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There was a man named Hannibal Mary Di Francia. He lived in Italy. While preparing for priesthood, he decided to live with the poor. He cared for them, fed them, clothed them, assisted the old, paid attention to the young. Most of all, he taught them about the prayer to God especially about the prayer for vocations. This shaped his life. After ordination, he was very resolute to spend his life with them beyond comfort and prestige. The Church has recognized his sanctity. He, then, was made a Saint of the poor and for vocations.

Such an awe-inspiring act enthused the Rogationists and the Daughters of the Divine Zeal all over the world, particularly in the Philippines, to continue the same endeavor of being in touch with God and of working with the poor. Through the blessing of the Superior General of the Rogationists in collaboration with the Philippine-Indian delegation and with the permission of His Eminence Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales, D.D., Archbishop of Manila, the St. Hannibal Empowerment Center (SHEC) was born. SHEC flourished with the support of the Parish Priests: viz., Fr. Antonio Navarrete, Fr. David Colong and Fr. Joey Tuazon. In essence, SHEC,
Leaving behind the comforts of the seminary in order to live simply with the poor in Pasay City is not easy. Some people chided the first group of Rogationist Priests who decided to live with the poor and established the SHEC. They received all kinds of threats. They were considered as fools. Despite the derision, the burning love for the poor continued to gush forth. The SHEC took as its mission to empower the poorest of the poor through community organizing, leadership trainings, values formation and networking. After three years on these, community leaders emerged, members were trained on various practical skills, and community building structures took form.

The progress, behind calculated risks, has prompted SHEC to share its wonderful experiences and insights on living with the poor. Thus, The Essentials was conceived. It is about the two important elements in the life of Jesus: prayer and proclamation of the Kingdom of God. On one hand, Prayer, for the Rogationists, is the very foundation of the prayer for vocations. Before one can ask for vocations from the Lord, one has to be sincerely in touch with God through prayer.

On the other hand, Proclamation of the Kingdom of God spells out the mission of Jesus Christ which is for all and yet with preferential option for the poor. Prayer is not enough; one has to carry out his mission.

For St. Hannibal, praying is becoming a good laborer in the Lord’s vineyard by working for the poorest of the poor. Thus, The Essentials attempts to share some insights on understanding prayer and the mission of Jesus Christ in dialogue with the Church. It also provides reflections and actual experiences of working with the poor as shared by the collaborators and friends. This is to inspire other people to seek for the deepening of their prayer life and their commitment to work for the realization of the Kingdom of God here on earth, beyond comfort zones.

Fr. Dexter M. Prudenciano, rcj
MESSAGE

Congratulations to the Rogationists of the Heart of Jesus for coming out with this maiden issue of *The Essentials* magazine.

This is a laudable, albeit bold, gesture on your part to turn to the print media to draw people’s attention to two important elements of our life in the Church: prayer and love for the poor. I say bold, because in our world now the printed word seems to be losing an audience as more and more turn to the electronic medium for information, education and entertainment, with boundaries among the three increasingly blurred and indistinguishable. The discipline of writing – of putting into a coherent exposition thoughts and theories – is fast being usurped by the sometimes unwieldy practice of blogging. Ideas quickly surface and just as rapidly vanish in the internet, virtual realities that substitute for real life. While modern life presents us with wonderful new discoveries, it is still worthwhile to hold on to traditional ways that contribute to the shaping of character and of the mind.

Thus it is appropriate that we in the Church are constantly reminded of what are essential, and these are, you propound, prayer and love for the poor. Prayer is our daily nourishment because it keeps us connected to God, in every way. And love for the poor is the beat of our hearts that tells us we are alive, and live for others. These are the essentials that we must not lose sight of.

It is my prayer and my hope that this magazine will serve as the impetus not just for constant reflection, but more so, of dedicated action – for us to pray more lovingly, and for us to love more deeply the poor. Our prayer should prompt us to action as Jesus commanded us: Love God above all and others as yourself. This is the essence of our faith.

God bless you always!

