

**Which Church?
What Kind of a Priest?
What Kind of Formation?**

Reflections on Priestly Formation in an Epochal Change

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17 October 2022

One Book, one Law, one Master

When I think about priestly formation, what immediately comes to my mind is my personal journey towards the priestly ministry, in which everything goes back to what is essential: one book - one law - one Master.

A single Book: The Gospel, to be put into practice faithfully or to the letter in everyday life.

Only one law: The commandment of mutual love that Jesus entrusted first, to his Apostles.

One Master, who makes himself present where we live together as children of one Father and as a family of brothers and sisters.

These three pathways have left a deep imprint in my life forever and they serve as a light and a guide for me even to this day. In fact, our formation is never a process that ends. On the contrary, we need a daily conversion so that our way of living, speaking and acting is more and more rooted in the Gospel. There is always something new every day that we learn from the Master, who wants to be part of our life and present among us.

These three pathways or directions, which in reality are very essential, already had a fundamental role in the early Church. The martyrs had the strength to bear witness to the Gospel even to the point of death because they allowed themselves to be guided by the Word of God radically – this is the case even in my own motherland. Mutual love was the basic rule of the community: “See how they love one another and how they are ready to die for each other.” The living presence of the Risen Jesus supported and guided the Church even in the most difficult circumstances.

It cannot be otherwise today! In every age, we need to go back to these beginnings and to embark on a new journey from these roots, from this so-to-say genetic code of ours that we cannot exchange with any other guideline.

Questions on Priestly Life and Formation

At the same time the Spirit of the Lord leads the People of God through history and guides them more fully to the whole truth (cf. Jn 16:13), who leads it towards a greater maturity and makes it respond to the signs of all times. It is, therefore, necessary to ask ourselves what kind of priestly formation could be suitably adequate today, in our time that Pope Francis characterizes as a “**change of age or epoch.**”

This is a question that I have constantly asked myself since the Pope appointed me as the Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy. And I do not simply raise this question to myself in my office, but to my collaborators as well, so we can constantly listen to Pope Francis, to the bishops and to other people who come to visit us at the Dicastery. Let us try to understand based on reality what kind of life priests have in various parts of the world.

We are certainly challenged by the serious problem of abuse, which are reported in many countries, truly painful for the serious suffering it inflicts on the victims and for the damage it does to the credibility of the Church. We cannot gloss over this. But I observe, above all, that many priests are discouraged, overworked, struggling with difficult pastoral situations. They often live in profound experience of loneliness and risk becoming individualistic. They do not feel valued and cared for and this wears them down inwardly. Of course, there are also many positive examples, but the question remains: What can we do to help priests become joyful and happy?

It is urgent that we keep asking ourselves as to what kind of priestly formation is needed, not only about initial formation but also, and in a special way, regarding ongoing formation. Every priest must feel welcomed and listened to, accompanied and supported along the path of his life. We have identified this as a priority for the coming years.

However, we cannot address this question directly, without raising fundamental questions even more: **First, which Church? And therefore: what kind of a priest for this Church? And consequently: what kind of formation?**

On this triple question I would like to offer you a few reflections which will certainly require ever greater study.

Which Church?

Mystery - Communion - Mission

Allow me to start my reflection on the Church, from a great bishop of my land: Cardinal Stefano Kim, who was Archbishop of Seoul for thirty years. He was a true father of the Church in Korea, and, with his wisdom and testimony, he has contributed a lot to the growth of Catholics in my country. When, in 1989, the International Eucharistic Congress was held in Korea, Cardinal Kim explained to all believers: **“We need to become like a big host (eucharistic bread) in society.”** This expression captures the whole ecclesiology of communion of the Second Vatican Council with its three dimensions of mystery, communion and mission.

Mystery. «**A big host**». The Church has the task of making God present, indeed: of making him seen. Thus, her life must be permeated with God, deeply rooted in him; constantly nourished by the sacraments and formed by her Word: **living Gospel**. It is the universal call to holiness to which the Second Vatican Council calls us (cf. LG, chap. 5) and which Pope Francis has reminded us of in his Apostolic Exhortation *“Gaudete et Exsultate”*: A holiness in everyday life that requires not only an intense life of prayer but also a continuous re-evangelization of our whole way of being, so that people can see Jesus in us.

