

Three Gifts, Three Vocations

Homily of Most Rev. Mylo Hubert C. Vergara, bishop of Pasig, during the Solemn Mass at the Manila Cathedral, June 25, 2016

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THREE GIFTS, THREE VOCATIONS

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Our readings for today's Mass in honor of St. Josemaria Escriva

present to us three gifts and three vocations.

In our first reading from the book of Genesis, we once again listened to an excerpt from the creation story.

Aside from creating the world we live in, the Lord created man. God gave us the precious gift of human life. We acknowledge this as a gift because it was not required of God to create us. St. Thomas Aquinas in one of his proofs of God's existence would put it this way: We need not be but we are. Therefore, there must be a MUST BE who IS. He argues from the fact of our contingent existence. Despite our contingency, God has made us the crown of creation. For this we are grateful to God for the gift of our humanity. But God did not just create man. At the end of our first reading, we also heard: "The Lord God took man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." (cf. Gen 2:15) So he

did something more; he made us stewards of creation.

From the gift of being human, he entrusted us the vocation to care for the earth. This vocation is a responsibility we have to seriously take to heart. Today, we face the alarming reality of environmental degradation brought about by illegal logging, irresponsible mining, cyanide and dynamite fishing, waste mismanagement as well as air and water pollution. These have brought about devastating consequences as natural disasters have plagued our country, then, now and in the future. Pope Francis tells us that as stewards of mother earth, we all have to “care for our common home.” (cf. Laudato Si’) Thus, the gift of our being human prods us to live out seriously our vocation to care for all of created life, our vocation as stewards of creation.

In our second reading from St. Paul's letter to the Romans, we reflect on another precious gift, the gift of being children of God. We have all been bestowed this special dignity. We can call God *Abba*, that is, Father; Jesus is our brother since we share in his sonship; and we are fellow heirs of God's kingdom, meaning we look forward to our eternal inheritance in heaven. Do we understand this? Do we appreciate this gift? Many years ago, after celebrating a morning mass in a chapel of one of the offices in Makati City, a man approached me with a tough question. When I saw him, I had the impression that he was an executive of a company and wanted to learn more about his faith. I guessed that he belonged to the *Opus Dei*. He asked: "Father, is it true that we are better or greater than angels?" Silently, I told myself: "Oh God, what a profound question to ask me in the morning. I did not have any books on hand to research an

answer!" Anyway, with a little wit, I threw back the question to him and replied with a question: "What made you ask that question?" And then, he answered: "Well, Father, somewhere in scripture, it is said that we are children of God, co-heirs of God's kingdom (perhaps he was referring to this text from St. Paul or some other scripture reference from Paul's letters). However, angels are spiritual beings. Though they have that supernatural reality, they do not inherit heaven. We are better off because we do, and by God's grace we will. "Listening to him, I simply said: "You answered correctly!" Thank God he answered his own question and with all humility, I thanked God that I was spared from not being able to answer the question myself.

The gift of being children of God necessitates that we live up to our vocation to be Christians, professing

our faith in word and deed. We heard what St. Paul wrote: "...if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs of Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we also be glorified with him." (cf. Rom 8:17) It is a fact that many of us are nominal Catholics and not in practice. Another term used to describe being nominal is being "split-level" Catholics. Pope Francis have used more coined terms like "part-time" Christians, "half-way" Christians, "bat-like" Christians. If we look forward to receive our eternal inheritance, we have to seriously live out our Christian vocation. This means to be faithful to the task given to us when we were baptized, that is, to share in the priesthood, prophetic role and kingship of Christ.

This leads us to the third gift revealed in our gospel reading from St. Luke. This is the gift of discipleship. Simon Peter with the

other disciples were given this gift as they were fishing on the lake. Jesus told Simon: “(*Duc in altum*) Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” Somehow, these words were meant not just for catching fish. They were being called by Jesus not only to follow his advise to try out another area where to fish but also to consider another paradigm of life, that is, to be his disciples and follow him.

The gift of discipleship also meant a new vocation for Peter and his fellow fishermen. This vocation was specified by Jesus: “Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men.” (cf. Lk 5:10) Their vocation was being sent on a mission to lead others to Christ. Like the apostles, we have been given the gift of discipleship and the vocation to propagate our faith so that others may know, love and serve Jesus Christ. So, practically, what does this

mean for us? Like Peter, we will, at times, receive a disturbing command from Jesus to challenge us to go beyond our comfort zones. Jesus' disturbing call is heard when we are faced with negative social realities like worsening poverty and grave social injustices, and we merely stand by as spectators, feeling indifferent. He disturbs us when we discover that someone knocks at our door and is in need of whatever help we can offer but we look the other way, filled with apathy. Sometimes, he even disturbs us when a family member or a friend simply asks for prayers to uplift him from a quicksand of troubles but we miss out on praying because of other peripheral concerns. Pope Francis has challenged us to missionary disciples. And in this Jubilee Year of Mercy, if we want to live up to this challenge, he wants us to fulfill our mission by doing corporal and spiritual works of mercy. In the

words of the Holy Father, he tells us: “In the corporal works of mercy we touch the flesh of Christ in our brothers and sisters who need to be fed, clothed, sheltered, visited; in the spiritual works of mercy – counsel, instruction, forgiveness, admonishment and prayer – we touch more directly our own sinfulness.” (Lenten Message 2016)

Three gifts: the gift of being human, the gift of being a child of God and the gift of discipleship. Three vocations: the vocation to be stewards of creation, the vocation to be christian and the vocation to be missionary disciples of Christ. These three gifts and three vocations were embodied in the life, person, teachings and witness of St. Josemaria Escriva. St. Josemaria has touched our lives in one way or another, perhaps, even more ways than one. We are here today because we thank God for his being a

precious gift to us and this gift has led us to live and love whatever vocation we have in our lives. It is said: “The gift you have received, give as a gift.” If we are truly grateful to this gift, then we must share it. So who or what are we called to share? Clearly, he is no one else but Christ. After all, St. Josemaria himself taught: “We are children of God, bearers of the only flame that can light up the paths of the earth for souls, of the only brightness which can never be darkened, dimmed or overshadowed. The Lord uses us as torches, to make that light shine out. Much depends on us; if we respond many people will remain in darkness no longer, but will walk instead along the paths that lead to eternal life.” (*The Forge*, 1)

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