

Being a Parish Administered by Camillians: A Place of Communion, Evangelization and Mission for Pastoral Health

(A reflection during the 3rd international meeting of the Camillian parish priests and rectors, Centro Santa Fe, SP Brazil by Fr. Gabriel V. Garcia, MI)

Introduction

Happy Easter! I would like to start my reflection with the Easter experience of the disciples of Jesus who were afraid to continue His mission. The risen Lord will be our courage to make our Parish as a place of communion, evangelization and mission.

When the disciples heard the call of the risen Jesus to **'go therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you'** (Mat. 28:19-20), they must have been terrified. They had nearly all deserted him. They had shown a lack of faith and their courage had failed them. Now Jesus was entrusting them to share with others the way of life he had lived and died for. All they had for the task was the promise of Jesus that he would be with them and they would be empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit.

This is the same command of Jesus to the Camillian Parish Priests to go into the world. We, as his disciples have emerged from behind closed doors and locked out of fear to be light of the world and salt of the earth for we feel inadequately resourced as far as our concentration is only on the health care world in the spirit of our founder. We seem to be unfit to administer a Parish community, yet we still have to proclaim the Gospel for people of every generation and variety of cultures and race in a Camillian way.

Our task as Camillian Parish Priests is to be disciples for today in the context of our parish community. The promise of Jesus is that he is still with us and the Church, despite human inadequacy, is still empowered by the Holy Spirit who brings new life and opens new horizons. As a Camillian, administering a Parish, we express new horizon to make our parish a place of communion, evangelization and mission for Pastoral Care.

A Parish as place of Communion in a Camillian Way

The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common. With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all. There were no needy person among them, for those who owned property or

houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need. (Acts 4: 32-35)

To be a Camillian Parish Priest does not mean that we have to isolate ourselves from the Diocese/Archdiocese where our parish belongs. In fact, our installation as a parish priest is a commitment to integrate ourselves to the directives, vision and mission of our local church. The first task of Camillian Parish Priest is to ensure that we are in communion with our local ordinary. The different programs and formations for the clergy and laity are observed diligently. In the Archdiocese of Manila, we implement the same Vision, Mission, Directives, Formation Program and Parish Structure to all parishes to avoid diversity. Thus, we instill communion of mind and heart in the diocese by building community, solidarity, fellowship, and friendship with the Bishops and clergies of the Diocese.

Secondly, the Camillian Community Life is the essential component of making our parish a real place of communion. Our Constitution Art. 14 stipulates that *“In order to exercise our ministry fruitfully, we live the spirit of the common life, directed towards charity”*. *“Community life is considered the best place where we can respond to our call to follow the merciful Christ and it is the theological form of life that allows and disposes us to exercise fruitfully the service towards the sick”* (V. Grandi, *Spiritual Commentary on the Constitution*, p. 62). This will serve as an inspiration of the faithful entrusted to us in the parish. Our way of living our community life as camillians mirrors the way our parishioners relate to one another.

The value of fraternal communion springs from the fact that the mystery of Christ is a mystery of love, that is, of total self-giving for the members of the community. All this is possible only when the community *“rejoices in the presence of Christ,”* the presence of his love that *“has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us”* (Rom 5:5). This love, which has been received by and is present in the members of the community by its intrinsic dynamism, becomes a love that gives itself away, unites, and creates communion, in order to become all in all, and to be the merciful Christ towards those who suffer. *“If this love that unites and animates is not present, the religious community does not exist; fraternal communion is not present. In the same manner, there is no life in the apostolate; only the group, as it is, exists because they stay together”* (Grandi, 63).

Thirdly, we express communion in the different communities of our parish by Word/Faith, Sacraments, and Sharing of Goods-Stewardships. What makes it unique for us in the expression of Faith experience is through the inspiration of St. Camillus. The parishioners are move to be in communion because of their local identity of having devotion to St. Camillus and witnessing different activities (Health Care Program and Pastoral Care) for the sick parishioners. They

developed a sense of compassion for the sick. While there are a lot of programs and formation provided by the diocese, what remains in their hearts and minds is that their parish is inspired by St. Camillus. I have this particular experience with a parishioner who calls our parish as St. Camillus Parish Church where in fact it is Our Lady of La Paz Parish. When I was student of His Eminence Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle, Archbishop of Manila, in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, he strongly challenged us religious from the different congregations that if we become a parish priest, we should make sure that every parishioner or pilgrim who enters our parish church should right and then smell the aroma of the Charism of our Founder.

It is then that a Camillian parish community should be a dynamic place for communion inspired by our founder and we as Pastors therefore should have to devise new and effective ways of shepherding the faithful, so that the faithful will feel part of the parish family where each one is important, each one is needed, each one served and called to serve.

