



Seeds *of*
FAITH VOL. 3

FRANCIS NEIL GICO JALANDO-ON

SEEDS OF FAITH

VOLUME 3

Francis Neil Gico Jalandon

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Francis Neil Gico Jalando-on

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Foreword

The University has witnessed several transformations and transitions since her founding in 1905. All these have been greatly influenced by the very reason why CPU has lasted the tests of time, faith. Our faith has kept our spirit alive despite the difficulties that we have to go through; has sustained each of us in circumstances where we almost gave up; and most importantly, has made us grateful for God's daily provisions.

As we live by faith, we give our full trust to our Heavenly Father especially on things that we no longer have control over; we seek for His words in moments of loss and abundance; and we rejoice for the little everyday miracles that we encounter.

As the University is always finding means to even strengthen our Christian faith, CPU embraces with an open heart opportunities that spread the gospel. This third volume of the Seeds of Faith is another collection of devotional reading prepared by Rev. Francis Neil G. Jalando-on that will once again inspire and guide each one of us as we become stewards of God's beautiful kingdom. Just like the two other volumes, may this even strengthen our convictions and may this impact our professional and spiritual lives.

I hope and pray that, as we read the texts, we will find time to meditate on them and may we apply these scriptures and messages in our everyday encounters with colleagues, loved ones and even strangers. May we be more committed to anchor our actions and decisions to our faith and may we influence those around us to do the same.

May God bless us all.


TEODORO C. ROBLES, Ph.D.

A New Year Resolution

After eating a lot during the Christmas break, many people put losing weight on the top of their New Year's resolution list.

As Christians, the words of St. Paul can be our New Year's resolution – “Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”

Let me personalize some of the radical demands of Jesus to His disciples so that we can really feel the challenge of Jesus' words:

I will let my light shine before all people.

I will become a salt of the earth.

I will walk the extra mile.

I will deny myself and pick up the cross.

I will love my enemies.

I will let my yes be a yes, and my no a no.

I will serve God and not money.

I will not be a hypocrite. I will get rid of the speck in my eye before I will deal with the speck on my friend's eye.

I will be a good tree that produces good fruit so that I will not be cut down.

I will not worry about my clothing, food, and drink. I will seek the kingdom of God above all for God will give me everything that I need.

And from Paul:

I will do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility I will consider others better than myself. I will look not only to my own interests, but also to the interests of others.

The Model Prayer

The Lord's Prayer found in Matthew 6:9-13 is a model prayer Jesus taught us to follow.

“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen. (KJV)”

The first word in the prayer is “our.” This word is communal rather than personal. This is later affirmed by the following words: “us,” and “we.” Jesus is reminding us that God is the God of everyone. God is not exclusive but inclusive.

In this regard, Jesus is questioning our tendency to make God exclusive to only one denomination, and that God is not present on others. We tend to domesticate God like the Pharisees of Jesus' time. Steve Mosher, former CPU Theology teacher, in his commentary on the book of Romans wrote that when we domesticate God, we reverse the spelling of God. God becomes a Dog.

The exclusivist attitude is quite rampant nowadays in our churches. It is as if we own God and that anytime we can put him inside our pockets and when we need him, we take him out of our pockets again. Let us do away with this personalistic tendency and let God be God. Our personal faith should not be over-emphasized to the detriment of our communal faith. Let us remember that this model prayer of Jesus later evolved to be a confession of faith by the church.

The last portion of the prayer speaks about the boldness of the declaration of Jesus that it only God who is the king of all creation and therefore has the power and the only one that deserves the glory. This is very revolutionary because it contradicts the

prevailing religious atmosphere brought about by the Romans. The emperor has declared himself a deity and required colonized areas to adhere to emperor cult worship. Those who did not worship the emperor faced severe punishments even death. The challenge for us is to continue their declaration that God alone is to be worshipped.

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The challenge for us is to continue their declaration that God alone is to be worshipped.

Live like Jesus

The phrase “Live like Jesus” is often heard because it is always preached by the church. But there is a nagging question that comes to our mind every time we hear the challenge of living like Jesus. The question is: can we really live like Jesus?

This is a very valid question because our faith declares that Jesus is God. This leads us to question our capability of following the commands of Jesus because we are human. We belittle our humanity and blame it when we fall short. Filipinos have this expression, “*sapagkat ako’y tao lamang.*” Thus, when we hear the challenge to live like Jesus, we have in our minds some doubts that even if we try our best, we cannot really live like Him because He is God. The result is that we tend to perceive the teachings of Jesus as ideals, and not imperative commands that need to be obeyed.

Paul addresses this issue of doubt. Philippians chapter 2 speaks about kenosis – the self-emptying of Jesus of his divinity to become truly human. “Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that He had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, He set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, He stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, He lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death — and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion.”

This theological statement by Paul should be enough to erase our uncertainties and doubts that we cannot live like Jesus. Yes, we can live like Jesus with the grace of God through our faith in Jesus the Christ!

Love will last forever

I always wondered why Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 (the love chapter) concluded his discourse by stating “Three things will last forever: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love” (NLT).

In this chapter Paul writes that there are five spiritual gifts that God has given us: tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith, and giving. Paul was saying that without love, the practice of these gifts is nothing.

Without love: the gift of tongues is just a big noise; the gift of knowledge will sometimes make us arrogant and feel important; the gift of faith will make us compare our maturity to others, and this oftentimes leads to envy; the gift of giving will lead us to count what we have given and belittle others.

Paul is reminding us that it is love that enriches the gift and gives it value. Faith, hope and love go hand in hand, but it is love that boosts faith and hope. When you love somebody, you have faith and trust on that somebody. When you love someone, you hope for that someone, and it produces anticipation of new things. This is why love is the greatest.

***...it is love that enriches the gift and gives it value.
Faith, hope and love go hand in hand, but it is love
that boosts faith and hope.***

What we should bring to our relationships

Bring your own uniqueness into your relationships. Do not lose your identity. In the first place, it is the distinctiveness of the person that you fell in love with.

When two different individuals bring their own personality in a relationship it is bound to clash. Do not avoid it. Embrace your differences. Listen to one another. When you do, there will be a creative tension that will eventually blossom into harmony.

When loving, do not drown out the person with your own style of doing things. Molding the person the way you wanted him/her to be will only result to resentment. It will eventually suffocate your loved one, and drive him/her away. Instead, allow the person to grow in his/her own pace and time. Give him/her space. Challenge him/her to be what God wants him/her to be. And love him/her for who he/she is.

Remember that you said “I do” for better and for worst. You can choose only one person to be your wife/husband for the rest of your life. There will be ups and downs. There will be good days but you will also encounter bad days. And sometimes they will come in bundles. Be ready for it. Anticipate it. When it comes, be patient and think first before you say something, because if not, you will later on regret having said those words.

For men, keep in mind the mood swings of a woman before their menstrual cycle. Oftentimes you cannot understand why a woman is easily angered and impatient. It is her biological makeup. Accept it with understanding and grace.

For women, do not ask men their opinion if you already have your own. If the opinion raised is opposite with the other, a woman will usually sulk and be in a bad mood for a number men cannot understand what in the world have he done to make women angry. He just voiced out his opinion that she asked in the first place. A

man should watch out for this, and weigh his words before voicing it out.

Lastly, give God a room in your relationship. If God is outside of it, then your relationship is bound to be selfish, and just centered on the two you. If God is there, your relationship is bound to be a blessing to others. It is because you will always think and act on what is pleasing to God and loving to others. Be a channel of God's bounty and love through your relationships!

When two different individuals bring their own personality in a relationship it is bound to clash. Do not avoid it. Embrace your differences. Listen to one another. When you do, there will be a creative tension that will blossom into harmony.

We must continue to transform these contemplative thoughts of ours into actions. We must not be thinkers only but also doers. Let us help each other develop this ability – the power to do.

Lessons from the 1986 People Power Revolution

Every February, the Philippines commemorates the People Power Revolution of 1986 also known as EDSA I. What have we learned from this significant event that happened a long time ago? Let me share three lessons that we can surmise from this momentous event.

First, it has taught us that Filipinos have the power to accomplish something great. We, Asians have a great ability of thinking. We are thinkers. We like to sit down and contemplate about a myriad of things. Most of the world's religions came from the East.

We must continue to transform these contemplative thoughts of ours into actions. We must not be thinkers only but also doers. Let us help each other develop this ability – the power to do. We must work hand in hand for the prosperity of our beloved country and not just wait in our chairs for a miracle to happen.

Secondly, it has taught us to learn from our history and culture. Our national hero, Dr. Jose Rizal in his great wisdom once said, “ang hindi marunong lumingon sa kanyang pinanggalingan ay hindi makarating sa kanyang paroroonan.”

That is very true. A Filipino who doesn't know why he or she is a Filipino is an embarrassment to the nation. We must remember that we are Filipinos and not Americans nor Europeans nor Australians. Remember the song that says, “ako'y isang pinoy ako'y hindi kano. Huwag kang mahihiya kong ang ilong mo ay pangu.”

We have so much to learn from history. This includes our struggles from foreigners and our aspirations to become a free and independent nation. Let us not be weary of teaching our children our distinctive history, our own Filipino values and our own culture. Let us continue the struggle to preserve our culture, our race and our language.

Thirdly, it has taught us to have the courage to fear God. Proverb 9:10 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”

If we fear God, we will value life, we will respect the sanctity of a person, we will uphold justice and we will work for peace. We can build a community in which everyone bears each other’s burden.



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Be ready anytime

Summer time is usually associated with vacation. We usually find time to be with friends and family, and have a trip to a beach to enjoy the heat of the sun. But in the last few years, our main concern was on how to escape the scorching heat of the sun.

The El Niño spell has continued to wreak havoc to health and livelihood every summer time. It seems that climate change is here to stay.

In one instance, I was having a conversation with National Capital Region coach of Table Tennis. While talking about El Niño and other calamities, he seriously asked if the end of the world is really coming. He quoted to me the verse in Mark 13:7-8 that says, “When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines.”

There is a temptation for us to speculate when the end time will come to us. A lot of religious groups gained membership because they provide dates and proclamations when the apocalypse will happen. But up to now, all these groups were proven to be false. The words of Jesus are still the most authoritative: “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

The lesson for us then is to take heed of the command of Jesus: “Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come...If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

Let us continue to be watchful and at the same time tell others to be on guard and alert.

Overcoming Violence against Women

During the celebration of International Women's Day, I was invited to lecture on the Role of Pastors in Overcoming Violence against Women at the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches headquarters. Here is a portion of my lecture:

Hans Küng wrote that religion can provide “A change in the inner orientation, the whole mentality, the ‘hearts’ of people, and a conversion from a false path to a new orientation for life.” This means that the church has a big role in the formation of theology and practice of the people.

Re-reading of the Bible is very important. Oftentimes, we read the Bible with closed minds. This means that we already have our own interpretation before we actually read it. Re-reading can change our perspective.

The issue of violence against women is related to the issue of dominance. And one of the scripture texts used to reinforce dominance of men on women is Ephesians 5:21ff “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”

If we re-read the words of Paul in the original Greek, we can see that our usual interpretation of the meaning of head and submission is far from the intention of Paul.

There are two different words that mean head in Greek. First, *arche* which means “beginning, chief, boss, ruler of a group.” But Paul did not write that the “husband is the *arche* of the wife, instead, he used another Greek word with another meaning. Paul used *kephale*. *Kephale* is also translated as head but the meaning of this Greek word is a leader means servant of all, who willing to give his life for the body. Verse 23 says, “as Christ is the head

(*kephale not arche*) of the church, His body, of which He is the Savior.”

Be subject to – “wives should be subject to their husbands in everything.” Paul did not use *hupakouo* which means the obedience of a slave to a master, nor did Paul use *peitharcho* which means obedience to someone who is in authority, nor did he use *hupotasso* which means to subordinate someone such as the plight of the conquered.

Instead, Paul used *hupotassomai*. The essential meaning of this word is “to be responsive to the needs of” or in modern translation, “to be supportive of.” It is almost identical to the meaning of agape which is which means “giving up of one’s self-interest to serve and care for another.”

With this re-reading of Paul’s words, we can see the original meaning and hopefully change our theological framework and our way of life especially on how we view and behave towards women and their role in the church and in society.

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Pilgrimage for Peace

Last 2010, the Convention Baptist Ministers Association (CBMA) has launched a program called the Pilgrimage for Peace in relation to the 2010 elections. I continue to believe that the Election Primer we prepared is still relevant to us today.

As we face elections be it in the national or local level, may our minds be not carried away by the whims and schemes of those who aspire for power. Let no one blind us of the issues that had been besetting our society for so long. These issues are unequal sharing of land and resources, poverty, corruption, unemployment, religious indifference, foreign domination, and the like. Most recently, our nation seems to have been plagued with the politics of impunity by those who are in power. This impunity resulted to indiscriminate and extra-judicial killings and disappearances, and warlordism.

Most people are sick and tired of politics, especially during election season. This country has witnessed in its most recent history that everything that could have been used for cheating had been used for cheating. Many have grown hopeless and fatalistic. But some are not giving up because of some sign spots of hope. Some remain optimistic despite the gruesome state of the country because for them the Philippines is like any growing person. The setbacks are right of passage in the growing process.

The CBMA shares the same view. As we reclaim our nation, we cling on to the following: Hope, Vision, and Struggle – Hope amidst despair; Vision of a beloved community in the era of darkness; and a protracted struggle for justice and lasting peace.

This means that every election time, it is not only about changing the incumbent and electing anyone to power; rather elections are about Hope, Vision, and Struggle.

We wish to equip our people with a critical awareness so everyone can cast their votes secretly, and the votes will be

canvassed transparently. It is on this ground that we put forward the following:

PRAYER – The Bible says, pray continually. When there seems to be no one to turn to in these perilous times, a Christian must pray. And while one can always pray personally, let us remember that we can also pray as a community of faith. As we pray together, let us bring into God’s throne of grace and mercy the issues that affect the life of the world God has created. These issues are maybe spiritual, economic, social, and political; in faith we can confidently say, “I know the Lord will answer all our prayers.”

EDUCATION – A good Christian is one who both believes and seeks to understand. As we have our individual and group Bible studies, let us not be contented only with what the Word of God means; let us proceed by asking what the Word means to the World today. Include in your study list elections as the most pressing event in our country. Make a thorough background check of the candidates running for both local and national positions. Check the daily papers, the internet; listen to the radio, get updated of TV news, and so on. Make use of every mode of communication that provides avenue for learning. Share what you glean with your fellow believers, neighbors, and anyone.

ANALYSE – Don’t get contented with mere data and raw information. Investigate. Be critical. Engage in formal and casual conversations with people. Stage a friendly and worthwhile debate. Agree to disagree. Wrestle with each other’s ideas and beliefs. On top of all, do not forget to respect one’s position. Hence, the future of this country does not only lie on the hands of its leaders, but on the maturity and vigilance of the people as a cohesive body to watch over those who govern them.

COMMIT – One can never know that what you know is right unless you make a decision to commit. After scrutinizing the background and track records of the candidates and their parties, and after you have consolidated and articulated the people’s

agenda, you have to make a decision. The decision might very personal, but it may also be collective since others might be sharing the same thing. Let no one catch you in a compromise. Decide for someone or for something. It might wrong, but that's alright. The worst decision one could make is to have no judgment at all. Judge and decide.

ELECT– Suffrage is your basic right. With it, you can be equal with even the most powerful person in the country. That one vote that you have is worth your soul. It should neither be sold nor be given to someone popular, winnable, and had been winning the survey. It matters not that your choice of whom to vote is maybe very unpopular. It is maybe a swim against the current, but that is what it takes to be a live fish; by just going with the flow makes you a dead one. It may not be a winning vote, but a vote of principle; it may not be a timely vote, but at least a vote of hope. Unpopular, yes, but what is popular is not always right and what is right is not always popular. Make your vote an expression of your protest against evil. Make your vote a flicker of light for others to see, so they will share the same vision and hopefully join the ongoing struggle of making a better community.

