

**Counter-
Cultural
Perspectives
of an Organic
Intellectual:
Selected
Works
of
Rudolf C.
Heredia**

Volume XV
HOMILIES
and
SERMONS

Volume XV

HOMILIES AND SERMONS

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Counter-Cultural Perspectives of an Organic Intellectual:
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Volume XV— Homilies
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME XV—HOMILIES | 9 |
| 1. CELEBRATING THE SANCTITY OF CHILDHOOD | 11 |
| CHRISTMAS 1995 | 11 |
| 2. PEACE AND POWER OF CHRISTMAS..... | 14 |
| CHRISTMAS 1999 | 14 |
| 3. ON EASTER JOY | 17 |
| EASTER 1999..... | 17 |
| 4. LIBERTY AND LOVE | 20 |
| MAUNDY THURSDAY 2000 | 20 |
| 5. METAPHORS OF THE PASSION | 22 |
| GOOD FRIDAY 2000..... | 22 |
| 6. RESURRECTION JOY | 25 |
| EASTER 2000..... | 25 |
| 7. WAR ON TERROR OR JIHAD FOR PEACE? | 28 |
| CHRISTMAS 2001 | 28 |
| 8. THE PASSION IN OUR TIMES | 31 |
| GOOD FRIDAY 2002..... | 31 |
| 9. SIGNS OF HOPE | 34 |
| EASTER 2002..... | 34 |
| 10. CHRISTMAS CELEBRATES OUR JOY | 36 |
| CHRISTMAS 2006 | 36 |
| 11. THE JOY OF EASTER..... | 39 |
| EASTER 2006..... | 39 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 12. THE HOLY FAMILY | 41 |
| CHRISTMAS 2006 | 41 |
| 13. THE MEANING OF EASTER..... | 44 |
| EASTER 2007..... | 44 |
| 14. WAITING IN JOY..... | 47 |
| GAUDETE SUNDAY, THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT | 47 |
| 15. PEACE ON EARTH, GOODWILL TO MEN..... | 49 |
| CHRISTMAS 2009 | 49 |
| 16. MARY, AN INSPIRATION | 52 |
| THE PRESENTATION OF MARY 2013..... | 52 |
| 17. DIVERSITY AND OPENNESS | 55 |
| FEAST OF ST BARTHOLOMEW | 55 |
| 18. CHRISTMAS AND CORONA..... | 60 |
| CHRISTMAS 2021 | 60 |
| 19. GIVING THANKS, PLEDGING FIDELITY, SHARING HOPE..... | 62 |
| FEAST OF ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI..... | 62 |
| 20. THE ROAD TO EMMAUS..... | 64 |
| THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER | 64 |
| 21. LOVE IS ITS OWN REASON..... | 67 |
| 14 FEB 2012 | 67 |
| 22. TWO BECOME ONE | 70 |
| A WEDDING HOMILY FOR CLAIRE AND HENRIK | 70 |
| 23. WALKING INTO THE FUTURE, SEEKING A BLESSING | 74 |
| 76 TH BIRTHDAY HOMILY, 2017..... | 74 |
| 24. NEW HORIZONS..... | 76 |
| 80 TH BIRTHDAY | 76 |
| 25. A FUTURE ALREADY NOW BUT NOT FULLY YET | 78 |
| 81 ST BIRTHDAY..... | 78 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| 26. THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING HOPEFUL | 85 |
| 82 ND BIRTHDAY HOMILY | 85 |
| 27. LOOK BACK IN GRATITUDE, BE FAITHFUL IN THE PRESENT AND LOOK FORWARD IN HOPE..... | 87 |
| 83 RD BIRTHDAY | 87 |
| 28.FULFILLING PROMISES – WHY DID I BECOME A JESUIT?..... | 91 |
| FINAL VOWS | 91 |
| 29. IDENTITY, COMMUNITY, MISSION GOLDEN JUBILEE REFLECTIONS FOR MY FRIENDS AND COMPANIONS..... | 95 |
| GOLDEN JUBILEE OF MY PRIESTHOOD | 95 |
| 30. MY THREE AVATARS | 100 |
| DIAMOND JUBILEE OF PRIESTHOOD, 2020..... | 100 |
| 31. IRENE’S MAGNIFICAT | 109 |
| IRENE HEREDIA’S 90 TH BIRTHDAY..... | 109 |
| 32. IRENE MEANS PEACE | 112 |
| IRENE HEREDIA’S FUNERAL MASS | 112 |
| 33. SWEET INCENSE UNTO GOD..... | 117 |
| IRENE HEREDIA MEMORIAL MASS, 28 JAN 2013 | 117 |
| 34. REMEMBERING TO CELEBRATE IRENE HEREDIA | 122 |
| IRENE HEREDIA’S MONTH’S MIND MASS | 122 |
| 35. GUARDIAN ANGEL ON OUR ROAD TO EMMAUS | 127 |
| FIRST ANNIVERSARY MASS & HOMILY..... | 127 |
| 36. WALK TOGETHER | 132 |
| LABOUR DAY HOMILY | 132 |
| 37. PRAYERS | 138 |

COUNTER-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES OF AN ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL: THE SELECTED WORKS OF RUDOLF C. HEREDIA

This collection brings together essays and presentations that span some five decades of my work. These are in the overall discourse of the social sciences and though I have trained as a sociologist, my perspective is more interdisciplinary. This is really the only way contemporary social issues and questions can be approached if they are to have any relevance today.

The collection is divided by common overall themes into separate volumes to provide a coherent unifying perspective to each volume. (list of volumes on the next page)

The following are the subdivisions of the collection.

I. Socio-Cultural Perspectives: Pluralism and Multiple Identities

II. Socio-Political Perspectives: Contradictions and Complementarities

III. The Development Debate: Growth and Equity

IV. Religion and Society: Secularism and Its Discontent

V. Ecological Concerns: Environmental Sustainability

VI. Hermeneutics of Dialogue: Discourses on The Self and The Other

VII. Education: The Dual System

VIII. The Tribal Question

IX. Gandhiana: Essays on A Yuga Purush

X. Globalisation And Its Discontents Globalisation

XI. Jesuitica: For the Jesuit Parivar

XII. Miscellaneous Articles

XIII. Book Reviews

XIV. Poems

XV. Homilies

INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME XV— HOMILIES

These homilies are a dimension of this sociologist's pastoral ministry. Each is specific to some particular instance.

It is divided into Sections, which are further arranged chronologically.

- [1. Feast days following the liturgical year](#)
- [2. Weddings](#)
- [3. Birthdays](#)
- [4. Homilies on Special Occasions— Final Vows, Golden & Diamond Jubilees](#)
- [5. Irene Heredia— Birthday, Funeral, Memorials](#)
- [6. Miscellaneous Occasions: Labour Day and Prayers](#)

Section 1
FEAST DAYS
FOLLOWING THE
LITURGICAL YEAR

1. CELEBRATING THE SANCTITY OF CHILDHOOD

Christmas 1995

24 Dec 1995, The Times of India (The Speaking Tree) Mumbai

Christmas brings us back to the Christ-child. He was homeless at his birth, and soon to be a hunted refugee. Even before he could walk, he had to flee the persecution of a power-hungry king. Are we, like that king, threatened by the defenceless innocence of a child in our secure and preoccupied world? Eventually, the Christ-child did find a home and recover his childhood. And so 'Jesus grew both in body and wisdom gaining favour with God and men.' (Luke 2:52)

Through his hectic public life, he never forgot the meaning of childhood, and would often call his disciples back to it: 'Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

'The greatest in the kingdom of heaven is the one who humbles himself and becomes like this child. And whoever welcomes in my name one such as this, welcomes me.' (Matthew 18:3-5)

And again, he said; 'Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Remember this! Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.' (Luke 18:16-17)

Christmas is a celebration of this Christ-child, who calls us to be born again of the spirit and resurrect our lost, forgotten childhood. Christmas brings us back to childhood. And who can resist the cry of a baby — defenceless, trusting in need?

As the abandoned child in Brecht's play, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, says: '... he who hears not a cry for help/ But passes by with troubled ears will never hear/ The gentle call of a lover nor the black

1. Celebrating the Sanctity of Childhood

bird at dawn/ Nor the happy sigh of the tired grape-picker as the Angelus rings.'

Will we tarry with the young maid fleeing the burning palace, 'for a moment or two/ Only till someone should come.' But then, 'fearful is the seductive power of goodness' — for 'She sat too long, too long she saw/ The soft breathing, the small clenched fists...' And since 'no one will take you, son/I must take you/ Since no one will take you son/You must take me../ We'll see it through together'

They are bonded now, forever — the mother and the child — unmindful of the danger from a hostile world that seeks to destroy them both.

Can we too be so moved by the goodness of children as to risk ourselves for them, and give them a chance for life? Christmas is a celebration of childhood and of children, especially the defenceless, abandoned ones.

Christmas brings us back to our children. How precious they are — or ought to be! The hauntingly sad and appealing eyes of children pierce us through as they glisten with tears.

What does our society do to our children? Use them for child labour because they are meek? Abuse them physically and psychologically because we have nowhere else to vent our frustrations? Live out our ambitions through them because we cannot admit our own failures? Demand that they behave like little adults because we ourselves are such overgrown children?

Christmas bring us back to the childlike. Too few of us allow the playful, trusting child in us to be cherished by the nurturing, supportive parent and the mature, responsible adult in us.

If we have lost our childlikeness, we may never find ourselves or God's kingdom. We may never reach out and save our children or their childhood.

Christmas brings us back to ourselves. As we go with the shepherds to honour the child in the manger, can we forget that he is born among us today — in the thousands of homeless, hunted children on our streets? Can we hear them cry?

Can we watch through the night, 'the soft breathing, the small clenched fists'? Will we as women and men of peace and goodwill be moved by their defenceless goodness, and take their part with: 'Well see it through together'?

What do we want to celebrate this Christmas and the next? As we hurtle into the future, we must ask ourselves where our children will

play. Christmas is a celebration for all of us, but especially the children. After all, we have not simply inherited the world from our parents; we hold it in trust for our children.

Let us pause a long moment in silence at the manger to wonder and find in this Christ-child our childhood, our children, ourselves — and celebrate them all, this refugee. Even before he could walk, he had to flee the persecution of a power-hungry king. Are we, like that king, threatened by the defenceless innocence of a child in our secure and preoccupied world?

2. PEACE AND POWER OF CHRISTMAS

Christmas 1999

Christmas is a time for peace, though for us it is still not a time of peace. And yet peace is the Christmas message: peace on earth, goodwill to all. At the end of the millennium, for all the progress we might congratulate ourselves on, ours has been perhaps the most violent century in our history. Violence is still the final arbitrator to conflicts and divisions that increasingly riddle our society and our world. Just catalogue the violence of this year, genocides, atrocities, riots, terrorism, murders, the tensions even on this very Christmas day—Non-violence seems to be an idea whose time has passed! Yet Christmas should make us pause in this spiral of violence that seems to engulf us like a cyclonic tidal wave and reflect on what peace today might mean for us.

The basis of the old Pax Romana, was '*si vis pacem, para bellum*' (if you want peace, prepare for war!) But at the very most such a peace can achieve a balance of power, which all too readily becomes a balance of terror, that can only be the basis for a very precarious and negative kind of peace. This may well be the only practical solution in many human situations, but it would certainly be far from the longing for peace that is so much part of our deepest human yearnings. For the peace that is premised on power, even when this is not dominating power but enabling power, all too easily is corrupted with violence, and even though this be defensive counter-violence, that some might justify, it is undoubtedly alien to the peace that was promised us at the first Christmas.

After the Romans, St. Augustine defined peace as 'the tranquillity of order'. But This is a rather passive understanding. We need a richer more positive understanding of peace. Thus, besides peace with justice, which is implied by order, there must be peace in freedom, if this just order is to be compatible with human dignity. Moreover, if

the dialectical tension between justice and freedom is effectively and constructively resolved, then we would have a third element in our understanding of peace, that is peace as harmony. Now each of these three elements, justice, freedom and harmony, can be described, but we still need to put them together in a collective understanding, or better represented in a collective myth. In fact, this is what most salvation myths are intended to express. This is the peace that is reflected in popular greetings: *Pax Vobis*, *Shalom Alaikum*, *Shanti Om*... This is the Christmas promise of peace that needs to be explored as a foundation for a brave new world.

We speak of the ‘myth of peace’, where ‘myth’ is pre-rational, not irrational but rather transrational. It is an imaginative rather than a merely rational grasp that can only be expressed in symbol and metaphor. For myth is a story that poetically not conceptually points to an eternal truth. Such myths are collective dreams that express the unarticulated depths of a people’s unconscious, their deepest longings that they themselves may not be consciously aware of. More than ever, we need a new collective dream, a more persuasive foundational ‘myth’ for our societies today. For tragically modern humanity seems to have too few creative and inspiring myths to live by and too many fads and fashions to distract us.

In desperation, we revive and cling to images and symbols that draw on the darkest recesses of our destructive potential. Thus, we seek redress in violence for our injured psyches, both individual and collective; we seek redemption in revenge for our traumatised memories both personal and social! Apologies are demanded but forgiveness is forgotten, revenge seeks satisfaction while reconciliation becomes alien, power is glorified and weakness is belittled. Yet all this is ultimately a violation of our truest selves and a betrayal of our deepest dreams. Such violence cannot but alienate us from ourselves and each other, and terrorise us in a nightmare without hope. We do indeed find this alienation and violence at the first Christmas as well: the smug priests who interpret the scriptures but do not act on its message, the treacherous Herod who murders the innocent for his own security. But nothing can overwhelm the Christmas message of peace and goodwill for the simple and trusting shepherds and the hopeful and persevering wise men. However, Christmas cannot remain an idyllic ‘once upon a time’ legend. It is meant to be a here-and-now inspiration for our own situation today, an abiding ‘myth’ of peace for our time, in our time. Indeed, there is a

place for all of creation at the manger of this babe, from unlettered young shepherds to old wise men, from dumb animals to singing angels. Surely somewhere among these we can contemplate our own place! And when we do find our place by the manger with the child we will find our own selves too.

For when we enter into the Christmas story, we find there God's own guarantee for the peace we long for and dream of. But this peace must be a continuing quest, perhaps the most relevant and deepest quest for the new millennium, a quest that not only bonds us each to the other, but encompasses the whole of the world in its embrace, in one inclusive human community, beginning with our families and our neighbourhoods, in ever-widening oceanic circles to include all peoples and countries, and indeed the whole cosmos. Such an inclusive community of solidarity would inevitably begin with a counter-cultural one today. For it must dismantle the pyramidal image of society, stratified by class or segmented into caste, compartmentalised by language or separated into religions. Rather the inclusive circle with our God at its centre gives us a commanding image for a society of peace, with justice, in freedom and harmony. The Christmas story of peace on earth, goodwill to all, is precisely such a foundational social 'myth', our deep collective dream of peace. But for this dream to become a reality, we must divest ourselves of a great deal of the cumbersome baggage we have been—and still are being—socialised into by communal identities and cultural nationalism.

We must not allow our history to control our destiny, or our inheritance to become our fate. We must come to terms with our collective memories and allow our wounded psyche to heal. This would demand a personal metanoia, a 'cultural disarmament', and an individual and collective change of heart, where this myth of peace must first be firmly rooted. May the peace and power of Christmas be with you all.

3. ON EASTER JOY

EASTER 1999

1 April 1999

Three happenings contextualise the resurrection joy for me.

Firstly, the exodus from the Society of Jesus after Vatican II in the 1960s. I still remember Fr. Arrupe's comment on this. It was not those who left the Society that worried him so much as some of those who stayed! For if there was no joy in the life of those dedicated to God, this would be a counter sign! Having given up so much for God, it would seem that theirs is a 'God that failed' them! As Nietzsche had remarked long ago: 'If Christians are redeemed; where is their joy!'

Secondly, the Jesuit Conference of South Asia (JCSA) meeting in Goa, in December 1972. After the self-introduction of the rather pessimistic and overburdened provincials, Fr. Arrupe introduced himself: 'I am Pedro Arrupe and I am very happy to be the General of the Society of Jesus!' And like the disciples at Emmaus 'their eyes were opened', and they burst into spontaneous applause at this man's infectious optimism. It was an electrifying moment indeed, that the provincials couldn't but carry forward to their men.

And thirdly, the words of Teilhard De Chardin written on the walls of the stairway leading to the chapel at Mother Teresa's convent in Calcutta: 'Joy is the only infallible sign of God's presence!' A compelling legend for these missionaries of charity in the midst of the death and dying, and an inspiring one for us, who deliberately distance ourselves from such sorrow.

Such experiences set the context for joy as our witness to God's presence in our lives. Karl Rahner says, ultimately being a Christian means to seize the world with optimism! Our lives must begin with an 'Amen' and end with an 'Alleluia'! If not our joy at least our optimism must be the sign of God's presence in us and among us. One must, of course, be realistic knowing that joy comes only after, and cannot be

separated from sorrow, just as the resurrection comes only after, and cannot be separated from death. Those who have never had a Good Friday can never experience Easter.

Now there are three aspects of this joy that overlap and include each other: joy always implies love, to be distinguished from mere pleasure or romance; joy necessarily means fulfilment, to be distinguished from feeling high, or being manic; joy cannot but involve delight, which must not be confused with excitement; and finally joy inevitably brings newness which is not the same as novelty. At the deepest level of our being we long for this joy so human and humanising. Hence we must ask: where is the joy in my life and my work, where is the joy in our communities, and our mission?

How would I want joy to mark my life? I would want the resurrection joy to ground a loving optimism in my life, the basis of my hope against all hopelessness. I know I am tempted to cynicism, which often masquerades as realism. But this is the characteristic of the pseudo-sophisticated and the over-educated, whether these be the intellectual academics or the radical activists. At times perhaps I do yield to the temptation of playing the cynic, sometimes mischievously, and may be even maliciously, but I hope always with some redeeming sense of humour.

How would I want my joy to mark my work? I would like my work to be a fulfilling challenge, of unveiling the future that is already being born now in the present. I would like my contribution to be a joyful discernment, a hopeful unmasking of present phenomena precisely to reveal their hidden noumena. For the future is but the noumenon of the present phenomena. These may distort its perception but can never suppress the future hope it brings 'already now but not fully yet'.

And how must this resurrection joy mark our community life? I would think that an authentic characteristic of a healthy human community would be to delight in the good of others, the good they do and are. Belittling criticism and petty jealousies are precisely the mark of the joyless person. The truly unselfish delight in another's joy.

And how must this resurrection joy stamp our mission? Surely it must be in terms of an ever-renewed enthusiasm! Our mission must be marked not only with the mellowness of maturity but with the vigour of youthfulness as well. If this is to be expressed in the prudence of the 'middle path', it must also have the courage to reach for the horizon beyond one's grasp, a joyful 'magis' that dares 'ad maiora'!

Of course, I know our world has often been described as a vale of tears and I certainly do not want to be blind to the tears of millions all around us. But I must not be blinded by them either. For as surely as we must live in the present with faith, we must live for the future with hope. I do believe that the resurrection that is already now but not fully yet, must mean that at least some of those tears will be tears of joy, a joy that transforms the rest of our lives, our work, our communities, and our mission.

4.

LIBERTY AND LOVE

MAUNDY THURSDAY 2000

20 April, 2000

[Mass Readings](#)

During this holy triduum, the liturgy solemnly recalls and sacramentally relives the momentous events and the final hours of the life of Jesus and brings us to the very heart of the paschal mystery. It is a mystery that we must all pass through in our own lives and so I invite you to prayerfully recall and relive these mysteries so that we too might pass over from slavery to freedom, from dissension to communion, from sadness to joy, in word from death to life.

Today we remember the last Passover meal that Jesus celebrated with his disciples. The Passover is the paradigm of God's liberating power. He hears the cries of his people and frees them from their oppression while destroying all those who oppose his mighty power. It is this Exodus experience that has become the foundation for liberation theology today. But is still an Old Testament paradigm.

Jesus takes this a step further. For it is not an individualistic freedom that would bring in the permissive society but rather what we celebrate is a communitarian liberty that presages a new communion that binds us all together, with each with the other, a bonding that is premised on our union with him. This is precisely what a common meal symbolises and expresses. And Jesus in his last Passover with his disciples makes himself this meal of thanksgiving, this Eucharist, the bread to be broken, the cup of wine to be shared.

Thus our union with Jesus and our communion with each other, are two essential dimensions of this new community that Jesus has come to create. For he calls us in community to be reconciled not just to himself, but with one another as well. For one guarantees and authenticates the other. If we are in fact united and reconciled with Jesus we can not but be united and reconciled with each other, and

vice versa we will only be in true and genuine unity and reconciliation with each other when we are united and reconciled with Jesus.

But even before he establishes this sacramental communion, and community reconciliation he clearly and emphatically founds this on a new principle of service and humility. Master and lord though he is, yet he is among us as a servant, and he expects all his followers to do likewise since we cannot be greater than our master.

And so we see the paradox of the freedom Jesus brings. It is not just for ourselves that we must be free, but freedom must be the liberation of the whole community, the community bound together in communion with each other and with him, a communion that is founded on service and humility. And so whereas the Old Testament Passover celebration recalls freedom and liberty, in the New Testament the Lord's Supper calls us all to service and humility. It is indeed a paradoxical journey from slavery to freedom in the old, and then again from freedom to service in the new. For in the end, we seek not a temporal and human freedom, but rather an eternal and divine liberty, not merely a freedom from oppression from the powerful, but the liberty of God's children, in humble service to each other.

And so the liturgy of the Passover of Jesus on this day leaves us with a new focus and a new emphasis: not on liberty, but on love. A love that is celebrated in the new commandment Jesus gave us this day: that we love one another as he has loved us. For no greater love can a man have, but that he lay down his life for his friends. This is the love we are called to, this is the love we must live.

5.

