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St. Scholastica's Priory
Manila

Dear Sisters,

We have entered into the season of ADVENT. If there is a word that describes the emotional color of this season, it is LONGING.. Who of us has not felt at one time or the other this poignant feeling of longing? People who have to live abroad away from their families, even some of us when we are assigned to a foreign country, feel once in a while this void in our heart that we call LONGING. Those who are serving their jail sentence must feel this emotion even more often than other people. A married couple may feel longing to have a child. People who fall in love yearn to be with their beloved. Maybe when we are unhappy in some assignment, we long for the day of our transfer. And so on.

During ADVENT, we, the whole Church and the whole of Creation express our LONGING FOR OUR SALVATION. In the depth of our heart, we long to be whole, we long to transcend our ego that subtly invades all what we do, we long to get out of our selfishness, addictions, inner slaveries, our pettiness. We long to be one with the Divine in us. As we look around us, we see our people longing to get out of their misery, their abject poverty, their many afflictions. We long to see the dawn of the real and fundamental transformation of our Philippine society—to have a government that will truly serve the people, that will put an end to corruption and to wipe away the shame from the face of our country.

We bring all these longings in our Advent liturgy till the dawn comes and the “morning star rises in our hearts.”

Lovingly yours,



Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB

125TH JUBILEE STATIO CONFERENCE

D i s c e r n m e n t - D i s c r e t i o n

By Ndanda Priory

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect. Rom 12:2

Cernere – the Latin word means to separate, to see,

Discernere – to distinguish,

To see deeply in order to separate, distinguish or discern

Our *sources* for the Benedictine values Discernment and Discretion are Jesus, then Cassian, the Early Fathers of the Church, Benedict and his RB, and our Constitutions.

Meditate how **Jesus, our Role Model**, discerns the will of His Father and follows it up in action. Examples: 40 days in the desert; his prayer at Gethsemane; and Mark 1:35-39 which shows you how Jesus discerns and acts against the humanly wise good expectation of all people.

“Discretion is the mother of virtues, says **Cassian**. All the other virtues lose their value when they become unbalanced. Discretion provides the balance, and is about preserving the balance between excessive fervour and laxity”

For Cassian, discretion is always the *gift of the Holy Spirit* that enables one to read the “thoughts” of oneself or another so as to understand and guide their direction.

We must make choices between various options, the good or the better: and something better in itself may not be better for me. We should serve God as generously as possible but also be guided by discretion, so that we do not exceed our personal abilities.

Discernment in the early monastic tradition:

is concerned with discerning one’s thoughts, to trace their origin. Discernment can only come out of a humility that will allow a monk to disclose his thoughts and deeds to the elder, “for a wrong thought is enfeebled at the moment that it is discovered”. (Cassian, Conferences 2:10).

Benedict was able to discern Totilus and was not deceived by the change of clothes. In RB 58 he strongly recommends wise discernment, whether the newcomer is coming with the right intention, in the spirit. The Abbot should let himself be guided by the gift of discernment. *He must so arrange everything that the strong have something to yearn for and the weak nothing to run from.* RB 64:19.

Cassian on the gift of discernment has the following to say:

It avoids every exaggeration to the right or left, and teaches the monk always to proceed on the golden way. It is neither in the habit of over-excited achievement of virtues (by overstepping the bounds of a correct asceticism from excessive zeal or from too exalted an opinion of oneself), nor will it deflect to the left, and from laxity allow all faults to run to seed (i.e. to become spiritually lukewarm under the pretext of keeping the body in good form).

Moderation is not minimalism.

Ruth Fox OSB in the Book for Benedictine Prioresses *Wisdom Leadership*, p. 72, says:

“The ideal process for arriving at decisions in the monastic chapter and council is discernment. Discernment is a decision making process for seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to arrive at the will of God. Discernment, which is integral to Benedictine spirituality, begins with the encounter with God in one’s personal center. Through silence, lectio, prayer, and stability in the community, each individual member lives her monastic life in the climate of discernment, always seeking the will of God.