+ GAUDENCIO B. CARDINAL ROSALES
Archbishop of Manila
I congratulate SHEC for coming up with this Magazine that promotes prayer and the proclamation of the Kingdom of God as the two essentials in Christian life and in following Jesus.

Living these two essentials realizes our charism as Rogationists. The proclamation of the Kingdom of God is centered on human promotion especially of the poor. Prayer is a vital part of working for the poor and that a profound prayerful life leads one to discover his own vocation in life and in the Church. This is directly in line with St. Hannibal’s call to prayers for vocations. The two essentials therefore is a way to contextualize our charism in the local Church.

May we be more prayerful especially for vocations, and more energized in working with the poor.

Fr. Bruno Rampazzo, RCJ
If you and I were to be asked to identify the two most important things about Jesus, we would probably say something like He is God-and-man, Messiah-and-Friend, Savior and Lawgiver. Although those are correct enough responses, Jesus Himself would identify two others as most basic and significant.

Jesus would say that He was a person (1) connected with the Source, his Abba (2) totally poured out in mission for total salvation.

The First Essential:
Connected with the Source

Jesus was intimately connected to the Source.
The Source was His Father.
Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. (Lk 6:12)

Being connected with the Source, Jesus’ inner being was fully charged with the Divine. Even his outer aura was luminous with the Divine.

... and the power of the Lord was with him to heal. (Lk 5:17)

Jesus was bursting with divine Energy because he was in touch with the Abba.

Jesus was never low-bat!
The Second Essential:

Poured Out in Mission for Total Salvation

I start with my childhood catechism. For me, then, the mission of Jesus was to die to save my soul from sin, to give me sanctifying grace in this life, so that when I die, I may go to heaven where I will see God face to face. Now that I am grown up, I find that formulation of the mission of Jesus to be correct but too narrow.

The overall lifework and mission of Jesus was, as one would expect, the proclamation of salvation. But what was the salvation Jesus proclaimed? Jesus proclaimed a new world and a new history for humankind and creation. In biblical language it is called “Kingdom of God” (Mk 1:14-15).

It is a new world on earth, to be consummated at the end of history. In fact, it is a new universe. At any rate, it is not heaven. We are not saying that there is no heaven. There is indeed a heaven; Yahweh’s abode in the firmament ‘above,’ but the Kingdom of God is not that heaven.

Inspired by the book of Isaiah, Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God as: Good news of liberation for the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed, the jubilee year happenings of release of slaves, rest for the land, recall of the debts of the poor, restoration of land and property and houses of dispossessed ancestral folk (Lk 4:16-20). It is a new world replete with various blessings for human beings, specially the poor and oppressed.

During his lifetime Jesus summarized his work of salvation thus: “the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have good news (of liberation and justice) proclaimed to them” (Mt 11:2-5 = Lk 7:18-23). No word about forgiving sins or saving souls for heaven. It is all about health, life, justice and liberation.

Kingdom of God then means a new world experiencing total salvation, total well-being. And Jesus’ mission was all about that.

Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news [gospel] of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near ...” (Mk 1:14-15).
It took me quite some time to start and finish this article. It is because I was afraid that I might come up with a theoretical exposition of prayer rather than a sharing of a concrete experience of how I tried to connect with God, drawing inspiration from Jesus who took time to connect with the Father, Abba, as presented in the Gospels. (Mk 1:35; Mt 14:23; Lk 4:42) It is worth noting that while Jesus was always on the go proclaiming the Kingdom and doing the Kingdom-works (Mt 4:23-25; Mk 1:29-39; Lk 4:40-44), He always set aside a moment to be connected with the Father. No wonder He was so energized. He was so full of Divine energy that He continuously shared life-blessings to all especially the poor, outcasts and sinners during His time. He was fully charged; consequently, He was totally poured out in His mission of the Kingdom. There are no hints or signs that Jesus experienced burn out. It was not that easy for me to be assigned in a religious community which is geographically located in one of the sociologically depressed areas of Pasay. Having been used to the structure and relatively comfortable setting of the seminary for 12 and a half years, my adjustment was not a walk in a park. During those moments, I am plagued with
so many questions and I had to wrestle with my ego (surface self) reminiscing the good old seminary days. Every time I am tempted to seek back past comforts and convenience, I always tell myself that I need to pay the price of following Jesus who opted for the poor and of being true to the identity of the Church as “Church of the poor.” This is only one-fourth of my experience in Pasay. Aside from the challenge of living a simple lifestyle, I was initially introduced to and involved (though minimally) in our apostolate with the poor and at the same time a full time student. Juggling a great volume of school requirements, responsibilities in the community and other commitments in my Priestly ministry. I would end up dead tired at the end of the day. Burn out is just around the corner. It was too tempting to set aside prayer with the reason that serving people is also a form of prayer. In fact, my prayer time was lessened and I felt that the fire within was gradually dying down. Little inconveniences became big deal for me; I was beginning to be fed up with the situation I was in. Prayer and service appeared to me more as things to be done rather than a natural flow of the Spirit in us. Everything started to be dry and mechanical.

