

HOMILY

by Most Reverend Jorge Carlos Patron Wong

Archbishop, Bishop Emeritus of Papantla

Secretary for Seminaries

at the

National Conference for the Promotion
of the New *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*

Every Eucharist has a special meaning for each one of us. Let me share with you the meaning I am experiencing in concelebrating this Eucharist with you. To concelebrate the Eucharist with so many bishops, so many priests, religious, lay people from the Philippines, many experience what you have in your heart, what you represent. Because in this concelebration like all the concelebrations we had with the priests and the bishops, we put together the thousands of intentions, the thousands of hopes and dreams of our people – the People of God. Each one of us has in his heart a specific concrete people of the diocese, of one's congregation, or of one's seminary. And we all together offer that to God as a family – as a family of Filipinos. And I really thank you in the name of Cardinal Stella and myself for this great opportunity to experience the beauty of being a family, a priestly family, a family that needs our Church; and to experience this great gift that you have received in the local Church of the Philippines; and how much you can share to the Universal Church.

One of you told me this morning that many of the reflections, discussions and even the moments of prayers are like seeds – “calls” getting into his heart, a priestly heart. And when I was meditating on the gospel for today, it is what actually is. It is what the new *Ratio* and this conference do to us. It makes us conscious of how many good seeds God is sowing in us, in each one of us. The challenges that we have in our missions can be seen like that. He does not cease to sow good thoughts, good desires, good dreams, good projects, good programs, good discussions – good seeds. And every day He is sowing those seeds. The only thing we have to do is just to prepare and to make our land, our humble land, receive those seeds, to make those seeds grow and bear fruit. That is all we have to do. But we can do that with confidence because he is sowing the seeds. He is giving us vocations, the renewal of our clergy, the renewal of our Church, the vision that Bishop Quevedo gave us, the vision of the Church of the Philippines that God wants to build up for our generation today and for the future. Those are the good seeds. And we experience this in a personal and in a communitarian way. Because each one of us experiences a new call – a call within the call.

Yesterday, one of you, a formator, told me: “I never realized that the call to be a formator was a call from God, from his merciful love.” Why merciful love? Because, I

know I am not ready but he wants me to get ready. Maybe I am not the best priest but he wants me to be a better priest. Maybe I do not have the best skills but He wants me to have the skills. It is a call within the call. He started a new charism, a new call, a new seed. And we have been really moved by the Holy Spirit because each one of us has welcomed those seeds and that new call. We have been enabled with the working of the Holy Spirit to say **YES**. I shared with one of you, too, some stories of formators, of priests, and bishops who said yes to any and to every new challenge from the Church. And this is not easy because we have to start a new process of welcoming that call, adapting so as to be a servant of that call.

I humbly share with you my last “call” four years ago. I received a phone call at five o’clock in the morning from the Nuncio asking me to move, to leave my diocese. And at that very moment, I told the Nuncio, “You remember what we have talked about four years ago when I was appointed bishop, that when I was ordained priest and within my priestly formation, I was taught to say YES.” The archbishop who ordained me told me, “Jorge, you are going to be ordained to say yes to everything that God will ask you through the Church.” Say yes, then afterwards find out how you are going to do it.” And so, I said yes and I had to find out how to do it. And I remember the last Mass, the farewell Mass we had in the Diocese of Papantla in a stadium with all the presbyterium, the consecrated people, the seminarians and the thousands of people representing all the parishes. That was the Eucharist that is like heaven. But five hours later that mass, I was in the plane alone with two suitcases flying to Rome to enter for the first time the Vatican Curia. I never, in my life, had been in a dicastery. And I was about to meet Cardinal Stella and my new family. And I remember in the plane, I asked God in tears: “Who is going to be my people?”

When you leave a mission, when you leave a parish, a diocese, you leave a concrete People of God. Concrete people with names, with works, with adventures, with projects. And the question for me is who would be the new people for me because it is impossible to think about a priest or a bishop without a people. We pray, we work, we are for specific people of God! And I remember when I arrived that day in Rome, Cardinal Stella met me at the airport and brought me to the office. That was the first time I entered a dicastery and he introduced me to all the priests and the other archbishop who worked there. Then he gave me a paper with a small signature of Pope Francis. Together with the signature was my name and it says, Bishop Emeritus of Papantla. That is a past! And then archbishop, the secretary of Seminaries for the Congregation of the Clergy. In that moment, the answer to the question started to sink in to my soul. Your new people are the seminarians; the priests.

