

Annual Retreat 2022 – “To Grow with the Culture of Synodality”

The 3-day annual retreat for the Oblates in Japan was held from Sept. 6 – 8, 2022 in Kochi. Fr. Maria Arul Raja SJ, from India gave his presentations via zoom. He based his talks on the theme of “To Grow with the Culture of Synodality”. Synod means ‘journeying together’ and involves listening to the Holy Spirit and to each one to discern the path we are called to walk together.

Day 1: Courage for Introspection & Confrontation with Impatience

On the first day of the retreat, we were invited to pick up the courage for some introspection which made us look at our inner selves by asking a few questions like: What is my present disposition? Tensions within? Preoccupations with family, OMI Delegation situations? Obligations? Do I need a retreat in 2022 perhaps after my own sickness, mini, moderate or major crisis and what is the retreat going to do for me? etc. Questions were also given for our personal and collective probe:

- ❖ Identify some of the new conflicts in my priestly life and in our OMI Family with the eyes of the Lord of History and our Mission People at this moment of history.
- ❖ What are my new concrete steps to accompany the impoverished/excluded/ alienated/ addicted/ disowned?
- ❖ How do I plan to grow in the culture of self-critique in the presence of my Compassionate Creator, my Mission People, and the members of my OMI Family?

We were also invited to place ourselves in the context of what is happening around us and in the world, for example, the painful stories of paedophilia and sexual abuse of vulnerable adults, joblessness of youth, the growing number of migrants, war etc. The first day’s talks and reflections were more for our inner journey of life.

Day 2: Compassion with Intuition & Confusion from Involvement

Compassion is to suffer with (cum-passion) the marginalized, and Jesus has shown us how to be compassionate towards others, especially the poor. *“God has been always the God of the poor because they are the visible proof of the failure in the function of the world of creation”* - Peter Hans- Kolvenbach.

A few Scripture passages and a quote from Pope Francis were given to us for reflection: Jairus’s daughter Mk 5:24-34; sheep without a shepherd (Mk 6:34); a sinful woman (Jn 8:10-11). *“God’s mercy can make even the driest land become a garden, can restore life to dry bones (cf. Ez 37:1-14). ... Let us be renewed by God’s mercy, let us be loved by Jesus, let us enable the power of his love to transform our lives too; and let us become agents of this mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish”*. - Pope Francis, Easter Urbi et Orbi message on March 31, 2013.

According to St. Basil & St. Jerome, *“my involvement in trying to put compassion into practice creates confusion from within. I may break the Eucharistic bread for others without breaking myself, my life. If so, what is the use of adorning the Church and chalice with precious stones when the needy are yet left naked and uncared for”*. In the words of prophet Amos, God *abhors empty liturgy and barren worship* (Amos 5).

Day 3: Courage for Involvement

Jesus, by involving himself with people especially with the poor had courage for intervention.

Courage is not absence of fear but resilient engagement with fear, much more the mastery of fear. Jesus also had courage for compassion and communion, and this was lived by his very life and became evident at the end when he said, *“It is accomplished”* (Jn 19: 28-30). By lowering his head, he gave up his spirit (Jn 19:28-30) in order that every animate person and inanimate material, visible object and invisible reality is to be spirited.

"You can't understand Jesus Christ the Redeemer without the Cross: you can't understand! We can come to believe that he is a great prophet, he does good things, He is a saint. But without the Cross you can't understand Christ the Redeemer"- Homily of Pope Francis (September 26, 2014).

Thanks to Fr. M.A. Raja for giving us a lot of food for thought and for challenging us through his reflections. I think this retreat was a timely spiritual exercise for us as we prepare to celebrate our 75 years of presence and mission in Japan next year.

