

Spirituality for a New Humanity
Give us this day our daily Bread
Exodus 16; Luke 11:1-13
August 20, 2016
10:30 A.M.

Greetings

Good morning to everyone. I do hope that for the last two days and two nights of your stay here with us in South Luzon you have enjoyed the warmth fellowship of the Katagalogan brethren. What we have offered was our modest way of sharing the best that we can for our church? In the coming months we will be hosting the National UCWO encounter and next year in summer would be the National Youth Camp. Kahit nabugbog kami sa gastos dito sa SLJ dahil sa sunod-sunod na hosting both the 2014 General Assembly and this NC meeting yet we were able to pool our resources together and came closer to NWMJ and SEMJ in terms of remitting our WMS this EY as reported by the National Treasurer. Again we're challenged in the last NEC meeting during our pledging session for the budget preparation to share 2.2M. Tingin ko makakaya namin ito sapagka't ang kabuoang budget na pinagtibay sa mga nakaraang taunang pulong ay umaabot sa 2.6M. Kung 90% ng budget sa WMS ay maabot ng mga kumperensya tiyak na makakayanan namin ang 2.2M share para sa EY 2016-2017.

We are about to close our 19th NC meeting. For the last two days we're able to finish all the business agenda and we thank God for having blessed our meeting with one mind, one heart and one spirit to pursue the mission and varied ministries of the UCCP. The approval of all the reports and the corresponding recommendations, the operational plan and budget for EY 2016-2017, and the Quadrennial Theme for EY 2018-2022, DOING CHRIST'S MISSION IN THESE CHANGING TIMES (Pagsasagawa ng Misyong ni Kristo sa Nagbabagong Panahon) have shown our continuing commitment to pursue the tasks entrusted us as the National Council. I pray that this ecclesial year would be the realization of consolidated program of the whole UCCP starting from the local churches. In preparation perhaps for the 11th quadrennial assembly and for the guidance of the Conferences in SLJ I have the Tagalog translation of the annual themes for 2018-2022:

- Tema 1: Pagsasagawa ng Misyong ni Kristo sa Nagbabagong Panahon (Doing Christ's Mission in these changing times)
- Tema 2: Pagsasabuhay ng mga Turo ni Moises at ng mga Propeta sa Nagbabagong Panahon (Making the Teachings of Moses and the Prophets Come True in these changing times)
- Tema 3: Paghahatid ng Mabuting Balita sa Masa sa Nagbabagong Panahon (Bringing the Good News to the Masses in these changing times)
- Tema 4: Pagbibigay ng Buhay sa Sanlibutan sa Nagbabagong Panahon (Giving Life to the World in these changing times)

Dalangin ko na ang temang ito ang lalung maghubog sa ating buhay at ministry na tulad ni Jesus ay inialay ang sarili upang paglingkuran ang masang dukha upang magkaroon ng buhay na ganap at kasiya-siya.

We are here in the province of Quezon. I'd spent 13 years of my life and faith journey in this province. Three years as college students and 10 years as pastor from 1979-1992. My humble beginning as an intern pastor in this province was way back in 1984 in UCCP Agdangan. My two daughters Bebeth and KS were born in Candelaria and Tiaong, Quezon respectively. I was ordained in June 28, 1987 at UCCP Candelaria together with my kumpadre, Rev. Noel Baybay. Very memorable indeed!