METAPHORS OF THE PASSION

Good Friday 2000

21 April 2000

How do we come to terms with and internalise our response to the tragic drama of Jesus' death, both as individual persons, as a community of disciples? What does the death of Jesus mean to me personally, as to us as a community, as a society? Perhaps the only human way to respond would be by silent contemplation of the crucifixion that will allow the events of the passion of Jesus to pierce us through and renew in us a committed witnessing to his death. Indeed, it is only in sign, symbol and in metaphor, most of all that we can begin to enter into this mystery.

Already in the New Testament, and especially in St. Paul's letters we find different metaphors which are used to explain this mystery. Each metaphor leaves much more unexplained than it explains, and even all together they indicate a very partial understanding. Rather they are an invitation to enter into the mystery, not any pretence at a comprehension of it.

The earliest one was that of redemption, a metaphor that came from a society that knew slavery, and in which the only legitimate way for a slave to obtain freedom was the payment of ransom. And so Jesus redeems us by paying our ransom with his life. But this seems to be too legalistic a demand for appeasement. Moreover, to whom is the ransom paid? This metaphor seems to say more about us than about our God.

Another explanation was in terms of justification. Jesus by his death merits for us the grace that justifies us in the eyes of his father. But this seems to stress perhaps too much a change that is external, rather than a transformation from within. For justification seems to stress overly an exterior grace, rather than an interior indwelling of the God who transforms us into himself, by first becoming one like us in all things but sin. The grace of Jesus does justify us before our God,

but more than that we are transformed from within, and our nature transcended and subsumed into the divine.

A more common metaphor was the one of sacrifice. Jesus sacrifices his life for us and wins favour for us before his father. This seems far too ritualistic and clerical an understanding of our relationship with our God. For sacrifice seems to suggest substitution over-identification, as though Jesus substitutes for us, rather than identifies with us in solidarity, and invites us to identify with him in love.

A more positive metaphor is the one of victory. Jesus' death is a victory over sin and evil and a vindication of his obedience to his father. Hence it is really his glory. Now the death of Jesus is certainly not his final failure, but the victory metaphor seems to take away from the real tragedy that we must enter into first before we can experience his triumph.

A less triumphalistic metaphor is the one of reconciliation. Jesus dies to reconcile us to his father and to one another. This is certainly a more consoling metaphor and one very pertinent to our violent and divided world today. But if we must appropriate the reconciliation that Jesus has won for us, not only must we enter into his death with him, we must also begin a dying to ourselves as well. This implies a further struggle with the evil in our world, and sin in ourselves. Moreover, such reconciliation has a cosmic dimension. All that is created by God through his divine word, but has been broken and bruised by humankind, is now reconciled and comes back to God in his Christ. But this still leaves us wondering why the reconciliation had to be through suffering and death, and not by some other less tragic path.

We can of course think of other metaphors, more contemporary or more traditional. But what makes for relevance is how personal and meaningful the metaphor is to my life, to our life. Not that we need to approach the mysteries of Good Friday, with one or the other exclusive understanding, but if we must enter into this mystery, then we cannot but take our life situation with us as well. Hence I would urge that we spend some time before this Jesus on the cross, and bring our lives and our own Calvary to his.

For myself, on a more personal note, the death of Jesus has been for me the strongest and most authentic guarantor of hope against hopelessness. For Jesus just doesn't die a brutal and torturous death. He dies abandoned by all, by his people, his disciples, even his father

seems to have abandoned him to his fate: My God, My God why have you abandoned me, is almost his last most terrifying cry. And yet in the face of such abandonment, he does not abandon hope: Father into thy hands I commend my spirit. And even at this moment as he breathes his last, he knows: it is accomplished.

Surely the way we experience ourselves will indicate the metaphor that will help us best enter into this mystery: as slaves waiting for a ransom, as sinners in need of grace, as a people in sacrificial worship, or defeated and waiting for victory, or broken and alienated but longing for reconciliation and wholeness, or pushed into despair yet clinging to hope..

But whichever the metaphor we choose the death of Jesus is a mystery that can have no meaning for us until we enter into it with our own dying to ourselves, our selfishness, our sinfulness. For the death of Jesus is the model and paradigm for our own dying. The dying that can never be in vain, because Jesus' death was not either. It was but a pause before his resurrection. And so we too tarry before his crucifixion today and ask where we fit into the scene: With the jeering soldiers, the mocking protests, the heartless rabble? Or with the good thief, his mother and the faithful few?

6. RESURRECTION JOY

Easter 2000

23 April 2000.

There is a unity and wholeness to the paschal mystery. We recall and relive the death of Jesus, but it would be an unchristian distortion if we did stop or tarry there too long. For the climax of the paschal mystery of death to life, is to encounter and experience the risen Jesus. This is the mystery that we must enter into with Easter, a mystery that will bring wholeness and completeness to our lives. Death and resurrection are inseparable in this paschal mystery; we cannot experience the second without entering into the first. Hence it is apparent, that the way we understand the dying of Jesus, will open us to the way we will experience his resurrection.

Thus, the Jesus who ransoms us from sin and slavery, will now will be the one who frees us for love and freedom. The Jesus who justifies us by his suffering and death will now be the one who transforms us with his grace and glory. His sacrifice made acceptable by his obedience, now consecrates us as a priestly people. His victory over his enemies will now lift him up to the right hand of his father and us with him. The reconciliation that his passion has forged, now melds us into one family with all people of goodwill, with the entire cosmos. This risen Jesus is now our hope against all our hopelessness, despondency, and depression.

Once again as with the metaphors of his passion, no single understanding of Jesus' resurrection is complete, and neither do all of them together make for any comprehensiveness. But each of us must find our own personal encounter with, and experience of the risen Lord. We have models and paradigms of this in the gospel narratives themselves. With which of these we can identify? Which of these helps to lead us into this culminating mystery of our faith? For it is this Easter experience that transforms his disciples and creates the Easter community that will become his Church, and it must recreate and renew us and our Church today.

We have Peter who, when confronted with the evidence of the empty tomb, can only wonder and is too hesitant even to doubt! It would seem he is still recovering from the disgrace of his betrayal but he experiences only forgiveness and peace. At the empty tomb, John's love leads him to faith, but as yet he does not have the boldness and encourage that the risen Jesus will eventually give him. Mary Magdalene is so overcome with grief that she cannot recognise him as he stands before her, but when she does she clings to his feet and will not let him go. But she must; because the risen Lord has a mission for her in Galilee. Thomas the pessimist who wanted to go to Jerusalem to die with him there, now seems to refuse to live with him until the doubts that he nurtures, almost petulantly it would seem, are dispelled. But Jesus' reassurances are so touching that Thomas can only respond in total surrender: My Lord and my God! The disciples on the road to Emmaus, trying to run away from their despair and despondency, can still recognise him in the breaking of bread. There is Paul who is knocked down on the road to Damascus and is turned into a great apostle who will travel many roads on the mission of this risen Lord.

Any one of these might well be the model in which I can experience my risen Lord, but it must always be an intimate and personal one, if it is to be authentic and genuine. But there is one characteristic that is common to all the experiences of our risen Lord, and indeed this seems to be inherent and essential to his resurrection: it is the joy that this encounter brings. Teilhard de Chardin once said: Joy is the only infallible sign of God's presence! Indeed we are meant for God, and we are made for joy! But too easily and too often do we unmake and unmend ourselves even as we resist the invitation of the risen Lord to come and find him and ourselves in his joy. This is not a joy that is to be confused with any kind of emotional high, such as we can create or perhaps others can create for us. But this is a joy that is deeper than any feeling and transcends all understanding, the joy that transforms and fulfils us at the inmost and deepest level of our being. A joy that we were made for, a joy that raps us up in the God we were meant for.

It is this joy that is the most consoling and most precious of all the consolations of our God. But too easily do we return to the comfort zones in our lives and miss out on the consolations of our God. Now to experience this joy, we must enter into the mystery of the resurrection, but for this, we must first enter and begin to die to

ourselves and our selfishness. This is not a very comforting experience, but it can be a very consoling one. For as Ignatius instructs us, consolation is anything that brings us closer to God. And only he can be our ultimate comfort. For the joy of the resurrection is really the guarantor that everything good, beautiful, precious and lovely in our lives will never be lost; that all the people we have loved, the bonds we have forged, the experiences we treasure, the relationships that have made us, all this is carried over into the kingdom of God which begins already now but is not fully yet.

This is the joy that we wish each other at Easter, this is the joy that Jesus died for and rose again for, so that we, in turn, might live his paschal mystery in our lives and bring this joy to others. Let this be the Easter joy we greet each other with today.

7.

WAR ON TERROR OR JIHAD FOR PEACE?

Christmas 2001

Today we seem to live in a world of terror, insecure, anxious, afraid. A world we feel orphaned in, and orphaned by! A world we want to escape, to distance ourselves from. But it is a world we cannot disown. For like it or not, it is a world we have created and to that extent, we must accept responsibility for, and respond to it as well. There is no exit from the horror of terror that seems to engulf us here!

Yet by and large this has not happened by chance or by accident, neither by deliberation or choice, but rather by callousness and neglect. But can we then negate our involvement in, and responsibility for this our creation? Certainly not, if we want to be ethical and compassionate. For sins of omission are no less culpable than those of commission, and their consequences are far worse at times, precisely because they escape our awareness, and thus go unrepented, and unforgiven. Their evil consequences leach into and subvert our world and our selves. At times we are indeed tempted to externalise this evil and blame it on the 'other' and rationalise our 'innocence'. We conveniently forget our own complicity, especially when we are advantaged by the very uneven and iniquitous circumstances that we disclaim.

Yet when a people are excluded and marginalized, they are already at a disadvantage with regard to other actors in the situation. When they suffer inequality and oppression, they become more vulnerable and even volatile. When they are further inferiorised and denigrated they will inevitably become desperate and lose hope. Is it any wonder then all this breeds anger and hate? Is this not the story of those that are discriminated against, dispossessed, and condemned by our alienating and dehumanising society? Such people are readily prone to political, religious and other kinds of manipulation. Not surprising

they fall in with political extremists, religious fanatics, violent Naxalites, social subversives, etc.!

Nothing can ever justify the horror of terrorism or the morbidity of hatred, and even when this is understandable it cannot be acceptable. But what responsibility do we have to address not just the symptoms, but the causes of such a disease, for we are all involved, directly or indirectly as perpetrators or victims? How do we diffuse the underlying anger and suspicion, and redress the injustice and oppression? Often our response is one of punitive measures that attempt to remedy violence with more violence. But does such rough and ready justice, if it can be called that at all, render even symptomatic relief? Does it not seem more like revenge of some kind rather than justice of any order? It is precisely such an escalation of violence that will precipitate a tidal wave of terror! State terror and red alerts, vigilante groups and high security are only part of the spiral of violence spinning out of control, and no matter what the spin doctors may say, a war on terrorism only escalates the terror on all sides!

Neither is a justice that is merely retributive adequate here. For as Gandhi pointed out: an eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind! If our justice is to bring peace it must address the deeper causes, heal wounded memories, remake broken promises, and rebuild trust and hope. For this, we need a justice that is not just remedial and restorative but compassionate and re-creative as well, a justice that will bring peace and goodwill, harmony and freedom to all.

This is what Christmas is all about. The Prince of Peace comes in the vulnerability of a child, born of refugee parents, in a makeshift manger, trusting and unafraid, promising us a new world, if only we will commit ourselves to the way he shows us: that of fellowship and freedom, of compassion and harmony, and yes, of suffering and love, ... Will our response to him be like that of Herod, who sees him as a threat to be eliminated? Or like the scribes of Jerusalem who take this as an event that can be ignored? Or that of the shepherds who believe and rejoice in him? Or of the wise Magi who understand and surrender to him? This is the decision you must make in your hearts tonight. For Christmas is a call to struggle, a 'jihad' against the terror and the fear, the anger and distrust in our hearts. For it is here that violence and terror must be exorcised first.

7. War on Terror or Jihad for Peace?

Such decisions are demanding in their implementation, especially when they are taken collectively as a people. And so Christmas interrogates our lives with an added incisiveness today. Are we prepared to sacrifice our higher standard of living for a better quality of life for all? That is at the centre of the issue of justice. Will we dare to change our competitive living for more cooperative solidarity? That is the heart of the feeling of fellowship. Are we prepared to make space for diversity and difference, even in what touches us as intimately as our religious traditions? This is the crux of any sensitivity to harmony. Can we enlarge our hearts beyond our family and friends, our caste and coreligionists? This is the critical condition for compassion.

Such and more are the questions. They all add up to a challenge to care and share: to care for the least, the lost, the lonely, to share with those who have not, or have less, and not out of the abundance of our affluence, but out of generosity even in our own need! What is our answer? To accept this Prince of Peace today means to follow him as the Man of Sorrows tomorrow; to be a part of his kingdom of love and harmony we must understand and accept his message of vulnerability and trust; to be part of the story that began in Bethlehem with angel song, through the human abuse at Golgotha, to the joy of discovery at Emmaus and beyond. It means to go against the flow. He challenges us to a 'jihad' for peace, not a war on terror!

The promise of Christmas is that God is with us, now and always. This is what we celebrate tonight. This is the hope that we are called to live by. Let us gather around the manger and make our pledge to this Prince of Peace while the silence of this night is still with us. Maranatha, come Lord Jesus!

8.

THE PASSION IN OUR TIMES

Good Friday 2002

29 March 2002

[Mass Readings](#) Gospel: [John \(18:1-40\) 19:1-37](#)

As we listen to the passion narrative let us position ourselves in the events that we hear not as a narration of something that happened then and there, far away and long ago, but of events that are happening among us today, engulfing us in a vortex here and now. The passion of Jesus is not something that has happened once and is over and done with. It happens again and again wherever the innocent suffer unjustly, whenever violence brutalises God's children, whenever hope is overwhelmed by despair.

Where do I position myself in this narrative? From where do I listen to these events and voices and how do I respond to them? Do I stand with the accusing Pharisees and Sadducees? Or with the neutral Pilot washing his hands? Or with the hate-filled mob that howls for Jesus' blood? Or with the cowardly Peter who denies him to save face? Or with the despairing Judas who hangs himself in despair? Or the inconsolable women so inconsolable on the Way of the Cross? Or the callous Roman soldiers, cursing and gambling away his cloak? Will I run away like his disciples did? Or will I stand by faithfully, with his mother, like John? Or perhaps steal heaven away at the very last minute like the good thief!

As we listen to the passion narrative, I ask you to keep three things in mind, which may help us to more deeply comprehend these mysteries and allow them to penetrate our hearts and make more concrete and more real the passion of Jesus that is being re-enacted among us today. I ask you to recall some images of recent events, of suffering and tragedy, of horror and brutalisation that have overtaken our society and our world so very recently. Recalling these images

might help us respond to this passion of Jesus in his people as we learn from his example of long ago but with us still.

And the first theme I take up is that of the innocent suffering. Why? There is really no answer. This is a deep mystery almost beyond our comprehension. We have so little choice in the matter and yet we have no explanation. Here the image that comes to me when I think of the innocent suffering today is that of this little child in the cauldron of Ahmedabad covered with ninety-five percent burns. The picture shows him wrapped up in bandages with just his face and his big bright eyes peering through the photograph, innocent eyes piercing our hearts and asking plaintively: Why? There is no answer. Perhaps only the example of Jesus in his own passion can help us to respond to this child and millions like him who suffer thus every day even now. The legend below the picture read: Asif died a few hours after this picture was taken. Only if we have the faith that Jesus' passion calls us to can we really begin to cope with the mystery of the innocent suffering. The second theme is the one of violence. We do not know how to cope with violence yet? And the only remedy we know seems to be to counter-violence, which only escalates and accelerates into even more violence, so that an eye for an eye is making the whole world blind. Violence today in our society is spiralling out of control and we seem only to pour more oil into the burning fires. A recent image of this brutal violence in our society that comes to me, is of the young man terrified and frightened begging for his life with the police in the recent pogrom in Ahmedabad. He is pleading for his life from the very agencies of the state that are specially commissioned to protect these very fundamental rights! The young man did survive though we are not told who protected him. What must be the memories that haunt him now? What scars must mark his soul and distort his psyche after such horrifying brutalising violence? How does Jesus respond to violence in his passion? Is there a lesson for us here? Does his example of non-violence mean anything to us anymore? We once proudly boasted of our tradition of *ahimsa*! But today when cynical politicians manipulate 'action and reaction' in an escalation of horror any claim of being a tolerant society is just plain hypocrisy. Yet at such times only if we have hope in the impossible ideal of non-violence that Jesus demonstrates in his passion can we ever be able to constructively address this brutalising violence of today. The third theme I would like to suggest is the need for reconciliation and forgiveness. There is really no alternative to this

and yet it is not an easy act to follow. And once again in the passion of Jesus, we find a challenge and a call: 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do'. And the image that I have of such forgiveness and reconciliation is the quiet heroism of persons who went out into the cauldron of communal violence recently to protect and succour others even at great risk to themselves. These are the true healers; these are the ones that build up the new community even as the old one crumbles into ashes. These are the citizens of the new society that we must make together.

Only if we can be challenged by the love that Jesus calls us to will we find space in our hearts for the reconciliation and forgiveness we so desperately need today. We are all involved in this passion of Jesus either by commission or omission, by careless words or cultivated suspicion, by negligence and doubt, or fear and cowardice, actively or passively, one way or the other we cannot escape this passion of Jesus that happens every day, wherever the innocent suffer, wherever violence brutalises, wherever reconciliation and forgiveness are banished.

Let us now for a moment pause and let the passion of Jesus touch our hearts and melt them, his passion that happens today in our midst, again and again in our riot-ridden cities and now even our remote villages! In the communal hate that divides even those who might have known better! In the terrorist attacks and the depressive brutalisation of the weak and vulnerable in our society. And as we enter into these mysteries let us pray that old and moving prayer of the Church: 'Passion of Christ comfort me. ... O good Jesus hear me. Within Your wounds hide me. Permit me not to be separated from Thee. In the hour of my death, call me and bid me come to Thee, that with thy saints I may praise Thee, forever and ever. Amen.'

9. SIGNS OF HOPE

Easter 2002

March 31 2002

Easter is a time for hope. And yet with disaster overtaking our world and tragedy engulfing our society, what can be hope for today? There is so little we can expect from our world and society after we have experienced the ingrained hostility and brutalising conflicts which have left us with so deep a sense of betrayal that we are even afraid to expect anything better now or rather expect only more of the same or worse hereafter. And yet in spite of this or rather precisely because of it we must hope! Despair is the only other alternative? For like the passion of Jesus, his resurrection is not about a there and then, it is about the here and now too. And if Jesus' passion is re-enacted all over again with the suffering and death that we see all around, then so too must his resurrection express itself in new life and new hope in our world today, already now even though not fully yet.

But first, we must understand the difference between 'expectation' and 'hope'. 'Expectation' derives from a situation that we have understood and grasped and then can project into the future. There is a logical calculus here. And if we cannot control and change the situation, we can at least adapt and adjust our expectations. And all this happens within our everyday mundane world, with all its drag and dross, its excitement and despair. But hope is always beyond our expectations and deeper than them as well. For hope is not premised on logical understanding, but rather on mythical imagination. It is not a matter of calculation, but of faith, not of control but of surrender. Hope is what we reach out and long for from the deepest depth of our being even before we are consciously aware of it.

Hope then belongs to a worldview of faith understanding. It is something that seizes us rather than something we grasp on our own.

Thus, the risen Jesus is beyond our pragmatic expectations precisely because he is the fulfilment of our deepest hope. And if we go only by what we can expect we will miss the risen lord in our lives. For it is only in our hope that we can recognise him and experience him, encounter him and surrender to him. This is precisely what we see in the New Testament encounters with the risen Jesus. The women go to the tomb full of apprehension and fear, expecting to find the body. But an angel rekindles their hope and when they recognise Jesus they are immediately transformed into his messengers for the resurrection. Jesus chooses the most vulnerable, the least credible, to be his first witnesses to his resurrection. Surely there is a message in that for our patriarchal society today. Mary Magdalene, blinded by her grief, can only see a gardener in the man speaking to her. But when he calls her by name, he touches a chord of hope and she recognises Jesus whom she loves and now clings to.

10. CHRISTMAS CELEBRATES OUR JOY

Christmas 2006

Christmas 2006, Melbourne

My dear friends,

Many years ago in Kolkata, at Mother Teresa's home for the destitute and dying called Asha Dhan, which means Gift of Hope—along the staircase that led to the chapel from the lying-in ward below I saw a legend which read: 'Joy is the only infallible sign of God's presence'. Asha Dhan is a place that could make anyone miserably sorrowful at the plight of the dying destitute, whom the Sisters of Charity sheltered there. It could also make anyone immensely angry at a world that allowed human beings to come to such a state. Yet the legend did not seem out of place because it was quite evident that God was truly present here and the sisters there were obviously joyful. I had gone to meet a beautiful young sister, whom I had known as a vibrant and vivacious college student a few years earlier in Pune. I found she had lost none of her zest for life. She was so patently happy with her vocation at Asha Dhan that I felt challenged by a mystery, which seemed to escape me.

Tonight, I will reflect on this mystery with you as we come together at the manger at Bethlehem and pause there in silent contemplation on the meaning of Christian joy. For Christmas is quintessentially a celebration of joy, and joy must define our lives as believers. The philosopher, Nietzsche, once asked with biting irony: if Christians are redeemed, where is their joy? Our salvation begins in joy at Christmas and ends with joy at Easter. If we aren't joyful then are we really redeemed? Yet from the beginning, even at his birth, the menacing shadow of Herod falls across the manger. Rachael mourns for her children when the innocents are massacred in Bethlehem. All through Jesus' life there is the scandal of the cross culminating only on Calvary when he dies. So how can our joy not be darkened by suffering and

tragedy that is so much a part of our lives as it was of his? But wait, we know the child escapes into Egypt; that finally the darkness at noon on Good Friday is dispelled by the dawn of Easter. What then can we learn about joy as we gaze at the child and his mother, at Joseph and the shepherds, at the three kings and their gifts?

