

January 1, 2017

Circular 2017-1

RE: Priests in the 2017 Year of the Parish

Dearly beloved brothers in the priesthood:

The Church in the Philippines celebrates 2017 as Year of the Parish.

What is the best way to describe the parish? The only word and the best word to define a parish is COMMUNIO. A parish is a communion of little communities. What an affirmation from the Good Shepherd that we in the Archdiocese of Lingayen Dagupan will celebrate our Second Archdiocesan Synod on Communion from September 2 to 9 this year.

Communion is the summary of the identity of the Church. This identity of communion comes from God who is communion--Father Son and Holy Spirit.

Communion is the summary of the task of the Church. The Church exists to make all one. Any pastoral activity of the Church that does to start, build and sustain communion is not worth pursuing at all.

Communion is the sole power that animates the Church to carry on. If there is no passion for communion, the rivers of commitment will run dry and the Church's lighthouse of hope will turn dim.

Communion is everything for us. Without it, we have no identity; we have nothing to do; we have no spiritual strength.

SOURCE

Where does communion come from? It comes from the humility of God who reaches out to mortal sinners like us and offers us a hand of unity. It is a hand that shakes our hands as equals. He has become like us.

"Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross". (Phil.2:7).

Communion mandates us Churchmen to be a humbler Church. A humbler Church listens without any urge to rebut. A humbler Church accompanies the weak without being judgmental and accompanies the strong without competition. A humbler Church sees the best in others and downplays defects and weaknesses. A humbler Church is forgiving yet not reluctant to denounce wrongdoing. A humbler Church seeks unity in doctrine, allows liberty in opinions but always opts for charity in everything.

If communion is to be our sole power for evangelization, let it be said that the power that makes the Church credible is humility in service, humility in teaching and humility in worship. Arrogance is a big turn off. Church arrogance has turned many of our flock against us. Humility is the cure. Humility is the way.

STEPS

How shall we live the challenge and task of building communion?

1. Only God can build communion and the first way to God is PRAYER. Pray if you want to be in communion. Our best contribution to the world is our prayer. All else follows from this life of prayer. Offer the parish church for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Teach our hungry youth that time spent with

God is not wasted. Be seen praying not for public show but as a God's witness. It is mystics not the activists who will renew the parish.

2. We have a long history of Catholic ORTHODOXY. Stay in line; stay in the communio of faith. Our people want to hear the logic of the Gospel. Our people need to hear Christ again and again. Entertainment is not our business. Partisan politics is not our arena. Our expertise must be the faith of the apostles.

3. When communio is hurt, communio needs healing. There will be massive parish renewal when CONFESSIONS are constantly celebrated. We cannot promote communio without the tender mercy of Confession.

4. There is no communio without Jesus. Show by your life, preach from the pulpit; speak in public that JESUS IS ALIVE! People need to hear that Jesus lives and He lives with us. Our people need hope and how much hope we will ignite by those simple proclamation of faith: Jesus is alive and lives forever.

5. There is no communio without unity of word and life. The Gospel becomes a victim when the proclaimer lives contrary to his ordination vows. I renew my request for a simpler priestly LIFESTYLE that is close to the lifestyle of our ordinary parishioners not the rich and affluent.

6. Communio is best nurtured in a stewardship Church.

May all be one! Pray for me. Pray for one another.

Sincerely yours,

+SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS  
Archbishop of Lingayen Dagupan