



ON THE ROAD TO LEBANON (WORLD ASSEMBLY 2013)

“Were not our hearts filled with ardent yearning when he was talking to us on the road and explaining the scriptures”. (Lk. 24:32)

We are invited to continue, prayerfully reflecting on the Assembly theme and the scripture passage as we journey on the road:

FROM OUR ROOTS TO THE FRONTIERS

“This is my son, The Beloved. Listen to what He says”. (Mk 9:7)

REVISITING CLC PROJECTS #150

Community membership on mission to the most needy:

The Lord sent them two by two: “The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few” (Luke 10:1-5). Therefore, the meaning of our membership (a) is woven from the identity that confirms the presence of the Spirit of God within us, (b) is affirmed by the communal expression of solidarity and loving brotherhood/sisterhood, and (c) becomes real in the mission which leads us to the most urgent needs in our world. Our membership is a firm commitment to go out in search of the poorest of the poor. Christ sends us out in community to work for the building of God’s kingdom. So then, the need for structures, processes (eg induction procedures), all of our formation programs, explicit financial co-responsibility, and any other processes for our integration and growth in CLC should always aim towards “mission and commitment” within the reality of life (GP. 8). Only in this way do we become full “members.”

THE NAME OF OUR POPE IS FRANCIS BUT, “FRANCIS IS NOT A NAME; IT IS A WAY OF BEING CHURCH: POOR, SIMPLE, EVANGELICAL AND DEVOID OF ALL POWER” (Leonardo Boff) AND IN DOING SO WE ARE BUILDING ON A SOLIDARITY WITH THE POOR.

“THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE.”

This famous phrase coined by Marshall McLuhan has been in my mind for the last week. McLuhan meant that the form of the medium embeds itself in the message. The election of Pope Francis has further driven home the meaning of that phrase. For weeks, after Pope Benedict XVI announced his resignation, we prayed for the right person to exercise the Petrine ministry. We spent long hours discussing and reading commentaries on the right person for “the job”. We pondered; we waited; we wondered: What kind of a Pope does the Church need today? What will the election of the new Pope mean for the Church and for the world? And then, we prayed some more.

It was not until last Wednesday, on March 13, 2013, that we started to discover the response to our prayers: Pope Francis. Shortly after his election, we met a man with a striking personality. We rejoiced in his simplicity and his joy. We praised his choice of the Papal name. Saint Francis of Assisi is the most famous and beloved of all saints. Born into a privileged life, he decided to leave his wealth behind to minister to the poor and sick. In choosing that name, Pope Francis stated his desire to care for the under-served and underprivileged; the poor and the lonely; the forsaken and the marginalized. Commenting on the election of the Pope, the theologian Leonardo Boff wrote, “Francis is not a name; it is a way of being Church: poor, simple, evangelical and devoid of all power.”

In his interactions with cardinals, journalists and with all people in general, Pope Francis has stated that he wants a “poor church, for the poor”. He has reminded us that true power means service, and that service implies the protection of the most vulnerable in our world.

In his role as the Vicar of Christ, the Pope is called to care for Christ’s flock. Jesus called St. Peter, the first Pope, to feed and tend his sheep (John 21:16-17). In turn, the Pope is called to be both a teacher and a shepherd. He teaches and leads not merely with well-written homilies or off-the-script comments, but with his actions. After all, it was St. Francis who said, “Preach the Gospel at all times, and only when necessary use words.” The Pope is preaching the Gospel with his life. He is doing it just as he has done it for many years. In being a Gospel-bearer, he has gone beyond proclaiming the Good News. He has become good news; he has become a source of glad tidings. He has learned to glorify the Lord by his life. And we rejoice in it.

As we reflect on the election of Pope Francis, our call is to discern what it means for us. As we rejoice in the election of this Jesuit priest from Argentina as our Pontiff, we ought to consider what the Holy Spirit is telling us all. As we delight in the great simplicity of El Papa, we are called to embrace that simplicity. In a world that treasures wealth, possessions and fame, we are called to live simply and to be humble. As we celebrate a Pope whose heart is so close to the poor and the marginalized, we are called to open our hearts to those who are suffering and who are longing for healing. As we thank God for this joyful man who calls us to remember the real meaning of power, we are empowered to serve those in need.

We cannot praise the Holy Father for all the wonderful things he does and says, when we continue chasing after titles, property and esteem. We are being called to re-assess our lifestyles and to put our gifts, our time and our resources at the service of the most vulnerable and marginalized. It might help to ask, do I know the poor? Do I spend time with them? Am I able to

be vulnerable around them and invite them into our lives? The more we allow the poor to crash through our defences, the more unsettled we feel. We begin to feel that the poor are just like us. We begin to identify with them and learn to lay down the burden of our perceived superiority. We are humbled and called into building a relationship.

It is worth rethinking our closeness to the poor. A good and holy monk once asked me, “So, you say you love the poor? Well, what are their names?” At that time, I did not have a good answer. The poor were merely an abstract conception; a blurred face I passed in the street; a nameless face I once saw in a World Mission commercial. I wanted to change that. The good thing is that it is never too late to do something about it. When we speak of the poor, we should never idealize them or simply think of them in the abstract.

When the Pope asks us to love and serve the poor, let us challenge ourselves to go out into the dark and remote corners of our world and meet people who are poor. Let us go out and enter into relationship with them. It all begins with a simple “Hello, what is your name?” Our friendships with the poor will transform us. As the late Dean Brackley, SJ, wrote: “If we let them, the poor will place us before the abyss of the holy Mystery we call God. They are a kind of door that opens before that Mystery and through which God passes to get at us. Clearly we need them more than they need us.”

The Pope is inviting us to transform the world by entering into relationship with all humans, but especially with those on the margins of society: the poor, the alienated and the infirm. Let us accept this invitation. In tending to the needs of those in need, we will be transformed and in turn will become agents of transformation in the world. In healing a broken world, we will be healed. This world is in need of love, healing, justice, beauty and truth. Pope Francis cannot do it all alone. We are invited to become messengers of the Good News and in the process to become good tidings for the world. The medium is the message. The message is the Crucified and Risen Lord. Will you become the medium, a channel of his peace?

Submitted by: Santiago Rodrigues, SJ

In our continuing journey toward the CLC World Assembly in Lebanon we are all invited to walk in solidarity with our national delegates (Mary Balf, Leanne Salel, and Fr. Charles Pottie sj) by taking a moment of prayerful reflection on the following questions:

- *What has been the most significant example of communal/individual outreach (brotherhood/sisterhood) that you have experienced within CLC?*
- *As a member of CLC what has been your experience in discovering the compassionate face of God and the loving force of His Spirit in “announcing the year of liberty” (see Lk 4: 18 -19)?*
- *As members of CLC **sent on the mission** by joining Christ in the building of the kingdom, how have you and /or group responded through an apostolic commitment to the poor?*

You may want to send, as a further sign of your solidarity with our World Assembly delegates and team, your reflections. To do so please send your reflections to our National President, Mary Balf:

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SUBMITTED BY

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