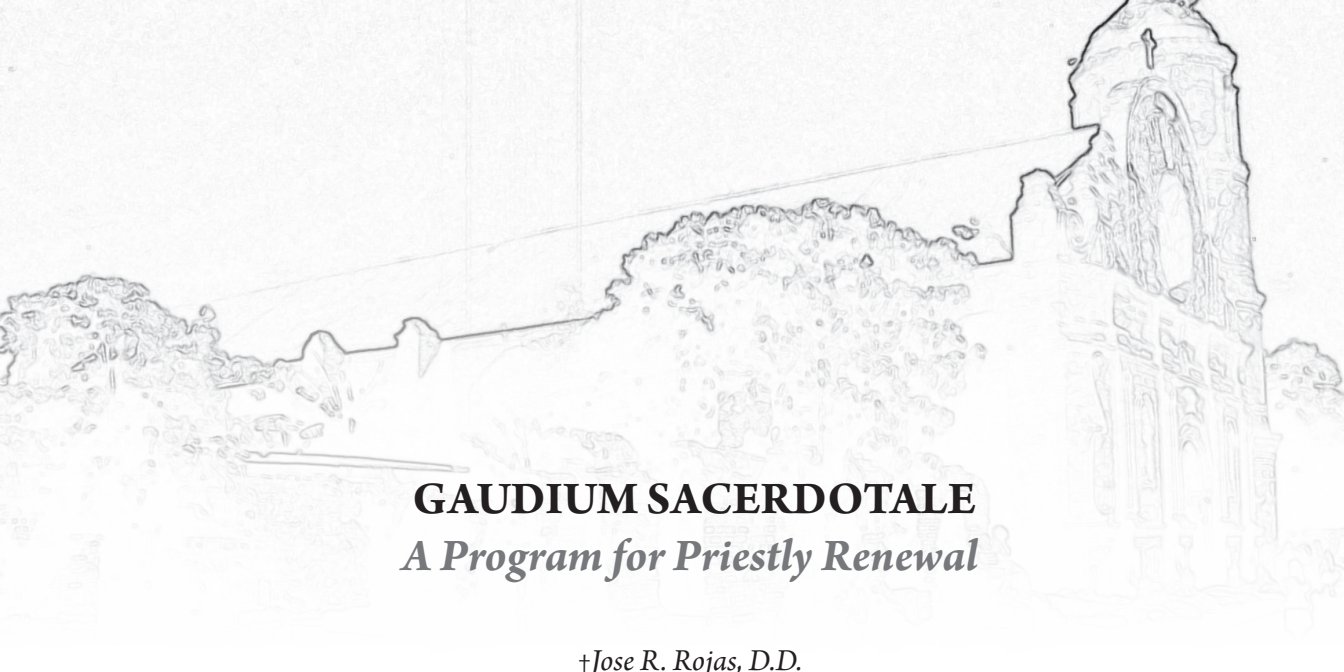




## GAUDIUM SACERDOTALE

### *A Program for Priestly Renewal*

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Established in 2007 by Archbishop Leonardo Z. Legaspi, O.P., this program of renewal for priests aims to assist priests who desire to rekindle their zeal and enthusiasm in their priestly life and ministry. The Archdiocese of Caceres used to send priests to different centers of priestly renewal in the country until this renewal program was conceptualized. Prior to this, the Archdiocese had sent two of its priests to take part in the CBCP-sponsored Assist Ministry Program for Priests in the hope that upon returning, they could initiate themselves a similar program of renewal as part of the continuing formation of priests in the Archdiocese. Nothing to this effect, however, immediately materialized until then Auxiliary Bishop of Caceres, Bishop Jose R. Rojas, organized a team of committed talk-givers, spiritual directors, guidance counselors and psychologists, including those priests who had been trained by the Assist Ministry and the graduates of other renewal programs elsewhere in the country. Bishop Rojas subsequently formulated a program which he named *Gaudium Sacerdotale*, drawing inspiration from the title of the book, “The Joy of Priesthood”, written by Stephen Rosetti of Saint Luke Institute in Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A. The content, however, of this program does not necessarily reflect the philosophy behind the programs offered by the American-based institute. The first batch of *Gaudium Sacerdotale* participants included ten priests of the Archdiocese of Caceres. Since then, *Gaudium sacerdotale* has evolved from being an archdiocesan to a regional program of renewal for priests in Bicol. The program is now on its fourth year of implementation. (F. Tordilla)

