

"Rev. Francis Neil G. Jalando-on is a prolific writer and I am glad that his writings, previously available only on the web, are now available in print. I look forward to seeing future editions even in commercial bookshops and e-bookstores here and abroad to enlarge the reach of these devotional messages. All for the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!"

Dimpna C. Castigador
Director for Institutional Advancement
Central Philippine University

"Every Monday, I look forward to a new Binhi sang Pagtuo article. Neil always delivers a thoughtful and easy to digest feature that stimulates the mind and warms the heart. His writing is founded upon an authentic walk with the Lord that serves as the base of his commentary. I keep a file of his best devotional essays, many of which you can expect to read in this book."

The Rev. Dr. Frank G. Reeder
Associate Regional Pastor
American Baptist Churches of New Jersey, USA

"For a long time I have been reading Francis Neil's brief reflections and appreciate their biblical base and relevant application to life. I encourage you to read them and apply them to your life!"

Dr. Floyd E. Roseberry
Long-time American Baptist Missionary to the Philippines
Senior Pastor, University Church, CPU 1974 to 1975

"Several years ago while researching for a seminary textbook on Baptists I became aware of Rev. Jalando-on's book: A History of Philippine Baptist Pastors 1898-2002. This gave me reason to get in touch with him for further understandings. And by these means I gained the opportunity to receive his weekly Binhi sang Pagtuo for many years now. They continue to give me new helpful insights toward practical Christian living and thinking. I believe they have aided his University and Alumni population as well. Here you will find new ways to consider thoughtful insights toward effective Christian living through Rev. Jalando-on's scriptural-truth-focus."

Dr. D. Leslie Hill
Retired President, Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary
Author, Faithful and Free (Baptist Beliefs Through the Years), 2013



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FRANCIS NEIL G. JALANDO-ON



V O L U M E 1

Francis Neil G. Jalando-on

BINHI SANG PAGTUO

(SEEDS OF FAITH)

VOL. 1

Rev. Francis Neil G. Jalandon

Chaplain's Office, Central Philippine University

Binhi sang Pagtuo (Seeds of Faith)

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Chaplain's Office, Central Philippine University

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FOREWORD

God speaks to us in many ways and in various situations. Most often, the significant lessons we learn from our daily experiences and observations further deepen our understanding of who God really is.

Doing personal reflection from our encounter with people and situations is an important exercise of connecting our faith with reality. It gives us the awareness that our God is continually participating in our day-to-day affairs.

May this publication serve as a reminder that God still speaks to us today if we are just sensitive enough to listen to Him.

Rev. Joniel Howard H. Gico
Vice President for Student Affairs
February 5, 2015

THE ABC OF LIVING A MEANINGFUL LIFE

Beginnings are always difficult. If we are in Jesus Christ, however, we are assured that He will be there with us from start to finish. Paul wrote in Philippians 1:6 “He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it...”

Let me share the ABC of things to ponder as we go through life:

A - Allow God to shape our lives.

Let us not be tempted to shape our own lives according to our own will and plan.

Starting from the Garden of Eden people have been disobeying God and following their own plan. Our society nowadays is increasingly becoming more selfish and greedy. Individuals in this kind of society have become individualistic. Meaning, we tend to think only of our own selves. We have cultivated the attitude of “me, myself and I.” We are selfish, that’s why we are always bragging so that we can direct the attention of others to us.

As Christians we always need to seek the will of God by asking ourselves, “Is what I am about to do loving to my God and my neighbor?” “What would Jesus do if He is in my place?”

B - Believe that God will make a difference through our lives.

Let us not be tempted to be indifferent - to be like others who don’t care and who won’t get involved. Let us always question reality. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

Let us be hopeful that in due time God will make all things beautiful.

C - Challenge ourselves to always do the best.

Let us not be tempted to settle with what is ordinary. We must always combat mediocrity. We need to strive for excellence in serving God, and in serving His people.

ARE YOU WILLING?

Asking for volunteers in any event is a hard task. God also asked for volunteers in Isaiah 6:8, “Whom shall we send?...Here I am. Send me!”

God was asking for a willing volunteer. God did not force Isaiah. God even presented the situation to Isaiah if he wanted to reconsider his decision -- “You will be preaching and prophesying to a very stubborn people who are not willing to listen.” Only a few of them would eventually listen and they became the new beginning, the righteous remnant of the chosen people of God.

The message of Isaiah gave hope to the remnant. Isaiah 7:14 says, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” After more than 500 years what they hoped for was born in Bethlehem. Jesus was declared by the angels as the Immanuel. Jesus was also called the Lion of Judah. Out of the righteous remnant, Jesus was born.

God can use only willing and loving service. Let us never underestimate what God can do with one willing worker.

In 1898, Braulio Manikan met Rev. Dr. Eric Lund in Barcelona, Spain. Manikan accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. He was then subsequently baptized in Spain. Manikan is considered as the first Filipino Baptist. While waiting for the opportunity to go back to Iloilo, Manikan and Lund began translating the Bible into Hiligaynon. They arrived in Iloilo in 1900. Years later, the whole bible was translated into Hiligaynon.

We praise and thank God for the life of Manikan and Lund. Every time we read the Hiligaynon Bible, let us remember their willing and loving service as they responded to God.

God is asking us also everyday, “Whom shall I send?” Will our answer be, “Here I am, Lord. Please send me”?

WHY DID YOU DOUBT?

We experience many things that oftentimes lead us to question God. Amidst these experiences, let us ponder on the words of Jesus Christ: Why did you doubt?

Let us reflect on these three things as we consider the question:

First, Jesus is teaching us that we need time to be alone, to reflect and to pray because our lives is surrounded by chaos. Matthew 14:23 says, “after Jesus had sent the crowds away, he went up into the mountain alone to pray.”

The mountain in this text is a symbol of reassurance. Psalm 121 says “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help. My help comes from the Lord who made the heaven and earth.”

A quote in a mural painting in Jaro says, “Prayer is not telling God what to do but reporting for duty.”

How is our prayer life?

Second, in the midst of chaos and troubles in our lives, Jesus Christ will find us and will be there for us. Matthew 14:25-27 says, “and in the fourth watch of the night he came toward them, walking upon the sea; but when the disciples saw him walking upon the sea, they were terrified. ‘It is a phantom’ they said and cried out for fear. But at once Jesus spoke to them ‘Courage’ he said, ‘It is I. Fear not.’”

Jesus came during a crisis. He came when they had exhausted their human resource. They thought he was a “phantom...a ghost” to fear rather than a savior who will help them.

Dr. Anatalio Viray, the grand old man of Central, said to me one time, “Oftentimes we are moved by our fear rather than our

faith. We make an action, a decision out of fear and not out of faith. We are being fearful rather than being faithful.”

Third, in the midst of chaos and troubles in our lives, and despite God’s presence, we are sometimes unwilling to trust God. The wind in this text symbolizes our unwillingness to trust.

We are sometimes like Peter who leaps before looking. When Peter first started, he had his eyes on Jesus but when he saw the wind he became afraid and his eyes were now on the storm and not on Jesus.

Peter was helpless as every man is without God. When Peter started sinking, Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. Jesus immediately told him, “O ye of little faith, why did you doubt?”

We must surrender all to Christ. We must have faith in Him. As a famous acrostic of faith says:

F - forsaking

A - all

I

T - take

H - him

What are the things that hinder us from following Christ?

As we continue to journey in this life, we will face several storms but let us be assured that Jesus will always stretch out his hand to save us. He is telling us today what he also told his disciples a long time ago: “Take courage. I am here. Do not be afraid.”

Let this be our constant confession and prayer, “Lord, I want to believe, help my unbelief and increase my faith.”

FAITHFULNESS AND FRUITFULNESS

Faithfulness and Fruitfulness are closely related. We cannot separate faithfulness and fruitfulness. The truth is, faith should bear fruits, and one cannot be called faithful if he is not fruitful. Fruitfulness is the result of faithfulness.

This truth is under attack nowadays. We preached that it is through faith alone that we receive salvation by the grace of God, and not through good works. This is biblical but the psychological effect of this overemphasis on faith brought enmity between faith and good works. The two became adversarial. It seems that we are forced to choose between the two. We become allergic to the term “good works” because we say that we belong to the camp of “faith only.”

James is telling us that this should not be. He said, “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.” (James 2:14-26)

James is giving us two reminders:

First, our faith should be expressed in helping the physical needs of those who are in want. “Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

Let us remember that “A faith that does not have an active participation and concern for the needs of others is really not faith at all. It is useless, unacceptable, and dead.”

Second, our talk should be our walk. If our faith is only on our lips, then James is telling us that we are like a fool or worst, a demon.

We sometimes are like the Pharisees that displayed their holiness in the public but forgot the major issues like mercy and justice.

We thought all the while that faith and religiosity are synonymous. We thought that serving God is by singing in the choir, going to church every Sunday and going to bible studies and prayer meetings. These are minor things. Amos wrote what God said, “I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!”

The lives of Abraham and Rahab are great examples. The two are way apart – one a great leader, the other a harlot. But their names are in the same category in Hebrews 11 as heroes and heroines of faith. Their good works brought their faith into completion.

How about us? Is our faith alive?

LIFE LESSONS FROM PING-PONG

I have been playing Table Tennis since elementary. Along the way, I have learned some life lessons from this game that I love. Here are a few of these lessons I have learned.

1. LOVE ALL. The game starts with the score of love all. This means that the game starts on equal footing. You must love the game and respect your opponent.

Life lesson: The greatest commandment is to “Love God and love one another.”

2. SERVE WITH AN OPEN PALM AND TOSS IT HIGHER. The game has a set of rules. You must follow it or else there will be a fault. No short-cuts or dirty tricks.

Life lesson: An open palm means you are not withholding anything or hiding something – no hidden or ulterior motive. Service to God should take higher priority in our lives.

3. BEND YOUR KNEES AND BOW DOWN. The game is best played if your eyes are leveled with the trajectory of the ball. This gives you more ball control, and more speed and power.

Life lesson: A humble person will be exalted by God.

4. FOLLOW THROUGH. The secret to a good stroke is in the follow through.

Life lesson: Oftentimes, we start but cannot finish it. We need to follow through.

5. EVERY POINT COUNTS AND THERE ARE NO TWO POINTS IN TABLE TENNIS. Our game is only up to 11 points. This means that every point is important.

Life lesson: Do not waste your time. Every time should have a purpose.

6. **FOCUS.** We are always told to concentrate and to focus. Distractions can lead to errors.

Life lesson: We need to focus on our priorities.

7. **LISTEN TO YOUR COACH.** There are many voices that you can hear during game-time. You need to listen only to your coach.

Life lesson: God is our coach. We need to listen to him. Are you listening to God?

GOD IS LOVE

The month of February is called the love month. Love, however, should not be seasonal. 1 John 4:8 reminds us that “God is love.” We are created in the image of God. If God is love, then we, as creatures of a loving God, have a very basic human need to seek to love and to be loved in return. The truth is: we enjoy loving and being loved.

This is the reason why the central theme of Jesus Christ is love -- love God and love our neighbor as we love ourselves. It is not difficult to love because this instinct is implanted by God in us. We have the capacity to love.

John is challenging us to express agape love. The English language, and Hiligaynon as well is insufficient in translating the original Greek words of love. There are four Greek words for love: *eros* - love that is expressed erotically; *stergo* - love for family; *phileo* - love expressed to someone whom you like; and *agape* - love that is unconditional. Oftentimes, we cannot elevate our love into *agape*.

Erich Fromm said “The deepest need of man is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness.” Mother Teresa also said, “Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty. The hunger for love is much more difficult to remove than the hunger for bread. The poorest of the poor are those who feel they are unloved.”

Erich Fromm in his book *The Art of Loving* (1956) teaches us four things:

First, let us express our love in caring. To care is to have an active concern for the life and growth of that which we love. To care is hard work and labor intensive. You need to get involved and do something. Jesus said, “go the extra mile.”

Second, to love is to have a responsibility. To be responsible means to be able and ready to respond. This means that you need to respond to the needs of your loved ones.

Third, to love is to respect. Respect is looking up and not looking down. You give freedom to the person to be and to become what God intends him or her to be. Respect exists only on the basis of freedom, and freedom is possible only on the basis of proper respect. God is love that is why we have the freedom to be.

