bishops by the reception of a sacrament. Like all sacraments, the episcopate is of divine origin. This has some importance for the understanding of the structure of the Church. Whatever be the mode of appointing a bishop – and today it is by a papal decision -- the episcopate exists in the Church not through the kind favour of the pope. The pope cannot choose to abolish it. The sacramentality of the Episcopal ordination guarantees the continued existence of the episcopate as a constitutive element of the Church. Secondly, the collegiality of the bishops. The Council has taught that college of bishops together with and under the pope has full and supreme authority over the whole Church.<sup>37</sup> The pope is a bishop, hence, “together with”, but he is the official head of the college, hence “under”. If the bishops of the world, who are heads of pluralistic local churches, constitute the central government of the Church and exercise authority in the collegial manner the emergence of truly world-wide and genuinely Catholic Church cannot be far off.

Vatican II rediscovered the local church. Even though in the New Testament the term ‘Church’ mostly refers to the local church, this idea was completely forgotten in recent centuries. There are three main points the Council makes regarding the local church. First the local church is not an administrative subdivision of the universal Church. The dogmatic Constitution on the Church states:

This Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful which, united with their pastors, are themselves called churches in the New Testament. For it their own locality these are the new people called by God, in the Holy Spirit and in much fullness.<sup>38</sup>

The local church is a community of faith, the Eucharist and love. Where the Word is preached and believed, where the Eucharist is celebrated and where love is practised where the church is.

Secondly, the local church is the goal of mission. According to the Council the mission of the Church consists in preaching the gospel and planting the church in places and among people who do not yet believe in Christ.<sup>39</sup> To plant the church in a human community is not to transplant a church that has grown old into adulthood in one place in another place. It is to foster the emergence of a church which is deeply rooted in the life and culture of a people. This calls for a thorough inculturation of the Christian faith and Christian life.

Thirdly, the local church is meant to be self-governing churches. Vatican II “solemnly declares that the Churches of the East, as much as those of the West, fully enjoy the right, and are in duty bound, to rule themselves”.<sup>40</sup> The autonomy of the local churches is quite difficult to realise. Centuries of Roman centralism have given rise to a dependent, conformist mentality among the clergy and the laity. And it does not come easily for the leaders of the local churches to take the initiative, to make decisions or to settle disputes without referring the matter to Rome.

7. Some years back Pope John Paul II wrote: “At the Second Vatican Council the Church committed herself irrevocably to following the path of ecumenism, thus heading the Spirit of the Lord”.<sup>41</sup>

Vatican II was quite revolutionary in its approach to ecumenism. There are four significant elements in the council’s teaching on ecumenism which I wish to highlight here. First of all, the Church of Christ is not exclusively identical with the Roman Catholic Church, though it subsists in Roman Catholicism.<sup>42</sup> As a result other Christian communities are churches endowed with many ecclesial elements. Secondly, these churches have a place in God’s plan of salvation. That is why the Holy Spirit uses them as means of salvation for their emmebrs.<sup>43</sup> Thirdly, the goal of the ecumenical movement is not the return of non-Catholic Christians to the Roman Catholic Church as the latter presently exists. The Roman Catholic Church stands in need of reform. Deficiencies in conduct, in Church discipline and formulation of doctrine have to

be carefully rectified.<sup>44</sup> All the churches have to move forward in order to become the Church of Christ's dreams. Fourthly, "In the Catholic teaching there exists an order or 'hierarchy' of truths, since they vary in their relationship to the foundation of the Christian faith".<sup>45</sup> This realization will prevent us from insisting on the acceptance by other churches of non-essential truths as a necessary condition for Christian unity.

Personal conversion, prayer, common worship (prudently undertaken), dialogue and common service are the means suggested to foster the union of Christians.<sup>46</sup> If all Christians can make common efforts in the service of the larger human family, that will surely bring them closer to one another.

8. It was at Vatican II that an Ecumenical Council for the first time dealt with the world religions. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church spoke of the Jews, the Muslims and others who believe in God.<sup>47</sup> The declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions dealt with Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Judaism.<sup>48</sup> Thus official recognition was accorded to these world religions. Further, the Council affirmed the existence of positive values in these religions – truth and goodness, grace and holiness.<sup>49</sup> It acknowledged the possibility of saving faith among the followers of these religions.<sup>50</sup> It also appreciated the spirituality found among them.<sup>51</sup>

Vatican II exhorts all the faithful to dialogue and collaborate with the followers of these religions in order to "acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral good found among them".<sup>52</sup> Such a dialogue and collaboration, the Council believes, can enable us all to work together to build up the world in genuine peace.<sup>53</sup>

9. Vatican II has a very positive attitude to the world. The Council document, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, focuses its attention on the world of humans which is the theatre of their history and carries the marks of their energies, their tragedies and their triumphs.<sup>54</sup> It is "that world which the Christian sees as created and sustained by its Maker's love,

fallen indeed into the bondage of sin, yet emancipated now by Christ".<sup>55</sup> The document regards the difficulties and imbalances brought about by the rapid changes that are taking place in the world as a 'crisis of growth'.<sup>56</sup> It has a positive attitude to the process of secularisation:

If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy. Such is not merely required by modern man, but harmonizes also with the will of the Creator.<sup>57</sup>

As a result, the Council "acknowledges this lawful freedom and affirms the legitimate autonomy of culture and especially of the sciences".<sup>58</sup>

Vatican II lays stress on the Church's solidarity with the world and expresses its eager desire to dialogue and collaborate with it. As Avery Dulles points out:

The Pastoral Constitution, in particular, sought to bring the Church into dialogue with the world on a basis of mutual respect and reciprocal give-and-take... The Council sees the Church as involved with the world in the tremendous social and cultural transformations of our times, and affirms the Church's solidarity with 'the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age'. Renouncing any attitude of haughty superiority, the Council expresses 'great respect' for "all the true, good and just elements found in the very wide variety of institutions which the human race has established for itself and constantly continues to establish". The Church here professes its readiness to put its talents and resources to work in order to contribute to secular goals such as peace, freedom, justice and human dignity.<sup>59</sup>