**Keywords:** *Gaudium Sacerdotale, Archdiocese of Caceres, priestly renewal program, renewal program for priests, assist program, the joy of priesthood*

## Introduction

**G**audium Sacerdotale is basically a renewal program for priests. The focus of its *vision* is the priest who rediscovers the “joy” of his priesthood and thereby finds satisfaction once more in his being a priest and in the things that he does as a priest. The program is therefore meant for those priests who seem to have lost this sense of joy or for those in whom fulfillment in the priesthood has become elusive and wanting. This may be the result of many *uneventful* years in the ministry, during which time everything may have become routinary, meaningless and unrewarding, or the consequence of a serious *crisis* the priest has had the misfortune of having fallen into.

The underlying presupposition of the program is that the priest who experiences joy in his priesthood would not seek fulfillment elsewhere, especially in things not compatible to the priesthood. Furthermore, if joy is revived and rediscovered, zeal and enthusiasm in the priestly ministry are also rekindled. It is hoped that this vision is attained within the atmosphere of prayer and reflection, and within the context of priestly fellowship, solidarity and charity.

As a renewal program, *Gaudium Sacerdotale* is for *all priests* who find themselves in such circumstances described above, irrespective of age, number of years spent in the ministry and any pre-condition. The priest-participant need not be in such problematic situation that might require outright professional intervention. In fact, every priest is encouraged to undergo the experience, if only to help him sustain the *joy of the priesthood* in his ministry, if not to rediscover it when there are circumstances in his life pointing to his having lost it or even only to indications that he is beginning to lose it.

The program, however, it must be said, is designed in a particular way to assist priests who have become unhappy in their priesthood or who have lost the sense of meaning in what they are doing as priests because of special human, emotional, spiritual and vocational needs and issues, and who thereby seek happiness and fulfillment elsewhere, usually in things or in situations that are alien to the priesthood itself.

Inevitably, the program, as in the CBCP-sponsored *Assist Program*, also addresses issues of individual priests that have an affective or emotional component and in the course of the program offer them assistance in confronting and resolving these psychosexual issues, be they those involving *abuse* and *boundary violation of others* or not, in a process-oriented way.

A deepening of one's conscious relationship with God, coupled with a humble self-acceptance based on a more profound knowledge of oneself, is considered an

essential and integral part of the whole process of renewal. For individuals in crisis, the program is eventually meant to facilitate *healing* and *growth* and thereby help them in transitioning back to the diocese (community) of origin and support recovery.

The program consists of three integrated phases: Orientation and Preparatory Phase, Forty-Day Residential Phase and Continuing Care Phase.

### **The Orientation and Preparatory Phase**

In this first phase of the program, individuals are helped in making a decision regarding the possibility of entering the second phase of the program (i.e., forty-day intensive residential phase). Each individual prospective participant is asked to attend a monthly recollection that could last for a year, immediately after a decision has been made. During this preparatory phase, the individual will be asked to take several psychological examinations to initially determine pre-dispositions and individual needs, thus at once *diagnostic*. The results of the examinations will serve as a guide for the Program Director and his staff in assessing individual situations and circumstances and in deciding what sort of intervention might be required, contingent upon the prospective participants' peculiar conditions. Taking the psychological exams is thus an absolute requirement for entering into the program.

The themes for the recollections vary as the case may be, but those which are prerequisite include: a) *Introduction to the Program* (this serves as an orientation); b) *Dynamics of Sharing* (building trust and confidence among the participants themselves, and between participants and the staff); c) *Vocation Story* (charting the story of one's journey into the priesthood so as to reminisce what it was that attracted him to the priesthood); d) *Sexual History* (an initial sharing about one's growth towards awareness of sexual identity and sexual expression); and e) *Psychology of Motivation* (based on motivational theories, participants are asked to examine what their motives are in joining the program, and to purify these motives when these are seen to hinder them from truly benefitting from the renewal experience).