Here we see with the eyes of faith our Creator. He has emptied himself and come to share himself with his creatures unreservedly, to the point of becoming one of us, Emmanuel, God-with-us, eventually even pouring out his life on a cross. Such is the boundless compassion of our God. This is precisely the secret of Christmas joy that is revealed in the Christmas story. It can be experienced by those who generously empty themselves of their selfishness, and share with others, what they are and what they have; those who can be genuinely compassionate to all, especially the less fortunate.

Because the simple shepherds are not over-preoccupied with just the care for their sheep, they are enthralled by the message of the angels; because the three wise men were willing to risk themselves on their arduous journey following their star, they find the infant and honour him with their gifts. Joseph is the model of compassion, protective of the weak and vulnerable. Mary brings this unselfishness, and sharing and compassion together in her maternal joy. This is the joy Christmas celebrates! Herod is the counterpoint to this Christmas joy. He is full of fear and hate, compulsively concerned only with himself and his own obsessions. The Pharisees and scribes too exclude themselves from this joy because though they may know the scriptures they fail to live by them. With whom do we stand as we contemplate this scene? With the unselfish simplicity of the shepherds, the bountiful generosity of the kings, the compassionate concern of Joseph, the boundless joy of Mary? Will we allow the child in us to come alive this Christmas? Or is there still a little of the Herod in us that needs to be exorcised and redeemed? Is there still a little of the Pharisee or the scribe in us as we teach others without ever learning the living of the message ourselves?

The manger in Bethlehem makes evident that joy is never incompatible with hardship and suffering, but it is always negated by hate and fear and the negative emotions that all too often plague our lives. People who are angry or jealous, selfish or possessive can have no place here. They belong rather in the palaces of present-day Herods, where pleasure and excitement are such poor substitutes for true joy. Persons who are filled with their own importance and

learning cannot experience Christmas joy. They are more at home with the sophistication and sophistry of present-day Pharisees and scribes, where hypocrisy and pretence have displaced sincerity and honesty. Today our world seems so far from Christmas joy when we think of the wars that still rage with indescribable destruction, as in Iraq and Afghanistan. When the terror of mindless violence grips us with horror, as in Bali and Dafur; when we are confronted with the uncertainties we must live with and the anxieties that still haunt us. Some days back I was reviewing all this and more with a friend and she finally concluded: Our world is hardly a happy place or our future a time to look forward, too! And my spontaneous response was: but wait, Christmas is coming! For Christmas celebrates joy, a joy that presages the presence of God, a God who never gives up on us, who forever loves this world, and whose redemption cannot fail. We experience this joy by unselfishly emptying ourselves, generously gifting ourselves, and compassionately engaging with others. Our God shows us how at Bethlehem.

Many years after my visit to Asha Dhan I discovered that the legend there was from Teilhard de Chardin, a man who knew suffering. As a Jesuit priest-palaeontologist, he was forbidden from publishing or lecturing by the then Holy Office of the Vatican because his ideas were considered too heterodox. Though after his death Vatican II vindicated him. For such a person to speak about joy as the infallible presence of God is deeply inspiring. In the Hindu tradition, joy defines God, the Ultimate Absolute: Saccidananda, Being, Consciousness, Bliss. In the Buddhist one, enlightenment, nirvana, always implies the deepest compassion. In the Islamic one, submission is to a God infinitely merciful and bountiful. In the Christian tradition, self-emptying best describes our God's love, a love that must bring joy.

This Christmas as we celebrate our God-with-us, may we also be with this God of joy, of compassion, of mercy, of love, who comes to us today and every day. With Mary then let us tarry at the manger and ponder these things in our hearts. May the Christ-child bring to new birth the child in us, that we too often suppress, the playful and joyful child because when God is present we cannot but be joyful, for joy is the only infallible sign of God's presence.

11.

THE JOY OF EASTER

Easter 2006

16 April 2006

On the wall of an ascending staircase at Mother Teresa's convent in Calcutta, long before it became Kolkata, I saw this compelling legend from Teilhard de Chardin: 'Joy is the only infallible sign of God's presence.' Though joy cannot always be the constant witness of our lives, since we are all so fallible, yet Easter challenges us to seize the world with optimism, to live our lives with an 'amen', 'Thy will be done', and end with an 'alleluia', 'glory and praise to you Lord'! For we believe we are ultimately meant and made for joy, that the Ultimate reality is *Saccidananda*! Yet too easily and too often do we unmake and un-mend ourselves even as we fail to find our God and ourselves in this joy, which is not to be confused with an emotional high, such as we can stimulate or simulate, or perhaps others can for us. It is deeper than any feeling and transcends all understanding, it transforms and fulfils us at the inmost and deepest level of our being.

Certainly, an authentic characteristic of a truly human person is to delight in the good of others, the good they do and are. To rejoice in the joy of another is a genuine sign of unselfishness. Belittling criticism and petty jealousies are precisely the mark of the joyless person, the cynic who masquerades as a realist. True joy is multifaceted and inclusive. It always implies love, to be distinguished from mere pleasure or romance, and necessarily means fulfilment, to be distinguished from feeling high, or being manic. Real joy cannot but involve delight, not be confused with excitement, and it inevitably brings newness, which is not the same as novelty. At the deepest level of our being, we long for this joy so human and humanising, the most consoling and most precious of all the consolations of our God. But for this, we must first die to ourselves and our selfishness, which is not a very comforting experience, though it can be a very consoling

one. Yet too easily, do we return to the comfort zones in our lives and miss out on the consolations of our God. One must, of course, be realistic knowing that joy comes only after, and cannot be separated from sorrow, just as the resurrection comes only after, and cannot be separated from death. Those who have never had a Good Friday can never experience an Easter.

At times we seem to live in a cosmos of *dukha*, and our world has often been described as a vale of tears. Certainly, we must not be blind to the tears of millions all around us, but we must not be blinded by them either. Nor must we yield to cynicism, the characteristic of the pseudo-sophisticated and the over-educated, but alien to the common person unspoiled by tired ennui. For even as we live in the present with faith, if we live for the future with hope, then at least some of those tears will be tears of joy, a joy that transforms the rest of our lives, our togetherness, our work, and our mission.

For the joy of Easter is really the faith that everything good, beautiful, precious and lovely in our lives will never be lost; that all the people we have loved, the bonds we have forged, the experiences we treasure, the relationships that have made us, all this is carried over into the kingdom of God which begins already now but is not fully yet. For the future is but the noumenon of the present phenomena. These may distort our perception of the deeper reality, but once unmasked they can never suppress the future hope hidden therein.

This is the joy that we wish each other at Easter: the confidence that we journey from the unreal to the real, out of darkness into the light, from death to immortality. We believe Jesus died and rose again, so that we, in turn, might live this mystery, make this journey, of dying to oneself and living for others, and so bring this joy to all the world. May the Easter joy ground a loving optimism in our lives, the basis of our hope against all hopelessness. Let this be the joy, the *ananda*, we greet each other with always.

12.

THE HOLY FAMILY

Christmas 2006

31. Dec. 2006, Melbourne

Introduction

Christmas is a celebration for the family and families get together at Christmas time. It is a family feast and so the feast of the Holy family is celebrated in Christmastide. Yet today everywhere the family is in crisis. Let us pray for our families: one we come from, one we have started, the ones we belong to, the ones we will leave behind – our legacy to the world.

At the Indian Institute of Technology campus by Powai Lake in Mumbai, I asked a class of first-year students, who was most responsible for their getting into this elite institution. Some 3,000 students are selected through a national examination out of more than 300,000 applicants. These are the brightest and the best in the country, the 99.99th percentile of the 12th graders in any year. I asked who was most responsible for motivating, inspiring, and supporting you to get this far today. After some discussion, they agreed, that it was by and large their parents. And so deflating their rather overblown self-importance, I concluded for them: the moral of their story was just this, children must choose their parents very carefully!

For better or worse, we owe our families far more than we ever realise. But if children don't choose their parents, neither do parents choose the kind of children they will have. And today they may not always be able to guide and direct them in ways they think best. Children at times exceed the hope and expectations of their parents, once again for better or worse! The family is so important for all of us and yet many of the things that impact the family are beyond our control, not always dependent on the decision we make. The Holy

Family experienced this when Jesus was left behind in the temple, where he amazed the priests and people with his understanding and the answers he gave. Parents, especially mothers, know this anxiety and worry when a child goes missing even if only for a brief while. Families are important and essential for us and the Holy Family must be our model and inspiration.

I draw attention to three characteristics I think are relevant for us today more than ever. First, a fidelity and commitment to the good of the others, that is open-ended and lasting: parents to each other, the children in loyalty to family members. Such commitments are deeply humanising and fulfilling. Flitting from one involvement to another, from one affiliation to the next, only makes us shallow, superficial and crass. We are meant for deep interrelationships not solitary isolation in the midst of the madding crowd. Fidelity and commitment define and humanise our bonding in our families and beyond. Second, freedom and responsibility. Fidelity and commitment do not negate our freedom, rather they bring a responsibility that is a necessary condition of our freedom. For freedom without responsibility would be mere licentiousness and irresponsibility. Freedom cannot mean doing my own thing regardless of the others. Christian freedom is much more about living my life for the sake of others, in our families and beyond. Third, faith and trust in each other. We live interdependent lives and our interrelationships are not meant to be dominant-subservient but complementary and respectful. Even children, not just spouses must be respected, not just loved. They must be given their freedom and taught to be responsible. Unless we trust each other we cannot live our interdependence creatively, let alone happily. But then again faith in each other is defined not by what we know or believe, but by whom we trust and love. And when such trust and love are reciprocated then truly beautiful things will happen. When we realise that we are never in complete control of our own lives, that our dependence goes beyond interdependence on each other to our dependence on the Utterly Other, our God, then we realise that our faith and trust in this God must be the foundation of our lives, as persons, as family, as a people and beyond.

In conclusion, then, fidelity and commitment, freedom and responsibility, faith and trust make for happy families. They also make for happy people and a healthy society. Indeed we need our local communities to be a family of families, and our society to be a

community of communities. In other words, our families must take us beyond ourselves with a charity that begins but does not end there. The Holy Family at Nazareth is surely the model to inspire our families to live thus together and for others.

13.

THE MEANING OF EASTER

Easter 2007

7 April 2007

Mass Readings

During these last days, we have accompanied Jesus in his passion and death. We now come together to celebrate his resurrection into new life. For with Easter the tragedy and agony and sorrow of Good Friday is now transformed into his triumph and ecstasy and joy. Both these aspects are part of one single paschal mystery, of death leading to life, of darkness turning into light, of despair finding hope. For our God is the God of new life and true joy. This is the real meaning of Easter. This is what we celebrate today.

But how can our joy not be darkened by sadness and suffering, by pain and grief that is so much a part of our lives as it was for Jesus? All through his life there is the scandal of the cross, culminating only on Calvary. For he emptied himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Jesus, our friend and brother, is no stranger to suffering and sorrow, for he became like unto us in all things but sin.

What then must Easter mean to us? The Gospels tell us how the first disciples experienced the resurrection of Jesus. The stories of their experiences are models for our own encounter with this mystery.

Let us pause for a while before the empty tomb and contemplate this mystery, recreating in our imagination the scenes that unfold there. Which one of these tells my story? With which of the persons there do I identify? The holy women come early in the morning and are dumbstruck when they don't find his body. Mary Magdalene lingers and when Jesus addresses her she cannot recognise his voice, so distraught is she in her sorrow. When she finally does, she clings to her Rabboni for sheer joy. Peter and John come in haste, look inside the empty tomb and while John believes, Peter is left wondering still. What must have been Peter's experience when he meets his master

after his threefold denial? Imagine Mary, his mother, the Pieta, who last held his broken body across her lap before his burial. What must be her joy now to see her son in his glory! Later the disciples cowering in the upper room are reassured by Jesus and their joy is boundless. They are no longer afraid. Even Thomas the doubter, and finally Saul the persecutor finally surrender to this risen Jesus.

Which one of these tells my story, my experience of this risen Jesus? Am I like one of the holy women? Do I cling to Jesus with Mary Magdalene? Is mine a quiet faith like that of John? Or am I still left wondering like Peter? If I have denied him earlier what do I say to him now? Am I a doubter like Thomas, who must be confronted by Jesus before I believe? Or a proud fanatic like Saul, who must be thrown of his high horse and humbled before I surrender?

Whatever my story may be, if I surrender to this risen Jesus, with faith and hope, my tragedy will become triumph, my agony will be transformed into ecstasy, my sorrow will turn into joy. This joy is always freeing and it necessarily implies love, to be distinguished from mere pleasure or romance. Joy necessarily means fulfilment, to be distinguished from feeling high, or being manic. It makes one humble and grateful even as it cannot but involve delight, which must not be confused with excitement. And finally, joy inevitably brings newness which is not the same as novelty. This is the joy that is the basis of our hope, that rejoices unselfishly in the joy of others, that brings courage and creativity to our work, gratitude and compassion to our communities, caring and sharing to our society. At the deepest level of our being we long for this joy, so human and humanising. In our encounter with the risen Jesus we will find the secret of Easter joy that is revealed in his resurrection. It can be experienced by those who generously empty themselves of their selfishness and pride, to care and share with others, what they are and what they have; by those who can be genuinely compassionate to all, especially the less fortunate. For the joy of the resurrection is grounded in the experience of the cross.

This is the paradox of the paschal mystery, through death to life, from sorrow to joy, from darkness to light. This was the transforming experience of the first disciples, and countless faithful Christians since then. Yet Nietzsche, the philosopher, once asked with biting irony: if Christians are redeemed, where is their joy? If we aren't joyful then are we really redeemed? We believe that our salvation begins in joy at Christmas and ends with joy at Easter. The paschal mystery sets the

context for this joy as our witness to God's presence in our lives. Hence against Nietzsche, Karl Rahner, the theologian, tells us that ultimately being a Christian means to seize the world with optimism!

We need such a joyful optimism today more than ever as the basis of our hope against all hopelessness. And so our lives must be lived with both, an 'amen' and an 'alleluia'! When we say amen to the Good Friday in our lives, then we must also believe and have confidence that we will be singing alleluia to the Easter that cannot fail us. This is the promise of the resurrection of Jesus, 'already now but not fully yet'. It had the power to transform his first disciples from frightened, demoralised men and women into messengers and witnesses to his message, to meld them into an *ecclesia*, a community that transformed their world. Today we must find the courage to ask ourselves: where is the joy in my life and my work? Where is the joy in our communities, and our Churches? May the power of the risen Jesus transform us too and may we in turn transform our world. May the joy of Easter be with you always, for as Teilhard de Chardin said so beautifully: joy is the only infallible sign of God's presence!

14.

WAITING IN JOY

Gaudete Sunday, Third Sunday of Advent

13 Dec 2009

Mass Readings: [Zephaniah 3:14-20](#), [Philippians 4:4-7\(8-9\)](#),
[Psalm 85:7-13](#), [Luke 3:7-18](#)

As a season for preparing ourselves for the Lord's coming at Christmas, Advent calls us to turn to God and shun all evil. Today on the Third Sunday our joy breaks through, anticipation for the Lord is so near, we cannot contain our joy. When we long for something very much, we often wait impatiently and even anxiously, and so we become fearful and even resentful when our wait is extended and the longing seems in vain. But fear and resentment are bad companions and worse councillors. Today the liturgy invites us to another kind of waiting for the God we yearn for.

The first reading is an assurance by the prophet Zephaniah to the Israelites not to be fearful or anxious for God will not fail us. In the second reading, St Paul exhorts his beloved Philippians to rejoice always because our God is always near and so we must be prayerful and thankful for the peace God's presence brings, a peace that surpasses all human understanding.

In the Gospel, St Luke relates how John the Baptist called people to prepare for the Lord's coming: share and be fair. Jesus praised the poor widow, who from the little she had, gave her all with the two mites she contributed to the Temple. Can we from the plenty we have, share with others in their necessity and need? Could we give in charity the equivalence of what we spend on luxuries? It will not make us wealthier, or poorer, but will take us closer to the God we wait and long for. Could we spend on others, some of the time we do on hobbies or waste on pastimes—to get involved, to make a difference to our world, whether it be small or large? It may leave us a bit tired perhaps,

but it could make us much happier too. And when we are truly happy what could be a more beautiful way of waiting for our God to come than sharing our joy. Teilhard de Chardin insightfully wrote: 'Joy is the only infallible sign of God's presence'. When we wait for our God brings us joy, God is already there with us. When we share our joy, we share ourselves and our God too.

This Third Sunday in Advent is a day of joy. And for Natasha and Nikhil, and for their family and friends today is a especial joy. The joy of love is in sharing and caring. May such love bring them joy, a joy that will keep them close to their God, who comes, comes always comes.

15. PEACE ON EARTH, GOODWILL TO MEN

Christmas 2009

The message of the angels at Christmas is surely one that stirs our hearts once again on this silent night: 'peace on earth, goodwill to men'. But yet again we find ourselves at Christmas with less peace and even less goodwill in our world. And indeed, if we look around our own society we see that violence is escalating everywhere: in public and private, in civic and political, in religious and social life. The goodwill of our fellow citizens is no longer taken for granted, while fear and resentment seem to grow like a cancer in the innermost recesses of our hearts. Newspapers are filled with reports of child abuse and domestic violence, atrocities against religious and ethnic minorities, the oppression of Dalits and tribals, injustice to the poor and the needy etc. And the response seems to be less one of compassion, concern and care but rather an authoritarianism that is unsympathetic to the genuine needs of our peoples, manipulative of their real concerns, and a betrayal of their deepest desires and hopes.

What we have rather is a national agenda by the powers that be, pushing the advantage of the rich, the powerful, and the majority, in a numbers game that counts rupees and votes and with the same cynicism. As a result, the spiral of violence engulfs us, even as the erosion of goodwill overtakes us. And as we become more and more blasé about the violence around us, anger and hatred unimpeded stalk our land. With repeated civil disturbances and political turmoil, how many of us feel secure and safe in our society or even in this city? Indeed, our world seems now to be divided between the violent and the violated, where the active aggression of a few is left to run its course by the passive acceptance of many. Yet we still think of ourselves as a tolerant, non-violent, peaceful society, while each year the dividing lines between us as persons, communities, traditions,

religions seem to be drawn ever more starkly in innocent blood! Dead issues are brought to life only to claim more of the living for the dead. The message of Christmas is in such obvious and stark contrast to what is happening around, that we might begin to wonder if it can speak to us anymore. And yet each Christmas calls us to the peace and goodwill that alone can save us from the dehumanising fate that we are drawing onto ourselves.

Now the basis of the Christmas peace and goodwill is precisely this Emmanuel, this God-with-us. He comes not to visit his wrath on us, not to vent his anger on us, but as an innocent defenceless child. St. Paul tells us that God was in Christ reconciling himself to the world. For it is precisely this God of reconciliation, who is so powerfully and convincingly symbolised by the child in the manger at Bethlehem. For reconciliation is truly God's work, because it is first and foremost premised on forgiveness, in being forgiven, and in turn being called to forgive others. This is how our saviour God heals our hurt and makes whole our broken lives. But God's reconciliation goes further.

The healing and wholeness he brings must now strengthen us to reach out to others in hope and trust. This means making oneself vulnerable to the other. Surely not an easy lesson to learn, for forgiveness does not come easy when one is ruled by anger and hatred, and trust seems humanly impossible in a situation of violence and oppression. That is why the defenceless child in the manger is such a powerful icon of trust. Almighty God sets no limits to his expression of love for us. Nor does he wait for us to reach out to him. God loves us first even before he created us, even when we betrayed him, he touches our hearts and calls us back, and at Christmas he does this as a defenceless child. Yet sometimes the romance of Christmas hides the tragedy of forgiveness rejected and trust denied. For the cross already casts its shadow across the crib and Calvary is never far from Bethlehem. Herod will seek to destroy the child and so almost from birth, Jesus becomes a refugee, having nowhere to lay his head. When he comes back to his people, he will eventually be rejected and put to death. So, if the defenceless child now wins our heart, he must also strengthen our will, if we are to answer his call for reconciliation. For he never promises us more than he himself underwent: no servant can be greater than his master! And this Prince of Peace is already on a pilgrimage from his crib to his cross. This is the message of reconciliation that we can take home this Christmas not just to reconcile ourselves to our God but to reach out to our families, our

communities, our societies, and embrace those who are in need of healing, even the ones who have hurt us. Perhaps there is no other answer to the spiral of violence that is caused by unhealed memories and perceived injustices. This is a categorical moral imperative in our own personal lives. For who has not experienced suffering and hurt in this world!

Our broken, bruised lives can only be put together, healed and made whole by reconciling ourselves to our God, to our own self and to others. And indeed, all three levels of reconciliation must go together. Surely this is a message that we must take away from Christmas in our present situation today. We are a community now on the defensive. We were silent witnesses to the atrocities against others at one time, never thinking that we might be victims ourselves. It is now time for us to reach out to all victims, and the violators responsible for such violence, whether they be those directly involved on the ground or the instigators further removed from the field, or event the silent majority that witnesses without intervening, to reach out to all these with the message of Christmas peace and goodwill, the peace that must be the fruit of reconciliation and forgiveness, the goodwill that comes from trust and vulnerability. May this mighty God of reconciliation, this Prince of Peace, this Emmanuel, our God-with-us be with this Christmas and all through the years.

16. MARY, AN INSPIRATION

The Presentation of Mary 2013

21 Nov 2013

[Mass Readings](#)

Introduction

This feast dates back to the 6th century and it's not a major liturgical feast of Mary. But we can on this occasion pause to reflect on the role of Mary in the life of Ignatius and in our own lives too. Mary as an inspiration for Christians, especially for everyday women, and not just for Christian women, but for all women too, an inspiration of a liberated, dedicated, committed woman for today.