This year, our country is celebrating “Year of the Parish, as Communion of Communities”, in preparation for the celebration of the fifth centenary of the coming of Christianity in the Philippines on March 16, 2021. I would like to share with this statement of the CBCP:

“The vision of the Church as communion veers away from an institutional and bureaucratic model of the Church. The Church is experienced as a community and an extended family where the members feel at home, experience a sense of belonging, solidarity and sharing. There are Filipino cultural values expressed in local language that are associated with communion: kapuso, kapamilya, kaibigan, kasamaand,kapitbahay. The intimacy, friendship, sharing and participation can be experienced more intensely at the local community or BEC level – among family groupings, at the neighborhood and villages. The sense of belonging and solidarity is felt at the parish level (the parish as a network or communion of small communities), the diocesan level, and the universal level. Beyond the level of the local community, what prevails is the spirit of unity and solidarity – a mystical communion. The Church indeed is a web of relationships. But, ecclesial communion is not automatically experienced by the members of the Church. The pastoral priority is to form genuine Christian communities, especially at the neighborhood and village level, within the parish where communion is truly experienced. This is the primary responsibility of the parish priest as part of his ministry of pastoral leadership and communion. Through his efforts, inspired by the bishop, and with the active participation of lay leaders the parish grows as a communion of communities.”

Communion requires that we should be united to our flock. We develop closer relationship with the members of the parish community. This requires knowing them, becoming close to them, spending more time with them and developing friendship with them. Having table-fellowship with them is an

expression of and a means for deepening communion. The Eucharist becomes a meaningful celebration of this communion.

A Parish as a place of Evangelization and Mission for Pastoral Health

“The parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of missionary outreach. We must admit that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to the people to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission oriented.” (EG 28)

Evangelization is an agent of communion in a Parish Community. What brings them together is their enthusiasm to evangelize after being inspired and trained by the Pastor. Our witnessing to the merciful love of Christ as Camillian pastors is vital in bringing them together with one mind and heart to serve the community. Pope Francis reiterates that our parish community should always be a place of love, compassion, mercy, healing and forgiveness. As a Camillian pastor, we are more demanded to express such compassion to all members of the community especially to the sick.

In 1976, His Eminence, Jaime Cardinal Sin, former Archbishop of Manila, invited the Camillians to administer Our Lady of La Paz Parish in Makati City. At first, the Camillians turned down the invitation because it was not in line with our Charism hoping that he will offer us to manage a Hospital in the Archdiocese. Yet, Cardinal Sin challenged us to make this parish as an open hospital. With that, it becomes a big challenge for our presence in that community to be creative and dynamic in the missionary dimension of pastoral health care. A Parish described by an Archbishop as an “open hospital” entails a big demand for a Mission for pastoral care. In fact this idea is fully affirmed by Pope Francis as regards our creativity in our Pastoral Ministry in the Parish.

“Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way”. I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities. A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory. I encourage everyone to apply the guidelines found in this document generously and courageously, without inhibitions or fear. The important thing is to not walk alone, but to rely on each other as brothers and sisters, and especially under the leadership of the bishops, in a wise and realistic pastoral discernment.”(EG 33)

Our two parishes in the Philippines, Our Lady of Annunciata Parish under the Diocese of Antipolo and Our Lady of La Paz Parish under the Archdiocese of Manila, are open hospitals wherein the members of the community are

generously and courageously inspired by the Spirit of St. Camillus to be of one heart and mind serving the our sick brothers and sisters. Lay Camillian Family members and other mandated and non-mandated organizations, parish ministries are active collaborators to implement the Programs for Pastoral Health Care in these parishes. Along our journey of being a Camillian Parish Priests, we experience a dynamic and fulfilling mission for pastoral health. As we continue to empower them, we inculcate stewardship among them to build a parish that is truly a faith community immersed in the lives of its people.

Thus, the Church as Community of Disciples is Living in Communion, Participating in the Mission of Christ as Priestly, Prophetic and Kingly People and as Church of the Poor. In celebrating the Year of the Parish in the Philippines, we were able to compose a prayer for the faithful to be aware of their role as stewards of God.

I BELIEVE IN STEWARDSHIP

I believe in the God of love
the owner of everything who possesses everyone.
I believe in the God of mercies who has chosen me
to be a steward of Mother Nature and Mother Church,
in spite of who I am and what I have done,
and in spite of the infidelities He knows I will still commit.

I believe in the power of giving
and in the power of loving like Jesus;
because love is the only way to holiness;
giving is the best proof of loving;
and perfect renunciation leads to unlimited fruitfulness.

I believe that in freely giving my time,
in humbly sharing my talents,
and in generously sacrificing my treasures,
the Lord will always provide.
he will take care of all my needs,
and bless me with infinite reward on earth and in heaven.

I will be the first to give.
I will not wait for the others.
I will keep on giving even if others do not give.
I will not be afraid to have none.

I believe that the best time to share is now, not tomorrow,
for tomorrow is an excuse of the greedy.

I will keep my needs and wants simple and few,
for I believe that in reducing my selfishness,

I will grow in happiness and holiness.

I am a steward of the Lord.

I will return all these to Him with abundant yield!

Much is asked of me because much has been given to me

I praise the Lord for His kindness to me

Now and forever.

Amen.

To conclude my reflection, as Camillian Parish Priests, we are all called by the Risen Lord on this international meeting to renew our being stewards, Let us return all these to Him with abundant Yield, Much is asked of us because much has been given to us, We praise the Lord for His Kindness now and forever. Amen.

HAPPY EASTER TO EVERYONE.