Fourth, to love is to know the person you are loving. Like Jesus, “he knows his sheep and the sheep know his voice.” To love is to identify ourselves with the one whom we love. This is what Jesus Christ has done.

Let us remember that as Christians we need to express *agape* love. Then and only then will the world know that we are truly Christians.

DO YOU LOVE ME MORE THAN THESE?

The scripture text in John 21:15-17 tells us about the encounter of Jesus and Peter beside the sea. This event happened after the resurrection of Jesus. Thrice Jesus asked Peter “Do you truly love me more than these?”, and three times Peter answered, “Yes Lord, you know that I love you.”

On the third time that Peter was asked by Jesus, he felt hurt. Why was Peter hurt? In some translations, Peter was grieved, distressed, sad. Some of us would instantly say, this was so because Peter remembered that he denied Jesus three times. But on a deeper study of the passage using the original Greek language, one can understand why Peter was sad.

Let us now retell the story using the original Greek translation of love:

First time:

Jesus said, “Peter do you *agape* me more than these?”

Peter answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I *phileo* you.”

Second time:

Jesus said, “Peter do you *agape* me more than these?”

Peter answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I *phileo* you.”

Third time:

Jesus said, “Peter do you *phileo* me more than these?”

Peter answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I *phileo* you.”

Phileo love is different from *Agape* love. *Phileo* is to love only those whom we like. While *Agape* love is to love without condition.

Please take note of the difference – two times Jesus asked Peter if he could commit to an *agape* kind of love, and two times Peter answered that he cannot commit to the demand of Jesus. He can only give *phileo*. On the third time, Jesus lowered his demand to

phileo. And Peter sadly answered: “Yes, I can give *phileo*.” No wonder Peter was so grieved by this encounter.

Later, church tradition tells us that Peter was martyred in Rome. He requested the soldiers to crucify him upside down because he felt that he was not worthy to die in the same manner like his Master did.

I believe that Peter’s encounter with Jesus beside the sea became a constant reminder to him to elevate his commitment from *phileo* to *agape*.

How about us?

To commit ourselves to *agape* is to answer the “radical demand” of Jesus. Let it be that the encounter of Jesus and Peter be our constant reminder also.

THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

February 25 is a Philippine holiday in commemoration of the People Power Revolution. It was on February 1986 when President Marcos was overthrown.

The community of Central Philippine University had various experiences in the long struggle to free our nation from dictatorship. Here are some of these historical reflections:

In 1985, CPUR President Manuel dela Fuente challenged the Centralians on their role amidst the system that “badly needs reorientation.” He said,

“We ask them to pledge themselves to the pursuit of freedom, not merely to attain the rights to our freedom, but to develop the capacity and work out the opportunity to express our freedom...We do not and cannot deserve freedom unless we are ready to work for it, fight for it, and if necessary, die for it. We cannot just ask for freedom. We cannot just ask for justice. We must let freedom ring. We must, in the words of the prophet Amos, “Let justice roll down like a river, and righteousness like a mighty stream.” (Centralite, 1985, p. 5.)

The Editorial of the Centralite 1985 boldly challenged the *Fides* legacy of CPU. It states,

“Its Christian emphasis of “faith” needs not deviate from its social functions of transforming the present society which perpetuate a system of inequality. It is imperative that “faith” and “struggle” are inseparable. Struggle because various segments of the Philippine society have united to resist, confront, and shake up the unjust socio-economic and political structure to enhance a more human and just order...In the struggle, faith humbly *listens* to the voices of the suffering and *understands* why they suffer; and then *acts* toward the full liberation of the people...The people will demolish all walls that separate them and will emerge victorious over all forces of evil. *Truth* shall be their shields; *justice*, their battlecry; *love*, their armor

and *solidarity*, their banner...the new generation of Centralians choose to break the legacy of colonial slavery...and to fight back for the freedom and uphold the genuine independence...Onward with the Central Spirit!...Serve the People!..." (Raymundo G. Tenefrancia, Centralite, 1985, p.3.)

More than a decade later, at the height of the Erap scandal of corruption and immorality, Centralians once again reiterated their brand of Christianity. Headed by the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Atty. Perfecto R. Yasay, Jr., the former Securities and Exchange Commission Chairman, who was the first to publicly denounced President Estrada, thousands of Centralians trooped to the streets to protest against Erap. In an unprecedented event in the history of CPU, Centralians were officially gathered by the administration. We marched from CPU campus to the Iloilo Capitol Rotary Amphitheater grounds. President Estrada was ousted by a popular People Power Revolution in January 2001.

In 2002, I wrote in the Centralite that Centralians "guided by Christian principles, should strive to have a society in which all forms of structural violence should be eliminated, the gap of the rich and the poor should be closed in, eradicate the unequal distribution of wealth and power, the exploitative economic policies should be outlawed, and the unjust dispensation of justice be done with. In other words, a Centralian strives for justice, peace and integrity of creation in order for everyone to experience abundant life as promised by Jesus Christ."

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Ash Wednesday is the official start of the Lenten Season. Forty days after that will be Easter Sunday, and another 40 days later will be the Day of Pentecost.

What is the meaning of Lenten Season for us? We will reflect on this question in the light of the prayer of Jesus in John 17. This prayer was probably uttered by Jesus after the Last Supper. Jesus prayed aloud. This prayer was very memorable to the disciples – the reason why it was recorded by John in his Gospel account.

There are three things to ponder from this prayer:

First, Lenten Season reminds us that we are physically in this world, but our ways are not dictated by the systems of this world. Jesus prayed, “I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.”

Lenten Season is a time to repent. That’s why we can see a lot of penitents. May it be a time, not to dwell on rituals, but on the real meaning of the rituals – to repent from our worldly ways, and go back to the ways of Jesus. If the world always said, “what’s in there for me?”, a Christian asks, “How can I be of service?”

Second, Lenten Season reminds us that we are sanctified by God through Jesus Christ. Jesus prayed, “And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth.”

We cannot afford to be lukewarm Christians – God will spit us out. Christ died for us. Why would Christ die for us if we are “good for nothing”? All of us are “good for something.” We must take our being a Christian very seriously.

Third, Lenten Season reminds us that it is imperative that we must be united. Jesus prayed, “I pray that they will all be one, just as

you and I are one – as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.”

Have you ever pondered what you write in your bio-data on the space for religion? I usually write “Baptist.” Recently I started answering “Christianity.” Oftentimes, we prioritize our denomination as a “Baptist” or a “Roman Catholic” than our being a Christian.

We can remember the first century quarrel of Christians. Some of them say, “I am for Apollos,” “I am for Cephas,” and others “I am for Paul.” Is Christ’s body divided?

Our witness, our testimony is hindered because of our divisions. Let us remember that Jesus sincerely prayed for our unity.

LET US REBUILD OUR NATION

Our Philippine Government has been marred by dirty politics that resulted in the deterioration of the Philippine society, and our nation in general. There is an urgent need to help rebuild our nation today.

What can we learn from the Bible with regards to helping rebuild our nation? Nehemiah 2:11-20 tells us the story of Nehemiah who traveled from Persia to Jerusalem with the mission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

“Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall in Jerusalem is broken down and its gates have been burned with fire.” This was the situation of Jerusalem after the Babylonian Captivity.

Before Nehemiah started his work, he inspected and experienced firsthand the situation of Jerusalem. While others were sleeping, he went around assessing the needed repairs. He also prayed and listened to God.

In 2009 the national situation of the Philippines was in crisis. Morgan Stanley, a respected financial institution, reported that the money lost in graft and corruption in the Philippines from 1965 to 2001 amounts to \$204 billion or about P12 trillion.

Last 2004, Teodoro Benigno reported that we lose P230 billion each year to government graft and corruption. Transparency International reported that we are the 3rd most corrupt country in Asia and number 11 in the world in 2004.

In January 2005 the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Standard and Poor agency reported that the Philippines was the number 2 most corrupt country in the whole world, second only to Bangladesh.

In 2014 the Napoles Scam jolted us with the reality that billions of pesos are lost due to the unscrupulous practices of our politicians.

During his time, what Nehemiah did first was to enlighten the people about their situation. He then inspired them to do their part. He organized the people and gave them hope. An acrostic of HOPE developed by Nestor D. Bunda says, “Help Organize People Everywhere.” Like Nehemiah, it is our duty to make the people aware of what is happening around us, and what kind of reforms is needed.

The people who worked with Nehemiah were not particularly gifted for construction work. There were no architects, engineers, or city planners. Those involved were the high priest and priests, goldsmiths and perfume-makers, rulers and their daughters, temple servants and merchants. They did not have the skills in construction but what they had was the determination and the passion to rebuild their nation. God gave them success, and the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt.

The message of Nehemiah for us resonates: “Let us rise up and build.” Are you willing to join in the effort of rebuilding our nation?

SERVE GOD AND SERVE THE PEOPLE

It is observed that people around politicians or CEOs are always involved in a power struggle. A similar situation happened to the disciples of Jesus.

The scripture text in Mark 10:35-45 tells us the story about the request of James and John to become the right hand and left hand of God in heaven. This story is a great reminder for all of us. It is a wake-up call for us to seriously reflect on our motives in following Jesus Christ.

Let us remember that following Jesus is denying ourselves, losing ourselves, and carrying crosses. It is also about giving service. Jesus summarized it by saying, "I came to serve and not to be served."

The following is an acrostic of the word **SERVICE** made by Rev. Ronny Luces, pastor of Jaro Evangelical Church.

S - SELF-GIVING. Service starts by giving of oneself. Christ called this self-denial or giving up of one's self-interest, self-gratification, and self-glorification. The welfare of others becomes the priority. Others become the embodiment of their dedication and sacrifice. One who looks for his/her own glory cannot serve.

Do you want to follow someone who tells you to deny or to forget yourself? Do you want to follow someone who tells you to take up or to carry a cross? Do you want to follow someone who tells you to lose your life for his sake and the message that he brings? Do you want to follow someone who tells you not to gain the whole world?

E - ENLIGHTENMENT. Service seeks enlightenment and truth, not darkness and falsehood. Our Lord Jesus is the light of the world. In addition, we were commanded by Jesus to let our light shine. Service gives light so that everyone can walk in the light, but not shining the light on one's self.

R - RECONCILIATION. One who serves always looks for establishment of a just order. What happened in the cross is a reminder for all of us that reconciliation is not complete when done only vertically or horizontally. It should be both.

V - VISION. This is the motivating or inspiring factor of service -**VISION FOR THE FUTURE.** The Bible says that a nation without a vision will perish. As prophets, we are called by God to dream dreams and envision visions. Our future can only be bright if we dream big dreams that will lead to concrete plans and actions.

I - INITIATIVE. The one who serves always initiates. Initiative is doing something good and favorable without being told.

C - COMMITMENT. The mark of a servant is total commitment at any cost. Each of us has a different calling but this doesn't mean that we all have different commitments to Christ. The degree of committing one's self to Christ is the same.

E - EMPOWERMENT. This is the result of service. People who were truthfully served became empowered to serve others also. They did not become dependent. They did not become powerless and unmanageable rather they become empowered to be of service to others also.

So, what then is service? It is **SELF-GIVING** for the work of **ENLIGHTENMENT** and **RECONCILIATION** with a **VISION**, **INITIATIVE** and **COMMITMENT** for **PEOPLE'S EMPOWERMENT**.

JESUS IS ALIVE

During the Holy Week we hear reflections and sermons on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. From what we have heard there is no lingering doubt that Jesus is alive and has resurrected from the dead. But what makes us doubt is whether Jesus is alive in the hearts of Christians.

The big question is not on the veracity of the resurrection of Jesus but in the result of his resurrection in our lives. Whenever we hear and witness graft and corruption, murder, rape, schism in churches, break-up of families, and the like, we can hear comments like “Jesus is dead”, “Jesus is still buried”, “Jesus is still in the tomb”.

Our scripture text in Acts 2:42-47 is about the early practices of the first century Christians – it gives us a vivid picture of their way of life – a life that manifested that Jesus was alive and not dead.