Homily

In coming to terms with women's role in the Church, Pope Francis points to the need of a deeper theology of woman. I suggest we need a spirituality of woman too or rather we need it first. Theology is a reflection on our faith experience. And further faith experiences must become a vision and way of life expressed in a spirituality. Surely women's experience is not the same as men's. She experiences the same things differently. All experiences of humans are gendered. Hence the imperative for a spirituality and a theology that would liberate women from the patriarchies of our societies and our churches.

Obviously, such a theology will have to be pioneered by women but men of goodwill can surely help to facilitate and enrich this and in turn be enriched as well in a 'redemptive relatedness'. Indeed, the liberation of women requires the liberation of men as well. For, the

mystery of the ‘humanum’, is too deep and complex to be engaged with or expressed in any one culture or language or religious tradition, and most certainly by a single gender.

Only a woman can pray with Juliana of Norwich to ‘Jesus our mother’ and teach us, men, that God is not just Father, Abba. Indeed, in the Indic traditions God, Parameshwar, the supreme lord, is both father and mother or better, Ma-Baap, Mother-father in one hyphenated word with ‘mother’ first! This is how women can open for us, a way of being inter-religious so we can be more deeply religious.

Mary Grey in *Redeeming the Dream*, suggests that women can show us ‘that is possible to cope with evil forces without killing,’ (p.141) and go beyond ‘an ethic of dominance, competitiveness, individualism and military strength through the living out of increasing depths of redemptive relatedness.’ (p.165)

[General Congregation 33](#) (December 14) on ‘Jesuits and the Situation of Women in Church and Civil Society’ is unfortunately a much-neglected document. Perhaps it embarrasses us too much! This is what it has to say:

Above all, we want to commit the Society in a more formal and explicit way to regard this solidarity with women as integral to our mission.

We do not pretend or claim to speak for women. However, we do speak out of what we have learned from women about ourselves and our relationship with them.

And so the Decree calls us to conversion and appreciation and then invites

all Jesuits to listen carefully and courageously to the experience of women. Many women feel that men simply do not listen to them. And further, the document calls Jesuits as individuals and through their institutions, to align themselves in solidarity with women. And in conclusion, the Decree thanks ‘women for the lead they have given, and continue to give’ and commits ‘the Society in a more formal and explicit way to regard this solidarity with women as integral to our mission.’

I will leave you with an image, which you will have to see in your mind’s eye, of a sculpture by Edwina Sandys of a woman on the cross, entitled Christa. When it was exhibited in California, women would stand before it and just cry. What did they see, recall, experience again? Do those tears speak to us? And will we help to turn those tears

22. Two Become One

of sorrow to tears of joy someday, when some of those tears will be our own!

References

General Cogregation 33:

<https://jesuitportal.bc.edu/research/general-congregations/general-congregation-33/>

17.

DIVERSITY AND OPENNESS

Feast of St Bartholomew

24 Aug 2013

[Mass Readings: Revelations 21:9b-14, John 1:45-51](#)

Introduction

St Bartholomew the Apostle is identified with Nathaniel in the Gospel of John. In the 2nd century, St Eusebius mentions that Bartholomew preached in the East, 'in India'. At that time 'India' was everything East of Mesopotamia all the way to China, which wasn't quite known then. Local legend has it that Bartholomew actually established a Church for a while in Kalyan, a suburb of Mumbai. However, there is convincing evidence though, that St Thomas Christians, who trace their origins to the apostle, were established in South India at least from 300 AD, and now have three sects: one which separated from Rome when the Padroado and Propaganda tried to Latinise them and has now joined the larger Orthodox Christian fraternity in the World Council of Churches; the other two are in communion with Rome: the larger Syro-Malabar Church which has established an Eparchy in Kalyan, claiming Bartholomew's legacy; and the smaller Syro-Malankara Church that has established an eparchy in Chicago, as a support to their diaspora people in the US. So, we have three rites in the Catholic Church in India and they represent a rich diversity; the Syrian ones though smaller are very Eastern, the much larger Latin one is quite Western. I will gather some reflections around two themes: diversity as illustrated from the powerful symbolism of Jerusalem in the first reading from the Apocalypse; and openness from the calling and confession of Nathaniel in the Gospel of John.

Homily

Ever since Jerusalem became the city of David and his capital, it had a powerful political significance for the Hebrew people. During the Babylonian exile, it became a symbol for a people in exile of their aching longing to return to their homeland. This is so beautifully expressed by the psalmist: If I should ever forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand wither and my tongue cling to my palate. (Psalm 137)

By the time of Deutro-Isaiah, Jerusalem symbolised the kingdom of God, the centre to which all the nations of the world would come to do homage. Yahwehism had now become a universal religion. It was part of the Axial evolution, about 800 – 200 BC, which saw the advent of other universal religions, like Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Vedanta. This began a real religious revolution freeing a religious tradition from geography and ethnicity. But all too often the opposite happens, the religious symbol binds a religious tradition to a sacred geography. Now the greater the religious/spiritual depth of the symbolised the more inadequate are the symbols used for it. This is true of all religious symbols and language, rites and rituals. Moreover, symbols are always meant to lead to the symbolised, and means must never displace ends. Hence without the necessary hermeneutics, there is great danger of religious symbols getting perverted.

The most dangerous of these perversions is the politicisation of religious symbols. A religious tradition then becomes an ideology, and no longer a faith, in the Pauline sense of a surrender to God, the transcendent, utterly Other, of whom we can only speak of in negatives, the *via negativa* of the scholastics, the *neti, neti* of the Upanishads, the silence of the Buddha. However, though transcendent realities can only be experienced, we need language not just to communicate these realities with others but even to understand and articulate them to ourselves. Hence religious language is necessarily symbolic. I believe the source of all, especially religious fundamentalism, is the reification of religious symbols, the displacement of the signified by the signifier. And so fundamentalist Christians hold that our God is bigger than their God, as though God had competitors, and for fundamentalist Hindus, their religion is more inclusive than others, as though all religious traditions can be

collapsed into one faith; and Buddhists would say my faith is more rational than yours, as though rationality was the ultimate criterion of faith; and for Muslims the Quran is only authentic revelation of God, as though God's truth could be contained in human language; and even atheist Zionists claim God gave them their holy land. Yet, to be evocative symbols must be concrete, rich in history, embedded in myth, powerful in conscious and especially unconscious meanings. The danger is that the richer the symbol the more the temptation to reify it, make it substitute and replace the symbolised. The then symbol becomes an idol. When such religious symbols are politicised, they readily lead to an ideology of violence. This is particularly true of a founding myth, a mythomoteur.

The temporal Jerusalem of King David was meant to be a symbol of God's eternal kingdom of peace and justice, harmony and love. Yet though sacred to three religious traditions, it has through much of its history been the site of bloody religious wars: once between Crusaders and Saracens, now between Jews and Arabs. How different from the Jerusalem of the Apocalypse! Not to mention the many times it was sacked by its enemies. So much of our inability to accept the other comes from our seeing the symbols they live by as alienating because they are different, rather than looking beyond to the human realities that their symbols and ours signify, the reality of the common humanness we all share: similar hopes and aspirations, fears and anxieties, similar loves and even hates. It's like persons communicating across a language they refuse to cross. Only miscommunication can result. The same is true of communicating across cultures and religions. Yet, there is so much common ground on which to establish positive and rewarding human connections, rather than seeking security in old stereotypes and prejudices.

Indeed, we need to meet the different 'other' on such common ground and then move together to higher ground. This calls for a creative and inclusive pluralism in our diverse and complex multicultural and pluri-religious world. It is only persons honest about themselves and open-minded with others who can cope with this complex diversity of cultures and religions. So where does St Bartholomew come into all this? He has his prejudices about Nazarenes: can anything good come from Nazareth? He is curious about Jesus, How do you know me? But when Jesus affirms him as a true and guileless Israelite, he is able to break through his

prejudgments and spontaneously confess his faith: Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the king of Israel.

Here is a challenge for us to be honest and open in coping with our world, not just sincere. A sincere person is one who expresses what he believes and feels. Honest persons are transparent to themselves and open to others. Such persons are best able to authentically dialogue across cultural and religious traditions, so much needed in our world today. St Bartholomew and St Thomas were men taking their faith to peoples entirely beyond their world. They challenge us to do likewise in our world, for those religiously and culturally different from us, and even counter-cultural and at times hostile to our faith. This then is my prayer: that St Bartholomew and St Thomas accompany us on our mission of faith to our many culturally and religiously diverse worlds, both old and new, we must live in and cope with.

Importance of Being Hopeful

There is so little we can expect from our world and society after we have experienced the ingrained hostility and brutalising conflicts which have left us with so deep a sense of betrayal that we are even afraid to expect anything better now, or rather expect only more of the same or even worse to come. And yet in spite of this, or rather precisely because of, it we must hope! Despair is the only other alternative, and it can only lead to self-destruction. But first, we must understand the difference between 'expectation' and 'hope'. 'Expectation' derives out of a situation that we have understood and grasped and then can project into a future. There is a logical calculus here. And if we cannot control and change the situation, we can at least adapt and adjust our expectations. And all this happens within our everyday mundane world, with all its drag and dross, its excitement and despair.

But hope is always beyond our expectations and deeper than them as well. For hope is not premised on logical understanding, but rather on mythical imagination. It is not a matter of calculation, but of faith, not of control but of surrender. Hope is what we reach out and long for from the deepest depth of our being even before we are consciously aware of it. Hope then belongs to a worldview of faith understanding. It is something that seizes us rather than something we grasp on our own, but something that always surprises us with joy! Trust is beautiful. Love is beautiful. Joy is beautiful. People are beautiful.

Hope makes the beauty last! Moreover, our hope must be founded on gratitude and trust in God's providence, because only such hope can open a brave and more beautiful world for us. For ultimately, all of us must approach our finitude and the moral ambiguity of our choices with humility, yet always with gratitude for the providence we have experienced and a hope for the future we can't control but must trust. Grateful persons are never negative or bitter, hopeful persons are always positive and optimistic.

18.

CHRISTMAS AND CORONA

Christmas 2021

Christmas is for children. We all have nostalgic memories of our childhood Christmas, of family get-togethers and carol singing, of lit-up Christmas trees and presents waiting to be unwrapped, of forgetting old quarrels and making new beginnings. However, the coronavirus has changed much of this and set a new normal we are yet to come to terms with.

During the lockdown for more than a whole year now, all the schools have been shut, families locked in, and social gatherings severely limited. It was necessary to contain the virus. But how could young children be expected to stay home indoors for so long? How much worse if there was an abusive adult in the house?

I was told of a child, who every morning would dress himself for school, pack his school bag, take his mother by the hand and say: Come let's go to school today! Online at home, children are bored to distraction and worse. What a child needs is not virtual, but the real company of other children, learning joyfully together in the classroom, playing enthusiastically on the grounds, The teacher on the TV screen is no substitute for either.

This pandemic will have changed our schools, and our lives as well, forever. It will set a new normal for us all. But what of children who never had a real choice for schooling in the first place?

Fr Sopena had worked with the Kathkaris, a small semi-nomadic Adivasi tribe in Raigad district, across the harbour from Mumbai. Once he tried persuading a man to send his child to school. The man was chopping firewood to sell in the local market and earn his daily wage. His child was happily playing by himself nearby. The man remained silent and unresponsive to Fr Sopena's urgings. The desperation and despair were all too apparent in his sullen silence. Finally, he said:

I know my child's life will be like mine, rigorous unskilled labour, just to stay alive; he has a few years now to enjoy himself, and I can't take that away from him. Schooling has not changed much for us Kathkaris.

This was years before the pandemic, which only made everything much worse for people at the bottom of the social strata. And when the lockdown is lifted, who will care to lift them with the others? Or will they be left stranded on the mudflats?

We seem to have forgotten the old Iroquois wisdom: we owe this world not so much as an inheritance from our parents, rather we hold it in trust for our children.

What sort of world will we bequeath to them? One of hate and violence, of division and differences of ...Will the world we bequeath to them be better than what we have made for ourselves? Where will our children play when global warming brings climate change? When pandemics and natural disasters degrade their environment irrevocably and forever? Already we seem to be on a cosmic train hurtling into a black hole in outer space.

Christmas is for Children, that is why it's a time of hope. Tagore once said every newborn child is a promise that God hasn't given up on our world. We mustn't either. May Christmas bring us all hope, to last through the new year, especially the last and least.

Maranatha, Amen!

19.

GIVING THANKS, PLEDGING FIDELITY, SHARING HOPE

Feast of St Francis of Assisi

4 October, year unknown

We all have so much to be grateful for. St Francis of Assisi was grateful for all of creation, for brother sun and sister moon, and even for his own existence. For, like the rest of us, he need not have been at all. Even when things do get bad, we must be grateful they aren't worse! For everything we have is gratuitously gifted to us by our Creator and as creatures, we have no claim on all this. And yet so often we are like the other nine in

Homily: Giving Thanks, Pledging Fidelity, Sharing Hope

We all have so much to be grateful for. St Francis of Assisi was grateful for all of creation, for brother sun and sister moon, and even for his own existence. For, like the rest of us, he need not have been at all. Even when things do get bad, we must be grateful they aren't worse! For everything we have is gratuitously gifted to us by our Creator and as creatures we have no claim on all this. And yet so often we are like the other nine in today's Gospel who don't come back to give thanks. Thanksgiving is to express gratitude, and gratitude often brings the expectation of favours yet to come! But who can we better entrust our expectations to than those we love and above all the God who loves us? But expectations are based on our experience of the past. Beyond this we must have hope, hope that is premised on our

faith in a promised future. And surely our hope must transcend our horizon of expectations and reach out to a beyond that's never quite determined by the past or defined by the present, or what's the future for? The future of the kingdom to which we are all called, the leap of faith into the resurrection and is already now but not fully yet! So, as we give thanks together for the past, let us pledge our fidelity in the present and share our hopes for the future.

20.

THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

Third Sunday of Easter

Third Sunday of Easter, Year unknown

[Luke: 24: 13-35](#)

Emmaus is a metaphor for our life's journey, with all its ups and downs, sorrows and joys, going away and coming home. A journey on which we are never alone, if we can only recognise Jesus in the guise that represents himself. Like the disciples our journey with Jesus begins with the excitement of meeting Jesus, the pledge of commitment in love to him, growing together in his companionship, the moment of truth, the test of fidelity, the sorrow, the failure ... but finally the joy, the reward of love, of fidelity, for those who trust in his love and allow him to set their hearts burning.

Emmaus is a metaphor for Christian marriage. Marriage too is a journey together knowing only where it began, sometimes not even how it began! But through all the vicissitudes of life a journey through which we grow and fulfil ourselves, our promises, the ones we make, the one we are! And at the journey's end, we finally come home, to the people who set us off, our family, where our first steps were taken, the home, to our roots in our faith, and finally home to our father in heaven. And so when we walk together we walk with Jesus even if we don't recognise him at first. He is always with us as we set out to the far places our journey will take us, but we know and are assured that we will come home to our people to our father's house where he is waiting to welcome us. For a Christian marriage always happens in the midst of God's people, the community of support and strength, always there for you to draw on, to come back to. So when at times

you find yourself downcast on the way to your Emmaus, know that there is a family in Jerusalem in the Cenacle there waiting to welcome you home, with the assurance that Jesus is still with us. Wherever you go, may you walk together in companionship and love, walk with Jesus always knowing he is with you though it may be hard to recognise him a times. May he open your eyes in the breaking of the bread, in the sharing of your lives, in the blessing he imparts. May he set your hearts on fire with his love, and may you always have the support of your family or friends to come back home to.

Section 2

Homilies on Weddings

21.

LOVE IS ITS OWN REASON

14 Feb 2012

14 Feb 2012

My dear friends, we have gathered here to witness the marriage of this young couple. This is certainly a defining moment for them as well as for all those whose lives they touch. And so it is indeed appropriate that we reflect for a while on the significance of this event and the meaning of our witness to it. If we think of the kind of events we would not want to be witnesses to, we will begin to realise why we are willing witnesses to happenings such as this. For here, ours is not an uninvolved presence of distracted observers. We are here to celebrate and confirm the promises that the young couple will exchange with each other, and even as we celebrate their joy with them, we confirm our support for them as well. For when the music stops and the guests go home, and the new life that the young couple have vowed begins, they must know that they are not alone, that we are still with them, when they need or want us, even though we may seem far away.

Today surely a young family needs all the support it can get. For, we believe that marriage is a covenant and more than a contract. Indeed, we have a great mystery here! To begin, putting aside generalities, there is no convincing answer to the concrete question: Why am I alive? Why me? Why now? Why here? And if we can comprehend the terror of that question we will be even more terrified if we would seek an answer to the more mysterious question: Why are we loved? Why do we love? Why me? Why you? And once again platitudes apart, there is no adequate answer here either.

For in the final analysis, we can only respond to such questions by going beyond ourselves into the heart of the mystery that in reality each one of us is, and was meant to be, and into the even greater

mystery each one of us comes from and must return to. For if we are alive because of an accident, then our life would be accidental and insignificant. But if we can believe we are alive because God's love willed us to be, then our lives must be an expression of that love. And if our love is motivated by 'reasons', however sensible they may seem, then it is not free but conditioned by those very motivations. For if we begin to find reasons for loving, our love cannot but be limited by those very 'reasons'; and if we must justify our love, our loving can be no larger than its justifications. And what would happen if these reasons cease to be 'reasonable'? Or the justifications are no longer justified? But then again only when we allow ourselves to experience an unconditional love can we love others unconditionally in turn. How precious and beautiful a gift this is! And how true that only in God can we experience a love that is totally unconditioned! And so the very foundation of our life and love must go back to the heart of the mystery of God's love unless we are content to settle for something less, less meaningful and significant, less loving and lovable. And it is such a love that must be the foundation and exemplar for our life too.

Now God's love for us is as unlimited as God, and if our love is indeed modelled on this, we in turn cannot put limits or conditions on our loving. But such a love, unconditional and faithful, generous and true, cannot but make us vulnerable, as anyone who has loved deeply and intensely will certainly have realised. How easily we can be hurt in our love! How quickly we can become bitter in our hurt! How long we can take to forgive those others responsible! How often we can resist our own healing! And yet the person who is most hurt by not forgiving is the unforgiving one, even more than the unforgiven unfortunate. The person most destroyed by the negation of love is the unloving one, even more than the unloved reject. For it is in giving we receive and in forgiving we are forgiven.

In other words: more generally, love is its own reason; or more specifically, I love because I love; or more concretely, I *love* you because of *you*! And so too forgiveness is its own reason: we forgive not to be forgiven, but forgiving prepares us better to receive forgiveness; and only when I forgive and am forgiven, can I begin to heal. Marital love would lose all significance and meaning if it was conditional or unforgiving. That is why it has become for us the most concrete and human expression of God's love. We are aware that the understanding of marriage we are describing here is hardly part of the

conventional social wisdom any more. The mystics have sacralised this love in the symbol of God's love for his devotees, God's people, God's family. For at the end of the day only a covenanted love, not a contractual one, can bring us into the promised land, where all our promises are fulfilled, the promises we make, and the promise that we are and are meant to be. As we witness the promises of this young couple and celebrate their unconditional love, we too can pray for his blessings on our love and our life. For if marriage is for young lovers, love itself does not grow old even when weddings like this will turn to silver and the silver into gold!

On this solemn occasion, the young lovers make their love explicit precisely in such unconditional terms: 'to be true to you in good times and in bad, in health and in sickness,' to 'love and honour you all the days of my life.' Let this be our prayer for them: may the promises you make today fulfil the promise that you are, the promise you are meant to be; may we all share in that promise even as we have witnessed your promises today. Amen.

22. TWO BECOME ONE

A Wedding Homily for Claire and Henrik

None of us can live truly human lives without serious commitments and yet we find some commitments burdensome and alienating no matter how easy they may be, and others freeing and liberating no matter how difficult they may become. Indeed, some commitments make us more human, and the others less so. How does one make the difference between such commitments? I suggest three characteristics of a genuine human commitment. All three are essential, and integral to any authentic human living. And if one or the other is lacking then the whole character of the commitment is compromised. In the first place to be human a commitment must be free. Freedom is in fact a constitutive characteristic of any authentic human behaviour, it is the defining element of any moral action and the very basis of our human dignity and identity. It can never be surrendered unless one freely chooses to limit one's freedom of choice. This is what makes freedom committed, but it does not make it less free. Indeed, the paradox of freedom is that in choosing we become more free! For when we choose we close some avenues even while we open up others. And in so far as these are fulfilling and humanising, our freedom is authenticated and enhanced.

The second characteristic of a human commitment is fidelity. For a choice that is reversed, a promise that is broken, is a betrayal not only of the person in whose favour the choice is made, but also of the person who did the choosing in the first place. For lack of fidelity degrades one's freedom, it does not enhance it. Now fidelity in a human commitment is not just a matter of integrity, whether the physical, psychological or otherwise. For fidelity as a minimum implies that any new commitment must be lived out in the context of

the other commitments we already have. But more than this fidelity demands a loyalty, a devotedness to the good of the other above one's own. There may indeed be a conflict of choice in exercising such fidelity in many human contexts, as in a family where many may demand our devotion and attention, and we have to be wise and discerning if we are to cope with them all. Yet here the conflict is one of priorities. But fidelity can never mean a choice between oneself and the other, for fidelity is precisely choosing again one's commitment to the other over one's own self-interest. What else can faithful devotion to another mean?

