

Handout #3

The Naming of God

A reflection based upon *Love Without Calculation- A Reflection on Divine Kenosis*, by David N. Power, OMI; The Crossroad Publishing Company, © 2005.

We have heard God invoked in order to justify conflict and killing, and this is shocking and dangerous to humanity, to say nothing of blasphemy. Divine truth and the divine name are often more endangered by their invocation than by atheism's denial. (p. 1)¹

As Christ entered the tomb to be among those who dwelt in the absence of God, so it is in passing through hell, the place of the dead, that we hear God speak and we hear the word of Jesus who speaks to us of the one of whom he is Son-- of the God who is Father, not Judge or Almighty, or Law... Through his death upon the Cross and through his descent into hell, Jesus subjected himself at the Father's bidding to the utmost limits of death and being dead, not simply to save us but to reveal God's true name to us. (p. 2)

It is because God so loved the world that he gave his own Son that we are sure of mercy and that we live in hope. We might have expected God to have shown this power in mightier ways. We might have found our ideas of God verified in law enforcement, in harsh judgment on the evil of the world, in all kinds of miraculous interventions. But God in sending Christ has renounced such actions. God in his Son who was among us as one of our race, learning obedience through suffering, has lowered himself, has totally changed the ideas we have of divinity. It is when we accept kenosis as God's chosen way of revealing and giving himself that we begin to know God. It is in the Son who makes nothing of himself that we begin to know the Father. It is in living with the Son, according to his example, one with him on his way, that we feel and are moved by the power of the Spirit.

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This is a God for all peoples. This is a God for all races and all nations. This is a God for all times. This is a God who will continue to take many forms though always bearing the name of Love. This is God through whose power in self-gift all things are transformed. This is God for the world and for a new creation. (p. 60)

The choice of the translation in the Bible of Jerusalem, "who count for nothing," has given some theologians occasion to think further on the manner of God's revelation and Christ's presence, and of course to relate this translation to that of kenosis, which says that "he made himself nothing." They emphasize that it is by appearing as without power before earthly powers, and by choosing the little of this world to be witnesses to the Pasch and the Spirit, that God reveals his own truth and his own self. It is among those who lack human prestige, who are counted as socially nothing, that the wisdom of God is to be found. It is among those who are account as "no-thing" that God dwells, and it is from these that the Gospel is to be heard. (p. 31)

	X	Y	Z
John 13 Washing of the Feet of the Disciples	...although [Jesus was their Master and Lord]	...he did not [lord it over them or ask them to wait upon him]	...but rather [he stripped himself and performed for them the service of a slave]

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- ❖ What names for God have been important to me in my childhood...adulthood... recent years?
- ❖ What names for God are emphasized in the history of my religious community... my local culture... my ethnic background?
- ❖ What names for God enter into my prayer... and what do these names say about me?
- ❖ I contemplate the Last Supper. I am at the table, and Jesus comes to wash my feet. He says to me, in a voice loud enough just for me to hear...

Handout #4

The Church of the Poor

A reflection based upon *Love Without Calculation- A Reflection on Divine Kenosis*, by David N. Power, OMI; The Crossroad Publishing Company, © 2005.

I am old enough to remember how we spoke of three states of the Church; Church Militant, Church Suffering, and Church Triumphant. This terminology is no longer used in the ***Catechism of the Catholic Church***, although the reality of the communion of saints to which it refers is still spoken of in simpler, less militaristic, less triumphalistic terms. In section 954 which speaks of the three states of the Church, we read: **"When the Lord comes in glory, and all his angels with him, death will be no more and all things will be subject to him. But at the present time some of his disciples are pilgrims on earth. Others have died and are being purified, while still others are in glory, contemplating 'in full light, God himself triune and one, exactly as he is'"** (CCC 954)

Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council called for an end to shows of triumph and worldly power in the Catholic Church. Paul VI followed this up by doing such things as suppressing the Nobel Guard and cutting the trains of the eminent Cardinals.¹ (p. 61)

On her pilgrimage, the Church has also experienced the "discrepancy existing between the message she proclaims and the human weakness of those to whom the Gospel has been entrusted." Only by taking the "way of penance and renewal," the "narrow way of the cross," can the People of God extend Christ's reign. For "just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and oppression, so the Church is called to follow the same path if she is to communicate the fruits of salvation to [all peoples]." CCC 853)

The Church of Christ ought to be a communion and a community in which the poor "feel at home." The poor are not to be simply objects of charity of ministers and faithful; they are one with all in being members of Christ; they are to be respected in their human and Christian dignity, and have as loud a voice in the life and work of the Church as anybody. (p. 67)