Communion. «**We must be a big host**». We, in our relationships! We are called to be an icon of the triune God, to show with our communion that we live on earth as in Heaven! This is the being of the Church, as the Second Vatican Council presents it to us in *“Lumen Gentium”*: “A people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (n. 4). Rooted in God and shaped by his Word, we are called to witness to this miracle every day: that what is many and diverse can become one body and one soul and that this unity does not cancel differences but brings them into harmony. The great Saint Bonaventure expressed this vocation to communion in this way: **“Ecclesia enim mutual se diligens est -the Church is the event of loving one another.”**

Mission. **“We must be like a big host in society”** – where people live, where they work, where they suffer, struggle, hope. We are called to become the leaven of the Trinitarian life into all areas of human coexistence. In the Apostolic Exhortation *“Evangelii*

Gaudium”, Pope Francis expressed this task as follows: “Today, when the networks and means of human communication have made unprecedented advances, we sense the challenge of finding and sharing a “mystique” of living together, of mingling and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another, of stepping into this flood tide which, while chaotic, can become a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity, a sacred pilgrimage” (n. 87). It is not a question of sacralizing people’s daily life, but of sanctifying it – an eminently secular task that involves all the baptized.

Thus, the Second Vatican Council has presented the Church to us: A People imbued by the life of Triune God while immersed in the life, joys and anxieties of humanity; a People in which all the members enjoy the same dignity and all are protagonists in the great mission of being – as “*Lumen Gentium*” says in number 1 – “in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.” In the words of Card. Kim: “a big host in society.”

What a long way to go before this prophetic vision of the Council impacts on the life of our Christian communities! Without illusions Pope Francis, in 2018 during the press conference on the return flight from Abu Dhabi, has observed: “Historians say that for a Council to take root in the Church it takes 100 years. We are halfway there.”

Synodal Church, Going Forth

We need to move forward decisively. In what direction? In “*Evangelii Gaudium*”, Francis invites towards a missionary conversion that transforms everything, “Customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation” (No. 27). Our Dicastery has provided special instruction on this topic. Furthermore, in “*Evangelii Gaudium*”, Francis launches a lively appeal: “Let us go forth, then, let us go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ.” “A Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security” (n. 49) is preferable.

We must understand – Pope Francis often reminds us – that what we are experiencing is **“not simply an epoch of changes, but an epochal change.”** Speaking about it to the Roman Curia on 21 December 2019, Francis has explained: “We find ourselves living at a time when change is no longer linear,” but “entails decisions that rapidly transform our ways of living, of relating to one another, of communicating and thinking, of how different generations relate to one another and how we understand and experience faith and science.” And it has also exposed a danger: “Often we approach change as if were a matter of simply putting on new clothes but remaining exactly as we were before.”

We therefore need to open ourselves to a new epoch, to new ways of living, of relating, of being Church. Hence, the invitation that Pope Francis addresses to the entire People of God, giving rise to a kind of a universal process: **the synodal process.** This is not an option. **“Church and Synod are synonymous,”** Pope Francis reminds us, in the words of St. John Chrysostom. It is, therefore, necessary to walk together: being open to one another and welcoming each other, listening deeply to one another, listening communally to the voice of the Spirit and discerning what is in God’s plans for the here and now. This is not a temporary project in view of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023, but a way to be learned as “the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church as the People of God.” Synodality – as Pope Francis already expressed in 2015 – is the “path that God expects from the Church of the third millennium.”

In other words, but on the same line of thought, Saint John Paul II had already expressed himself, when after the Great Jubilee of 2000, he wrote in the Apostolic Letter “*Novo Millennio Ineunte*”: **“To make the Church the home and the school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God’s plan and respond to the world’s deepest yearnings”** (n. 43). According to St. John Paul II, “the very essence of the Church” is at stake here (n. 42). But for this to happen - he explained clearly – **“we need to promote a spirituality of communion, making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons, and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up”** (n. 43).

Which Church, then? A synodal Church that lives as a home and as a school of communion from within the community and, becomes a leaven of the Trinitarian communion in all areas of human life in the world. This is the vocation of all baptized Christians to be protagonists of the Church's mission, that is, to be at the forefront of the Church's mission.

What Kind of a Priest?

