



"To gather priests to Christ and to one another to proclaim..."

THE VISITATION

A monthly publication of the Fraternity of Priests, Inc.

January 2020						
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Missionary Disciples - A Personal Reflection

By Fr. Dwight Merrick, Trinidad and Tobago Fraternity

Somewhere around 1998, the Fraternity of Priests, an international organization with a chapter here in Trinidad & Tobago, held our annual retreat with Fr Tom Forrest our retreat master. He arrived a bit under the weather with fifty prepared talks which he carried everywhere with an aim to deliver as many of them he could manage. There would be no after lunch siesta as we were accustomed to and it would be business all week if we let him have his way. Soon enough, we were off and running with some of the most instructive and insightful talks I ever heard from any teacher, preacher or lecturer.

I still remember some of his statements, vividly, after 21 years.

"There is no priest crisis only priests who want to be star boys for Hollywood and for Jesus at the same time and it just doesn't work that way," he said to us.

But with his exciting teaching on discipleship, there was just too much to catch everything. I wrote profuse notes and tried my best to capture everything. What I did get however, continues to serve almost every retreat I have ever done. So profoundly did these talks affect my life and, in particular, my priesthood.

By far the most impactful teaching I ever received was his talk on "What Is a Disciple." Every

parishioner or group member whom I have pastored since 1998, heard some version of this talk at least a few times. He explained in detail the strategy of discipleship used by the Jews. We speak about so casually about that term without a clue of what it means.

Jewish young men, we heard, were constantly looking out for a highly respected, senior man whom they wanted to imitate and hold as a master. A man whose life they considered a masterpiece, would be deserving of their life's effort to spend time learning to become that man's disciple. They would love this man more than their father who gave them life because he teaches them how to live their life.

To become a replica of the master would entail living in a commune where there are no other influences except those of the master, so that a voluntary brainwashing as it were, would take place. The aim would be to become just as the master, to walk, talk, think and behave just like the master in every way. Having paid this price, a disciple would be privileged to write in his master's name since he would do so literally with his master's mind (as many chapters of the book of Isaiah would testify).

Wow, I was never taught that there was so much to the term 'disciple', which, therefore, really needs proper explanation for every

Christian. No going back and forth between one's home and family and then one's master. The disciple lives with the master twenty-four/seven, as they say, and wants nothing but to become the master in time. What a revelation! What clarity. It was as if I had been waiting to hear this for my whole life.

In my hidden life through childhood, all through my teenage years and up to my Baptism in the Spirit at age 20, I had been attending mass on weekends religiously either by being taken there or, when I was old enough, to go on my own, but I was searching for God persistently. Then hands were laid on me through the UWI prayer group by Ian Taylor and Michael Moses RIP (not yet priests) and my whole world was turned right side up. It was a homecoming like none before or since and without words to explain. All I wanted to do by the end of that prayer session was to help other people find Jesus the way he found me. That was in 1981 and by 1988 both Ian and Michael were ordained priests. Fast forward to 1994 by which time I had become a priest. We were all in the Fraternity of Priests group and still there was something missing. This was the answer.

As a disciple of Jesus, I do not need to fit into everybody's camp. I do not need to be acceptable to everybody's idea of being magnanimous. I do not need to be comfortable with

A PRAYER FOR PRIESTS

O Jesus, Eternal High Priest, live in (name of priest), act in him, speak in and through him. Think your thoughts in his mind, love through his heart. Give him your own disposition and feelings. Teach, lead and guide him always. Correct, enlighten and expand his thoughts and behavior. Possess his soul, take over his entire personality and life. Replace him with yourself. Incline him to constant adoration and thanksgiving; pray in and through him. Let him live in you and keep him in this intimate union always.

O Mary, Immaculate Conception, Mother of Jesus and Mother of priests, pray and intercede for (.....). Amen.

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Please send articles, comments, and photos to the FOP Newsletter editor, Fr. Bob Carr, via e-mail to editor@fraternityofpriests.org

Newsletter material from all Fraternity members is gratefully accepted. Any submissions will help make each issue better!

For me, December 27th, the Feast of St. John the Apostle, is a great feast of the love of God. Why? Because on this Feast Day Jesus revealed His Sacred Heart to both St. Gertrude (1256-1302) and St. Margaret Mary (1647-1690).

On this Feast, St. Gertrude was praying, and Jesus and St. John appeared to her. The Beloved Disciple invited Gertrude to repose "on the sweetest bosom of Our Lord, in which all the treasures of beatitude lie hidden" (*St. Gertrude the Great: Herald of Divine Love*, Tan Books, p. 30). As St. John rested on the Heart of Jesus at the Last Supper, so he invited St. Gertrude to do the same.

Gertrude shares that she was ravished with delights beyond the power of words at the beating of His Heart. After John confirmed that he experienced this at the Last Supper, she asked why he did not write of it in his Gospel. He responded that the purpose of the Gospel was different, but that *the language of the blissful pulsations of the Sacred Heart is reserved for latter times, that the timeworn world, grown cold in the love of God, may be warmed up by hearing of such mysteries.* (ibid. 30-31, emphasis added)

On December 27, 1673, our Lord appeared to St. Margaret Mary revealing His Sacred Heart to her. He shared that now was the time for His Divine Heart to be known widely.