...every election time, it is not only about changing the incumbent and electing to power anyone; but election is about Hope, Vision, and Struggle.

A promise, and a possibility

A few years back, we watched our son Kairos received his diploma from the CPU Kindergarten. I was overjoyed to note that the theme of the graduation ceremony was “I am a Promise, I am a Possibility.” Before the program ended, all the graduating kindergartners shouted the theme with smiles on their faces and twinkling in their eyes that gave the audience an assurance and hope that indeed with the grace of God, our children will someday realize their God-given potential, and be what God intends them to be.

In return to the kinder graduates’ declaration, I asked myself what should I do to help make their statement a reality. What flashed in my mind was a song I learned during my college days. It is a song that continues to challenge me to be involved in what is happening around us. Find the clip in YouTube and sing the song:

PUSONG LIGAW ISIPAN AY NAG-GAGALA
WALA NANG DATI NIYANG TUWA, KAWAWA
NAKALULUNGKOT KUNG SIYA’Y
IYONG PAGMAMASDAN
NGUNIT MARAMING GANITO SA ‘TING LIPUNAN

SISISIHIN ANG ATING PAMAHALAAN
SA GANITONG KALAGAYAN
NGUNIT ANONG GINAGAWA NG SIMBAHAN
TAYO BA’Y TUMUTULONG O TAGA-PUNA NA LANG

BUHAY KRISTIYANO’Y
DI HALLELUYAH LANG
MAGING BAHAGI KA
NG PAGTULONG SA LIPUNAN
MANALANGIN AY TAMA DIN NAMAN
LALO NA’T MAY GAWA
AT DI LANG SA SALITA

GANO'N ANG GINAWA NG ATING PANGINOON
SA MGA NAGDARAHOP SIYA ANG TUGON
SA KANILANG MGA PANGANGAILANGAN
ABOT ANG KANYANG TULONG
SA MAGDAMAG MAGHAPON

PROBLEMA MINSAN SA 'TI'Y SA MALAYO NAKATINGIN
IBANG BANSA 'Y GUSTONG MISYUNIN
HINDI NAMAN MASAMA KUNG ATIN 'TONG GAGAWIN
NGUNIT SANA NAMAN UNAHIN ANG BANSA NATIN

***BUHAY KRISTIYANO'Y
DI HALLELUYAH LANG
MAGING BAHAGI KA
NG PAGTULONG SA LIPUNAN***

The gates of hell will not prevail

One promise that Jesus said about the Church is that "the gates of hell will not prevail against it." What is the meaning of this?

We put gates in our property to primarily keep people out -- to defend our house, family, business or whatever might be inside our property.

In the context of what Jesus said "gates of hell" can be understood as defensive in nature. What then is in the offense? The Church is in the offense. And if the Church continues its mission, the "gates of hell" cannot withstand it -- it will surely crumble down and will release people from hell-like situations. Christians are people who were once slaves of sin and have become slaves of righteousness, as Paul would describe it.

As members of the Church, we need to be militant and continue our offense. As promised by Jesus, the gates of hell stand no chance. Let us be emboldened by this promise.

***As members of the Church, we need to be militant
and continue our offense. As promised by Jesus,
the gates of hell stand no chance.***

Lessons from Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday is celebrated because of the palms laid down by the people in the road during the triumphal entry of Jesus in Jerusalem. But in the midst of the joyful exclamation of the people shouting “Hosanna” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” “Hosanna to the son of David”, Jesus was grieving. Luke 19:41-42 says, “But as they came closer to Jerusalem and Jesus saw the city ahead, he began to weep. “How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace...”

Jesus cried on what is happening in Jerusalem. He cried because he had seen enough. His eyes were full of compassion and care. His tears were tears of longing and yearning for Jerusalem to soften their hearts and to open their eyes. Probably, Jesus was not hearing the words of “Hossana” but “crucify him” because days later they turned their backs on him and demanded his death.

The subject of peace is very relevant to us today. Today, there are a lot of election-related violence happening in the Philippines. Jesus is crying because like the people of Jerusalem during his time on earth, people are not willing to listen to his way to peace.

Jesus is telling us to repent from our sins if we want peace. Repentance requires two things: first, admission of sin or guilt done to God and towards people; second, renouncing of that sin or guilt.

What follows after repentance is reconciliation. If we repent our sins, forgiveness and healing will then follow. The mark of our reconciliation is when we forsake our own will, our own self-interest and follow the will of God.

Reconciliation will result to transformation or change in our outlook of life and attitude towards God and people. Reformation will happen.

When we complete the cycle of 3 Rs – Repentance, Reconciliation, Reform – the result is peace.

As we celebrate Holy Week every year, let us reflect on how we can contribute in bringing about peace. Let us not put tears in the eyes of Jesus. Let us follow Jesus' way of peace.

Repentance requires two things: first, admission of sin or guilt done to God and towards people; second, renouncing of that sin or guilt.

Reconciliation will result to transformation or change in our outlook of life and attitude towards God and people. Reformation will happen.

Why do some people do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus?

In defense of the resurrection of Jesus, former British Chief Justice Lord Darling said: “There exists such overwhelming evidence, positive and negative, factual and circumstantial, that no intelligent jury in the world would fail to bring in a verdict that the resurrection story is true.”

The book of Lee Strobel *“The Case for Christ”* and its subsequent documentary film, report that even though there is overwhelming evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, a lot of people are still not convinced that Jesus rose from the dead, and the number of skeptics is increasing.

Matthew 28:11-15 narrates to us a story that some of the guards of the tomb when to the chief priests and reported to them what happened. Consequently, the chief priests and the elders gathered to discuss the report and devised a plan. They gave money to the soldiers and told them to spread the news that the disciples of Jesus came during the night and stole the body. And this lie was consistently circulated by the religious leaders of that time.

This story gives us some reasons that although the resurrection really happened, the rumors and lies spread by the Jewish leaders are still being spread in our society by modern day Chief Priests, Elders and Soldiers.

We are sometimes like those Chief Priests. They are the kind of people who are only concerned about their position in society. We are embarrassed to let other people know that we are Christians. We think that it will degrade our position in the society if we practice our Christian faith openly. Because of this, we help perpetuate the lie that Jesus did not rise from the dead because the effect of his resurrection cannot be seen in our lives.

We are sometimes like those elders. They are the kind of people who forsake the plan of God and instead devised devious plans to benefit our own self-interests, and we do it by hook or by crook. In the case of the Elders in the story, they resulted to bribery.

We are sometimes like those soldiers who took the bribe. They followed the orders of the Elders without objection. We oftentimes follow orders like blind people even if the orders are dead wrong. We fail to question what is happening around us.

If you have seen yourself like a modern day Chief Priest, Elder or Soldier, it is time for us to purge this kind of personalities or attitudes. Let us be like the women who when they received the news from the angel that Jesus is alive, they were filled with joy and hurried themselves to tell the good news.

If you have seen yourself as a modern day Chief Priests, Elders or Soldiers, it is time for us to purge this kind of personalities or attitudes. Let us be like the women who when they received the news from the angel that Jesus is alive, they were filled with joy and hurried to tell the good news.

What the story of Thomas can teach us

There are many stories after the resurrection of Jesus for he stayed for 40 days before his ascension. One of these stories was about Thomas.

Let me share four things that we can learn from the story of Thomas.

First, if we continue to miss gathering with the believers of Jesus, then we will continue to miss the blessings of God.

This is what happened to Thomas. John 20:19ff tells us that he was not with the disciples when Jesus appeared to them on Sunday night (the resurrection happened early on that day). He missed the commissioning of Jesus. He was not there when Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you. Receive the Holy Spirit.”

How many times have we missed to be with the fellowship of the community of faith?

Second, we must trust the words of our fellow believers, and we ourselves must also be trustworthy.

Thomas did not trust the testimony of his fellow disciples. He did not believe their story that Jesus is alive and was with them. Thomas declared in front of them that he will not believe their words unless he can put his hand on the wounds of Jesus. The 10 disciples must have felt very bad because after Judas betrayed Jesus, another one of their own is in doubt.

Let us be responsible with our words, and let us be held accountable with what we have said. Do we still have Palabra de Honor (Word of Honor)?

Third, Jesus is waiting patiently for us to believe.

Jesus had all the right to be angry with Thomas. They were together for many years. He could have said, “Shame on you! We were together for many years yet you do not believe.” But when Jesus appeared to them, he still said, “Peace be with you. Put your finger here and do not be faithless anymore. Believe!”

Let us believe and be true to the pronouncement of Jesus, “Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.” Do we still doubt?

Fourth, let us be ready to humble ourselves, admit our mistakes and declare that Jesus is our Lord and our God.

Thomas, when confronted with the reality of the resurrection, was humble enough to exclaim that Jesus is his Lord and God. The proof of this turnaround from doubt to faith is found on his commitment to spread the good news of Jesus to other parts of the world. Church history tells us that Thomas went to India and established a church there in 52 AD. About 20 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the gospel takes root in India. Until now the St. Thomas Church in North Paravur, India still stands.

Let us be responsible with our words, and let us be held accountable with what we have said.

Learnings from the Emmaus story

One of the post-resurrection stories is the story of two disciples travel towards Emmaus. What can we learn from this story?

First, let us continue to talk about Jesus. The two disciples talked non-stop about the Jesus-event. They were passionate in discussing what happened. How about us? Are we passionate in talking about Jesus?

Second, let us include others in our conversation about Jesus. While talking about Jesus, they opened themselves to accommodate another person in their conversation. How about us? Do we open ourselves and include others?

Third, let us acknowledge Jesus in the midst of our conversations. Though they were passionate in discussing about Jesus and opening themselves to another person they surprisingly failed to recognize Jesus in their midst. They have to be reminded through the breaking of bread.

The same is true with us. We oftentimes need to pause for a while and acknowledge God's presence in our midst.

***We oftentimes need to pause for a while and
acknowledge God's presence in our midst.***

Teachings from the beach

Another interesting story after the resurrection of Jesus was on the third time that he appeared after he was raised from the dead. This is the story of Jesus coming to the Sea of Tiberias in the early morning. The account of which is in John 21.

We can learn three lessons from this story:

First, Jesus comes to where you are. In this instance, Jesus came to His disciples in their workplace – the sea.

This lesson is very comforting for all of us because it teaches us that Jesus is not someone who is accessible only on Sundays, or in church but He comes to us wherever we may be. And He is always there when we need Him most.

Let us expect Jesus in every aspect of our lives. Sometimes, His presence can be felt in mysterious ways. One time, I was invited by the pastors of Luzon to be with them in their fellowship of Luzon, Romblon and Mindoro pastors in Tagaytay. While contemplating if I will attend, I received a gift from my first cousin. It was a t-shirt with a print in front that says, “Tagaytay.” Was it coincidence? Maybe. But deep in my heart I believe it was God’s presence confirming His approval that I will attend. So I went.

Second, let us be open to new ideas and opportunities. They have learned before that when you follow the commands of Jesus, something good is bound to happen.

The experience that they had when Jesus called them to be fishers of men was similar to this one. The would-be disciples were fishing out on the sea on that night but they caught nothing. They argued with the command of Jesus to cast their nets again. But when they did, they caught a lot of fish that they even requested other boats to join them. Now, on this account, although they do

not recognize Jesus yet, they followed Him when they told them to cast their nets on the right side and they will find some fish.

Sometimes we push our own ideas and neglect the ideas of others. What the disciples did is teaching us not be close-minded nor hard-headed but to allow the workings of the Holy Spirit to work in us, or through the lives of others. God might be speaking to us through other people. When we open our lives to others, something good is in store.

Third, let us relax and enjoy life in the fellowship with others. The account in John 21 tells us that Jesus was beside the sea, with a fire of burning coals with fish on it and some bread. Wow! What a picturesque way of telling us to take a rest, eat with others, throw away our inhibitions, laugh, unload our burdens and just enjoy what God has given us.

We are sometimes so busy that we missed having a quality life. Let us take a break. Jesus is calling us to have some “sinugba nga may sinamakan ukon patis nga may kalamunding, kag nagakinamot sa kilid sang baybay.”

***Let us expect Jesus in every aspect of our lives.
Sometimes, His presence can be felt in mysterious
ways.***

God will continue to remind us

Another post-resurrection story is about the disciples who went back to their previous occupation -- fishing. Jesus appeared to them and they had a miraculous catch.

What lesson can we learn from this encounter?

One important lesson that we see here is that though we may be stubborn, Jesus will continue to remind us of our purpose in life.

It is to be noted that this is the third time that Jesus appeared to his disciples. In the first two appearances of Jesus the disciples were hiding. In this instance they were fishing in the sea.

What can we see in this picture? We can reflect that they were not yet fully convinced to become messengers of the Gospel. Two appearances did not convince them. They needed another one. And by this time they left their nets and became what they were truly called in the first place -- fishers of men.

The story of the disciples rings true to our own stories. Oftentimes we need to be reminded many times through many revelations of God before we can fully commit ourselves to the mission that God has given to us. But the best thing here is this -- God is patient and will continue to post signs along the way to remind us of our true calling.

***God is patient and will continue to post signs along
the way to remind us of our true calling.***

Going Deeper and Coming Ashore

In one of the post-resurrection stories, we can observe some similarities that happened in the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

In Luke, the would-be disciples were commanded by Jesus to launch into the deep because they had no catch for the whole night. The result was a miraculous catch of fish.

In John 21 the disciples who went back as fishermen were commanded by Jesus to cast their nets just a hundred yards from the shore. The result was also a miraculous catch of fish.

What lessons can we draw from this? I can see two things here: going deeper, and coming ashore.

In discipleship training, we need to bring people into the deep. This means training them deeper and letting their faith be tested by the big waves.

When the disciples finished their training in the deep waters they then came near the shore to invite other would-be disciples to join them in hauling the catch. This should be the same in our discipleship training. The cycle of going deeper, and coming ashore must continue.

We indeed need to go deeper in our studies and in our faith, and then must come ashore and bring others into the deep again and again.

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The wonder of the spread of the Gospel

One would wonder why the gospel of Jesus reached us, and is still reaching others. This is a great wonder because Jesus lived only until the age of 33. His public ministry lasted for only 3 years, and just concentrated in some certain parts of Israel.

The answer to this mystery is that the Word who became flesh and lived among us did not leave without witnesses. In one of the post-resurrection stories, Jesus gathered his disciples and told them, "...you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere..." (Acts 1:8).

Yes, Jesus died but he resurrected and continued to live on the hearts of his disciples and apostles. The gospel reached us because those who came before us acted on their faith.

Those that came before us were Jesus Christ's flesh here on earth since our Lord cannot be seen nor can be touched anymore. Their bodies were presented as living sacrifices. As Christians we are challenged by the gospel to incarnate Jesus Christ in our lives.

We can do this incarnation or giving flesh to the teachings of Jesus Christ by:

First, having eyes that show compassion to the poor. It has been said that the eyes are the windows of the soul. Jesus is counting on us to be His eyes nowadays.

Second, having a nose that smells the fragrance of a person. We are not to point out just the odor of another person but acknowledge his/her fragrance so that we will see the good in him/her and develop it.

Third, having ears that listen to the cries of those who are oppressed. Listening in this sense is not about being passive but being active. Let us give actions to what we have heard and making "love your neighbor" as the basis of our actions.

Fourth, having a mouth that speaks encouragement to the weary. Let us remember that words can either destroy or build. When we have already spoken, we cannot just simply return the words into our mouth. There will always be consequences. Let us choose our words wisely.

Fifth, having arms that lift up the weak. Let us pull up those who are down along our journey of faith. Let us encouragingly push those who are slowing down. Let our hands be the guide to those who are lost.

Sixth, having a heart that is willing to die for a friend. This is what Christ has done a long time ago and our fore parents in faith have done the same. Let us remember the words “there is no greater love than laying down one’s life for a friend.”

Seventh, having feet that will go to the lost. How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news to those who are in the dark and cannot see where they are going because they are lost.