During the preparatory phase, it is hoped that the participants get to know each other well and begin to develop friendship, fellowship and solidarity among themselves, and be able to feel at ease with one another and shed off inhibitions, as this is prerequisite to openness in the sharing sessions. Most important of all, it is also during the preparatory phase when participants get acquainted with their guidance counselors and spiritual directors, and are encouraged to build a relationship of mutual trust and confidence with them.

## Forty-Day Residential Phase

### 1. Description

The second phase of the program consists in a *forty-day residential phase* which is actually an *intensive psycho-spiritual retreat*. It is patterned after the *forty days* and the *forty nights* Jesus spent in the desert in prayer, thus also corresponding to the number of days that constitutes the season of *Lent*. There is some symbolism involved in this arrangement. If Lent is the time in the liturgical year devoted to fasting, penance and prayer, the residential phase is also meant to evoke the same spirit of these religious practices, and while Lent leads to the *joy of Easter*, the forty days of prayer and reflection spent during the residential phase should also lead to the rediscovery and reliving of the *joy of the priesthood*.

In any case, it is during this phase when the participants will be helped in going deep into themselves in self-knowledge and self-acceptance and be able to work on their personal issues and life-concerns in the atmosphere of a caring and faith-filled community. It is hoped that during this residential phase, the participants will grow through three stages: a) initial awareness and acceptance of issues to be dealt with, b) in-depth exploration of issues, and c) working out and implementation of a healthy celibate lifestyle or designing a plan for recovery.

To achieve this, the residential phase includes the following components: a) Individual counseling; b) Group counseling; c) Individual spiritual direction; d) Group spiritual direction; e) Conferences and workshops; f) Spiritual exercises and communal celebration of the liturgy; g) Community activities (e.g. socials, sports, etc.) and bonding.

The topics of the conferences and the content of the workshops are of particular interest. The conferences include such topics as the Joy of the Priesthood, Needs, Pretenses and Defenses, Self-Esteem, Management of Emotions, Theology of the Priesthood, Celibacy, Prayer and Contemplation, Mid-Life Transition, Irrational Belief, Personality Types, Inner Child, Human Sexuality, Boundaries in Ministry, and should there be a need, an optional topic on Dispensation/Laicization. The *workshops*, on the other hand, include: Journaling, Inner Child, Mask-Making, Empty Chair, Sociogram, Genogram and Relapse Prevention.

### 2. How the Various Components Cohere

At the start of the residential phase of the renewal program, the picture of a “joyful” priest is painted (*Joy of the Priesthood*). Here, the ingredients that make for a happy priest are outlined. This is to constitute the background for self-examination

and self-evaluation to assist the participant in discovering what it is to be a truly happy priest. Everything during the residential phase is geared toward this. All the subsequent talks, the periods of reflection, counseling, spiritual direction, prayer time and the other activities comprise the instruments with which the participant will find the mosaic parts that one must put together to create the image of a happy priestly life.

Subsequently, a personal testimony (of one who has undergone the renewal experience himself) is given to offer the participants the inspiration and evoke in them the interest to go through the forty days of renewal and encourage commitment and openness on their part to the healing and saving grace of the merciful Father. Knowing that a fellow priest has benefitted from the program itself might be enough invitation to the participants to at least give it a try and not impede the workings of the Holy Spirit.

Basic to the whole process that the participants will have to undergo during the residential phase is the concept of *wholeness* and *integration*. The concept is then explained outright by way of an analogy. That is, for a picture to be beautiful, all its different parts must be in place. Just as food is truly delicious when every ingredient in its preparation is present and in right proportion, a person is also truly happy when he is proportionately whole.