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...Christians may learn... by looking to those whom they themselves have systemically forgotten. We have many examples of how feminist and womanist theologians have recaptured the stories of women and the origins of the Christian reality in the Jesus

movement and the hope of the advent of the reign of God. This was a movement not only for the poor but of the poor. In renewing ourselves as Churches, we have to unearth the memories of two thousand years of how the poor have lived this hope, even when Churchmen had other ambitions. If God wishes to reveal the divine glory, if God wishes the divine Name to be unveiled, if God wishes to give hope to the world, the Church of the Poor is the preferential option of a kenosis that is completed in the glory of the freedom given by the risen Lord and the hovering Spirit. (p. 70)

Poverty is often imposed by cultural and social situations and comes in many forms. In its present poverty, the Church now finds that it is deprived even of the power of language, as well as of a position in society. It seems to have no place of discourse. It no longer has the firm footing of the respect of the public and the strength of its manifold institutions. It finds itself where what is spoken is not germane and fears that what is said by appeal to the past may be untrue to the vibrancy of the Gospel. It ought to be fearful of misrepresenting the claims of the Gospel by hanging on to the prestige of position and the power of possessions. It risks accepting too easily what has been woven into systems of thought or into systems of Church organization, or working with assumptions about the exercise of power that relate more to a fabricated ideal of Christ's lordship than to the reality of his power. (p. 74)

... If the Church speaks with authority, this can only be the authority of Christ, the insight derived from knowing Christ in his kenosis. If it is to be where the future of the poor is worked out, this will be by being poor itself alongside them, or more truly in recognizing the privileged way in which they themselves embody the Church and humanity's aspirations. It is among them that the communion of the Son with the Father, and in turn with the world, is richly revealed.

Which means that the active have to learn to be at root contemplative. (p. 82)

Reflection Questions:

- 1** Who are the poor, the forgotten, the ignored around me... and how might the Lord be speaking to me through their plight?
- 2** "...the active have to learn to be at root contemplative." What does this mean to me... what is it that I contemplate in order to more truly recognize the privileged ways in which the poor embody the Church and humanity's aspirations? Who are the poor around me that I can name... and what do they reveal to me of the power and love of God?
- 3** What are some of the poverties which I encounter in my life today, not of my choosing? What is my response?
- 4** What might a reflection upon or observation of kenosis have to say about the diminishment we have experienced within our own congregation/delegation?

Talk #3: The Naming of God

[SLIDE 1] The Naming of God

[Reflection based on *Love Without Calculation*, by David N. Power, OMI.]

We have seen, with Michael Gorman's help, that the **[SLIDE 2]** Incarnation and Crucifixion of the Word made Flesh reveals to us [who God is. When the eternal Word took on our flesh, this was done not in contradiction to who God is, but rather because of who God is... Love out poured for the good of the Other.]

[SLIDE 3] This is the pattern, we have seen, of kenosis... [which is also the path of theosis, of becoming like God.]

As disciples of the Risen One who still bears the marks of crucifixion, kenosis is also our pattern of life, through which we come to know who God is, where God is, and become more like God, so that with our brother Paul we can affirm that it is not we who live, but Christ living in us.

Today, with guidance from my brother Oblate, David Power, OMI, I would like to look at implications which kenosis, the pattern by which Christ reveals God's power-in-weakness, may have for us as a Body of faith and the Body of Christ... that is to say, what does this pattern of kenosis say to us about who God is (what is God's name) and about our being Church?

[SLIDE 4] In his prayer to the Father just prior to his death, Jesus states that he has revealed the name of the Father to his disciples, and that he will continue to make it known to them (through the action of the Spirit) so that they, in turn, can make this name of the Father known to the world.¹ Thus it is important for us to know the Name of God, because it is this name which Jesus came to reveal to us, it is in this name that we are sent, and it is this name which our words and actions are to proclaim.

¹ Cf. Jn 17:6- "[Father] I have revealed your name to those whom you took from the world to give to me." and Jn 17:26- "I have made your name known to them and will continue to make it known...". Also, Jn 14:25-26- "I have said these things to you while still with you; but the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, ... will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you."

[SLIDE 5] To know the name of God is not to have intellectual information about God, but it is rather to have an experience, a personal contact, with God. To know the name of God is to allow that name to name us, [(we cannot name God as Father or Mother) without [also being named as Daughter or Son] nor can we name God as [Creator without also naming our creatureliness]) and to become more and more an echo of the Divine Name.

