

Feast of the Visitation of Mary, 31 May 2019

A LETTER FROM THE GENERAL RESPONSIBLE TO THE BROTHERS OF THE WORLD

"The Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you." (John 14:26)

Warm greetings of peace to you, dear brothers,

With all humility, I make a personal confession why it took me so long to write this letter. Many times, I sat in front of my computer not knowing what and how to write. It felt like a pregnant woman about to give birth but her pelvis is too narrow for the new born. I struggled with words but my biggest struggle was the heart, having the right spirit and disposition of a brother. Many of you are mere names to me without faces and stories that we share to qualify our being brothers. I needed the time to ground myself to the Father who has invited me to leave the comfort of my homeland and is sending me as a



missionary brother. I needed moments of nakedness before Jesus at prayer whose Spirit at Nazareth is inviting you and me to this great adventure of downward mobility, living simply but with joy, in ordinariness and obscurity, finding the last place, consumed by the gospel of the greatest as the least, seeing Jesus in the poor, apostolate of goodness, not lording over but serving, to be poor in spirit for the sake of the kingdom. I needed the

space of being rekindled by the spirituality, life and intuitions of Brother Charles through the testimonies of brothers and sisters who are deep into the life and the tradition of the Fraternity. The meeting with the spiritual family at Haiti last April, my visits to the brothers in Haiti, Dominican Republic and the United States and my retreat at a Trappist Monastery in Georgia have been a tremendous help. (These will be the subject of my next letter). Jesus too needed that space in my heart for my conversion because even if I am 30 years in the fraternity and have been in 3 months of Nazareth, I still have unhealthy and



immature ways that may stand in the way of this ministry. Being an unfinished project myself, I need your honest feedback and fraternal advice. Please tell me and I would gladly receive them as a gift for my on-going formation.

As you know, before I was elected general responsible, my world revolved around my little fraternity in a small village, without TV and internet, as a chaplain of a small Carmelite monastery of nuns and dean of studies of a small college seminary, coming from a small diocese in the Philippines. My world was then very small, my way of living very rural and the thought of writing to the brothers all over the world is overwhelming at the least. I thank

the Advocate for enabling me to write. I pray that these same words may not stand in His way of teaching us everything that Jesus wants us to know. I thank you for your generous patience. I am so sorry for those who feel orphaned by my long silence. In my silence, I **whispered** your names in my prayer (thanks to the directory), one day at a time.

Another Look at Cebu Assembly and Beyond

Our Cebu Assembly last January was indeed “a precious manifestation of the Spirit of Pentecost.” My brotherly joy and sincere gratitude to all of you who have prayed for us while in Assembly. To our continental and country responsables with our former general responsables, **Mariano** and Abraham who have travelled to **the** other side of the globe just to be in the assembly, thank you very much. To the previous team - Aurelio, Jean Francois, Emmanuel, Mark and **Mauricio** - for your great planning and hard work before and during the assembly, thank you very much. We can only **build** on what you have generously laboured. Thanks in **particular** to Aurelio for the legacy **project** of **iesuscaritas.org** website and for Jose Alberto Hernandis who is very willing to manage our website. My joy and gratitude to the members of my team with Tony Llanes as my co-general responsible who are very willing to **serve**. Since ours is service to the international fraternity, may I beg you to write to us your concerns, news, invitations, feedbacks, stories. I personally chose them to represent the four continents so that there would be more easy access to news and information. Here are our contact **details**:

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Tony Llanes, stonyllanes@yahoo.com - 63 9183908488;
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Just as you trust us, can we also trust you to help us in this? More than a **top-down** dynamic, we wish to have more dialogue, transparency, reciprocity, feedbacking in our



different levels of communication. For a start, we are **meeting** this 11-18 of October in South Korea and we **would** appreciate **anything** from you – **personal**, local, **national**, **regional** - that you may want us to consider and respond to. You may channel them to me or to **your continental representative** in the team.

Brothers, the **Letter** from Cebu is not a finished document. It is a work-in-progress. May I invite you (and let us be together in this) to make it a subject for personal and fraternity **re-reading** and discussion. In Cebu, we have **identified** and have committed **ourselves** to be **missionary** diocesan priests **inspired** by the witness of Bro Charles. We

have contemplated the realities of our society, church and **fraternities** from the different continents and countries. We have listened to the call of the Spirit to be church in the peripheries (thanks to the **prophetic leadership** of Pope Francis). And from the calls that we heard, we are firmly resolved to concrete and strategic actions for the development of our **society**, church and fraternities.