This province and its people had nurtured my convictions as Pastor and my commitment to the church and its ministry to the struggling farmers or masang magsasaka. My bond with the farmers started in 1984 when they approached me as Pastor of UCCP Agdangan and then later on of UCCP Candelaria to help them in their struggle for land reform and as a human rights defender. May be they thought that if a church-people was with them, no harm will come to them. At first, I was very reluctant because during those years especially after the death of Ninoy Aquino, Quezon was heavily militarized and still is today. I have had Moses like encountered with the Divine telling me "I have heard the cry of the people. I have seen their afflictions." Most of the farmers here in Quezon are coconut growers. They have been receiving so little from the tenancy share. I know this because when I was in college I am working in a coconut buying station during daytime and studied in the university at night. And I know that the farmers were just receiving one third of the tenancy share every 45 days. Aside from the unfair tenancy share, they were not even allowed to grow other crops or to even raise hogs and goats to meet both ends. Big tracts of land are in the hands of very few landlords in Quezon and in the whole country until this day. So, when they invited me to their provincial assembly I met two priests who also participated: Fr Obet Andrey of Atimonan and Msgr. Tony Obeña of Cotta, Lucena City. We became ecumenical friends from that time on. I was elected as Vice Chairperson and Fr. Andrey as Auditor. Three of us supported the plight of the poor peasants and we even joined and helped in the organizing of municipal chapters. I remember when I was pastoring Candelaria, Quezon we allowed the provincial farmers to hold their office at the church. Together with some members and elders of the church, we organized the Candelaria municipal farmers organization called MALAKAS, Magsasaka Laban sa Kaapihan sa Sakahan, and Elder Concordio Osorio was elected General Secretary and I was the adviser. I can't forget that almost every week we held fact-finding mission because peasant leaders were killed and arrested especially on the dying years of the dictatorship. Every month I have to conduct funeral services to farmers killed by the military and CAFGUs because some priests for fear of military harassment refused to give church rites to the victims. Several times I have to hide at the pastoral house attic or roof space because of military and police surveillance. Sometimes I asked my mother to lie that I am not around when persons unknown to us asking my whereabouts.

I am telling this my dear brothers and sisters because the situations of the poor farmers haven't changed since 1984. Two days ago, as we have been starting our meeting, 200 coconut Farmers from Quezon, Cavite, Batangas, Laguna, Rizal, Mindoro, and Palawan gathered for an assembly. They are claiming their rightful share from the 246 Billion worth of Coconut levy fund that was collected 44 years ago under Marcos dictatorship. It is known to many that Danding Conjuanco used these funds in San Miguel Corporation to get its chairmanship. But these funds rightfully belongs to the farmers. The Supreme Court had already decided to return this money to the farmers for their welfare but an enabling law shall have to be enacted for the farmers to have their benefits. Right now a house bill # 557 was introduced by the Makabayan bloc otherwise known as "An Act Creating the Genuine Small Coconut Farmers' Fund and for Other Purposes." This needs our support for benefits of coconut farmers.

This was also one of the promises of President Duterte during his campaign when he had a dialogue with the farmers. The resolution of the farmers in Southern Tagalog for their claims in coco levy fund will be presented to PCA and President Duterte. They called their group as CLAIM-ST (Coco Levy Fund Ibalik sa Amin Timog Katagalugan). I was invited to this gathering but unfortunately we were of the same schedule.

The farmers are still poor today. And unless a genuine agrarian reform law had been enacted, the farmers will forever be tied to poverty and sufferings. And therefore, armed conflict will stay and peace will forever be elusive.

"Poverty is the root cause of armed conflict". This was the statement of late President Cory Aquino in her inaugural speech when she replaced Marcos. But she and the administrations after her until her son's time, had

never addressed poverty. What is ironic is that, the comprehensive agrarian reform law enacted during Cory's time and ended its 25th year of implementation under his son's administration have not emancipated the farmers from feudal bondage? The microcosm of the failure of CARPER was the inability of the government from Cory to Noynoy to distribute Hacienda Luisita to thousands of farmers despite Supreme Court decision with finality and the payment made by DAR to Cojuangco family in the amount of 471M appropriated from the discredited Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP).

Addressing poverty is addressing armed conflict. I am happy that the Peace Talk between the NDFP and GRP will start today, August 20. The released of the 13 NDF consultants including an Ordained Pastor was part of the Exploratory Talks inked by both parties in June 14-15, 2016 in Oslo is a positive development. The Duterte administration has been showing its commitment for the peace talks and the secession of armed hostilities and we are all praying that a genuine and lasting peace will come out from these talks based on justice and social equality. As a church we should support this initiative. But we should not be contented on the sidelines as bystanders and merely observing what's going on in the negotiating table. We must be active participants by providing venues for the talks and by initiating forums on the substantive agenda of the peace talks to bring the agenda of the Filipino people especially the suffering masses to the negotiating table. One of the substantive agenda that has been put on hold when the peace negotiation stopped was the Comprehensive Agreement for Social and Economic Reforms (CASER).

