

## THE GIFT OF THE PRIESTHOOD TO THE MISSIONARY CENACLE FAMILY

*“The priesthood is an infinite and eternal gift that God, because of His mercy, has been good to give us.”* Fr. Thomas Judge

Fr. Judge insisted that when we see a priest celebrating “the holy sacrifice,” he is the same Christ of the cross, “the victim is Jesus and the supreme priest is Jesus.”

Fr. Judge believed that frequent attendance at Mass and the Eucharist was similar to coming to the cenacle, “The upper room,” a place where the apostles were refreshed and illuminated.

In his reflections he wrote that the *“the Eucharist is the sun and center of our life of faith.”* It is there, where the priest must *“gather the aspirations and spiritual sighs”* of the faithful, *stand up amid the assembly and “ask pardon of the Lord, they are to take the place of Jesus Christ.”* *“ Oh how grateful we should be in our sacred faith, there is only one Church, one religion, and that is the Catholic Church, your sacred faith, because there is only one victim, an altar, a sacrifice, the priesthood of Jesus Christ”* How we would like to make of our priesthood a rich treasure in the Church! How we would want to gather from that part of the vineyard entrusted to our care, a rich crop of souls for eternal life! (Meditations page 208)

Father Judge believed that to be a priest is “a serious occupation” that supposes “selfless and sacrificial service.” It implies that the ordained is “to see with Jesus' eyes, hear with his ears and to think with his mind”.

Father Judge saw his life as a gift of God to the Church. Our brother priests are a both a gift for the Church and the Missionary Cenacle Family. They are called to be men of faith, deeply convinced of the mission. They are to be shepherds, friends, available and understanding. The ST priest is called to listen and take counsel, to be able to guide others on his or her journey of life in the Cenacle and the life of the

Church. The priest is called to be a man of virtue, an authentic teacher of the faith. He collaborates with the members of the Missionary Cenacle Family in their ministries through his ability and willingness to foster their dialogue with God. He works with them in the challenges and indecisions of life. Hence, the necessity of his having an integral faith. Because "every priest is taken from all men and placed to intervene in favor of men in everything that refers to God" (Hebrew 5, 1)

Being a priest, Father Judge wrote, is a serious occupation; "an insistent call to sanctity." It is about finding ways of being in communion with the faithful, to live incarnate, to have an apostolic zeal, a disposition and dedication to live and give testimony. This "serious occupation" implies capacity of love and fidelity, identity as a disciple and missionary.

The identity of the ministerial priest in the Cenacle must be conceived and lived as gift from God, and in relationship with each member of the Missionary Cenacle Family. It must also be understood as a valuable and important ministry in the mission of the Church.

The Missionary Servant knows "*everything begins in God, in His love; that He loved us first*" (1Jn. 4, 10-19), and he calls us "*in the here and now of our people*" (Heb. 1, 1-2).

Today, we are called amid of "*so much leakage in the number of people apart from the Church and the organized religion, the dozens of baptized Catholics indifferent to their faith*" (Fr. Gary). We are called amid much cruelty and misery, iniquity, lust, disorder and violence.

We are called to look for new and innovative initiatives, in making of ourselves "fishers of men" in the style and model of the Good Fisherman.

To do this, some important steps occur to me, product of my reflection and reading from Father Judge. I do think that living our priesthood is a "serious occupation." Father Vincent used to refer to the virtues of the Cenacle as a means for us to strengthen our values and transmit the charism.

Allow me to reflect upon some of these virtues and how their practice as a priest enriches our life in the Missionary Cenacle Family:

**Simplicity:** to live in a simple way looking for the purity of intention, being sincere, true and genuine, honest in proceedings, without fear when speaking truth. How many works of love can the Cenacle Family realize if we assume this virtue in carrying out our pastoral work!

**Humility:** humility as virtue invites us to be priests recognizing the priesthood of all the Baptized. Humility invites us to live in the truth, not lending ourselves to the lie, to be sincere persons, transparent, without deceits. Jesus himself is our model of humility: "he took our human condition," lived humble and simple, "Learn from me that I am meek and humble of heart." How many examples and live testimonies have we had of this virtue of Humility in the life of the Cenacle!

**Charity:** God infuses in us a loving heart, the source of all the virtues as written in Corinthians 13. It is the virtue that motivates us to be compassionate, moves us to do heroic work and extraordinary actions. It invites us to stroll in the world of friendship, of coexistence and sharing. Charity is the communication that allows a kind approach, to be helpful, to rectify and to ask for forgiveness, to be faithful and grateful. There are thousands of members of the Missionary Cenacle Family that have given us so many lessons in this virtue. A virtue that Jesus demanded of Peter before he entrusted him with his flock. With much love we are to reach the hearts of multitudes of people. It was the only immediate demand that Father Judge requested of those that sought entrance into the Inner Cenacle. Love moves mountains.