In your re-reading and discussion, may I invite you to treat the document as a friend whose words are Spirit-filled, transformative and **prophetic**. The reality of violence, terrorism,

injustice, trafficking, serious ecological crisis, migration, globalization of indifference, **fundamentalism**, secularization (the list is too long) is very complex. Yet almost immediately, we tend to project this reality from outside. This **attitude** is not very helpful. We need to be more involved. Asking the Spirit for the gift of courage and humility, we take a long, loving look at our interior structures/subcultures –**values**, mentality, lifestyle, biases, attitude, preferences, wants - as diocesan priests. We name the many subtle ways where we have been part of the problem. We share our realizations to brothers in our fraternity who could help us in our growth. Perhaps, the most beautiful gift we could offer our world today is by owning that we have been a part of the problem. Hopefully, with repentant and transformed hearts, we become part of the solution.

The Spirit is calling us to be a church in the peripheries. Asking the Spirit for the gift of courage and trust, we explore together the peripheries of our soul – the rejected, ugly, despised, deep-seated, hidden, denied parts of **ourselves** that we need to claim, own, accept, embrace and heal. Here, we need the intimacy of our fraternity to be able to share our deepest wounds without being judged. As need be, we may consult a professional for our on-going growth and recovery. Then, the next time we go to the peripheries, we are different. We are more interiorly free and happy **missionaries**. The sad thing is when we go with our unhealed wounds and unreal selves. We go blind, needy, full of ourselves and we do not even know that. We forget the agenda of Jesus and the Kingdom. How can the blind lead another blind? I am convinced that the best gift of mission we can give to the people of God, **especially** to the poor is our attentiveness to our on-going transformation as missionary disciples of Jesus.

Brothers, in Cebu, we saw how we **all struggled** with the desert day and review of life. We need to treat this fact not as a conclusion but as a starting point. The conclusion is quite obvious and we need to be honest about it. It means poor quality of our **meetings**, our relationships, our **ministries** and even our prayer. This is our poverty and our lack of attentiveness to



the essentials. This is also our path to **liberation** and **wholeness** if we want it. We need a firm **resolve** to **commit** to a **regular** and quality time of solitude in the **desert** where the Divine Therapist **could transform** us and make us whole. Our review of life is not a mere report of our lives and ministries, no **matter** how honest we are. Rather, it is a place of encounter with the Spirit who enables us to see our lives as God sees us. Our **fraternal sharing** is a real place of **heart-to-heart** meeting. In the regularity of such meeting, we grow **together** as soul **brothers** - more trusting, honest, intimate, truthful, less judgmental,



pretentious and defensive, more caring and **committed** to each other's on-going growth as beloved disciples of Jesus at Nazareth inspired by Bro **Charles**. This witness of **fraternity** is for me a good vocation campaign.

Come, O Holy Spirit, Come

Allow me to speak a little about the coming Pentecost feast. The Acts of the Apostles records, *“When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the spirit enabled them to proclaim.”* (Acts 2:1-4)



With due respect to our bible experts, especially Emmanuel Asi, may I invite you to meditate with me this text. It seems that the favourite place of the Holy Spirit is when persons meet as an intentional community of friends, brothers, ((including sisters) believers of the Risen Christ. At its core, a community, **different** from a crowd, is a firm resolve of every member to ceaselessly work for what unites

rather than what divides, mindful that everything is a gift and that there is only One Giver. Though we struggle with differences (mind you, it is always a tough one) but we keep coming and falling into the Source that unite us. Every time we pray, *“Come O Holy Spirit and renew the face of the earth,”* we are praying what Jesus the High Priest dream of the world, *“Father, that all may be one just as you and I are one.”* (Jn. 17:21) The Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life (as we profess in the creed) infinitely animates, enables, transforms and gathers all of creation so that it becomes one living image of unity in the Trinity just like in the beginning. The whole earth, not just the human world, as Pope Francis fondly calls, becomes our common home where life in all its **forms** is **revered** as sacred and a gift. When Paul teaches the community at **Philippi** *“to put all things under Christ,”* (2:10) Christ is the universal reference point of everything and not just for Christians. To be men and women of the Spirit, then is to always work for what **includes** rather than what excludes, for dialogue, for universal fraternity with everything that is.