Jesus came to witness to the Father, and the Church, the Body of Christ today, is to continue that witness to the Father, whose Kingdom is here, hidden, and yet coming, by repeating the name of God as given us by God's beloved, crucified, risen Son.

Yet we have not always done well in the task of proclaiming God's name. As Fr. David Power points out, **[SLIDE 6] We have heard God invoked in order to justify conflict and killing, and this is shocking and dangerous to humanity, to say nothing of blasphemy. [Divine truth and the divine name are often more endangered by their invocation than by atheism's denial. (p. 1)² David Power, OMI]**

Much of the world violence which is reported on the nightly news has roots in people invoking God's name to **[SLIDE 7]** bless their battles against the foe, [the enemy, the infidel], [the foreigner, the alien]... [you can fill in the blanks however you want]. [This tendency to justify our violence by saying it is God's will is the reason why the Second Commandment of the Decalogue is "Do not take my name in vain!"]

But the God whom Jesus reveals to us has a name **[SLIDE 8]** which carries tones not of power, judgment, or retribution, but of compassionate mercy and love. [Actions speak, of course, louder than words, and it is in the ultimate action of Jesus,] his [self-out-pouring on the cross and descent into the abode of the dead, that we come to realize the full extent of God's name. Fr. Power remarks:]

[SLIDE 9] As Christ entered the tomb to be among those who dwelt in the absence of God, so it is in passing through hell, the place of the dead, that we

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hear God speak and we hear the word of Jesus who speaks to us of the one of whom he is Son-- of the God who is Father, not Judge or Almighty, or Law...

[Through his death upon the Cross and through his descent into hell, Jesus subjected himself at the Father's bidding to the utmost limits of death and being dead, not simply to save us but to reveal God's true name to us.] (p. 2)

[SLIDE 10] We can look at the stars and the oceans, and see God's immensity and grandeur. **[We look at hurricanes and windstorms, and see God's power.]**

[We look at a sunset or dewdrops glistening in a spider web, and see God's beauty and simplicity].

[SLIDE 11] But when we look at the Crucified Risen Lord, we see the very heart of God... of a love that will not be silenced by death. **[In the image of the risen Son we see the revelation of the compassionate Father. The image which Jesus presents to us is one that is counter-intuitive to all our ways of thinking about Divinity, and is not obvious to those who look for an all-powerful (omnipotent), all-knowing (omniscient) God, never-changing, perfect God. Jesus has changed for us the way we are to think of God. As Fr. Power comments:] [...Christians proclaim Christ as God's SON, the one on whom God's Spirit reposes, God truly among us in the flesh. They witness to him as God's greatest self-gift, God's compassion for humanity in its suffering and conflict and his presence among us.]** **[SLIDE 12]** It is because God so loved the world that he gave his own Son that we are sure of mercy and that we live in hope. We might have expected God to have shown this power in mightier ways. We might have found our ideas of God verified in law enforcement, in harsh judgment on the evil of the world, in all kinds of miraculous interventions. **[SLIDE 13]** But God in sending Christ has renounced such actions. God in his Son who was among us as one of our race, **[learning obedience through suffering, has lowered himself, has totally changed the ideas we have of divinity.]** **[It is when we accept kenosis as God's chosen way of revealing and giving himself that we begin to know God. It is in the Son who makes nothing of himself that we begin to know the Father. It is in living with the Son, according to his example, one with him on his way, that we feel and are moved by the power of the Spirit.]**

[SLIDE 14] This is a God for all peoples. This is a God for all races and all nations. This is a God for all times. [SLIDE 15] This is a God who will continue to take many forms though always bearing the name of Love. [This is God through whose power in self-gift all things are transformed.] [This is God for the world and for a new creation.] (p. 60) **[photo of leaf in rain]**

There is a beautiful Swedish hymn which speaks of how we come to know who God is by knowing what Jesus suffered. It expresses in song the dynamics of kenosis as depicted in the hymn in Philippians 2. The hymn goes like this: **[SLIDE 16]**

1. **För att du inte** tog det gudomliga dig till en krona,
för att du valde smälek och fattgdom, vet vi vem Gud är.

2. För att du lydde fram till det yttersta--
döden på korset, vet vi vad seger, vet vi vad väldighet,
vet vi vad Gud är.

3. För att du nedsteg hit till de plågade,
hit till de dömda,
vet vi att ingen ensamhet finnes mer, vet vi var Gud är.

4. Därför skall alla sargade, döende, alla de dömda,
säga med alla heliga, saliga, Jesus är Herre.

5. Därför skall alla världar och varelser,
allt som har varit,
är och skall komma, en dag bekänna det:
Jesus är Herre.

1. Because you did not wear your divinity like a jeweled crown,
Because you chose our shame and our poverty, we know who God is.