And finally, a human commitment besides freedom and fidelity must be loving. Love is not just the motivation of such a commitment. For indeed there is something that motivates love, then it would seem to make love an instrument, a means for something else. Whereas real love is its own reason, for it is an end in itself. Hence a truly human commitment begins with and is fulfilled in love. In other words, a commitment inspired by love leads us deeper into a loving relationship. This is the paradox of human commitment: in giving we receive, in loving we find love, in choosing we find greater freedom, in being faithful we find our liberation. And yet only when all three of these characteristics come together and are integrated and genuinely expressed in a human commitment, only then will our commitment be truly humanising. For freedom alone without fidelity and love, is nothing but license.

Fidelity in a human relationship that is neither free nor loving is oppressive and even exploitative. And love that is neither free nor faithful cannot be true love. It can only be a compulsive self-love, it can never be a genuinely unselfish love. Such is the commitment that Christian marriage demands, a commitment that unites the two into one by an indissoluble union. And indeed it is surely the kind of commitment that is beyond human strength. For the sacrament of marriage asks the partners to make the freedom, fidelity and love of Christ for the Church the model on which to base their own commitment. They are asked to mirror in their family life the inner Trinitarian life, the loving, enduring relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is not an ideal we can aspire to with our own strength. That would be but a recipe for failure and frustration. Rather it is precisely the grace of God that calls Christian spouses to such a commitment, and it is the same God who promises in his free and

loving fidelity to sustain the spouses to strive for this ideal and who brings a wonderful fulfilment into their lives.

No wonder Christian marriage is a heroic commitment, but it is not a lonely heroism to which it beckons us. It is a commitment to which the spouses are called to, and choose precisely because they rely on this loving fidelity of their God, a God who surrounds us with his providence and acts through his creatures. Moreover, Christian marriage is a commitment made in a community, that is in turn committed to support and nurture it. This is what our presence in the church today must mean to the young couple trembling on the brink of their new life, as we pray: may the promises you make today fulfil the promise that you are.

Section 3

Homilies On Birthdays

23. WALKING INTO THE FUTURE, SEEKING A BLESSING

76th Birthday Homily, 2017

3 June 2017

My dear friends,

Birthdays are a time for nostalgia and gratitude, sharing edited recollections, leaving the unedited ones to be sanitised by a copy editor. I can't, of course, really share 76 years even if there was a captive audience to inflict it on. A minute a year would precipitate a walkout, and a blink a year would need a Kathakali interpreter. A memoir might be completed for posthumous publication. However, I thought I'd sum up my life in an image: walking into the future. Walking is the myth I live by. It's not an image of a settler in a comfort zone, but rather one who comforts the discomforted and discomforts the comfortable, as Galbraith once challenged young graduates.

It's my personal myth of walking at the margins, though not as a scapegoat, the 'homo sacer' of Agamben, sacrificed by his people for communal peace, but 'homo ambulans', critical of the establishment status quo, trying to be constructive even at the risk of being seen as destructive, hopefully not cynical but creative. If I can't beat them, never join them opportunistically but strive to remain, not the last man standing, but the one still walking into the future. For I believe this earth was meant for us to walk on, not lie under, not until one exits.

The prayer I make, the blessing I seek is to stay the course:

Walking into the future

I want to walk this earth as Jesus did,
making a difference,
bringing wholeness and hope,
forgiveness and healing
to a bruised and broken world;
helping to fulfil hidden promises
deep in peoples heart's,
to be what we were always meant to be;
walking with friends and companions,
with soulmates and fellow travellers,
with wayfarers on the way. And when I must,
walking alone with my absent-God,
echoing in my heart Tagore's haunting song
Êkla Chôlo Re, Êkla Chôlo Re (Walk Alone, Walk Alone),
But always and everywhere
walking with hope, daring the future,
which is already now but not fully yet.
Walk me into your future, O my God!
And you wayfarer, will walk with me?
Be friend and companion, soulmate and guide?

24. NEW HORIZONS

80th Birthday

3 June 2021, Arrupe Nivas, St Mary's Mumbai

If there's a sentiment that overwhelms me today on my eightieth birthday it is gratitude for all that's been, for all the people who have been part of my life who have left footprints on my soul and have become my soul mates. Though many have already crossed the bar, I can still reach out to and embrace them across the divide even now, as we wait for the resurrection wherein every tear will be wiped from every eye and death shall be no more. This hope has become more real than ever as I sing my 'Alleluia' for all that has been, say my 'Amen' to all that is yet to come. And what better place to live out this gratitude and joy than in Arrupe Nivas, where I am constantly reminded of the shining example, nay the saintly challenge Fr Pedro Arrupe represents for us all.

For a Jesuit is called to a universal mission, even as this is expressed in a particular ministry. This is the mystical inspiration of the Society of Jesus' corporate service, as friends and companions, inclusive friendships and enduring companionship. Indeed, I belong to this Society through the friends and companions I have there. It is a challenge to be totally involved and completely detached in a loyalty that is liberating, in a bonding in a common commitment, a life that provokes others to ask: Who are these men that they do what they do and the way they do it?

Not that I can claim to have already arrived or that I have always been faithful to this calling. Yet in spite of promises broken and hopes belied, I pray that God's grace gives me the strength to pick up the pieces of my life and once again thrust myself on God's unconditional love and mercy with renewed commitment and new energy. However, this is not a logically reasoned conclusion, but a matter of the heart. For the heart has reasons that reason does not know! So now in my

80th year, though I know I'm slowing down, in the years left to me, I do not want to settle in the comfort zone of mediocrity, where people long dead have forgotten to lie down.

I still want to walk to new horizons as yet beyond my grasp. I still want to 'put out into the deep', to set my sail against the wind. I want to live my life with the Ignatian mysticism of action, never intimidated by the greatest and yet always concerned for the least. I want the romance of Francis of Assisi, whom G. K. Chesterton described as a poet, whose whole life was a poem. I would hope my prophetic witness, such as it may be, will be a counter-cultural solidarity, defined by apostolic action and spiritual mysticism, humble courage and caring concern, moving poetry and enthusing romance. For Fr. Arrupe this would mean falling in love with God! And for Jesus this does not exclude humans, but the last and least most especially.

For a prophetic witness in the image and likeness of Jesus must be a counter-cultural one as Jesus was in his day. And so the defining image of my life I treasure that epitomises all this for me as a Jesuit is this: to walk this earth as Jesus did, with my companions on mission, as friends in the Lord, touching people's hearts and doing good, bring healing to the hurt and wholeness to the broken, being an instrument of peace, a witness to resurrection joy, a prophet of the kingdom to come already now but not fully yet.

And so I pray:

Walk me into your future, O my God!
And you wayfarer, will walk with me?
Be friend and companion, soulmate and guide?

And now once I remake my offering in the words of St Ignatius. I ask you to sing with me:

Take and receive, O Lord my liberty
Take all my will my mind my memory.
Do Thou direct, and govern all and sway,
Do what Thou wilt, command and I obey.
Only Thy grace and love on me bestow
Possessing these all riches I forgo.
All things I hold, and all I own are Thine,
Thine was the gift, to Thee I all resign.
Do Thou direct, and govern all and sway,
Do what Thou wilt, command and I obey.

25.

A FUTURE ALREADY NOW BUT NOT FULLY YET

81st Birthday

3 June 2022

Introduction

As we get older and look back on all that has been, we cannot but be filled with gratitude and a birthday is a good time to recall and relieve this gift of gratitude. But even as the balance between past and future in our lives changes, and there is so much more 'past' and 'future' as we grow older, I do believe that to age gracefully we must not just look back in gratitude, but also and equally look forward in hope. Indeed, all that has been is very much a preparation for all that is to come, for a future that is already now but not fully yet.

Homily: A Future Already Now But Not Fully Yet

Hope is not an 'expectation'; for an expectation is always within the context of our past experience. Hope reaches beyond our past experiences, to horizons beyond, only vaguely grasped in images and sometimes felt in moments of ecstasy. This is the *satya* underling all the *maya* of our worlds, the true reality, the hidden noumenon of our present phenomenon, a future that gives meaning and purpose to our present lives. This hope is the resurrection celebrated by Christians as an ongoing and continuing experience, already now but fully yet. It is the *moksha* of the Vedantins and *sant kavis*, the enlightened *nirvana* of the Bodhisattvas, the *qayamat* of the Sufis.

For me on this pilgrimage into the future, my inspiration has long been the Jesus myth, the deepest and most enduring motivation of my

life. And the metaphor of the clown is the carapace that has helped me cope with the ups and downs, the twists and turns of the circus of my world.

For it is the ‘Jesus myth’ I was internalising on my spiritual pilgrimage that began to trump all else in my own life: to walk this earth as He did, bring healing and wholeness to broken and betrayed lives, to live the beatitudes He taught, bring to birth a brave new world, to pour out my life in libation on the desert sand in the hope it would bloom into an oasis of joy and hope. Eventually, I believed it would grow into a garden of Eden, where every tear would be wiped away from every eye, and death would be no more. This ‘Jesus myth’ has been internalised so gradually in my life that even now it was difficult for me to articulate it, though I try to live it and share it along the way.

This is not just the historical Jesus we read about in the Gospels, not only the Christ of faith we learn about in Christian tradition. It is the Jesus whose ‘mimesis’ (imitation) transforms my own life and becomes the deepest longing of my being, this unconditional, inclusive love of my Ishtadevata, my personal Godhead, who excludes nothing good and beautiful, brave and strong, gentle and caring...wherever it’s found. Moreover, wherever such good is renounced for the greater good, the common good, it is never lost but comes back a hundredfold.

It’s my personal myth of walking at the margins, with this Jesus, though not just as a scapegoat, the ‘homo sacer’ of Agamben, sacrificed by his people for communal peace, but more as ‘homo ambulans’, critical of the established status quo, trying to be constructive even at the risk of being seen as destructive, hopefully not cynical but creative. If I can’t beat them never joining them opportunistically but strive to remain, not the last man standing, but the one still walking or rather limping into the future.

This, then, is the prayer I make, the blessing I seek to stay the course:

Floating on Hope

As we walk together for a while,
we could become companions along the way
bound together heart to heart
soulmates on a pilgrimage

floating on a hope for a better
more beautiful, more compassionate world
for tomorrow and beyond,
for ourselves and others
and every single one.
(10 April 2013)

So now, I write:

Looking Back

From where I'm at all
the wonderful things have happened,
despite all these turns and twists
and ups and downs,
my cup brims over in joyful gratitude.
Though I've often wondered
about what might have been,
I don't regret the path I've trod,
And which I'd tread over and again.

I had to learn the hard way that a suffering love can be redemptive as well. For what we love changes us, whom we love transforms us. Ultimately, 'Joy is the only infallible sign of God's presence' as Teilhard de Chardin said, and our *rishis* and *roshis*, our Sufis and *sant-kavis* all taught. The ultimate reality is *sat-chit-anandam* (the trinity of being-consciousness-bliss).

But none of this is easy. Nor do I think I would want it to be. For I have learnt to mistrust that which comes too easily. As with Hilaire Belloc's,

'Prophet Lost in the Hills at Evening':
I challenged and I kept the Faith,
The bleeding path alone I trod;
It darkens. Stands about my wraith,
And harbour me—Almighty God!

The Clown Metaphor

We have different ways of coping with tragedies and traumas, the ups and downs of our lives. A clown does it with humour and wit,

compassion and empathy. Indeed, I believe it has been my way of coping, a way of concealing my own tears and fears and those of so many others that lie hidden and ‘uncried’, still damned within one’s soul, the *lacrimae rerum* (the tears of things) of Virgil, though mine seem always to be tinged with a touch of humour and mischief.

The appreciation of the comic in our lives serves as a much-needed corrective to taking ourselves over-seriously and forgetting the ever-present ‘circus’ of the world we inhabit. Clowns helps us see that ‘All the world’s a stage’, we all have our entrances and exits; and in between we play many parts, which add up to the complex story of our lives. Clowns bring with them much-needed healing laughter and humour to relativise the highs and lows of our journey. So it’s never too late to ‘call in the clowns’, indeed there ought to be clowns; if only we’d look, already they’re here.

Clowns find their joy in the laughter of others. They choose to expose their vulnerability to help others cope. And the more decisive they are about this, the more convincing they become. This is the blessed that means ‘happy’. This is the blessedness of the beatitudes that must, in these troubled times add up to a sustained and consistent endeavour towards a counter-culture for the common good, in a community of solidarity, where each one will find the place and space to fulfil their God-given potential, as persons-in-community and a community-of-persons.

Living Intensely

I have always wanted to live an intense life, one that would combine total commitment with complete detachment. But I did not give enough importance to the backlash that critical truth-telling precipitates, especially when this questions the status quo or the comfort zones of others, and more so when it goes without any ‘compassionate healing’. I’m wiser now: critique, however insightful, must be compassionate; and truth-telling however objective must be healing. We must learn to suffer even ‘fools’ wisely.

Moreover, to live intensely, we must live transparently to our own self and others, that is, to be honest. Thus a person expressing anger rather than equivocating it, is sincere. But neglecting to probe its underlying causes is not being self-transparent, not being honest with oneself. And then how can one begin to be honest with others.

Authentic, humanising intensity demands both honesty and sincerity, or else it only adds up to mere feverish excitement or some melodramatic excess. Either of these tip over into taking oneself over-seriously and being dismissive of others. And so for the future

A Blessing

May the promises hidden deep in your heart
fulfil the person you were meant to be.
May the paths you choose in life
open to enchanting scenes.
May your fellow-travellers
be companions on your journey
to a brave new world.
May the dreams your dream
awaken you to beautiful days.
May the friends you make
be yours for keeps.
May you meet with soulmates
on your way
to enrich each other lives forever.
As you have mine.
(Rudi, S.J., 14 July 2017)

I await this future ‘with a great curiosity’ as John Henry Newman did. For the best is yet to come, in the resurrection, where God will be all in all, and we will God’s one people; where every tear will be wiped from every eye, and ‘all things will be well, all things will be very well’ (Juliana of Norwich).

We must learn to experience the divine dimension in creation with William Blake, who gives expression to this reality in the form of a poem:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour

Travelling Together

Too often in too many lives the future crashes into them, bringing shock and trauma. I would rather walk into the future hoping I will be remembered for the good I did and the difference it made, knowing too I am forgiven by the people I've hurt and the harm done has healed. For a forgiven love is twice as precious for having been lost and found.

The appreciation of the comic in our lives serves as a much-needed corrective to taking ourselves over-seriously, and forgetting the ever-present 'circus-like' world we inhabit. Royal courts had their 'jesters', as Akbar had Birbal. So why not a clown in the religious courtyards of the Jesuits, and the ecclesial ones of the Church?

The 'clown' calls us to travel together, like a performing circus, forming 'community' on the way, intertwining our lives as we begin birthing a future still known. The future is born in the past, lies hidden in the present, and remains an invitation to reach out to receding horizons and float beyond them over the rainbow to a land we once dreamt of in lullabies of bygone days and faraway places.

The Circus of Life

I must recognise in gratitude the numerous friends and companions who have accompanied me on the circus of my life; Jesuits and friends, family and relatives, men and women, young and old, students and teachers, beautiful persons, and not quite lovable ones...too many to be mentioned here by name. I do certainly hold them in my heart, remembering the good times, the cheer and laughter, we shared along the way over the years; as well as the less memorable instances of jeers and sneers; all of these and more that have been valuable learning experiences for me. They have all contributed to what I am today.

However, despite the differences and disagreements, there was far more we shared, as we impacted each other's lives, in a dialogue of word and action, in prayer and silence.

For in these shared relationships with my 'soul mates', as I call them, of intimacy and mystery, I will always treasure the ways in which they have marked my life making it the more beautiful and precious. I hope the gift they have been to me has been reciprocated in some measure.

25. A Future Already Now But Not Fully Yet

Some of my soulmates have crossed the bar into the beyond; others are still walking with me, sometimes together, sometimes alone, but always into a newness of life that begins already now but not fully yet.

Where, as T S Eliot opined,

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

26. THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING HOPEFUL

82nd Birthday Homily

3 June 2023

My dear friends, a birthday celebrated with friends and family, companions, and soul mates is surely an occasion for gratitude, reliving shared memories—memories of all the people who inspired me and made a difference by the impact they've had on my life! And as I realise there are more days behind me than days ahead, more past to remember, less future to anticipate, I invite you to rejoice with me in gratitude for all that has been on my journey, and even more so to join me in hope for what is yet to come, already on its way, but not fully yet. For it is surely our hope in a future, that gives meaning and depth to our life's journey. If our gratitude for the past does not open to a hope in a future, our life's journey will be dead-end.

So, I invite you now to celebrate my 82nd birthday, not just with gratitude for what has been, but more so with hope for what is yet to come, already now but not fully yet. Gratitude, for the hand of Providence protecting me from misfortunes that so easily might have overtaken me on my life's journey; gratitude for all those who walked with me, helped and supported me, my family and friends, companions and soulmates, sojourners and wayfarers, all who have crossed my path and marked my way, and catapulted me into a future of hope. There is so little we can expect from our world and society after we have experienced the ingrained hostility and brutalising conflicts which have left us with so deep a sense of betrayal that we are even afraid to expect anything better now, or rather expect only more of the same or even worse to come. And yet in spite of this, or

rather precisely because of it, we must hope! Despair is the only other alternative, and it can only lead to self-destruction.

Hoping against Expectations

But first, we must understand the difference between ‘expectation’ and ‘hope’. ‘Expectation’ derives out of a situation that we have understood and grasped and then can project into a future. There is a logical calculus here. And if we cannot control and change the situation, we can at least adapt and adjust our expectations. And all this happens within our everyday mundane world, with all its drag and dross, its excitement and despair.

But hope is always beyond our expectations and deeper than them as well. For hope is not premised on logical understanding, but rather on mythical imagination. It is not a matter of calculation, but of faith, not of control but of surrender. Hope is what we reach out and long for from the deepest depth of our being even before we are consciously aware of it. Hope then belongs to a worldview of faith understanding. It is something that seizes us rather than something we grasp on our own, but something that always surprises us with joy! Trust is beautiful. Love is beautiful. Joy is beautiful. People are beautiful. Hope makes the beauty last! Moreover, our hope must be founded on gratitude and trust in God’s providence, because only such hope can open a brave and more beautiful world for us. For ultimately, all of us must approach our finitude and the moral ambiguity of our choices with humility, yet always with gratitude for the providence we have experienced and remember, a hope for the future we can’t control but must trust. Grateful persons are never negative or bitter, hopeful persons are always positive and optimistic.

A Final Blessing

May the God of hope turn all our worries into prayer,
may all our trespasses be forgiven,
may our peace be surpassed
by resurrection hope and joy.

27.

LOOK BACK IN GRATITUDE, BE FAITHFUL IN THE PRESENT AND LOOK FORWARD IN HOPE.

83rd birthday

3 June 2024, Arrupe Niwas, Mumbai

Readings: [Philippians 2: 1- 5](#), [Psalm 23: 1 -6](#), [Luke 24:28 – 32](#)

In celebrating my 83rd birthday I cannot but begin by looking back at the years gone by, with immense gratitude for truly the Providence of God has accompanied me all along my life. I now pray with Fr Arrupe: Grant me, O Lord, to see everything now with new eyes.

Homily

As we get older and look back on all that has been, we cannot but be filled with gratitude is a constant sentiment of gratitude. A birthday is a good time to recall and relieve this gift of gratitude. Yet now there is much more 'past' and less 'future' as we grow older. I do believe that to age gracefully we must not just look back in gratitude, be faithful in the and look forward in hope. Indeed, all that has been is very much a preparation for all that is to come, for fidelity to the present will open to a future that is already now but not fully yet.

1. Gratitude

I have much to be grateful for over the years. This gratitude can never leave me bitter; it must always make me gracious and generous. And so I pray for all my friends and relatives, my colleagues and comrades, and most especially for those who walked with me through

all the ups and downs, the twists and turns of my life's journey: may God's most generous blessings be showered on them.

2. Fidelity

Gratitude anticipates graces yet to come. But the condition of this is fidelity in the present, to seize the sacrament of the passing moment and experience the divine presence of the Providence ruling our lives. For ultimately our life is but a precarious candle against the wind that burns itself out or is blown out when the window of the future is opened.

3. Hope

And our life is ever open us to a future not of our making, where all that was beautiful, our loves, our joys, our friends and family, our soulmates and in-mates which be gathered together, where there will be no more weeping, no sadness, where every tear will be wiped from every eye, where we will be overtaken by a joy in a new heaven and a new earth, and death will be no more!

May this God of hope turn all our worries into prayer,
forgive us our failings and infidelities,
bring us surpassing peace
and resurrection hope and joy to abide with us always.
Amen.

Concluding colloquy

In conclusion my prayer, for myself and for all of us, for all who have walked with me on my journey, relatives, friends, soulmates in my *satsang* who gather along the way, is this:

May the gift of gratitude will overcome all bitterness and regret,
May our commitment to fidelity prevail in the most difficult of trials.

May our vision of hope seek a future beyond present horizons.
May we remember the words of Jesus:
it is more blessed to give than to receive.

In our life together may we seek:

to console rather than be consoled,
to understand rather than to be understood,
to give rather than receive;
for it is in giving we receive,
in forgiving we are forgiving,
in dying to we born to resurrection life.

Communion antiphon: Where charity and love abide, there God is.

Communion prayer: Lord though the grace of this holy sacrament may we always remember that your joy is the only infallible sign of your presence; make us instruments of your joy.

A Final Blessing

May the good Lord bless us
with joyful gratitude,
lasting fidelity and
wondrous hope

Concluding hymn: Ps 133: 1
Ecce quam bonum,
Et quam jucundum
Habitare fratres in unum, in unum.

(How good and how pleasant it is, when brothers dwell together as one!)

Section 4

Homilies on Special Occasions: Final Vows, Golden & Diamond Jubilees

28.

FULFILLING PROMISES – WHY DID I BECOME A JESUIT?