Lastly, the Word became flesh and lived among us. He identified himself with the poor, weak, oppressed and weary. But Jesus Christ is not here anymore. The good thing is that he did not leave without witnesses. He left us. He died but only to live in our hearts. Let us incarnate him in our lives by being his eyes, nose, ears, mouth, arms, heart and feet.

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Our LABOR is not in vain

Every May 1 we celebrate Labor Day in honor of all the workers. In 1 Corinthians 15:58 Paul encourages us to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for our labor in the Lord is not in vain.

What should we LABOR in?

L - Loving God and neighbor. Jesus reminds us that all the Laws, Writings and the Prophets hang on the commandment to love God with all our being and loving others the way He loves us.

A - Accepting the will of God. Jesus' central message in the Gospels was the Kingdom of God. God can only be king in our lives if we let Him rule our lives. And God can only reign when we deny ourselves and follow His will.

B - Believing that Christ has already won the victory. We already know what will happen in the future -- Satan and his minions will be totally defeated. The battle between good and evil continues at present and we need to take the side of the victors. Good will eventually triumph over evil. Thus, let us live victorious lives.

O - Obeying the commands of God. The commands of God are not ideals but imperatives. We need to get our marching orders from the Bible and fulfill it.

R - Relaying the Gospel to others. The message of salvation in Jesus Christ was heard by others because it was relayed to them. We need to continue in relaying the Gospel to those who have yet to hear it.

Biblical Leaders

The Bible has a set of criteria on choosing leaders. Before Israel had Kings, their form of government of Israel started on what is called theocracy – a government ruled by God through the prophets, judges and messengers. Later, when they entered Canaan, they clamored for a king like all the nations around them.

God gave them a set of parameters on what kind of king God desires for them. Deuteronomy 17:15-20 tells us about these criteria.

First, “He must be from among your own brothers. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not a brother Israelite.”

This challenges us to vote for leaders who know our Philippine situation. Our next leaders should not be an "alien" or a "foreigner" to our real situation. Popularity should not be our number one basis but to choose someone who really can situate himself/herself on what is happening around us and propose solutions to solve the problems we are facing.

Second, “The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself”

“Horses” in this verse means “a great army.” Therefore, we must not choose leaders who prefer war or violence as his/her way of solving things. The campaign period has taught us that a lot of candidates have resorted to threats, and killing their political enemies just to ensure their victory. Let us not vote for these violent people.

Third, “must not make the people return to Egypt...for the Lord has told you, ‘You are not to go back that way again.’”

Egypt is a symbol of slavery and oppression. God intends that we must be free, and be given the opportunity to actualize our potential. Let us choose leaders who will not enslave and oppress

us. We must be courageous enough to stand on what is right and defy the tyrants in our land.

Fourth, “He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray.”

This criterion reminds us to elect leaders who are not immoral. Let us say no to politicians who oftentimes have the gall to flaunt their mistresses in the public.

Fifth, “He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.”

Corruption is now the number one perceived problem in the country that causes poverty. One wonders why the national candidates spend billions of money in their campaign. I was told by a TV executive that a 30-second advertisement costs about P400,000.00 during primetime. With this amount in mind, we can count how much money the politicians have already spent every week just for this type of campaign.

Let us make a concerted effort to stop corruption. It starts by saying no to vote buying.

Sixth, “When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law...It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees.”

We must choose leaders who are God-fearing, and takes seriously that his/her way of life is according to the will of God. Let us not choose the religious but rather the righteous.

Seventh, “and not consider himself better than his brothers...”

We must choose leaders who are humble. The attitude of humbleness is not a sign of defeat but rather a sign that he respects

other people and their right to be heard. There are a lot of arrogant politicians that act as if they are the messiah. The leaders must remember the adage that says, “Come let us reason together.”

Let us ponder who among our leaders fits the biblical criteria.

Let us choose leaders who will not enslave and oppress us. We must be courageous enough to stand on what is right and defy the tyrants in our land.

We must choose leaders who are God-fearing, and takes seriously that his/her way of life is according to the will of God. Let us not choose the religious but rather the righteous.

Praying for a better Philippines

During the May 2016 elections, we prayed that our election will result to a better Philippines. My prayer is that our VOTE will bring leaders who are:

V - Visionary

The Bible is reminding us that without vision the people will perish. May our new leaders envision visions that will bring the Philippines to a better situation.

O - Obedient to the will of God

There is always a battle of wills inside us. May our leaders always seek the will of God rather than their own wills.

T - Teachers who will mold the next generation

We always look up to our leaders as our teachers. May they teach us with godly values and restore our pride as Filipinos.

E - Examples who are worthy to be emulated

We expect our leaders to be great examples we want to follow. May our leaders be the persons whom we can point to our children as worthy examples. May they have the moral integrity to say what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

May they have the moral integrity to say what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

On leadership, and Mother's Day

As we celebrate Mother's Day, let us learn leadership lessons from mothers. When we hear the word mother, we would always associate it with care. Let me share 5 things from the letters of word CARES.

Like a mother, we hope for a leader who is Compassionate.

Jesus was very compassionate. Matt 9:36, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

Mothers have great compassion for their children. They are always concerned about their children. They will always consider the plight of their children before their own interest.

Like a mother, we hope for a leader who shows Affection.

The affection of God to us can be glimpsed in these verses, "...You will nurse from her breast and be carried at her side; you will play on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so I'll comfort you..." (Isaiah 66:12-13)

We really need leaders who will show their love and care all throughout their terms, and not just during election time.

Like a mother, we hope for a leader who Restores us.

Psalm 23:1-3 says, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul."

Our country needs leaders who will restore our Filipino pride and lead the country out of poverty and into economic, social, political and spiritual prosperity.

Like a mother, we hope for leaders who will Elevate our status.

Leadership is often seen by others as a way to marginalize the masses. We can often hear threats like “Just wait until I become a leader, and then I will trample you down.”

Elevating the status of the marginalized was a way of life for Jesus. He talked to women, tax collectors, sick and poor. God is a God of life. Jesus had a preferential option for the poor because the poor were dying before their time. Jesus always pronounced a blessing to the marginalized sector.

Lastly, we also hope for leaders who will always Seek the will of God.

Jesus always sought the will of God. But he was also tempted to follow his own will. The Lord’s prayer reminds us that even Jesus was tempted to follow his own will. But later on, he prayed “not my will but thy will be done.”

We must also convert the perceived negative Filipino trait that is “Bahala na.” Actually, this phrase was originally “Bathala na” or “thy will be done.” This only shows that Filipinos are culturally a people with great faith on the Almighty God.

Happy Mother’s Day to all mothers! Let us pray that our leaders will learn from mothers and will really care for all of us.

Elevating the status of the marginalized was a way of life for Jesus. He talked to women, tax collectors, sick and poor. God is a God of life.

Holy Spirit, may you empower us

In the Old Testament, Pentecost was a Jewish harvest festival that was celebrated 50 days after the Passover, the feast celebrating the passing over of the angel of death among the doors of the Israelites while they were in Egypt.

In Christianity, the Passover and the Pentecost have an added meaning. The Passover Lamb that saves us from death is Jesus Christ -- His blood is painted in us. The Pentecost became a plentiful harvest for the early Church because when the Holy Spirit empowered the disciples the result was 3,000 people were added to the fold of believers.

Acts 1:8 reminds us that the Holy Spirit is the one that empowers us. It is not the local church nor the denomination nor our loved ones that empower us, although they are our great inspiration, but the Holy Spirit.

What does the Holy Spirit empower us to do? The Holy Spirit gives us the power to become witnesses of Jesus in our homes, our community, and to the other parts of the world.

Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will anoint us so that we can be effective witnesses of Jesus wherever we may be situated. Indeed the symbolism is clear: Pentecost Day in Acts was a great harvest because they were empowered by the Holy Spirit. We, too, can bring a great harvest when we are filled by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit gives us the power to become witnesses of Jesus in our homes, our community, and to the other parts of the world.

May the Peace that Jesus gives be in us

Many people feel indignant when they see a crime reported in the news. Studies show, however, that these same people would deny the possibility that it will also happen to them. That is, until crime hits them.

The reality is that in this world as Jesus said, there will be trouble. Jesus indeed did not promise us a world without problems instead He promised us peace, thus, we must take courage because He has already overcome the world (John 16:33).

What does this peace mean in the midst of troubles? The peace that is in Jesus is a peace in the heart, a state of spiritual wholeness, a peaceful disposition of our spirit that will give us strength and calmness especially in the midst of troubles. The promise of Jesus gives us the confidence and hope that evil schemes will always be exposed, and what is right will find a way to emerge and overcome.

The reality is that in this world as Jesus said, there will be trouble. Jesus indeed did not promise us a world without problems instead He promised us peace...

The Great Commission

40 days after Resurrection Day, Christians would celebrate Ascension Day – commemorating the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ to heaven who was last seen in the Mount of Olives. Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He left an imperative command to His gathered disciples. This command is now famously called, “The Great Commission.”

I once heard a sermon illustration about a gathering of ministers in a mission conference under the theme “The Great Commission.” On their opening celebration, a wind passed by and the letter “C” in the cutout letters fell off. Although the spelling is wrong, the congregation understood the message – the Great Commission has oftentimes become the Great Omission.

What is the message of the Great Commission for us?

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” This is a very revolutionary statement from Jesus. The emperor of Rome during the time of Jesus was the one considered to be the authority under heaven and on earth. By declaring this statement, Jesus has declared that nobody should usurp the authority of God, and that His disciples must be courageous enough to stand on this declaration. True enough, the disciples stood on their faith and were martyred because of it.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.” Jesus is expecting us to be this kind of example: “If anyone wants to follow me, he must deny himself, and pick up his cross. Any of you who do not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”

“Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Paul reminds us the meaning of baptism – we share in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ during immersion and rising up from the water.

“And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Let me refer you to Matthew 5 to 7 for the commands of Jesus. These chapters are a constant source of reminder of what Jesus demands of us.

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” In doing the mission that Jesus has commanded us to do, He promises to be with us. We can just imagine the comfort of these words during the times of persecution in the early church. This promise continues to be true until today.

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” In doing the mission that Jesus has commanded us to do, He promises to be with us.

We are mandated to teach others

Vacation Church School every summer is usually for our children and not for adults. But some churches now have they designed a curriculum specifically for adults.

The teaching ministry is indeed part of the Great Commission that Jesus commanded us to do -- "and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

We can see three things in this mandate:

First, we are mandated to teach others. It is the duty of each Christian to teach. We cannot delegate that duty to others.

Second, we must study all the commands of Jesus because that is the content of our curriculum. People must have the knowledge and understanding of the commands of Jesus and they will know it by studying the Word of God.

Third, the main objective of our teaching ministry is for people not just to know the commands of Jesus, but more importantly to obey them. The desired result of our teaching is that people will be obedient to the will of God.

The main objective of our teaching ministry is for people not just to know the commands of Jesus, but more importantly to obey them.

The peace that Jesus gives

Peace is very elusive. This is maybe the reason why we continue to discuss it. Jesus spoke about peace many times. Let me give you five points using the first letters of the word PEACE.

P – Pray for peace. During the birth of Jesus, the angels sang a beautiful prayer: “Peace on earth and goodwill among people.” Let us continue to pray this kind of prayer, and hope that someday we may experience continues peace and goodwill.

E – Educate the people about peace. Jesus taught his disciples that when they enter a house they should always say, “Peace to this house.” There is a Filipino tradition when building a house – a comb (husay) is put in every post of the house when building the foundation. This comb (husay) symbolizes the desire of the occupants of the house to have peace: “May ara sang kahusayan ang pangabuhì sa sulod sang balay kag wala nagagumon ang pangabuhì.” Let us hope that this tradition will be passed on to the next generation. I just experienced it the other day when my mother-in-law requested the carpenters building our bahay kubo to put the husay in all the posts.

A – Advocate peace. Jesus advocated peace by challenging the violent practices of the Jews. One of these is the principle of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But Jesus said, “I tell you, when someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other cheek also.” This calls for a radical change on our behavior. Let us not turn a blind eye on this command of Jesus.

C – Coordinate with other groups and organizations working for peace. Jesus was once told by his disciples that they stopped someone who was driving out demons in his name. Jesus scolded John and said, “Do not stop him...for whoever is not against us is for us.” This should be a lesson to us to be open for partnerships with other groups. God is working also through them.

E – Endeavor the culture of peace. Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God.” It is a continuous struggle for me whether or not I should allow my children to watch the famous cartoon show, “Tom and Jerry.” Although hilarious, we can find a lot of violence in the show. Some of them are sometimes practiced by my children. My wife and I are doing our best to counter this culture, and instill to our children the culture of peace. To my fellow parents, let us start teaching the culture of peace while our children are still young.

Peace be with you!

There is a Filipino tradition when building a house – a comb (husay) is put in every post of the house when building the foundation. This comb (husay) symbolizes the desire of the occupants of the house to have peace...

Pentecost Day

Pentecost Day is celebrated 50 days from Resurrection Day. But a lot of churches nowadays forget to celebrate it.

The word Spirit in Old Testament Hebrew is "*ruach*" and in New Testament Greek is "*pneuma*." These words means "breath," "wind," or "breeze." A kindred verb is "*rawach*" which means "to breath," "having breathing room," or "to be spacious."

This reminds us that it is God that gives us life, and together with it God gives us space to live our own life. God, being our life-giver, gives us a "breathing room" to practice our own unique personality. God does not choke us. Rather, God gives us the freedom and the opportunity to live who we really are.

The Holy Spirit is also called the "*paraclete*." This Greek word means, "one who consoles, one who intercedes on our behalf, a comforter or an advocate." This proves true the promise of God "to never leave us nor forsake us."

The Holy Spirit is our Teacher. John 16:12-13 says, "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth." God will teach us through the Holy Spirit, "...over and over, one line at a time, one line at a time, a little here, and a little there!" Isa 28:10. This is a great comfort to all of us because God continues to speak to us, and many times even in mysterious ways. Let us just be open to the workings of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is our Reminder of the words of Jesus. John 14:26 says, "...the Holy Spirit...will remind you of everything I have told you." In this modern time, we are accustomed of using alarm clocks, calendar reminders on our cellphones, and organizers. The next time our alarms and reminders rings, let us be reminded that the Holy Spirit continues to remind us to follow the commands of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is our Conscience. John 16:8 says, "...the Holy Spirit will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment." How many times have we felt the piercing in our hearts when we have committed an act contrary to the will of God? That is the work of the Holy Spirit. Let us listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

God, being our life-giver, gives us a "breathing room" to practice our own unique personality. God does not choke us. Rather, God gives us the freedom and the opportunity to live who we really are.

Jesus is crying with us

Losing a loved one is very hard. You cannot prepare for it. You do not look forward to it but surely it will come to each one of us sooner or later because death is part of our lives.

How did Mary and Martha deal with the death of their brother Lazarus?

John 11:19 tells us that Mary and Martha were surrounded by friends and family to comfort them. This is a great example for all of us. We need to be with the bereaved family in their time of bereavement. We are not there to fill in what they lost, because we could never do that, but we are there to show them that we care.

The story also tells us that Mary and Martha were looking for Jesus. It was Jesus that gave them hope. Jesus reminded them that there will be a resurrection of the dead in the last days and they will be reunited again. They got a glimpse of that resurrection when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

John 11:35 reminds us that when we cry and shed tears in the loss of a loved one, our God is crying with us. The shortest verse in the Bible expresses who God is -- God is full of compassion. He cares so much and He loves you and me. Mary and Martha were comforted when Jesus cried with them. We, too, should take hope knowing that God is our constant comfort.

John 11:35 reminds us that when we cry and shed tears in the loss of a loved one, our God is crying with us. The shortest verse in the Bible expresses who God is -- God is full of compassion

Life lessons from school

June is usually the time when the school year starts in the Philippines. When I see the faces of new students, my mind would flashback to when I first entered the university. A lot has happened from that time until now but the lessons that I learned as a college freshman are still life lessons I practice today. Let me share those lessons with you.

First, we must have the constant eagerness to learn and unlearn. First time students have a great passion to study and discover things. Yet, this passion would later wane off for some of us. We become bored and just go through the rituals of life. Later we just find out that we have missed a lot of things. This is the time then that we regret the things that we have not done.