2. Because you obeyed to the most full extent--
death on a cross,
we know what vict'ry, we know what majesty, we know what God is.

3. Because you came down here to the suffering, here to those doomed,
now is all loneliness banished forevermore, we know where God is.

4. Therefore let all the wounded and dying ones, all the condemned,
say now with all the saints and the blessed ones: Jesus is the Lord.

5. Therefore let all the worlds and all creatures, all that has been,
is and shall come, one day proclaim the truth: Jesus is the Lord.

Examples of how God is manifest through the weak or second-best... [SLIDE 17]

- Selection of David, so insignificant among his brothers that he is left in the field with the sheep!- as King
- [Jacob (wiley, conniving, and a cheat!) over Esau]
- [Joseph (pampered, a dreamer-a mere boy) over his brothers]
- [Israel, a nation of slaves]
- [SLIDE 18] Moses, who stammers, as spokesperson
- [Abraham and Sarah, well beyond child-bearing years]
- [Mary..., CF the Magnificat!]
- [Marian visions appear to children or those without status in the local culture, those seen as nothing...]

All throughout Salvation History,(and even beyond, when we consider the Marian apparitions,) God has chosen the humble, those who have little or no status among the rulers of the world, through whom to enter into our world and our flesh. God continually has surprised us by coming among us in ways unsuspected. [SLIDE 19] It was not in firestorm and mighty earthquake that God revealed herself to the prophet on the mountainside, [but rather through the whispering of a breeze.]

As Paul mentions to the Church in Corinth:

²⁵ [SLIDE 20] *God's folly is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.*

²⁶ [Consider, brothers, how you were called; not many of you are wise by human standards, not many influential, not many from noble families.]

²⁷ [No, God chose those who by human standards are fools to shame the wise; he chose those who by human standards are weak to shame the strong,]

²⁸ [those who by human standards are common and contemptible -- indeed those **who count for nothing** -- to reduce to nothing all those that do count for something,]

²⁹ [so that no human being might feel boastful before God.] (I Cor 1:25-29-- NJB)

In reflecting on this passage, David Power notes that

The choice of the translation in the Bible of Jerusalem, "who count for nothing," has given some theologians occasion to think further on the manner of God's revelation and Christ's presence, and of course to relate this translation to that of kenosis, which says that [SLIDE 21] "he made himself nothing." They emphasize that [it is by appearing as without power before earthly powers], and by [choosing the little of this world to be witnesses to the Pasch and the Spirit, that God reveals his own truth and his own self.] It is among those who [lack human prestige, who are counted as socially nothing, that the wisdom of God is to be found. It is among those who are accounted as "no-thing" that God dwells, and it is from these that the Gospel is to be heard.] (p. 31)

Yes, God's ways are certainly astounding [SLIDE 22] and beyond the box when it comes to the way we think and move in the world. It is easy to imagine and name God as [Almighty], [All Powerful], All Knowing, [Holy and Immortal], [Lord and Master], [Creator of the Universe...]

[SLIDE 23] Less obvious, perhaps, are the names of God as [All Merciful], [Patient and Forgiving One], [Tender Mother], [Womb of the Worlds],... [Abba- papa!]

[SLIDE 24] Yet there is another name for God that remains unspoken. It seems almost blasphemy to say it, but it comes directly from the example of Jesus at the Last Supper...

The Last Supper is, of course, the foundational meal of our Eucharist. And at the Eucharist, when the priest holds up the consecrated host or cup, it is common piety for those present to say in their hearts the proclamation of faith given first by [Thomas (erroneously labeled the Doubter!) and say, "My Lord and My God..."]

But how would it sound to add on a third name and acclaim, ["My Lord, My God and My Slave." ?]

Yet John's Gospel, the only one not to have a narrative account of the institution of the Eucharist, [SLIDE 25] gives an account of the Lord washing the feet of his disciples, and makes clear that Jesus, after the meal, disrobed and took on the service of a slave among his disciples.

... and he got up from table, removed his outer garments and, taking a towel, wrapped it round his waist; he then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciple's feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing. (Jn 13:4-5)

Of course Peter is going to object! His world has just been turned upside-down. Here is the man he most looks up too, down at this feet! Here is the one he has claimed to be the Christ, the chosen one of God... acting like his personal slave!