When the members come together in community meetings, they bring the richness of their spiritual life with them. With the experience of listening to God in prayer, they now turn to listening to one another. Each member speaks respectfully from her own well of wisdom. To the degree that every member of the community is able to speak her wisdom, then to let it go, and to hear and assimilate the wisdom of others, will the group come closer to the will of God on any given issue at any given time in its history. The process facilitates the sharing and provides the environment of freedom wherein she invites the sisters to speak freely at meetings. The elder members have earned a certain amount of respect for their experience and learned wisdom. A novelty introduced by Benedict is the part given to the young in community discussions. St. Benedict feels, on the contrary, that the younger ones, who arrive without experience or prejudices, were more open to receive inspiration from the Holy Spirit. From the sharing and the listening to the Holy Spirit present in the members, a communal decision is reached.

The very validity of a discernment process is found in the unanimity of the acceptance of the discerned decision. One opinion does not win over another opinion. Rather, the entire community wins because the voice of the Spirit has been heard, interpreted by the wisdom of the prioress after discernment with her sisters, accepted by all members.”

It is the obligation of all sisters, especially of the young ones, not only to listen to the Spirit, the sisters, and the signs of the times prayerfully, but also to voice their opinion in a humble way in a community meeting/ chapter. cf RB 3:3

Ignatius of Loyola has much to say on discernment in his Spiritual Exercises and presents Rules for the discernment of Spirits for the individual person before God.

Consolation indicates any movement of affectivity toward God; desolation any movement of affectivity away from God.

Guide Questions for Reflection:

- Do I take time for listening in prayer, for consultation with the basic readiness to do the will of God, not my own, unconditionally, for major but as well for minor decisions?
- How pure are my motives to discern what God wants me/us to do?
- Do I study relevant articles, books, documents to build, and form my conscience?
- How do I involve myself in the decision making process of the community and do I accept the final outcome as the will of God in faith and humility without grumbling?
- Reflect on three examples of discernment of the will of God (either personal or in community) during the last year. What can I learn about the process for the future?

Excerpts from PAUL’S DYNAMIC MISSION PRINCIPLES -A Missioner Reflection – By James Kroeger, M.M.

The Apostle Paul is considered the greatest missionary of all time; he is called the Apostle to the Gentiles since he was mainly responsible for the spread of Christianity into the Gentile world. The church owes much to Paul for its growth; he pioneered its early expansion through his mission labours and his theological reflection.

I. DEPTH AWARENESS OF VOCATION. In Paul’s mind there was not an iota of doubt about his calling, his vocation; for Paul and all missioners, **mission originates in the call of God.** Several passages in the Book of Acts describe Paul’s conversion and call to mission: “The Lord said to him (Ananias), ‘Go! This man (Paul) is my chosen instrument to bring my name before Gentiles’... “ (Acts 9:15).

In addition, the majority of Paul’s letters begin with a firm assertion of his identity as a chosen instrument of God. “From Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, who has been called to be an apostle and specially chosen to preach the good news..”(Rom 1:1) Several other letters begin with almost the identical words: “From Paul, appointed by God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus..” (II Cor 1:1); see also 1 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; Phil 1:1 and others. Writing to the Corinthians about Christ’s Resurrection, Paul categorically states: “I am the least of the apostles; in fact, since I persecuted the church of God, I hardly deserve the name apostle; but by God’s grace that is what I am, and the grace that he gave me has not been fruitless” (I Cor 15:9-10).

II RADICAL COMMITMENT TO CHRIST. Paul's experience on the Damascus road was, in fact, only the starting point of a life-long relationship; **mission envisions a totally Christ-centered life.** Paul expressed his life in Christ in various ways: "Life to me, of course, is Christ..." (Phil 1:21). "None of us lives to ourselves, and none of us dies to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's..." (Rom 14:7-8). "I have been crucified with Christ, and I live now not with my own life, but with the life of Christ who lives in me." (Gal 2:19-20)