What is perhaps most significant in the Pastoral Constitution is that it conceives the role of the Church in the modern world as that of a servant. Inspired by no earthly ambition, the Church wishes only to carry forward the work of Christ who came not to be served but to serve.<sup>60</sup> Hence "Christians cannot yearn for anything more ardently than to serve the men and women of the modern world ever more generously and effectively".<sup>61</sup> The document spells out concretely the kind of service that the Church can render to human persons, human communities and human activity

in the world.<sup>62</sup>

The Council has no hesitation to admit that the Church has learned a lot from the world:

Thanks to the experience of past ages, the progress of the sciences, and the treasures hidden in the various forms of human culture, the nature of man himself is more clearly revealed and new roads to truth are opened. These benefits profit the Church, too. For, from the beginning of her history she has learned to express the message of Christ with the help of the ideas and terminology of various peoples, and has tried to clarify it with the wisdom of philosophers, too.<sup>63</sup>

10. J.J. Markey has put forward the idea that Vatican II was a revolution:

The Second Vatican Council was clearly a revolution in that it fundamentally and irreversibly altered the historical development of a massive social and cultural institution in a way that no one could have planned, foreseen or predicted before it began. It was revolutionary in that it marked both the end of something (the Catholic Counter-Reformation) and its defiant confrontation with the post-Enlightenment world) and the beginning of a new era for the Roman Catholic Church, the wider Christian community and the world of which they are a part.<sup>64</sup>

I think that Markey is right. Unfortunately, this revolution has been stalled. Historical studies have shown that revolutions can be stalled for a time but cannot be stopped. Hence I am inclined to agree with Markey when he says:

So clearly I believe that the revolution is not over at all. It is merely going through a kind of convalescence. But eventually it will have to return to the critical issues raised by the Council, and the great unfinished agenda that was created in its wake.<sup>65</sup>

It is my fond hope that the Church in the coming years will have the courage to creatively respond to the challenge of Vatican II. Is the election of Pope Francis a sign of the Church's readiness to relaunch the Vatican II revolution? Only God knows.

## Notes

1. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n. 41.
2. *Ibid.*, n. 36.
3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, n. 11
5. Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, n. 9.
6. Pastoral Constitution, n. 19.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, n. 20.
9. *Ibid.*, n. 21.
10. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 16.
11. Pastoral Constitution, n. 3.
12. *Ibid.*, n. 12.
13. *Ibid.*, n. 41.
14. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 40.
15. Decree on Priestly Formation, n. 11.
16. Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, n. 3.
17. Pastoral Constitution, n. 40.
18. *Ibid.*, n. 55.
19. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 4; see also Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, n. 4.
20. Decree on Ecumenism, n. 3.
21. Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, n. 15.
22. *Ibid.*, n. 4.
23. Pastoral Constitution, n. 26.
24. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 14; Decree on Ecumenism, n. 3.
25. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 16.
26. Pastoral Constitution, n. 22.
27. K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 22, New York: The Crossroad Publishing House, 1991, p. 103.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
29. Pastoral Constitution, n. 45.
30. *Ibid.* N. 22.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, n. 8.
33. A.C. Outler, "A Response to *Lumen Gentium*" in W.M. Abbot, *Documents of Vatican II*, p. 103.
34. See Dogmatic Constitution, n. 2.
35. *Ibid.*, n. 32.
36. *Ibid.*, n. 22.

37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, n. 26.
39. Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, n. 6.
40. Decree on the Eastern Churches, n. 5.
41. John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, Rome, 1995, n. 3.
42. Dogmatic Constitution, n. 8.
43. Decree on Ecumenism, n. 3.
44. *Ibid.*, n. 6.
45. *Ibid.*, n. 11.
46. *Ibid.*, n. 8.
47. Dogmatic Constitution, n. 16.
48. Decree on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, nos. 1-4.
49. Dogmatic Constitution n. 16; Decree on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, n. 2.
50. Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, n. 7.
51. *Ibid.* n. 18.
52. Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, n. 2.
53. Pastoral Constitution, n. 92.
54. *Ibid.* n. 2.
55. *Ibid.*
56. *Ibid.*, n. 4.
57. *Ibid.*, n. 36.
58. *Ibid.*, n. 59.
59. A Dulles, "The Church in Communication" in *Catholic Mind* 69 (1971), p. 11.
60. Pastoral Constitution, n. 3.
61. *Ibid.*, n. 93.
62. *Ibid.*, nos. 40-43.
63. *Ibid.*, n. 44.
64. J.J. Markey, "George Washington, Napoleon, John Paul II and the Future of the Vatican II Revolution" in *Seattle Theology and Ministry Review* 3 (2003), pp. 15.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

## Kurien Kunnumpuram: A Man for Others

*Jose Thayil SJ*

Rector, Papal Seminary, Pune 411014

I have known Fr. Kurien for the last 30 years or so. I have been a silent admirer of him during all these years. While I was the director of studies in Patna Regional Theologate, I have invited him few times to come and give classes in Patna. His classes were very well appreciated.

There are very many things that I appreciate in Fr. Kurien. I like to mention a few of them. He is known for his availability. He is always willing to help out the staff and the students in any way he can. I have seen him volunteering to help out. He is a man who encourages others especially to do well in academic matters such as reading, writing and publishing. I have found him to be a crusader for freedom. Though giving more freedom to seminarians brings along its own problems, he feels that true formation can take place only in an atmosphere of freedom. He is an optimist by nature. He tries to see the positive side of people and situations and gives a positive interpretation to the things that he hears and sees. He is a good observer. He is able to notice what many of us fail to notice at all.

He is known for his clarity in thinking, speaking, teaching and conducting meetings. That is why his classes are very well appreciated and his articles and books are easy to read and understand. We can get many insights and practical suggestions from his classes and writings. He is invited time and again to be the resource person in chapters of both men and women religious. He is also sought after as a retreat director. He challenges people to be more human and spiritual rather than being "pious and holy". I have found him very human in his approach towards me and others.