I am going to be honest with you. The first year in the Vatican was purgatory. I always say to Cardinal Stella, “You know when I die I would either go into hell or to

heaven but not in the purgatory because the purgatory... I am having it now.” But it took me one liturgical year; a whole process of pastoral conversion or spiritual direction to start loving my new people. And now I can humbly say, I no longer feel uncomfortable but excited and passionate for this particular people; for the priests; for the seminarians. Because I can see how God see each priest and each seminarian. Each priest and each seminarian represent a whole diocese; a whole parish; a whole section of the Church. And each priest is loved by God. Each one is loved by God. And that is why he keeps on calling new seeds and this is the experience we live now. So, I know, each one of us, each bishop, each priest who are here is loved by God. And we are called to love our new people: the seminarians, the future priests.

The *Ratio* calls for a renewal of our vocation; to kindle our desire not only to be formators for our future generation but to form ourselves according to God’s will, to Christ’s feelings, to Christ’s heart. And this is one reality that we have to be very sincere before God and before the Church. Say, when we start having this charisms of being formators of future priests, those charisms do not stop when you finish your assignment in the seminary. It will continue your whole life. The new *Ratio* is written in this way. All those visions of the ongoing formation programs that we have to build up for the new generation for all of us priests. Who is going to do it?

We made a research of some young priests that have good pastors in their first assignments. And there was a question that says, “What do you like and what do you lack?” And the lacking, you know what, we were surprised that many of these priests said, “I had a good pastor, a good parish priest but I did not have someone who accompanied me.” The parish priest at the end is full of work about pastoral plans who never spoke about how am I doing. Who has the charism to listen, to make empathy, to accompany a priest? Who can be a formator? We are formed to accompany. Each priest is a person, a beloved son of God and not just a part of an institution. This is the charism we have. Our ministry can build up the ongoing formation. That is why we say that the seminary does not only form the future priests but the seminary forms the future formators of ongoing formation. So welcome to this life-long charism of being always close to our brother priests.

Feel a little bit like the Blessed Virgin Mary! The Blessed Virgin Mary is a model of being an apostle. She never had a direct contact with the crowds that Jesus healed and preached. And she was never in touch with all the crowds than the apostles, the evangelized, the first apostles. But she was very close to Jesus and was very close to the first apostles – the first priests, the first bishops. Our charism as formators should have this Marian outlook; close to Jesus and close to the apostles; close to Jesus... close to the priests; close to Jesus... close to the future priests. May the Blessed Virgin Mary

help us to welcome this new seed of being very close to Jesus and very close to the priests – to the apostles of Jesus Christ.

Message

Thank you Brother priests and bishops for this invitation. I am really loved by God! I'm privileged really by the Church to have this ecclesial experience with you all! Thank you very much! We are, you know, big family. Thank you very much!

You know the fact of being (with) the *Nuncio Apostolico*, the courage of the clergy, the bishops, the priests, the lay people, the religious called together is a great gift ... please continue to be like this. Continue to be like this because we need you in the universal Church, in the universal church ... This family has no fear when we feel all beloved by God and cared for and beloved by our brothers and we experience being in the same boat. The Holy Father represented it, the one who pray and serve like servant for the clergy, congregation, dicasteries and all the bishops. We are in the same boat. I am speaking with the bishops that the best is that we don't have to wait until the National Ratio be published in the Philippines because the *Ratio* has already started to be lived in our hearts, in our lives. So the whole process of writing the *National Ratio* started here, it started in our life. what is the most important part is the Holy Spirit inspires and will inspire our presbyterium and our seminarians to write with their lives the *New Ratio*, to make it not just a document (but) living the ecclesial spirit by having it these days. So thank you very much, you do not know how much you encourage me! One seminarian told me you give me energy, spiritual energy, human energy, good motivations, because the people we pray for, we work for, one day will show who are they. And I think that because now when I think of the Philippines, I don't (only) think of your faces (but also) your hearts, and you, please, when you think about the Congregation for the Clergy, be assured of the prayer, support and friendship of Cardinal Stella, Msgr Patron Wong and all the priests who work in the Dicastery. WE ARE IN THE SAME BOAT, we are part of the team, the team of Jesus Christ. Thank you very much!

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