All of Paul's writings speak of his love for Christ, his identification with Christ. So intimate was his relationship that he could even advise the Corinthians: "Imitate me as I imitate Christ" Paul writing to the Philippians, makes a moving comparison of his previous life to his new-found existence in Christ. "I believe nothing can happen that will outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For him I have accepted the loss of everything, and I look on everything as so much rubbish if only I can have Christ and be given a place in him"(Phil 3:8)

III. VOLUNTARY ACCEPTANCE OF SUFFERING. Not relying on words alone, the Apostle Paul preached the gospel by his life and example. In a particular way, **vulnerability and acceptance of the Cross authenticate mission.** In imitation of Christ who gave himself up to death – even for sinners (Rom 5:8), Paul considers his suffering for the sake of the gospel as a participation in the sufferings of Christ (II Cor 1:5-7) Paul saw himself sharing in Christ's kenosis (Phil 2:6-11) as he endured suffering. Writing to Timothy, he says"... join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling" (II Tim 1:8-9)

Paul recounts his numerous trials in the service of the gospel, he mentions his imprisonments, beatings, shipwrecks, travels, robberies, hard labor, sleeplessness, hunger thirst and nakedness (cf. II Cor 11:23-27) Paul also mentions that he had to bear "a thorn in the flesh" (II Cor 12:7). Yet he notes:"I am quite content with my weaknesses and with insults, hardships, persecutions and the agonies I go through for Christ's sake. For it is when I am weak that I am strong" (II Cor 12:7)

IV. INSIGHTFUL MISSION METHODS. It is valid to affirm that all Paul's energies were mission-focused, yet one can also point out that he employed distinct methods to achieve his purpose. **Mission demands creative, inculturated, ever-renewed approaches to evangelization.** Paul sought various occasions which would facilitate his proclamation; he attempted to suit his preaching to the people's context and worldview. Paul's approach at Ephesus (Acts 19) is exemplary; he would preach in the synagogue or a nearby house and attempt to bridge the Jewish faith with Christian revelation (cf. Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1, 17:1, etc.).

Paul's missionary activities are manifested in his convictions that adaptations (inculturation in today's parlance) is essential when mission meets a new situation (Acts 15) He vigorously opposed the imposition of Jewish legal traditions, cultural observations or external religious practices on Gentile Christians; these could hinder the spread of the gospel into the

Gentile world. Paul even withstood James in Jerusalem (Acts 15) and Peter in Antioch (Gal 2:11-14).

Paul articulates his “inculturated” method of becoming “all things to everyone” (I Cor:19-23) He adapts himself to the Jews, to those outside the law, and to the weak. His vision is crystal clear: “I have made myself the slave of everyone so as to win as many as I could .. I made myself all things to everyone in order to save some at any cost; and I still do this, for the sake of the gospel, to have a share in its blessings.”

V. URGENT GOSPEL PROCLAMATION. Paul did not understand ”preaching” as giving a spiritual reflection in a liturgical assembly. Integral proclamation means heralding an urgent message from God that profoundly affects the destiny of humankind. **Mission has lost none of its urgency in the contemporary world.** Paul’s words possess a genuine, authentic ring –even in our ears today: “ For if I preach the gospel, that give me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (I Cor 9:16) For all Christians, evangelization must be a “daily preoccupation” (II Cor 11:28)

This Pauline “mission principle” is actually a call for an examination of conscience on the part of the church. Have many local churches placed too much emphasis on administrative efficiency, pastoral management, economic accountability, liturgical practice, canonical and catechetical orthodoxy – all to the detriment of dynamic programs of renewed evangelization? Have inward (ad intra) concerns vitiated the church’s outward (ad extra) mission commitment? Paul’s words contain a challenge to all churches and religious communities.

VI. DEEP LOVE OF THE CHURCH. In examining Paul’s apostolic methods, it is enlightening to probe his view of the church. Paul primarily understands the church as a local community of baptized followers of Jesus Christ, he was not opposed to the idea of a universal church, but in his day the local congregation was central to his experience. **Mission and love of the people who constitute the Church go hand-in-hand.** This principle echoes the thought of an elderly Maryknoll missionary who never tired of repeating: Mission is people.