Hopefully, this lesson can be learned until it's too late. Psalm 90:10, 12 says, "Our lifetime is seventy years or, if we are strong, eighty years, Teach us, then, O Lord, how short our lives really are so that we may be wise and live according to your purpose."

Second, we must continue to gain new friends for life becomes beautiful when you share it with others. Most of us can probably remember how we became friends with our current friends. They were probably our seatmates or someone walking in the campus road towards another building and we asked them directions where our class is located. With these newfound friends, we share food, study together, sleep over in their boarding house or their homes. Then we would later agree to take the same class schedules in the next semester until we graduate. And soon after, without us consciously knowing it, these faces that we met during our first year in college have become our friends for life.

Let it be that we will not stop making friends. Jesus once said to his disciples, "I now call you friends."

Third, we must work hard because a good life is not handed to us in a silver platter. I learned this lesson when I first got a rating

of INC (incomplete) in one of my subjects. I have to work doubly hard in the next semester just to complete my term papers and other assignments. Those who do not learn this lesson would get a lapse subject, and have to re-enroll it. Worst, some would drop out of school.

This lesson teaches us not to give up and to continue to work hard. Let us remember that God honors an honest labor. He always rewards the faithful.

***We must have the constant eagerness to
learn and unlearn.***

***Let us remember that God honors an honest labor.
He always rewards the faithful.***

Independence Day

June 12 Philippine Independence Day. Filipinos celebrate the Philippine Declaration of Independence from Spain on June 12, 1898.

What can we learn from this National Day of Freedom? Here is a Psalm written by King David when he was old. This Psalm was his prayer to his son Solomon who is his successor as king of Israel. Psalm 72 speaks about freedom, justice, hope – the values that our Independence Day teaches us. It also a wish of what kind of leader we are longing for.

Here is Psalm 72:1-4, 12-14

Give your love of justice to the king, O God,
and righteousness to the king's son.

Help him judge your people in the right way;
let the poor always be treated fairly.
May the mountains yield prosperity for all,
and may the hills be fruitful.

Help him to defend the poor,
to rescue the children of the needy,
and to crush their oppressors.

He will rescue the poor when they cry to him;
he will help the oppressed, who have no one to defend them.

He feels pity for the weak and the needy,
and he will rescue them.
He will redeem them from oppression and violence,
for their lives are precious to him.

Let this be our prayer also for the leaders of our country, and all the leaders, be it in our institutions or churches.

Let us celebrate our Freedom Day

June 12, 2016 was the 118th anniversary of the Philippine Independence Day. Filipinos were once again reminded of the sacrifices made during the struggle for freedom against the colonizers.

As Christians, we gained our freedom because of the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

How then should we commemorate our freedom day from the power of sin and darkness?

First, we must share our own testimony of how Christ saved us.

All of us have different stories yet it has a common thread -- at one time somebody shared the Gospel to us and we received Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. By sharing our own stories, we are repeating it, and we are telling ourselves that we will not forget it.

Second, we must mark and celebrate dates that are meaningful to our Christian faith.

The Bible is full of feasts celebrating God's faithfulness in the life of Israel. Passover Feast, for example, is a celebration of how the angel of death passed over the houses of the Israelites whose doors were painted with the blood the lamb while they were still in Egypt as slaves. We, too, need to celebrate for God is also good, faithful and merciful to us.

By sharing our own stories, we are repeating it, and we are telling ourselves that we will not forget it.

What the Bible expects from fathers

Every third Sunday of June we celebrate Father's Day in honor of our fathers. We commemorate this special day to let our fathers know that their lives have special meaning to us.

One time, I had one of the great scares in my life as a father. Our son, Kairos, had a bike accident. He was wounded in the area between his nose and mouth when his face collided with the handle post of the bike. His Lola was shouting, "baw nasungi ang apo ko." I, too, thought at that time that the accident would result into a cleft upper lip. But thank God, after some ice and "balunggay" he was okay. My sister-in-law said to Kairos, "grabe gift mo kay tatay mo sa Father's Day ba." As I reflect now on what happened, I can indeed say that it was indeed a gift because it validated my love to my son. This accident reminded me that God is telling the fathers to take care of their children for they are precious gifts from Him.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 tells us what God expects from fathers. This passage is called the *Shema* and is considered to be the most important prayer of the Jews. They pray it every morning and during nighttime. In the context of the Old Testament, the Shema is only prayed by the fathers. We can reflect three things from this prayer.

First, we need fathers who have a personal relationship with God. Verse 6 tells us that the commandments of God must be upon the hearts of the fathers.

The current observation in churches now is that the men are inactive in church activities. The women and the youth are the most active. The Bible continues to remind all of us, especially the fathers, to read, meditate, pray and live the Word of God.

Let all fathers be reminded to cultivate their personal relationship with God.

Second, we need fathers who teach their children about God. Verse 7 tells us, “Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

Are we sitting with our children and talk to them about God? Or do we grab first the remote control of the TV or play the computer when we arrive to our homes? Do we bring our work at home and have no time to lie down and read stories to our children? God is reminding the fathers of our task as educators.

Third, we need fathers who live what he teaches both at home and in public. It is common to hear this phrase, “just practice what I teach but do not follow my example.” This phrase should not be in our vocabulary anymore as we teach our children that ways of God.

As parents we have seen our children using our shoes or slippers when they were small. This event should remind us that our children need good role models who follow the ways of Jesus. By the grace of God, let us try our best not to fail our children.

***We need fathers who have a personal relationship
with God.***

Stand up and make history

One of the trending stories in 2016 was the NBA Championship won by the Cleveland Cavaliers over the defending champion Golden State Warriors in a historic fashion. They were down 3-1 yet persevered to win it all and giving Cleveland the championship title they were waiting for in the last 52 years.

What life lesson can we learn from this?

The best thing that we can do when we are down is to stand up. And the best thing to make history is seize the opportunity that God has given us to leave a mark in this world.

Every time we wake up is another chance for us to do better, to strive harder and to make our lives count.

The story of Saul who became Paul is a great reminder that our God is giving us opportunities to turn around our lives for the better.

Paul is teaching us that God is able to make His grace abound in us so that we will be equipped to do good. All that we need to do is surrender our lives to God and ask for His mercy that we may be given another chance.

Are you ready to stand up and make history?

Every time we wake up is another chance for us to do better, to strive harder and to make our lives count.

Let us LEARN

The advent of K-12 last 2016 resulted into fewer first year college students since they proceeded to Grade 11, and next year to Grade 12. These additional two years are designed for students to learn more, and later to be competitive in the global arena.

In life we need to LEARN. What are the essential things in the learning process?

L - Listen to the voice of the wise and experienced people. These people are your teachers and your parents. Proverbs 1:8 says, "Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching." Proverbs 13:14 also says "The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death."

E - Excitement in learning must be present. I remembered that our two kids woke us up so early in the first day of school because they were excited to learn new things and make new friends. This excitement should continue all throughout our lives.

A - Allow yourself to be corrected. The hardest part of the learning process is to unlearn what you feel is already correct but turned out later to be wrong. Proverbs 15:32 reminds us that "He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding."

R - Remember that learning should never stop. Proverbs 24:32 tells us that we can learn many lessons if we just have the openness to learn -- "I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw..."

N - No learning can equal the learning that we can get from the Word of God. This learning starts by fearing and trusting the Lord. Proverbs 15:33 says, "The fear of the LORD teaches a man wisdom..." Proverbs 3:5 also reminds us to "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."

Who is my neighbor?

Our leaders need to remember the lessons of the story of Jesus when He was asked “Who is my neighbor?”

There are many characters in this story: victim, robbers, priest, Levite, Samaritan. In this reflection, let me symbolically assign the characters in relation to the situation of our country.

The victim is our country, the Philippines. Our country has been robbed, stripped, beaten and left as half-dead. The robbers are the corrupt officials that have no sense of shame in stealing the money of the people.

This victim is on the side of the road waiting for help. The first to come was the priest. When he saw him from a distance, he decided to pass on the other side. Are we like this priest? Do we close our eyes on the problems of our society? The priest in this story symbolizes the people who are indifferent to what is happening. They only care about themselves.

The second one to come was the Levite. The only difference of the Levite with that of the priest was that he walked over the victim and looked at him while he was lying there. Are we like the Levite? Do we see the situation, maybe out of curiosity, and then go the other way?

The third one to come was the Samaritan. When he saw the victim, he had compassion for him. He soothed his wounds by putting olive oil and wine and bandaged them. He put the victim on his own donkey and took him to an inn and took care of him. He also made provisions by giving the innkeeper money to take care of the victim.

The Philippine society needs people who are like the Samaritan in the story. This man sacrificed his time and resources for the sake of the victim. Can we show mercy to our country? Do we have compassion to those who suffer around us?

CHANGE

The popular word in the Philippines right now is the "change." The slogan of President Duterte during his campaign was "Change is coming." Now it is "Change has come."

For Christians, what does CHANGE mean for us? What does it mean in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that the old has gone and the new has come?

First, Committing ourselves to Christ, the Author of change. As changed people, our commitment now is to serve Christ no matter the cost.

Second, Helping those who are outside of our circles. Those who are in Christ are now looking to help beyond family and associational ties, sharing the light of Christ to those in the dark.

Third, Allowing ourselves to be corrected by the Holy Spirit. As Christians we are being sanctified by Holy Spirit in order for us to become more mature in our spiritual lives.

Fourth, Negating evil influences in our lives. In Jesus Christ we are given the power overcome temptations. In doing so, we negate the hold of evil in our lives, living a life of liberty under His grace.

Fifth, Going out of our way for others. Jesus teaches us to "go the extra mile." Let us give more than what is expected of us.

Sixth, Engaging in transformative ministries. Because of the changes in our lives, we also want others to have that change in their lives. So, we join others in sharing what we received from Christ.

Checklist

In reality all of us are under the watchful eyes of God. If God would ask us today to make a report of our past, present and hopes for the future, what would be our answers? What would be the content of our report as disciples of Christ?

Here is a checklist that we can answer yes or no based on Luke 9:23, and Matthew 28:19-20:

1. Do you deny yourself for the sake of Christ?
2. Do you pick up your own cross daily?
3. Do you follow Jesus Christ?
4. Do you go and proclaim the Gospel?
5. Are you engaged in making disciples of Jesus?
6. Are you involved in leading people to baptism and baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?
7. Do you teach what Jesus commanded and obey them?
8. Do you reassure others that Jesus will always be with them?

Let us start checking it now. For sure there are still a lot of checklists in the Bible.

If God would ask us today to make a report of our past, present and hopes for the future, what would be our answers?

Lessons from Mighty Samson

One of the saddest verses in the Bible can be found in Judges 16:20. It says “Samson did not know that the Lord had left him.” Try substituting your name to Samson's name and feel the sadness.

Samson is described as mighty and strong man who single-handedly killed a lion with his bare hands.

How did Samson lose God's strength?

First, because of his wrong choices.

The evidences of his poor decisions are:

He chose a very demanding wife. His first wife nagged him by weeping for seven long days because she was asking for something.

This teaches us to really choose well in finding a life partner.

He chose to be with a prostitute. He defiled his body.

Who or what are the prostitutes in our lives? These are the persons or things that may give us instant pleasure yet ultimately will destroy our lives.

He chose to fall in love with a woman who is deceptive, manipulative and who is not of the same faith as his. This woman, Delilah, later became his downfall.

Who or what are the Delilahs of our lives? These are persons or things that will tempt us to turn away from God. We need to stay away from the many Delilahs that will surely come our way.

Second, because of pride. Samson was always speaking in riddles and he would belittle people who cannot answer his riddles (Judges 14:12ff). This angered the people. These prideful acts led to his reliance upon himself alone. Eventually, God left him.

In what areas of our life is pride evident? Let us take account of ourselves and find these areas so that we ask for forgiveness and acknowledge God as the true source of our strength.

Third, because of uncontrolled emotions. Samson was oftentimes angry. Judges 14:19 described him as burning with anger. His anger led him to tie the tails of 300 foxes, fastened it with a burning torch and let them loose in the vineyards and farms of the Philistines.

Let us take an accounting of ourselves and identify areas in which we cannot control our emotions. What triggers it? We need to surrender it to God.

How did Samson receive again the strength from God?

First, his hair grew long again and he received God's strength (Judges 16:22). But it was not the long hair rather it was the symbol brought by the growth of his long hair -- the acceptance of Samson to be set apart again by God for a special purpose.

Second, he prayed for God's mercy to give him strength again (Judges 16:28).

We, too, can receive God's strength when we accept the purpose of God in our lives, and when we pray that God will empower us through the promise of His word.

Fellowship

Filipinos are fond of reunions. We would always find time to be together just to eat and have fun fellowshiping with one another.

What comes to mind during reunions is the word fellowship. We are relational beings with a constant need of fellowship. One aspect of the church is *Koinonia*. There are three English words that are associated to this Greek word – fellowship, communion and community.

There are two words in fellowship – fellow and ship. We are all fellows in one ship, and we are fishers of people.

The earliest symbol Christianity, which is earlier than the cross is the fish – *iktus*. The early Christians assigned a meaning to the word *iktus*. In Greek this means: *Iesou, Kristou, Theo, Uious, Soter* or Jesus the Christ, Son of God, our Savior. The ship also symbolizes the church, up until now.

The design of the University Church in the campus of Central Philippine University is a big reminder for all of us to remember that we are all fellows in one ship. If you picture out the University Church, it is in the shape of a barangay – the Malayan ship that our foreparents used in going to the shores of our country. Let us continue to grow together in the Centralian Spirit of fellowship and togetherness!

There are two words in fellowship – fellow and ship. We are all fellows in one ship, and we are fishers of people.

Peace

Our world nowadays would often hear in the news about terroristic attacks and bombings. These are mostly traced to Muslim extremists, and other religious extremists. Ironically, the usual Arabic greetings of Muslims is "As-Salaam-Alaikum" and the response of "Wa-Alaikum-Salaam." These greetings mean "Peace be unto you" and the standard response is "And unto you peace." The Jews would also usually greet each other "Shalom" which also means "Peace."

What does peace mean in the Bible?

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia defines peace as a condition of freedom from disturbance, whether outwardly, from war or enemies, or inwardly, within the soul. Shalom means "soundness," "health," but also signifying "prosperity," "well-being" and good relations among people and to God.

If this is peace, what then should Christians do?

First, accept Jesus in your life so that you may have peace. Romans 5:1 reminds us that we have peace only if we have Jesus Christ.

Second, we need to live in peace, and to bring peace wherever we are. Jesus commanded His disciples, "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace one with another" (Mark 9:50), and Paul wrote, "Live in peace and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Corinthians 13:11).

***Accept Jesus in your life so that you may have
peace.***

The encounter with Jesus

Our reflection for this week is about the encounter of Jesus with Zacchaeus.

This encounter happened in Jericho, a wealthy and important town during that time. It was the center of trade and industry. Its commerce was mainly on palm and balsam. Zacchaeus lived in this town.

He was wealthy but unhappy. He was lonely for he had chosen a path that made him an outcast. He was not only a mere tax collector but a chief publican. He was despised and hated by people. He was corrupt because he charged more than what was required. He was an extortionist. This was his kind of life before he met Jesus Christ.

We can learn three things from Zacchaeus.

First, he had an Eager Attitude. He was determined to see Jesus and would let nothing stop him. Zacchaeus threw away his pride, being a chief publican, and climbed the Sycamore tree in order to see Jesus.

Are we eager to find Jesus Christ? Do we let the crowd, the people, our work hinder us from coming to Jesus Christ?

Second, he had an Obedient and Open Attitude. When Jesus said that He will dine in the house of Zacchaeus, he immediately came down. He did not hesitate.

Jesus is continually knocking on our doors. Are we open to receive him? What obstacles do we have to overcome in order to see Jesus?

Third, he had a Repentant Attitude. There was a radical repentance in Zacchaeus. His change of life was evident in the

actions that followed. He promised to give away half of his wealth and to return four-fold to those whom he had cheated.