**Counsel:** counsel is helpful in obtaining clarity, freedom in decisions, it motivates, focuses, it gives us balance. Counsel gives us consistency in thoughts, it makes us responsible of our acts. When we take and give counsel, when we give a correct word in any certain moment, when we exchange ideas and opinions, when we make charitable recommendations, we contribute to the revelation of the Kingdom of God.

Clearly, the experience of the virtues allows us to cultivate an apostolic zeal that transforms us and the effort to look for those “new and innovative initiatives” that we need today to motivate and channel the faith of the people.

We need to be willing to leave our Cenacles, to be more daring and brave in re-inventing our mission, even amidst the austerity that we live.

We all need to assume our roles as graces of God to the Church. Father Judge would say that each soul in our care is a treasure. We cannot neglect to teach the doctrine that feeds the soul. This is Ad Fidem Servandam or preservation of the faith. In the Cenacle we have to be worshipers and contemplators of the Eucharist.

The validity of the Eucharist does not depend on the celebrator's sanctity. Benedict XVI says, “the more alive our faith is, the deeper, fervent and passionate is our love for the Eucharist, the more fervent our prayer spirit, the greater the sanctity we obtain. Sanctity is inherent to the human person's nature, according to Lumen Gentium No. 39/41. We all are called to be saints; it is a gratuitous gift of God. This is a fact that our priests in the Cenacle cannot forget.

As person “of the Spirit” we should take our spiritual accompaniment seriously, letting the Holy Spirit act and work in depths of our human reality with all its contradictions. For this to occur, it is important to discover God in His Word. Pay attention to the Meditations of Fr. Judge. There is not a single meditation that doesn't mention a biblical passage. The Word is to become our word. Someone asked how we are to respond to so many problems of hostility, indifference, skepticism, resistance, and scandals in the Church. Clearly, there is not a single easy solution. It becomes necessary however, that in the “being defenders of the faith” we must have a lived encounter accompanied by the Living Word.

The rule of life insists that we frequently use the Word of God. The constant reflection and living of the Word gives us a security and makes us heralds of Christ. Today, we need “a sacred priesthood, aware of the Lord, a sign of joy, of faith in the Spirit and in the resurrected Christ.

This implies a responsible, balanced, ecclesiastic, creative, faithful, tenacious and renewing movement. The faithful need to feel accompanied, supported and protected by their ministers. A Missionary Servant priest should suffer every time that the children leave the house of the Father. Their ministry is to see that Jesus Christ is loved. A Missionary Servant priest, living son of the Missionary Cenacle Family, knows that the greatest happiness is to live embodied in the vision of our dear Father. The ST priesthood is and will always be an invitation to communion, unity, and to apostolic joy.

Father James Hayden, C.M., said about Father Judge, "He was a man with fervor that never, in spite of his serious illness, stopped having a great apostolic zeal." This missionary ardor that opens paths and spaces, should constantly be refounded, otherwise it dies. The priesthood as a gift should be revived, so that it continues to give life. Every day we should rediscover the beauty and importance of our ordained ministry for the Church and the Cenacle.

This is and will be the spirit of the Missionary Cenacle Family. It is about an entire movement still valuable and important as it was on that day Father Judge met with those first young women in New York. It remains a gift to the Church. To a disciple and a missionary of Jesus, **Aparecida\*** tells us, it is more than a condition, it is a blessing. To lose one's life (Mt. 16,25), to serve (Mt. 20,28), to be humble and meek of heart (Mt. 11,28) are the credential of disciples or apostles. To rediscover the Beatitudes, to show that the Church has the capacity to promote and to form responsible disciples is the mission of all in the Cenacle.

In short, the spiritualization and training of a laity that vitalizes the Church continues to be an urgency. God in His madness has chosen us (Jeremiah 1,5) his Missionary Cenacle Family, each sister, brother and priest to do this work. "Without being static," "with an entire special Vincentian sensibility," let us take initiatives and put the boat "out to the lake." Let us together look for the excluded and marginalized, those who are impoverished and rejected. As priest "in Persona Christi" and

anointed by God and “crucified with Christ” we are especially invited to promote healing, liberation and transformation.

The invitation to all the baptized is “to be configured with Christ” (Paul VI) That was Father Judge’s insistence when speaking about “every Catholic is an apostle.”

In summary, the priesthood that is lived in the Cenacle is one lived and rooted in the people, one that is to give us joy and happiness, open to the ministries of the laity in the life of the Church. We are obliged to be promoters of a “Eucharistic spirituality” in the Missionary Cenacle Family.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. Today, what motivates you and others who feel called to follow and be configured with Christ?
2. How can we obtain an “authentic coherence” between our daily life ministry and a relationship with those who are called to priesthood in the Cenacle?
3. What must we do to assure that priestly ministers are part of the local community and that we are all missionaries together?

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\* **Aparecida:** The Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Conference met in Aparecida, Brazil in 2007. The final document referred to as “Aparecida” is a concrete challenge to “foster the responsibility of lay people in the world for building the Kingdom of God.”