Let us learn from three Hiligaynon words that are associated with being alive – same spelling but with different meanings if you change the way you pronounce it.

First, buhi[^] (alive). We have a living church if we continue to steadfastly devote ourselves to the apostles’ teaching. Reading, reflecting, studying, and applying the Word of God is not just very important, but an imperative for all Christians.

Second, bu...hi (recess). We need to set aside a time for fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer. We need a recess from our work, and go to church. God is asking for one day every seven days. Oftentimes we see Sundays as the end of our week, but if we look at our calendars, we can be surprised to see that Sunday is the first day of the week. A day of worship is essential if we want to start our week right.

Third, bu[^]hi, sometimes pronounced as buhi-i, buhi-an or buy-an (to free, to liberate). In Luke 4:18, Jesus spoke his mission statement: to liberate the poor by preaching to them the good news,

to release the captives, to set free those who are blind, to unchain those who are imprisoned, to unshackle those who are oppressed.

Our study of the word *buhí* from the Hiligaynon language is a great reminder that God always speaks to us in a language that we can understand. Our God is indeed *buhí*!

May our lives be a testimony that Jesus is indeed alive.

LESSONS FROM MARY

March is celebrated as Women's Month. This is to give importance to women who for a very long time were treated as second class citizens because of the patriarchal society.

One of the famous women in the Bible is Mary. What kind of woman and mother was Mary?

Let us learn from the responses of Mary when Angel Gabriel announced to her that she will be the mother of Jesus.

First, she was humble. Jewish women during this time were aware of the prophecy that a messiah will be born. Because of this, every one of them was hoping that they will become the vessel, the mother of the messiah.

The greetings of the angel, and that of Elizabeth - "Greetings favored woman!" "God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me?" - did not go up to her head. She did not brag nor boast about it. She did not look down on other women because they were not chosen.

Unlike Mary, we oftentimes do anything just to put ourselves at the center of attention, even to the point of stepping on the toes of others to place ourselves higher than them.

Second, she was a ready servant. Mary responded to Angel Gabriel, "I am the Lord's Servant."

Sometimes, we pray, "Not my will but thy will be done" but then we add "Let it be your will to do this, and to do that." We are commanding God to do something on our behalf, instead of Him telling us what to do.

Third, she was a caring mother. Considering her circumstances - unwed mother, with illegitimate child, and was going through

teenage pregnancy – she was the center of the gossip. But she did not let these affect her. She would have been stoned to death but God, true to His word, intervened.

The Gospel tells us that “Jesus grew in stature, and in wisdom, and in favor of God and all people.” She took care of her child, and nurtured him. Mary was even there during the crucifixion, and during the birth of the early church.

She did not only raise Jesus properly, but also the half-brother of Jesus – James, the leader of the Council of Jerusalem.

These words of Jesus, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" -- may have been inspired by the caring attitude of his mother, Mary.

May our mothers and all the women make Mary the inspiration of their lives. Mary was indeed a mother and woman who is worthy to be emulated.

DAY OF VALOR

Holy Week starts with the celebration of the Palm Sunday, the Triumphal Entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem. On April 9, 2009 the Araw ng Kagitingan (Day of Valor, previously Bataan Day – is celebrated to honor the bravery and heroism of Filipinos and Americans during World War II) coincided with the celebration of Palm Sunday.

Connecting our Christian history to that of our Philippine history, we can say that the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem was also his Araw ng Kagitingan. Previous to this, the center of Jesus' ministry was Galilee and the outskirts of Jerusalem. His public appearance in Jerusalem was very limited. His audience was mainly the poor, the sick – the marginalized sector of the society. But on that day, Jesus showed courage by riding a donkey in broad daylight and challenged the political and religious authorities in front of many people.

The people upon seeing Jesus shouted “Hosanna!” which means “Save us, now! We pray!” The people were fed up. They were ready for a revolution. They were looking for a savior. The Pharisees shouted at Jesus, and asked him to rebuke his disciples. But he said, “If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.” (Luke 19: 28-48)

A great multitude followed him. They thought all the while that he will lead them to raid the Praetorium, the headquarters of the Roman camp. He instead turned towards the Temple. If you study the map of Jerusalem from the entrance, Jesus can either go to the seat of Roman power, or to the Temple, the religious center of the Jewish people. He chose the Temple. He did not want to start a bloody war with the Romans that is why he did not enter Jerusalem riding on a horse, a symbol of war, but on a donkey, a symbol of peace.

He cleansed the temple because it had become a den of robbers. Graft, corruption, conflict of interest had become the way of life of the religious sector – there was collusion between the

religious leaders and businessmen. The priests deliberately declared the animals brought by the people as unclean, and those declared as “clean” were the animals sold only in the temple area. The price of the “clean” animals was exorbitant. The religious sector was getting richer and richer at the expense of the poor people.

Jesus exposed these evil practices. On that day, he was marked for death. The plot to kill him was under way.

If we examined our lives now, what do we see? Is Jesus still trying to enter our lives or are we afraid that Jesus will find out our corrupt practices?

Oftentimes, we expect Jesus to act in a way that we expected him to act. But like in New Testament times, he turns to the unexpected – he turns towards the core of our being. He confronts us face to face. He wants to clean us first – to drive away our evil practices.

Should we join the plot to kill him? Will we be one of those who, at first, shouted “Hosanna” and later shouted “Crucify him!?” It is my prayer that Jesus will enter our lives triumphantly just as He did in Jerusalem thousands of years ago.

THE CHALLENGE OF EASTER

Easter Sunday – the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the highlight of the Holy Week. Almost all Christians celebrate it on the same date. Why almost? The Western Church (Roman Catholic and Protestant) celebrated it on April 12, 2009 while the Eastern Church celebrated it on April 19, 2009. Last 2010 and 2011 the dates of Easter celebration were the same for both churches. It is sad to note that Christians cannot even unite on the date of Easter Sunday celebration.

I would like to share one message, one implication and four challenges on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The message of the resurrection is that God is a God of life. The statements of Jesus as recorded in John – “I am the way, the truth and the life”, “I am the living water”, “I am the resurrection and the life”, “I am the bread of life” – point to the truth that our God is a God of life, and giver of life. John 10:10 affirms it, “I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full.” Because of this truth, together with Peter and Martha, we can declare, “Thou art Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

The implication of this message is that we must not allow the world to kill Jesus again and again, and force him to remain in the tomb. Thus, as we resist the forces of death in our midst, let us ponder on these challenges from the word **LIFE**.

L – Live a life that shows that Jesus is alive in our lives and is not dead. Like what happened to Lazarus, Jesus Christ is commanding us to unwrap ourselves from the graveclothes, thus freeing us from the bondage of death-like situations. Let us always imagine Jesus shouting at us, “Get out of there.”

I – Involve actively in the ministry of resurrection. Let us be active in the ministry of resurrecting our brothers and sisters who are living a spiritually dead life; and resurrecting also those who are victims of modern day Sadducees and Pharisees.

F – Fulfill God’s expectation to be bringers of life and not death. We are expected to always seek life and not destruction. Let us cry together with Jesus (John 11:35) every time we see death and destruction, and then let us do something about it.

E – Encourage one another to be united in taking away the stone from the tomb. Jesus is asking us to collectively “roll the stone away.” There is strength in unity. We must participate in the task of putting away the barriers that impede us in having a life in its fullest.

The Easter celebration is a reminder of Jesus Christ victory over sin and death. May we live out that victory in our daily Christian life.

WALKING WITH JESUS

Every early morning and late afternoon we can see many people exercising and walking around the campus of CPU.

There is one interesting story about “walking” that can be found in Luke 24:13-49. This is the story of two followers of Jesus on the road to Emmaus – about 11 kilometers from Jerusalem, two hours of walking distance. This is one of the stories after the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The two men were talking about what happened in Jerusalem – the suffering and death of Jesus, the one whom they were all hoping to redeem Israel, and that it was now three days after his death. They were sad, disappointed and on the brink of losing hope. The setting of their journey was towards the sunset – a symbol of death. Jesus joined and walked with them. Their conversation with Jesus gave them hope – a hope beyond the sunset.

We can see three things in their journey:

First, Jesus will help open our eyes and make us realize that there is always hope. To hope is to have faith. Hebrews 11:1 says, “What is faith? It is the confident assurance that something we look forward to is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead.”

There was a great reversal in their situation. At first, they were walking away from Jerusalem, but after Jesus opened their eyes, they immediately went back to Jerusalem – symbol that there is now hope. We, too, should open our eyes and help in opening the eyes of our brothers and sisters.

Second, Jesus gives us peace. Jesus appeared to the gathered disciples and said to them, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you.” Jesus knows that our world is thirsty of peace. In Hiligaynon, *Shalom* (Hebrew for peace) is more than *kalinong*. It is also *kasulhayan*, *kabuganaan kag kaginhawaan*.

We have the responsibility to be bringers of peace. Jesus told them that his father sent him to bring peace, and he is also sending us to bring peace.

Third, Jesus sends us the Holy Spirit to sustain us in our mission of opening the eyes of the people to the truth, and in our mission as peace bringers. The Holy Spirit fills us with power to do our assigned tasks.

Dunamis (Greek of power) gives us two words in English -- dynamo and dynamite. Dynamo is a generator of electricity from mechanical energy. To be a dynamo means to be dynamic -- to be full of energy, enthusiasm, and a sense of purpose and able both to get things going and to get things done. Dynamite on the other hand is an explosive, and is very harmful and dangerous.

Let us be a dynamo of peace, and not a dynamite that destroys peace.

Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, let our hearts burn with passion as we do our Christian mission.

DO NOT DOUBT

One of the many stories after the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the story of the doubting Thomas (John 20:26-29). Thomas would not believe unless he could put his fingers in the wounds of Jesus. When Jesus appeared to them, he said to Thomas, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Dr. Lester Ruiz once told me a story that illustrates faith. He said that every time he goes to work in New York, he sometimes see a blind man with a seeing-eye-dog. This blind man takes a train from Trenton to Princeton. He told me that every time he sees this blind man, he felt both sadness and envy. Sadness because Dr. Ruiz has sight and he does not and envy because that blind man has fully comprehended what faith is.

Dr. Ruiz is right. The “eyes of faith” are eyes that are blind. In order for us to have faith, we have to be blind and must remain blind. This should not be confused with being blind to the realities of life, but blind in a sense that you do not know the exact details of what will happen yet you are excited about what it would be because you believe that God has in store something good for you.

The hymn says,

I don't know about tomorrow,
I just live from day to day.
I don't borrow from it's sunshine,
For it's skies may turn to gray.
I don't worry o'er the future,
For I know what Jesus said,
And today I'll walk beside Him,
For He knows what is ahead.

Many things about tomorrow,
I don't seem to understand;
But I know Who holds tomorrow,
And I know Who holds my hand.

Let us remember the words of Jesus to Thomas, “Stop
doubting and believe!”

HAVE FAITH

Amidst the economic crisis that the world is facing, let us ponder on our faith in God because as Hebrews 11:1 says, “Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.”

Faith can be understood using its acrostic:

F – Faithful to the commands of God.

An essential ingredient of faith is to be faithful. We must be obedient to the will of God.

Noah was ridiculed – laughed upon, made fun, teased by people. The climate was hot. Rainy season was over. Wise and old people during that time told them that no storm was coming. They did not believe him. They thought he was crazy. In spite of this, Noah built an ark. He obeyed God. The Great Flood eventually came.

A – Allow God to work in His mysterious ways

Sarah attempted to work on behalf of God. She gave her servant Hagar to sleep with Abraham. Hagar eventually gave birth to Ishmael. Because Sarah “fast forward” the plan of God in their lives, conflict happened; a conflict that is on-going even until now.

Let us not play God. Let God be God. Let us remember that if we do not allow God to have his way in our lives, disastrous things will happen.

I – Integrate your belief and your action

James tells us that “faith without works is dead.” Meaning, a faith that is only creedal in nature – belief in one God (*shema*), but not shown in actual life – is not acceptable to God.

Faith should have fruits and one cannot be called faithful if he is not fruitful; Fruitfulness is the result of faithfulness.

T - Trust in God

The primary idea of faith is trust. To trust God is to recognize our helplessness. It is a confession that only in God can we put our trust. There is nothing and no one else we can rely on. Our trust must be in God alone.

