

**A TALK DELIVERED DURING THE KUMBO DEANERY  
CLERGY RECOLLECTION, AT THE SAINT JEROME'S  
BIBLICAL AND PASTORAL CENTRE – KUMBO,  
ON TUESDAY, 9<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2020**

***OPENING PRAYER***

*O Spirit of God, we ask you to help orient  
all our actions by your inspirations,  
carry them on by your gracious assistance,  
that every prayer and work of ours  
may always begin from you  
and through you be happily ended.<sup>1</sup>*

**INTRODUCTION**

Sometime in late November 2016, in the Gregorian University in Rome, a Jesuit Priest and Professor was giving a lesson in one compulsory Spirituality Course, dealing with *Ignatian Spirituality*<sup>2</sup>. During his introductory remarks, about the characteristics of Ignatian Spirituality, he asked us, the licentiate students: “What is the difference between a Jesuit Priest who obviously is Religious, and a Diocesan Priest who obviously isn't Religious?”. Some silence followed. Looking around and seeing no hand up, one licentiate student, a Diocesan Priest, from Kumbo in Cameroon, timidly raised up his right hand. The Professor nodded in affirmation, and the Priest confidently answered aloud: “The difference is clear: A Jesuit Priest brings Jesus to the people, while a Diocesan Priest takes the people to Jesus”. The silence in the aula was broken by some light laughter. Then, the apparently puzzled Professor now smiled and said: “Please, let's proceed”.

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<sup>1</sup> M. HARTER, ED., “Prayer for Spiritual Freedom”, *Hearts on Fire: Praying with Jesuits*, Chicago 2004, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Ignatius of Loyola is the Founder of the *Society of Jesus*, SJ, commonly known as the Jesuits.

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We know that we here belong to various Congregations, Orders, or Institutes. In fact, we should be six of such in this our Kumbo Deanery<sup>3</sup>. As we recollect this time around, it may be useful to consider the way we each see one work. Saint Paul makes us understand that in order to be moulded by God, the Potter, we need to have a mind or mind-set which Jesus had. In fact, many old translation say: “ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (*Philippians 5:8*)<sup>4</sup>. Our mind-set, our disposition and attitude may, or may not, reflect an abandonment in the Lord's hand. A vital aspect of such abandonment in the Lord's hand is precisely the topic to this Talk: *The Way We See Our Work: Being Clay in the Potter's Hand*.

## 1. PRIORITY OF VISION OVER WORK

Our concern is not so much the work as it is the way we see the work. Why? Because, in our process of on-going formation, the work can still be done with external excellence, but with insignificant self-transformation, simply because it is wrongly perceived. My theoretical assumption, or our understanding, here is that perspective modifies attitude, which in turn, transforms.

So, the way we see our one work, in various changing circumstances, remains significantly influential. It shapes the way we do the work; it shapes the way we interact and treat those with whom we work. The way we see our work determines not only our commitment and the underlying motives; it also determines our degree of detachment regarding the work and its fruits. Sometimes, and perhaps more often than we may suppose, we are either unaware, or just superficially aware, of the way we see our work. We expect that recollecting on this, would sharpen our awareness and shape our focus accordingly. Thus, it would be helpful that we participate with active presence, as we try to see and listen with the eyes and ears of our hearts.

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<sup>3</sup> The Diocesan Priests; the Capuchins (Order of Friars Minor Capuchin); the Piarists/Calanzan Fathers; the Sons of Mary Mother of Mercy; the Rogationists of the Sacred Heart; and the Claretians (Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. King James Version; Berean Literal Bible; Websters Bible Translation.

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The work we do is unique. Indeed, we do not only have some work; we each rather have some exceptional work. Our blessed brother, of happy memory, Henry Newman, testifies this aptly<sup>5</sup>. He says:

God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission (...) I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do His work; I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep His commandments and serve Him in my calling<sup>6</sup>.

Besides the exceptionality of the work, Newman notes that our work is paradoxically not our work; it is the Lord's work. And this Lord is obviously our Potter. In the course of doing our Priestly work, when we periodically pause, like now, to recollect, we may not lose sight of its uniqueness. We need to remind ourselves to see it as it is.

## **2. SOME MISCONCEPTIONS OF OUR WORK**

Some misconceptions infrequently mark our work. The perspective which shapes the view of our ministry is not (and should not be) to outshine one another; talk less of the thought or intention of demoralizing a brother Priest.