The next concept that is introduced and explained is that of *needs*. The reason for introducing this concept is that for the person to be whole, he must be able to meet all his *needs*. That is because a need is precisely that which is lacking in a person, which, if not satisfied, will make him tense, restless, despondent, depressed and unhappy. Thus, participants are made to reflect on their needs. To facilitate such reflection, needs are classified into three types: a) *physical*, such as the need for food, shelter, rest, relaxation, exercise, oxygen, sex, and any other activity that helps to maintain a state of physical satisfaction; b) *psychological*, the most acknowledged of which are affection, security, achievement, independence, and status or the feeling of self-worth; and c) *spiritual*, which include the need to believe, love and worship an Absolute Being, to seek and relate with God, to seek transcendence, the need to “live for others”, to be detached and be free, and the need to have a meaning and purpose in one’s life. To be happy and whole, a person must be able to meet these needs. Such is the framework of subsequent discussions and reflections.

As already mentioned earlier, all the activities during the renewal program are geared toward assisting the participants in assessing themselves and discover how they can truly be happy in their priestly life. These activities then are to help the participants recognize their needs, which ones are not being met in their lives and

how to adequately satisfy them, and thus become whole and happy priests. The participants are then encouraged to exert every effort and take every opportunity to examine and evaluate themselves along these lines.

To help them monitor their progress, they are taught how to *journal* their experiences and insights. In order to discover their needs, especially the psychological ones, and how they are coping with them, they are shown how to get in touch with and know themselves (*self-discovery*), how to be aware of themselves (*self-awareness*), and to accept themselves (*self-acceptance*) by:

- a) removing all *masks* (here the participants undergo a workshop on mask-making-removing);
- b) removing all *pretenses and defenses*;
- c) rectifying all *irrational beliefs*;
- d) discovering the *inner child*, that very lovable, appealing, playful and care-free child within each and every person, which can many times be terrible and very difficult to deal with, because of its many tantrums;
- e) managing successfully uncontrolled and uncontrollable *emotions*, both positive and negative; and
- f) overcoming *addictions* through the help of grace.

Still meant to facilitate introspection towards self-discovery, a whole day discussion on *sex and sexuality* is afforded the participants. Such discussion is focused in making the participants realize that sexuality is part of the human make-up and that it is a beautiful gift from God which must be cherished and maturely lived out. For this to happen, sexuality is described as the human person's *yearning for communion* and *capacity to love* that can be expressed not only in exclusively *genital* but also in various *non-genital* all embracing ways. The participants are subsequently accompanied and helped out in charting their way along the *psycho-sexual developmental journey* to see if they have already overcome childhood and juvenile fixations and grown into the integrated adults that they ought to become. This is followed by the discussion on the *sexual deviancy cycle*, detailing the different phases of a cyclical pattern of behavior leading to an illicit relationship in which a priest finds himself trapped. Among several strategies to get out of this trap, two coping mechanisms are proposed, that of overcoming the *problem of immediate gratification* (PIG) and learning the way of *integration* (as distinguished from gratification, repression, suppression and sublimation).

Complimenting this detailed treatment of sex and sexuality are talks on the usefulness of keeping *boundaries* in one's personal relationships and in the exercise of one's pastoral ministry, and how keeping such boundaries leads to a greater sense of self-worth or *self-esteem*.

Going further into the project of self-discovery, another workshop is introduced, the *enneagram*, an exercise in delineating and discovering various personality types. Although not to be taken as an inflexible *straitjacket* as it were, each of these personality types is meant to give the participants a glimpse of who they are in terms of tendencies, dispositions and attitudes. Participants are also prepared for the possible disorientation and resulting disequilibrium in mid-life and how to handle this state in one's life.

In the participants' reflections, especially on their life map, they are led to discover that in all this, the childhood years are acutely crucial to a happy adult life. Many times, traumatic experiences during childhood are so etched in the subconscious, that one still harbors so much hatred and anger within oneself even now. To help the participants to get rid of such hatred, they are asked to go through the activity called *empty chair*. During this activity, the participants are given the opportunity to identify persons who have caused them so much pain and anguish, throwing out in the process any resentments and rancor experienced therefrom, by physically, verbally and emotionally ventilating anger against the person imagined to be sitting on the empty chair. By ventilating such anger, it is hoped that the participants get into the first step of forgiveness and finally be healed by the peace that forgiveness brings.