CASER talks about economic orientation and direction. When we talk of economy it talks about BREAD? We talk about the rights of the people, of every citizen of the Philippine to have equitable access to material resources of this land God so blessed with abundance. But since the time of the Spanish, American and Japanese colonial periods until today, the material resources of our land were controlled and manipulated by just few families in cahots with the foreign investors and capital. There has been no changed for more than 400 years, the poor peasants are still poor today and remains tied to feudal bondage. The workers who are former farmers and farm workers are enslaved to economic enclaves of foreign and local slave drivers, no union and no strike, no security of tenure or mostly contractual and no livable wages. These are the faces of old humanity. Our theme invokes of new humanity. How can we realize new humanity if forces of old humanity and darkness still operate? By 2017 Reformed Churches will celebrate its 500 years. By 2018 Protestantism is already 120 years and by 2021 Roman Catholicism is 500 years in the Philippines. Whether we agree or not, the church had tremendous influenced to the kind of politics, economics and cultural dynamics our society and yet we never call this an ideology. Ang ideolohiya na nangingibabaw sa ating bayan ay hindi ang ideolohiya ng Marxismo at di rin impluwensya Das Kapital na sinulat ni Karl Marx na sa katunayan ay kinikritik pa nito ang kasalukuyang neo-liberal na ekonomiya na kontrolado ng oligarkiya sa pinasya sa ilalim ng monopolyo kapitalismo ng US at mga dayuhang kapital na pinalalakas ng pyudal na sistema at pagsasamantala sa kanayonan at ng mga pinuno ng bayan na ginagamit ang pusisyon sa pagpapayaman at sa paglikha ng mga batas na kontra sa mga mamamayan. Ito ang kalagayan ng ating bayan. Ano kaya ng naging ambag ng Katolismo at Protestantismo sa pag-angat ng buhay ng mga dukha sa Pilipinas? Ano ang mga values o mga pagpapahalaga ang naituro ng ating simbahan sa ating mga kaanib at mga mamamayan upang baguhin ang kalagayan ng ating lipunan? Filipino people remains to be one of the poorest in the world and the Philippines is one of the most corrupt nations in the world according to transparency international index. Only in the Philippines that corrupt officials have never been brought to justice. And now, the former dictator who plundered our economy will be allowed to bury in Libingan ng mga Bayani? Only in the Philippines that a plunderer President has been allowed to run for mayoral office and those that were slapped with corruption cases can be allowed to run for congress or be appointed to executive offices. Was there no law ever enacted to prohibit these thieves to run for office? We have not nurtured our people to the very foundation of love, justice and equality.

On the keynote address of Bro. Larry Millan he talked about the Faith and Ideology. History will tell us that Faith (expression of religious practice) and Ideology existed and developed both in a concrete historical reality and have addressed the same historical context. Some would say faith and ideology co-existed, even collaborated

or sometimes collided with each other. Some are also saying that Faith as an expression of religious belief especially christianity is an ideology in itself.

What is an ideology by the way? **It is a system of ideas and ideals, especially one that forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy. A system of ideas that explains and lends legitimacy to actions and beliefs of a social, religious, political or corporate entity.** Ideology is a world-view about the materialistic world. With this definition, faith and religion carries with it an ideological premises and practices that justifies or legitimizes existing social structures that deny the poor and the oppressed their right to life and dignity.

Faith in itself provides world-view. I see nothing wrong with ideas and world-view. What makes an ideology worst and evil when it is used for the advantage of the few and the disadvantage of many by building social structures depriving the majority of the populace of equitable share of the resources using the state apparatus such as executive, legislative and judiciary in cahoots with one another to advance the interest of the few against the majority? Philippine history told us how Catholic Christianity was brought to our shore covering up the ideology of feudalism from Spain while Protestantism came with the expanding capitalist interest of United State of America. Both faith expressions although differs in theology and practice brought with them the ideology of the West that I personally believed caused of the sufferings of the poor.