Jesus' name for the Spirit is the Advocate. Jesus promised the Advocate who **will** teach us everything that we need to know. In legal terms, the advocate means a defence attorney. The Spirit is our defence against the spirit of the Evil One operating in our world today, be it in political and economic structures, in interpersonal, familial or communal relationships even in the



subcultures within church and religion. It is very cunning and deceptive, always disguised as good and even as license to do evil in the name of God. The text tells us that the coming of the Invisible Spirit takes the **visible** form of **tongues** of fire resting on the head of each of the apostles gathered. We pray for that fire to rest on each of us “to transform our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh” and make us more able to discern very well where evil lies from good. May the fire of Truth rekindle our hearts with a passion for Jesus and the Kingdom. The other visible image of the Holy Spirit is a strong wind that fills the entire place of those gathered. We pray for that strong wind to topple down and transform hearts and institutions hardened by indifference, violence, **hatred**, **resentment**, exclusion that **only**

fragments God's creation. May the Spirit who is a strong Wind widen the spaces of every human heart to include the poor, the marginalized and the stranger in the family of God's beloved children. May our fraternities be schools of the Spirit so that we become passionate yet gentle disciples of Jesus at Nazareth in our violent and fragmented world as inspired by Brother Charles.

Brother Charles, the Universal Brother

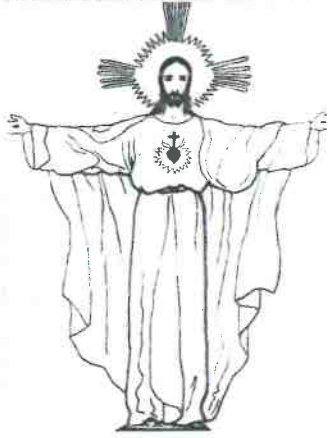
Finally, a note on Brother Charles. Early this year, Little Sister Kathleen of **Jesus** published a book of the same title. It contains the major themes and I love how it is written. Thank you very much, Kathleen. As you already know, Brother Charles - his life, message, intuitions – should occupy a significant space in our on-going formation as diocesan priests. It is what qualifies us. The more we know him, the more we know Jesus, his Beloved. Brother Charles is not just some icon to be venerated. He is a living call, a tangible point person in our deep longing to follow Jesus.



On the call to be universal brother, Little Brother Antoine Chatelard points out, "It's first about being a brother, before thinking about being universal." In the life of Brother Charles, the intuition to be a universal brother first happened in October of 1901, as Sr. Kathleen narrates, when Brother Charles settled at Beni Abbes. Through the generosity of his cousin Marie, he was able to buy a piece of land **strategically** located halfway between the walled local villages and the French garrison. He built, **through** the help of the French army, a little monastery bounded by lines of big stones. And this is the key. "He himself would rarely go beyond it but anyone could enter. He wished to be a universal brother in a context of conflict involving **many** opposing parties." (p.16).

That was a moment of insight! The call to be universal **brother** is first and **foremost** the **call** to be a brother. In Brother Charles, to be brother is to stand in the in-between, (not black or white but gray) in the **middle** (not the same with being at the center) of many opposing parties. A brother is immersed, rooted, right in the midst of Reality with all its paradoxes, tensions and complex cross-points and he never leaves his stance. If he leaves and moves off the middle, he becomes particular. In embracing one, he excludes the other. He is not some fence-sitter who does not have any concrete stand on any socio-political-**economic-cultural** or even **church** issues. On the contrary, he is grounded on what is going on and he stands in the middle of everything. When he opts for the poor and the **marginalized**, he **includes** the rich. **Precisely**, it is only in being at the middle of things that he can embrace all things as universal brother. And it is only then, with this evolving insight that Brother **Charles** began to call his house not a hermitage (living under a cloistered monastic rule of life) but a fraternity where anybody could come and is welcome. He **painted** at the **ceiling** of his fraternity the **image** of the Sacred Heart of Jesus whose arms are wide open to anyone who comes. His consuming closeness with the Sacred Heart of Jesus leads him to imitate Jesus Caritas, the **Universal Brother par excellence** of which he is only a humble witness **pointing** to Jesus.





Brothers, thank you very much for your generous patience in reading along my rather long letter. I continue to hold you, your fraternities and your dioceses in my prayer one country at a time. Please pray for me also your little servant-brother.

With my fraternal embrace in Jesus Caritas,



Eric Lozada