As he will moving out of Papal Seminary to Christ Hall in Calicut in his home province, I wish him good health, good friends and God's abundant blessings. Fr. Kurien, as Papal Seminary has been your home for the last 45 years or so, you are most welcome anytime to this home of love. As we promise to keep you in our prayers, we request to keep Papal Seminary in your prayers and thoughts. Once again wish you all the best and may God bless you.

### WITH A GRATEFUL HEART

Kerala province Jesuit, the follower of Jesus the humble and meeK  
Universal in vision a typical Jesuit ubuntU  
Realistic in thinking, thought provoking wirtE  
Innovative ideas of formations, an asset of De Nobili  
Enthusiastic, energetic ,empowering and affectionatE  
New ecclesiology of Vatican II, of which you are certaiN

Known for three points in homily and reflection for which many of  
us seeK

Umpteen books and articles; for the list meet Fr. KurU  
Numinous spirituality that comprises the fullness of being humaN  
Nurturing many religious, brothers and priests through, retreats and  
spiritual directioN

Untiring zeal to follow Christ, your GurU  
Maximum span of your life is spent in Papal AthaneuM  
Promoter of life, fullness of life in Jesus' fellowshiP  
Unwavering in convictions and humorous with those around yoU  
Responsible freedom promoter, Papal Seminary's unique factoR  
AUC Editor, JDV President emeritus, Theologian of India  
Maestro, Guide, Companion, Colleague, and Friend VANDANAM  
Bala Francis Papal seminary

## “No More Words”

*Ben Bose*

Papal Seminary, Ramwadi, Pune 411014

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“No more words. We know them all, all the words that should not be said But you have made our world more perfect and beautiful.”

To gild (make golden) a lily would not be necessary because it is sublime in itself. So is Fr Kurien. Well! It is indeed, an honour and privilege for me to express the deepest sentiments of feelings and gratitude to Fr Kurien for his wonderful being to each one of us. He is a person of integrity, a happy priest, lives his life with commitment, self-contentment and love. As he has been engaged in learning and teaching theology for 50 years his very life has become a message: a life promoting and growth enhancing person.

As I was asked to share my experience of working with Fr Kurien, I would say he has played a predominant role in my life to deepen my faith, understanding of theology and convictions of life realities. But as the time limits me I would like to highlight them in three points: as a person of faith, as a person of hope and as a person of love.

**A Person of Faith:** As Abraham was a blessing, Dear, Fr Kurien you are a blessing to us as you have been one of stalwarts of Papal Seminary. Faith in God is the foundation of his theology as it is permeated throughout his life. The intellectual caliber, depth in his knowledge and experience, clarity of thoughts and precision in his words are the characteristics of his lectures and talks as they are the reflections of his faith understanding, which are very much demanding till today. His total surrender before the Lord, as a faith expression is very inspiring. An example is that whenever he comes



to the chapel for the mass, he kneels down and pray devoutly and genuinely. Perhaps it looks very simple, but it means to me a lot and gave me lot of inspiration.

**A Person of Hope:** Fr Kurien is a peaceful person. His words are hope filled as they give consolation in the lives of the people who are in touch with him. May be a tremendous openness, an incredible optimism, joy and enthusiasm are the hallmarks of his towering personality. Whenever there are some serious issues or discussions in the community, Fr Kurien comes with three points to give us hope and encouragement. It is very true, when we go for our spiritual direction or personal-sharing, he is always able to understand from the students' perspective and pinpoints the goodness in us. At any time, I approached him with serious difficulties, he used to tell me: "Don't worry, see Ben, you, do one thing etc. etc." Likewise, the amount of trust that he has shown in me made me more committed to life. Similarly, his constant support and encouragement enabled me to grow in several ways, and one of them is to opt for B. Th. Comprehensive Defence Paper.

**A Person of Love:** According to Fr Kurien, our relationship to one another was important for Jesus. That is why he asked us to love one another as he had loved us (cf. Jn 14:12). In one of the writes up, Fr Kurien says: "I am particularly thankful to God for creating me something of the goodness and loving kindness of God. They have also shaped me as a human person. I would not have such basic human characteristics as the ability to love or to speak a language unless I was first loved and spoken to by other human beings." This reflects his loving relationship with God and human beings. Since, he cherishes many loving relationships in his heart he becomes an apple of everyone's eye in the seminary, campus and elsewhere. Therefore no wonder to say that he is a man of parts as he is very dynamic and young in his hearts and thoughts.

As we come together to bid farewell to Fr Kurien, now I feel a feeling that you all feel that is to say: We miss you father! The

*Continued on p. 35*

## **Papal News and Views**

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Academic year at Papal Seminary began on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May 2013. During this academic year we have students from 56 Dioceses from India who belong to three Rites( Latin, Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara.) We also have students of two Religious congregations.

### **No of Seminarians for the year 2013-2104**

I BPH: 25; II BPH. 20

I BTh: 25; II BTh: 37;III BTh: 24; IV BTh. 25

**Fare well to three staff of Papal Seminary:** Papal Seminary bid farewell to three veterans:

Rev. Fr. Paul Pazhathandham of Kothamangal Diocese.

Rev. Fr. Francis Pereira SJ of Mumbai province

Rev. Fr. Kurien Kunnupuram SJ of Kerala Province. Papal Seminary places on record all the valuable services they rendered to the seminarians over the years and to the Church of India.

**Writers at Papal Seminary: Br. Nibin Kochuveetil** of the Diocese of Kanjirapilly came up with his 30<sup>th</sup> book titled: "Anudhinam Vishudharilude" in Malayalam about daily readings on Life of saints.