Poverty during the time of colonial societies still exists until this time of neo-colonial period that breed rebellion and armed conflict. Addressing poverty is very important in these changing times. To address poverty needs an ideological manifestation to realize the goal of alleviating it. Cite for instance, how can Duterte put an end to contractualization if the economic orientation of the government is subservient to the WTO and GATT conditions? Contractualization is an ideological apparatus of capitalism liberalizing our economy to further increase their profit and lessen their obligations to the workers and exploit cheap labor. President Digong has to rescind the Herrera Law that amended the 1989 Labor Code, a 25 years of legalizing contractualization. Economic deprivation of the majority in a country such as the Philippines is both faith and ideology concern that continues to entangles in our society. Yes, I fully support that as Christians our response to the plight of the farmers for genuine land reform and the workers for their rights to regularization and security of tenure should be motivated by faith according to the teachings of Jesus. But this stand collides with the capitalist ideology and therefore would consider our faith an ideological expression opposing the principalities and powers of our time.

Today's readings are very important reflections on how we will deal on the issue of poverty. I don't know if you would consider this reflection a faith reflection or an ideological proposition:

According to Luke, Jesus disciples asked him to teach them to pray. In ancient times teachers or rabbis are recognized by the manner its disciples do their prayer. People could easily tell who was the rabbi when they heard the disciples' praying. This is the reason why his disciples asked him to teach them how to pray.

The prayer that was taught by Jesus to his disciples and was handed to us is called "The Lord's Prayer." One of the petitions incorporated herein has something to do with economy called "bread." **"Give us this day our daily bread."** The Lord's prayer that was taught to the disciples was not just for recitation and repetitive prayer. It concerns the core value of the Kingdom of God that has tremendous impact to the material world specially to the very core issue of today's poverty. The prayer was taught for the disciples to live out daily. Bread or economy is our main problem in our society under a neo-liberal orientation. In a neo-liberal economy such as ours that excludes majority of our people to equitable and fair share of its abundant blessings should be criticized by this prayer. The disciples were taught to pray for the daily bread and not for bread control. This prayer had shaken the very foundation of economic orientation of the corrupt and brutal Roman Empire and temple authorities. Why daily bread? Jesus wanted us to see these things:

Jesus taught us of equitable sharing. If we only have bread for a day i understand no one will go hungry or deprived. God has blessed this world particularly Philippines with abundance. From the sea, rivers, mountains, under the sea, valleys and every thing you see are God’s abundant blessings that are full of life, hope and sustenance for generations to come. But why majority of our people are poor until today despite abundance? How can we pray to God give us this day our daily bread if most of us have no bread to eat? How can we pray the Lord’s prayer if we deprived others an equitable share to God’s abundant blessings. Jesus economy is very simple, that all have bread for daily sustenance. An economy that equitably sharing the abundance of God’s blessings to everyone so that no one would go hungry and no one would monopolize economy that may condemn anyone to death and wanting. Jesus prayer may be considered by the capitalist an ideological slogan? Ang panalangin ng ”Paghingi ng Tinapay sa araw na ito,” sa tala ni Lukas ay pagbaklas sa pagsasamantala ng mga mayayaman sa mga dukha sa panahon ni Jesus na laganap ang pagpapahirap sa mga mamamayan sa pamamagitan ng buwis ng Imperyo ng Roma at ng mga namumuno sa templo. Kaya’t sinabi ni Jesus sa beatitudes, ”Mapalad kayong mga dukha pagka’t Dios ang naghahari sa inyo nguni’t sa aba ninyong mayayaman sapagka’t nagtamasa na kayo.”

We are reminded by the book of Exodus when the Hebrews were crying for food in the wilderness. God gave them quail and manna. In the evening they have quail and in the morning they have manna to harvest. God told them through Moses that one should get manna enough for their everyday needs. Those who took many didn’t have any surplus and those who took small portion did not want. Why? Those big families took what is enough for them and small families took what is fit for their size. But there are those who took more for the next day. And what they kept for the next day were spoiled. A lot of food and material went to waste or had been spoiled, dumped in the seas instead of sharing to the poor so that capitalists production will keep the cycle of the law of supply and demand and further exploit the world.

Jesus motivates us to work for economic order that trully alleviates poverty and dismantling the economic monopoly depriving the poor of their daily bread. I hope this will be addressed in the peace talk as they work for Comprehensive Agreement for Social and Economic Reforms.