Related to this is another activity that the participants have to go through, that of *role-playing*, an exercise meant to afford them the occasion to go deeper into the residue of experiences, both from the distant and the recent past, that continue to dictate on their present relationships. Once again, the goal of this exercise is not so much to dwell on the past, as it is to break its negative and destructive influence on the present and thereby throw wide open the door towards the promise of hope in a bright future.

With regard to spiritual needs, the participants are assisted with the tools for satisfying them, in order to attain wholeness (and be a whole person), with talks on *Prayer and Discernment* and *Prayer and Contemplation*. These topics are given concrete expression in spiritual activities that form part of the daily *horarium* itself during the forty days of renewal such as the common recitation of the liturgy of the hours, the holy hour, periods of meditation, and the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

Among the theological topics, those on the *priesthood* and the *vow of celibacy* are reviewed and given new appreciation. It could be that the participants' theology of the priesthood has simply been relegated to classroom instruction and has little to do with how the priesthood is actually and concretely lived that there is a need to revisit it in a way that would make it relevant and useful to the participants' concrete situations. It could also be that the participants' view of celibacy has been too negative

that there is a need to rethink one's understanding and appreciation of it in a more positive way.

Furthermore, activities on time management and life-style check show how at the present time, one actually responds to needs: physical, psychological and spiritual. The participants are guided to reflect on the amount of time they actually spend in satisfying each individual need and therefore on the importance and value they actually give, rightly or wrongly, to each individual need. They are also to evaluate whether the activities themselves that they daily spend time on are appropriate, fitting and proper or helpful to a priest and whether the time they actually spend on each of them corresponds to its genuine importance and value in their lives as priests.

All of these, that is, all insights, reflections and things learned in the conferences and workshops are deepened in *guidance counseling* and *spiritual direction*, be they conducted on an individual basis or in a group. Guidance counseling, both individual and group, should help the participants identify and overcome the obstacles that unconsciously prevent them from satisfying their psychological needs and stunt their growth in emotional maturity. Individual and group spiritual direction, on the other hand, is meant to assist the participants in removing hindrances in their spiritual life and in facilitating spiritual growth. One should not forget that guidance counseling is *problem-solving oriented* and is therefore *shortterm*, while spiritual direction is *growth oriented* and is therefore *longterm*.

Explained this way, everything it is hoped falls into place. It is further hoped that given the whole process, the participants acquire the mosaic pieces to make a beautiful and wonderful mural of a personally happy priestly life, all the ingredients for a truly happy priesthood. It is rightly so, because the priesthood is of paramount importance and value to each and every priest. It is what gives meaning to the life of the priest.

Towards the end of the residential phase, a great task which is not easy remains: that is, to gather and put together – or in psychological language, integrate – all these parts and ingredients to make one whole *gaudium sacerdotale*. The big word is *integration*, which means *the act or process of making whole or entire*. Thus, the task is to integrate one's life, in order to be whole, to be complete, and to be happy, as a priest.

### 3. Conclusion of the Residential Phase

An important question, however, lingers. What is there to integrate, to gather and to put together? The participants are made to realize that the answer to this question is *everything*! That is, everything that, by the grace of God, they have

imbibed and digested during the forty days with the Lord (residential phase). All the discoveries, all the realizations, all the insights, all the experiences, all the emotions! Each one will have to integrate all his needs, be they physical, psychological or spiritual. Each one has to integrate his strengths, weaknesses and limitations. Each one is to integrate all these with his identity as a priest, with the fact that he is a priest, with the strong desire, not only to remain in the priesthood, but to be a happy priest, because that is what God wants him to be: a happy minister in His vineyard, laboring joyfully, together with Jesus, in His saving ministry and in His presence among His people.

This process of integration, it is assumed, has already started during the forty days. Thus, the journey towards wholeness has begun. The participants inevitably ask themselves, *What now? What happens after the forty days? What assurance does one have that he will continue the journey?* Only the participants, of course, can give the answer to these questions. The forty-day renewal is just a beginning; whereas the process of integration lasts a lifetime. The struggle – for a struggle it will most assuredly be – does not end until one has attained complete happiness in the Kingdom.