On the one hand, and perhaps more from the perspective of the much younger Priest, it would be unhealthy to see my work as a means of trying to impress and win the fervour of some people or Prelates. On the other hand, and perhaps more from the perspective of the much elderly Priests, it would be improper to see my work as a means of exercising control in the sense of dominance, or even manipulation in the name of care. A ridiculously sad story is told of an unhappy and domineering Parish Priest who did not feel fulfilled, because he never really saw himself as the Parish Priest, until his Bishop assigned to him a Curate.

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<sup>5</sup> He was canonized by Pope Francis on Sunday, the 13<sup>th</sup> October 2019, during an open air Mass in Saint Peter's Square. I was there.

<sup>6</sup> J.H. NEWMAN, *Meditations and Devotions*, M. TREVOR, ed., London 1964<sup>2</sup>, 6.

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When he was later assigned a second Curate, he felt himself a powerful Parish Priest.

Apart from the possible examples given in the cases of both extremes (the much younger and the much elderly Priests); it is possible, and perhaps more from the perspective of the middle-age Priests (who sometimes can be suffering from midlife crises), to see their ministry as a means of looking for something higher than what we already are. We can no more become anything more than being Priests. Even when we talk of the fullness of the Priesthood in the Bishop, that essentially means just one thing, namely: that unlike us Presbyters who have only the power of the Priesthood, the Bishop has the power to share that power of the Priesthood with other persons. Yes, every other thing is just mere administration.

Concerning these misconceptions of our work, we can add and multiply ways. Italians, for instance, have a commonly heard expression, understood as normal, which is: "*fare il Sacerdozio*" (that is "to do the Priesthood"). I am not accusing or criticizing their view; but I am saying that we can have various views which may be missing the point, including amongst others: seeing it as a mere past-time, leisure or recreation activity; seeing it as some paid or underpaid job or contract; seeing it not as an expression of who and what we are and should be, but as something we hurry over to finish soonest so as to have time for some other activity (which only God may know); seeing our work as a means of elevated social status through which we win notice, public attention and admiration (as may be portrayed in certain excessively stylish gestures, postures, unnecessary additions to the Rites and rubrics, as well as in homilies which seek more of applause and acclamation than spiritual edification).

Interestingly too, and perhaps out of financial interest or constraints, we can possibly see our work almost primarily as an income generating activity. Institutional businesses notwithstanding, some of us may still retain the words of one of our venerable brothers of happy memory and shining sanctity, namely, Paul Mbiybe Verdzekov. Although Archbishop Paul Verdzekov was nicknamed *Pa Danger*, and one of my friends (Fr. Anthony Mailiy) once described a certain pleasant event by saying that it was "as brief as the smile of him the Archbishop",

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this illustrious son of the Church usually said that he fears the Priests who does business. I am not advocating that the Church should not do business; I am rather suggesting that the more we see our work as distant from pecuniary preoccupations, the more the vision of our work would be Christ-like in nature. After all, it may not be unduly daring to say that many members of the laity can exercise greater competence in such monetary matters than us.

In this regard, also, we can draw from the resourceful wisdom of our forefathers of the first century Christian communities. Out of divine inspiration, wherein we find the origins of the Diaconate, they said: "It would not be right for us to neglect the word of God so as to give out food; you brothers, must select from among yourselves seven men of good reputation, filled with the Spirit and with wisdom, to whom we can hand over this duty" (*Acts* 6: 2-3). By obeying and following this divine inspiration, the Apostles made themselves more malleable clay in the hands of God, the Potter. They could, as well, have made other rational claims, and clung to their own will.

We, as well, may wonder, and have our own arguments for, and against, our various perspectives; but in our pondering, it is indispensable to consider as fundamental and foundational, how Jesus himself saw, and would still see, our work which is supposedly a continuation of the work of him.

### **3. OUR MINISTRY AS MEANS OF SANCTIFICATION**

Traditionally, our work has been seen in a threefold fashion, namely: to teach, to govern, and to sanctify<sup>7</sup>. There remains ever a danger of dichotomy, or even a trichotomy. By dichotomy, I mean, the seeing teaching and governance as belonging to one domain, while sanctification belongs to its own different domain. So too, a trichotomy could exit, wherein, one sees each of the three distinct components as being separate. I think that any dichotomy or trichotomy would blur both our work and our identity. It is not only the administration of Sacraments (accompanied by Liturgy as well as the blessing and use of sacramental) that is to be

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 21.

