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St. Scholastica's Priory
Manila

Dear Sisters,

The Gospel for the first Sunday of August is about Jesus walking on the water and saving Peter from drowning. I think all of us have had the experience of "drowning" in our lives when problems and cares seem to overwhelm us like giant tsunamis. In such situations we are like Peter. As long as he was looking at the Lord, he actually walked on water! But as soon as he looked down and saw the waves, he was terrified and started to drown. The message is clear. We actually come to realize our problems as soon as they come. But it seems we are prone to dwell on them, circle around them and ourselves on and on and in so doing they assume greater and greater proportions until we feel overwhelmed by them. Very often we need to get a new perspective, back off a little to see them in proper proportions. And certainly the best way to distance ourselves is to take away our eyes and minds from them and focus on the Lord. And when the Lord stretches out his hand to us, we just have to cling to it until the winds and the waves die down. And another thing, such fears should not discourage us in the future again to take risks. Actually it took courage for Peter to actually venture to go out of the boat and dare to walk on the water on the Lord's command. He alone among the apostles dared to do it. So there are times when God calls us to go out of our safe boats and venture to do the seemingly impossible and when we are in danger of sinking, we will not hesitate to cry out : "Lord save me". Don't you think it is better to risk the waves just to experience God's loving care for us than to remain forever safe in the boat of complacency?

Sincerely yours,



Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

STATIO CONFERENCE

GENTLENESS

SISTER M. BENILDA MARAMBA, OSB

As I write this, I remember how a speaker introduced her talk saying something like this: A speaker is usually judged by the life he/she lives. I beg you not to judge me that way. What I am about to say is the fruit of my prayer, my reflection, my study. It is what I aspire to be, what I pray to God I shall be, in God's time.

I have been tasked to write on **mildness**, the eighth fruit of the Holy Spirit. However, I prefer the translation **gentleness**, which is used in some translations of Holy Scripture.

I. Definitions/ Descriptions of Gentleness

An author writes: "Gentleness" is a soothing comforting word. It evokes thoughts of peace and rest. We long for a sense of this peace in our homes... We desire to be treated **gently**. **Gentleness** marks an environment we can find comforting, uplifting and calming."

Michael Bradley has a number of definitions/ descriptions of **gentleness**:

- ❖ Mildness combined with tenderness
- ❖ Gracious, kindly disposition, controlled strength
- ❖ A disposition that is even-tempered, tranquil, balanced in spirit, unpretentious and that has passions under control
- ❖ A character that is equitable, reasonable, forbearing, moderate, fair and considerate
- ❖ Power and strength under control
- ❖ Willing to pardon injuries, correct faults. One who rules his spirit well.

II. Examples of Gentleness

Stanley Horton illustrates the meaning of **gentleness** with examples. **Gentleness** founded on humility is illustrated in a story about George Washington. He was fox hunting with some friends. When his horse jumped over a stone wall, a stone fell off. He stopped, got down from the horse and put back the stone. One of his friends remarked "You are too big a man to bother with that." He replied **gently**. "No, I am just the right size."

The same author gives another illustration of **gentleness**, this time as power under perfect control: a giant steam hammer capable of flattening an automobile that can also break the shell of a walnut without hurting the meat of the nut.

Another aspect of **gentleness** is not to give as much importance to our honor as much as to what happens to God's honor and what happens to others. Horton believes Moses excelled in the meekness that is **gentleness** (Numbers 12:3). When he was attacked by Miriam and Aaron, he

did not defend himself. He dealt **gently** with Miriam and Aaron and let God take care of the situation.

III. Gentleness, Fruit of the Spirit

According to James Dunn, the Scriptural basis for the fruits of the Spirit is Gal. 5:22-23 in a nine-fold list: "...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **gentleness**, self-control" to which the Vulgate text adds "modesty, continence and self-control". In this list, **gentleness** is the eighth fruit, however, other writers name it as the sixth. Meekness and mildness are among the other terms used in various translations of Scripture for **gentleness**.

In Galatians 5:19, St. Paul enumerates the "works of the flesh" as "fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like this." He warns the Christians that "those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God". (Gal 5:21) Next, he enumerates the characteristics of the Spirit.

James Dunn says that St. Paul deliberately contrasts the "works of the flesh" and the "fruit of the Spirit". The characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit are not produced by the believer. Rather, they are the result of his possession of the Spirit, the products of his active relation with God, through the "believer's active cooperation and response to the promptings and enabling of grace". John Dunn continues, " 'The fruit of the Spirit' describes the quality of the person who is ever conscious of his vulnerability before the selfish grasping of his sinful nature and who therefore lives all the more out of his dependence on God."