Let us raise another question vis-à-vis a synodal Church: What kind of a priest?

It is important to point out that the priest, in unity with the bishop and together with the entire clergy, must carry out a specific mandate as a pastor or more precisely: as the presence of Christ, the Shepherd. I do not dwell on this, but I limit myself simply to recalling the words of the Gospel of John: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained" (Jn 20, 21-23).

But how to live out genuinely this mandate and how to make him credible and with the witnessing force that he needs? I would like to focus here on three points:

- [1] the call to discipleship, together with all the baptized**
- [2] the call to the "washing of the feet": the ministry as a service**
- [3] the call to life and common synodal action.**

1. The Call to Discipleship, together with all the Baptized

From the very beginning of his Petrine ministry, Pope Francis reminded us that the shepherd must have "**the smell of sheep**" and sometimes walk ahead, other times behind and other times in the midst of the flock. There is no leadership, therefore, that isolates the priest from the People or places him only in front of and ahead of the People!

In his opening message at the Symposium on the Priesthood at the Vatican on February 17, 2022, Pope Francis said, "We should never forget that each particular vocation, including that of Holy Orders, is

a completion of baptism.” And, as on other occasions, he warned against clericalism: **“It is always a great temptation to live a priesthood without baptism –in other words, forgetting that our primary vocation is to holiness.”** We must, in fact, be Christians before being priests, witnesses before teachers, we must first of all make the paschal mystery our way of life which, later on, we are also called to celebrate.

It is not by chance that the *Ratio Fundamentalis* on priestly formation in 2016 strongly emphasized on the dimension of discipleship. Discipleship must be the soul not only of initial formation, but also characterize the entire span of priestly life.

But what does this mean? I would like to illustrate this concretely. We constantly need to ask ourselves: Am I poor like Jesus, without attachment to things and comforts? Am I chaste like him, transparent in relationships? Am I obedient to the Father’s plans or do I follow my personal plans and aspirations?

When Pope Francis invited me to come to Rome, he helped me make an important decision in this regard. Leaving my homeland, leaving the new diocesan curia that I was building and many pastoral initiatives well under way, leaving, above all, many relationships and good friendships, was a beneficial test for me. Whether I liked it or not, I was surrounded by many facilities: the car with the driver, the secretary, the nuns ..., everyone and everything available, at my service. Not getting used to this and maintaining evangelical simplicity was a constant struggle.

We read in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *“Pastores Dabo Vobis”* of St. John Paul II: “The priest - like every other member of the Church - ought to grow in awareness that he himself is continually in need of being evangelized” (n. 26). In this regard, it has always helped me to examine my life very concretely with the Word of God; not only meditate on it, but to commit myself in living it, and every evening to examine myself on how I have lived God’s Word. And it has helped me a lot to do this together with others who were also eager to live the Gospel in their life seriously. How many times have they been an example for me, a mirror and a constant encouragement!

2. The Call to the Washing of the Feet: The Ministry as a Service

As a student, the scene of Jesus in the Upper Room has always impressed and challenged me: the Washing of the Feet. It is not just an episode to be commemorated on Holy Thursday or to be placed as the image on a souvenir prayer card of the first mass, but an indispensable antidote to the various forms of clericalism that do so much harm to the Church.

In his speech on the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis has reiterated in continuity with the Council that in the People of God, “within the Church, no one can be “raised up” higher than others. On the contrary, in the Church, it is necessary that each person “lower” himself or herself, so as to serve our brothers and sisters along the way.” And he explained: “But in this Church, as in an inverted pyramid, the top is located beneath the base.” “Consequently, those who exercise authority are called “ministers”, because, in the original meaning of the word, they are the least of all” [...] “Jesus who at the Last Supper bent down to wash the feet of the Apostles” (cf. Jn 13: 1-15) [...]. Let’s never forget this! For the disciples of Jesus, yesterday, today and forever, the only authority is the authority of service, the only power is the power of the cross.”

“Like in an inverted pyramid”: it’s a striking image! It does not want to question the hierarchical order of the Church, but it specifies, however, the radical novelty of this order which must be everything - and to all effects - service.

The scene of Jesus washing the Apostles’ feet seems not to be a good idea. He takes off his tunic, girds his apron, washes the feet with his hands. Following his example means sweating, rolling up sleeves, moving legs. It entails being concrete in serving, being simple.

