

# Laudato Si' 2020

Theme: "Everything is Connected"

## A 9 day Retreat

16 – 24 May 2020



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Capuchin GEM (Green Environment Movement) – JPIC Office - OFM Capuchins

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Peace and Good.

To commemorate the 5<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of Laudato Si', we invite you to join us in a 9 day retreat.

Each day, we will provide you with materials from which you can find inspiration. All that is required of you is to provide yourself a few minutes each day to find a quiet place to read and reflect in peace.

For today, Day 6, we have two topics:

1. Living the Gospel Life
2. I call him 'Jesus Christ'

Happy reading and God bless you always!

Office of the JPIC, OFM Capuchins

## I. Living the Gospel Life

*'Altri Emmanueli'*: Proclaiming the Good News that 'God is with us'

### 1. God goes to the forefront while we recede to the background

I believe that every JPIC work should always be a living out of the Gospel message that God has heard the people's plea and He has come to redeem them. We preach the Gospel by the way we live our life and our message is that God has come to the people and He wants to restore them to the freedom and dignity of being His children.

To accomplish this we need to imitate Jesus, the Emmanuel. His joy is to do the will of the Father and he always attributes everything to the Father. <sup>34</sup> *Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work."* (John 4:34) Before performing any miracle (e.g. the feeding of the five thousand people and the rising of Lazarus from the dead) or doing any activity (e.g. having a meal with His apostles) Jesus would always begin by giving thanks to the Father.

#### Feeding the five thousand:

<sup>11</sup> *Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.* - John 6:11

#### Raising Lazarus from the dead:

<sup>41</sup> *So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. <sup>42</sup> I knew that thou hearest me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that thou didst send me."* <sup>43</sup> *When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out."* - John 11:41-43

### Having a meal with His apostles:

19 And he took bread, and when he had **given thanks** he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." - **Luke 22:19**

We too are called to attribute all the good things in our work to God. To be **altri emmanueli** challenges us to always put God in the forefront while we recede into the background. As we go <sup>45</sup> *into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation* (Mark 16:15) we need to make the world feel *"the merciful gaze of Christ the Good Shepherd, whom we are called to make present."* (Pope Francis)

In the past, whenever we go to the peripheries and respond to people in need (e.g. when calamities like a super typhoon happens), we oftentimes hear people say: 'Salamat sa Diyos!' (Thanks be to God!). This is a good sign. It means that they see in our response that God is answering their prayers. We need to constantly maintain this outlook in them.

In everything that we do, we should **strive to put God in the forefront while we recede to the background.**

### 2. 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'

At this point, I would like to quote a discourse of Jesus in the Gospel of St. Luke: " <sup>7</sup> Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? <sup>8</sup> Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? <sup>9</sup> Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? <sup>10</sup> So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, '**We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.**'" – Luke 17:7-10

In **Admonition number 17**, St. Francis of Assisi writes: "*Blessed is that servant (Mt. 24:46) who does not pride himself on the good that the Lord says or does through him any more than on what he says or does through another.*"

In the same letter, in **Admonition number 5**, he said: "*But in this we can glory: in our infirmities (cf. 2 Cor. 12:5) and bearing daily the holy Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Lk. 14:27).*"

For St. Francis, all good things that happen in our life should be attributed to God and we can only be proud of our failings and infirmities.

### 3. The tabernacle

Whenever we go to the church, we often look for a vigil lamp at the altar to locate where the tabernacle is. Upon seeing the tabernacle, we bow in homage. We bow in homage not to the tabernacle but to the presence of God within. God is in the center stage. It is not the tabernacle.

### 4. Mary: the 'tabernacle of Christ'

St Francis refers to our Mother Mary as the 'tabernacle of Christ' and indeed she is. As she brings Jesus into the world, she directs all praise to the Lord while she recedes to the background. The scene of the visitation illustrates this eloquently:

Upon hearing that her cousin Elizabeth is with child, she hastened to the hill country in order to visit her. Her cousin Elizabeth and the child within her immediately recognized the presence of God and it prompted Elizabeth to say, " <sup>43</sup> And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy." – Luke 1:43-44

Mary responded immediately by reciting the Magnificat where she directed all praises to God.