**Fr. Stephen Jayard** of Trichy Diocese published a book : titled" TOWARDS THEORY OF RATIONALITY IN SCIENCE" a Plea for Reasonableness

**Fr. Kurien Kunnupuram** added one more book to his earlier contributions. The title of the book is: "Called to Serve". It is on the role of priests and ministers in the Church. He has also brought out 6 Volumes on the **Writing of Fr. Samuel Rayan SJ.**

**Fr. Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ** published the book titled “ **Between Beneath, Before and Beyond**”

“**Committed to the Church and the Community,**” a book in honor of **Fr. Kurien Kunnupuram SJ**. Edited by Fr. Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ, Fr. James Ponniah and Fr. Thomas Kuriakose SJ

**SILVER JUBILARIANS OF 1988 BATCH:** We had the joy of hosting the Silver Jubilarians of 1988 batch at Papal Seminary. On the 16<sup>th</sup> October, 2013 they ( 14 fathers) celebrated Jubilee Mass in the Papal Seminary Chapel. During the homily Rev. Fr. Kumar Raja of Tuticorin Diocese on behalf of his companions who were present thanked the Papal Seminary staff and students. He thanked God for all the blessings and graces they have received through the past 25 years. He concluded his homily in the words of Dag Hammarskjöld “For all that has been, THANKS, and for all that will be, YES” AUC wishes the silver jubilarians God's choicest blessings and prays that SILVER will turn to GOLD....

**New Look to Papal Seminary: Fr. Jacob Kullangara** the Minister of the Papal Seminary has given a face lift to the front portion of the Seminary.

#### **EVENTS TO CHERISH:**

- 1) New Priests of the year 2013 celebrated their thanksgiving Mass in the papal Seminary Chapel.
- 2) Vianney Day: Papal Seminary celebrated feast of St. Mary Vianney on the 3<sup>rd</sup> August. Bishop Emeritus Valerian D'Souza was the guest of honor.
- 3) Tamil Academy Festival on .... Titled “VIDIYAL” (Dawn): On the 15<sup>th</sup> September Tamil Academy put up the cultural programme in which all the seminarians took part and made it a memorable event.
- 4) Farewell to 4<sup>th</sup> Year BTh students (25 Brothers). On the 15<sup>th</sup> September Papal Seminary bid farewell to the 4<sup>th</sup> year BTh students.

“**To Reach the Unreachable....**” Three Brothers from Papal seminary (Br. Rohan, Romel and Rajan) went to Uttarakhand to participate in the rehabilitation work organized by the Diocese of Bijnor. They were there from the 7<sup>th</sup> of August to 17<sup>th</sup> of August. Br. Rajan narrates his experience in following words: “Really we had very tough time there and many times we had to face the oppositions and the challenges of the locals, yet we did not give up those challenges. We carried the message of great love and service to the people as we have received from Lord Jesus, we went like St. Paul and other disciples to the different communities and villages to give them some means and hope to re-start a new life and to come out of all that tragedies they have underwent. And the same time though our stay was not so long we have also learnt many things from this catastrophe, from the nature and from the people over there, which will remain in our mind till our last breath.”

*continued from p. 32*

song is ended, but the melody lingers on. “No more words. We know them all, all the words that should not be said but you have made our world more perfect and beautiful.”

Dear Fr Kurien, we thank you very much for all that you have been to each and every one's life. We wish and pray that may God grant you good health of mind and body to serve many more so that they may have life in abundance. **Thank you!**

## Homily Notes

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November 3, 2013 XXXI Sunday

(I: Wis.11:22-12:2 ; II: 2 Thes.1:11-2:2; III: Lk. 19:1-10)

Care and Concern for Others

There is a tendency among most of us to enquire about others, before we encounter them. It is precisely to know what others feel about that person and what was their experience with him/her. At times, we completely ignore persons merely by listening to what others say about them. We even don't attempt to know what that particular person feels deep within.

Our intention behind this may be to have a better understanding about them. But, most of the time, it gives us the negative result. It is this enquiry that influences our thinking and with this prejudiced mind, we approach that person. Because of this pre-occupied thought of ours, our relationship with that person will never be genuine and even when we listen to them, we listen not with our hearts, but with our heads. We often even tend to think that this sort of approach helps us. But, in reality, it doesn't.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is presented as someone who stands exceptional to such attitude. He also sets us a new example of what would happen when we go beyond this attitude; what kind of changes it will bring forth in others, when we listen to them and their feelings; what sort of response we will receive, when we relate to them wholeheartedly irrespective of what others think about them.

Zacchaeus was considered to be a sinner mainly because of his profession. People were very hesitant to relate with him either. Nobody seemed to have even tried to know what he was feeling within. Actually he was longing for someone, who will listen to his inner yearnings. The very moment Jesus gives his attention to Zacchaeus, and when he feels that there is someone to listen to him, he begins to pour out what he wants to do for others, especially for the ones,

whom he had defrauded. Jesus thereby affirms that he too is the son of Abraham and thus invites us to accept others as they are without any distinction on the basis of 'good' and 'non-good', because there is nothing non-good in God's creation.

Today's first reading also affirms this attitude of Jesus and invites us to do so, saying that God loves all things that exist and detests none of them. Because He would not have made anything if He had hated them. In saying so, it calls us to accept and approach others as they are, which will help us to find the goodness in others, and as a result, we will be able to establish a good and genuine relationship – where there is real care and concern for others without any prejudice.

**-S. John Milton, II B.Th.**

November 10, 2013, XXXII Sunday

(I 2 Mac 7: 1-2, 9-14; II 2 Th 2: 16-35; III Lk 20: 27-38)

Treating Women with Respect

The trouble makers, the Sadducees, came to question Jesus about the resurrection. It is not clear in the text if the Sadducees think that Jesus believes in the resurrection as the Pharisees do, but we assume that they assume that he does. Sadducees in Luke are only mentioned here. This group of The Jewish sect took its name from Zadok, David's priest. It is Zadok whose descendants became the authorized high –priestly line in the post-exilic period (Ezek 40:46). They were conservative in their belief, rejecting the existence of angels as well as the resurrection of the dead. But Jesus having understood their cunning nature replays that god is not of the dead but of the living. Jesus deep knowledge of Torah is mentioned here. He quotes from the genesis in which Moses experienced god in the burning bush.

God's answer in regarding his identity is most of the time 'I am who I am'. In this we can't put god to a being that existed in the past but we can call god a being that existed without being created and continues to exist to eternity. So according to Jesus only the earthly beings find difference between man and woman. But they enjoy equal status in heaven. So this could be a paradox that perplexes our understanding of the status of woman and man. Jesus is telling that they will be like 'angels' in the presence of the almighty. So what would be the intention of Jesus in this passage. I feel that Jesus must

have been aware of the injustice that is done against woman at that time. Even some of the philosophers of the Greek propagated that man is a higher being and woman doesn't possess a soul. Jesus removes this kind of lower speculations regarding the dignity of woman. He wants everyone to be treated equally as it is an anticipation of the heavenly existence.