Jesus knows this, and explains to Peter and all those present: Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you. (Jn 13:14-15)

This action of Jesus displays again the pattern of kenosis... of the out-pouring of self-sacrificing love in service to the other. If we were to put it in our XYZ format, it might look like this: [SLIDE 26]

John 13 Washing of the Feet of the Disciples	X ...although [Jesus was their Master and Lord]	Y ...he did not [lord it over them or ask them to wait upon him]	Z ...but rather [he stripped himself and performed for them the service of a slave]
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Our primary text for this retreat, Philippians 2:5-8, mentions how the Divinity came down and for our sake humbled himself and took on the form, position, or status of a slave. Normally a slave is someone who has been conquered...

vanquished, defeated, captured, sold. A slave is someone forced into subjection, and held in a position of weakness, in which the slave's needs or worth **count for nothing**. [SLIDE 27] What, then, are we to make of someone who voluntarily enters into the position, service, or status of a slave?

[God is not a slave or servant to us because God has been defeated, vanquished, conquered, or sold]. [Rather, this is a servitude and slavery that is freely undertaken]. [It is therefore all the more frightening, and heart-rendering, mind-boggling and soul-shaking]. [*Jesus washes Kofi Annan & Osama Bin Laden's feet...*]

Jesus has shown us that we are to be, if we are his disciples and followers, a Church that stoops to serve.

[SLIDE 28] While I am not suggesting that we amend Thomas' profession of faith (*My Lord and my God*), it might be good to recall [that the Lord we receive in the Eucharist] is the [one who stoops to wash our feet, performing for us the service of a slave.]

[SLIDE 29] May we who receive from the altar be able to name, in word and deed, the God whom Jesus reveals to us in ways surprising and contrary to the wisdom of our world.

To become like God, we must walk the path of his Son who humbled himself for our sake, learned obedience through what he suffered, and stooped down to wash our feet, leaving us an example to be followed.

[SLIDE 30]

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- ❖ What names for God have been important to me in my childhood...adulthood... recent years?
- ❖ What names for God are emphasized in the history of my religious community... my local culture... my ethnic background?

- ❖ What names for God enter into my prayer... and what do these names say about me?
- ❖ I contemplate the Last Supper. I am at the table, and Jesus comes to wash my feet. He says to me, in a voice loud enough just for me to hear...

[SLIDE 30]

Praised be Jesus Christ, and Mary Immaculate.

Talk #4: The Church of the Poor

*Kenotic theology is inevitably paradoxical theology, for it is founded on the concept of the humility of God.*¹-- John Polkinghorne

[Slide 1] [Kenosis & the Church of the Poor...]

[Reflection based on *Love Without Calculation*, by David N. Power, OMI.]

I am old enough to remember how we spoke of three states of the Church; Church Militant, [slide 2- 3 clicks] Church Suffering, [slide 3- 3 clicks] and Church Triumphant. [slide 4-3 clicks] This terminology is no longer used in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, although the reality of the communion of saints to which it refers is still spoken of in simpler, less militaristic, less triumphalistic terms. In section 954 which speaks of the three states of the Church, we read: [slide 5]

"When the Lord comes in glory, and all his angels with him, death will be no more and all things will be subject to him. But at the present time some of his disciples are pilgrims on earth. Others have died and are being purified, while still others are in glory, contemplating 'in full light, God himself triune and one, exactly as he is'" (CCC 954)

[Notice that there is NO mention of Militancy, despite our earlier tee-shirt which cited this section of the Catholic Catechism.] And so we can [dispense with this tee...]

If we were to look again at our Kenotic chart, [slide 6] we can see that of the three terms traditionally used for the states of the Church

(which terminology the current Catechism did not keep) we can see that the term Church militant fits in least. While terms of suffering and triumph (or glory/exaltation) are found in our Kenotic hymn, nowhere is there a sense of militancy as commonly understood.



¹ The Work of Love-- Creation as Kenosis, edited by John Polkinghorne, © 2001, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., p.106.

If militancy has no part in the kenosis of Christ, then it certainly should have no part in the pattern and life of the Church. If suffering and humility are reflected in the kenosis (the divine self-outpouring) of Christ, then these will also be part of the pathway that the Church finds herself on as she seeks to follow her Crucified, Risen Lord. And just as Jesus did not raise himself from the dead, but was raised by the Father, and just as the exaltation of Jesus mentioned in Philippians 2 is the work of the Father, so, too, will the Church be exalted not by her own power but only by the gift and grace of God.