H - Hope on the promises of God

Hope is what keeps the people of God going. Because we know that the best is yet to come.

Joseph dreamed of a time when the Israelites will go back to Canaan, their home. He believed that exodus will come. He left instructions to bring his bones with them. It was after 430 years that they were able to leave Egypt. That was a great faith for Joseph.

How is our faith nowadays?

GOD IS MOTHER TOO

Every second Sunday of May is Mother's Day. We celebrate it in honor of our mothers.

In the Bible, God is also referred to as a mother. Isaiah 66:12-13 says, "For this is what the Lord says: "Look, I am ready to extend to her prosperity that will flow like a river, the riches of nations will flow into her like a stream that floods its banks. 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. You will be comforted in Jerusalem."

This text declares that God is mother too! This is intriguing because most of time we call God our father, and only a few would dare to call God as mother also.

Our bible is written from a patriarchal point of view. In the Old Testament, God is called the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and God is not called the God of Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel. But God did not demand that He should only be described as father. God also allowed the Prophet Isaiah to describe his motherly love for Israel.

God described Israel as a mother from whom the Israelites can drink milk from her breasts, that the Israelites can be gently rock to sleep in the arms of her mother, and that they can play with her. God also disclosed that it is not only Israel that acts as a mother to her children, but God himself is also a mother - "as a mother cares for her child, I will also care for you."

God did not also allow a total blackout of women in the Bible. There are famous women in the Bible like Queen Esther, and Ruth. These two women have two books in the 66 books in the Bible - only 3% yet their stories were told. There is Deborah, the female judge. There is Rahab, the harlot, who was applauded for her faith. In the New Testament, there were many women disciples of Jesus who actually were the financial supporters of Jesus like Mary

Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna (Lk. 8:1-3). Statistically speaking, the names of women in the Gospels are mentioned more than the names of the twelve disciples except that of John and Peter.

Jesus was very radical in challenging the patriarchal world view of the Jewish tradition. He healed women; he spoke to them about spiritual truths. The words -- “You must worship God in spirit and in truth” was spoken by Jesus to the adulterous woman when she asked where the proper place of worship is. Jesus also came to the rescue of another adulterous woman who was about to be stoned to death. The actions of Jesus towards women during his time were very revolutionary. Many were shocked by what Jesus did especially the religious leaders. Jesus gave the women their proper honor and dignity that they deserved.

Isa 49:15 says, “Can a mother forget the infant at her breast, and walk away from the baby she bore? But even if that were possible, I would not forget you!” Yes, we hear stories of mothers abandoning their new born babies but God as our mother will not abandon us. He will never leave us nor forsake us. God as our mother will always be there for us.

THE COST THAT TRULY COUNTS

Have you ever been harassed because of your faith?

In the book of Acts we can see stories in which the disciples of Jesus were persecuted, harassed and imprisoned because of their faith.

When the disciples were let out by the angels from their prison cells, they once again preached the gospel in the temple and anywhere where there were people who were willing to listen. The Jewish religious leaders heard about this, and they called the disciples in their council to answer various charges hurled against them. They were told by the High Council, especially the High Priest to stop preaching in the name of Jesus Christ. But the apostles answered the council, “We must obey God rather than any human authority.” (Acts 5: 17-42)

The High Council was furious when they heard this reply from the apostles. They planned to kill all of them. Some of the members of the council followed the advice of Gamaliel, a Pharisee, to leave the apostles alone because if what they were doing is from God, they will be fighting against God. But some had the apostles flogged.

What was the message of the apostles?

The angels commanded them to “give the people the message of life” – a new life in Jesus Christ. This message was a very simple message and was understood by the people. Thousands of people joined them every day. Why? Because this message is devoid of the burden of rituals perpetuated by religious leaders – rituals that led some of them to corrupt practices like the collusion of priests and merchants in the temple area. This message was joined by the testimony of the lives of apostles – they practiced what they preached.

What gave the apostles the confidence, the courage and the will to be consistent in their actions and convictions no matter what the costs?

The statement “We must obey God rather than what you are telling us” was a courageous stand. This statement also answers our question – they were obeying the command of God. They did not forsake the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives. The Book of Acts is not only called the Acts of the Apostles, but more appropriately it is also called the Acts of the Holy Spirit.

Their courage in preaching the Good News has left a legacy throughout the whole world. Their courage to teach and preach despite the opposition ensured the continuity of Christianity.

Are we going to continue what the apostles and our foreparents in faith started, cost what it may?

POWER STRUGGLE

Bickering among disciples was common. In Matthew 18:1-6 we can see a familiar scene among the disciples of Jesus - a scene in which they asked Jesus who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

This often repeated discussion was aggravated because Peter was able to walk in the water together with Jesus. He was also there in the mountaintop during the transfiguration of Jesus when Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking to Jesus. James and John also asked Jesus if they can be in the right hand and left hand of Jesus in the kingdom of heaven.

Their inquiry to know who was greatest in the kingdom resulted into a totally unexpected reply from Jesus - "He called a little child and had him stand among them. And He said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'"

The child is the living embodiment of several truths which the disciples of Jesus had missed. The first truth involves faith.

The people of Israel did not respond when Jesus called them to Him. They stood off at a distance, reserving judgment. When Jesus called the child to Him, the child responded immediately. Very trusting, the child accepted Jesus' invitation at once. (The Teacher's Commentary)

The second truth is about humility. The disciples waited breathlessly for Jesus to name the greatest man, among them. The disciples were wondering what great positions they would have. In response, Jesus took a little child, who had no rights according to the Law, and stood him in their midst. He told the disciples a change in their thinking was necessary.

Greatness in the kingdom was not based on great works or words, but on childlike humility of spirit. Jesus bypassed the

disciples completely and called a little child into their midst. This child was the example of true greatness. (Bible Knowledge Commentary)

Competing or jockeying for positions brings about selfishness and disunity. What happened to the disciples long time ago is still happening in our midst today, and it is a scandal to the Christian faith. There is a growing need for humility. We need to let go of our pride, of thinking ourselves more important than we really are. Let us remember that the center letter of the word pride is “I.”

The reply of Jesus indicated that they were asking the wrong question. They should have been concerned about serving the Lord, and not asking about positions in the kingdom. Their service needed to be directed towards the people. Jesus was telling them that they should focus on welcoming the little children – a symbol of the marginalized sector of their society.

What about us? Are we like the disciples who are quarreling for positions, or are we focusing our energy in serving the people of God?

FIX YOUR THOUGHTS ON GODLY THINGS

How many has your thoughts wandered into ungodly things?

Paul encouraged the faithful Christians of Philippi to fix their thoughts on godly things. Philippians 4:8-9: “And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me – everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.” (NLV)

There are four major things from this Scripture Text:

First, Restoring the world to what is true and noble.

Do you remember what God said in Genesis every time He finished creating something? “And God saw that it was ... GOOD.” God declared in the sixth day after He created Adam and Eve that everything that He had made was “very good.”

God created us in His very own image but sadly, the image of God is a little dimmed and on some days cannot be seen in us. We need Jesus Christ in our lives so that we can be restored.

Second, Reconciling broken relationships back to what is right.

Our broken relationship with God, with our fellow human beings, and with nature needs to be reconciled. This is the reason why the symbol of the cross has two points: one vertical and one horizontal. What happened in the cross is a reminder for all of us that reconciliation is not complete when done only vertically or horizontally. It should be both.

Third, Returning to what is pure.

Our sense of morality nowadays is very confusing. The culture of greed in our society is blossoming. Scandals can be heard and seen left and right. Maybe we have forgotten what are our Christian values and morality. We need to go back to what is pure in the sight of God. As Christians, we must be in the forefront in the mission of restoration.

Fourth, Releasing those who are in bondage so that they may become lovely and admirable. God wants us to be liberated from anything that hinders us in achieving an abundant life.

WHAT SHOULD WE GIVE?

I once asked my students, “When will you start giving?” Most of them answered that they will start giving when they have a surplus. I told them that if this is the basis of our impetus to give than we will continue to live in a very selfish world.

In II Corinthians 8:1-9 Paul challenged the church in Corinth to give of their resources. Paul told them how the church in Macedonia gave sacrificially.

Paul challenges us to give six things.

First, let us give of our material resources. How is our offering nowadays? Are we faithful with our tithing? Or are we finding it hard to give our materials resources to the church and to the mission of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Second, let us give our faith. Let us not just keep the faith, we must spread it. Our faith is enriched if we share it with others.

Third, let us give our kind words. We cannot catch our words the moment it leave our mouths. So let us be careful of what we say.

Pastor Rudy Acosta once told an illustration about a little girl that shouted “buang” in the mountain. The mountain echoed back “buang” to her. She was infuriated. Her mother told her to shout “gwapa.” When the mountain echoed back the word “gwapa”, she beamed with joy. Her mother reminded her to watch the words that she speaks.

Fourth, let us give our knowledge. Let us train second-liners. Like Jesus, we must have disciples.

Jesus had his full-time ministry for about three years. It was very short yet after thousands of years we had received the Gospel in the Philippines. Why? Because Jesus trained not only a core group of 12 disciples but also another 70 and then 120. In turn, these

disciples also trained other disciples. The gospel reached all of us because of discipleship.

What about us? Are we training someone to replace us someday in our leadership positions, or are we holding on to our positions until we die?

Fifth, let us give our availability to serve. We give many excuses to God. Although we really felt that God was calling us to serve Him, we still refused to listen. We say things like – I’m still young, I’m old, others are better than me, I’m shy, I’m busy, I’m afraid and many more. Like prophets of old, let us say, “Here I am, send me.”

Sixth, let us give our loving attitude.

Dr. Feliciano Sombito, first President of Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches said in 1935, “Dapat naton usisaon kag suklon ang aton kusog kag kaluyahon... magamitlang sang mga defectos, sa espiritu nga dili pag padiutay apang pagpadaku, dili pagmusmus apang pagbatak, dili paghikay apang sa higugma, kag dili pag patay apang sa pag hatag kabuhi.”

Our loving attitude can influence the lives of other people.

If we sum up these six things, we will realize that what God is asking of us is our whole being.

OUR INDEPENDENCE DAY

Every June 12 the Philippines celebrates its Independence Day. In the light of this event, let us reflect on the freedom that God gave us through Jesus Christ.

Let me share with you a portion of a beautiful book entitled “Joshua” written by Joseph F. Girzone. This passage is a critique on how we oftentimes missed the message of freedom that was so essential in the life and teachings of Jesus. We are frequently guilty of building theological prisons in our strict devotion to church doctrines. We have failed to grasp that “fidelity to the teachings of Jesus cannot be forced by threat of punishment...Jesus wanted the human spirit to find him in freedom and to embrace him joyously and spontaneously.”

“God never intended religion to be what it is today. Jesus came to earth to try to free people from that kind of regimented religion where people are threatened if they don’t obey rules and rituals invented by the clergy. Jesus came to teach people that they are God’s children and, as God’s children they are free, free to grow as human beings, to become beautiful people as God intended. That can’t be legislated.”

“Jesus gave the apostles and the community as a support to provide help and guidance and consolation. Jesus did not envision bosses in the worldly sense. He wanted his apostles to guide and serve, not to dictate and legislate like those who govern this world. Unfortunately, religious leaders model themselves after civil governments and treat people accordingly. In doing this they fall into the same trap that the scribes and Pharisees fell into, making religion a tangible set of measurable religious observances, which is legalistic and superficial...it is their endless rules and their rituals rather than love of God and concern for others that occupy the people’s attention.”

“Customs and practices and traditions then replace true service of God, and these become a serious obstacle to real growth in the

love of God...People become rigid in their thinking and afraid to think for themselves...when even ceremonies and mere customs change they panic, because they have been led to believe these things were their faith. With that kind of mentality all growth stops... If a person was not open to the inspirations of the Spirit, because it goes beyond what the (religious traditions) allow him, then even the Holy Spirit cannot work in him and he remains stunted. What is worse, he frustrates the work that God wants to accomplish in him.