Jesus believed in resurrection of the dead. And Sadducees knew that. Though they tried to trouble him with these questions, Jesus puts before them a new theology. An ethical and eschatological realm in which God treats every individual equal, no inferiority or superiority. Today we see a lot of atrocities being done against woman. Jesus might have warned the followers to not be ashamed to give equal status to woman. In the letter to Corinthians Paul mentions of the curse that the women received for accepting the wish of Satan. He further mentions that by becoming a good mother she will get special blessing from God. Leaving aside the resurrection aspect it is a good passage to ponder over our understanding towards the dignity of woman. Are we able to treat woman as they are? Or will we be able to treat them equally imagining the equal status that we enjoy when we are with God in paradise?

**-Shibin Mattathil CST**

November 17, 2013, XXXIII Sunday

(I Mal 2: 19-20a; II 2 Th 2: 7-12; III Lk 21: 5-19)

Towards Abundant Life

We are nearing the last Sunday of the liturgical cycle. In the readings we see the episodes of the end of the world. This makes us possible to think that the topic is a relevant one. "If you study well you will come out with flying colours in the exam," says a teacher. This could also mean that if you do not study well, you may not get through the exam. Both the statements are made to make a student prepare properly for his upcoming exams. Jesus, in today's Gospel adopts the latter technique to unfold the mystery of life. He promotes life by this way of telling. He asks us to move towards the thing that can uphold life.

The Gospel of today portrays the awe feeling of the people towards the Jerusalem temple. During the time of Jesus, people were sticking on to the rules and regulations of the scripture like keeping the Sab-

bath, giving sacrifice, etc. forgetting the basic quality of humanity. They wondered about the architecture of the temple forgetting the God who is the core. So he tells the people that these external beauties of the temple will be destroyed one day. Along with the temple, the people also will be persecuted. Those who follow the scripture, with its right intention and with endurance will be saved. Also Prophet Malachi prophesises that those who do things that promote life will get the warmth of the sunlight and doing otherwise will put us into the oven. St. Paul, in his second letter to the Thessalonians speaks about the hard work that we have to put in to get our salvation. He says that those who do not work do not deserve his food. This implies that those who endure only will attain salvation and those who do not work for their salvation do not deserve it.

Obey God and you will be rewarded. This is the message that we infer from the three readings. Obeying God sometimes could be a tedious task for some of us. But still we have to obey Him. How should one obey God? This is a million dollar question today especially when we live in a consumerist pluralistic society, where things considered to be luxurious once is said to be necessary. We worry much about money value than Human values. We try to get new relationships with new friends who live in other countries through the new media forgetting the relationship with our own parents who live downstairs. Some Catholics prefer Sunday movie to Sunday Mass, which has become an option from obligation. Some of the negative values are considered to be norms these days. When we read newspapers, we find lot of news about bribes, scandals, rape, planned murder, mass killing, scams etc.. This makes us possible to doubt whether the world rotates and revolves only because of the negative values. We are much confused. Jesus also speaks of a similar chaos in the Gospel that will happen. People will get confused and will not know what to do next.

But actually it is not the ignorance of the people that make them too poor to decide what they have to do when a choice between good and bad values are kept. God has given us freedom. He also will help us to decide what we have to do next. We have to tune ourselves towards Him. To get ourselves attuned towards Him, we need to know Jesus and Love Jesus. In the busy world of E-mail, E-commerce, E-gift,

E-shopping, E-business, E-library, do not forget “E-shwar,” who is the foundation of our Human life. - **Benjamin L.**

November 24: XXXIV Sunday of Ordinary time

(I 2 Sam 5: 1-3, II Col 1: 12- 20, III Lk 23: 35- 43)

Feast of Christ the King who lives forever

The birth of a royal baby on July 22nd 2013 named Prince George Alexander Louis of Cambridge born to prince Charles and Kate Middleton brought message of joy and happiness to royal family and all over the world. The leaders from different parts of the world congratulated and shared their happiness to the royal family of United Kingdom. This is one of the places where monarchy is still prevalent even today. The history is full of Kings and queens but we hardly remember them today.

Today, the mother church celebrates the feast of Christ the king. Christ as a king, is different from all other kings reigned in this world in many ways. Christ is king forever, His kingship was foretold long before He was born.. There are many instances, where Christ is referred as king in the Bible. He is the descendant of great king David. He is anointed and affirmed as King and son of God.

The Kingdom of Christ is all embracing and never ending. “He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” ( Luke 1:33). The second reading of today is very clear with regard to the importance and significance of Jesus as King. As said in the second reading Jesus is the king of whole universe. Whole creation is connected with Jesus Christ, therefore he has dominion over both heaven and earth. Everything is created through him, with him and for him.

The gospel reading of today gives entirely different picture of Jesus’ kingship. The soldiers and people standing near the cross mock at Jesus, it shows, He was not understood by people. But one of the criminals in the gospel understood Jesus as a real king, therefore he requests Jesus to remember him in His kingdom. Jesus responds to this criminal’s saying and assures him of Paradise.

Why was Jesus as son of God had to undergo brutal and ridiculous death ? As son of God Jesus performed many miracles during his life. In spite of all this he accepted death on the cross like any other

criminal deserved at that time. Because for Jesus Kingship was meant something different than the people thought of. The greatest weapon Jesus executed for spreading of Kingdom of God was LOVE. The Love of God, enabled Jesus to accept ridiculous and painful death. He was not like other kings, who wanted to be served and wanted to protect their lives. He was the king who loved and served others, in that process died for all of us.

We all of us are asked to be the members of that Kingdom, which Jesus propagated during his life. It is our duty to expand this Kingdom to all over the world. The motto of this kingdom is promoting love, justice, peace and equality.