Jesus taught us to be mindful of the poor who always have no bread. It teaches us to defend the rights of the poor. In this age of monopoly capitalism may our aims to develop our properties should not bury us to the system that denies people their equitable share to God’s blessings. Lest we may be absorbed by the values of profit motivation and serve the God of mammon and forget the very basic ministry and prophetic witnessing in our country longing for change. While we as a Church working to develop our properties to support our mission and varied ministries, let us be reminded that we should not pay lip services to the ministry of Jesus among the poor and use our resources to help alleviate poverty. Developing our properties should not be in any way bring us to self-serving institutional purpose rather it should be used to address the grinding poverty in our land otherwise we will be condemned by the prayer of Jesus.

Martin Luther in his chatechism said these,

‘Feed the hungry. If you have not fed them, you have killed them’

These bold words from Luther are found in his first recorded sermon from the year 1510. Seven years before he nails the 95 Theses to the Castle door (1517), Luther’s uncompromising concern for those in need is clear for all to see. In 1528 while preaching on the sixth commandment ‘You shall not kill’, Luther repeats the words.¹ Luther understood that the commandments issue a call to human love and action. He also understood that caring for the poor and for those in need is at the heart of congregational and parish life:

¹ LW 51:153 Sermons on the Catechism. 1528.

'Next to the proclamation of the gospel it is the task of a good pastor to be mindful of the poor. For wherever the church is, there must be poor people. Most of the time they are the only true disciples of the gospel.'²

A year after making his stand at the castle door Luther wrote a defence of the 95 Theses. He includes the following:

A God who takes sides

'Down Down says Christ; you will find Me in the poor; you are rising too high if you do not look for me there.'

Luther preaches these striking words in the year 1526 based on Mt 22: 34-40 ; 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself'.

And he continued:

'Therefore this command of love should really be written on all the foreheads of the poor with letters of gold that we may see and grasp how close Christ is to us on earth.'³

Luther asked, "How close is Christ to you on earth? 'As close as the poor' says Luther. So stop looking up and instead look down; "Down, Down .. you will find me in the poor.." Not up in the clouds but down on earth is where you will see Christ!

Luther's recognition of Jesus' concern for the poor is evident across his life and work.

'The people of Christ's Kingdom are the poor, the insignificant, the faint-hearted, the harassed, the lowly, the fearful'. (1527)⁴

'He is the God of the poor' (1532)⁵.

'God sees and governs all things but has regard solely and in a special manner for what is despised and cast off, just as Christ himself was on the cross' (1541)⁶

'He is not neutral as he looks'⁷

We always wanted to find the picture of God treating us equally. But Luther's statements may come as shocking. Luther does not only see God who is not neutral but rather a God takes sides.

If God is not neutral, how can we be? In a modern globalized and neo-liberal economy, what would it mean 'to take the side of the poor'?

Hunger is all over the world today. But churches are can also be found in many places in the world. How can we teach the prayer of Jesus to our children about the petition to "give us our daily bread" when

² LW 26:105 Lectures on Galatians .1535.

³ W 20,517, WLS vol 1. 206.

⁴ LW 16: 121 Lectures on Isaiah. c. 1527

⁵ LW 12: 336 Lectures on the Psalms. 1532

⁶ LW 5: 315 Lectures on Genesis. 1541

⁷ LW11: 391 Lectures on the Psalms. 1515

economic monopoly is being supported by the church either directly or indirectly? Jesus prayer awakens us to see what he saw in his time that is still happening today.

May Jesus prayer and the teachings of Mathin Luther helps us to work for a new humanity by taking the prayer of Jesus seriously to address the issue of poverty in our critical time. God bless us all.

Brothers and sisters, we will go back to our respective conferences carrying with us all the decisions we made that we believe for the sake of our church and its mission to the community where our churches are located. Let us always be mindful that our Lord Jesus preached, taught, and healed the people and likewise denounced and exposed all the evils that dehumanizes people for he loves the poor so much and died serving them. Let us be reminded that our Lord Jesus Christ send us to serve the people and not to be served. Amen.

Bishop Joel E. Tendero
NC Closing Worship
August 20, 2016
Ouans' Farm, Lucena City