Paul had great love and concern for the ecclesial communities he founded with painstaking effort. His writings frequently and spontaneously express his affection. “It is only natural that I should feel like this towards you all, since you have shared the privileges which have been mine: both my chains and my work defending and establishing the gospel. You have a permanent place in my heart, and God knows how much I miss you all, loving you as Christ Jesus loves you” (Phil 1:7-8)

When the churches Paul established with patient, apostolic ministry were in trouble, Paul shared their pain; he speaks of his “daily preoccupation” for them (II Cor 11:28) He wonders aloud: “I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted” (Gal 4:11). “My children, I must go through the pain of giving birth to you all over again until Christ is formed in you” (Gal 4:19)

VII. CLOSE COLLABORATION WITH CO-WORKERS. The Apostle Paul, though a strong individual, was a team-worker in the task of evangelization. Paul understood that **all apostolic ministry is enhanced through collaborative efforts.** A few examples show that Paul saw great advantages in working together with other apostles. On his first missionary journey, Paul was accompanied by Barnabas and Mark (Acts 13-14) Timothy and Silvanus were his trusted co-workers in Corinth and elsewhere (II Cor 1:19) Titus was his appointed deputy in dealing with difficulties in the Corinthian community (II Cor 8:23) Among other co-workers and fellow-apostles were Luke, Erastus, Aristarchus and Tychicus.

Paul considered teamwork and collaborative ministry important for a variety of reasons. Apostles working in partnership presented a visible image of the church as community; it gave the people an example of common witness. A variety of apostles working for a common goal presented a more balanced picture of the church than Paul alone could have given. In addition, the gifts of various individuals were put at the service of gospel proclamation.

Paul frequently expressed his admiration and appreciation of his collaborators; he called Timothy his “co-worker” (Rom 16:21) and tenderly describes him as “my dear and faithful son” (I Cor 4:17) “whose worth you know, how like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel” (Phil 2:22). Paul referred Titus as “my brother” (2 Cor 2:13) and “my partner and co-worker” (II Cor 8:23) Even if disputes occasionally arose, Paul sought to promote communion-in-mission. Paul offers contemporary ministers a model of cooperative ministry.

VIII. COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION. Paul preached a gospel of freedom and liberation along his manifest concern and love for the poor and the suffering. **The Gospel message of human dignity and equality, if embraced, leads to social transformation.** Paul firmly believed in the transforming power of the Gospel message, and he proposed to his communities the model of Jesus Christ: “Remember how generous the Lord Jesus was; he was rich but he became poor for your sake, to make you rich out of his poverty” (II Cor 8:9) And for gospel credibility, Paul himself imitated Christ. Though he possessed citizenship in the Roman Empire, as a sign of his social concern and commitment, he chose the lot of ordinary working-class people and laboured with his own hands for his livelihood (e.g I The 2:9; I Cor 4:12)

Paul challenged many of the social, racial, religious, cultural and economic barriers of his time. One brief example illustrates Paul’s social message. In ancient times, there were three great blessings pronounced in the Jewish synagogue: “Blessed be thou, O Lord our God .. who has not made me a Gentile, ... who has not made me a slave... who has not made me a woman!” Paul certainly had these barriers in mind when he expressed the new unity of those baptized in Christ: “There are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28) All without distinction, are to gather around the Eucharistic table, that great center of unity.

Numerous additional examples of Paul’s social consciousness readily come to mind. He struggled to alleviate the suffering of the Christian communities in Jerusalem and Judea during the severe famine (I Cor 16:1-4). Paul laid down a clear apostolic principle: “the only thing

insisted on was that we should remember to help the poor, as indeed I was anxious to do “ (Gal 2:10) Paul converted the run-away slave Onesimus and then demanded that he be accepted “no longer as a slave but something much better than a slave, a beloved brother” (Philm 16). In a word, Paul preached authentic liberation:” When Christ freed us, he meant us to remain free” (Gal 5:1)