How do we act on our repentance?

The verse ending the story of Zacchaeus says, “Salvation has come to his house.” It means that Zacchaeus became a blessing to his house. He brought the means of grace and salvation to his household because he had the desire of encountering Jesus at all cost.

Tradition tells us that later Zacchaeus became the bishop of Caesarea. What a turn of events if someone encounters Jesus Christ!



Jesus is continually knocking on our doors. Are we open to receive him? What obstacles do we have to overcome in order to see Jesus?



Are we eager to find Jesus Christ? Do we let the crowd, the people, our work hinder us from coming to Jesus Christ?



Zac's encounter with Jesus

Last 2016, one of the Themes for the Christ Emphasis Week Celebration at Central Philippine University is "Change" with the Biblical text based on the story of the encounter of Zacchaeus and Jesus.

Let me use ZAC, a shortcut of Zacchaeus' name on reflecting what it means to change.

Z - Zest for change

Zacchaeus was enthusiastic in meeting Jesus. He found a way to see Jesus. His low stature became a weakness as he was drowned by the great crowd who came to see Jesus. Forgetting his position as a tax collector and his economic class as a rich man, he climbed a sycamore tree just to see Jesus. He really wanted to change his lifestyle.

This is the same for us. We need to have that zest to change. God will not just barge into your life without your desire to be changed.

A - Allow Jesus in your life

Jesus saw the zest in Zacchaeus life. Because of this he told Zacchaeus that he would be eating in his house. Zacchaeus could have said no. He could have made a lot of excuses but he wholeheartedly welcomed Jesus in his home, and eventually into his heart.

We too can say no to Jesus. Although Jesus is knocking on our hearts we still have the option of not opening it. We need to make a decision of opening our lives so that Jesus may come in.

C - Commit to actions that show that you indeed have changed

The encounter of Zacchaeus with Jesus produced a change in the life of Zacchaeus. He declared to the public that he will give half of his possessions to the poor and will pay back up to four times those whom he had cheated as a tax collector. Because of this, Jesus declared, "salvation has come to this house."

We, like Zacchaeus, must show publicly through our good works that indeed change has come into our lives, and that change must not be a passive declaration but an active lifestyle of honoring God in all that we do.

We need to have that zest to change. God will not just barge into your life without your desire to be changed.

Awakened

One of the Christ Emphasis Week (CEW) Themes that I like most is “Awakened” based on the scripture texts: Ephesians 5:14-16 and Romans 13:11-12 -- “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you”... “The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.” The theme and texts imply two things:

First, we need to get involved in the process of waking up people from the state of “sleep-mode” Christianity.

My family is living now in CPU Heritageville, Pavia (Before, just outside the CPU campus). Before we had a private vehicle, it would take us three rides to reach CPU in Jaro (1 tri-sikad and 2 jeepney rides). Because of this we need to wake up early in the morning so that we can be on time for our office, and also for our children’s class.

The process of waking up takes a lot of effort. Sometimes it would take three pushes of the snooze button of the alarm before we finally wake up. Then a cup of coffee to perk us up, a little stretching, followed by a cold shower, and a breakfast to make us finally ready to go.

This is also the same with our spiritual lives. We need a lot of “alarm clocks” – preaching, bible studies, Sunday School, fellowships to continually remind us to wake up and shine for Jesus Christ. Are we acting up as the “alarm clocks” “exercise” “coffee” “shower” “food” of people so that they can be awakened?

Second, as “awakened” people, we need to live for Christ. The texts say, “Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil” ... “So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.” Are we shining for Christ? Are we bearers of the light of Christ?

Our identity in Christ

A Philippine Passport is an official document that certifies one's identity as a Filipino. You need it to travel abroad. Your passport is the document that you present to the immigration of every country that you wish to enter.

If we have Jesus Christ in our lives, what then is our new identity? Let me just cite five characteristics of our new identity out of the many.

First, we can claim the identity as children of God. We are children of the light and not of darkness. John 1:12 "But as many as received him—to those who believe in his name—he gave to them authority to become children of God..."

Second, we are not slaves of sin anymore. Our lives are now directed by Jesus Christ. Romans 6:6 "...knowing this, that our old self was crucified together with him, in order that the body of sin may be done away with, that we may no longer be enslaved to sin."

Third, we are part of the body of Christ -- the Church. We should not feel alienated nor estranged because we have many sisters and brothers in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 12:27 "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

Fourth, we now seek godly things than worldly things that will lead us to sin. Colossians 3:1-3 "Therefore, if you have been raised together with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

Fifth, we are now commissioned to do good works. Our old self which is selfish is now replaced by a new nature which is service oriented. Ephesians 2:10 "For we are his creation, created in Christ Jesus for good works..."

What an Affirming Christian Church should be

I have visited many churches and preached on most of their pulpits. I have witnessed how churches formulate decisions, and implement programs and activities. Now here is a poem written by a good friend, Dr. Henry Florida Funtecha last December 20, 2004. He already passed away many years but this poem remains a treasure that will continue to inspire and challenge me. This poem entitled “What an Affirming Christian Church should be” was written to challenge our churches. It appeared in the UC Newsletter “Church Alive” last July 25, 2010.

“We want a church that welcomes people
Whatever their beliefs are, even if they belong to other
religious persuasions.

We desire a church that makes one feel at home
Whatever his/her socio-economic status in life is.

We admire a church that welcomes people wherever
they may be in their faith journey
Believer or agnostic, conventional Christian or
questioning skeptic.

We prefer a church that is open to the ideas and
experiences that people attending its services can
bring.

We love a church that reflects God’s own love for
humanity.

We believe that, as a church, the way members treat
one another is more important than the doctrines they
hold.

We think that it is vital to take seriously the intellectual problems which many people have with Christianity, and encourage ways of understanding religion which feeds the mind as well as the soul.

We submit that a church must be concerned with injustice and suffering, and see itself as a community helping to build a better world, bring hope to those whom Jesus called the least of His brothers and sisters.

We recognize that some of the people's ignorance far outweighs their understanding, and that the church should give as much value to their asking questions as in finding answers.

We affirm that, as members of a Christian church, faith entails costly discipleship and conscientious resistance to all sorts of evil.

We trust that God in His infinite love and wisdom will always give a helping hand to an affirming church, and in the end, His kingdom will reign supreme in this world.”

***We want a church that welcomes people
Whatever their beliefs are, even if they belong to
other religious persuasions.***

Let us get CLOSE to God

Growing in our intimate relationship with God should be our passion in life for it is in this personal relationship that our expression of Christianity comes from. David wrote in Psalm 27:4 that he seeks to dwell in the house of the Lord, to seek God, and to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.

Here are some things we can do to get CLOSE to God:

C - Clear your mind from things that distract your focus on God

We need to consciously identify these things. It can be your relationships, social-media, gadgets, work, or being caught up in the business of our schedule.

L - Leave the bitterness and disappointments of the past

Our unresolved past tends to pop out from time to time and tries to pull us back. Oftentimes we are not aware that these issues are there. We need to go to a retreat and meditate on these things. It can be a failed relationship, a fear of rejection that stems from a traumatic experience, or it can be living in the shadow of your parents.

O - Obey the Word of God

The greatest way to get closer to God is to read the Bible and to obey what is written and commanded by the Word of God.

S - Serve the Lord with gladness

There are many areas of our life where we can serve God. We need to identify our God-given gifts and make ourselves available in service to the ministries of the church. It can be singing in the choir, decorating the altar, writing, preaching or teaching.

E - Enjoy the presence of God

What are the things that you do in order to enjoy the presence of God? It can be going to church, reading Christian materials or having a quiet time for prayer and Bible reading. Enjoying the presence of God increases our desire to know Him more.

Our unresolved past tends to pop out from time to time and tries to pull us back. Oftentimes we are not aware that these issues are there. We need to go to a retreat and meditate on these things.

There are many areas in which we can serve God. We need to identify our God-given gifts and make ourselves available in the many ministries of the church.

Prayer of Jabez

The story of Jabez' life can be found in two verses in the Bible – 1 Chronicles 4:9-10. Jabez is the head of a family in Judah, noted for his honorable character. The popular explanation of his name is that his mother bore him in pain.

What can we learn from the life Jabez?

First, Jabez had a good parent. His mother brought him up in the way of God.

The Bible mentioned that the mother of Jabez bore him with great pain. This verse implies that because of the great pain, his mother made a vow to train him in the right way so that she will not regret the great pain that she suffered.

I remember my mother who once scolded me, “I bore you with great pain. Now, please behave or I will return you to my womb.”

This is a big challenge to parents – to train their children in God's way.

Second, Jabez was declared by the Bible as an honorable person.

This tells us that Jabez found favor in the eyes of God and the people. “More honorable than his brothers” does not mean that his brothers are not honorable, but Jabez was singled out because he was probably more consistent in his godly living.

How about us? What is our reputation in the community?

Third, Jabez was a prayerful person.

Our passage tells us that Jabez “cried” out to God. Crying out to God in prayer signifies how he fervently prays to God.

How is our prayer life?

What was the result of the prayer of Jabez?

God granted the prayer of Jabez. A village was named after him. It was famous as the home of scribes. This village produced a prominent clan from which came both Caleb, Joshua's colleague, and his son-in-law, Othniel, Israel's first judge. Othniel also established a school and named it after Jabez.

This is a big challenge to parents – to train their children in God's way.

How is our prayer life?

What is our reputation in the community?

Leadership style of Jesus

There are many books about leadership. There are also a lot that talks about the leadership style of Jesus Christ. Here is my contribution about the leadership style of Jesus. Let me give an acrostic message from the word LEADERSHIP.

L – Loving and Compassionate

John 15:13 states that “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” We are reminded of 1 John 3:16-18 that says, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”

E – Exemplary Plan and Mission

Jesus is certainly clear with his mission. The mission of Jesus was the proclamation of the Good News of the kingdom of God. Luke 4:43 says, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.” After Jesus’ resurrection, he still preached for 40 days about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).

A – Appealing and Charismatic

Jesus had great charisma. He had the charm, appeal, personality, and magnet to draw the people close to him. For example, Matthew 14:15-21 tells that about five thousand people excluding women and children followed him. If the number will include women and children, then the population that followed him that day would be about fifteen thousand.

Leaders should develop their personality so that they can readily influence the people and convince them to put the plan into action.

D – Delegation and Discipleship

Jesus did not do it alone. He chose 12 disciples. He only stayed on earth for about 33 years. On top of that, his public ministry lasted for 3 years only. He needed others with him.

Mark 6:7-13 and Luke 10:1-12, 17 remind us how Jesus delegated his work to his disciples. 2 Timothy 2:1-2 is a great challenge hurled by Paul to us. We should constantly disciple others so that we will not have a shortage of leaders and experience a crisis in leadership. We must remember that the reason why Christian mission is effective is because of delegation and discipleship.

E – Elevates the status of the marginalized

Oftentimes, we look at leadership as a way to marginalize people. Some of us silently swear that when we become leaders, we will do everything in our power to diminish others. But this is not so for Jesus. Elevating the status of the marginalized was a way of life for Jesus. He not only talked to women, tax collectors, sick and poor, but gave them provisions and healing. God is a God of life. Jesus had a preferential option for the poor because the poor were dying before their time.

Lester Ruiz wrote, "Lead in such a way that when someone thinks of fairness, kindness, and integrity, he or she will remember you; Empower in such a way that when someone rises to question, to protest, or to challenge, he or she will remember you."

R – Resists Temptation

A leader is always tempted to become selfish and self-centered. The Bible knows that our human nature has the tendency

to be selfish and self-centered. Jesus was tempted by the devil to become selfish and self-centered. Jesus reminded us to stay away from these temptations.

What were those temptations Jesus encountered? (Matthew 4)

1. Change stone to bread – quick economic gain through short-cuts. 2. Jump down from the top because angels will catch you – the misuse of power. 3. All the kingdoms will be given – the worship of glory.

S – Seeks the will of God

Jesus always sought the will of God. But he was also tempted to follow his own will. The prayer in the garden reminds us that even Jesus was tempted to follow his own will. But later on, he prayed "not my will but thy will be done."

We must also reclaim the defeatist Filipino worldview that is "Bahala na." A Centralian anthropologist, F. Landa Jocano wrote that this phrase was originally "Bathala na" or "thy will be done." Thus, Filipinos always say "Bahala na ang Dios." Let us dwell on the positive side of this trait. We need to develop an attitude of trusting God's providence.

H – Humble

John 13:2-17 tells how Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. It is a great illustration on how humble Jesus was. Mark 10:35-45 is a great reminder on what kind of leader Jesus expects us to be. In these verses, James and John, the sons of Zebedee demanded a favor from Jesus that both of them should be seated in the left and right side of the glorious throne of Jesus.

These two disciples were seeking popularity and the glory attached to it. The ten disciples who heard of this request got angry. Were they angry because they too wanted to be in the right or left side, or were they angry because they know that this is not the style of Jesus? I don't know of the answer to that question but

Jesus called them together to clarify his kind of leadership. Jesus said that they should not be like the Gentile leaders who lord over the people instead they must become humble like a servant for even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.

I – Immerses in the situation

One cannot be a good leader if he/she will not immerse him/herself in the context where he/she is leading. Jesus is our great example. John 1:14 tells us that God became human. God was incarnated in the person of Jesus. Jesus became one of us. In doing so, he knows our struggles, our fears and worries. He went through all the hardships that humans are experiencing. The importance of incarnation is that Jesus understands us.

Leaders must incarnate themselves also in his/her context and also on the lives of his/her followers. By doing so, the organization will run smoothly and without much conflict because the followers know that they are part of the same team. This is the reason why Jesus emphasized that we must become the “salt of the earth.” The salt can only be tasted if it is immersed and is no more to be seen. Though it cannot be seen, the taste can be found everywhere.

P – Provides space

Providing space means being open to others and welcoming mistakes. The story in Mark 9:38-41 exemplifies this kind of attitude. “Teacher,” said John, “we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.” “Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us.”

The 12 disciples thought all the while that they were the only disciples of Jesus. Jesus reminded them that there are others who are working for the realization of the kingdom of God. Jesus welcomed their mistake and taught them to be open to other people. When you are open, you never lose the spirit of a learner.

Meeting Successfully the Challenges and Opportunities of Life as a Centralian

During the 105th University Day celebration of Central Philippine University, the Theme was “Meeting Successfully the Challenges and Opportunities of Life as a Centralian.”

What is it in being a Centralian that one can meet successfully the challenges and opportunities of life?

I would like to believe that a Centralian is Christ-centered.

The training that a Centralian receives is geared towards the realization of CPU’s vision, meaning, to become an exemplary Christian for life. This is very ideal and should be a continuing reminder to all teachers, staff and administrators.

Nelson and Herradura once wrote, “...faculty members made it a point to provide a Christian atmosphere in the school, give the students a thorough knowledge of the Bible and some understanding of the meaning of the Christian life, and provide opportunities for the development of interest and abilities that could be used in the service of the church.”

Do we, the new generation of Centralians, live up to expectation of providing a Christian atmosphere in the campus of CPU, and to wherever we are?

I am praying that CPU will not only be “a university where the student is central” but more importantly CPU will become “a university where Christ is Central.”

If we are committed to Jesus Christ, then we are committed to Christian mission. We must instill in Centralians that we must develop a missionary attitude and orientation. CPU was born because of Christian mission. Thus, in one way or another, depending on how you exercise it, Centralians must become missionaries.

Rev. Dr. Johnny V. Gumban once wrote, “CPU is committed to Christian mission. Christian mission is for the purpose of attaining the wholeness of life on the total life of creation in conformity to God’s design and purpose as revealed in Jesus Christ according to the Scripture. God initiates this work in history by whatever means He chooses. CPU offers itself to be a means that God may choose for this purpose.”

We hope that all of us who profess to be Christians will make our lives as a channel of God’s blessing and purpose for other people.

...praying that CPU will not only be “a university where the student is central” but more importantly CPU will become “a university where Christ is Central.”