On a personal note, as rector of the seminary and then as bishop, I experienced that, in certain situations, to create the family of God it could be of great help to go to the kitchen and prepare a good plate of spaghetti for my collaborators or for my guests. Everyone was very happy with it: the collaborators, personalities from the civil world, former prisoners. On several occasions, with this initiative, I also went out on TV!

Serving different persons, serving people, also means discovering and valuing the gifts and talents present in the People of God and resisting the temptation of a false protagonism. The Council has

already exhorted us in this regard. Priests - says the Decree "*Presbyterorum Ordinis*", "Should uncover with a sense of faith, acknowledge with joy and foster with diligence the various humble and exalted charisms of the laity" (n. 9). How good is it to recognize in the laity their professional ingenuity, their creativity and competence, to encourage them in their commitment, also in politics!

3. The Call to Life and Common Synodal Action

I am concerned that often, too often, we speak of the priest in the singular, while the Council nuances this word almost exclusively in the plural. As priests we are a body of persons with the bishop - the presbyterium - just as the bishop is himself part of the episcopal college. Not surprisingly, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "*Pastores Dabo Vobis*" has reiterated that the ordained ministry has "radical communitarian form" and can only be carried out as "a collective work" (n. 17).

I am concerned about the loneliness of many priests. Seminary formation takes place in community, but afterwards we risk too much of each going our own way, while we are called to be the first witnesses of the new commandment of Jesus. In fact, "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35).

How important it is, in today's fragmented society, **to be a family**: to know who we belong to! And, how important it is for priests to be a family! Yes, called to celibacy for the Kingdom, not to be alone, but to be brothers, to be friends; to renounce the joy and gift of having a natural family, in order to form and serve a bigger family: the family of the sons and daughters of God, all brothers and sisters!

I am grateful that as a seminarian and as a priest, I have always been able to live the life of communion with others even to the point of sharing not only my spiritual experiences but also my goods. In general, priests are used to sharing but not pockets: money! And I am also grateful for the fact that since 2001 most of the Korean bishops meet four times a year, not for a meeting as the Bishops' Conference, but simply to live communion with each other, as brothers and as friends.

It is undoubtedly important that every priest allows himself to be accompanied, not only spiritually but also humanly and pastorally. And the gift of priestly friendship is precious. The Church's

Trinitarian DNA, however, requires more. In fact, how can we speak about a God who is communion, and how can we be servants and builders of a Church that is communion, if we ministers do not live among ourselves and with the bishop, and with the entire people of God, a profound and living Communion? How then could we speak of ourselves as “a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all humanity” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 1)?

What Kind of Formation?

At this point, the fundamental coordinates for priestly formation are already clearly outlined. I highlight three of them here, referring to “*Pastores Dabo Vobis*” and the new *Ratio Fundamentalis* and at the same time to Pope Francis:

- 1. The seminary, school of the Gospel**
- 2. Home and school of communion**
- 3. Evaluation of the vocation in view of the mission.**

1. The Seminary, School of the Gospel

Let’s face it frankly: the seminary is not a factory for priests, but a place to learn how to live as followers of Jesus! “In its deepest identity - affirms the apostolic exhortation “*Pastores Dabo Vobis*” - the seminary is called to be, in its own way, a continuation in the Church of the apostolic community gathered about Jesus, listening to his word, proceeding toward the Easter experience, awaiting the gift of the Spirit for the mission” (n. 60; my highlight).

Thus, “*Pastores Dabo Vobis*” characterizes the seminary as a “**school of the Gospel**” and states: “before being a place, a material space, it represents a spiritual space, an itinerary of life. [...] Being formed in the priesthood means getting used to giving a personal answer to the fundamental question of Christ: “Do you love me?”. The answer for the future priest can only be the total gift of his own life” (n. 42).

It is obvious that this itinerary of formation does not begin in the seminary, but already in the family and in the communities of origin. If these are alive, marked by the life of the Gospel, authentic vocations are born. And it is also clear that this journey cannot end with priestly

ordination. Here we are faced with a guiding principle that runs through the whole *Ratio Fundamentalis* for priestly formation: "The formation of priests is the continuation of a single "journey of discipleship," which begins with baptism and is perfected with the other sacraments of Christian initiation, is welcomed as the center of one's life at the moment of entering the seminary and continues throughout one's life" (RFIS, Introduction; my emphasis).