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seen as sanctifying. We need to see both the acts of teaching and of governing as sanctifying. If teaching, for instance, is seen merely as opening the mind, broadening one's perspective, acquiring skills, improving health and living standards; then, at least, it falls short of its truly intended purpose. Otherwise, it would even become tantamount to what the Bishop of Kumbo, George Nkuo, referred to, on Thursday, the 28<sup>th</sup> May 2020, during the Chrism-Mass Homily in the Kumbo Cathedral as: cheap political jargon.

If, then, our teaching loses its sanctifying aspect, what would distinguish it from other forms of teaching, apart from the fact that it is done by us Clerics? So too, if our governing work loses its essential perspective of sanctifying, what would distinguish it from other secular acts of governance, apart from the fact that it is done by us Priest?

It may be possible that some persons may not see sense in this way of seeing the matter. There was a once certain Christian Mofor, a Priest, genuinely scholarly and truly saintly. Yes, I believe that his high learning and sanctity were unquestionable to any objective persons who truly knew him. At about 8:30 p.m. of Sunday, the 13<sup>th</sup> June 2004, Fr. Christian Mofor, now of happy memory, as Rector of Saint Thomas Aquinas' Major Seminary - Bambui, told me one unforgettable thing in his office. He said: Evans Shang, among other philosophical disciplines, I am a logic teacher. In life, you would frequently find yourself between paths. On the one hand, the path of intelligence and logic; on the one hand, the path of experience and wisdom. If both conflict, and you are to choose, choose the latter.

By sharing the experience this encounter, with Fr. Christian Mofor, which happened some sixteen years ago, I am suggesting and recommending that we consider always the experiential lessons of wisdom, and not just the eloquence of some logically sound arguments about the way we see our work.

So, seeing our work as ministry and means of personal sanctification would dispel many blurring and blinding misconceptions, some of which we have just seen; it would help us seek sanctity with sanity. This seems to me the best way of seeing work. In the twenty-third Annotation of his masterpiece titled the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius of

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Loyola establishes as the first principle and foundation one thing, namely: the will of God. He says that God created us to fulfill his purpose by rendering him praise, reverence, and service<sup>8</sup>. I would wish to highlight the element of service; for, in some sense, both praise and reverence are acts of service. This agrees well with Christ's words when he says that his food is to do the will of the Father who sent him. (Cf. *John* 4:34).

Strangely, the noun *diakonia* (that is: "ministry"), appears only once in the Gospels, precisely in Luke 10:40. However, the verb *diakonein* (that is, "to serve") as well as the related noun *diakonos* (that is, "minister") appear throughout the New Testament. Jesus says: "Whoever serves me, must follow me, and my servant will be with me wherever I am. If anyone serves me, my Father will honour him" (*John* 12:26). The secular, political, or worldly use and implementation of the words "minister", "ministry" or "to administer" can taint, blur, and even blind our vision. Authentically, the underlying understanding is not only service, but selfless service. The selflessness of the service is demonstrated in the laying down of one's life, as Mark and Matthew would testify. (Cf. *Mark*. 20:45; *Matthew*. 20:28). Generally, Jesus' life was one of selfless service, so much so that, (I believe), we cannot do justice in expressing that way of life, by enumerating individual incidents as if they were isolated. Nevertheless, the feet-washing of Holy Thursday remains an eloquent symbol, which apparently occupies a privileged position. (Cf. *John* 13:1-17).

We know well that we, Ministers, act as Shepherds or Pastors. But this metaphor can easily imply and communicate a radical distinction, or even separation from the sheep. No wonder, Jesus had to qualify it as "Good Shepherd". (Cf. *John* 10:11). Thinking in terms of sheep, someone has even suggested the alternative of a "*sheep dog*", because both the sheep and the *sheep dog* belong more to the same order of reality than do the sheep and the shepherd. Apart from both belonging more to the same order of reality, you may notice that the dog directs the flock with greater

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<sup>8</sup> IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, *The Spiritual Exercises*, Ann. 23.

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clamour and energy, even if the dog does not have a significantly greater insight about the journey or its destination<sup>9</sup>.

The point here is that shepherding or pasturing should be seen, first and foremost, as ministry wherein the Minister manifests selflessness as he assumes the condition or state of the one served. If the condition of the person served is too lowly for the Minister to stoop down and assume it, then, the Minister has the challenge of raising that lowly state to look like his own standard. While commenting on the statement that "Christ identified with us in everything except sin", I overheard someone saying that Judas had to embrace and kiss Jesus before his arrest, because, while with the twelve, he was just like one of them, to any onlookers.