“That’s why the prophets of old were such great men. They had the boldness to see beyond the limitations of human religious traditions and provide guidance to God’s people. They had the courage to break out of the sterile rigidity of religious forms, and incurred the wrath of religious leaders who hated them for this, and persecuted them, even killing some of them in the name of religion.”

May God grant us the freedom to think and see beyond the “four corners of the church.” Jesus was once asked, “Where is the proper place of worship, in this mountain or in the temple?” Jesus answered, “Neither here nor there but you must worship God in spirit and truth.”

GOD OUR FATHER

Every third Sunday of June is Father's Day. This celebration is to give honor to our fathers.

A prophet in the Old Testament asked a question -- "Have we not all one father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?"

Malachi was a minor Prophet but he had a major message. His message was: Remain in your covenant with God. Malachi was telling them that God should be their Father and they should act as children of God.

The story of the Bible is a story of a covenant relationship of God and His chosen people. The covenant is this: "I will be your God and you will be my people."

Through Jesus Christ, we can now be called sons and daughters of God, and we can call God our Father. Christians are called the New Israel. Jesus gives us this new covenant: Love God and Love your neighbor. This is the commandment that all the laws, the prophets and writings are based.

The obvious question for us today is - Is God still our father? Do we still consider ourselves as children of God? I hope God will hear our resounding yes.

There are two attributes of God as our Father that can found in Malachi 2:10-16.

First, God is a caring father. The people of Israel at that time were careless in their attitudes. In spite of that, God was still the father who cared. He was still reminding the Israelites through the prophet Malachi to turn away from their careless attitudes. God as Father cared so much that He sent prophets to always warn the Israelites and turn from their wicked ways.

Second, God is a sustaining father. We see in the passage that Israel became unfaithful to the covenant to the point of divorcing God. God still sustains His part of the covenant even if it is one sided. He is like the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son who keeps on waiting for his son to return.

According to a survey, here is the Top 10 appreciated qualities of a father by his children:

1. He takes time for me.
2. He listens to me.
3. He plays with me.
4. He invites me to go places with him.
5. He lets me help him.
6. He treats my mother well.
7. He lets me say what I think.
8. He is nice to my friends.
9. He only punishes me when I deserve it.
10. He is not afraid to admit when he is wrong.

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Have you seen a blind man begging in the streets? In John 9, Jesus encountered a blind man who is a beggar. Jesus saw a man with congenital blindness.

The result of their encounter was a miracle. The blind man can now open his eyes after Jesus put a mixture of saliva and mud into his eyes. Why saliva and mud? Yuck! I don't know of the medicinal value of mud and saliva but this is the underlying meaning; we are all made from dust, from mud; and God can use anything to heal us.

Jesus used this incident to differentiate a man who was once in "darkness" but is now in the "light." The bringer of the "light" is Jesus who declared "I am the light of the world" (v.5).

At the Half-moon Drive in CPU, there is a big globe with a picture of Jesus Christ inside it. The words "I am the Light" are also inscribed on top of the picture. This is a visible reminder that Jesus brings light to our darkened world.

The interesting part of the story is how this man responded to the miracle that happened to him. We can learn three things from his responses.

First, the man testified courageously. The healing experience of this man was challenged not only by his neighbors but by the Pharisees as well. At first there was some hesitation in his testimony but later on when he was cornered by a lot of people, he courageously declared that Jesus is a prophet. He responded with great logic and reasoning (vv.26-34) that even the Pharisees were caught off guard.

Second, his testimony was brought about by his accountability to become a "bringer of light." He "let his light shine" (Matt. 5:16) to other people. He knew what it is to be in "darkness", thus, this propelled him to bring the "light" (Jesus) to those who are in the

“dark.” He wants others to experience the *metanoía* – of being transformed.

Third, he became a disciple of Jesus with the mission to “open the eyes” of other people. In his second encounter with Jesus, this man was taught that there are people who can physically see yet are spiritually blind (v.39).

This lesson became his commission to help “open the eyes” of those who are spiritually blind. His desire to reach others was intensified by his awareness that God will judge each person according to their response to the message of the “light” (Jesus). He wants others to “open their eyes” also.

The three responses of the former blind man present to us three questions that we need to ask ourselves. First, are we testifying courageously for the cause of Jesus Christ? Second, do we let our light shine so that others may experience *metanoía*? Third, are we continuing the mission to open the eyes of those who are spiritually blind?

ARE WE A FRIEND OF JESUS?

Every July 4 the Philippines celebrates Philippine-American Friendship Day. Previously, July 4 is celebrated as Philippine Independence Day coinciding with the American Independence Day. Later, the date was moved to June 12.

In the light of this Friendship Day, let us reflect on how Jesus developed his friendship with the people. In John 15:14 Jesus called his disciples his friends. And as friends, he was telling them to “bear fruit that will last” and to “love one another.”

There are three instances that Jesus’ disciples were astonished of the many friends of Jesus who were willing to “Lay down their lives for a friend.”

First, the disciples asked the permission of Jesus to rebuke some people who are doing the same work that they have been doing – casting out demons, preaching and sowing seeds of goodness among the people.

Jesus told them not to stop these people for “Whoever is not against us is for us.” The disciples had an exclusivist thinking because these people are not part of their group. Jesus rebuked them.

How many times did we put down others because they are not from our circle of friends?

Second, a friend of Jesus lent him a donkey for him. He used this in his Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. The disciples who fetched the donkey marvelled at the friendship network of Jesus.

Jesus established true friendship with the owner of the donkey. And this friendship was tested when the time Jesus needed something from that man.

How many times did we promise our friends to be their true friend through “thick and thin” and yet failed them?

Third, another friend of Jesus lent him an upper room. They used this room to commemorate the Passover meal. We call this as the Last Supper.

Every time we celebrate Communion or Lord’s Supper, let us also remember this friend of Jesus who risked his life and his family by letting Jesus, an outlaw and a rebel in the eyes of the Romans and Jews, use a part of his house. It was an important time for Jesus because he explained to his disciples the real meaning of his death and sacrifice.

How many times did we say “no” to our friends when they needed us most because our comfort zone will not allow it?

Let us be true friends who are willing to lay down our lives for a friend.

FINDING REST

Everyone gets tired. Everyone is not exempted and all of us are looking forward to rest. We oftentimes pray, “Lord, I am tired please give me some rest.”

It is observed that the Jewish religion was a thing of burdens. They have endless rules. One writer has written that a Jew lived his life in a forest of regulations which dictated every action of his life. He must forever listen to a voice which said, “Thou shalt not.”

In that situation, Jesus offered them an invitation, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavily laden and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

We need rest in this age of busyness in which the theme of every person is: work...work...work. We seem to always want to be busy. We feel that there is always shortage of time. In CPU, we call people who are always in meetings to have a disease called “meeting-gitis.”

This invitation is liberating. The Greek word for “rest” is *anapausin*. It literally means “an intermission, or a vacation.” Jesus is saying to us, “I will give a break from the day-to-day struggles of life. I’ll give you a second wind.”

This invitation also frees us and gives us rest from the structures that block us from being what God wants us to be.

In one of my classes, we discussed the silent years of Jesus – between the ages 12 to 30. One of the theories suggested that Jesus was a carpenter who made the best ox-yokes in all of Galilee and all over the country people would go there and buy the yokes. In Jewish culture, one follows his father’s business. It has been suggested that the signage of Jesus’ carpenter’s shop was: “My yoke fits well.” This means that if we accept this invitation, then God will send us tasks that are made to fit us. Whatever God sends us is made to fit our needs and our abilities exactly.

The invitation to take the yoke of Jesus upon us is an invitation not to quit. It is an invitation to do God's work. It is about trading our purposes and goals for God's purpose and goals for our lives.

St. Augustine said, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee, O Lord." May we find our rest in Jesus Christ.

JESUS CARES

One of the themes of Christ Emphasis Week at CPU was “Jesus Cares: Our Hope in Times of Trouble” and the Scripture text was found in I Peter 5:7 – “Cast all your worries upon him for he cares for you.”

Does Jesus care? Yes, I believe with all my heart that Jesus cares. Last July 2009 was one of the trying times in my life. My then 5-year old son, Kairos, was diagnosed with pneumonia and AH1N1 flu. He was subsequently quarantined together with my wife, Hermely, at the Western Visayas Medical Center. I was also under house quarantine with our 1-year old little girl, Francheska.

God truly cares. God has shown me His care through the many individuals that touched our lives through their constant prayers, encouraging text messages and emails.

When Bagyo Frank ravaged Western Visayas in 2008, CPU was not spared. The estimated damage was about P60 to P80 million. But by the grace and care of God, CPU has survived and got stronger in the process.

When Peter wrote his letter, he addressed it to the scattered Jews all over Asia and Europe. The Jews were experiencing the Diaspora -- the scattering all over the four corners of the Earth. The Temple in Jerusalem was about to be destroyed by the Romans. Their revolution was brought to an end by the Romans. They were eventually cornered in the mountain of Masada.

The scattered Jews longed to go home yet they have no home to go back. Israel ceased to exist. It was only in 1948 that they became a nation again.

The letter written by Peter was a great reminder to all of them that God cares for in spite of the seemingly unfavourable circumstances.

Here is a poem by Charles Brown which reminds us that we can become an extension of God's hand in caring for others.

“Reach out and touch that neighbor who hates you
Reach out and touch that stranger who meets you
Reach out and touch that brother (and sister) who needs you
Reach out and let the smile of God touch through you
Reach out because touching means
you became the hand of God to the people here on earth.”

LET US CONTINUE TO BE PARTNERS

Filamer Christian University in Roxas City, Capiz is a product of partnership. The name Filamer means Fil - Filipino and Amer - American.

Paul also wrote about partnership. In Philippians 1:3-6 Paul reminded the Christians in Philippi of their partnership in proclaiming the gospel. Philippi was the first city in Europe reached by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This city was a strategic area for the entrance of the Gospel into Europe.

Paul is reminding us of two things in our partnership:

First, we need to pray for one another. Paul prayed for the members of the churches that he established. Prayer has become their spiritual communication.

Jesus taught his disciples how to pray. We popularly call the prayer “Our Father.” The bottom line of this prayer is about asking the will of God. Jesus prayed “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

The theological principle is this: The will of God is good. Therefore, our will should be connected to the will of God. After we know the will of God, we should do the will of God, thus, resulting to goodwill among people. (Angut naton ang aton buot sa buot sang Dios agod mangin mabuot kita kag may yara sang maayong kabubut-on sa palibot).

Second, for our partnership to succeed we need a third party. This should be a tripartite partnership. This third party is, of course, God.

Eccl 4:12 says, “Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”

Dr. Anatalio Viray once told me how Dr. Rex Drilon, the first Filipino president of CPU, contributed to the design of the University Church. The design is that of a Malay balangay (barangay) boat. You can see the bugsay (paddles) on both sides. It teaches us that if we are united in our bugsay (paddle) in one direction we will go forward.

Paul is reminding us that we must pray for one another, and that God should be the third partner in our partnership because he will be faithful to bring into completion the good work that He has started in all of us.

WE ARE DESTINED TO DIE

When the first woman president of the Philippines Cory Aquino died in 2009, the Philippine Government declared a National Day of Mourning. We too will die someday. We too will be mourned by others. We are all finite beings. We are not immortals.

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.”

When someone dies, we usually pause and reflect when will be our appointed time to pass away also. It is in this moment that we take account of ourselves: what kind of life are we living? Do we want to continue living that kind of life?

Two things to do as we do our accounting:

First, when we understand that life is short, we start living responsibly and become good stewards of our God-given resources.

The Parable of the Talents is a good reminder for all of us to invest our lives on things that can give glory to God. We have to know that life is different from existence. Life is being alive with a purpose.

Second, when we know that life is short, we start living a life that becomes a preparation for the next life.

I remember a nursery rhyme during my Sunday School years that says, “*Eternidad, Eternidad. Magpili ka sinining duwa, langit impierno diin ka? Mapa langit gid lang ako kay gahulat ang Ginoo.*”

Here is a poem entitled "I Will Never Pass This Way Again

I will pass this way but once
And if there's any good that I can do
Let me do it now
For I'll never pass this way again

I will see this day but once
If there's any kindness I can show
Let me show it now
For I'll never see this day again

Tomorrow may be too late my friend
To do all the good that you planned
So reach out to those who need you
And lend them a helping hand

I will know this world but once
And if there's any love that I can give
Let me give it now
Oh Lord, please show me how
For I'll never know this world
I'll never see this day
I'll never pass this way again

WALK THE TALK

One way or another we were once reprimanded by our teachers. We have learned from our mistakes because it was pointed to us.