The importance of permanent or ongoing formation is important not only in the Church but also in society. It is ongoing because we can never say that we have "made it," we always have something to learn. And this is all the more so when we follow Jesus. "Repent and believe in the Gospel" is his kerygma that reaches us every day (Mk 1:15).

Pope Francis is very clear on this point. I still got his homily in my ears during the last Chrism Mass: "At the end of the day, we do well to gaze upon the Lord, and to let him gaze upon our hearts and the hearts of all those whom we have encountered. Not as an accounting of our sins, but as a loving act of contemplation, in which we review our day with the eyes of Jesus, seeing its graces and gifts, and giving thanks for all that he has done for us. But also, to set before him our temptations, so as to acknowledge them and reject them. As we can see, this requires knowing what is pleasing to the Lord and what it is that he is asking of us here and now, at this point in our lives. And perhaps, if we meet his gracious gaze, he will also help us to show him our idols. The idols that, like Rachel, we have hidden under the folds of our cloak (cf. Gen 31: 34-35). Allowing the Lord to see those hidden idols - we all have them; all of us! - and to strengthen us against them and takes away their power."

If we do not want to fall into idolatry, the clear choice of God alone and his Gospel must be the basis of our Christian and priestly life. No room for self-referentiality, not even in the name of the gift of the ministry! This was the strong realization of the venerable François-Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan, when, after years of great activity and fruitful episcopal ministry, he suddenly found himself locked up in prison. What remains and what only matters? God and not the works of God!

Gradually, this School of the Gospel must lead us to strip ourselves of all glory (cf. Phil 2) in order to configure ourselves more and more to Jesus who gave his life as a ransom for all (cf. Mk 10:45; 1Tm 2, 6)

and thus generated the new People of God (cf. Jn 16:21). Jesus, Crucified, Forsaken and Risen, is the incomparable model of every Christian and in a particular way of us priests: the Priest par excellence.

2. Home and School of Communion

At the service of a Church which is communion and whose mission consists in generating communion, the communitarian dimension of vocation and priestly formation cannot be left to chance. We know how many problems - and also how many abuses - come from the loneliness and individualism of priests, from the difficulty of opening up with trust to a spiritual companion and from the inability to speak to others about one's own experience of God, from the struggle of living fraternal relationships, marked by the right amount of closeness and distance, between priests and laity – all of these aspects must be carefully given attention in priestly formation. But here is a crucial question that challenges us; a question that I often ask myself together with the bishops when they come to talk about the problems of seminaries and priests: who do seminarians look up to if not priests, starting with their formators? And who do priests look up to if not bishops? Is there communion, a fraternal life among formators and among us bishops?

But we need to broaden our gaze even further. God himself is undoubtedly the first agent of priestly formation, "The patient and merciful craftsman of our formation." But as already expressed by the wisdom of the Fathers: "No one can have God as Father unless he has the Church as Mother." It is in the bosom of the People of God and together with the People of God that all Christian vocations are formed. I think that, in the years to come, we will still have to reflect a lot more on this.

The primacy of the action of the Holy Spirit - says *Ratio Fundamentalis*, "Calls for a reciprocal listening and cooperation between members of the ecclesial community, priests, deacons, consecrated persons" (n. 125). We are increasingly aware that, for a balanced and solid formation and in particular also for formation in celibacy, the contribution of all the members of the People of God is needed: men and women, priests, lay people and consecrated persons.

On a personal note, let me mention that some nuns who cared for me, made me discover my vocation and who encouraged me with maternal solicitude to cultivate the seeds of the vocation that they recognized were planted in my heart by the Lord. I will be grateful to them forever.

3. Evaluation of the Vocation in View of Mission

Finally, the missionary dimension of formation. The Greek word *apostoloi* means “sent” – missionaries. The Acts of the Apostles (cf. 1, 8; 2, 32; 3, 15, etc.) make it clear that to be missionaries means to be “witnesses” -- *mártýres*. The history of the Church in my land has always reminded me of this martyrdom: we have many martyrs and even the first Korean priest, St. Andrea Kim, died as a martyr. Even before I was baptized, the middle school and high school I attended were named after his name. There are the origins of my vocation.

