

## PRECIOUS IN GOD'S SIGHT

Diocese of New Westminster

Vancouver, B.C., Canada

July 26, 2020

Greetings of Shalom Beharim from our Clergy and Laity in the Episcopal Diocese of Northern Philippines – your Companion Diocese. Let me first thank Archbishop Melissa for her acceptance as preacher today at our Cathedral in Bontoc, and for inviting me as your preacher today. We call this “exchange pulpit” in our diocese where our priests agree to preach in each other’s church. It is comforting to know that we all are still alive and able to “exchange pulpit” and give thanks and praise to God in this manner – at great geographical distancing. You have been in our prayers of wellness and wholeness particularly during this pandemic that is gripping the whole world with morbid fear and great uncertainty as never before.

This coronavirus pandemic has restricted our movements and activities including the celebration of the Eucharist and fellowships in our churches. In response to our people’s hunger for praise and worship amidst this pandemic, we have discovered new ways of continuing worship services. From March to May, we were not allowed to gather as usual in church for our Sunday services and fellowship. But we continued celebrating the Eucharist with only the priest and his family and staff in attendance to sustain the Prayers for the People. For the rest of the congregations, family devotions were held in their homes some using printed materials while other accessed this from the internet. Still others without internet followed the service broadcast in local radio stations. Live streaming of the Eucharist is unreliable due to poor internet service. Lockdown restrictions were relaxed a bit starting mid-June which allowed the conduct of church services at half the capacity of the church to allow social distancing. This meant that the priest has to conduct more than one Sunday mass to accommodate the other members. One parish made some innovations by conducting the Mass for small clusters of members residing in a “purok” or section of the community. The priest goes around the puroks to conduct the services which are spread out over the weekdays and Sunday. Meanwhile, the slight relaxation on travel has allowed our staff to facilitate

the transport of vegetables from our farming members to people in other places, thereby allowing continuous production by our farming communities and continuous supply for other people. We have offered some of our church buildings as isolation or quarantine facilities. Due to the continuing suspension of public transportation, our service car took our new seminarians today to the Seminary in Manila, and will return with our new seminary graduates who recently finished their canonical examinations through Zoom. When our new Seminary graduates come, they will be quarantined for one month before they start their internship. These are some of the adjustments we have made to cope with the effects of the pandemic, not to mention its adverse impact on our finances and that of our people.

Nevertheless, whatever Covid 19 can take away from us, it cannot take Christ from us. Covid 19 has not diminished or put on hold our faith; instead, our faith has been growing in this time of peril. It feels like we have discovered or rediscovered a priceless treasure that has been hidden all along in our hearts. The hidden treasure in the third parable in the Gospel this morning represents the Kingdom of heaven and the field symbolizes you and me. It turns out that the treasure is hidden in our hearts and it is there for each of us to discover. Only you can discover and cherish the treasure hidden in your heart. “The Kingdom of God is within you” was Jesus’ answer to some pharisees who asked him when the Kingdom would come. Luke 17:20-21

There are four other parables of the Kingdom of heaven in the Gospel reading this morning: the parable of the mustard seed, of the yeast, of the fishnet, and of the pearl of great value. Let me share my reflection on the parable of the pearl of great value. Mt. 13:45 says: *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.”* It’s a very short parable and it reveals an aspect of the Kingdom that affirms God’s abiding love for us. The parable simply means that we are precious in the eyes of God. The pearl of great value represents you and me, and the merchant represents God. As pearls are uniquely formed in the depths of the ocean, so are human beings a unique creation of God. Genesis 1:27 says: *“So God created man in his own*

*image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*” And God showered them with abundant love and placed them in the Garden of Eden to live happily ever after in accordance with God’s will and commandment. However, life in paradise for Adam and Eve was shortlived because they were banished for committing the grievous sin of disobeying God’s commandment. But in His infinite and boundless love and mercy, God made a grand plan to reconcile us to our Creator and save us from eternal damnation. And the Bible is all about the story and history of God reaching out to his people through the patriarchs, prophets, kings, judges and other personalities including ordinary people to work out his plan for our salvation. God’s ultimate act to redeem us is the sacrifice of his only begotten Son on the cross. God redeemed us at such a great price. The parable says: *“On finding one (pearl) of great value, he (the merchant) went and sold all he had and bought it.”* And the Psalmist asks in Psalm 8:4, *“What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?”* Indeed, why should God care about us? Why are we precious in God’s eyes?

God created us as an act of divine love, bestowing to us his divine image and attributes of love, faithfulness, mercy and righteousness. God is our creator; we did not create ourselves. But there are people who behave as though they created themselves and the world. Their mindset leads to a greedy pursuit of power and material riches and devotion to selfish endeavors, forgetting or denying Divine Providence as the source of all blessings. When we realize that everything we own is a blessing from God, we stop being greedy and start to be mindful of the needs of our neighbors and to share our blessings. Somehow, this COVID 19 pandemic made us much more aware and mindful of the needs of neighbors. And we begin to be thankful to God for creating us and sustaining our life.