[slide 7] Before the Church can reflect the face of the Lord of Glory, she must **[show forth the face of the Compassionate Crucified One.]**

At the Second Vatican Council we saw a shift from a Church marked by a sense of triumphalism to one of a more humble presentation. As Fr. David Power notes:

[slide 8] **Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council called for an [end to shows of triumph and worldly power in the Catholic Church.] Paul VI followed this up by doing such things as [suppressing the Nobel Guard] and [cutting the trains of the eminent Cardinals].**² (p. 61)

Yet the Church was, in the years following the Vatican Council, humbled in ways quite unforeseen at the time.

[slide 9] **Nobody could have imagined how much the Church would be humbled beyond its own intentions fifty years later on. In Europe, the Church still has to account for its actions during the Nazi and Fascist regimes. In Africa, Asia, Latin America, Oceania, the Church in bringing the Gospel was often complicit in aborting local culture and the Gospel's own inculturation. In North America, bishops, clergy and religious are publically humiliated by revelations of sexual and financial misdeeds.** **[(p. 61)]**

It has been made clear to the world that we do not always practice well what we preach, and that the Church, while claiming the Sinless One as her head, also

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suffers from the sinfulness of her members. This is an observation borne out in our own Catechism:

[slide 10] On her pilgrimage, the Church has also experienced the "discrepancy existing between the message she proclaims and the human weakness of those to whom the Gospel has been entrusted." [Only by taking the "way of penance and renewal," the "narrow way of the cross," can the People of God extend Christ's reign. For "just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and oppression, so the Church is called to follow the same path if she is to communicate the fruits of salvation to [all peoples]."] CCC 853

The "narrow way of the cross" mentioned here can be seen as referring to the kenosis of Christ who humbled himself, even to accepting death, death on a cross. On the cross Christ completed his out-pouring of self, proclaiming "*It is finished*", for he had poured out all he had, even his spirit, through obedience to his Father. This path of Christ is also the path the Church must take. And thus Fr. Power will remind us that:

[slide 11] Reflection on the call, life and mission of the Church, as an extension of the kenotic mystery of Christ viewed as kenosis takes place in this context. [The key to the theology of the Church that does justice to the mystery of being followers of Christ on the way of self-emptying [*the narrow way of the cross*] is the call to evangelical poverty.] (p. 62)

[SLIDE 12] When we ascend the cross with Christ, we are made poor, [for our hands are nailed fast and not able to grasp at or hold on to anything.]

Blessed John XXIII made clear during his brief but historic pontificate that the [Church in its ministry must allow for a *preferential option for the poor*. The preferential option for the poor is in line with the lifestyle of Jesus] who continually placed himself in the [company of the poor], the [disenfranchised], [the sick], [the outcast], the [public sinners].

[SLIDE 13] If these are the kinds of people Jesus established table fellowship with, then the table of the Church should also find them gathered round. As Fr. Power remarks:

[SLIDE 14] The Church of Christ ought to be a communion and a community in which the poor "feel at home." **[The poor are not to be simply objects of charity of ministers and faithful; they are one with all in being members of Christ]; [they are to be respected in their human and Christian dignity, and have as loud a voice in the life and work of the Church as anybody.]** (p. 67)

[SLIDE 15] Of all the theologies that have arisen since Vatican II, it is the Liberation Theology from Latin America that has brought this point to the fore. **[Liberation Theology itself grew up at the kitchen tables of the poor. As David Power explains:]**

Liberation Theology itself **[SLIDE 16]** is not the work of writers, **[professional theologians]** or **[bishops:]** it is the work of **[SLIDE 17]** communities of poor Christians, **[discriminated against not just by individual persons but by the economic, social and political structures of society.]** The writers are the servants of these communities, those who have the ministry of articulating the biblical, liturgical, social and theological insights of the Church of the Poor. ... **[(Liberation Theology) calls on all Christians everywhere to see that the community of disciples in the teaching of Christ is a place where the poor have a privileged voice. The Church is the Church of the Poor because they are its primary and most powerful members. ... (68)**

This is not easy to hear or accept... as evidenced by the student in Fr. Power's classroom who, while the class was having a discussion on poverty and the poor, threw down his pen in exasperation, claiming that **the poor were no better than anyone else and had no special claims on God or on us.** (p. 68)

Fr. Power goes on to comment...