As we celebrate this feast let us ask ourselves, what is that we give importance in our lives. What is the dominating factor that gives us sense of security and comfort in our lives ? Is it our carrier, money, power and position ? Are the values of kingdom of God has place in our hearts ? Do we promote and propagate these values in our lives ?

Let us pray during this Eucharistic celebration that Jesus Christ becomes the king of our hearts and may we be guided and strengthened by Jesus in our lives. May God bless us all ! -**Upendra D**

December 1, 2013; First Sunday of Advent

(I Is 2: 1-5; II Rom 13: 11-14; III Mt 24: 37-44)

Being Spiritually Awake

Matthew’s audience was mostly made up of Jewish converts to Christianity. These Christians were ridiculed by their Jewish friends who had not accepted Christ as the Messiah, and they wondered why some Jews were selected to become Christians and others not. To clear their doubts Matthew quotes Jesus in today’s gospel suggesting the apparently arbitrary nature of the election on the last day. Just as at the time of the Deluge, Noah and his small family were spared while others perished, so shall it be at “the end.” This apocalyptic section of Matthew’s gospel begins with Jesus’ prediction of the destruction of the Temple, and goes on to Christ’s Second Coming, and the signs preceding both. Jesus answers the disciples by giving them signs of the end of the age (24:3-8), foretelling persecutions (24:9-14), and recalling of the sacrilege prophesied by Daniel (24:15-28). Jesus

also tells the Parable of the Fig Tree (24:32-35) in which he warns his disciples to be alert and prepared.

**The need for preparedness:** The consistent warning in today's gospel text is that we should be prepared for the coming of the master. In a reference to the story of Noah, Jesus says that the sin of the people was placing too much emphasis on the normal cares and necessities of life. They were too concerned with eating and drinking – just as we are during Christmas and New Year's holidays. Jesus reminds us that there is something more important than feasts or weddings: the Son of Man could come to us either in the form of our death or at the end of the world at any time. Since God may show up without an appointment, we must be prepared at all times. The passage in Matthew (24: 40-41) does, indeed, talk about some people being "taken" and some being "left behind," but the word for "taken" means, not "to go up" but rather "to go along with." It isn't a magical word about the "born again and saved" people floating up in the air as many of our Protestant brothers believe. It is much more like Jesus' words to the apostles by the Sea of Galilee: "follow me" or "come along with me."

**Be alert even while you work:** The man working in the field and the woman working at the mill will be "left", because they won't leave their work. True enough – work is important. But there is something more important than our work: the coming of the Son of Man. God may arrive unexpectedly. We don't know when a thief might break into our house; so we are prepared for him at all times. We lock our doors and windows. We leave a light on when we're gone. We insure our possessions. We do things now because a thief could come at some unknown time. Hence, even during this busy Christmas season we must keep our daily life centered on Christ.

**How do we prepare for the unexpected coming of the Son of Man?** In this parable of Jesus we have an example of the proper and improper methods of waiting. The faithful slave who, with sincerity and good management, has faithfully carried out his master's instructions to ensure the welfare of his fellow slaves (20:26-27) is always ready for his master's coming. In contrast, the wicked servant is primarily concerned with power, food and drink. The master is the image for Jesus. To be prepared for his coming (Matt. 24:3,

36-43) we must be obedient to the divine will, which means that our actions must serve the community. The question we might ask is: "Am I being faithful and wise in caring for others while waiting for Christ's return?" The text reminds us that our preparation for the Incarnation of our Lord is only one aspect of our Advent preparation, and not necessarily the most important.

Every morning when we get up, let us pray, "Lord, show me someone today with whom I may share your love, mercy and forgiveness." Mother Teresa of Calcutta once said, "Whatever you do in your family, for your children, for your husband, for your wife, you do for Jesus." Every night when we go to bed, let us ask ourselves, "Where have I found Christ today?" The answer will be God's Advent gift to us that day. By being alert and watchful we'll be getting an extra gift: Christ himself. There is a saying which goes s back to St. Thomas Aquinas: "Without God, I can't. Without me, he won't." We are so future-oriented that we frequently forget the present entirely. We spend too much time trying to protect ourselves against future misfortunes. We save for a rainy day, to get married, to buy a home, to send the children to college, to retire in comfort and to protect ourselves against future misfortunes with varieties of insurance. But we need to be more spiritually wakeful and prepare for our eternal life. Let us make this advent season the time of such preparation.

**-Sudhakar**

December 8, 2013: Second Sunday of advent

(Is 11:1-10; Rom 15:4-9; Mt 3:1-12)

Harmony and Peace

The season of Advent gives us opportunity to ponder, meditate on the greatest event of God-human history, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God on earth. Advent is a season of preparations of our hearts to celebrate Christmas in dialogue with the Holy Trinity and resolve to commit ourselves actions for transformation of self and our surroundings, true actualization of the spirit of joy of Christmas in human hearts. The Second Sunday of Advent focuses on our readiness for 'conversion' or change of attitude, aptitude and behaviour that often loaded with selfishness, pride and insensitive towards others. The readings of the day are invitations, invitations from God for renewed human person, persons able to relate and love

others. A story is told about people caught hold of a swine, gave solid bath with perfumed shampoo and soap and kept it in a cozy place. After sometimes they left it out thinking that the swine would detest dirt and come back to the clean shed.

However, to their surprise, it hurried to a nearby dirty pond and immersed itself fully, never to turn back to its clean shed. Nevertheless, we are humans, thinking beings with freedom and responsibility and can courageously say no to certain habits, interests, people or opportunities that deviates us from God and our fellow beings. It is a painful process for to say 'no' to these life-negating forces which appears temporarily so 'exciting' or 'source of happiness.' In today's consumeristic society, the sense of 'sin' is absent and life of simplicity and discipline and moral principles has become taste-less for many. Most of us have become 'ritual-fulfilling' Christians and forgotten to combine our faith life with action for the reign of God.