To Thomas Keating the fruits of the Spirit manifest the presence of God working in us. "By manifesting the fruits in daily life we bear witness to the resurrection of Christ in a most profound manner.... If we are rooted in the Spirit, these fruits inevitably begin to appear." He continues:

Gentleness is a participation in God's way of doing things that is at once **gentle** and firm, sustaining all creation with its enormous diversity, yet without effort. We labor in the service of God more than ever, and yet have the sense of stepping back and watching God make things happen according to his will both in ourselves and in others. Our anxious efforts to serve God and our anguished search for God cease. Like God we labor and are at rest at the same time. We work hard but we know by experience, even by bitter experience, that our efforts are not going anywhere except insofar as God makes them fruitful. Hence vanity, jealousy and contention – which often accompany even our spiritual endeavors – are gradually evacuated, leaving immense freedom just to be who we are and to serve the special needs of those around us.

I came across the following in the internet and I quote:

'**Gentleness**' is an interesting fruit of the spirit... Like the other spiritual fruit, **gentleness** is an aspect of God's character which God's followers take on as they follow Christ.

...**Gentleness** is a desire that no harm be done. There are **gentle** ways to be bold, non-violent ways to stand up for what is right and non-manipulative ways to lead and to

convince. But it is not human nature to be **gentle**. It goes beyond ‘instinct,’ or ‘education,’ or ‘society’s influence.’ We are simply no **gentle** creatures. Certainly not males, despite the term ‘gentleman’. Males are quick with the fists and the guns. Women have historically been more **gentle**, but that’s a relative matter; they have their own ways of being vicious and destructive.... If we are to bear the fruit of **gentleness**, we need the Spirit to give us the ability to be **gentle** when it’s hardest to be that way.

Gentleness is more than a personal disposition; it’s an outgrowth of love. It is when you care enough to choose not to be harsh, rash, angry, or rough. **Gentleness** is when you know and use the best way to hold an egg or a butterfly. A **gentle** person knows better than to harm others, and so chooses to act in a way that does not. A **gentle** person does not seek to make other people angry. **Gentleness** may lose battles, but it helps to win the overall struggles. A **gentle** response tends to create fewer enemies, and more friends.

IV. Gentleness in Scripture

Following are some texts from Scripture on **gentleness**.

“He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and will **gently** lead the mother sheep.” (Isaiah 40:11) Jesus appropriated this text to Himself when he said that he is the Good Shepherd.

In 2 Cor 10:1, St. Paul follows Christ’s example when dealing with one who has failed. “I, myself, Paul, appeal to you by the meekness and **gentleness** of Christ – I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold towards you when I am away.” In Gal 6:1, St. Paul exhorts the Galatians to behave like Jesus in the same manner. “My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of **gentleness**.” In a similar vein he describes a Lord’s servant in 2 Tim 2:25 as, among other things, “...correcting opponents with **gentleness**.”

To be a Christian worthy of his calling, St. Paul exhorts the Ephesians in Eph 4:2 “Let your **gentleness** be known to everyone. The lord is near.” He also instructs Titus, his “loyal child” to remind the Christians “...to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrels, to be **gentle**, to show courtesy to everyone.” (Titus 3:2) James has a similar gauge of how to be a follower of Jesus. “Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with **gentleness** born of wisdom.” (James 3:13) Along the same line, Peter exhorts followers of Jesus to deal with nonbelievers in the following manner: “...but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you, yet do it with **gentleness** and reverence...” (1 Peter 3:15, 16)

V. Gentleness: the Spirit of Jesus

Jesus narrated a number of parables to illustrate His/His Father’s **gentleness**, e.g., the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15: 3-7); the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32); the Parable of the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-18). Jesus, in fact, explicitly said, “Come to me all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am **gentle** and humble in heart.” (Mt. 11:28-29).

Since Jesus walked his talk, he demonstrated by his own behavior how truly **gentle** He was. According to Michael Bradley, it is His **gentle** way of handling people that “truly jumps out at you”. Instances in which Jesus demonstrated his **gentleness**, especially towards sinners, include: how He forgave the many sins of the sinful woman who washed and anointed his feet (Luke: 48-50); the way he treated Zaccheus, the tax collector (Luke 19: 1-10); His request “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” for His executioners (Luke 23:34); and how he forgave Peter for denying him with “ Peter, Son of John, do you love more than these?” (John 21:15-19).