It is indeed a hard saying that the poor have a privileged and primary place in the Church and in the kingdom of God. ...**[SLIDE 18]** Much critical attention has been given to what Liberation theologians say about the poor organizing themselves in the effort to claim justice and change sinful structures. What can be missed is that this is the second step, for such work can be done only by those who live the life of God's kingdom among themselves. Living together in

communion, those especially subject to life's difficulties show great respect for the personal dignity of each member [and find concrete ways to support and love one another. They aid and assist as needed, in their own way living out the communion of good and the care for "the widow and the orphan."] ... [They know what it is to be despised and persecuted] and yet [to keep hope in God alive, as well as hope in the life of Christ's grace given superabundantly (Rom 5:20) and transforming human conduct. [They also know what it is to keep alive the hope of eternal life,] [that begins now but awaits completion.] On the ground of this life of Gospel Beatitudes, which they know in a special way, they band together in action to change society. To live evangelical poverty, the Church must learn what this means from the poor... (pp 68-69)

The poor here are not simply the economically poor, but also those who have been, as David Power would say, "systematically forgotten." As he would tell us,

[SLIDE 19] ...Christians may learn... by looking to those whom they themselves have systemically forgotten. We have many examples of how feminist and womanist theologians have recaptured the stories of women and the origins of the Christian reality in the Jesus movement and the hope of the advent of the reign of God. This was a movement not only for the poor but of the poor.

[SLIDE 20] In renewing ourselves as Churches, we have to unearth the memories of two thousand years of how the poor have lived this hope, even when Churchmen had other ambitions. [If God wishes to reveal the divine glory, if God wishes the divine Name to be unveiled, if God wishes to give hope to the world], [the Church of the Poor is the preferential [option of a kenosis that is completed in the glory of the freedom given by the [risen Lord and the hovering Spirit.] (p. 70)

As Paul mentions to the Church at Corinth, God chooses the lowly through whom to speak and make herself known. **[SLIDE 21]** Who are the marginalized, the poor, in our community and church, and how do we listen to them?

[SLIDE 22] Just as the poor among us have many faces, so does poverty itself. We cannot and do not always chose just what kind of poverty we shall be engaged by.

[SLIDE 23] Sometimes situations and forces beyond our control or choosing bring us to the poverty by which we are being poured out. As Fr. Power explains:

[Poverty is often imposed by cultural and social situations and comes in many forms. In its present poverty, the Church now finds that it is deprived even of the power of language, as well as of a position in society. It seems to have no place of discourse. It no longer has the firm footing of the respect of the public and the strength of its manifold institutions. [It finds itself where what is spoken is not germane and fears that what is said by appeal to the past may be untrue to the vibrancy of the Gospel.] [SLIDE 24] It ought to be fearful of misrepresenting the claims of the Gospel by hanging on to the prestige of position and the power of possessions. It risks accepting too easily what has been woven into systems of thought or into systems of Church organization, or working with assumptions about the [exercise of power that relate more to a fabricated ideal of Christ's lordship] [than to the reality of his power.] (p. 74)

[SLIDE 25] Often enough we think of the commitment to live a life of poverty, whether on the part of bishop, religious or new lay communities, as something chosen. [There are those who remind us of how much commitment of any sort is a matter of consenting to live under conditions not of one's own choosing.] [This is true of both persons and corporate beings.]

[SLIDE 26] One has freedom to refuse these conditions or to accept to live openly and hopefully in the place in the world that is inevitable, and find there that the inspirations of the Spirit are to be lived. [Like Christ himself, the Churches are invited today by the Spirit to testify to the God of love out of a position of powerlessness, not chosen but forced upon them. Are they truly able to consent to this and find the freedom of the Gospel there], or [will they resort to various forms of compensation?] (p. 74)

[SLIDE 27] For the Church in this age, all across the world and most particularly where it has been long in existence, a key factor to its evangelical witness is the consent to the poverty which is not of its choice, a readiness to live through the kenosis to which it is subjected. ... [Do we find our presence and our mission, and the power of Christ, in being weak? There is a ring of truth in a saying

among the Irish that happiness is not terribly important and that what matters is to live by the truth, for all that it might be discomfoting.] (p. 75)

In terms of seeing their place in the world and of being faithful to their mission Christians look to their inheritance of faith when they wish to discern the appropriate action and way of life that the time demands. [SLIDE 28]