Before the participants leave to take on the tasks ahead, and to keep their realizations alive, the *Director of the On-going Formation of Priests*, the *Vicar for the Clergy*, or anybody designated by the Superior or Bishop, is invited to participate in a planning conference. In this exercise, the participants do not only evaluate how they spent the whole time during the residential phase but also draw up a *program for life* involving a radical change in lifestyle and in one's pattern of behavior. A primary component then of this program is a plan for the *prevention of lapses and relapse* (i.e. to the *old ways*) similarly and necessarily drawn up by the participants themselves. The participants choose an accountability partner and the members of his support group (both of whom must meet the approval of the superior or the bishop), who are to accompany them in the next phase of the renewal program, the continuing care phase.

### **The Continuing Care Phase**

These are assumptions that form the basis of the next phase of the program, the continuing pastoral care phase. For it could be that after sometime, the priest-participant might begin to think that he is not growing at all. The growth in emotional maturity and spirituality that he desires can seem very slow in coming. He may even slide back and have a relapse. Thus, discouragement can creep in and one is tempted to give up the struggle. Thus, in this next phase, the participant is encouraged not to give up, to just do everything he can, everything in fact that he learned during the

residential phase, and to take all the necessary precautions, keeping one's boundaries clear and intact, and humbly asking for God's help and assistance. During return workshops, sessions will stress the fact that Jesus promised that he will be there accompanying the priest at all times; that he is the strength and hope one can rely on. He has conquered the world and so can the priest, with his help, of course. The priest then during this phase is asked to have faith and put all trust in the Lord.

Initiated the month immediately following the residential phase, the continuing care phase consists of monthly *recollections* and *return workshops* that could last for two years. During this time the project of integration is further laid out for the priest. Most crucial, however, is the continuation of spiritual direction, and if need be, of guidance counseling. If the priest is to grow, the role of the spiritual director is necessary and indispensable.

Important too is the role of the co-responsibility partner and his support group for it is from them that the priest is to draw some strength and encouragement, what might be conveniently called a *ministry of accompaniment*. Not only is the support group expected to provide the priest company, it is also tasked to offer him a medium for an exchange of views and feedback when necessary. It is in this group where the priest must feel free and safe to discuss further his difficulties and problems as he transitions back into the ministry.

During the continuing care phase, a re-entry visit can also be made by one of the program's staff members (preferably the *Program Director*) to see if the environment (*the locus of ministry, that is, if the priest is allowed by his superior to exercise his ministerial faculties*) in which the priest finds himself supports the priest's "program for life" and provides the atmosphere that would allow him to live out his resolutions.

The real substance, however, of the continuing care phase is spiritual direction. It is in the context of spiritual direction that several things need to be pointed out: the need for *sacrifice*, the need for *poverty*, the need for *humility* and the need for *prayer*.

### 1. *The Need for Sacrifice*

First, it will be pointed out to him that the process of integration will demand from him sacrifices – many sacrifices, big sacrifices, painful sacrifices. The priest will have to fill up what is lacking in his life in order to make it whole and complete. He will have to fill up the void in his life in order to be a happy priest.

He will also have to give up certain things – perhaps, many things. For in the course of time, the priest has accumulated a lot of baggage – possessions, activities, attitudes, mind-sets, ambitions, attachments to persons and things, a particular

lifestyle, etc. – things which he thought he needed to fill up the void in his life and which he thought will make him happy, but which in fact he really did not need at all, which actually distracted him and diverted him from his goal of wholeness and true happiness, and which many times became a heavy weight that hindered his progress to maturity and even prevented him from entering through the *narrow gate* (Mt. 7,13-14) into *gaudium sacerdotale*. Then, there are the negative feelings, traumatic experiences, defense mechanisms that the priest must divest himself of. The priest must therefore realize that integration demands sacrifice – lots of it.

This needs to be explicitly pointed out since unfortunately, many young priests today shy away from sacrifice. They say that performing acts of sacrifice and self-denial belongs to the past. They do not even want to hear the word “sacrifice”. Thus, their lives are devoid of sacrifice as they seek pleasure at every turn. On the contrary, the priest in the continuing care phase must realize that the priesthood is a life of sacrifice, a life of following and imitating Jesus crucified and risen. So that, without sacrifice, there can never be real integration; there can never be real happiness.