In Luke 6:47-48 Jesus also reprimanded his audience. He asked them why they are calling him “Lord, Lord” but do not do what he says. He then proceeded to remind them that those who call him that title must put into practice what they heard from him.

I remember a time when CPU put up a banner that says, “Jesus is Lord of CPU.” The message of that banner brought a lot of accountability to the CPU community.

Perhaps it would be important to ask the question about what we mean by “Lord.” The “Lord” is one who commands our attention, our loyalty, our fidelity. The “Lord” is one who makes claims on our lives, to whom we yield authority.

In a parallel verse on Matthew 7:24, Jesus is telling us that the one who obeys his commands is like the wise man who built his house on the rock. When the flood came, it was not able to shake the house because it was founded upon a rock.

Therefore, Jesus teaches us to be like that wise man. To be wise is:

Firstly, to say the right thing in times of persecution and examination. We would sometimes break down in times of suffering and would be willing to say anything that will get us out of adversity. Jesus commands us to stand in the right way even if it would get us into trouble.

Secondly, to make the choice for the development of humanity. Inherent to us is the attitude of selfishness. One only likes to advance his/her own agenda and forget everyone around his/her. Filipinos has this “crab mentality.” We like to pull down those who

are ahead of us. Jesus is mandating us to work for the prosperity of all and to deny our own selfish desires.

Thirdly, to accept that the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men. I am convinced that we are getting tired on the wisdom of the world. The Lord of Wisdom is letting us know that the intelligence of people is no match to that of God.

Today, Jesus commands us to act upon what we have heard. Let us remember that a person who hears and does not obey is like the foolish man who built his house on the sand. When the rain came down and the flood arose, the house fell with a great crash.

TOWEL LEADERSHIP

Every election time the Philippine television is full of info-commercials advertising a politician. They would “make-up” stories just to promote themselves to be the next leaders of the country.

In John 13:1-17 we can see the kind of leadership exemplified by our Lord Jesus Christ. The event happened in the night before the Last Supper. Jesus was illustrating his kind of leadership by taking off his outer garment, wrapping a towel on his waist, getting a basin of water, and started washing his disciples’ feet.

He is reminding us that to be Christian leader one must have humility, a service oriented mind and above all, love to whom you serve. He wants to instill in our hearts that there is no scarcity of feet to wash. He is making us understand that a person who wants to lead must also learn how to follow.

There are several leadership lessons that Jesus teaches us. Let me share three things:

First, a leader must be a pathfinder. He must have a vision and a mission. He knows where to take his group. He leads them in a path towards the goals and objectives of the organization. He plans as if he would live forever and work as if there is no tomorrow.

Second, a leader must be a manager. He knows how to identify and put people where they really belong. He understands the personalities of his followers and gives them roles where they are happy and can help develop their potentials. He does not force the individual to do the task that does not suit him. Instead, he helps that individual discover what he is called to do and develop those skills and abilities that God gave him.

Third, a leader must empower his people. He gives them the power to do things. He knows where to push the right button of an individual. He also knows where to put the key that unlocks the drive of an individual to do great things.

Let us ask ourselves this question: What kind of leader am I?

ARE WE WORTH DYING FOR?

Every August 21 the Philippines celebrates Ninoy Aquino Day to commemorate his death and martyrdom for the Filipino people. One of the famous last words of Ninoy were “The Filipino is worth dying for.” He died for the cause of freedom and democracy. Although his death was just one of the many deaths during Martial Law, it became the rallying cry of the Filipinos to topple the dictator. Ninoy became an icon of the struggle of restoring democracy.

More than 2,000 ago, Jesus was also killed for a cause. He died not only for the Filipino people but for the whole humanity. Mark 10:45b says that Jesus came to “give his life as a ransom for all.” Jesus is our Lord and Savior.

Here is a short biography of Jesus through a poem entitled “One Solitary Life.” The authorship is attributed to Dr. James Allen Francis, 1926.

“Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another obscure village, where he worked in a carpenter's shop until he was thirty. Then for three years he was an itinerant preacher.

“He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a home. He never set foot inside a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place he was born. He did none of the things that usually accompany greatness. While He was still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends deserted him. He was turned over to his enemies, and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for the only piece of property he had - his coat. When he was dead, he was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave.

“Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure for much of the human race. All the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever sailed, and all the parliaments

that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of people on this earth as powerfully as this One Solitary Life.”

As we reflect on the sacrificial death of Jesus, let us ask ourselves this question “Are we worth dying for?”

JESUS, MY HERO

Every August 31 the Filipinos celebrate the National Heroes Day in honor of the heroes of yesteryears. The Tagalog word for hero is “bayani,” the root word of which is “bayan.” This means that a “bayani” does or did something great for the “bayan.”

We have many heroes in our country. For me, however, Jesus is my hero.

Jesus, my hero, had a cause. The central message of Jesus’ ministry was the Kingdom of God, or in some translations, the Reign of God. Luke 4:43 says, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God...because that is why I was sent.” All the parables of Jesus were about the Kingdom of God. After the resurrection, Jesus also preached about the Kingdom of God.

Jesus, my hero, organized people for the cause of the Kingdom of God. He rallied his disciples to preach and teach about the Reign of God. These disciples left their work and made the cause of Jesus their priorities. Jesus said, “deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.”

Jesus, my hero, challenged the status quo of his time. The cause of the Kingdom of God became a threat to the religious leaders, and the ruling class. In a sense, Jesus liberated “God” by his actions. “God” was imprisoned in the temple, in the Holy of Holies and in other religious places. But Jesus said to a Samaritan woman, “Worship neither in the mountain or in the temple but worship God in spirit and in truth.”

Jesus, my hero, died for the cause. Everybody who became uncomfortable by the message of Jesus plotted to kill him. They eventually captured him at night to evade the multitude of his followers. They put him in a mock trial. They forced him to recant. But in his silence, he showed them what loyalty to the cause is all about. It was a deafening silence; a silent protest that was so loud that they had to kill him.

Jesus, my hero, never died. Jesus resurrected from the dead. A godly cause cannot be killed. When Jesus showed himself to his disciples, they were at first frightened, but later they were empowered and emboldened to declare to the whole world why Jesus came and what Jesus died for. Later, these early disciples were persecuted and put to death for the cause of Jesus. They gladly gave their lives.

My hero is Jesus. Is Jesus your hero also? Let us then follow in the footsteps of our hero.

EMPOWERING THE CENTRALIANS FOR A BETTER CENTRAL

The theme of the 104th University Day celebration of CPU was “Empowering the Centralians for a better Central.” There were two immediate questions that came to my mind when I read the theme: Are Centralians not yet empowered? Is Central not better already?

If we take positively our theme, then it means that we are always empowering our students and alumni; Centralians are always empowered. And that Central is fundamentally better yet we strive to continue to make it better, and better.

Christians are empowered by the Holy Spirit. To be empowered means to have the power to do things. Yet the term “power” has several negative connotations. It is associated with abuse, dictatorship, authoritarian and being bossy.

One time, the disciples of Jesus associated empowerment to be like that – to be a boss, someone who is a master with slaves. The disciples were clamoring who will be at the right hand or left hand of Jesus when he assumes the kingship of Israel. But Jesus Christ scolded them by saying, “You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:42-45.

This statement of Jesus means that as Christians we do not strive to become rulers with an attitude of “lording it over the people” but we are empowered to become servants. The Holy Spirit is our guide in giving service to the people. Every day we must ask ourselves the question, “How can I be of service to the people of God?”

Acts 1 tells us that we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to become witnesses of Jesus Christ. “In Jerusalem” symbolically means to be a witness of Jesus in our own homes; for a Centralian it means to be a witness of Jesus inside the community of CPU. “In Judea” symbolically means to be a witness of Jesus to our neighbors – to fellow Centralians outside the campus, to our alumni. “In Samaria” symbolically means to be a witness of Jesus in our surrounding communities. “Into the ends of earth” means to be a witness of Jesus everywhere. (Acts 1:8)

Are we a good witness of Jesus Christ? If we are, then we can positively say that indeed Central is getting better because Centralians are becoming servants of Jesus anytime and anywhere.

LESSONS FOR GRANDPARENTS

Every year on the second Sunday of September churches in the Philippines celebrate Grandparents Day.

One grandmother in the Bible that is worthy to be emulated is Naomi. Her story can be found in Ruth 4:13-17.

Ruth was the daughter-in-law of Naomi. She had no children with Naomi's son. Ruth and Naomi soon became widows in the land of Moab. They eventually decided to go back to Israel. Ruth remarried through the prodding of Naomi. Ruth and Boaz were blessed by God with a son named Obed. Now, Naomi became a grandmother. She took care of Obed to the point that the neighbors were calling Obed as Naomi's son.

The significance of this story is that Obed is the father of Jesse, and Jesse is the father of King David. And from the line of King David comes our messiah, Jesus Christ. Indeed the prayer that the line of Obed will be great became a reality.

There are two lessons that we can learn from this godly grandmother.

First, Grandparents should be the storytellers to their grandchildren of their family's history and legacy. They must also be the roots that strengthen the faith of their grandchildren. In Hiligaynon we call this "apostolic" ministry (the root word is "apo" - grandchild).

Lois Wyse said, "Grandchildren are the dots that connect the lines from generation to generation." The relationship of grandparents and grandchildren is the chain that links the past and the future.

When grandparents retired, this does not mean that they are very tired already. It means that they have another tire. God gives them a brand new tire so that they can play with their grandchildren.

Second, Grandparents, like Naomi, are given by God a second chance. Naomi felt that she was a failure with her children. Now, she gave it all to her grandson.

A quotation says, “A Grandmother is a wonderful mother with lots of practice.” And “A grandfather is a father who has a second chance.”

Young parents should listen to the words of grandparents. We must not reject “the strength and wisdom that time and experience have given them.”

FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

On September 21, 1972, Martial Law was declared in the Philippines. Centralians struggled against the dictatorship of Marcos. They engaged in “parliament of the streets.” Some Centralians and Baptist pastors were imprisoned, and some were brutally killed.

The following are inspiring reflections on past events.

Rev. Moley Familiaran, President of CPBC 1976-1978 reflected on the May 1977 CPBC Assembly Theme: “Life Worthy of Human Dignity” held in Capiz:

“The life worthy of human dignity is the Christ-like life. It is free. It is true. And it is the only way to live. On the editorial pages of the Bible we read the Good News that Jesus Christ gives light to the darkened eyes; he removes resentment that breaks the heart; he sets them free, those who were bound by many invisible chains; and he announces the arrival of the new age – the age of liberation! In every one of us there is a Christ going to be. Dignity is only one of the flowers of that Christ-seed. It is the flag flying in the brilliant sky proclaiming Jesus’ sovereignty over a human life. Where there is no freedom, there is no dignity.”

Through the leadership of Rev. Dr. Domingo J. Diel, Dean of the College of Theology in 1975, CPU put forward a new approach on theological education in the light of the contemporary issues during that time. The statement says,

“We believe that theological education should help in preparing Christians serve God through service in the world. As such, theological education should start where the people are. It should take on account the people’s desires and aspirations, their struggles, and most of all, their needs. It should be able to understand the ‘hows, whys and wherefores’ of the people that it may be able to apply the Christian message relevantly to the lives of the people, and the community wherein they live. We believe that

Theological Education can do this when it opens itself up and enters into dialogue with the world – its cultures, ideologies and religions.”

“Theological Education should promote a living involvement in the life situation of the people. Having understood the hows, whys and wherefores of the people, it should seek to put into practice such understanding in terms of involvement in actual life situations of the community, participate in its struggles and become a motive force in the shaping of history.”

The struggles of our foreparents bore the fruit of freedom. Most of them are still alive. They are a continuing visible reminder that pricks the young generation’s insincerity, insensitivity, indifference and passivity. They are not yet the “clouds of witnesses” that cheer us to go on. They are in the midst of us – continuing the struggle for liberation. Let us march with them.