Let go of the past that haunts you

There are many things in life that pull us back. These are things in our history that continue to haunt us and hamper our growth as Christians.

Peter was once reprimanded by Jesus because of the things that he cannot let go. Jesus said, "Get behind me Satan." Jesus said these forceful words because when Peter heard that Jesus will suffer and die, he rebuked Jesus. Peter has not yet let go of his thinking that the Messiah that they were waiting for will suffer and die. They were expecting a Messiah that will lead a revolution against Rome and establish the Kingdom of Israel like the golden years under King David. Up to the arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter was still in his old frame of mind. He was even able to grab a soldier's sword and managed to expertly chop an ear.

Jesus taught us how to let go. He said in Mark 8:35 "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life on account of me and of the gospel will save it." Jesus is teaching us that we must let go of our self-centeredness. He reminds us that the moment we have accepted Him as our Lord and Savior, He is changing us from being selfish to being selfless.

Let us claim the promise of God that by His grace we will be freed from the chains of our past that hinder our movement towards a meaningful life.

Jesus is teaching us that we must let go of our self-centeredness. He reminds us that the moment we have accepted Him as our Lord and Savior, He is changing us from being selfish to being selfless.

Jesus is crying with us

The shortest verse in the Bible is John 11:35 “Jesus wept.” A very good friend of Jesus, Lazarus, died. When he visited the grave together with Mary and Martha he let go of his emotions.

This event shows us that Jesus feels our pains and sufferings. The tears of Jesus signify that he grieves together with the family of Lazarus. This then gives us an assurance that in our sad moments in life, Jesus is there with us, crying with us. Jesus does this because he is compassionate and loving.

Amidst tears, my mother, Mrs. Josette Gico Jalando-on, wrote a poem in honor of Mrs. Eleanor Ruth Buensuceso Fabula – her best friend.

A Salute to Nang Babie (Eleanor Ruth B. Fabula)
Josette Gico-Jalando-on

“Lord, how can I say thank You for the person that
was Eleanor Ruth?
She was full of love, of kind thoughts and what a lot of
joy to us she has brought.
She was always willing to share her blessings to dear
family and friends.
She was ready to even go the second mile or her last
penny lend.

You have endowed her with great talents in music and
the arts,
She was also a creative cook, as she experimented with
her heart.
Her hands were indeed a wonder and she wielded them
with great care, as she played beautiful music,
soothing to the ears.

She was a very caring wife and mother, a dotting grandmother too,
She hid her tears and disappointments well so they need never know.
She always lived and laughed as she committed all to You
These matters that really shaped her life to fully trust in You

I thank You Lord for the gift of being a friend and a dear sister to me.
She taught me to be true to one's commitment til the very end.
I'll never fully comprehend why you took her home this early
as we could have more years together to make our dreams a reality.

Thank you even if it pains us to see her go...
even if we sure would miss her presence in our lives...
You have given her relief from the excruciating disease which sapped her strength and deprived her of enjoying her retirement years.
We cannot fathom your wisdom Lord, but we do thank You for the life of Manang Babie.”

The tears of Jesus signify that he grieves together with the family. This then gives us an assurance that in our sad moments in life, Jesus is there with us, crying with us.

Learnings from the house of mourning

There was a time that while visiting bereaved relatives, another news came that another relative has died. It seems that while you're still busy preparing and holding a vigil or necrological service, another death has come.

Amidst this context of death, I was drawn to the words of Ecclesiastes 7:2 -- "It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart."

Why would the writer of Ecclesiastes write these words? I can reflect a few things:

First, we who are visiting the house of mourning are reminded that we are still alive. This means that we need to be thankful to God for another opportunity to see our family and friends. We need to reflect on what really are our priorities in life.

Second, we who are alive are reminded that there is another chance to live life, another chance to change our wayward ways, and another chance to submit ourselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Third, when looking at a dead loved one we are reminded of our own mortality, that we too will soon die. We need to ponder on what legacies are we leaving behind to the next generation.

Fourth, in seeing the tears of the bereaved we are reminded that we are all human beings and we are in need of each other. We ponder then of why we still find ways of sowing conflict instead of mutual respect and love. The 9/11 commemoration is big reminder of our hate and bigotry. We are better than this. We are made in the image of God, thus we are made in the image of love, peace and selflessness.

Do not withhold the blessings that you have

Are you tired of sharing your blessings? Do you feel that your generosity is being abused? Proverbs 3:27-28 reminds us --“Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, “Come back later; I’ll give it tomorrow” when you now have it with you.”

The question for us is this: what can I give that is within my power to act? What are the good things that I have that I sometimes withhold from those who deserve it?

Let me share six things that I believe that it is within our power to act.

First, it is within our power to share our material resources.

How are we in this? Oftentimes we like to make excuses and say no to those who need our help.

The former president of CPU, Dr. Juanito M. Acanto once told me of his principle in giving his resources. He said that if your pocket is always full, how can God add something to your pocket because there is no room left for an additional blessing? You need to empty your pockets so that God can make it overflow.

Secondly, it is within our power to share our faith.

I received a poster when I was in High School that says, “don’t just keep the faith, spread it.” This is a very good challenge to all of us.

Let us remember that we became a Christian because someone shared his or her faith to us. Can you still remember that someone? Thank God for that someone. Would you also like to be that someone to somebody?

Thirdly, it is within our power to share our kind words.

An anonymous quote says “There is power of life and death in the tongue. An encouraging word to someone who is down can lift them up and help them make it through the day. A destructive word to someone who is down can be what it takes to kill them.”

Fourthly, it is within our power to share our wisdom.

There are many wise people who do not hesitate to share their wisdom but still there are still a lot of people who withhold sharing their wisdom.

Let us remember that when we share our wisdom, we gain more of it. We should not think that when we share our wisdom we reduce it.

Let us train second liners. Let us be happy when somebody is ready to replace us. Let us teach disciples so that they will also become teachers. Jesus had a public ministry of just 3 years but Christianity is alive because Jesus trained disciples who in turn trained disciples.

Fifthly, it is within our power to share our availability to serve.

Oftentimes we can hear a lot of excuses when serving in the church is being talked about. Some of us would say, “I’m still young, I’m too old, I’m afraid, Let others do it, I’m shy, I’m busy” and many other reasons. Does this sound familiar? I hope not.

Never allow yourself to be discouraged. Never think that your life is insignificant and cannot make a change. God will do wonderful things through us when we just say, “Here I am, send me, use me in your ministry.” We will be surprised what God will do through our lives.

Lastly, it is within our power to share our loving attitude.

Sometimes our church has become a place where people feel that they are condemned. It is as if they would feel that they are not worthy to come inside the church because the people inside it are very accusatory. They accuse people of their sins as if they themselves have no sins.

Let us be like Jesus who approached persons with an attitude that everyone has the capacity to do good. Like what Jesus did to the woman accused of adultery. He went there not to condemn the woman but to help her. He later said, "Go and sin no more." This signifies the attitude of Jesus to give people a chance to change their lives. This is what the grace of God means.

It is within our power to share our faith... Let us remember that we have become a Christian because someone shared his or her faith to us.

Let us train second liners. Let us be happy when somebody is ready to replace us.

Stop the blame game

Since the beginning of time people like to play the blame game. We blame others on what is happening in our lives. We make a lot of excuses just to deflect the blame.

Adam blamed Eve, and in turn Eve blamed the serpent because they ate the forbidden fruit. Nobody accepted that it was their fault. If this is the same with us then ultimately we will all blame the serpent with what is happening to us.

What then should we do if we do not want to be stuck with the blame game?

Paul in Philippians 2 teaches us a few things with regards to this matter.

First, do not feel that you are always right. That is pride and being conceited. See others as someone who can also be right, and even better than yourself.

Second, do something not out of selfish interest but act because it is the right thing to do.

Third, be united in one purpose. Along the way, there will be dissenting opinions but just look back to your purpose so that you may not be sidetracked by petty things.

Fourth, endeavor to have the spirit of unity. Unity is not uniformity. Unity is the harmony of many ideas all woven together to realize the purpose of your relationship.

Fifth, have the love of Jesus Christ as the center of all your relationships. This love is the glue that will hold you together. If this love is non-existent then your relationship with others will surely disintegrate.

May we stop the blame game in all our relationships!

Living beyond borders

The Theme during the 111th University Day and Foundation Day celebrations of Central Philippine University in 2016 was: “Living the Central Spirit Beyond Borders.”

One person that lived beyond borders was Rev. William O. Valentine. He could have stayed in the United States of America all his life but he signed up as a missionary and went to Burma. When he suffered a heatstroke, he could have stayed in bed but he stood up and went to the Philippines and established Jaro Industrial School, now Central Philippine University. He could have stayed in Iloilo but he did not. He went to the USA for further studies and wrote about the work study program he started in Burma and the Philippines. Again, he could have stayed there but he had the spirit of living beyond borders. He went back to the Philippines and became the pastor of Bacolod Evangelical Church in Negros. He also established another school in southern Negros, the Ilog Private Academy which continues to exist until now. He died in Bacolod and was buried in Iloilo but his Central Spirit of living beyond borders continues to live on.

Paul in the New Testament was also a man who lived beyond borders. He did not just want to stay in Jerusalem. He insisted on going in a missionary journey. Twice, he attempted to go to Asia Minor but was prompted by the Holy Spirit not to go there. Instead, he was sent to other places that later led him to spread the Gospel in Europe. Paul indeed lived a life beyond borders because he had the passion to bring the message of salvation in Jesus Christ to others.

What about us? Are we just satisfied in being comfortable where we are right now? Do we want to live beyond borders?

Let us live beyond borders and leave a lasting legacy to others.

Let us SHARE what we have

The Theme of the 105th Foundation Day of Central Philippine University last October 1, 2010 was “*Paghiliambitanay*” or “Sharing with one another.”

Let me give an acrostic on the word SHARE.

When we share we S – SHOW that we care.

I read an illustration about a father and a son who walked in an area where a person was crying because his house was razed by a fire. The father said to the son, “let us pray for that poor man so that God will help him.” The son answered, “Dad, let us not bother God anymore, let us help the poor man.”

Sometimes the phrase “let us pray for...” has become an excuse not to get involved in the situation. Let it be said that when we utter “let us pray for...” let us do our part to show that we really care.

When we share we H – HELP alleviate the situation of others.

Looking around us, we can see a lot of people, organizations, churches, and institutions that need our help. Let us try to find someone who we believe needs our help and share to them what we have.

When we share we A – ALLOW God’s blessings to flow.

There are people in this world that have become a dam. They block the resources and it is only upon their mercy that the resources will flow into others.

We need to become rivers in which resources and blessings continue to flow. One can always see something green beside the river – and that means life. When we continue to share it will surely give life.

When we share we R – REMEMBER God’s goodness.

Our sharing is a symbol of our thanksgiving to God. Thanksgiving comes from two words – thanks and giving. There is always giving when thanking is being talked about.

When we share we E – ENCOURAGE others to share also.

Oftentimes the end result of our sharing is that other people will be encouraged to share their blessings also. A sharing attitude is a contagious attitude.

Sometimes the phrase “let us pray for...” has become an excuse not to get involved in the situation. Let it be said that when we utter “let us pray for...” let us do our part to show that we really care.

Our sharing is a symbol of our thanksgiving to God. Thanksgiving comes from two words – thanks and giving.

Why PRAY?

Prayer is something that most of us do every day. It has become part of our lives. Acts 12 tells about the persecution of early Christians, the imprisonment of Peter and the prayer of the early Church.

Here are four things that we can see when we PRAY:

P - Partner with the Church

Acts 12:5 says "Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer was fervently being made to God by the church for him."

This story reminds us that we need to pray for one another. We need to partner with churches in praying for what is happening to us and to our society.

R - Results will surely happen

God hears our prayers and will surely answer our prayers. The answer could either be yes, no or wait. If it is in the negative, then God has a better plan for us.

God answered the prayer of the early church. God sent an angel to rescue Peter. The chains fell off in Peter's hands and he was able to escape.

What is surprising in this story was that the people in John Mark's house were astonished that Peter was right outside their door. They prayed yet they were somehow surprised that God answered it immediately. We need to believe that God will surely answer our prayers if it is according to His will and purpose in our lives.

A - Angels come

There were many instances in the Bible when God would send angels to accomplish His purpose. In Peter's escape, God sent an angel to break the chains and to guide Peter out of the gate and towards the narrow street.

Matthew 18:10 also implies that God has assigned an angel to each one of us - "See to it that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven constantly see the face of my Father who is in heaven." Thus, we need to have the confidence that God has sent angels to protect us.

Y - Yearn to share

When Peter arrived at the house where the Christians were meeting, he told a testimony on how God rescued him. Before he went out, he also left word to tell James and others about what happened.

This should be the same with us. We need to testify to others how God has answered our prayers. We need to tell the world that God answers prayers.

***God hears our prayers and will surely answer our prayers. The answer could either be yes, no or wait.
If it is in the negative, then God
has better plan for us.***

Let us PRAY

Prayer should be part of the regular habit of every Christian. Sad to say but some who profess to be Christians do not know how to pray. For some prayer is just a repetitious ritual, and for some it is some sort of a magical incantation.

What should we do when we PRAY?

P - Prepare ourselves properly

We need to find a time to pray. Preferably, we need to find a conducive place to speak to God. Jesus has given us a good example. He would pray early in the morning in a solitary place (Mark 1:35). In some instances he would go to a mountainside and pray during nighttime (Matt 14:23).

R - Receive instructions from God

Prayer is a two-way communication. We talk and the same time listen to God. We must be sensitive to the promptings of God. It may come anytime, we just have to be ready.

Jesus was in agony when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed, "If possible, let this cup of suffering pass over me." Jesus received instructions. When he received it he prayed, "Not my will but thy will be done."

A - Act on it

The song "Do something" reminds us of a person praying to God to do something about what is happening around us. The person eventually heard from God. God said, "I did something. I created you." Now, go and do something.

Y - Yearn for the workings of the Holy Spirit

In the life of Paul, he felt the workings of the Holy Spirit. They prayed for their mission work to start in Asia but twice the Holy Spirit would not allow them to go where they planned to go (Acts 16). Instead, the Holy Spirit led Paul to a vision of a man from Macedonia begging them to come. And Paul and his companions followed that vision.

This should be the same with us. We make plans and we pray for our plans. But along the way we need to take detours if the Holy Spirit is leading us to another way.

Let us all strengthen our prayer life.

***Prayer should be part of the regular habit
of every Christian.***

***We must be sensitive to the promptings of God. It
may come anytime. We just have to be ready.***

Living a Healthy Lifestyle

Senior Citizens Day is celebrated every year in honor of those who are 60 years old and above. These Senior Citizens love to joke that they are now dual citizens.

One time I was invited to speak to a Senior Citizens group on the topic: Living a Healthy Lifestyle. Here is what I shared to them.

A lot of people are surprised to know that the Bible also speaks about how to live a healthy lifestyle. Here are four things that I learned.

First, we must eat healthy food.

What is the biblical definition of a healthy food? Gen 1:30 says, "I give every green plant for food." Wow! The Bible encourages us to eat vegetables and fruits.

When the Israelites became a nation, they instituted dietary laws. Some Christians would say that we are free from these laws. But it is good to be refreshed on what are these laws because Paul once said, "Everything is permissible but not everything is beneficial."

Leviticus 11:4-8 says that God prohibits the Israelites to eat camel, rabbit, and pig. Leviticus 11:9-12 says that God commands the Israelites to eat only fishes that have scales and fins. Prohibited are eels and shells. One cannot eat blood from animals also, and eagles, storks, hawks, ravens, heron, bat.

Second, we must rest because rest is essential.

The Bible says, Ex 34:21 "Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest."

We are always busy. Sometimes, the irony is that because of our busyness, no work has been done. We are busy with meetings, and oftentimes we are lazy with the implementations. Nevertheless, management principles tell us that productive, effective and efficient workers are those that are well-rested.

Rest is also to retreat with yourself and commune with God. Jesus Christ would always retreat into the mountain to pray. Jesus teaches us to have an “alone time”. Prayer teaches us also to be patient - for we await the command of God.