Final Vows

3 December 1981, Feast of St Francis Xavier

My dear friends,

Oftentimes I have been asked: why did you become a Jesuit; or at times even more pointedly: how did you ever become one of those? Sometimes the question is posed out of light-hearted curiosity and perhaps earnest surprise, sometimes it is thrown at me with a little disappointment and perhaps some disgust. But even when the question comes from a genuine interest and concern, I find it extremely difficult to answer. I don't know where to begin – or how to end. It is a question which is so personal and all-embracing, that I am always a little afraid that something of the personal mystery will be lost in the answer of that story may not make the same sense to the other – if indeed it makes sense at all. And yet if an occasion like today is to mean anything to those who witness it, then something must surely be said of the reality symbolized and witnessed in this ceremony. I do not intend to inflict an autobiography on you here, nor will I attempt to explain what went into my decision 21 years ago. But I would like again today to tell you what these vows, taken long ago and confirmed once again today, mean to me now, and what I'm trying to say to you with them. In making this personal statement I am not denying the juridical aspects involved in these vows – lest perchance some doubt be cast on their validity. But beyond the letter of the law, it is the Spirit who gives meaning to these promises, and who has brought me to this day in mysterious and wonderful ways.

The determination to live the evangelical life is too open-ended and comprehensive a decision for anyone to make in a single, once-and-for-all act. Rather it is expressed in decisions that one must make every day, all the time. Indeed, it is not so much a resolution one

makes and keeps, rather it is a promise that makes and shapes one's destiny we all are as yet promises unfulfilled. And only when the promises we make fulfil the promise that we are, can they be true and holy. So much of our life is strewn with false promises which have scared our souls, or shattered with broken promises which have betrayed our hopes that many of us are unable or too afraid to make promises anymore. And so the promise we are remains unfulfilled, unspoken and unheard.

To me the religious vows speak a promise to live the evangelical life as fully as one can, to live as Jesus of Nazareth taught us to live, in freedom and trust; to walk as he did, bring healing and hope; to work for the kingdom he preached – of justice, fellowship and love. Each vow represents an aspect of this evangelical life that must witness to this kingdom. Poverty then is my act of trust in God's providence. In a society so sharply divided between the affluent rich and the destitute poor, the promise of poverty I make certainly gives me no claim to be one with the masses of our people. In fact, the very renunciation of wealth in favour of community living gives me no claim to be one with the masses of our people. In fact, the very renunciation of wealth in favour of community living gives me a kind of security that few can enjoy in our world. But I do not attempt to define my poverty negatively – in terms of insecurity; but positively in terms of trust. And in the support derived from my community I hope to find the courage to risk all I have, and all I am for I am for the sake of the kingdom; to stretch what talents and abilities I may have for this service; to risk what may be most precious to me, my reputation even, in this task. Such a trust can be sustained only by a personal conviction in a divine providence, that rules our lives and never fails us in our need. Such trust does not come easily. But it would be hollow and empty if there was no real willingness to risk. And yet what a joy it is to risk and be held up triumphant.

Chastity is my act of faith in God's future. It is not a denial of human love or intimacy but rather an attempt to affirm this for the sake of the kingdom. And renouncing an exclusive union in marriage and the closeness of family love it brings, I believe I will find the grace for a detached and unselfish love that will reach out and touch those who need it most, a love that will be involved and yet not want to possess, faithful yet make no demands, vulnerable and yet never grow bitter. And if my faith should fail me then truly I am lost and my life is wasted. For there is a terrifying loneliness in the celibate life if

indeed God does not fill one's heart. My faith is that he will not let me down, for he is a God of love and the future he promises me in the resurrection, begins already now, in the relationships I have experienced and come to treasure even more than my life; but it is not fully yet because the fullness and completeness still to come is as yet beyond our dreams.

Obedience is my act of freedom for God's kingdom. A truly free person is a rare and beautiful find. Too many of us chafe under any restriction from without and so preoccupy ourselves with these that we never come to realize how we are even more imprisoned from within by our own passions and emotions, our own limited reasoning and unchanging ideas and, most subtly of all, by our overblown egos. And if one is not free from oneself and free for others, then one's freedom is lost even before it is found. I know how easily I can betray my calling to the evangelical life for a professional career or clerical status. How quickly the service of others can be converted into prestige and privilege for oneself, and how subtly the glory of God can become just another ego trip. And so, in submitting myself to the authority of a religious order pledged to the service of the kingdom, to a team of brothers dedicated to the same ideals as I am, I hope to find that freedom from myself and my self-centredness and that freedom for others and the task I am given. It might seem paradoxical but it is true, in giving up my freedom for the kingdom of God, I hope to find it once again renewed and strengthened. And so far I have not been disappointed. Authority for me is then no longer a mere juridical structure but a discernment for the greater good; and obedience not just blind submission but the loyalty of friends in a common venture. Finally, for Jesuits, there is the special vow of obedience to the Pope which till only—recently might have seemed a mere formality! But for Ignatius a man whose heart embraced the whole world, this was, I believe, a symbol of a more universal vision and unity that saw even the most ordinary tasks in the light of the larger mission.

For to be a Jesuit means to seek always the greater service, the more universal good. And no matter where a Jesuit is sent he is always bound to his companions in the Society In this common purpose. Indeed it is this aspect of being 'friends in the Lord' that is for me the unique strength of the Ignatian charism. Xavier expressed this when he wore the names of his Jesuit friends—that he belongs to this Society of Jesus. I hope what I have said does not seem arrogant or presumptuous. If I am over-reaching myself it's only because I trust

God's grace will see me through. If I am promising too much, it's only because I know I can get by with a little help from my friends. Indeed I would never have reached this day without friends like you and I am leaning on your support to walk the path beyond. I do not know where this will lead, but I do know I must follow.

And so far

I don't regret the path I've trod
looking back from where I'm at
the wonderful things that happens
already now but not fully yet.

And if I were to begin over again, if everything were possible, I would still choose to live this evangelical life; to walk this earth as Jesus did with his face set to Jerusalem where he poured out his life to win for us a future and a hope; to walk this earth as it was made for us to walk on, not to lie under; where children can play and men and women be equal and free; to pour out my life for this is an *anjali* or offering, and hope it will not be lost or in vain. My dear friends, how wonderful it would be...

if we could walk together
for just a while —
or for always if you will —
to a future that reaches out
beyond our grasp...
to things invisible and dreams impossible
to a fidelity that's free
a love that's everlasting
forever and for always
will you walk with me
my friend?

29.

IDENTITY, COMMUNITY, MISSION GOLDEN JUBILEE REFLECTIONS FOR MY FRIENDS AND COMPANIONS

Golden jubilee of my priesthood

20 June 2010

Any pilgrim's progress over 50 years has to be such a long journey. At times I've felt the loneliness of the long-distance runner, but looking back from where I'm at, the sentiment in my heart and the memories in my head are best expressed in the song we sing at Jesuit gatherings: *Ecce quam bonum, et quam jucundum, habitare fratres in unum!* (Oh, how good and joyful it is to live united as brothers). Fifty years ago, on the 20th of June, my family reached me to the novitiate in Vinayalaya, Bombay. This year on the day, I concelebrated the Eucharist at the Indian Social Institute with my Jesuit friends and companions in Delhi. I wish some of you could have been there. For what they are worth, these are some reflections in the light of our recent [General Congregations \(GCs\)](#) that I shared with them and now with you. A golden jubilee is an occasion for me to share with you my reflections on these themes, in gratitude for the past, in fidelity to the present and in hope for the future. GC 35 puts together a triptych: Identity, Mission, Community. We need to live this integration as Jesuits *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*.

Identity: Who am I?

[GC 35](#) gives us an image of a Jesuit: ‘Our lives must provoke the question, who are you that you that you do these things ... and that you do them in this way?’ (Dec 2 No. 10) This means living a prophetic witness in our way of life. A student of mine once questioned me: What do you do that is so different? I can do just as much and perhaps better without being like you. So what makes you so different? I wondered, what could have been the witness coming across to him from me as a teacher and the college as an institution. Was I perceived as a sign or contradiction or just another Jesus-freak going with the flow? Was the institution perceived as more concerned with the collective ‘profit’ than prophetic engagement, more focused on institutional excellence, than social relevance, on prestige not justice... The testimony that reached this young man, and others like him, seemed far from prophetic? GC 32 Dec 1, No. 11 defined a Jesuit thus: What is it to be a Jesuit: It is to know one is a sinner, yet called to be a companion of Jesus as Ignatius was.’ Dec 4 of the Congregation gave us a moving image of our option for the poor: If we have the humility and courage to walk with the poor, we will learn from what they have to teach us what we must do to help them ... which is to help the poor help themselves: to take charge of their own personal and collective destiny’ (GC 32 Dec. 4 No. 50). GC 35 brought us back to our roots: Jesuits know who they are by looking at him’ (Dec 2, No. 2)

My more personal take on the spirituality of Ignatius I recall from the old Summary Rules of the Constitutions we read in the novitiate. Even before admission as candidates we were asked if we had at least the desire for the desire ‘to don the livery of their cherished and respect Lord... to resemble Jesus Christ and be clad with his garb...’ (Summary Rule 11, Examen 44, Const. 101). The Ignatian mysticism of action I find so evocatively in his own words: ‘to seek God in all things transcending the attraction of all creatures, as far as possible, to set their heart wholly on the Creator, loving him is all creatures and them all in him’ (Rule 17, Const. 288), in others words: to seek God in all things and all things in God. The old 11th Rule (Const. 101) goes back to the Spiritual Exercises (No. 167) the three degrees of humility, better understood as three ways of loving with the third degree of humility as a more excellent way of loving: identifying with Jesus even in his humiliations. The old 17th Rule (Const 288) is inspired by the

Contemplation for Love that climaxes in the dedication so movingly familiar to us: Take and Receive (No. 234). St Francis Xavier responded with his Prayer for Generosity: Teach me Lord to serve you generously as you deserve. To give and not to count the cost...save that of knowing that I do your most holy will. Fr. Arrupe sums this up in his imitable way: ‘a personal love for the person of Jesus’.

Without such a personalised commitment a resolute Jesuit could so easily become a dangerous commissar, ruled only by his head even when it betrays his heart: what’s love got to do with the party line? Off to the firing squad! Or a cool hitman who shoots his hapless victims: nothing personal, sir, just business as usual. Bang! We have seen such men, and there but for the grace of God go I! Moreover, a Jesuit must be driven by the Ignatian ‘magis’, the restless pursuit of the greater good. A Jesuit settling into a comfort zone, on an ego trip, or pursuing a career has lost his vocation though he may still be in the Society. He becomes deadwood, rotten fruit that weighs down the tree. Ignatius has said that if he wanted to live longer it was to be stricter with admissions to the Society. He was concerned that in his lifetime it had expanded from the seven friends it began with to the limited number envisioned in the approved Formula of the Institute, to over a thousand at his death. His approach was: I would rather a horse that needed the control of the reins than one that needed the kick of the spurs. Over the last half-century, I know I have needed both.

Mission

Dec 4 of GC 32 defined our mission as the service of faith and the promotion of justice. Not ‘the faith’ or ‘our faith’ or even religious or ideological ‘faith’, but ‘biblical faith’ which is more a loving trust than an intellectual belief; in Ignatian terms an *obsequium rationale*, a meaningful, not necessary rational, offering of oneself in trustful surrender to our God. GC 34 challenged us to build ‘communities of solidarity... where we can all work together towards total human development... sustainable, respectful, .. diverse,..’ (Dec. 3 No.10). GC 34 brought this service of faith and promotion of justice together in an integrated mission with inculturation and inter-religious dialogue as Servants of Christ’s Mission (No. 47). The context of all this must be the Ignatian norm: The more universal a good, the more divine. Ignatius was a man with a heart as large as the whole world. He could be inspired by the flowers on the curia terrace and the stars in the sky;

he worked in the confines of his room, yet planned for missions to the jungles and deserts in faraway places. Our mission is inspired by the vision of the Trinity at work in the meditation on the incarnation in the Exercises. There our salvation is grounded in the life of Jesus and his kingdom, it culminates in the challenge of the Paschal mystery, and climaxes in the contemplation for love.

Community

Our vocation is to be friends in the lord and companions on mission. This is what the first companions were and what led them to persevere as ‘Companions of Jesus’. Today this would mean living a common life and working as a corporate team: life groups and teamwork. I belong to the Society through the friends I have there. If I don’t have such friends in the Society my centre of affectivity will gradually migrate elsewhere, to my work, my co-workers and then even beyond both these. I live in the Society with the companions I have there, I work for my mission in the Society with the team we make together. GC 32 challenged us to a community life of union of minds and hearts, unio animorum (GC 32 Dec 11). GC 35 affirms that community as an essential dimension of our identity and mission too, that together define our prophetic calling, a ‘fire that kindles other fires’ (GC 35 Dec. 2). We are a *communitas ad dispersionem* (a community for dispersion), but our communities must give prophetic witness, or else they become bachelor chummeries, ruled by the simple norm: don’t ask, don’t tell. Our institutions must be counter-cultural challenges, or else they will be organised bureaucracies: no exception to the rule except for another rule. This is a negation of our identity and our mission, it betrays genuine Jesuit community living, and undermines any institutional witness to our mission.

Defining Image

To bring these reflections together in a personal image, I would rather be a small bit player in the main drama of salvation history, than run in the wrong race and win. I do not want to settle in a comfort zone of mediocrity. I still want to ‘put out into the deep’, to set my sail against the wind. I want to live my life with the Ignatian mysticism of action, never intimidated by the greatest and yet always concerned for the least. I want the romance of Francis of Assisi, whom G.K.

Chesterton described as a poet, whose whole life was a poem. I would hope my prophetic witness, such it may be, will be a counter-cultural solidarity, defined by apostolic action and spiritual mysticism, humble courage and caring concern, moving poetry and enthusing romance. For Fr. Arrupe this would mean falling in love with God! And for Jesus this did not exclude humans, but the last and least most especially. A prophetic witness in the image and likeness of Jesus must be a counter-cultural one as Jesus was in his day. And so the defining image of my life as a Jesuit is this: to walk this earth as Jesus did, with my companions on mission, as friends in the Lord.

References

<https://jesuitportal.bc.edu/>
General Congregations

<https://jesuitportal.bc.edu/research/general-congregations/>

30.

MY THREE AVATARS

Diamond Jubilee of Priesthood, 2020

10 Nov 2020, ISI, Delhi

Every parting is a little death, but it can also be a bigger resurrection. It's, like I'm sorry to leave but I'm happy to go. We don't want to feel the parting is because we are rejected where we are, but rather because we are wanted where go. The first is the little death, the second, the greater resurrection. This is the death-mystery enacted in our life. I believe that these little deaths in our life's journey will in the end add up in the final Resurrection. My three avatars at The Indian Social Institute (ISI) have been thus marked by such goings and comings.

The first avatar was in 1992. In 1988, the POI as the POSA, as he was then called then, asked that I be released for ISI, but the principal of Xavier's, who was short of Jesuit staff, refused to release me from the college. He wrote to the General and stymied the request. But then I was taken to chair the Formation Review Commission (FRC), 1990 – 1992, After this I asked to be a part-time lecturer since I wanted to devote more time to the Social Science Centre, as it was called then. But the principal wanted a full-time person, so when the POI asked again, I was readily released and happy to go. I went with the promise of only research and no administration. The then ISI Director was very welcoming. But months before I could take up this new assignment, he was appointed provincial superior elsewhere, leaving both the Institute and the Research Department headless. I was asked to fill in. I pointed out to the POI, his proposal was for research only and even before I could start you're asking me to be the Director! I would not be able to do any research if I took that job. But he and the existing Director insisted it was God's will. I replied I would write to

Fr. General to find out if this was so. Finally, someone was found to accept the directorship, and I was welcomed as Director Research. It was a very happy ending for all, only I needed an angiogram in 1993. But that can be blamed on the FRC, not the ISI.

We had a good and productive time in the Department. Each one was to design a research project within the allotted budget and set their timelines. Over lunch together we would discuss our projects. I would give them a long rope but hold them to their self-chosen deadlines. It worked very well and we became a great team.

After two years, the new rector at Xavier's asked if I would come back and revive the Social Science Centre which was quite dead. I felt the Research Department was running and stable and ready to be handed over to someone else. So I accepted.

However, my transfer was so abruptly announced by the ISI Director it came as a shock to my colleagues in Department. They felt betrayed, were angry and in tears and wouldn't talk to me. It was *katti* (breakup). Fortunately, the jinx was broken before I left.

I offered to continue editing *Social Action*, from Mumbai if needed and did so for a year. I would come to Delhi the week before the issue was due and finalise it. This made my sudden leaving more gradual and acceptable to people in the department.

The second Avatar was very different. My rector's term ended in Oct 2003. On 13 Feb 2004, the provincial said he wanted me to stay on the campus to be an intellectual presence there. But on 8th March he called up when I was visiting Delhi to say, why don't you go on sabbatical for two years to any place in the world? But I replied, I don't need a sabbatical. I have a book contract from Penguin, which I want to complete before I go anywhere. What has changed between 13th Feb and 8th March?' So he said why do you want to stay in a community that doesn't want you? 'I will go,' I said, but give me the reason for this sudden change' I was told there were 'specific things I had said and done' so even he couldn't support me. I never got anything specific from either the provincial or the rector. When I did, he insisted: 'nothing specific but that in general—that you make people uneasy. I shuttled between provincial and rector until the rector wrote me a note: Why don't you 'just go and give us the space'?

There had been no consult, no community or college team meeting, no GB. A young Jesuit in the community even asked me: why are you leaving, I can't understand. I told him: I never asked to leave, I was told to go.

These were not the ancient Romans, for whom it was 'not the custom of the Romans to give up any man to destruction, before the accused has met the accusers face to face, and has had opportunity to make his defence concerning the matter laid against him'. (Acts 25: 16)

Just weak egos but strong egotism! It would seem the Peter Principle was at work: in any organisation, persons rise to the level of their incompetence. I could have appealed to Fr. General but I didn't. There was no point in clinging to a community where I was not wanted. I guess I crowded them out.

I remember how Fr. Neuner, doyen of theology in India and a Vatican II *peritus* (expert) transferred from De Nobili College to a district mission station because the younger faculty felt: we won't grow under his shadow. So unlike Pope Francis, who when asked about the Pope Emeritus staying on in the Vatican said: 'It's good to have a grandfather in the house'. I think he knows now how difficult some grandfathers can be!

I finally got to know that two Jesuit officials from the college had met the provincial with his consultors and made their case. I asked but was denied the same courtesy, However, I got permission to talk them individually. One consultor said to me the provincial wanted a 'yes or no' answer to the representation from the college, the other one told me he had said to one of the two from the college: you are doing to Rudi, what you accuse him of doing to you, we don't like it but we have no choice'.

I told the provincial the whole affair was very unfair. He agreed and shrugged his shoulders. What was very hurtful to me was no one stood up and opposed the decision. One even told me: 'What they are doing to you is unfair, but I don't want to get caught in the crossfire'. Life is unfair' as JFK said. I must admit I was truly shaken by the experience, a bit more than a little death!

Now I had to find another community to stay in. I approached ISI. And the custodian of the money there insisted I do something in the Institute to earn my keep. I said I have a book contract from Penguin I'm asking for a place to work. If Penguin had given ISI the contract, you would have come to me and paid me. But the man insisted I pay my way. Only old Paul Guerviere supported my request. In a compromise, I accepted to edit *Social Action*. I was given an office in the basement, where I worked my tail off because I had something to prove.

In 2006 on finishing the book I finished my first book, *‘Changing Gods: Rethinking Conversion in India’* (published by Penguin in 2007) In April 2007, I had to have a cardiac bypass. I had to make a down payment of two lakh Rupees before the operation. But the rector of the community I was staying with was reluctant to make the advance. The POSA and the ISI Superior, said to me: do whatever is needed and don’t worry about the money. I’m forever grateful for this.

The ISI superior once asked me: Why don’t you make a sacrifice for the Society and take up the Directorship? I said you’re right in asking this, but appointing a suitable director of ISI is not a new issue. JCSA of which you were a part is responsible for this, but they have outsourced their collective responsibility to the POI. So you are asking me to make-up for what the JCSA neglected. Is that fair? Silence was his answer.

I was again asked to be Director. I said I’d consider it for one year. The POSA said it must be at least two. ‘And after that what?’ I asked. ‘You can go to your province.’ I replied, ‘then I might as well return now.’ So, I was given the pink slip. I gave this letter of termination to our superior, and said I will not contest this. He took the letter and got the decision reversed. So, I started on my second book while continuing to edit *Social Action*. After a year, in 2008, I was removed from the editorship and it was given to the new Director. So, I was no longer contributing to ISI, and I became a resident guest in ISI at the expense of my province.

Once I finished my second book in 2010, *‘Taking Sides: Reservation Quotas and Minority Rights in India’*, also published for Penguin in 2012, I returned to my province, ending my second avatar in ISI. I was apprehensive wondering where I would be appointed. In an aging province, your appointment depends on who dies! However, my provincial assured me that I would be given to full-time research. In six months, after I returned, he asked me to be superior of the community and the manager of the Institute of Education and the Boys Academy, while keeping me on as his representative on the Campion Board. I asked, ‘What about research?’. ‘That you do as well,’ he said rather off-handedly.

I felt my objection to this overload was not being heard by the provincial or the provincial designate. So after talking to some Jesuit friends, I decided to write to Fr. General and prayed, because there is

no appeal after that. After a while, I got a reassuring email saying not to worry.

Finally, the decision was in my favour. I was happy but the provincial wasn't. He asked me, 'Why did I have to write to Fr. General. I confronted him with: 'Are denying my right as a Jesuit to appeal to Fr. General?' 'No, no, he exclaimed, I meant that...I interrupted with, 'Then what are saying?' He never expected this, so he came back with: 'But you could have waited till after the province appointments came out'. But that would be too late and more complicated.