But the incident that touches me most and which I can identify with, is the woman caught in adultery. Perhaps the reason is that I had a personal experience that has some parallels with this story. This was an experience I kept secret for almost thirty years because I was so ashamed of it. It was only when I was working in Campus Ministry, preparing a conference on forgiveness, an experience of God! After that realization, I could begin talking about it to demonstrate what God’s forgiveness is like.

I was in third grade. Our topic in Social Studies was the Filipino Heroes. The teacher showed us pictures of the heroes (ten or twelve of them!) and for our test we were to identify the heroes through those pictures. There was no way I could pass the test! The only one I could identify was Jose Rizal, no one else! In desperation, I made a deal with my seatmate: she was to help me out in Social Studies test; in turn, I would help her out in Reading. Our teacher returned our test papers, calling us to her desk one by one. When I was in front of her, she softly and **gently** asked me, “Did you copy?” to which I answered, “Yes, miss.” And again, very **gently** she said, “Don’t do it again.” When I answered, “Yes, miss,” I knew in my heart that I would NEVER do it again.

What my teacher did was against school policy, the policy being, anyone caught cheating would automatically get a failing grade in the subject and, of course, would be summoned with her parents, to the principal’s office. None of that happened to me.

Like the woman caught in adultery, I was caught. Like Jesus, my teacher was **gentle** with me, she did not threaten nor intimidate me nor expose me to ridicule. Like Jesus, she did not apply the letter of the rule. Instead, like Jesus, she forgave me, totally. Like Jesus, she told me not to do it again, trusting that I had the capacity to change. Like Jesus, through her **gentleness**, she healed me. Like the woman caught in adultery, I knew that I was forgiven and that I could begin life anew. After almost thirty years, upon reflecting on the experience, like the woman caught in adultery, I knew that I was loved.

Let me quote from a conference of Mother Irene Dabalus on “Profession – Conversatio Morum”

Gentleness with each other belongs to “conversatio”. It is a recognition and an acceptance of the fact that you and I suffer from our vulnerabilities. Benedict enjoins on the superior to act towards her sisters with **gentleness** so that she “does not break the bruised reed nor quench the wavering flame.” This pertains also to us for we too are in the capacity of a superior in one way or another, having persons under us. This fine touch is so God-like when we think of how God treats us. He treats us with so much respect for

our freedom even to the point of rejecting him. “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened and I will refresh you.” What tenderness in this invitation of our Lord which we can also proffer to one another. Will there not be less bitterness in our world?”

In 2005, in commemoration of my father’s 100th birthday, my tribute to him ended this way:

As I grow older and reflect on what Papa means to me and what values I would like to learn from him, I come up with three: from Papa I would like to learn gentleness, generosity and magnanimity.

As a missionary, I believe these three values will go a long way in making my witness credible among the people I live and work.

I ask Papa to be my intercessor before the Lord to grant me these three gifts.

Six years have passed since, I must ask Papa to pray harder still!

That in all things God may be glorified!

1. **Personal reflection:** Recall an experience with our gentle God. Take time to savor and relish the experience.
2. **Communal sharing:**
 - a. Do you agree that we are not gentle by nature? Why or why not?
 - b. Do you agree that gentleness may lose battles, but helps win the overall struggles? Why or why not?
 - c. Do you agree that women have their own ways of being vicious and destructive?
 - d. How can we help each other in community to be more gentle with each other?

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Human Rights and Judicial Remedies in the Philippines: Problems and Prospects

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Berlin, Germany
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Why has there been no improvement in the human rights situation in the Philippines?

- We are, after all, a “democracy;”
- We have a “free press;”
- We have active and committed civil society groups;
- We have a President who was himself a victim of human rights violations, a Secretary of Justice well versed in human rights, and a pro-active Commission on Human Rights;
- We have civilian courts run by judges schooled in both the common law and civil law systems;
- We have legal remedies like the writ of *habeas corpus*, the writ of *amparo*, the writ of *habeas data* and the recently enacted Anti-Torture Law for victims of human rights abuses;
- And we receive a lot of funding for human rights coming from Germany, the United States and other countries.

So why has the Philippines not made any real progress in the human rights arena?