We know well that we, Ministers, are also referred to as Reverend Fathers. Truly, we all are Spiritual Fathers! We are Fathers because, by our work: we generate others in the faith through Baptismal rebirth; like the family father who is often the breadwinner, we provide nourishment through the Eucharist; we strengthen them in the faith through the ministry of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments; our mere presence, especially when we are appropriately dressed, and accompanied by our Christ-like comportment, would surely (and sometimes painfully) remind onlookers about Our Father in Heaven.

However, if there is a certain perspective, especially Protestant in nature, which resists and rejects this Father-metaphor, it is not without reason. We cannot simply respond that a biblical reference (*Matthew* 23:9) is taken out of context. Such a response, far from insinuating the defence mechanism of flight, actually limits us at the academic or intellectual real. A comprehensive response would be the challenge of exercising Fatherhood; and this can be done by considering the way we see and do our work. That is, by ensuring that it really be ministry - *diakonia*; for, though Presbyters and not Deacons, each of us is *diakonos* (minister), whose mission is *diakonein* (to serve). We have qualified such service with the precision of selflessness. The more one shuns one's

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. E.E. WHITEHEAD - J.D. WHITEHEAD, *Christian Life Patterns: The Psychological Challenges and Religious invitations of Adult Life*, United States of America, 2016, 138.



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self-will, and abandons oneself in the hands of our heavenly Father whose will is to be sought, the more fatherly one would become.

Gerald May, being a Spiritual writer, director, and retreat preacher, is more of a Theologian than Psychologist. He makes a clarifying distinction between two important words, namely, *willfulness* and *willingness*. He says:

The path to willingness asks us to give ourselves to God, and the awesomeness of this sacrifice coupled with the awesomeness of God can cause our egos to come up with ingenious attempts to have our cake and eat it too, to seek belonging without self-sacrifice. This can result in all kinds of spiritual pride and narcissism, born of fear and self-defense. The path to willfulness says, 'You can enjoy the fruits of the spiritual realm and at the same time amass personal power and control over destiny. You can BE God'.<sup>10</sup>

The implication here is clear: The path of *willingness*, that is, of surrender, is to be sought; whereas, the path of *willfulness* is to be shunned. It is possible to be so pastorally engaged, even to the point of moving mountains; but, I believe that it is necessary to always discern if one is following the awe-filled path of willingness or the awful path willfulness.

Our spiritual life cannot be seen apart or dissociated from our psychological states because we are psycho-spiritual beings. One of the things which stroke me in the course of my research is the relationship between personal maturation and service. While looking among the various growth models, which depict the different courses of maturation from infancy to adulthood, it can be said that maturation of the person is realized in service, and through service. For instance, Richard Barrett, traces the course of human development, through seven stages, beginning from Survival (usually at the age of two years and below, with the motivation and task of satisfying the nutritional and physiological needs to be alive and healthy). Then, one could rise, right up to the seventh stage which is Service (often from the age of sixty years, with the preoccupation of social justice and lessening the suffering of humanity)<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> G.G. MAY, *Will and Spirit*, USA 1982, 287.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. R. BARRETT, «The Seven Stages of Psychological Development» [accessed: 21.05.2020],

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Also, Murray Bowen, the founder and first president of the American Family Therapy Association (1978-1982), identified selfless service as characterizing mature adulthood<sup>12</sup>.

The point here is that, even from what may be considered secular sciences, there is much evidence attesting to the fact that seeing our work as service would do us much good. It would allow us to be more malleable clay in the hand of God, the divine Potter. Saint Paul says, with a somewhat insistent tone: "People should think of us as Christ's servants, stewards entrusted with the mysteries of God" (1 *Corinthians* 4:1).

I think that every vocation has its adolescence; and adolescence is neither a crime nor a curse, but often disturbingly irresponsible in nature. But there comes a time in the life of each one, when one does not see one's work as a means of defending, acquiring or procuring some interest. Such a time should have come in the life of every ordained minister. Such a time is come in the life of every mature ministry. Otherwise, one is still living one's vocational adolescence.

Accordingly, then, the various acts of our work can be seen as our concrete measures, not only of rendering services to other people, but also as doing to ourselves some service of personal maturation or growth in holiness. For instance, instead of seeing the preparation and presentation of this Talk as a show, I can choose to see it not just as an act of selfless service to the audience, but also as a concrete means of sanctifying my own self.

#### 4. CONSEQUENCES OF MISCONSTRUING OUR WORK

Numerous consequences accrue from misconceiving our work. Let us briefly consider some of them, which can do harm, with far-reaching repercussions.