Campion was quite a dysfunctional community as far I was concerned: four Jesuits doing different things and little to unite them. The superior kept asking me to support myself. The province would pay if he said the community couldn't afford me. But he wouldn't say that, because the province treasure would have challenged him. Finally, I had to ask the provincial to intervene and put things right but the nagging topped. But I ended up feeling like an un-paying guest. He once actually said to me: writing is so easy; just sit in front of a computer and type. How would he know, he's hardly written anything. But then neither did Socrates!

I took a break in 2014 on a fellowship being offered to Jesuits from developing countries. I opted to stay with the scholastics in Bellarmine House. It was a very positive learning experience for me living with young Jesuits, and I was grateful for the chance to spend time in the library and catch up on my reading for the book I was working on collective violence.

Back at Campion, I began working on my third book again. But the community was not a help though it wasn't too much of a hindrance. I thought I must break out of this to some more positive place. So I wrote the Director of ISI to ask if the 5-6 months invitation that was earlier put in place was still on. He wrote back inviting me to join. I said you work out the details of the appointment. He created a new post, 'Research Consultant', a term which confuses people when I tell them what doing! What's that they ask? I say, I don't quite know and don't want to either. The ambiguity suits me!

In my appointment letter, all extraordinary medical expenses were to be borne by the province. I mentioned this to the superior when I first came, but he said ISI could afford it, so not to worry. I couldn't contrast [sic] with Campion. I hope the new superior does regret and reverse this.

So now my third avatar is ending on a high note for I finished the third book,

‘*Reconciling Difference*’: *Collective Violence India*. The manuscript is with the publisher, ‘Speaking Tiger’. It’s due to be released in December. This could not have happened, but for the support I got from each one in the community. In spite of my health issues, it has been a smooth ride due to their care and concern. They treated me as an elder brother, since I was the oldest in the community. I just hope they don’t graduate me from elder brother to grandfather!

Now I will return to Xavier’s, after 16 years! The community has changed completely. The old guard and has been moved out and replaced by new young blood. I hope I can be an elder brother there also and not a grandfather, yet.

In my first avatar, my leaving was neither opposed nor proposed and happy to be there. Xavier’s loss ISI’s gain so told myself. In a new and strange place, at the beginning I felt I was in ‘van-vas’, exiled to the concrete jungle, However, within the year, the teamwork of the research department and the many new friendships made helped me feel at home though the city that wasn’t very user-friendly then.

In my second avatar, there was not so much a leaving as an expulsion from my community, leaving me to find a place in the shade on my own. My acceptance at ISI was conditioned to my contribution to the Institute in terms of ‘real work’, writing was not enough, though I was writing on themes relevant to our mission. Research was not much thought is both places at the time.

In my third my leaving was uncontested, and the welcome at ISI was warm and enthusiastic; a home rather than a house. I felt concern and care, from all, the superiors and minister and the Director. As I leave for St. Xavier’s Mumbai, I say *Olak asu dhya*, which freely translated means, Remember me! I will for you, and you please do for me.

It’s been a long journey of many little ‘deaths’ but far more and greater ‘resurrections’. However, in the end it all adds up. So I can feel God’s presence in my life.

I have always wanted to live an intense life, but I didn’t give enough importance to the backlash that critical truth-telling precipitates, especially when this questions the status quo, or the comfort zones of others, and more so when it goes without compassionate healing. In my arrogance I was just too dismissive of the feedback I got: ‘If they

can cope, well then that's their problem not mine.' I'm wiser now: critique, however insightful, must be compassionate; and truth-telling however objective was their healing. Or else it queers the pitch for all concerned.

What does it all add up to? The usual triage for any organisation has a third of the members at the leading edge. They carry the others along through the heat and burden of the day. I have known many heroic Jesuits and others, who have been challenging role models for me. I still pray at their graves when I can. A third is at the trailing edge, a drag on the others and must be carried along. They are not employees who can be dismissed; they are volunteers who must be gently re-motivated. I have seen conversions here too. And in the middle are the fellow-travellers who can settle into their comfort zones but can also rise up when called to meet a challenge.

Moreover, every organisation has a life which can only be extended by a constant renewal of their founding charism, their mythomoteur. For Jesuits it is the personal love for the person of Jesus, the saviour-myth ever ancient new.

Many times, I've watched the sun go down from mountain tops, as the valleys darkened and the hilltops lit up; or listened to the waves crash on the sea shore and withdraw in silence as the sun went down over the horizon; and prayed with my soulmates for peace through the night, and for morning sunrise to bring a new day, not just another one.

And so I pray with St. Cardinal John Henry Newman's prayer:

May He support us all the day long,
Till the shades lengthen and the evening comes,
and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over,
and our work is done.
Then in his mercy may he give us a safe lodging,
and holy rest, and peace at the last.

And so I end for now as always with this:

Prayer

May your hope lift you up
against all hopelessness.

May your love bring you ecstasy,
even as you root your feet
firmly to walk this earth
in joy and freedom
in hope and compassion,
for yourself and others.

Section 5

Homilies for Irene Heredia: Birthday, Funeral, Memorials

31.

IRENE'S MAGNIFICAT

Irene Heredia's 90th Birthday

22 Sep 2007, Church of the Immaculate Conception, Panjim.

My dear friends and family, We have just read Mary's song of praise celebrating all that God has done for his humble handmaid, rejoicing in his mercy, remembering his eternal fidelity, a God who chooses the lowly and humble over the rich and proud. St. Luke places the Magnificat, as Mary's song is called, at the beginning of his Gospel in the first chapter. At the end of her eventful life, Mary could well sing her Magnificat with even more poignant meaning. And so Mummy chose the Magnificat as the theme for this Eucharist to celebrate her ninety long years, and many more to come. Yet this celebration is not just for the Eucharist or for today, but for Mummy's whole life, and not just for hers but for ours as well.

All our lives have been marked with God's grace and mercy, his fidelity and providence; and so, gratitude ought to be the constant leitmotif of our lives. The truly grateful person can never be bitter or angry, proud or conceited, because true gratitude recognises all we are and have as a gift we are always undeserving of; all we do and undergo as a life ruled by God's providence with more love than we can ever know. St Paul in the first reading today reminds us, 'we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him', and when we do, he assures us nothing 'will be able to separate us from the love of God'. As we thank God for the gift given to us in Irene Ann's ninety years, we can all recall God's grace and providence in our own lives too, the people we have met, the things we have done; the love we have shared, the joy we have experienced, the richness of the life God has gifted us and the providence that has protected us over the years. It has been such a long journey, from the church of St Francis Xavier,

Dabul, where she was christened Anna Signorina Scholastica Santa Irena, through her brief sojourn in Goa and then Poona, finishing school and College in Bombay again, before coming as a young bride to Asian Building, coping with a large extended family there, bringing up five high-strung children together with a hectic public life, until she left fifty-four years later as a widow, to make a new beginning in Goa. Indeed, a wonderful and courageous adventure that brought grace and beauty to so many she touched.

Hers has been an eventful life with its share of joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments, excitement and solitude. Yet all through the ups and downs, the highs and lows the turns and twists, she has been a model and inspiration to many of us over the years. With them I too realize the immense debt of gratitude I owe her, one I can never repay, not that she would expect it either. And so in the spirit of the Magnificat we have just heard, I recall some leitmotifs of her long and celebrated life. Mummy has always been resolutely resilient in her quiet gentle way. Dignity in adversity, is how I remember her. She certainly has had her fair share and more of difficulties, though not many would have guessed: the devastating fire that destroyed Asian Building and everything we had, sparing only our lives, the uncertainties of Dad's changing assignments, difficulties of their political commitments, anxieties over Dad's health, and most of all the suddenness with which widowhood overtook her. The peaceful happy retirement with Dad, perhaps in Uran, she so looked forward to was not to be.

In all this she brought home to me those beautiful words of St. Francis de Sales: there is nothing as strong as true gentleness, nothing as gentle as real strength! She could cope with unexpected and demanding situations because she made a little go a long way. Grace without waste, was the key to her almost magical resourcefulness, whether it was an impromptu party, when the larder was rather empty, or demanding guests arriving unexpectedly yet expecting a generous welcome which they always got, or someone who needed a listener, just when urgent matters called her elsewhere. Her hospitality seemed inspired by St Benedict's dictum: when a guest visits, Christ comes! And yet Mummy is a great worrier, at times ending in her 'hesitation waltz', that Dad always said she had so elegantly mastered, about others, leading to silent tears, as when I saw her pray her fifteen-decade rosary alone at night. She would, of course, be always willing to give God more than an urgent nudge in

the direction of her petitions. They were all stacked at the statue of Mary, bracketed on the wall, waiting to be granted, till one day the load came crashing down. Miraculously the statute was unbroken, and the petitions found their place beside it once again.

Such was her trust in God's providence that at the end of the day, she'd always say, everything will work out for the best. And it always did, if not better than feared. A life lived in gratitude will always be generous, giving freely because we know we have received freely far more than we deserve. Gratitude is ever gracious, remembering the words of Jesus: it is more blessed to give than to receive. But most of all genuine gratitude makes us forgiving. The unforgiving servant in the Gospel parable had not realised how grateful he ought to have been for having his own debt pardoned, or else he would never have turned on his pleading debtor. Moreover, forgiveness seeks reconciliation. This implies that forgiveness is mutually given and received; the hurt caused and suffered is mutually recognised. When this mutuality is wanting, for whatever reason, then real reconciliation does not follow forgiveness. Yet even when rejected the grateful person will be forgiving from the heart with no bitterness or resentment in spite of the hurt caused by the other's denial. This is a difficult teaching to follow and yet I have seen my mother practice it in her quiet, unpretentious way, even when the hurt and denial has been by those once so close to her that healing could be a long time coming.

As we celebrate today how Irene Ann has touched our lives over the ninety years she has been blessed with and the many more to come, let us recall God's blessings in our own lives too with a song of praise for God's grace and mercy, his fidelity and providence. May our gratitude be humble and gentle, dignified and resilient, generous and trusting, and above all forgiving and healing. With Mary, the mother of Jesus, who has been the model for so many mothers, may we too sing our own Magnificat, our song of praise, today and every day of our lives.

32.

IRENE MEANS PEACE

IRENE HEREDIA'S FUNERAL MASS

23 Jan 2013, Funeral Mass St Michael's, Taleigao, Goa.

Introduction

My dear brothers, sister, relatives and friends, We have gathered here to share our sorrow and to remember together Irene, a mother, a relative, a friend, so many things to so many of us for we all share a common bond with her. She's one of the last that held together 'our dear octopus', as she affectionately called the extended family of our clan. In the early hours of the 21st of January, peacefully, without pain to herself or trouble to others, my mother slipped away gently into a new dawn. After she had completed her memoir last year just before her 95th birthday, she had a sense of closure and wanted to 'go home'.

The dissonance between her frail, failing body and her very alive and clear mind had corroded the quality of her life so drastically. She would say to me she was praying that God would take her home soon. I would say to her that this was a very Christian and human prayer, but God would take us in God's good time. Now she's gone home to be a guiding/ guardian angel, who will be on our side still even as she is on the other side of our world. But it's not for her we should be sorry. She's gone home after a very long day. It's we who must now cope with this sense of loss. But as we now recall the times when we felt touched and moved by her; inspired and joyful because of her, we can lace our sorrow with joy and streak our loss with happier memories, and we all have had so many such beautiful moments with her to fall back on.

For we are not a people without hope. We are all on our way home and we long for the day when in a 'new heaven and a new earth' God 'will wipe every tear' from our eyes and there'll be 'no more death or mourning, wailing or pain.' This is the promise of our God, this is our

faith in the resurrection we await, a resurrection that begins already now but not fully yet. And so I invite you to recall the happy peaceful, joyful memories you have of Irene, to some a mother, to others a relative, to many a friend and companion on their way. I'll share with you what I wrote on the train in the first week of January this year. It was in the present tense then. I read it now to you in the past tense.

A Nonagenarian Remembered

You so rarely called me,
it's I who called you every day and more
just to break the silent stillness
of your long day and cheer you for the morrow,
so you'd have something to wake up for
each time you'd go to rest. But when you'd call
it's always been to ask after me
and whether I was taking good care of myself.
So when you rang me that morning on the train
to tell me you weren't too well and
that I wouldn't be hearing from you in a while,
I sensed it was the end game now
and I was left hoping, praying
I'd be there for you before it was over and out.
Gradually as it sank in
I found myself feeling
so intensely proud of you
and your journey on your long day home,
for all you've been and mean
to me and so many on whom you left
your gentle imprint.
The empty space you'll leave behind
will be too large to fill
it will remain an aching longing
at the end of each long day
I'll miss you in my emptiness
left to wait and to remember,
feel proud and happy over and again
Your remembrance will lift and heal,
and float the hearts of those
you once reached out to

and now have left behind.
Memories and nostalgia are
are all that's left to unite us now.
But when the kingdom comes
We'll once again relive those days
of long ago and far away,
familiar still for our having shared them once
and now so easy to recall yet once again.
Be no longer anxious, woman,
though it's been a very long day.
May your sunsets now light up your eyes
to see the stars awaiting the dawn,
the sunrise of another day,
in some other place,
a new heaven and a new earth,
where every tear will be wiped from every eye,
and death will be no more.
And all that was so lovely and precious,
so beautiful and wonderful,
will last forever in new life
that banishes forever
the darkness in our souls.
God be with you, gentle woman
to light your way,
and may angels guide you
to your new home.
But never forget we're walking close behind,
so that the promises we shared together
fulfil the promise that we are and called to be,
to one another and to oneself together.

Mass Readings—First Reading: [2 Timothy 4: 6 – 8](#)

Gospel: [Luke 1: 46-56](#)

Homily

My dear friends, The Song of Mary, the Magnificat, we just heard from the Gospel according to Luke was one of my mother's favourite scriptures. It expresses the early Church's reflection on Mary as an

example for the Church: the defeat of the proud and haughty and the triumph of the humble and lowly. Every line in that song touched a cord in my mother's heart. Indeed, she could truly say at the end of her life as Mary did at the beginning, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit has found joy in God my saviour'. It is a theme echoed in the dedication of her memoir to the unknown housewife.

Paul's reflection on his life in the letter to Timothy brings a sense of closure to his long journey, with unbounded trust and unflinching confidence in his Lord: 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.' We all have our beginnings full of the promise of fulfilment at the end of our days if only we are faithful to our God. We are all wayfarers here. We have our entrances and exits, while we strut and fret, do our thing, play our role and sometimes leave behind a memory to treasure and/or hopes belied. Our journey begins here but it ends elsewhere. The readings of today represent markers for how we must begin, with humility and lowliness, so that we can end with completion and fulfilment. My mother's memoir marks her life thus: beginning with her dedication that articulates how she tried to live, and ending with her final fare-thee-well, her God-be-with ye as she slipped away from us, peacefully into the dawn, without pain to herself or trouble to others. Bear with me as I recall this for you now.

It's Been a Long Day, (pp. 202 – 204)

Yes, indeed, it has been a very long day. It is evening now. The horizon is not as far as it used to be. It's dipping and there is a glow in the sky which comes on between sunset and moonrise, which enlivens your mind for thoughts and soothes your heart for memories. Soon the moon will come tripping across the river, lighting up the foothills that enclose this lovely territory of Goa, created by the god Parasuram, who got so enamoured of it that he shot a mighty arrow into the Arabian Sea commanding it to recede. The moon, in whatever phase she may be, will climb up to the summit in a cloudless sky throughout the year, excluding the monsoon months, until daunted by the red rays of the rising sun, she will pale into the daylight. She is loath to leave Planet Earth, even as I am, where I have spent ninety-five wondrous years among you.

And if you would care for a last word from me, I would refer you to the poet Alfred Lord Tennyson in his poem, 'Crossing the Bar': May there be no moaning at the Bar when I put out to sea.

The 'Bar' in my case was the great breakwater of my faith and my values behind which I took shelter. Though at the moment of writing, I am 'dead woman walking' I will meet each one of you someday again. That I know for sure. It is in quiet moments that pictures and phrases from the past seem so much more beautiful and more meaningful than ever. The shadows are deepening and the stars twinkle a warm welcome. I am reminded of Jimmy's words that sunny morning a couple of weeks before he died: 'You have been the most beautiful thing in my life'. I feel I can say with St. Paul without being overly immodest or unduly vainglorious: 'I have run the race and have kept the faith'.

It's been a long day and now at eventide I pray with John Henry Newman:

May He support us all the day long
till the shadows lengthen
and the evening comes
and the busy world is hushed
and the fever of life is over
and our work is done—
then in His mercy—
may He give us a safe lodging
and a holy rest
and peace at the last
Good night, God bless.
Irene

33.

SWEET INCENSE UNTO GOD

Irene Heredia memorial mass, 28 Jan 2013

28 Jan 2013, Haines Road Chapel.

Irene Heredia (22 Sept 1917 – 21 Jan 2013)

Introduction

My dear brothers and sisters, family and relatives, companions and friends, We have gathered here because we remember Irene, my mother, who touched so many of our lives in so many different ways. We all share a common bond with her and we feel her loss in the measure in which she touched our lives. For me, it seems like an unending ocean of sadness, and yet I cannot but celebrate her life her nine-five years here. There are the memories we bring to this final farewell, and there will be many more we take away from here. They should all help to lift our sorrow, to pick up the pieces of our lives and to heal our hearts. Otherwise, our loss might draw in the horizons of our lives, like enclosing walls of sorrow, dark, desperate, crushing. Every goodbye is a little death and now the final goodbye, when one who touched our lives as she did, leaves us with an emptiness that only resurrection hope can fill, already now, but not fully yet. This is a mass of the resurrection and I ask you to bring to this mass memories to celebrate the life she lived and the new life she now enjoys. We all want to be remembered by those we leave behind.

The haunting lines from Rabindranath Tagore, she included in her memoir, express it so beautifully:

Remember me, still remember me (Tobu mone rekho)

If I go far away,
still remember me ...
If tears come to your eyelids
If play ceases one day, one spring night,

still remember me
If work is stopped one day, one autumn dawn,
remember me
If I come to your mind,
yet heavy tears no longer brim
in the corners of your eyes
still remember me
Remember me, still remember me

How do we want to remember the way Irene, my mother, was? How would she like to be remembered and how would we like to be remembered by her from where she is now? No human life is perfect. But of those who have gone before us we want to treasure the happy, soothing memories to heal our sometimes unhappy, disturbed hearts. In the liturgy we ask God to forgive our dearly departed Irene, remembering that we all need God's mercy and unless we forgive others we ourselves cannot receive God's pardon. For it is in forgiving we are forgiven, in giving we receive, in dying to ourselves that we are born to eternal life.

Readings for the memorial mass

First Reading: [Romans 8: 31-39](#)

Gospel: [Luke 24:13-35](#)

Reading Theme: The love of Christ is shown to them in the breaking of the bread.

Homily

My dear friends, we often find ourselves on this road to Emmaus when death and loss darken our lives with despair from which there seems no escape. But like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, if we but open our hearts to understanding the scriptures, we will find our hearts 'burning within us' and we will recognise the Lord's presence in the breaking of bread together, experience the joy that he is risen as a promise and presage that we will too someday. Indeed, if death, the one certainty in our life, were the final curtain after which we all

exit forever, what meaning would our lives have? They would be but little blimps in the vast, silent emptiness of cosmic space.

In the first reading, St Paul expresses his unbounded confidence in God in life and in death. For nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, a love that binds us to our God and bonds us to each other, beyond death and unto the resurrection of new life together in

a new heaven and a new earth,
where every tear will be wiped from every eye,
and death will be no more.
And all that was so lovely and precious,
so beautiful and wonderful,
will last forever in new life
that banishes forever
the darkness in our souls.

This is our faith, our hope on which we stake our lives, as my mother did and now, she is sweet incense unto God in a brave new world. So, as we remember Irene, my mother, what images of her will we treasure and what hopes will we dare? An image I treasure is of Mum, sitting in our large living room alone in the dark, when the whole house was silent in sleep. I had once crept up on her to find her crying as she prayed her fifteen-decade rosary. Go to sleep now, she said to me as she told her beads for her many, many intentions. I could only guess at the rupture my father's death must have meant for her. Everything seemed 'like ashes in the mouth', she had said to me then. This is how she remembered him:

Will I remember you?

Will I remember you
your tender smile
the kindness, the care
the love you showered on me?
It empties my mind of everything
but you.

I remember how hard it was for her to leave her home in Ballard Estate when she was relocating to Goa. I've lived here for fifty-five years, she said to me, I feel safe here; I know the people here, the very

stones are so familiar. But she picked up and made a life for herself in Goa on the banks of the Mandovi, a less active but a rich and enriching life that touched so many there. Once again, she was in familiar environs. After her ninetieth birthday, she told me she was loath to leave this planet earth, she liked it here. But then her gradually failing sight and hearing enclosed her space, while her undaunted spirit struggled with the dissonance between her clear, incisive mind and her frail, failing body. As she waited on her God to take her home, Cardinal Newman's prayer became her own:

May He support us all the day long
till the shadows lengthen
and the evening comes
and the busy world is hushed
and the fever of life is over
and our work is done—
then in His mercy—
may He give us a safe lodging
and a holy rest

and peace at the last. Even now I hear her echoing the words of Rabindranath Tagore to us: '*Let my thoughts come to you, when I am gone, like the afterglow of sunset at the margin of starry silence.*' (Stray Birds). In the afterglow of her sunset now this is my dedication to my mother for I know the sun is rising on her in another better place to which we all are called.

A Dedication to Em

For Em, the gem
whose gentle sparkle
of flickering light
reflects, refracts,
enhances, nuances,
brightens, enlightens
as she polishes to perfection
opaque-resistant stones like me.
With filial reverence, loving respect,
boundless admiration, unbounded appreciation,
and irrepressible hope that
the glorious burst of colours

at the sunset
will only presage an ever more
beautiful, wondrous dawn.
Your (sometimes ungentle) son
Rudi.