IX. EFFECTIVE, EXEMPLARY LIFE-STYLE. The Apostle Paul was always very careful that his personal life should encourage and facilitate the spread of the gospel and never become a counter sign. **The witness of a Christian life is the first and often the most effective proclamation of the gospel.** When Paul speaks of imitation in his letters (he is not being arrogant), he believes that Christians can encourage one another through their Christ-like words and deeds. An exemplary lifestyle is a very effective mode of proclamation. “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (I Cor 11:1)

Several of the foregoing sections of this presentation have unfolded key elements which coalesce to form Paul’s life witness as an apostle: Christo-centric spirituality, voluntary vulnerability, innovative mission approaches, evangelical urgency, collaborative ministry, social engagement. To these elements one could add additional virtues as Paul himself does in his lists of spiritual gifts (cf. I Cor 12 and 13; Gal 5:22)

Read in a contemporary theology of mission, this holistic approach to mission exemplified in Paul’s life could be termed “integral evangelization”

X. TOTAL RELIANCE ON GOD’S PROVIDENCE. Paul had full confidence in God’s everlasting love and fidelity; the absolute guarantee of God’s salvific love is manifested in Jesus Christ. Paul asks: “ If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?” (Rom 8:31-32) **Mission always remains “God’s Project” and evangelizers seek to be God’s faith-filled humble instruments.** Paul so willingly and generously cooperated with God’s grace, because he was firmly convinced that he was doing God’s work. He asserts that he is only a servant of the gospel: “ I did the planting, Apollos did the watering, but God made things grow. Neither the planter nor the waterer matters: only God, who makes things grow” (I Cor 3:6-7)

Paul lived his apostolic life based on great confidence and full trust in God, whom we can call “Abba” (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6-7) His life was filled with many sufferings, hardships and challenges, he even faced Spirit-given “road-blocks” in his missionary journeys (cf. Acts 16:6-10) Fully convinced that his life and mission were dependent totally on God and the guidance of the spirit, Paul laboured unceasingly, always ascribing any missionary success to god. “By the grace of God, I am what I am ... I worked harder than any of them – though it was not I, but the grace of God that is in me” (Phil 4:13); the spirit comes to help us in our weakness” (Rom 8:26) Paul was a man of faith.

CONCLUDING REFLECTION. The dynamic apostle Paul is undoubtedly the greatest missionary of all time. Based on his mission experience and profound theological insights, this presentation has surfaced ten “mission principles”, valid for Paul of Tarsus as well as for all modern-day Pauls. Paul burned with the flame of God’s love that was enkindled in his heart during his conversion experience; that flame engulfed his whole existence- even until the final hour of his martyrdom in Rome.

This writer-missionary appreciates Paul as a fulfilled, joyful, Spirit-guided missionary even in spite of all the affliction and suffering he endured. A deep, inner joy and peace filled the Apostle to the Gentiles. Paul was a “joy-filled evangelizer”, and thus became an effective propagator of God’s saving love. His awareness of God’s transforming grace given to him in abundant measure (cf. I Cor 15:10) enabled him to joyfully proclaim Jesus as Lord.

Paul, exemplifying a genuinely missionary attitude, was filled with deep joy, not because of personal gratification or external success, but because he saw many communities accept the person of Jesus. He wrote to the Philippians: “ My brothers and dear friends, do not give way but remain faithful in the Lord. I miss you very much, dear friends, you are my joy and my crown” (Phil 4:1) To the Thessalonians Paul wrote: “What do you think is our pride and our joy? You are, and you will be the crown of which we shall be proudest in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes; you are our pride and our joy” (I Thes 2:19-20) The Corinthians received this message from Paul: “ I have the very greatest confidence in you that in all our trouble I am filled with consolation and my joy is overflowing” (II Cor 7:4)

Paul’s exhortations need to be heard by the missionary church today: “Rejoice in the Lord always, again, I say rejoice” (Phil 4:4) “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances” (I The 5:16-18) “My brothers, rejoice in the Lord (Phil 3:1) “Shine in the world like bright stars, because you are offering it the word of life” (Phil 2:15-16) Pastors, missionaries, catechists, religious, all ministers of the church, imitate Paul, the joyful evangelizer!

“That in all things God may be glorified.”