- I. Competing with one another, rather than completing one another, so as to make up for the lapses in one another;

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[http://www.valuescentre.com/sites/default/files/uploads/The\\_Seven\\_Stages\\_of\\_Psychological\\_Development.pdf](http://www.valuescentre.com/sites/default/files/uploads/The_Seven_Stages_of_Psychological_Development.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. M. BOWEN, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, USA 1978.

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- II. Running down one another with one another or with the laity;
- III. Reporting people to the Bishop, instead of telling the Bishop the efforts I have made to help the persons concerned, as well as the good example that I myself have already set without success in helping the persons concerned;
- IV. Hampering my personal growth as well as the maturation of others;
- V. By adopting a wrong perspective of our work, whether consciously or unconsciously, we subsequently assume as well a wrong posture before others who, usually, would either rebel, or, out of respect, only resist. Such perspective and posture create unnecessary tensions, and impedes the smooth progress of ministry.

## 5. DETACHMENT FROM OUR WORK

The dynamics of detachment, or non-attachment, to our labour and its fruits, is of great pertinence here. It is perilous when we face our work with attachment, which may be mistaken for commitment.

The phenomenon of attachment is traceable in, and is marked by, a certain concomitant desire within oneself. This desire in itself is natural and neutral. But, self-monitoring shows that the desire rapidly or slowly attains the status of attachment, as it gains some emotional quality which would usually manifest itself in some physical sensations which can actually be felt. At an extreme, a glaring expression of attachment is seen is violence. Perhaps contrary to popular understanding, much more energy is invested not in the object of the desire (which is our work), but in the desire itself. Psychologically, the desire which unfolds as, and culminates in, attachment often manifests itself in a longing for affirmation, achievement, and success<sup>13</sup>. More often than not, undignifying means are employed to achieve such success.

Once upon a time, a journalist confronted one saintly sister, an Albanian-Indian, called Mother Mary Teresa Bojaxhiu of Calcutta. He,

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. G.G. MAY, *Will and Spirit*, USA 1982, 222-223.

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the journalist, asked her what degree of success she achieved as she and her Sisters invested their resources in the care of the poor and the destitute. Responding, with an apparently distracted gaze, she said that she bore no memory of where the Lord asked us to be successful; that rather, the Lord asked us to be faithful.

We remember the Master praising the faithful steward, saying: "Well done good and trustworthy servant; you have shown you are trustworthy in small things; I will trust you with greater; come and join your master's happiness" (*Matthew* 25: 21,23). Concomitant texts calling on fidelity abound<sup>14</sup>. Commendable success, rightly perceived, can be seen only as an outcome of fidelity.

Surely, Mother Teresa was right in not mistaking success for faithfulness. There can be many apparently successful people who are not faithful; just as there can be many faithful people who are apparently unsuccessful before human eyes. Surely too, she was right in not mistaking efficiency for faithfulness. Efficiency is the characteristic of machines, not humans. While it is in the nature of robots to be efficient, and they can be extremely far more efficient than humans, though made by humans, it is in the nature of humans to be aware. Awareness of oneself, of what one does, while one does it, can immensely augment one's faithfulness and add grace to such actions.

Attachment either to our work, or to its fruits, reveals a certain unhealthy craving, bearing some repugnance. According to John of the Cross, attachment makes us ill-disposed to the Holy Spirit; it wearies, torments, darkens, defiles, and weakens us<sup>15</sup>.

Unlike attachment which is nothing less than self-seeking manifesting itself, the same Saint John of the Cross is quite enlightening, when he expresses detachment in some poetic paradox:

To reach satisfaction in all  
desire satisfaction in nothing.  
To possess all

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<sup>14</sup> For instance: *Luke* 1: 16; 16:10; 19:17; *Proverbs* 28:20; 1 *Samuel* 12:24 2 *Chronicles* 19:9: 1 *Corinthians* 4:2.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. JOHN OF THE CROSS, «The Ascent of Mount Carmel», Book I, Chapter VI, in K. KAVANAUGH, tr., *The Collected Work of St. John of the Cross*, Washington, D.C. 1991, 130.

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desire possession of nothing.  
To arrive at all being  
desire to be nothing.

To come to the knowledge of all  
desire the knowledge of nothing (...)  
Because if you desire to have something in all  
your treasure in God is not purely your all<sup>16</sup>.

Therefore, by facing our work with attachment, we make ourselves less pliable clay in the hand of God, the Potter; and by facing our work with detachment, we make ourselves more malleable clay in the hand of God, the Potter.