Third, we must have the right attitude and spirit

Jesus said, “do not worry...for who can add a single hour to his life by worrying? None!” To worry is subtract hours from our lives. Prov 17:22 “A cheerful disposition is good for your health; gloom and doom leave you bone-tired.” Laughter is the best medicine.

Paul also wrote about right attitude – “if the love of Jesus has made any difference in your life...have this attitude: Don't act out of selfish ambition or be conceited. Instead, humbly think of others as being better than yourselves. Don't be concerned only about your own interests, but also be concerned about the interests of others.”

Fourth, we must regularly exercise physically and spiritually

Paul observes what a good athlete is and challenged Christians to do the same in their lives. He wrote in 1 Cor 9:24-26, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training... Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly.”

How to face the future?

One of our greatest fears is facing the future. How should we as Christians approach the future with the mindset of faith?

First, Dedicate yourself to God every day in preparation for tomorrow.

Joshua commanded the Israelites to consecrate themselves before they entered the Promised Land (Joshua 7:13).

Secondly, Start believing in God's plan, and Stop useless worrying.

Jesus is of course right when he said "Who of You by Worrying can add a Single Hour to His Life?" (Matthew 6:27).

Third, Embrace the lessons of twists and turns of the past by being prepared today.

The failures and disappointments of the past should teach us to be prepared for any contingencies. Proverbs 22:3 says "A Prudent Man perceives the difficulties ahead and prepares for them. The Foolish goes blindly on and suffers the consequences."

Fourth, Make plans but do not forget God in your plans.

James 4:13 describes two businessmen discussing about their plan: "Now listen you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to This City or That City and We'll spend a Year there and carry on Business and make Money.'" What's wrong with this picture? They have forgotten God.

Fifth, With God's grace, do what you can today without delay.

Procrastination is something that we must confess and ask for forgiveness. James 4:17 reminds us that "Anyone who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins."

Sixth, Enrich the Present by Facing it with Courage.

The advice of Paul to Timothy is very apt for those who are experiencing fear -- 2 Timothy 1:7 "God has not given us the Spirit of Fear, but of Power and Love and a Sound Mind."

***Start believing in God's plan, and
Stop useless worrying.***

***The failures and disappointments of the past should
teach us to be prepared for any contingencies.***

Let us open our hands to the poor

October 17 is "End Poverty Day." Last 2016, CPU joined in the celebration by having a forum with a varied panel of speakers discussing the Theme: "End Poverty: What more can we do?" The audience were recipients of the government program of 4Ps, out of school youth, students, faculty and staff.

The desire of God was that there will be no poor among us -- Deuteronomy 15:4 "There shall not be among you a poor person, because God will certainly bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving to you as an inheritance, to take possession of it."

But why is there a lot of poor people in our midst? Deuteronomy 15:5 explains that there are poor people because of the disobedience of mankind to the will of God. This is the reason why God declared that there will always be poor people among you.

What then can Christians do? Deuteronomy 15:11 reminds us that God has given us a command to take care of the poor -- "For the poor will not cease to be among you in the land; therefore I am commanding you, saying, 'You shall willingly open your hand to your brother and sisters, to the needy and to the poor that are in your land.'"

Let us open our hands every time we are given the opportunity to give to the poor.

***Let us open our hands every time we are given the
opportunity to give to the poor.***

An unforgettable birthday

All of us expect that our birthday celebration would be trouble-free. The opposite happened to me in one of my birthdays –my laptop was stolen; our satellite box broken cause by a lightning; the LAN card of the office computer broke down; and to top it, I noticed a lot of bird droppings in the windshield of our car.

I said to myself, “I don’t know what will happen next but I am ready for it.” Instead of feeling sorry, I wrote down a reflection.

One famous statement says, “when troubles come, they come in bundles” or another version of it says, “when it rains, it pours.” With faith, I dare say “Let it come for I believe that my God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. God will never leave me nor forsake me. God will supply my needs according to His riches and glory.”

I pray that Christians will hold on to the promises of God when troubles come to our lives. As Paul reminds us, “nothing can separate us from the love God in Christ Jesus.”

My *Maninoy*, Rev. Ronny Luces, wrote me, “I will still greet you a happy birthday even though your laptop was stolen because joy is not based on the possession of material things but on things that are eternal.” How true indeed!

It is so easy to be pessimistic but we really need to be optimistic. When I sent a text to my sister that my laptop was stolen, she wrote back, “the best is yet to come.” We need to continue to be hopeful in spite of the negative things that are happening around us.

Jesus told us a story about great hope. It was about a farmer who sowed seeds. Some fell in the way side and birds ate it up; some fell in stony places where there is little earth and when it sprung up, they were scorched by the sun because they have no

root; some fell among thorns and they were choked; but others fell into good ground and bore good fruit, some hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

This story is about our perspective that “the best is yet to come.” The success of the farmer was 1 out of 4. But it brought forth many folds. The seed of faith was planted in us. Let it be that we also must plant seeds of faith in the hearts of people even if it will result to only 1 out of 4. Something good is bound to happen when we just plant seeds.

We need to continue to be hopeful in spite of the negative things that are happening around us.

The seed of faith was planted in us. Let it be that we also must plant seeds of faith in the hearts of people even if it will result to only 1 out of 4. Something good is bound to happen when we just plant seeds.

Let us **PLAY**

I saw the following words written in the wall of the Silliman University Gym:

“For when the Great Scorer writes down your name,
He writes not whether you win or lose,
But how you played the game.”

I have been an athlete since my elementary days. Thanks to training of my father, I studied at CPU with full sports scholarship during my college years. Now, I am somewhat repaying my alma mater as the coach of Table Tennis varsity team. I have learned a lot from sports that influence how I view life.

Let me share four things from the word **PLAY**:

Be **PASSIONATE**. I would always encourage my players to play with passion. Passion is what fuels a person to go on no matter the odds. When you have passion, you are excited to live life; you are enthusiastic to face another day.

LOVE life to the fullest. I read these words from the t-shirt of the College of Saint Benilde player: “Life is Short, Play Hard.” When we have come to realize that our life on earth is very short, it will change our attitude on how to view life. We need to love every moment of our life. I would always say to my players: “Every point counts. Play hard for each point.”

ALLOW God to shape our life. I believe that God does not want to intrude in our lives. God is not an intruder who just goes in without permission. We need to invite God in our hearts. God is saying, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” Let us not make God wait outside of our lives.

YEARN for more. Lately, I have realized that life is an adventure – you’ll never know what would happen next; you just keep on discovering. Yes, we will never know what will happen in

the future but we can be rest assured that God will be there for us. I always tell my players, “Prepare for any eventuality. If your one type of game doesn’t work, shift to another type. Maybe that type is the weakness of your opponent.” As they say in the ball games, “The ball is round.”

When we have come to realize that our life on earth is very short, it will change our attitude on how to view life. We need to love every moment of our life.

God does not want to intrude in our lives. God is not an intruder who just goes in without permission. We need to invite God in our hearts.

Let us not forget

Filipinos would normally travel back to their respective hometowns in time for November 1. This is a tradition that is worth practicing. It is a tradition of remembering.

When we remember, we are declaring that we will not forget. We are not forgetting the good things that they have done so that we can continue it. At the same time we are also not forgetting the negative things that they have done so that we will not repeat the same mistakes.

Let us look on two contrasting verses. Acts 11:16 says "Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" In this verse, John, who was dead already, was remembered as someone who would preached repentance and challenged people to be baptized as a sign that they have repented. The good things that John did were remembered. The second verse is Luke 17:32. Jesus said "Remember Lot's wife!" Jesus was reminding the people not to follow what Lot's wife did. This is not good way to be remembered but it has be brought up again and again so that we may not repeat her bad example.

When we remember, we also declare that our departed loved ones have become a member of our present community once again. Remember is a combination of two words -- "re" and "member." It can mean "to be a member again."

Hebrews 11:4 is an example of "becoming a member again" -- "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead." Abel becomes a member of the community again every time he is remembered.

Let us now take this time to pause and remember our loved ones who have gone before us.

The November 1 tradition

Most of us would visit our departed loved ones in the cemetery during November 1. It is our tradition to light candles, eat sticky food, and reunite with family members on All Saints Day.

What lessons can we learn on our November 1 tradition?

First, let us value our family. In our fast pace world nowadays we sometimes tend to forget to greet our loved ones, share stories with them, and just sit there, feel their presence, and spend some quality time with them.

We need to seek out our family members and let them feel that we value their existence. Sometimes a surprise visit does a lot of good.

When was the last time you visited your family?

Second, let us fellowship in our table. It increasingly alarming that we oftentimes eat alone, and in a fast food joint. One can note in the gospels that there are many stories of Jesus together with people attending a feast or having just plain supper. Jesus did not do it for the free food but in eating together, Jesus was teaching us about how to nurture our relationship with one another.

What is it in eating together? When we share a meal, there is ritual of passing the plates, viands, and drinks. While doing this, we are reconnecting with our family members – we would ask them what is happening with their life, and vice versa. This is why eating in a table with family and friends would sometimes take a long time to finish. Table fellowship is a good way of uniting our family.

Eating foods that are sticky on November 1 is a reminder for Filipinos to stick with your family. There are many families that

are breaking up, and eating “*suman*” reminds us to keep our family together.

When was the last time you ate with your family?

Third, we need to keep and continue the legacy of our departed loved ones.

I noticed that in the cemetery, one of the purposes of lighting a candle is to start a conversation about the departed loved one and use the life of the candle as the timer when to end the conversation. Although the conversation is short, it rekindles memories. The swapping of stories becomes a great way of passing on to the next generation the legacy of the previous generation.

When was the last time you told a story of your departed loved one to the new generation of your family?

Let us value our family. In our fast pace world nowadays we sometimes forget to greet our love ones, share stories with them, and just sit there and feel their presence.

Pruned to be Fruitful

Jesus said, “I am the vine and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch that does not produce fruit and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more.”

When Jesus spoke of this analogy I imagine that He was standing in the midst of a vineyard or near its vicinity and that his audience is looking at a lot of grapes. Jesus often spoke using the object lesson method of teaching. In this instance Jesus was telling his disciples that their faith must bear fruit. For our faith to be like a fruit it should be something that is tangible, attractive, tasty, and useful.

What kind of faith did the early church show that can be describe like a fruit?

First, their faith was tangible because they helped the poor. They have a food distribution center, and shared their excess wealth. It was a very attractive sight that eventually attracted the people and made them join Christianity. The book of Acts tells us that thousands were added to their fold.

When was the last time that you gave a material thing to someone who is in need?

Second, their faith was attractive because they verbally shared the Gospel to the people. They did it through preaching, singing and giving testimonies.

Let us find ways to verbally express our faith. If you want to preach, then study preaching and ask your pastor for an opportunity to share the Word of God. If you do not want to preach, you can become a Bible study leader, a Sunday School teacher, a testimony giver, a liturgist, a singer or an encourager.

When was the last time that you verbally expressed your faith?

Remembering how to give thanks

November is the month when churches celebrate Thanksgiving. This is a tradition coming from the Protestant Missionaries that came to the Philippines more than 100 years ago.

The time of Nehemiah was a time of rebuilding. He was the leader who led the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. When they finished the wall, there was a dedication ceremony. In this ceremony, the people of God once again learned how to thank God.

Nehemiah 12:27-28 point two interesting points – “At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres. The singers also were brought together from the region around Jerusalem...” If you have noticed, the interesting phrases are “were sought out” and “were brought together.” These verses are telling us that previously they were engaged in praising and thanking God. But for a long time they have forgotten it. They must have thought that if there was no temple or walls there was no reason for thanksgiving. At this juncture, the people were reminded by Nehemiah to give thanks to God.

How did they give thanks again?

First, through singing. Nehemiah 12:31ff says “I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks. One was to proceed on top of the wall to the right, toward the Dung Gate... The second choir proceeded in the opposite direction.”

Singing has a mnemonic ability for people to remember words. Our brains are designed to remember songs. One verse for example, Psalm 47:6, commands us to sing four times – “Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises!” We remember more when we sing compared to just

talking. So, let us sing thanksgiving songs to God and remember His goodness to our lives.

Second, they brought their contributions, first fruits and tithes. Nehemiah 12:44 says, “At that time men were appointed to be in charge of the storerooms for the contributions, firstfruits and tithes. From the fields around the towns they were to bring into the storerooms the portions required by the Law...”

They brought three specific things – contributions, first fruits and tithes. We, too, must do it. The contributions are for specific purposes. The first fruits are the best of our labor that we give to God. The tithes are of course, the tenth of our income.

What was the result of their thanksgiving? Nehemiah 12:43 tell us of the result – “And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.” Our thanksgiving must be heard in our lips and be seen in our lives.

***Our thanksgiving must be heard in our lips and be
seen in our lives.***

Walking with a purpose

My family had the opportunity of having a one-week vacation in Singapore. Our vacation involved a lot of walking. The number of steps that I can make in normal day would just be between 5,000 to 10,000, that involves exercise already. In Singapore it jumped to a low of 18,000 and a high of 25,000. This seemingly endless walking from one station to another, from one tourist attraction to another, got me thinking -- how many steps did Jesus have on an average day?

Jesus may have walked a few kilometers or a lot, but what matters to Him was that He walked with a purpose. Matthew 4:18-20 recounts one of the walking trips of Jesus -- "As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him."

Jesus walked with a purpose in mind -- to search for people to become His disciples. We can see the criteria in the searching process of Jesus. He was looking for hardworking people who would not give up. A fisherman for this matter fits the criteria. A fisherman would try his best not to go home empty handed because the survival of his family depends on his fishing.

Jesus was also looking for people who are obedient and can make sacrifices. As we can see, they left their nets, their source of income. Their family depended on them yet they obeyed Jesus. They made a great sacrifice. Their sacrifice was honored by God.

What about us? Do we intentionally search for would-be disciples who can continue the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ? It is time for us to do that. Are we working hard for the ministry of Jesus, finding time to share the Gospel? We need to work out our salvation. Meaning, to exercise our faith by sharing it to others. Are we willing to sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel?

Continue

November 20, 2016 was the 89th Commencement Exercises of Central Philippine University in its 111 years of existence. Families from all over converged at Rose Memorial Auditorium to witness the graduation rites of their respective loved ones.

The word that came into my mind when I saw the throng of graduates was "Continue." I am praying for them to just "Continue." Here are four challenges for the graduates to "Continue," and of course these challenges are also for all of us.

First, continue the exemplary teachings that you have received especially those teachings from the Bible and those lessons that lead to salvation.

Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:14-15 "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

Second, continue to live out your salvation wherever you may go.

Paul reminded the Philippian Christians in Philippians 2:12 "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling..."

Third, continue to live for Christ and in Christ.

Paul challenged those who received Christ to show it in their lives -- Col 2:6 "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him..."

Fourth, continue to share your blessings and God's favor with others.

Paul reminded the church in Galatia not to disregard those who are in need -- Galatians 2:10 "All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do."

Continue the exemplary teachings that you have received especially those teachings from the Bible and those lessons that lead to salvation.

Continue to live for Christ and in Christ.

Thanksgiving Reasons and Ways

Psalm 75 teaches us to thank God. Verse 1 says, "We thank you, O God!" Here are four reasons that the Psalmist has given:

First, we give thanks because God is always with us. Ps. 75:1 reason out that "We give thanks because our God is near."

Second, we give thanks because we can see God's amazing work in our life and the lives of other people. Ps 75:1 also says that "People everywhere tell of God's wonderful deeds."

Third, we give thanks because God in His own time will bring justice. Ps. 75:2 gives us this assurance -- God says, "At the time I have planned, I will bring justice against the wicked."

Fourth, we give thanks because our hope is in God. Ps 75:3 gives us the confidence -- "When the earth quakes and its people live in turmoil, I am the one who keeps its foundations firm."