Isaiah reminds about a peaceful kingdom that would emerge only in the grace of God and not according to the worldly standard. The spirit of wisdom has dawned in us the day we were baptized and came to know and love Christ and our fellow beings. Thus, we are invited to be 'God fearing persons' for it is the beginning of true wisdom. Fear, without taking it in literal sense we understand it as our reverence towards God and no more to look God as a punishing agent. The God-centeredness life has to grow into a tree of wisdom of which roots are rooted in love, justice, peace and fellowship – the values of the kingdom of God. The stump of Jesse, the full grown tree with kingdom values is none other than Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Thus, centuries before Jesus' coming, Isaiah envisioned a community of God's reign where two contrary principles find co-habitation, the prophet gives images of harmony like wolf-lamb, leopard-kid, calf-lion, cow-bear, little child-wasp, etc. Imagine if our earth was devoid of war and blood-shed, people loving each other crossing boundaries of caste, creed and colour. Can we make this a possible reality?

St. Paul encourages us to cross our 'boundaries,' living a life in harmony with others (non-Christians), including our environment that is pleasing to God and not the Lucifer. Similarly, the invitation of John the Baptizer urges us to embrace a self-disciplined life to

make possible in our little way towards the reign of God amidst us and may our Advent preparations lead us to this awareness.

**-Udayanath Bishoyi**

December 15: 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent

(I Is 35:1-6a; 10; II James 5:7-10; III Mt 11:2-11)

Coming of the Lord

All of us are happy to see children, especially when a new born baby comes to our home, then our joy and happiness redoubles. Most probably all of us have had same experience. Actually advent is a season which gives us the same feelings because, Jesus Christ, the savior is coming to the world within a short period of time.

All the three readings of third Sunday of advent present to us the theme of 'coming of the lord'. The prophet Isaiah in the first reading encourages the exiled Jews in Babylon to believe that God is going to save them and transform their lives. He strengthens the Israelites by giving the idea of a real redeemer. In the second reading James the apostle encourages the early Christians to be patient "because the coming of the Lord is at hand." Finally, in today's Gospel reading, Jesus encourages John the Baptist to cast away the popular expectations about the Messiah and simply to accept His healing and preaching ministry as the fulfilling of the messianic prophecy of Isaiah. So it can be said that John the Baptist also preparing for the coming of the Lord.

Here arises a question? How are we going to prepare for the coming of the Lord? Is it only external preparation like fasting or abstinence? Or it means much more than that? In today's gospel we have a clear cut answer about this question. In the day of the Lord all are equal. On that day all kinds of injustice and inequalities will be thrown away. The blind will receive their sight, the lame will walk and the lepers will be cleansed (Mt. 11,4). That means Jesus Christ is going to come for all people, then there will not be any discrimination on the basis of caste, colour, gender and creed etc. God's salvific plan is not only for Jews or Christians but for all. So today He is telling us to come out of all kinds of barriers and fight for equality and justice and to have solidarity with the poor, marginalized and oppressed. What is our role for the coming of the Lord? Are we able to receive

God in our hearts without any prejudice, do we consider our brothers and sisters equal? Are we able to cut down our jealous and selfish motives for the kingdom of God? Are we able to give dignity and honour to our sisters or still we consider them as objects, and then still we are in the realm of darkness.

So in this advent season let us specially widen our hearts to receive the Lord and open ourselves to the marginalized and the oppressed. Then the child Jesus will surely enter in our hearts just like He comes in to the world. Let us always seek the help of John the Baptist, who will help us to prepare the coming of the Lord. Always have an optimistic mentality like John the Baptist. During this season, let us joyfully share God's bountiful grace, forgiveness and mercy with others. What Jesus commanded John's disciples, he commands us, as well: therefore Go and tell others what you hear and see. Amen.

**-Togin Kallarackal**

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent

(I Is 7: 10-14; II Rom 1:1-7; III Mt: 1:18-24)

Listening to the Divine Voice

The gospel today begins with a seemingly casual statement: **“Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way”** (Matt 1:18). But for the average Jew of Jesus' times this statement would be a shock. Why? Because, popular Jewish belief in those days did not expect the Messiah to be born of a woman as a normal suckling baby. Though the scribes and scholars were aware of the prophecy that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem, the average person held to the popular theology which says that “Three things come wholly unexpected -- the Messiah, a godsend, and a scorpion” (Sanhedrin 97a). The Messiah was expected to drop suddenly from the skies, full-grown in all his divine regalia and power. His landing space, of course, was no other than the Temple mount. Now you can understand why Satan tempted Jesus by proposing that he jump down from the pinnacle of the temple. The Jews found it hard to reconcile these expectations with the reality of this man Jesus whom they knew to be born and raised in their midst. **“We know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from”** (John 7:27). They found the ordinary ways of God's coming, God's presence and God's action among His people too simple to be true.

In the Gospel we also meet Joseph who is told by the angel not to be afraid to take Mary your wife into his home. Joseph was not a puppet on a string. He was not bereft of free will. He listened to this message from God told to him in a dream. He could have neglected that dream saying it is just an ordinary dream of a confused mind. Yet he responded with faith. He rose above his confusion and fear. He did not know how the story was going to end other than knowing that this child was going to save his people from their sins. The words -- **HE DID AS THE ANGEL OF THE LORD COMMANDED** should be inspirational to all of us. They are simple words yet behind them stand a man who should inspire us to respond generously to every prompting of the Holy Spirit in us to do as the Lord commands.

Like the Jews of old we also wait for the coming of God among us, for our Immanuel. Maybe we should take a moment and ask ourselves, how do we expect God to come among us? How does God work among us? This is necessary because sometimes the problem is not that God is not with us, the problem rather is that we do not recognize the ways of God's presence and action among us. His presence could be so simple and ordinary that we may not even care. We are often enough like Jacob in Bethel who woke from his sleep exclaimed, **“So the LORD is in this place - and I did not know it!”** (Gen 28:16).

Let us challenge and inspire each other to always listen to this Divine Voice in our hearts, in our heads, and in our dreams. Let us never dismiss generous and loving impulses that seem to come out of nowhere. We may never know their overall effect in the world. For those who wait and listen; the Lord himself will give a sign for we are called to belong to Christ.