## 5. The presence of the Holy Spirit

From the moment the arrival of Jesus has been announced by the angel, the Holy Spirit immediately took action. The angel said to Mary, <sup>35</sup> *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God."* (Luke 1:35) The Holy Spirit continued to silently work and his presence is often felt by the people around. As we have noted earlier, Elizabeth sensed the Holy Spirit and the child within her womb leapt for joy! During the presentation, Simeon had previously received revelation from the Holy Spirit that; <sup>26</sup> *"he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ."* <sup>27</sup> *And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law,* <sup>28</sup> *he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,* <sup>29</sup> *"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word;* <sup>30</sup> *for mine eyes have seen thy salvation* <sup>31</sup> *which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples,* <sup>32</sup> *a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel."* (Luke 2: 26-32). There are more instances in the New Testament that reveal to us the constant work of the Holy Spirit but for the sake of brevity, we will limit ourselves to these examples.

## 6. Our active participation to the works of the Holy Spirit is required

Again, we go to the example of our Mother Mary with regards to cooperation with the work of the Holy Spirit. When Angel Gabriel mentioned, *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God."* (Luke 1:35) Mary responded by saying, *"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."* (Luke 1: 38)

St. Francis would often remind his brothers that in everything that they do, they should always strive not to stifle the work of the Holy Spirit.

When we go out to serve, we need to bear in mind that the initiative is from God through the Holy Spirit and our role is to cooperate to His plan. God is the Lord of the mission of spreading the Gospel. To fully cooperate in it, we need to be constantly aware of the movement of the Holy Spirit in every aspect of our work. It entails a constant disposition to prayer and contemplation.

The prayer often recited by St Francis and the early brothers was: *"We adore you, Lord Jesus Christ, here, and in all your churches throughout the world, and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world."* It was not just a devotional prayer for them. The prayer was a whole hearted affirmation of the fact that they see God's presence and movement in every creature and situation that they encounter as they go about performing their ministry.

## I. I call him 'Jesus Christ'

When I was still a postulant, I stayed for one month at the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in Quezon City, Philippines. I took care of a friar who underwent a Heart Bypass Operation. There I met padre Benito de Arraiz, OFM Cap, an old Capuchin Missionary from Spain. He was joy to the brothers and a consolation of the poor. His joyful disposition enlivens our meals. He took upon himself the apostolate of cleaning the comfort room of the fraternity. He would silently and happily wipe the floor of the comfort room on a regular basis. Often at around midnight, he would rise up and clean the balustrade of the choir loft.

When he goes out of the convent or walk back to the convent after celebrating mass, the poor would approach him knowing that their requests will be patiently and generously attended by him. One time, he became sick for three days and he could not get out of the convent. The poor kept looking for him and we kept explaining his condition. After three days, he went out of the convent and poor people immediately gathered and surrounded him excitedly. A few years later, I passed by Lourdes Shrine to visit a brother before going to our Novitiate in Baguio. I saw him give food packets to a family. Later, as I

ride the bus to Baguio, I saw the same family sitting together in a circle in front of a closed bank, happily eating the food they have received.

He was also a caretaker of animals especially the stray cats in the vicinity of the shrine. He knew all the cats in the streets and their unique habits. One time, when he was sick and cannot go out of his room, we both peered through a window and watched the cats below. He described to me in detail each cat and how they interacted with each other. He called his favorite cat Picicin and his favorite dog Piccion. Picicin follows padre Benito everywhere in the convent. As a rule, cats are not allowed to roam around the convent but Picicin always finds ways to break the rule. When a brother catches Picicin following padre Benito around, the kind padre will pretend to admonish the cat. But as soon as the brother disappears, he would smile sheepishly and admit that all he did was play acting. One time, I went out of the convent on an errand and I met padre Benito returning from a store carrying a meal consisting of rice and meat which he intended to give to the dogs staying at the back of the convent. He smilingly whispered to me not to tell the friars that the dogs are eating better food than what we are eating in the convent. At another time, I saw him carrying a handful of bread in order to feed the fish in the pond of the shrine.

I left the Capuchin Order for nine years after my novitiate. Later, I heard news of his death. A brother told me that his favorite cat, Picicin stayed at the foot of his coffin and kept him company throughout the wake. On the day of his burial, a bus load of poor people said their final goodbyes to him.

After I returned to the Order, I got an opportunity to talk with a homeless man on one occasion. He animatedly shared with me how a friar in Lourdes Shrine showed him kindness regularly and he added, "*Ang tawag ko nga sa kanya ay Jesus Christ.*" (I actually call him Jesus Christ).

Although I suspected that he was referring to padre Benito, I could not confirm it because the man never knew the name of the friar. He just saw Jesus in the kindness of the friar and contented himself by calling the friar 'Jesus Christ'. If the man was referring to padre Benito, then the kind friar has achieved what we are all called to live: To bring God to the forefront of our lives and for us to recede to the background.

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

**Br. Joel de Jesus, OFM Cap**  
Director, Office of JPIC, OFM Capuchins