## 6. SOME QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

As a vessel that can be chipped, cracked, broken, or even shattered, so too can the wonder of our being be ruined by sin. Fortunately, God, the Potter, can always again re-mould and fashion the clay of our being, restoring its splendid beauty. Before we conclude this Talk, have an interval of silent reflection as well as the administration of Sacramental Confession to one another, I would suggest, amongst other considerations, that we take into account the following questions:

- I. Which Pastoral work or assignment would I grudgingly or unwillingly accept; and why, if any?
- II. How applicable to me is the assertion that a Minister feels more fulfilled if he is ready to serve anywhere, anytime, and for whatever length of time?<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> JOHN OF THE CROSS, «The Ascent of Mount Carmel», Book I, Chapter XIV, in K. KAVANAUGH, tr., *The Collected Work of St. John of the Cross*, Washington, D.C. 1991, 150-151.

<sup>17</sup> On Friday, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 2020, I went to the Bishop's House to surrender some of my documents/Certificates (not in order to avoid the temptation of escaping to America, but because it is the appropriate thing to do). There, I overheard a Capuchin Priest who jokingly said that if he is not transferred this year, he would go on strike.

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- III. Is the way I see my work helping me, and those with whom I work, to grow; or do I see my work as a tool of manipulating others?<sup>18</sup>
- IV. Which are the things that hurt me while I work, and why?
- V. Do I insist much that things go my own way; am I attached to my work and its fruits?
- VI. Do I feel or think myself as indispensable where I am and in what I do?
- VII. Am I lazy, or a workaholic possibly at the verge of burnout?
- VIII. Do I under assign or over assign those with whom I work?
- IX. Do I periodically assess what I do, to see if I do it in the light of Gospel values?
- X. Do I trust and share responsibilities?
- XI. In the planning and execution, management and accountability, am I freely open and transparent to those with whom I work, or am I rather involved in dirty games?
- XII. Do I see it as a disturbance, or as part of my teaching ministry, the service of proofreading and discussing the Assignments of the Maryvale candidates or Catechists with them?
- XIII. Is the vision and exercise of my priestly ministry mature, or is it still undergoing its adolescence?

## CONCLUSION

Perhaps, partly inspired by Jeremiah's words of us being clay in the Potter's hand, Saint Paul would remind us that the clay of our being is fragile earthenware jar, though bearing heavenly treasures. (Cf. 2 *Corinthians* 4:7). We have seen that one big way by which God, the

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<sup>18</sup> In as much as every true Minister would like to contribute in collaborative ministry, no Minister whether lay or ordained, would like to feel manipulated, used or exploited.

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Potter, can remarkably mould the clay of our character, is through the way we see the work we do. And this way is much practical because we do this work daily. So, the kind of view we entertain about our work, can either enhance or diminish the pliability of clay that we each are. Our work can rightly be seen only as selfless ministry of service, entailing the paradox of commitment and detachment.

In the course of doing our work, we may notice that we do a lot of talking, shaped by our various perspectives. Priests and Deacons, generally do so much talking: in the classrooms, in Churches, during Catechesis, seminars, meetings, personal encounters, etc. Whatever talking we may do while working, it would be worth remembering that no force of words can ever replace, or even measure up to, the force of personally witnessing by one's own life example. In this light, the repeated and memorable words Paul VI resound with a unique eloquence, when he says: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses"<sup>19</sup>

In this Talk, in a sentence, I have said one thing, namely: for us to make ourselves more malleable clay in the hand of the divine Potter, we need to see our work as selfless service, which serves as a means for our personal sanctification. Thank You!

***CLOSING PRAYER***

*I beg of you, my Lord,  
to remove anything which separates  
me from you, and you from me.*

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. PAUL VI, «Address to the Members of the Consilium de Laicis» (2 October 1974), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 66 (1974), 568; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 41. Cf. also A. J. CRONIN, *The Keys of the Kingdom*, New York 1941, 320.

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Being Clay in the Potter's Hand. (Jeremiah 18:6)

Fr. Evans Shang, SD

*Remove anything that makes me unworthy  
of your sight, your control, your reprehension;  
of your speech and conversation,  
of your benevolence and love.*

*Cast from me every evil  
that stands in the way of my seeing you,  
hearing, tasting, savoring, and touching you;*

*fearing and being mindful of you;  
knowing, trusting, loving, and possessing you;  
being conscious of your presence*

*and, as far as may be, enjoying you.*

*This is what I ask for myself  
and earnestly desire from you. Amen<sup>20</sup>.*

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