1. The answers to this question, I believe, can be found if we dig deeper into how my country works; if we look beyond the words and see the realities of the situation.
 - 1.1 We have a legal system that is fatally flawed; a system where 1 out of every 4 trial courts has no judge; a system where we follow rules of procedure designed for juries but we have no juries; a system where our judges are not independent; a system where judges are appointed and promoted not because they are good but because they are good to the Chief Executive; a system where judges are corruptible if not corrupted, or easily intimidated.
 - 1.2 We have legal remedies on paper but not in fact; legal remedies that promise justice to victims of human rights abuses, but deliver only more suffering and injustice.
 - 1.3 We have a press that is free, yes; but it is a press that has no access to vital information of public concern, a press that must content itself with sensationalism and which is dependent on big business for its survival.
 - 1.4 We have military and police forces that declare their commitment to human rights with one hand, but take it away with the other; military and police forces who still believe that membership in the Communist Party of the Philippines is illegal when it was legalized more than 15 years ago; and who operate on the belief that communism is an evil that should be stamped out by any means.

- 1.5 We have a prosecution service that professes adherence to the rule of law but does not practice what it preaches; a prosecution service that protects witnesses but has no mechanism for perpetuating their testimonies – so that the witnesses end up languishing in safehouses for years waiting to testify, while the perpetrators roam free; a prosecution service that allows the filing of John Doe cases vs. human rights defenders and tolerates their persecution when the cases against them are utterly without basis.
- 1.6 And we have an Ombudsman’s office that views human rights with disdain, that is too scared to go after high- ranking officials who commit or condone human rights violations; an office that is itself plagued by corruption, inefficiency and delay.

We have, in short, a democracy in name but not in fact; a democracy struggling to stay afloat in the dark sea of impunity.

What then can and should be done?

There are no easy answers because the problems are so deeply rooted. To solve these problems we must dig out those roots, by challenging, confronting and changing the institutions, policies and practices that generate injustice and human rights abuses on a massive scale.

To address these problems we must first attack the policies and practices that have been in place in the Philippines for a long time – policies and practices that outlast changes in political administrations, that have caused untold suffering for many Filipinos.

I have 8 proposals, but my list is by no means exhaustive; these are only baby steps that I believe we must take if only to start us in the right direction.

- (1) Depoliticize the selection of judges, and fill the vacancies with qualified and well- trained members of the bar. The Judicial and Bar Council was created to remove politics from the process of appointed of judges, but sadly it has not achieved that goal.
- (2) Stop the practice of filing John Doe cases against human rights defenders, a practice that has been going on since the 1970s.
- (3) Establish mechanisms for perpetuating the testimonies of material and protected witnesses. The Philippine Congress should amend the Witness Protection Law to provide such a mechanism. The Philippine Supreme Court should amend the Rules of Court to the same end.
- (4) Strengthen the capability of our law enforcement agencies to solve extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances by forensic and physical evidence instead of relying heavily on testimonial evidence. Witnesses can easily be intimidated, pressured, compromised, threatened or killed. Law enforcement

agencies, with the support of the National Government, must reduce their reliance on testimonial evidence and develop their forensic capabilities.

- (5) Re-educate the military and police to eradicate their belief that membership in the Communist Party of the Philippines is illegal, and that communism is an evil to be destroyed by any means. This belief is the source of many human rights abuses.
- (6) Require all members of the military and police forces to secure clearance from the Commission on Human Rights before they can be promoted. During the term of President Fidel V. Ramos, this served an effective deterrent. Unfortunately, the presidents who succeeded him did not continue this requirement. President Aquino does not need congressional action to do this; he can do this himself simply by issuing an administrative order requiring such clearance.
- (7) Demand that the Ombudsman –
 - a. Concentrate on prosecuting high level government officials instead of wasting resources on low level officials; and
 - b. Exercise the powers granted by the Constitution to pre-empt and prevent corruption and human rights violation, instead of waiting for them to happen before taking action.
- (8) Insist that the Ombudsman and Department of Justice evaluate their performance not just based on conviction rates but rather on actual service of sentence. Conviction rates are mere paper statistics. To restore accountability the Filipino people must actually see corrupt and abusive government officials in jail. To date, there is no central body in the National Government that monitors and ensures that those who are convicted by final judgement actually go to jail and serve their sentences. And there is no central database that collects the data needed to ensure that they serve time.

Eliminating impunity is no easy task. But address it we must, if we are to build a nation we can be proud of, a nation where our children can live in peace, instead of dreaming of a better life on distant shores.

Thank you.