LET US LISTEN TO WARNINGS

On a Friday, September 25, 2009, Bagyo Ondoy visited the country. In the afternoon, a siren was heard in Jaro and people started going home from the CPU campus. Lopez-Jaena Street began to flood. Later, news coming from Luzon broke our hearts. Disaster struck our fellow Filipinos.

The 8 hours of continuous rain brought flood in many cities in Luzon. The last big rainfall that fell in the Philippines was on 1967. The rain brought by Ondoy is so far the biggest, even bigger than Bagyo Frank. Some reports said that the rainfall is approximately equivalent to 6 months of rain. The flood reached more than 12 feet in height.

In the midst of this situation, we can raise a question, “Why did God allow this to happen? Is God deaf, not to hear the prayers and pleas of our fellow Filipinos? Or is there really a God? Is God dead?”

Romans chapter 8 reminds us that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord – be it trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword.

I may sound callous but I am reflecting that the flood is a big warning to all of us. Tropical storms are normal occurrences but floods like this one are abnormal. We reclaimed lands that are normal pathways of water. We dump garbage in the river. Industrial wastes go to the river also. Graft and corruption in the making and cleaning of canals are rampant. We cut trees that are essential in holding big amounts of water. In short, we are killing our environment. No wonder we are all experiencing the fruit of our own labor.

God always brings a way out in any situation. God always sends people to warn us like what He did when He sent Noah. But our problem is that we ridicule people like Noah – those people who are always giving warnings. Are we listening to warnings? Let us

remember to go inside the ark. The ark symbolizes the church. Sad to say, like in the time of Noah, only a few are inside the ark. The animals even outnumbered the people. How about us? Are we inside the ark?

After the flood, there is a rainbow. It symbolizes hope. Hope is what propels the Christians to go on. And faith is what pushes us to continue loving one another, to make actions that will make planet Earth, our only home, a better place for the next generation. Let us not lose hope.

The flood is a very costly reminder. Let us listen to its warning.

THE MISSION OF CENTRAL PHILIPPINE UNIVERSITY

Every October 1 Central Philippine University celebrates its Foundation Day.

The Central Decalogue printed in the 1960 Student Handbook is a good reminder to all of us about the mission of CPU:

1. I believe in Central Philippine University because she believes in the future of the Filipino youth;
2. I believe in her democratic spirit;
3. I believe in her emphasis on scholarship and character;
4. I believe in her teaching that the human personality is sacred and its dignity should be upheld over and above the arrogance of wealth and the tyranny of power;
5. I believe in her educating the poor in order to lift them up and free them from the shackles of social and religious prejudice, ignorance, and superstition;
6. I believe in her educating the rich in order to imbue them with high social conscience for imaginative vision, generous attitudes, civilized humility, and sacrificial dedication to the welfare of the people;
7. I believe in her classroom instruction which insists that students must be free to explore honestly any area of knowledge and push back the horizons of their intellect and educate the emotions of the heart;
8. I believe in the freedom and fearlessness of her professors to discuss ideas and issues without imposing their will, but guiding the youth along the path of broadmindedness, independence, self-reliance, and creativeness;

9. I believe in the necessity of research in the atmosphere of freedom because a university is not truly a university unless it carries on research;

10. I believe that a university with a Christian base and a Christian orientation should be more progressive and more daring in pressing ahead of its times in all things, to the end that the human spirit will come to full flowering under constant ferment.

BAPTIST ROOTS OF CENTRAL PHILIPPINE UNIVERSITY

The beginning of Central Philippine University cannot be disconnected with the start of the Baptist mission in the Philippines.

Let us ponder on some of these historical notes:

In 1935, when the American government granted a commonwealth status to the Philippines, a great milestone in the history of Philippine Baptist churches occurred...Representatives of the Philippine Baptist churches and the American Baptist missionaries dissolved the WVC on May 23, 1935 to give birth to the Kasapulanan sang Bautista nga Pilipinhon (Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches).

The significance of this new development was described by Nelson and Herradura. Their words deserve a longer quotation,

“This new organization changed the status of Central Philippine College from being an institution of the Foreign Mission Society to a cooperating entity of the Convention (CPBC). The By-laws specified that the corporation members should be members of Convention-related Baptist churches, elected by the annual assembly of the Convention, and that two thirds of the College Board of Trustees should be members of Baptist churches. With this development, majority control of policy-making passed from American to Filipino hands.

Consequently, the campus of the college was leased to the Convention as the field body responsible for its oversight. All requests by the college for appropriation, missionary personnel, and other related needs had to be coursed through the Convention Board of Trustees, to the Society. Furthermore, proposed changes in the constitution of the college or its By-laws must be ratified by the Convention in session before they could be enforced.” (Linnea A. Nelson and Elma S. Herradura, 1981, p. 45.)

Going back to the New Testament, Paul was reminding Timothy to remember the genuine faith that he has which was passed on by two generations – his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice. Paul was telling Timothy not to put to shame the faith that he has inherited.

In the Filipino culture, we always tell our children not to put to shame our family name. We always tell them that we cannot give them money but we can give them a good name – a name that they can carry with pride because it has a good reputation.

It is common in CPU to have three generations of Centralians. We even have up to five generations of Centralians. This is because the old generation trusted CPU to pass on the faith to the next generation.

Are we still passing the faith of the older generation to the latest generation? The Foundation Day celebration is good time to remember our heroes of faith, the past American Baptist missionaries, and Filipino pastors and leaders. Are we remembering their names, their ministries and their words? Or are we disconnecting ourselves from the legacy that they have started?

I hope that CPU will continue to connect with the past so that the faith that they have will be passed on to us.

LET ME LIVE BRAVELY

When I turned 33 years old, a friend asked how old I am, I jokingly answered, “The age when Jesus died on the cross.” Later, I reflected on my remark and noticed that Jesus died young yet fully confident that he has finished his mission in life.

In the early morning of my birthday, I accidentally broke the handle of my wife’s mug while preparing coffee. She said that I have to fix it. While fixing the mug with an epoxy, I received a birthday message from God – Jesus was telling me, “My body was broken at 33 years old so that your broken life can be mended and used for My mission.”

Here is a poem written by Jennie Claire Adams, a young missionary nurse whose life was cut short when she was executed during World War II.

“Let me live bravely;
For life has many battlefields, Where valor must be shown,
Many darkened corners, Where pain and fear are known,
Life calls for sacrifice, To share the highest good,
To serve courageously, Sometimes to give life’s blood.
As others lived and gave, Let me be brave.

Let me serve faithfully;
Content with work to do, Whatsoever life may bring,
I’m serving others well, Thus do I serve my King.
May I not weary grow, When tasks seem burdensome,
Nor turn aside distraught, Before life’s work is done.
As others served, proved true, Let me be faithful too.

Let me die heroically;
Steadfast in faith and calm, When that great day is near
Knowing no hour of dread, Feeling no anxious fear,
For death is but a door, Closed tight on pain and strife,
A door that opens up That we may enter Life.
As heroes die, Still brave and true, Let me die, too.”
(Centralite, 1946, p.24)

UNITY IN SPORTS FOR NATION BUILDING

In 2009, the 14th National University Games was hosted by Central Philippine University. The campus was full of athletes from various schools all over the country. The theme of the event was “Unity in Sports for Nation Building.”

What lessons can we learn from sports that can help us in nation building?

First, we must trust each other. Team mates need to trust each other. During game time each one should trust each other to perform his/her respective roles. One should never abandon his/her task and play the task of another. One must have the confidence in his/her team mate that he/she should be in the designated spot when you pass the ball because if not, then indecisiveness comes in and consequently, mistakes will happen.

Filipinos should learn to trust each other. This is one way that we can help our country.

Second, we must listen to each other. Every player needs to listen to the advice of his/her fellow players, and especially to the coach. Many times, my players in Table Tennis have learned this lesson the hard way. I have to call a timeout and tell them the gameplan once again. Sometimes it would cost us the game.

Filipinos should learn to listen to each other. Nobody has the monopoly of bright ideas. We also need a coach. The coach can be our leaders. The coach can identify the weaknesses and strengths and points us to the right direction. But of course the best coach is God, and the best gameplan is the Bible.

Third, we need to have determination, intensity, focus, passion and enjoyment. These are the keywords that are repeatedly heard in the game courts. Coaches, team mates and fans shout these words as a reminder to those who are playing. The most popular words in the duration of the game are “kaya mo yan” and “focus.” Most often,

the intensity level of the players is heightened when they concentrate and give the best that they can. The result is a good game with no or little regrets.

Filipinos oftentimes think that a foreigner is better than him/her. He/she does not believe in himself/herself. Filipinos sometimes are resigned to their fate or to whatever will happen next, and not making their own destiny. We need to be determined, and be passionate. We need to bring back the pride of being a Filipino – “Kaya natin to!”

LIFE IS A CONSTANT CHANGE

Every November 1 most Filipinos would go to the cemetery to visit the resting place of their loved ones. Some would even go back to far flung provinces to be with relatives in this day of memorial.

In our home in Pavia (we are living very near a cemetery), we can always see a lot of people camping near the burial ground in jolly moods reminiscing the days of their departed family members. We can also see a lot of lighted candles - a Filipino tradition of honoring the dead.

Life is a constant change. It is a transition from one segment to another. In a cemetery in Negros, there is a sign that says, “Kami subong, Kamo sunod” (roughly translated as “Us now, You next”).

We all love to be in our comfort zones. We like the normal situations because our actions are always almost automatic. We are not comfortable with transitions. Changes are oftentimes painful. But whether we like it or not, there will always be transitions.

As we cope with life's transitions - birth, childhood, youth, young adults, adulthood, senior citizen, dying, death, and life after death - let us remember that our God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. Our God is a constant like the mathematical equation of “pi” that would always be 3.14. If we embrace this truth, then we can always be ready to face whatever life may bring us. We will not be afraid because God will always be there.

GIVE THANKS

November is usually the month that the churches celebrate thanksgiving. This is a tradition that we got from the Americans. We give thanks to God for what He has done in and through our lives.

Psalm 100 teaches six things with regards to thanksgiving. Here is an acrostic meaning of the word **THANKS**.

First, **T** - Thank God for giving us three things. Thanksgiving comes from two words - Thanks and giving. Thanks be to God for he has been giving us his goodness, mercy and faithfulness. Verse 5 says, “For the **LORD** is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His faithfulness endures to all generations.”

Because of these three major things that God has given us, what should be our responses? The five letters that are left, based on Psalm 100 are the responses that God expects from.

The first of the five responses is that we must have a **H** - Heart that is thankful/grateful (indebted). Verse 4b says, “Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.”

The second is that we should **A** - Always praise God. Verse 1 says, “Make a joyful noise to the **LORD**, all you lands!” Verse 2b, “Come before His presence with singing.” And Verse 4a, “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise.”

The third is that we must remember that we belong to **N** - New Covenant community. Verse 3b, “We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.” We Christians belong to the New Covenant community or the New Testament community. Jesus said, “This New Covenant I gave to you...love one another.”

We need to be reminded that when we were baptized, we signed a new contract with Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. We gave our commitment to repent from our sins, to be transformed by

the Holy Spirit, and as a result to be initiators of the Kingdom of God. Have we been faithful to this New Covenant?

The fourth of the five responses is that we must **K** - **Know** that the Lord is God. Verse 3a, “**Know** that the **LORD**, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves.” We are His people. He is the owner. Sometimes we forget that God is the owner and we are his stewards. What is happening around us is a testimony how we fell short of our responsibility as stewards of God’s creation.

The fifth response is that we should **S** - **Serve** the Lord by serving his people. Verse 2, “**Serve** the **LORD** with gladness.” The Hebrew word used by the Psalmist to describe serve is *awbad*. The literal meaning of *awbad* is to be enslaved to serve the Master. We are bondservants of Jesus. This verse teaches us that serving God is not a burden but a joy. We must never feel that the ministry of Jesus Christ is a burden. Rather we must feel joyful because we are serving the Lord of lords and King of kings.

THANKS BE TO GOD

Thanking God should be a lifestyle for all Christians. How can we give thanks to God? Here is an acrostic of the word THANKS that can help us:

T - TRUST GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART

Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”

Are we trusting God completely?