We also thank God for sacrificing His only begotten Son Jesus Christ for the redemption of our sins. *“For God so love the world that he gave his only Son, to the end that all who believe in him shall not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).* As we gaze at the cross, we stand in awe at all the things that God through Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross for us. We come to the realization that Christ’s crucifixion reveals the love of God at its purest and exposes the sinfulness of man at its worst. Jesus Christ bore the curse,

torture, the pain and the agony and died for us and we are eternally grateful for this show of love despite our sinfulness.

And we thank God for the resurrection of his Son from death, thus giving us hope of our own resurrection to life eternal as heirs of His Kingdom. Without the resurrection, there would be no Christianity today. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, saying: *“If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then your faith would be a delusion and you are still lost in your sins.”* His resurrection liberated us from the grip of death and opened the gates of the Kingdom of heaven to all believers.

At this point in our life, what could be our most fitting response to God’s gift of life and love if not to become his disciples? Discipleship and disciple-making is the ministry focus of the Anglican Communion which declared 2016-2026 as the Season of Intentional Discipleship. This is our response as Anglicans to the Lord’s Great Commission to His disciples, saying: *“Go, therefore, to all people everywhere and make them my disciples, baptize them...and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.”* Mt. 28:18-20

And this was what the original disciples did after receiving the power of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost day. They were fired up by the Spirit, and they left their comfort zones and dared to enter danger zones, boldly proclaiming the Good News, bringing people into the fellowship of believers, teaching them to emulate the lifestyle of Christ, and exhorting them to go out and make other disciples.

Our Lord’s command was meant not only for the original disciples; His command is a call to you and me, and all believers to go out and make disciples. But before we go out to make disciples, we ourselves must first become disciples. For no person is born a ready-made disciple. And only a disciple can make another disciple. Jesus calls us to be his disciples, not only believers. A disciple of Christ is one who believes and follows and emulates the lifestyle of our Lord during his earthly life.

How do we become disciples? Simply by following and emulating the ways of our Lord. But it is not really that simple. Listen to our Lord in the Gospel of St. Luke 9:23: *“If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.”* Jesus demands that to be his disciples, we must carry our own cross daily and follow him wherever he leads us. Jesus is not telling us to just suffer for the sake of suffering, but to be prepared daily for what may happen to us as a consequence of being his followers. Discipleship also means giving up one’s self-directed life for a new life under our Lord’s direction and control. This is called dying-to-self, banishing selfish desires, arrogance, pride and egoism. In verses 24-25, Jesus also demands that we love him more than our very own selves, our parents, and all who are dear to us. And verse 33 says, *“In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”* It is not the intention of Jesus to starve us to death or to deprive us of our basic necessities of life. Here Jesus is concerned with the obsessive materialism that makes people forget, ignore or deny the Divine Providence from whom all blessings flow.

As pearls of great value in God’s eyes, we must live out the Gospel message by putting to practice the Biblical teachings of Jesus in our lives. This is what discipleship is all about – following the footsteps of our Lord and reflecting his image through Christ-like words and actions so that people who meet us will encounter Jesus in us. In this way, we, like John the Baptist, will reflect the true Light in Christ that others around us may see their way and be drawn into our fellowship with Christ.

In the same way, we become yeast that God uses to leaven the Kingdom of heaven in our time; and we partake in the building of God’s kingdom that sprung from a humble beginning like the tiny mustard seed, and spread from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, defying the persecutions, worldly powers, and the powers of darkness through the ages, and now this pandemic.

Let us pray: *Almighty God, whose beloved Son willingly endured the agony and shame of the cross for our redemption: Give us courage to take up our cross and follow him. Fill us with the power of your Holy Spirit to overcome the dangers we face in this perilous*

*time; and grant that your Spirit may restore within us the perfection of your image and likeness, that you may be glorified in us according to your will, forever and ever. Amen*

+Brent/EDNP: 7/20/20

DIOCESAN EMPLOYEES CREDIT COOPERATIVE  
4F Diocesan Center, Bontoc, Mountain Province

BOARD RESOLUTION NO. 7-01, Series 2020

A RESOLUTION DESIGNATING CAROLINE M. COFULAN AS DECCO OFFICIAL DELEGATE AND AS NOMINEE FOR THE CBMP BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND FR. RAFAEL LOMONG-OY AS NOMINEE FOR THE CBMP ELECTION COMMITTEE

RESOLVED, as it is hereby resolved, That the DECCO Board of Directors hereby designate MS. CAROLINE M. COFULAN as its Official Delegate to the 25<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Cooperative Bank of Mountain Province to be held on August 1, 2020 at the Sibley-Shaw Memorial Hall at All Saints Cathedral Compound in Bontoc, Mountain Province;

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Board of Directors hereby designate MS. CAROLINE M. COFULAN as the DECCO nominee for the position of Director, and FR. RAFAEL C. LOMONG-OY as its nominee for the Election Committee of the Cooperative Bank of Mountain Province.

APPROVED at the Regular Board Meeting this 16<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2020, Bontoc, Mountain Province, Philippines.

For the Board:

MS. CHARLOTTE CAMFILI  
Chairperson

FR. WYLER B. GANSOEN  
Secretary