They often gather the challenges facing them in the world of today into two categories. [One covers what we see as the vast and terrible injustice and violence that holds the human race in thrall. Is their [sic] any inspiration in our God-talk to harmonize an effective action?] [The second refers to the vaguely dubbed process of secularization, which speaks to both the elimination of certain ways of talking about God that in effect failed, and an increasing reliance on human ingenuity with its potential to build a future.] When this was first noted in theology in the sixties it was seen as a liberation, for it rid us of the God of the gaps, of notions of a rather whimsically interventionist God. It may, however, be necessary to attend even more to the need to purify speech, since those who think and act as though might were right do a lot of God-talk, at times quite fundamentalist in character. [SLIDE 29] Nothing seems to prevent some American leaders from invoking God even while claiming the right to dominate the future of global reality by virtue of military and economic power. They are quite adept at adapting Bible stories to this vision of their chosen people. [When, however, we let ourselves be truly inspired by the law and the prophets and by the New Testament teachings of Jesus, we find that God-talk embodies another way of talking about power, justice and human community.] [We have to look for a language that inspires another vision, an alternate globalization, where ideals of service, peace and justice may prevail and where divine power features as quite OTHER.] (p. 78)

In our world today where the Church is rocked with scandals, and seems in the eyes of many to become less relevant to the important debates taking place within society, [SLIDE 30] how are we called to be Christ's Body, "... a living sacrament of Christ, a sign ... of the living and loving presence of God"? (p. 81)

David Power mentions three ways in which the Church might choose today to be such a sign or living sacrament to a world seemingly more secular than ever before...

[One is to try to be a strong Church again, reinforcing the sacred, making authoritative declarations on theological, liturgical and moral questions, defying the "culture of death" with the "culture of life"-- always of course defined through authoritative statements! The claim to power in this is clear.]

[SLIDE 31] A second option is to serve the poor above all, **[to be with the poor in their struggle for justice and the basics of life,] [to be prophetic in declarations on war and peace, on immigration, on the rights of peoples to freedom. As the OMI Constitutions have it,] [to be "where the future of the poor is decided," which means using our not inconsiderable portfolio with discretion and finding a place in boardrooms and international organizations around the world to serve the interest of those who suffer discrimination, perhaps even of the earth itself when it is subjected in slavery to the one who sins.]**

[SLIDE 32] The third option for the Church, the harder road to travel, is to be poor itself. **[This last option means first of all to recognize something that is too often avoided,] [namely, the Church's weakness.]** The Church today is weak, at least in part from its not inconsiderable failures of the past, and also from the lack of credibility given to its ministers and the word that it has to proclaim. **[Christians have to appear before the world as beggars, as people who claim no worldly authority, who recognize their weakness, their sins and their poverty,] [and are even ready to carry the opprobrium and the sins of others, as Jesus did. It also means to be poor in literal ways-- "possessing nothing."]**

We, for we are all Church,**[SLIDE 33]** ought claim no other power than love and service. **[This means a discreet presence and careful listening to God's presence among the poor , [the destitute], [the alienated], [the illegal alien, the refugee], [the unhoused], the [lines outside the dole office.]** It is a presence better expressed by the quiet of an unassuming neighborhood, with people

meeting around kitchen tables, not in board rooms. Which is, of course, what base Christian communities often do, with or without the succor of the ordained, whom they are glad to have but do not necessarily find necessary. (pp. 81-82)

Most radically, this means living for eternal life, the life that God alone gives. Whatever efforts we make in the name of the Gospel to live in justice, with concern for the poor, with love and respect for the ground on which we dwell and the rivers and oceans in which the earth bathes, in the end life and a life with God is totally gratuitous. (p. 82)

[SLIDE 34]... If the Church speaks with authority, this can only be the authority of Christ, the insight derived [from knowing Christ in his kenosis.] If it is to be where the future of the poor is worked out, this will be by [being poor itself alongside them,] or more truly in [recognizing the privileged way in which they themselves embody the Church and humanity's aspirations.] It is among them that the communion of the Son with the Father, and in turn with the world, is richly revealed.

[SLIDE 35] Which means that the active have to learn to be at root contemplative. (p. 82)

[SLIDE 36] Reflection Questions:

- ❖ Who are the poor, the forgotten, the ignored around me... and how might the Lord be speaking to me through their plight?
- ❖ "...the active have to learn to be at root contemplative." What does this mean to me... what is it that I contemplate in order to more truly recognize the privileged ways in which the poor *embody the Church and humanity's aspirations*? Who are the poor around me that I can name... and what do they reveal to me of the power and love of God?
- ❖ What are some of the poverties which I encounter in my life today, not of my choosing? What is my response?
- ❖ What might a reflection upon or observation of kenosis have to say about the diminishment we have experienced within our own congregation/delegation?

[SLIDE 37-- LJC et MI]