H - HELP THE NEEDY

2 Corinthians 8:1-4, 7“ Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity. For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem... But just as you excel in everything ...see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

When was the last time that you helped a needy person?

A - ALLOW THE HOLY SPIRIT TO REGENERATE YOUR LIFE

1 Thessalonians 5:19, “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire.”

Are we surrendering our lives to the working of the Holy Spirit?

N - NEVER FORGET WHAT GOD HAS DONE TO YOU

Deuteronomy 6:12, “Be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”

When was the last time that you testified about God’s goodness?

K - KNOW JESUS MORE DEEPLY

2 Timothy 2:15, “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

Are we devoting time to prayer and studying God’s Word?

S - SHOW THE PEOPLE WHAT IS GOOD AND AVOID EVERY KIND OF EVIL

3 John 11-12, “Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.”

Is your life a good testimony of what it means to be a good Christian?

DIFFERENT POSITIONS OF THANKING GOD

Many people were healed by Jesus. The account of the ten lepers who were healed by Jesus is a good reminder for all of us about thanksgiving. (Luke 17:11-19)

People who have leprosy during the time of Jesus were one of the outcasts of their society. They stayed in the cemeteries and caves away from the people. They were away from their family, their husbands, wives, children and friends. There is an Old Testament law that states that a leper should maintain a distance of 50 feet away from the people, and they shall shout “Unclean! Unclean! Get away from me!”

Have you ever felt being neglected and driven away? Yes, all of us have, in one time or another, experienced this kind of feeling. But the good news is that Jesus Christ cares and has compassion to those who are being neglected and cast away. The story says that when the lepers cried out for mercy, Jesus took pity. They were cleansed along the way to the priest but only one of them remembered to say “thank you.” This leper was a Samaritan. This Samaritan leper will teach us three different thanksgiving positions.

The first thanksgiving position that he showed was “*he turned and went back.*” This Samaritan was not an “eat and run” type of person like some of us. The nine, who were Jews, forgot about Jesus and went straightly back to the society. They were even the ones who were expected to come back since there was an enmity between Samaritans and Jews. Jesus might be saying, “These nine lepers who did not come back have a greater disease than leprosy – the disease of ingratitude.”

In our Filipino culture and tradition, we frown upon those who are ungrateful because we have a culture of *utang na loob* (*utang nga kabalaslan, utang nga kabubut-on* -- sense of gratitude). We need to practice *utang nga kabubut-on* towards our God.

The second thanksgiving position that the leper showed was “*he raised his head to heaven and praise God in a loud voice.*” The leper knows where credit is due.

When something good happens to us we sometimes forget whom to be thankful and credit our being a *de buenas (lucky)* or *swerte (to fate)* or to the other gods.

The third thanksgiving position that he showed was, “*he bowed to the ground at Jesus’ feet and thanked him.*” To humble oneself is to perform an act of submission. It is to do away with our human pride and let God reign in our hearts. Like the Samaritan leper, we must learn to let go and let God reign in our lives.

It is hard to have a “humble thanksgiving” when we have something better than what is being given to us. It is also hard to say “Thank you, Lord” when we are in want. But all the while God is saying, “Look at what you have.” As the hymn goes, “Count your many blessings name them one by one and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.”

The fourth thanksgiving position is to “*rise up and go.*” The healed leper is teaching us that thanksgiving is not complete when you give thanks only. There should be giving. This is the reason why the word thanksgiving is divided into two words – thanks and giving.

This position is the same with that of the Great Commission “Go ye into all the world...” “Rise and go.” Jesus Christ commissioned the healed leper to go and spread the good news. Jesus is probably telling him, “You have experienced it yourself. Go tell others.”

The nine lepers may be physically healed but the one who returned was not only physically healed but more importantly was also spiritually healed. “Your faith has made you well” – this is what Jesus said. Because of the leper’s faith and thankful attitude, he was made whole.

TURN YOUR BACK FROM INDIFFERENCE

Every November 30 our country celebrates the heroism of Andres Bonifacio, the Filipino who organized a secret society called Katipunan – Kataastaasan Kagalang-galang na Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan (The Highest and Most Respectable Society of the Sons of the People). The Katipunan advocated revolution rather than reform.

The Katipunan interpreted Christianity apart from what the colonizers taught them. Mabini wrote a New Decalogue. A portion of it says:

“...God is the fountain of all truth, of all justice, and of all activity, and thy honor the only power which will oblige thee to be truthful, just, and industrious...Thou shalt cultivate the special gifts which God has granted thee, working and studying according to thy ability, never leaving the path of righteousness and justice...Thou shalt strive for the independence of thy country: for only thou canst have any real interest in her advancement and exaltation, because her independence constitutes thy own liberty, her advancement, thy perfection, and exaltation, thy own glory and immortality.” (Obusan, ed., *Roots of Filipino Spirituality*, p. 280)

What about our current politicians? Are they really there to serve the people? Does their faith have an influence in their service? Or are they in their positions because of another reason?

The gruesome massacre of about 60 people in Maguindanao, Mindanao in November 2009 reminds us that most of these politicians do not want to serve the people. They only want to serve themselves. The pictures and videos being shown in the newspapers and TV news stations are so horrific that makes you want to puke. Women were raped and then shot in the genitals; some were murdered by a chainsaw; some were buried alive inside their vans; and some were killed while the perpetrators were laughing. It is as if Lucifer was incarnated in these merciless killers.

Where are the principles of honor, justice, righteousness, and sense of service? The Katipuneros are reminding us today of what they fought for. As Christians let us have a righteous indignation on what happened. Let this be a costly wake-up call for all of us to stand up and be counted. Let us throw away our indifference and be part of the transformation of our society.

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE TO THE WORLD

Every December the CPU campus is full of lights. Thousands of people flock the campus and witness the official opening of the Festival of Lights and Music at Central.

This annual celebration challenges us to reflect on the meaning of the words of Jesus when he declared “I am the Light of the world.” It is also a time to ask ourselves the implication of the command of Jesus to “Let your light shine to the world.”

Let me share some of my thoughts:

First, there is no hiding when the light is turned on. We are uncovered and out in the open.

Jesus exposed the evil deeds of the people during his time. Those who were exposed plotted to kill him. This means that Jesus is commanding us to be involved in the ministry of exposing and uncovering the wickedness of people and institutions. Let us be courageous in this ministry because our jobs and lives will be threatened. To be a Christian is not to be faint-hearted.

Second, the light that we received needs to be passed on. Evil people will try and try to extinguish the light. They will only become successful if we will not pass on the light to other people.

The people that crucified Jesus thought that they have succeeded in extinguishing the Light. They were wrong. The darkness of death was not able to enveloped Jesus. When the disciples saw this, they were emboldened to follow the “Great Commission” of Jesus to go and spread the light.

During the time of Jesus, light is generally referred to as the light emitted by a lamp -- there is wick in a shallow bowl that rests in an olive oil as its fuel. Symbolically, this means that we should continue putting oil in the lamp -- making disciples who emanate the light of Jesus.

In a modern setting, before the light burns out from a candle, we must light a new candle - this is one of the major reasons why Christianity still continues to spread out.

Let us continue in shining!

WHAT KIND OF GIFTS ARE YOU GIVING?

Giving of gifts is part of the Christmas tradition. Every year we hold Christmas parties and exchange gifts.

As a young child, I was intrigued with the idea of exchanging gifts every Christmas. Later, as I was studying in the seminary I learned that most probably the idea of giving gifts during Christmas started with the gift-giving of the Wise Men or the Magi.

Traditionally, we interpret the gifts brought by the Wise Men in their symbolical meaning. Gold – this means that the receiver is a King, thus we connect this to the declaration that Jesus is the King of kings. Frankincense – this means that the receiver is a Priest since frankincense is used during religious ceremonies, thus we relate this to the declaration that Jesus is the High Priest. Myrrh – this means that the receiver is one who will sacrifice himself since myrrh was used in the embalming process, thus we link this to the declaration that Jesus is the Sacrificial Lamb.

Is there more to it aside from this traditional interpretation? Did the Wise Men really think of these theological meanings? They were probably astrologers who studied the stars, and they followed the star because they believed that there is a tremendous mystery under it. I told myself that the Wise Men may have done something wise to deserve the title of Wise Men. I started searching the practical uses of their gifts and I found out that indeed they were wise men.

Joseph, Mary and Jesus fled to Egypt to hide from the murderous intent of King Herod. The gold given by the wise men was most probably used by Joseph and Mary in their travel to Egypt, and to start a new life there. It was indeed a wise gift because Joseph, Mary and Jesus have no relatives in the land of Pharaohs.

Frankincense was used in ancient times, and even until now to ward off mosquitoes and flies. Jesus was born in a manger, a place

swarming with mosquitoes and flies because animals were there. It was a very wise gift!

Myrrh was used in ancient times for its healing properties. It was sprinkled in the umbilical cord of a new born baby so that it will heal faster. It was also used to stop the bleeding of a woman who had just given birth. This was a very welcome gift for Mary and Jesus because they have to travel the arduous path towards Egypt just a few days after Jesus was born.

This may sound conjecture but I am comforted with this assumption because I believe that God sent the Wise Men to give gifts that were really needed by Joseph, Mary and Jesus.

How about us? What kind of gifts are we giving every Christmas? I hope that it will be a gift that would truly matter.

JESUS IS OUR HOPE

Kairos, our son, acted as one of the angels in a Christmas presentation when he was still in the Kindergarten. He had a speaking part as the Angel of Hope. He was saying something like, “There is hope because Jesus brings a new life, a life that is better than this world can offer. Jesus is the hope of the world. Keep your hope alive!”

The angels during the birth of Jesus brought a message of hope. They proclaimed to the shepherds, “Glory to God in the highest! Peace on Earth and goodwill among people.”

This is a message of hope because:

Firstly, the angels remind us that nobody should be above God. During those times, the emperor cult worship was practiced. King Herod felt that nobody should be above him. He killed four of his sons, one of his wives, and even his in-laws. Tradition also tells us that Herod massacred 14,000 innocent children from 2 years below when he heard from the wise men that a king was born. This is one of the worst political killings.

When the shepherds worshipped the new born Jesus, it was telling us a revolutionary message – they were turning away from the rule of Herod. In turn, the message for us is that we should not worship ourselves, the political leaders or any other so-called “powerful people.” God is the only one worthy of worship, and all glory must be given to God alone.

Secondly, the angels remind us that peace on earth can be achieved if there is goodwill among people. This was a message of hope for the shepherds because they know that Israel was beset by violence for a long time. When the shepherds decided to spread the good news, they were telling the people that peace can be achieved. But sad to say, the gospel according to John records that “he came into his own but his own received him not.”

Conflicts are still happening nowadays because we refused to believe in the way of life that Jesus taught us. We are still rejecting the message of Jesus.

Hopefully during Christmas time we can reflect on the message of the shepherds to us.

AM I TRYING TO KILL JESUS?

Traditionally, December 28 is celebrated in the Philippines as Innocents' Day – a memorial day in honor of the massacred children during the week when Jesus was born. The slaughter was ordered by King Herod – a power-hungry leader who would do anything to maintain his position.

Oftentimes Niños Inocentes is celebrated as a day to make pranks and jokes, and when the hapless victim fell for it, the prankster will proclaim “Happy Innocents Day.” This memorial day has sometimes become like an April Fools Day. It is good to laugh but not on the expense of others. We dishonor the memory of the innocent children if we will not celebrate their martyrdom.

In retrospect, the first Christmas weeks were probably not as joyous like our celebration today. Hundreds, if not thousands, of families were mourning the death of their innocent children; and Joseph, Mary and Jesus were forced to escape to Egypt because of the wrath of Herod.

At the end of every year, let us ask ourselves some questions – “Am I trying to kill Jesus because I don't want him to be the king of my life?” “Am I forcing Jesus to flee from my life because I don't want him to change my way of life?” Let us hope that we can answer these questions honestly, and let us ask God's forgiveness for our murderous intent on Jesus and in our refusal to accept his message.

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 later was elected 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 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 also has involvements in national organizations. He serves 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 the 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.