Psalm 75 also teaches us three ways of thanking God:

First, we must thank God by not boasting and acting in defiance against Him. Ps. 75.4 says, "I warned the proud, 'Stop your boasting!' I told the wicked, 'Don't raise your fists.'"

Second, we must thank God by telling others what God has done and is doing in our lives. Ps. 75:9 recounts what the Psalmist did "But as for me, I will always proclaim what God has done."

Third, we must thank God by singing songs of praises and thanksgiving. Ps. 75:9 challenges us to sing -- "I will sing praises to the God of Jacob."

Eucharistia

The Greek word “thanksgiving” is *eucharistía* and it comes from two Greek words – *eu* which means “well” and *cháris* which means “grace.” This means that when we consider God’s *cháris* “grace” we are compelled to have *eucharistía* “thanksgiving.”

I remembered what Mrs. Felina Silencino emphatically preached, “We can live for 60 days without food, 6 days without water but not 1 second more without the grace of God.” Indeed, we must acknowledge our indebtedness to God for the gift of life itself and for His mercy in sustaining us.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:18 Paul encourages us that we must “give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” The duty of thanksgiving must be evident in our prayers.

We must thank God for blessings that are granted. We must also be thankful for prayers that are deferred for they are delayed only until a more favorable time when we can fully appreciate the value of the blessing. And we must still be grateful for the petitions that are denied because God knows that what we have asked is not beneficial and can only hurt us. Soon, God will bestow to us something better than what we have prayed for.

I remember one instance when we decided to buy tiles for our house. To my disappointment, the tile that we have chosen was out of stock when we decided to buy it. Somebody bought it a day before. My wife, Hermely, reminded me that since we committed our plans to God, He will give us something better. I was skeptical with her reassurances. She urged me to visit another store. And behold the tile what we like was available and, to make it sweeter, the tile was for sale at a discounted price.

Let us continue to give thanks to God for indeed He is faithful, good and merciful to all of us.

Be a herald

Most of us are looking forward to the month of December because we will be celebrating Christmas. With this celebration comes reunions, parties, festivities, and of course church worships, fellowships, gift giving, White Gift service and cantatas.

As we hop from one celebration to another during the Christmas season we need to be reminded of our role as the herald of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist is a great example of being a herald.

Here are some of the things that we can learn from him:

First, we must be forerunners of Jesus Christ like John the Baptist. He was sent to tell the people about the light, the true light. He was not the light but a witness to tell about the light.

What about us? Let it be that our presence in a festivity or a party in the Christmas season becomes a big difference because we are witnesses of the light of the world – Jesus Christ.

Second, we must be moral reformers. John challenged the people to become righteous. He preached “Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.”

Here are some instances about John’s moral challenge found in Luke 3:11ff. He challenged people to share their clothes and food. He told the tax collectors not to take more than they are required to. And when the soldiers asked him what to do, he replied that they should not extort money and be content with their pay.

It would seem that not much has change. Their society is somewhat similar to us – people are greedy, materialistic and abusive of their power.

Can we follow John's example to be "a voice crying in the wilderness" and get the anger of powerful people? Josephus, a Jewish historian, later recorded that Herod arrested and executed John because his message of reform might lead to a revolt. Let us pray for moral courage like that of John.

Let it be that our presence in a festivity or a party in the Christmas season becomes a big difference because we are witnesses of the light of the world – Jesus Christ.

We must be forerunners of Jesus Christ like John the Baptist. He was sent to tell the people about the light, the true light. He was not the light but a witness to tell about the light.

Without the Light there is no life

Last December 2, 2016 between fifteen thousand to twenty thousand people witnessed the switching on of Christmas lights and fireworks display at Central Philippine University. This event spearheaded by the CPU Alumni Association was started many years ago not just to attract people to the campus of CPU but more so to draw people to the Light of the World, Jesus Christ.

Why is Jesus called the Light of the world (John 8:12)? It is very interesting to note that in Genesis 1:3 the first command of God was "Let there be light." In the New Testament Jesus was called as "the true Light that gives light to every person" (John 1:9). Theologically, we can see the reason behind the first command of God. Genesis 1:2 says "the earth was formless, empty and in darkness." It was the Light that gave the world meaning, form and sense. John 1:4 connects light with life -- that without Jesus, there will be no life. This means that without Jesus Christ our lives will be without form, meaningless and in the dark.

Another interesting fact is that this theological assertion is supported by a scientific explanation. <https://theplanets.org/the-sun/> says that "the Sun provides a vital ingredient for most of the life on Earth. Without the energy provided through sunlight, vegetation cannot grow, and without vegetation animals do not have a source of nourishment." Furthermore, <http://solarsystem.nasa.gov/planets/sun> declares that the Sun's "gravity holds the solar system together, keeping everything from the biggest planets to the smallest particles of debris in its orbit."

Indeed, without Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, we will never have a meaningful life. Let us be witnesses of the Light!

Live out Christmas

Every December, people would come to the campus of Central Philippine University to witness the switching-on of the Christmas lights as part of the awaited annual celebration dubbed as the Festival of Lights and Music. One time, many years ago, the theme of Festival was “*Ikabuhi ang Paskua.*”

How should we live out Christmas in our daily lives?

In order to live the meaning of Christmas, Jesus must be born in our lives. John 1:14 tells us that “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us...” Jesus is not a metaphysical being but as the early creeds of Christianity state, “born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose again from the dead...”

Although the early creeds left out the portion that “Jesus lived, preached and taught about the Kingdom of God, healed the sick, organized disciples” the objective to defeat the teaching of the heretics in the early church was achieved. The heretics argued that matter is evil and spirit is good, thus, in order for Jesus to be good, he has no flesh, and he was like a phantom. They denied the humanity of Jesus. The early Christians defended the humanity and divinity of Jesus.

What can these musings on creeds and church history teach us? It reminds us that Jesus is not just interested in our spiritual lives but equally, Jesus is interested also on how we live our physical lives. There should be no dichotomy between what is spiritual and what is secular. Christianity is not only on Sundays but the whole week 24/7. To be a Christian is not only to be practiced inside the church but also in our workplace, home and anywhere.

Check your insecurities and pride

The World Human Rights Day of the United Nations interestingly falls during the Christmas season. The first Christmas story was not just a joyous celebration of the angels, the worship of the shepherds, and the gift giving of Wise Men but it was also a very sad time because of the heinous violation of the human rights of innocent children -- the right to live. The lives of many children were cut short by the command of King Herod because he wanted to kill Jesus.

What lessons can we learn from this story?

First, violation of human rights happens if people are insecure of their position. King Herod did not want that anybody would threaten his kingship. He even put to death his wife and sons. Thus, we need to remember that we should strive to be promoted, not because we have put down others, but because of our own merit.

Second, human rights are trampled because of pride. King Herod summoned the chief priests and teachers of the law, and asked them where the Messiah was to be born. All of them answered that the prophets have foretold that it would be in Bethlehem. Even with this affirmation, King Herod did not humble himself. He could have organized a search party of his own and looked for Jesus. Instead he tried to trick the Wise Men. King Herod's pride resulted into the bloody death of the innocent children. This teaches us to always strive to humble ourselves because our pride will only hurt others.

Let us check our insecurities and our pride, and commit it to God because if it will continue to be unchecked, it will surely lead to hurting others and ultimately our own destruction.

The Christmas Star

Every December we can see a lot of stars. We can see it atop the Christmas trees, star-shaped Christmas lights, and of course the traditional *parol* in the form of a star. We use the symbol of star to remember what happened in the first Christmas story.

What lessons can we learn from the Christmas star?

We must become a guide to people who are searching for Jesus; we must continue to be seekers of Jesus. The star was the guide of the wise men who traveled from a faraway place to visit Jesus.

The wise men had detractors along the way, notably King Herod, but they were persistent because the star guided them.

According to scientists, there are about 5,000 stars that can be seen by the naked eye although not all are visible at any given time or place. Modern astronomers believe that there are more than 1×10 to the 22 number of stars. The number is 1 followed by 22 zeros.

Among these millions of star, one star became visible to the wise men that became their guide. The account in Matthew 2:9 is that “the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was.”

There are two challenges here:

Firstly, to those who have found Jesus, we must become the guide of those who continue to seek Jesus. We must be their “star” that continues to point the direction where Jesus is. Among the many “stars” let us be visible and guide those who need our help. The wise men a long time ago were filled with joy when they saw the star. We hope that a lot of people will be overjoyed because we acted as their “stars” leading them to the light of Jesus.

Secondly, to those who are seeking Jesus, do not be in despair in your search. There will always be detractors along the way, but continue on searching because there are guides who are there for you. These guides will be your “stars” who will point you to the right direction.

May we remember the meaning of the Christmas Star every time we see stars not just during December but during nighttime as we reflect on the light of Christ.

We must become a guide to people who are searching for Jesus; we must continue to be seekers of Jesus.

To those who have found Jesus, we must become the guide of those who continue to seek Jesus. We must be their “star” that continues to point the direction where Jesus is.

Christmas time is reunion time

Christmas is a season of family reunions. We always find time to go back to our roots and visit the ancestral house and join with our families who are still living there.

The story surrounding the first Christmas also talks about the value of family. What lessons can we learn from Christmas in relation to our family?

Matthew 1 talks about the genealogy of Jesus. It is boring to read. But I heard a testimony from an American Jew that that chapter was the way that he was converted.

After Mary's questions and hesitations were answered by the angel, she conceived Jesus through the Holy Spirit. This is where the problem started. The problem was pregnancy out of wedlock. This teenage pregnancy was a scandal. Nobody believed Mary. Her family, friends and even Joseph thought of having her stoned to death.

Who helped Mary in this time of crisis? She went to her cousins Elizabeth and Zechariah. She was with them for three months - the most delicate part of pregnancy. She experienced care, love and attention from the family of Elizabeth and Zechariah. And this is where Mary sang her *Magnificat anima mea Dominum* (My soul magnifies the Lord).

The first lesson here is that our family should be a place of refuge and strength for those who are in need. We must open ourselves, our family to persons who are in need of us.

Another part of the Christmas story is the travel of Mary and Joseph back to Bethlehem. This was because of the census. This was a big family reunion because everyone was returning to their roots. The map that I consulted shows the travel of Mary and Joseph to be about 129 kilometers. This was a long travel by foot and donkey.

The second lesson for us is that we must try our best to go back to our original homes during Christmas time. It should be the time of the year for renewing family relationships. Christmas is a time to go back to our roots, a time to proclaim that we value our family, our tradition and our legacy.

If you read the book of Numbers there are a lot of "begat" in there. A lot of us got bored reading it. But the lesson of that book is to value our family, our lineage. Matthew 1 is a good example of tracing the lineage of Jesus.

How about us? Do we draw our family tree and make the persons in there alive through our stories? Christmas time is a good time to gather together and start tracing our roots.

***Our family should be a place of refuge and strength
for those who are in need. We must open ourselves,
our family to persons who are in need of us.***

Year-end reflections

Year-ender days are times ripe for reflections. In a few days a brand new year will come. A good reading during year-end is Paul's letter to the Philippians. It says in 3:13-14, "To forget what is behind us and do our best to reach what is ahead. To run straight toward the goal in order to win the prize."

I am very sure that most of us have a lot of things that we want to forget. But apart from being senile, brain malfunction or maybe hypnosis, no person can really forget what has happened in the past. We cannot erase bad memories even if we wish to.

What then is the message of the bible to "forget what is behind us"?

In Biblical terms, "to forget" does not mean "to fail to remember." Rather, "to forget" means "to be no longer influenced by or affected by." The Bible Exposition Commentary explains it this way: "We cannot change the past, but we can change the meaning of the past." If we look at it this way, then we can say that although the events did not change, our understanding of the past events has changed.

By learning from what happened in the past, we are breaking the power of the past by living for the future.

John Booty states it more clearly. He wrote: "More importantly, there is the way in which the past determines the present and the future. To move from one agenda to another without reflection on what has happened is to allow ourselves to be tyrannized by past events. If we are to deal meaningfully with current issues we must consider our past, both as individuals and as groups – churches and nations."

About the Author

Rev. Francis Neil Gico Jalando-on comes from a family of pastors.

He earned his Bachelor of Science in Accountancy at Central Philippine University. He did not become a Certified Public Accountant but answered the call of God to become a pastor. He enrolled at the College of Theology, Central Philippine University and finished his Master of Divinity.

His masteral paper entitled “A History of Philippine Baptist Pastors from 1898-2002” was published later into book by the Institute for Advanced Theological Studies.

During his college days, he was a two-time CPU Republic Senator and was later elected as CPUR Vice President. He supported his studies with a scholarship as varsity of the CPU Table Tennis Team. He was also the first webmaster of CPU.

From 2002 to 2008, he served as Administrative Assistant of the Institute for Advanced Theological Studies. This organization helped in the continuing theological education of pastors and publication of theological journals.

During these years, he was a part-time teacher at the Convention Baptist Bible College in Bacolod City where he taught Church History, Contemporary Issues, Ecumenics and Systematic Theology.

In 2009 he became the Assistant Director of the Office for External Affairs and Public Relations of CPU. He hosted programs in Radio DYVS, DYSI, RMN, and TV programs in the CPU TV Channel. During his tenure he was also in-charge of the publication of the alumni newsletter, *The Centralian Link*, and the weekly online newsletter, “Letter from Central.”

Currently, he serves Central Philippine University in various capacities. He is an Assistant Chaplain, part-time teacher of the College of Theology and College of Business and Accountancy, and the coach of the CPU Golden Lions College Table Tennis Varsity Teams.

He writes a weekly reflection entitled “Binhi sang Pagtuo” published online with more than 8,000 recipients. Some of these reflections can be found in this volume.

During weekends, he serves as Pulpit Pastor of Bacolod Bethany Church, and La Carlota Evangelical Church, Negros Occidental.

He was previously an Associate Chaplain of Central Philippine University, and later an Associate Pastor of the University Church. Presently, he is the Director of the CPU Office of Communications. Under this office is the Information Center, the Educational Media Center, TV Channel, Website and Media Relations. This office manages the official social media accounts of the university, and spearheads the publication of the *Weekly Centralian Link*, and the *Central Post*.

He also has involvements in national organizations. He previously served the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches, and the National Council of Churches in the Philippines as member of the Faith and Order Committee. This is body that decides matters on church doctrines, and practices.

He was also the National President of the Convention Baptist Ministers’ Association from 2011-2013. This is the national organization of Baptist pastors serving the churches and institutions of the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches.

He is married to Hermely Agriam, Purchasing Officer of CPU. They have two children: Kairos Rye and Francheska MJ.

From the Foreword

As the University is always finding means to even strengthen our Christian faith, CPU embraces with an open heart opportunities that spread the gospel. This third volume of the *Seeds of Faith* is another collection of devotional reading prepared by Rev. Francis Neil G. Jalando-on that will once again inspire and guide each one of us as we become stewards of God's beautiful kingdom. Just like the two other volumes, may this even strengthen our convictions and may this impact our professional and spiritual lives.

Dr. Teodoro C. Robles

President
Central Philippine University

The *Seeds of Faith*, sent weekly through email and posted in social media has been a part of my spiritual refreshment. Rev. Francis Neil G. Jalando-on's theological insights coupled with his personal experiences imbued with local color bring a certain vitality and freshness that enrich my own spiritual musings. I hope many other readers would allow God to speak to them through Rev. Jalando-on's devotional reflections which speak of his spiritual awakenings as a Filipino Christian.

Prof. Esther Rose A. Romarate

Faculty
Department of Languages, Mass Communication, and Humanities
Central Philippine University

For the past many years, *Seeds of Faith* has been instrumental in nurturing the faith not only of our CPU faculty, staff and students, but also our churches, alumni (both local and abroad) and individuals who have been benefited by this project initiated by the Rev. Francis Neil G. Jalando-on. As General Secretary of CPBC, I strongly recommend that we utilize this great spiritual resource full of profound and practical relevance to our daily living. I would like to thank the Rev. Jalando-on for generously sharing this devotional material for the spiritual and moral uplift of all those who get hold of this valuable material.

Rev. Dr. Jerson B. Narciso

General Secretary
Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches