

PART II: INSIGHTS FROM EVANGELII GAUDIUM

THE FORMATION OF THE PERSON OF THE EVANGELIZER

Evangelization is highly personal. Now, let us take a look as to how the person of the evangelizer is formed? How is the person formed? We do not want seminarians or priests who know the content of faith very well; who are walking encyclopedias; who speak of so many languages and who are well-versed in pastoral strategies but whose person is suffering from a death of humanity.

When I visit parishes, especially during their anniversaries and all of the pastors are present. I can sense who among the pastors had developed a loving relationship with the people. Not all of them, I tell you, not all! Some are very remembered because they were very good builders, some for their financial expertise. All these are important, but there is a question of who among them was able to develop a loving relationship with people?

This matters a lot and Pope Francis is asking us to return to that. WE address this right at its root, in the formation of the person of the evangelizer. Some sectors call this authenticity, some call this integrity. But authentic persons—persons of integrity – capture the attention of some people. These people in turn get in the way curious of who are they—like the woman at the well, not necessarily because of the words they utter but sometimes with their simple presence; the quality of their person. If the person is authentically Christian, if he is a person of integrity, meaning, there is no dichotomy or at least, less dichotomy between his ordinary life and the Gospel, that will shine forth.

Before we leave this point on human formation towards authenticity, may I suggest that in seminary formation, a inquiry must be done as to how we form the seminarians to a life of authenticity. An approach to formation that is too rule or law-oriented has its merits and deficiencies. While it sets things in order and in place, it simply requires seminarians to comply. It does give them the opportunity to become the real persons they really are or better yet, it does not give the opportunity for their true person to emerge. This is counter productive. When I was still a formator, I told the seminarians, I can always handle even your worst crimes, just be open!”

THE HOMILY AND HUMILITY

Now, when you take a look at Vatican II, is it surprising for an ecumenical council that whenever the 3 offices of Jesus are mentioned, the first thing that comes is teaching - the prophetic' then the followed by the priestly and the third is the kingly. You would think that as Catholics, getting with our battle with the Reformation, the priestly will be the first, secondly the kingly, and the last to avoid Luther is the biblical teaching. No!

The Holy Father expressed his concern for the homily as very spiritual. The homilist as a listener of the word; appropriating the Word of God as one's own, making it part of his person by a deep listening to it ; listening that will entail the change of his person- the conversion of his person, because he has allowed the Word of God to enter himself. The Holy Father adds that it is not enough to listen to the Word of God, there is also a need to listen to the peoples' context: their very situation. There is a need to listen to the situation of the people so it will link up with the Word of God. Before doing the talking in a homily, there is first a lot of listening needed.

I am appealing to those who are teaching homiletics. Sometimes, we turn the course into a a world of techniques and sophistication. Some even ask their seminarians to do a video recording pf themselves for a critique by their classmates. " You move your head very often...; you lick out your tongue... etc, avoid these!" " Look to the left, then to the right and then start!" While all these are important, remember that the person is to proclaim the Word of God. Better still, to comment on the life of the people in the light of the Word of God. That is the description of the homily. We are not exegetically commenting on the Word of God, we are commenting on the life of the people in the light of the Word of God. For that to happen, the person of the homilist must do a lot of listening.

Aside from the techniques, those assigned in training the seminarians and priests for homiletics must be attentive to that. They should sense whether the seminarians have listened to the Word of God; whether they have appropriated it and have immersed themselves in the life of the people. When I was still a Rector, I saw a seminarian in the middle of the night preparing for his homiletics class. I said, " What will preach on in your class at the Anunciation?" He said, : Do you have time

Father, I will show you. “After proclaiming the Gospel, I will disappear, then show up again with wings. I will wear a pair of wings and tell the people I am angel Gabriel.” I told him, look, if you shall be assigned in the cathedral where there is mass one hour after another, you do not have time to change costumes. The homily is not about costumes. Besides, you do not look like an angel and definitely you don’t look like the Blessed Mother. “

The remote preparation for a homily is intense listening. According to the Holy Father, the manner is like a mother speaking to her children. A mother that touches hearts – typical of a parent. The point of the homily is to enkindle the fire in the hearts of the people just like the woman at the well; “Yes, that is true, He was speaking to me!” The Word of God speaking to someone’s situation. This requires a lot of listening and also study. With these I asked priests: “When and what was the last time you were able to finish reading a book?” Most of the time, from the homilist’s examples, you get to know what the priest is engrossed with – movies, telenovelas – making the impression that this priest spends a lot of time watching all these. Why not go to person-to-person encounter? Visit the homes, get to the slums and take your stories from them. Why do you have to borrow a story that is concocted by a scriptwriter? So, those who do not go people have no stories to tell and they borrow the stories of a scriptwriter and call it inculturation? The truth is, you just do not want to go to the people and you simply rely on these those strange stories or blogs that are meant for commercials rather than for human interest. If the experience of going to the people is not available, read so many current of thoughts that are affecting our young people. How do we understand these?

EVANGELIZING CHURCH THAT EMBRACES EVERYONE

The Holy Father is encouraging us to be an evangelizing Church that embraces everyone., inclusive not excluding people especially the poor and the vulnerable because society already excludes them. Because of the economic systems prevailing in the world, the Church as Mother and Teacher, as the Body of Christ, the Bearer of Good News, has an eye towards the poor and the vulnerable and consciously includes them. The preference for the poor is not a political or social choice for the Church. According to EG, it is a theological choice, meaning, this is the way of God. It is not a passing sign, it is the way of the Theos – the way of God who loved the poor

and became poor in Jesus so that we may become rich in the full light of sharing in God's life. This inclusive approach especially with its preference for the poor and the vulnerable includes with it a critique of prevailing mindsets, systems and lifestyles that forget the poor that set aside the poor.

So here, formation in the seminary and the on-going formation must be very clear: let us check on our lifestyle, the lifestyle that we have in the seminary as well as the lifestyle of our presbyterium. I remember a seminarian approaching me in the 1990s saying: "Father, our rooms are so small. I noticed that they were built in the 70s during the time of dictatorship. But now time has changed, the rooms are very small. Can we knock down some of the walls to make one room of the two?" I said, "Wait, is your room small or you have accumulated a lot of things? If you have only 2 shirts, the cabinet is big! If you have only a pair of shoes, the shoe rack is big. Now, what really is the problem, is it the room or your things?" "Oh Father, I am just joking," said the seminarian because he knew I know the answer already. But I said, "Come here; do not call it your room. No one among us here owns a room. All the rooms are owned by the diocese and are lent to us. It is just for efficiency and economy of words that we say, "Where are you going?" "I am going to my room." You do not say, "I am going to Room 213, which is owned by the Diocese of Imus and which for this semester is being lent to us.

In the seminary, stewardship must already be taught otherwise we produce priests who in their seminary days started talking of "my room," who now as priests say "my parish." You cannot transfer them anymore because they do not have a sense of mission only proprietorship and entitlement. Where did it begin? In the seminary: "Mine! Mine! Mine! My dear people, oh they are God's people not yours! Why Am I getting angry?"

Now a concrete expression of this according to the Holy Father is the role of popular piety. Popular piety in the Church is vital and important areas of evangelization. In popular piety, we have a culture, the Gospel, the Spirit of God and poor knitted in a mysterious way. In many parts of the world, this popular piety is the bearer of faith transmitted from one generation to the next by simple means. Of course, there is lot to be purified and evangelized in popular piety. But in Churches where popular piety has been thrown out of the window and only formal catechism;

formal theological classes and formal religious education are retained, the faith is now in decline. Because not everyone is capable of doing this formal education in faith, the smell of the incense, the procession and touching of the image of Our Lady are of big help.

May I please ask this august body of bishops and formators wanting to buy the image of our Lady of Thailand, do we introduce our seminarians our seminarians to the popular religious experience of our people? Or are they so divorced from popular piety that when they become priests they will question the people:” Why are you very superstitious?” By then, who will understand any devotion but only those who started them? It is also good for us pastors to lead some of these novenas and to be present with the people. When they see that we are one with them, the purification that we need to introduce will come easier because they know that we understand them and we are coming from where they are at.

TEMPTATIONS TO PASTORAL WORKERS

Finally, there is a need, according to the Holy Father, to identify the temptations to pastoral workers. Temptations that all of us, ordained and lay pastoral workers experience (cf EG # 76-109). He mentioned things like selfishness and spiritual laziness, manifested like “I already spent nine years in studying the bible so I do not see a need to deepen my knowledge of it. I do not need to prepare my homilies anymore because I have already preached them before. “There are even some who are wise in keeping the outlines of their homilies. When they have completed cycles ABC, and it is time to preach on Cycle A again, they will simply say “Ah, yes I know this. No more need to pray and reflect, I already preached about this before!” Spiritual laziness! With these. I usually crack a joke with people on the need for the transfer of priests. I say” We need to transfer them every 3 years because the people have already heard them preached on Cycles ABC. So they will not hear again, it is better to transfer them! Just imagine, if a priest stay in the parish for 30 years? Ten times each cycle they have heard and the people suffer because of spiritual sloth.

Another is pessimism. Pope John XXIII already said in the opening of Vatican Council II: “There are so many prophets of gloom and doom. They talk only of negative things.” He said, “ I disagree with them.” Pessimism sees danger everywhere but the opportunities in the presence of God, as though Easter had not happened.

“There are some Christians who look like they have just come out from a funeral – pessimists – no joy, no hope! To these we proclaim: “Jesus is risen!”

Spiritual worldliness is the other temptation using spiritual matters for worldly gains. Spiritual worldliness, what a term is not something new. It has been a temptation to many people in the Church since time immemorial. Now, I challenge priests how generous people are. Say for example, a woman gives you an envelop and say” Father, please pray for my daughter who is taking a very important exam. She wants to enter a university, please pray for her.” Then you take the envelop with a contribution. But do you pray? After a few months, you happen to see again the woman saying: “Father thank you for your prayers.” And you started to recall, “Oh yes, is your son well now? Has he gone out of the hospital? “ Then the woman will say, “ It is about my daughter whom I asked you to pray.” And you say to save yourself from shame,” Oh, yes! Yes, I prayed for her!” Oh, come on! That is why I warn people not to ask us to pray for their intentions because we do not pray! Now, if you want to accept donations, pray! Take it seriously! Do not use our role in the Church to amass wealth.

Finally, the Holy Father says we are warring among ourselves. This has come up in many ways in his speeches and talks at audiences in Rome. There is always bickering, in –fighting among the priests and the bishops; the lay among themselves and the lay and the priests. There is a lot of gossips; a lot of bickering... Precious time is lost to useless chat and in-fighting especially for ecclesiastical politics. “Why was he the one appointed to the cathedral when I have a doctorate and he doesn’t have one? I am a doctor, he is just a nurse. Why was he given the cathedral, please?”All of these things point to the community life in the seminary so the seminarians are trained to live with each other and do not spend precious time on trivial things. Let me end with this: the person who internalizes the Word of God can embrace the poor and the vulnerable; the people who can be strong to resist these pastoral temptations that block evangelization is one who is authentic.

Last January, I was invited to the World Economic Forum in Switzerland. At first, I ignored the invitation with the reservation as to the reason why I was invited to such a conference to be attended by presidents of countries, World Bank, IMF and financial experts. They were developing a global agenda for faith and human

development. There were Cardinals invited – one from Africa, the other from the Vatican and myself. I was unresolved to go but persuaded by the Apostolic Nuncio to the Philippines’ “You do not know when shall you be invited again, better take advantage of the opportunity.” I was tasked to a part of simultaneous workshops by giving a talk on authenticity. There were four of us. Imagine, a world economic forum looking for authentic person. But it was interesting. One of the speakers was a chef and talked about authenticity in foods. He said many restaurants advertise authentic Peruvian foods but not all. There was an artist, a museum curator. He told us how people are cheated when they enter a museum for a ticket of price only to view not authentic works but only imitation. The third was a woman who looked at the authenticity of products by checking the ingredients and the correctness of labels. There was a woman working for a perfume factory who asked;” Have you tested the authenticity of our perfume?” The woman said, “Yes. According to your labels, your product is authentic but you have not exposed your labor practices. We do not know whether you pay your laborers the just wage , or whether you engage into child labor. So we cannot say that your product is authentic.”

Imagine, the search for authenticity is present in the world: in the kitchen, in the museum, in the factories. They asked me to share about finding authentic personhood in the world of virtual reality. How do you become a human being when you are bombarded by virtual reality? We have today, emails, text messages – we seldom get in touch with the real meaning. When we are just in virtual reality, what happens to human authenticity? Indeed, a difficult topic.

I mentioned this to emphasize that the Church is not alone in looking for authenticity. This is our contribution, authentic person bearing the Gospel with joy. The missionary joy that comes when God sends a person to the peripheries, to the vulnerable, the forgotten. The joy an authentic evangelizer will manifest even without words.