I shared this to a confrere, and he pointed out that such experience happens naturally for a person who is not praying… for a person who broke off his/her connection with God. As I assessed my past, true enough, there was very little time for connecting to the Source. It was at that moment that I was reminded that connecting to the Father is non-negotiable if I want to follow Christ. Being actively involved in our apostolate with the poor can never be an excuse for not praying. On the other hand, the difficulties and dangers we experienced in our apostolate with the poor prompted us to run to God in order to connect. The community I belong to continually assist me to make sure I have time to connect. As we journey with the people, we face difficulties and dangers. There are threats and false accusations directed at us; but, God sustains us. It really makes a difference when we are connected. Our experience testifies that after moments of connecting with the Source, we are recharged. We get physically tired but not exhausted; we are pressured but do not surrender. There are moments of dismay, but not hopelessness. Why? We know deep inside that it is because we are connected with the Source. After going through what we went through, God never abandoned us. Our connection served as our anchor with God that continually sustains us. Believe me, our community would have not lasted this long if we compromised our connection with God. We do not have to use words to connect with Him. I do not have the words to explain how it works. We just have to be aware of His presence in us and in nature, and the connection happens. Working with the poor for justice and liberation will be the natural flow of our connection with God. The next time we experience burn out, reflect. We might not be connected as we should.

Being actively involved in our apostolate with the poor can never be an excuse for not praying. On the other hand, the difficulties and dangers we experienced in our apostolate with the poor prompted us to run to God in order to connect.
The teaching of Jesus on the beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew and Luke started with “blessed are you the poor” (cf. Mt 5, 3 and Lk 6, 20) and ends with “blessed are you when people persecute you” (cf. Mt 5, 11 and Lk 6, 22). Is there a relationship between being poor and working for the poor and being persecuted? We do not know the full intention of Jesus in this regard, nor do we know the intention of the Sacred Writers. But experience seems to prove that there is a correlation between the two. There is a correlation between being poor and being oppressed, persecuted and reviled. In fact, the anawim - the term for poor used in many Bible passages - were not only those who had no money. They were also those being oppressed. Many times their poor situation was not just caused by misfortunes in life but also be the oppression of others. Furthermore, their being poor is also the reason for people to look down on them. We read this in the thoughts of the ungodly persons in the Wisdom of Solomon, “Let us oppress the righteous poor man. Let us not spare the widows or regard the gray hair of the aged. But let our might be our law of right, for what is weak proves itself to be useless.” (Wis 2, 10-11)