**-Claudin B.**

December 29, 2013: Feast of the Holy Family

(I Sir. 3:2-6, 12-14; II Col.3:12-21; IIMt.2:13-15,19-23)

A Family of Mutual Respect and Love

We continue to breathe the Christmas air. We continue to feel the joy, the peace and the love this season brings. It is but fitting to celebrate the feast of the Holy Family during this octave. We are reminded once more that God intended from the very beginning that the entire human race becomes one family. He gave us His only Son,



to be human like us, to be one like you and me, to experience life the way every human person experiences it.

The readings of today tell us that every human family is based on mutual respect, service and that strong bond of charity. The human family, which is the most important unit of our human society, is where relationship and communion is nurtured and nourished. What every family is would define our society. For the family to be the strength of every society, every human family must be rooted deeply in God's compassion and mercy. Like Jesus, it is the experience of God's unconditional love that will make every individual, every family become an agent of love, peace, justice and forgiveness.

We see in the life of the Holy Family that Jesus is at the center. Every Christian family is invited to put Jesus at the center of its life. Christian parents are called to imitate the intensive spiritual atmosphere within the Holy Family and to be faithful to their spiritual duties. Within the holy Family, we also see that God is given priority over blood relations. The Holy Family leaves their comfort zone to do the will of God. Christian families are called to give absolute priority to God's will and to fulfill God's mission at all cost. We need to be aware of our destiny like Jesus who became gradually aware of who he was and what his destiny was. We too have to discover God's plans in our family.

The Gospel tells us of what the Holy Family has to go through while the world rejoices for the coming of the Messiah. The sufferings of the Holy Family more than two thousand years ago are also experienced by every family in our here and now. Present realities tell us that the life of the innocents are also threatened in one way or another, parents have to flee from one place to another for survival and families are faced with so many dangerous factors, that they need to protect themselves from all kinds of disunity. Let this be an opportune time to think of our own family. How is our family? How is the human family as a whole?

Like the Holy Family who is attuned to God's will, every human family is called to recognize God's presence and to listen to God's voice in the ordinariness of each day. Every family is called to discover God's plan as each day unfolds, in their experiences, through the events that come their way. Above all, every human family is

## A CHURCH THAT DOESN'T JUDGE

Francis made his first stop in Assisi to an institute that cares for gravely disabled children, who in the words of the director are often seen as “stones cast aside,” invisible and neglected by the world. Francis refuses to cast such judgment — he caressed each child, kissed each one, saying their “scars need to be recognized and listened to.” It was part of the simple message of love that he has brought to others often considered outcasts, like drug addicts and convicts. His “who am I to judge” comment about gays represented a radical shift in tone for the Vatican. Catholic teaching holds that all people should be treated with dignity and respect, so Francis was making no change in doctrine. But church teaching also holds that gay acts are “intrinsically disordered” — a point Francis has neglected to emphasize in favor of a message of merciful inclusion.

## A CHURCH THAT WORKS FOR PEACE, CARES FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

St. Francis is known for his message of peace and his care for nature, but he is often misunderstood, “sweetened” into something he wasn’t, Pope Francis said Friday. A Vatican spokesman put it this way: “Too often his message is lost and we reduce his role to that of a gentle, whimsical hippie who fed birds, smelled flowers and tamed wild wolves.” Pope Francis said the saint’s message was to truly “love one another as I have loved you,” calling for an end to all the wars in the Middle East, especially Syria. The pope has been steadfast in his call for peace in Syria, inspiring hundreds of thousands of people around the world to hold a day of fasting and prayer when it appeared military strikes against the Damascus regime were imminent.

called to be holy like Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Jesus’ entire life was spent in total obedience to the Father’s will, Mary allowed her “YES” to the Word of God shape her life and lead her even at the foot of the Cross and Joseph’s unquestioning obedience paved the way for the Holy Family to fulfill God’s will at all times. They who have been human like us, who have enjoyed the pleasures of life as well as endured life’s struggles, showed us the way. We too, parents, children and the whole human family, in our own unique way can be holy. Let us remain united with our Father in heaven because only then can we hear what He perfectly wills for us, only then can we fulfill His plan for us, only then can we be holy like Him, who is holy. It is never easy, but God’s grace is enough. May the example of Jesus, Mary and Joseph continue to inspire each of us in this path of love, in this path to holiness.

**-Vinod SVD**

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## A REFORMED CHURCH

Francis was elected on a mandate to reform the church, and he has set about doing that. One of his first stops Friday was to pray at the sanctuary of St. Damian, where the saint in 1205 famously was told to take a broken church and rebuild it. The pope has just finished three days of meetings with advisers helping him rewrite the main blueprint for how the Catholic Church is governed. Ideas include having a “moderator” to make the Vatican bureaucracy run more smoothly and a revised role for the Vatican’s powerful secretary of state. It also includes involving lay men and women more in the life of the church. Just as St. Francis wanted.

Nicle Winfield, *The Huffington Post*







# Five Finger Prayer

One can make the Five-Finger Prayer a part of our lives.

## 1. MY THUMB IS NEAREST ME.

So, let us begin our prayers by praying for those closest to us. They are the easiest to remember. To pray for our loved ones is a “sweet duty.”

## 2. THE NEXT FINGER IS OUR POINTING FINGER

We pray for those who teach, instruct and heal. This includes teachers, doctors, and ministers. They need support and wisdom in pointing others in the right direction. Let us keep them in our prayers.

## 3. THE NEXT FINGER IS OUR TALLEST FINGER.

It reminds us of our leaders. We pray for the President, Leaders in business and industry, and Administrators. These people shape our nation and guide public opinion. They need God’s guidance.

## 4. THE FOURTH FINGER IS OUR RING FINGER

Surprising to many is the fact that this is our weakest finger, as any piano teacher will testify. It should remind us to pray for those who are weak, in trouble or in pain. They need our prayers day and night. We cannot pray too much for them.

## 5. AND LASTLY, COMES OUR LITTLE FINGER

- the smallest finger of all  
which is where we should place ourselves  
in relation to God and others.  
As the Bible says,  
“The least shall be the greatest among you.”  
Our little finger should remind us to pray for ourselves.  
By the time we have prayed for the other four groups,  
our own needs will be put into proper perspective  
and we will be able to pray for ourselves more effectively.