May she now rest in holy peace, sweet incense unto God, a
guiding-guardian angel to watch over us on our own road to
Emmaus. With Dad now she's home at last, the memories are ours
to share and care and carry on. Let us pause for moment of silent,
prayerful remembrance.

34.

REMEMBERING TO CELEBRATE IRENE HEREDIA

Irene Heredia's month's mind Mass

21 February 2013, Sophia College, Mumbai.

Irene Heredia (22 September 1917 – 21 January 2013)

My dear friends, we are gathered here to remember and celebrate Irene Heredia, whom you knew through many decades across two centuries. Memories of her *Long Day* with us are still as fresh, as when she lived in this city and came to this campus, to this chapel. Yet even as we recall our loss we must now recalibrate her life, her ninety-five years on this earth, which she loved and was loathe to leave. Her last years were spent in Verem Villas in Goa, and towards the end much of it was just waiting, while she prayed for her numberless intentions.

The last few visits there as I left she would say to me: I don't know if I'll see you again. Something that had hardly occurred to me because I took it so much for granted that she'd always be there for us. She'd be always there when there was nowhere else to go. And even now I believe she still is with us, in the new and resurrected life, where death will be no more and every tear will be wiped from every eye. And now in my imagination, I hear her calling from where she is, as well as she might have each time I had to say goodbye and leave:

Come Home to Me

Wherever you are, my son, come back to me
Wherever you are, come home to me
Come back to me wherever you are.

And if for can't, don't explain,
I won't complain,
I'll understand.
Be safe wherever you are,
take care wherever you go,
And remember me though I can't be there.
But whenever you can,
do come back to me
in dreams at least come back to me.
In dreams, I wait for you.
I'll always remember
How can I forget?
I always will be waiting
There's little else I can do.
If I don't see you again, my son,
in dreams I'll wait for you,
I always do, I'll wait for you.
Come home to me,
At least in dreams come back to me.
Rudi, S.J., 21 February 2013

Mass Readings: First Reading [Philippians 1: 3 – 6, 4: 5 – 9](#)
Gospel: [John 14: 15 – 18; 25 – 28](#)

Homily

St Paul's letter to his beloved Philippians, (Ph 1: 3 – 6, 4: 5 – 9) which we just read, is his last farewell to them, a farewell full of thanksgiving, joy, and peace, and an invitation to celebrate all we hold precious in our lives and in our world. In the Gospel (Jn 14: 15 – 18; 25 – 28) we just heard, the farewell of Jesus the evening before his death is even more poignant. Jesus is so sensitive to their sadness at his going, so reassuring with his promise of his enduring peace and his lasting presence. Both these scriptures call us to respond to the parting of a dearly loved one with faith, and hope and love. As a people of the resurrection, we can do no less.

I'm sure this is how Irene, my mother, would want it to be. In many a crisis, she would cope with a simple trust in God's providence. In critical moments she'd say: it will all work out. But she would do all she possibly could before that and then wait and watch in prayer,

telling her beads in tears when all had gone to sleep. But she was never one to tarry with a setback. She'd pick up the pieces and put them together again, sometimes more beautifully than before, as when the fire of Dec 14th 1947, took up in flames our home and everything we had there.

I have an image of her tattooed in my memory, of her coming to terms with my leaving home to join the Jesuits at just nineteen. When she found me determined she had said to me: well, if you must, go join the Jesuits, better the devil we know than the devil we don't. I had a whole new future opening before me; she had a past that was closing in on her. For her it was, as she said, like a death in the family', and it took her a while to come to terms with 'losing me to the Jesuits'! She'd call me to sit by her bed after supper. Now what, I'd impatiently say. And she'd answer: I just want to look at you! It took me many years to realise what that meant to her, and how much she loved me, loved all her children. She was often anxious, but it was an anxiety born of her care and concern to protect those near and dear to her. But it took me a while to understand her anxiety. I was too young and too much in a hurry. I needed to slow down, to understand the anxiety of a mother for a son walking to uncertain horizons. But by and by, my understanding of her grew in wisdom with my years. Only at my ordination, thirteen years later, when she blessed me in the porch of St Peter's, Bandra, crossing my forehead as she sent me to the altar, did she finally give me up to God. It was for a blessing as sacred as the imposition of the bishop's hands later that evening. By then I realised that a mother's love will always be a bit anxious even in celebration. And so at my final vows, twenty-one years after leaving home, I wrote for her:

Anxious Woman

Why are you afraid for me
anxious woman?
Your love without your trust
would be a burden round my neck
weighing me down
heavy, joyless and inescapable. For I will not have the strength
to carry it if I'm doubted
and I cannot loose myself
from it if I love. And so we hurt each other

when we come too close
and yet can't keep apart
in our separate solitudes.
For our lives are too entangled now
to seek salvation each alone. I hear you say
I love you
I need you more to whisper
I trust you! Before you go
where I cannot follow
I want to know how you feel
and if you believe in me
and my trackless journey
over unmapped paths.
One you never would have chosen for me
one I cannot turn from now.
But it would seem less terrifying
if you were less anxious
for your trust
would give me courage
to walk to that unknown horizon.
Be not afraid for me,
anxious woman
if only you can truly say:
I believe in you
even when I cannot choose
the things you do!
Rudi, S.J., 25 December 1981

There too many memories to recall but the thread that knits together my most treasured recollections of her is her gentleness and strength. She epitomised for me St Francis de Sales' beautiful insight: 'There is nothing so strong as gentleness and nothing as gentle as real strength'. On her eightieth birthday in Divar, she spoke of the many ups and downs in her life, some heart-breaking letdowns, many more ecstatic highs. At times she stood on the shores of 'an ocean of sadness' as when she was so suddenly widowed. But she'd always find a safe harbour of peaceful calm in the faith in which she sheltered. In her last weeks of frail and failing vitality, she'd prayed that God would take her home soon. She had lived a life with Mary's 'fiat', an active engagement with what providence sent her way, her death was her

last 'amen' at the end of a long life, her final surrender unto her God, and now she has already sung her first Alleluia in the next. And so I celebrate her now with this haiku:

Frail woman loses
battles, wins peace, anxious now
no more, home at last.

Goodnight Irene, Irene goodnight, I'll see you in my dreams. We will remember to celebrate you, Anna Signorina Scholastica Santa Irena, as she was baptised, and now sweet incense unto God. Rest in peace and pray for us, whom you've left behind – for now.

35. GUARDIAN ANGEL ON OUR ROAD TO EMMAUS

First Anniversary Mass & Homily

21 January 2014

Irene Heredia (22 September 1917 – 21 January 2013)

Mass Readings: First Reading [Romans 8: 28, 35 – 40](#)

Psalm: [Luke 1: 46 – 56](#) – *Mary's Song*

Gospel Reading: [Luke 24: 27 – 35](#)–*The Road to Emmaus*

In the first reading, St Paul expresses his unbounded confidence in God in life and in death. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, a love that binds us to our God and bonds us to each other, beyond death and unto the resurrection of new life together, in a new heaven and a new earth,

where every tear will be wiped from every eye,
and death will be no more.

And all that was lovely and precious,
beautiful and wonderful,
will last forever in new life
that banishes forever
the darkness in our souls.

This is our faith, our hope on which we stake our lives, as my mother did. It was her faith that saw her through all the anxieties and anguish, the joys and sorrows of her long life. Now she is sweet incense unto God in a brave new world.

The Song of Mary, the Magnificat, we just heard from the Gospel according to Luke was one of my mother's favourite scriptures. Every line in that song touched a cord in my mother's heart: the defeat of the proud and haughty, the triumph of the humble and lowly. It's a theme

echoed in the dedication of her memoir to the unknown housewife. On her road to Emmaus, when death and loss darkened her life with doubt and sadness from which there seemed no escape, like the disciples, she'd listen in faith and recognised the Lord's loving presence as she waited in confident hope for his healing power. At the end of the day, she'd say: it will all work out. And it did.

So as we remember and celebrate our mother, Anna Signorina Scholastica Santa Irena, as she was baptised, what images of her will we treasure and what hopes will we dare? An image I treasure is of Mum sitting in our large living room alone in the dark, when the whole house was silent in sleep, in tears at times, telling her beads for her many, many intentions. On her eightieth birthday in Divar, she spoke of the many ups and downs in her life, some heart-breaking letdowns, many more ecstatic highs. At times she stood on the shores of 'an ocean of sadness' she said as when she was so suddenly widowed, as her own mother had been twice over – the second time, Mum was orphaned at just two. But she'd always find a safe harbour of peaceful calm in the faith which she sheltered in.

On her ninetieth birthday in her reply to the toast, she said: I am ninety years old and I won't be able to talk to you all again. I'm going to take my time, so now just listen to me. I once asked her why she hadn't written more. She replied: there were five of you and your father was always so busy. He was a real MCP. I said, Mum do you know what that means? Yes, she said, male chauvinist pig! But in those days men were just like that! No wonder she dedicated her memoirs to the unknown housewife! I could only guess at rupture my father's death must have meant for her. She told me how she hoped for just a few years of retirement in Uran, the farmhouse my father had built on a beach across the harbour in Mumbai, where he spent his weekends and we, our vacations with numerous cousins. Everything seemed 'like ashes in the mouth', she had said to me then.

This is how she remembered him:

Will I remember you?
will I remember you
your tender smile
the kindness, the care
the love you showered on me?
It empties my mind of everything
but you.

I remember how hard it was for her to leave her home in Ballard Estate, where she had come as a young bride and stayed for fifty-five years. She said to me, I feel safe here; I know the people here, the very stones are so familiar. Relocating to Goa was a real trauma. But she picked up and made a life for herself on the banks of the Mandovi, a less active but a rich and enriching life that touched so many there. But then her gradually failing sight and hearing enclosed her space, while her undaunted spirit struggled with the dissonance between her clear, incisive mind and her frail, failing body, as she waited on her God to take her home. With Dad now she's home at last, the memories are ours to share, care and carry on. There are too many memories to recall but the thread that knits them together, my most treasured recollections of her is her gentleness and strength. She epitomised for me St Francis de Sales' beautiful insight: 'There is nothing so strong as gentleness and nothing as gentle as real strength'. We can never forget her, but even as we miss her achingly as indeed we do, let's remember to celebrate her as she would have us do. And let us ask her to be our guiding star, our guardian angel on our own road to Emmaus.

Prayers

Let us pray for all those who have touched our lives with something of beauty and wonder, that God bless them all and may we always be grateful to them. Let us pray for the girl-child. This was a pressing concern for Mum. She had a story in mind she wanted to write and was waiting for an appropriate ending. It remains part of the unfinished business she left for us to finish. I pray that since all her six great-grandchildren are girls the story will be completed and with a happy ending too by one of them....

Offertory Prayer

Lord, we ask you to accept these gifts we offer, as a pledge that one day you will receive us at the end of our journey home from here, our pilgrimage back to you from whom we come and must return.

Concluding Prayer

May we be grateful for all that has been;
may we live in the present alive and alert,
may the future show us new and wonderful things;
may the tears we cry be tears of joy;
may we be blest with true friends and companions;
may we experience new love and fulfilment;

Last Blessing

(John Henry Newman)

May He support us all the day long
till the shadows lengthen
and the evening comes
and the busy world is hushed
and the fever of life is over
and our work is done.
Then in His mercy
may He give us a safe lodging
and a holy rest
and peace at the last.
Amen.

Section 6

Miscellaneous

36.

WALK TOGETHER

Labour Day Homily

2 September 2013, Bellarmine

Introduction

Labour Day in the United States is a day of R & R away from labour. An odd way, I'd say, of celebrating 'labour' by avoiding it! Labour Day was first proposed by workers in this country in 1882, and it became a federal holiday in 1894. In most other countries it is celebrated on 1st May, after the International Socialist Conference meeting in Amsterdam in 1904, which called workers to vigorously demonstrate for an eight-hour working day. The Catholic Church, arriving a bit late on the scene canonized the day in 1955 as the feast of St Joseph the worker, celebrated on 1st May.

I recall two very different stories about work. The first, about a Chinese cycle rickshaw puller, Bai Fangli, who at 74 retired to his village in 1987 to find child labourers in the fields because they were too poor to go to school. So he went back to work, till at 90 he could work no more. By then he had donated 350,000 yuan, about \$50,000, and helped 300 children to continue with school. He died in 2005 at 94 but his legacy endures. There are people like that, and they may be some closer to us than we know. Then just last week someone forwarded an email to me, supposedly from Bill Cosby originally, who said at 83 he's tired and ready to retire, but even more tired of being told he must spread his wealth among those who, he feels, don't share his work ethic. Yet he doesn't consider the possible differences in the life-chances these unfortunates might have had that could have affected their attitude to work. Sometimes it's a chance circumstance, an accident of birth that makes all the difference. There is clearly a divide here in what work is all about and we must take sides. Today is a day to choose with the workers and commit ourselves to, and

celebrate our solidarity with them, as a commitment to share the fruit of our work with others in need, for it's not just for gain and profit for oneself and one's own. I propose that at this mass on labour day, we express our solidarity with all labourers wherever they are, especially the least and the last, those who bear the heat and burden of the day, for the benefit of many, though at times they are exploited for the profit of a few!

Homily

I imagine it is difficult to celebrate an abstract noun like 'labour'. We need to think beyond it to something concrete that it speaks to us about, i.e., *the labourers or workers*. We live in a world of ever-increasing individualism as something to be prized and praised. But humans are not isolated individual monads, each 'a prophet, priest and king' unto himself. We are persons-in-community, and human society is a community of communities. We are meant to be self-reliant, we cannot be self-sufficient. And so I suggest we think not of labour and management and capital, but of workers and managers and owners. Thus focusing more concretely on human beings in relationship to each other, relating as persons and as groups, rather than considering these as abstract nouns that economists often relate to other such nouns in complex econometric equations. It is here, I suggest, that we can find not just compatibility between these constituencies but the possibilities for a positive complementarity between them to help build and maintain an inclusive society that is just and humane: with a justice that is free, equal, and fraternal; a humaneness that is one of caring and sharing.

For Catholic Christians, Joseph the carpenter, supporting his family with his trade, a constructive member of his community, is an apt expression of what we are celebrating today. For, as Karl Marx tells us, work is the way we relate to the world, not just the cosmic world, but to human society and our integration into it as well. Yet so much of the impact of humans on our world is but violence on our environment and its ecology. Work is also the way we relate to each other. Yet here too, so much of our work is alienating, not humanizing, divisive not bonding, where, as Marx says, art increases, the artisan diminishes. Charlie Chaplain captured this so brilliantly in his film,

‘Modern Times’! Pope Francis too, who wants ‘a Church that is poor and for the poor’, has pointed out that ‘Work is fundamental to the dignity of a person...It gives one the ability to maintain oneself and one’s dependents, and further to contribute to the growth of one’s own nation.’ In our complex world we cannot create wealth by ourselves alone. We work in collaboration with others; we can’t be Robinson Crusoes on some tropical island with obedient man—Fridays at our command. Nor must we use our wealth just for ourselves.

Catholic social teaching, that rather well-kept secret, has always insisted, together with the right to property, on the social responsibility of property owners and managers. The right has been readily seized, the responsibility much neglected if not negated. There is so much one-sided making of protective rules by those empowered by their huge possessions and motivated by self-centred possessiveness: He who makes the rules, he wins the game! But what happens when power equations change? If on the international scenario China, ambitioning to be a superpower, uses its UN veto, flexes its muscles and begins to make the rules of engagement to favour itself! Or the BRIC countries enthused with their progress, begin to throw stones at other peoples’ glass houses! Or on the local scene, when unions become far too powerful against management, or vice versa? We do not need conflict, let alone war, to address the issues of the contentious inequalities at the international level nor do we want civic strife or violence to address the severe inequalities of our domestic societies. Only long-term investments in the future can address such issues, a short-term band-aid approach confuses and confounds the real issues.

The ancient Greeks from the time of Herodotus realized the human race is one. The ancient Hindus thought of their world as *vasudaiva-kutumbakam*, the world as one family. All major world religions have held the same, and yet all in various ways, at various times have betrayed this universal worldview of human unity in favour of narrower, more self-referential ethnocentric understandings. I don’t think I can pretend to speak for the workers in this country. But I remember, when I was in graduate school in Chicago, listening to Studs Terkel on the radio as I drove to the university in Hyde Park from my parish in Bridgeport. His conversations with America, an oral history of ‘Working: People talk about themselves and what they do all day’. He opened for me a world so different from the one at the

university. It was a world of hope and struggle, so different from the cynicism that an academic is easily tempted to and often gives in to.

I have often wondered what would happen if that promise of hope was broken irreparably? Will there be a bitter-sour vintage from the grapes of wrath that ripen and sour with such hopelessness? In India the worst off workers are found among the landless dalits, formerly the 'untouchables', in our villages; and among the marginalised indigenous tribals in their forest dwellings. Rapid growth in recent years has only increased our social inequalities and left them further behind. Mobilised by young city intellectuals, beginning with some of the best and brightest from our IITs, (this was before the days of Silicone Valley attractions!); they formed an extremist Maoist movement that has precipitated violent atrocities, while the hapless villagers are caught between state and Maoist violence. I believe this is true of all extremist, fundamentalist movements, whether political or religious, cultural or ethnic, racist or casteist. Desperate, disoriented people find their last option for survival in violence.

However, as an ex-Jesuit companion of mine, who left the Society as a young priest to start such a movement, now in his 60s, says: violence doesn't help the poor. But if we are to reach out to the disadvantaged and under-privileged, we must first empathise with their plight, feel it from their side, do a reciprocity of perspectives. If we don't walk with them as brothers, especially the last and the least, then by default, we too will be among those responsible if their desperation turns to anger, and anger to rage and rage to violence. This is the story of the Maoist in India, it is the story of dispossessed of the world, the disinherited of the earth, when slums and shanties of hope become ghettos and enclaves of despair! Ignacio Ellacuría, one of the six Jesuit martyrs in San Salvador insisted: we must not take away hope for the poor; it's all they have!

Mahmoud Darwish, a rare poet of peace in the middle-east, wrote this chilling warning:

Identity Card

by Mahmoud Darwish

Put it on record

—I am an Arab

And the number of my card is fifty thousand

I have eight children

And the ninth is due after summer.
What's there to be angry about?

Put it on record.

—I am an Arab

Working with comrades of toil in a quarry.

I have eight children

For them I wrest the loaf of bread,

The clothes and exercise books

From the rocks

and beg for no alms at your doors,

—Lower not myself at your doorstep.

—What's there to be angry about?

....

So!

—Put it on record at the top of page one:

—I don't hate people,

—I trespass on no one's property.

And yet, if I were to become starved

—I shall eat the flesh of my usurper.

—Beware, beware of my starvation.

—And of my anger!

If we are to heed such warnings, we must affirm the dignity of those whose labour sustains our world, and find ways of expressing our solidarity with them, across boundaries of nation and ethnicity, of race and religion, of caste and creed; and find a solidarity based on our common human dignity that binds us together as the one family, one community of humans, as we walk together as brothers and sisters, and work together as companions to build the kingdom of God's rule on earth.

For us Jesuits, whose 'Mission Today' is the 'service of faith' and the 'promotion of justice', this world of the workers, especially of poor workers, is a call and a challenge. There are many ways we can bring our service of faith and our commitment to promote justice to these workers. We must discern and decide. As 'our way of proceeding', December 4 of [General Congregation 32](#) gave us these inspiring words:

‘If we have the humility and the courage to walk with the poor, we will learn from what they have to teach us what we can do to help them. ...to help themselves to take charge of their personal and collective destiny.’ (G. C. 32 Dec. 4. No. 50)

So let us celebrate labour day with a commitment to work for the labourers, especially the most disadvantaged, the poorest; to work for down-up change for a more just and egalitarian world. And as men of learning and virtue, we must also work for top-down coordination for an effective sustainable world of freedom and fellowship, of justice and peace, of equality and harmony for all God’s children. May the witness of our martyred brothers in San Salvador and elsewhere be our inspiration. May we walk this earth together as Jesus did.

37. PRAYERS

An Easter Prayer

A prayer for you,
from a smaller player,
on the larger stage of a life,
that seems at times
to be puppet theatre,
at others psycho-drama.

May you be happy and free,
may you fulfil the dream
you were always meant to be.
May your wisdom bring you harmony,
forgiveness and compassion.

May your hope lift you up
against all hopelessness.
may your love bring you ecstasy,
even as you root your feet
firmly to walk this earth
in joy and freedom
in hope and compassion.

12 April 2009

A Prayer of Thanksgiving

(One that bears repetition)

Lord,
Teach us to be grateful to you,
for your providence that accompanies our lives.
To realise that a truly grateful person
can never be bitter
and where there is no bitterness
there is no room for anger, hate, jealousy, envy,...
and all that makes us less than we're meant to be.
May our gratitude to you
teach us to be grateful to others,
Who have touched us with your love,
So we in turn can be generous in our love.
This is the love that brings beauty and grace into our lives
And makes us committed and creative to your calling.
And so find the joy we were made for,
The joy that is the only infallible sign of your presence.
May this joy make us all the more grateful.

26 Nov 2021

Thanksgiving Prayer

(This is an early morning prayer so that it might take effect in time for the fourth Thursday of November.)

I pray that we may all be grateful because a deeply grateful person can never be bitter or resentful, truly grateful person is always generous and forgiving. And the person who is not bitter has much room for joy, a person who is generous shares this joy. I pray that we may be really joyful, for a joyful person can never hate. And when we don't hate we have much room for love and creativity. And I pray that we might be truly creative, for a creative person is not destructive. And so my prayer is that we be grateful, joyful and creative, sharing and caring.

I hope you can make the same prayer for me.

Rudi S.J.

2002