The correlation of being poor and being oppressed is also very clear in our present situation. If more than half of our people are poor it cannot be that more than half of the
Filipinos are lazy, or that this big number suffers such great misfortunes in life that they are poor! There must be something wrong with our economic system, or with our governance, that makes so many Filipinos poor, and keeps them poor! There are oppressive structures at work, locally and internationally. Furthermore, the oft-heard blame on the poor for their lot is very common -- they don't strive enough, they are lazy, they allow themselves to be used by politicians, etc.etc.. Are these not views that demean them? They are looked down upon because they are poor. I hope I am wrong, but I stumbled across this quotation which allegedly comes from the MMDA Resolution 02-28 series of 2002 which says “all items, goods, structures found along roads, streets, avenues, alleys, sidewalks, bridges, parks and other public places shall be confiscated by the government without prior notice. The same shall be treated as common or ordinary garbage and shall be disposed as such. The government shall thus not be held liable for any damage arising from the removal, confiscation, or disposal of the said items.” Again I hope my source is wrong, because if it is correct then how very sad it is that our government people look at our informal settlers’ homes and belongings as garbage just because they are not found in “proper” places! Experience tells us that not only is there a correlation between poverty and oppression, but there is also correlation between oppression and those who are in solidarity with the poor and work for them. Many times those who immerse themselves with the poor and work for their empowerment are tagged as leftists. Because they enable the people to speak out for their rights they are called agitators and militants. Verbal abuse, persecutions and even threats do not only come from some of the rich but also from among the poor who are gaining from the poverty of their fellows. These are those lower rank government officials who use the poor as their “bata-bata,” and even rent out squatter lots for these hapless people. These can be the “siga-siga” of the place who collect fees from the poor for any flimsy reason.

These can also be the mini drug and gambling lords of the locality. All of these benefit from the plight of the poor so they keep them that way. For this reason they are the ones who make the lives of those who want to uplift the poor and organize them difficult. They oppose them and even threaten them. They benefit from the status quo.

But then let us listen to the words of Jesus when we find ourselves in similar situations.

“Happy are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of man (Helping the poor is a work on account of Jesus because whatever is done to the poor is done to him). Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, surely your reward is great in heaven, for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.” (Lk 6, 22-23)
A FRESH PERSPECTIVE –

PSYCHE OF THE MARGINALIZED

by ANTONIO B. ELICAÑO

Because I have reached, and even surpassed, what is normally considered as “senior years,” my perspectives have been shaped by the experience of what seems to be a “lost” generation, and, a déjà vu vicarious observation of more current generations.

This is then compounded by lack of education or very low-quality education, resulting in persons not knowing how to lift themselves and their families out of the cycle of poverty (or worse, a fatalistic attitude or twisted sense of entitlement).

Witness the customary attitude that one cannot be employed unless one has a “backer.” While this is true in a society where the practice of “whom you know and not what you know” is prevalent, yet it is not an absolute. Persons who are qualified will become employed and will eventually be recognized for their value to any organization.

But simply lack of academic preparation or quality education are not the only reasons for the existing mindset of the poor. The prevailing attitude of the great majority of the poor is matira ang matibay. When applied in a Machiavellian the end justifies any and all means, this is of course wrong. However, it is to them a logical evolutionary step in light of the literal isang kahig, isang tuka lifestyle they are forced into – mind you, not by choice.

Initially, many of the poor are poor not by choice, but because of birth-determined life accidents or opportunities.

While I do not cast any aspersions nor apply these observations to everyone — since there are many who, through the works they are currently engaged in, have obviously arrived at the same analysis — I have repeatedly witnessed mind-sets regarding “working with or helping the poor” which completely miss out an understanding of the psyche of what forms the attitudes and behavior of the poor. This is especially true among those who are of the “bleeding heart – dig into pocket, but no personal involvement” genre.

But this is true in a society where the practice of “whom you know and not what you know” is prevalent, yet it is not an absolute. Persons who are qualified will become employed and will eventually be recognized for their value to any organization.

And this is why we need a fresh perspective – the psyche of the marginalized.
Thus in a perverted sense, evolved from erroneous processes of rationalization, the poor do not believe “squatting” is stealing the use of someone else’s hard-earned property. On a petty scale, the otherwise usually honest and hard-working employee does not believe anything is wrong with taking and bringing home stationery or paper clips from the office. The psyche behind all of the foregoing is of course that the wealthy have so much and do not care, while the poor have so little or none at all.

In other words, there is no sense of “I am my brother’s keeper” - no community spirit, no civic-mindedness, no respect for the “other”. Under these circumstances, it becomes easy to forget the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Our group wanted a social outreach program that goes beyond opening of wallets; we sought one that would help in nation-building. We recognized that nation-building requires a first step: a change in the individual and then his immediate community.