The martyrs remind us that one cannot become a priest looking for a position, a refuge, a security. Becoming a priest means being sent as witnesses. Among other things, this requires a great personal integrity, which must be nourished and evaluated during the entire formation process. One cannot be a priest without first being a mature and well-integrated man. Pope Francis, speaking before the Plenary of the Dicastery for the Clergy on October 3, 2014, said: “Please we need to study carefully the journey of a vocation! Examine well if that vocation is from the Lord, if that man called to priesthood is healthy and has a well-balanced personality, and is capable of self-giving, of evangelizing, capable of forming a family yet renouncing this for follow Jesus.”

In today’s pluralistic and fully connected society, a future priest cannot grow in isolation, in a protected space, like a delicate plant that is grown in the greenhouse. It is necessary to be in touch with everyone’s reality, and it is in that context that one must learn, not only how to stand on one’s feet and but also how to share the Gospel.

We read in *“Evangelii Gaudium”*: **“A true missionary, who never ceases to be a disciple, knows that Jesus walks with him, speaks to him, breathes with him, works with him. He senses Jesus alive with him in the midst of the missionary enterprise”** (n. 266). Also, the *Ratio Fundamentalis* reiterates: “This missionary drive concerns those called to the ministerial priesthood even more particularly, as it is the goal and the horizon of all formation” (n. 91).

Becoming a priest means learning to establish relationships and to dialogue with everyone, with a 360° openness, deeply rooted in the Gospel, but also knowing how to discover the good that flourishes in the most unexpected places. Pope Francis writes in *“Evangelii Gaudium”*: **“We need to look at our cities with a contemplative gaze, a gaze of faith which sees God dwelling in their homes, in their streets and squares. God’s presence accompanies the sincere efforts of individuals and groups to find encouragement and meaning in their lives. He dwells among them, fostering solidarity, fraternity, and the desire for goodness, truth and justice. This presence must not be contrived but found, uncovered”** (n. 71).

During my ministry as a priest, I have seen how many fruits this way of approaching people bears. Even as a bishop in the diocese of Daejeon, I tried to journey together with everyone as much as possible. Thus, a network of many other relationships was established—a beautiful friendship with a Buddhist monk. We have repeatedly had very warm and profound encounters. At the moment of saying goodbye before my departure for Rome, he said to me: “His smile conquers everyone!” Then he then sent me a text message: “Now the world becomes his land. There, in Rome, he will live for everyone, he will treat everyone well!” I took it as a mandate, a mission, which accompanies me every day in my new service.

Conclusion

I conclude these reflections by returning back to the Apostolic Constitution *“Praedicate Evangelium”* on the Roman Curia and its service to the Church and to the world. With this document, Pope Francis did not want only to reform the Roman Curia, but also to direct the entire Church decisively towards **evangelization and charity**. Let us pose some questions from some passages in the preamble of the Constitution:

“Praedicate Evangelium” (cf. Mk 16:15; Mt 10:7-8): this is the task that the Lord Jesus entrusted to his disciples. This mandate constitutes “the primary service that the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world” [...] “Our Lord and Master left us an example of this when he washed the feet of his disciples and declared that we shall be blessed if we do likewise” (cf. Jn 13:14-17) n. 1).

In the Church, “mission and communion are so closely united that we can say that the purpose of mission is precisely that of “making everyone know and live the ‘new’ communion that the Son of God made man has introduced into the history of the world” (No. 4).

“Reform is not an end in itself, but a means to give a more convincing witness to Christ; to favor a more effective evangelization; to promote a more fruitful ecumenical spirit; to encourage a more constructive dialogue with all” (n. 12).

My beloved bishops,

I am convinced that we will be able to do all this only if our life is progressively imbued with the Word of God. Only then will we be able to carry out the great task that Pope Paul VI had indicated to us in the Apostolic Exhortation, “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*” and which is particularly relevant for our Asian continent:

“The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore, **every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures.** They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel” (n. 20).

Published October 2022

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158. *Meeting of the Presidents of Doctrinal Commissions under the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences and the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF)*, 15 – 18 January 2019, Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Centre, Bangkok, Thailand by FABC Office of Theological Concerns and Central Secretariat, March 2019
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