My Heart is so full of love for men that It can no longer contain the flames of Its burning love. I must discover to men the treasures of My Heart and save them from perdition. (ibid. 31)

With Jansenism rampant – which emphasized the depravity of humanity, and God's disgust of us – much of the Church had lost confidence in God's unending, merciful love. Jesus longed to share with the world the fire of infinite love and tenderness in His Heart. He called on humanity to trust in great confidence in His mercy and love.

How much more is this needed in our day! The Heart of Jesus burns with love for us! Even with the witness of Sts. Thérèse,

Faustina and John Paul II added to Sts. Gertrude and Margaret Mary's testimony, we too often run from His Heart to things that will not satisfy. The idolatry of entertainment continues to grow, as we can see by who gets paid the

most: superstars of film, TV, music and sports.

We look to entertainment to fill our emptiness. Yet, it is love we seek – love with no bounds, love that does not love me for what I can do, but for who I am. Only in God can we find this furnace of love in the Heart of Jesus. Why, oh why do we settle for less? Why do we run to our phones, YouTube, video games, pornography, instead of to the One who can really fill our loneliness and emptiness.

The Heart of Jesus longs for us to allow Him to love us and to return that love. He aches for our confidence in His love. I invite you to pray Fr. Dolindo Ruotolo's "Surrender Novena" (purportedly given to him by Jesus, and can be found online) to stir up a greater trust in Jesus' love for you, me, and the entire world. As we move through this Advent Season into Christmas, let's make the decision to look to Jesus for love, to let Him fill our emptiness. In those moments of loneliness and anguish, let's get on our knees – instead of on our phones – to let the Lord of light and love set our hearts on fire!

Grace and Peace,
Fr. Von DeRosia
Fr. Von DeRosia

One of the objectives for the Fraternity of Priests is to inform our donors about the ongoing financial health and details of the organization. We thank those many faithful benefactors who help make our service possible. Thank you!

Fraternity Financial Report

Monthly Donation Budget: \$ 4,750.00
Actual Donations: \$ 4,174.17
Budget Deficit: \$ 575.83

Current as of October 31, 2019.



...continued from page 1

everybody's brand of spirituality. I do not need to worship with everybody and pretend it is all good, or that we are more alike than we are different. I especially do not need to engage in exercises pretending that I am lost in darkness looking for the light. I know God and have regular personal encounters with Him for which I will not apologize. I have a personal relationship with Jesus and feel privileged for Him to use me in ways I could never have imagined. Thirty years ago, I took a pamphlet from a Jehovah's witness trying not to offend them. Then I tried to read it at home and was immediately stopped. A voice in my head asked me how I could make time for this pamphlet when I had not made time for the books I bought with my own money and wanted to read. That was the last time I took such a pamphlet. Life today is simple, not easy, but simple. If it is not going to help me become like Jesus, it is not worthy of my time or effort.

So how much does it cost to become a disciple? Fr Tom exclaimed "everything." Not fifty percent, or eighty percent but one hundred percent! Everything about us needs to belong to Jesus, if we are going to become His disciple.

Another anecdote Fr Tom explained was scary to say the least. He lamented that one of the mistakes the Church was making, he felt, was ordaining priests who were not yet disciples and hoping they became disciples somehow. This, he explained, was hopeless and thus his suggestion that the Church needed to help men become disciples and then ordain them priests. My own fear is that there is so much pressure for Churchmen to be all things to all men inclusive of religious differences, that the focused lifestyle

described above as discipleship is condemned today as narrow-mindedness. It reminds me a bit of the saying that a specialist is one who knows more and more about less and less. I must confess that I do want to become a specialist on Christianity and especially Christian spirituality. I believe that I am called to know more and more and become more and more like Jesus as my priority, and I don't need to be an expert on everything out there. Since my early years, I have always thought that when people come to a priest they should meet someone who is trying to be an expert on God revealed through Jesus and not of all things spiritual. That makes life simple, just Jesus! Now on to the topic of the "mission".

What is the "mission" of the Church? Has it changed over time? Is it the product of exhaustive discussions and resolutions as with Church Assemblies and Synods? Are we free to redefine the mission of the Church? "The great commission has become the great omission," as one person said.

What caused the early church to spread like wildfire especially amidst a hostile environment of persecutions and martyrdom? Surely it was the fire of the Spirit propelling believers to not only keep the faith but to share it widely with their testimonies of how real the Lord is and how wonderful His works. Preaching and teaching were accompanied by signs and wonders and the presence of the Lord was personal and communal.

With many problems facing the Church today, maybe we are like that little boy who lost a coin in a dark area but then proceeded to look for it under the streetlight. Asked why he was looking under the light and not where he lost it, he

responded that the light was better here and not there.

Maybe a source of our problems as Church stems from our apparent departure from the true mission of the Church. It would be interesting to know how many parishes, including my own, budget or otherwise spend a sizeable portion of their income and resources on evangelization? It would be equally interesting to know how many Catholics are taught and trained to evangelize others. If we do not teach children, youth and adults how to evangelize, then how are we as Church fulfilling the great commission?

What would happen if Catholics became so excited about their faith that they started sharing it with others? Suppose it became normal for Catholic children to learn how to evangelize their friends, their parents and anyone who would listen to their story of Jesus. Who knows, we just might see the Church spring to life—new people, set on fire with love for the Lord and a zeal for the Christian life. What would it cost to become a Church like that? Whatever it takes! A Church on mission driven by enthusiastic disciples seems just what we need today.

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