This is the principal reason why our group initially chose Gawad Kalinga, but because of certain conditions, shifted to SHEC.

Just as “charity begins at home,” so we felt that a decent home that one could call his/her own is unquestionably a source of personal dignity and pride. And it would thus, literally and figuratively, provide a venue, on a daily basis, where mindsets of individuals and entire families could change.

On our part, our group felt this could be our humble way of “lighting our one little candle” through values formation …... the start of the change in the mindset and attitude of an individual, then his family, and hopefully, expand this into community spirit.

With God’s help, we will be able to “light our one little candle”.

St. John Baptist de La Salle, pray for us.

Live Jesus in our hearts – forever.
Reflections

The first time we set foot in Rodriguez, Malibay, Pasay City, we got a tour of the place - densely-packed houses, narrow paths that got even narrower as we went deeper into the area, sometimes refusing a glimpse of the sun. Then we came to the edge of a pond or maybe a river. Around it are temporary houses-on-stilts, a very classic informal settlement in Metro Manila. Hidden from the noise, smoke and busy life in the center of Pasay City, some 2,000 families of the St. Hannibal Christian Community (SHaCC) huddle together behind the high walls of factories and around the Maricaban Retarding Pond.

With the request from St. Hannibal Empowerment Center (SHEC), the non-government organization assisting SHaCC, TAO-Pilipinas, Inc. drew up plans of proposed subdivision schemes in two areas: Barangay 165 surrounding the Maricaban Retarding Pond and Barangay 156 along Aurora Boulevard (Tramo). Planning a subdivision on the assumption that all existing structures will be cleared is easy.

The challenge lies in how to accommodate twice the density of people than what the land could normally carry. And the next bigger challenge is how to realize the plan. Processing solutions with the community to generate understanding, make decisions and later ownership of the results are three big steps towards empowerment – three steps we are looking forward to happen once land tenure issues have been addressed.

Working with the poor is the very reason why we formed TAO-Pilipinas. So we could “go to the people rather than ask the people especially the poor to come to us”. Working with the poor in Pasay gives a spark of excitement to the possibility of realizing a poor man’s dream of secure tenure. With support from the church, the government and other sectors, we earnestly look forward to see decent homes rising amidst the hidden recesses of Pasay City.

Arlene Christy Lusterio
Executive Director, TAO-Pilipinas, Inc.

Working with the Poor in Pasay
The Maze

It was just a few days before the break of New Year 2007. My daughter, together with her cousins, with ages ranging from 12-15, were made to do an outreach with ten less privileged children from Bgy. 162, Malibay, Pasay City. I brought my group of six kids to the site and met up with Fr. Dexter Prudentiano RCJ, the Executive Director of SHEC who introduced them to one another. They were to go to Rockwell for a day of fun, hopefully for a day of learning from one another.

Shortly after we saw the kids off, Fr. Dexter decided to walk me through what seemed to be a maze of dwellings so dimly lit even at high noon. Very little sunlight could penetrate the nearly inhuman shelters that unfolded. I was engulfed by a stream of faceless humanity staring at me as if saying "There is no hope here!". Stench and squalor was everywhere and my subconscious seemed to tell me that nothing here was real - everything around me was just a figment of my dark imagination. My whole being was wanting to get out of the maze, wanting to once more reach out for the sun. The experience jolted me out of my comfort zone and was a stark reminder of the existence of another world -- a world marked by extreme deprivation and an almost inhuman existence. It made me see once again the urgency of working for change. Because I had to raise a family, I had excused myself from reaching out to the less privileged, even to the extent of isolating myself from the people who could benefit from my time. Because I was too busy chasing my own pot of gold, I thought to myself I will give back to society only at that time when I have already achieved my dreams.

The walk through that maze where the sun never shines made me realize that the time to do something is NOW - tomorrow could be too late. The opportunity to leave a mark behind, to be of service to the poorest of the poor can be found right in Bgy. 162. The work that has been done by the religious community whose credibility lies in living side by side with this marginalized group stirs one's own conscience into answering the call to serve.

By MP
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