## 2. *The Need for Poverty*

Spiritual direction must also be able to point out that herein lies the paradox of happiness. Many priests today, both young and old, surround themselves with so many possessions, gadgets, cars and motorcycles, even pets. They think they need these to be happy, that without these, their life will be boring and dreary. It is about time that the priest should realize how wrong this mentality is. For happiness is achieved in having less, not in having more inasmuch as there is only very little that one actually needs, very few essential things in order to be really and truly happy. All the trimmings and trinkets that people adorn themselves and their lives with – these actually hamper – even obstruct – their growth in maturity. As the priest goes over his own past, he sees how true this is. So too does the experience of the forty days of renewal should have proven to the priest. His stay, with all its privations, without the many luxuries and conveniences of life, the priest has been accustomed to, must have been surprisingly and paradoxically, a very happy experience for the priest. What was there – only silence, the intimacy, the poverty, the simplicity of life and the joy of Nazareth. Such experience must be relived during the continuing pastoral care phase.

## 3. *Need for Humility and Kenosis: the Way of Jesus*

Another lesson that needs to be given due attention in spiritual direction is the need for humility, a lesson that is learned from Jesus himself, the only and eternal priest,

*Who, though he is by nature God, did not consider his equality with God a condition to be clung to, but emptied himself by taking the nature of a slave, fashioned as he was to the likeness of men and recognized by outward appearance as man. He humbled himself and became obedient to death; death on a cross. That is why God has exalted him and given him the name above all names. So that at the name of Jesus everyone in heaven, on earth and beneath the earth should bend the knee and should publicly acknowledge to the glory of God the Father that Jesus Christ is Lord! (Phil 2, 6-11)*

The priest must see that Jesus, the Word incarnate, is the most integrated person ever. His person has fully and perfectly integrated his divinity and His humanity. This he achieved precisely by emptying himself, *kenosis*; by not clinging to his godhead and by fully embracing his manhood, so that the two natures were most fully integrated, without one being confused for the other, without any diminishing of either, but each remaining complete and intact. Thus, imperative for effective integration – and a truly happy priestly life – are paradoxically, the spirit of sacrifice, the spirit of poverty and the spirit of humility.

#### *4. Need for Prayer*

Finally, the priest is led from the spirit of humility to a life of prayer. For humility shows one's weakness, limitations and propensity to evil and to sin. Humility should lead one to accept that, of himself, he can do nothing! "Without me, you can do nothing," Jesus tells his disciples (Jn 15, 5). The priest's personal experience must have shown that these words of Jesus are literally, absolutely, ontologically true. Thus, he is to seek assistance and strength from God in prayer, in humble, earnest prayer. One's perseverance in his journey toward wholeness and happiness depends on his prayer life. The priest must be convinced of this fundamental truth. For constant, devout, sincere, earnest, and humble prayer builds up his relationship with God, a relationship of unconditional love and acceptance, an intimacy that will fulfill all his needs.

### **Conclusion**

In a study made in the U.S., it was found that the priests who were leaving and marrying were very often depressed. The priest dropout was most often a man who found himself taken for granted – even forgotten – in a crowded system that sometimes denies the human need for recognition and approval. This may also be

true in the Philippines. But also, perhaps, because, wherever they may be assigned – in small and far-flung *barangay* or coastal parishes, or even in the big city – priests do not feel fulfilled in the priesthood. They feel very frustrated in their work, in their relationship with superiors and peers or with the people they are working for, their parishioners; or perhaps they have poor self-image or low self-esteem and depleted feeling of self-worth because of traumatic experiences in the past, especially during childhood. Then, they begin to think that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. Thus, they try to go over the fence – or around it.

But if a priest is emotionally mature, fulfilled in and by his ministry, regarding himself as a worthwhile person, then he will be a very happy individual indeed. So that, if a priest is able to give love and feels genuinely loved in return, howsoever he may have received this love, but especially during childhood, he will be happy and will need nothing more, not even sex. If a priest has real friends with whom he is able to interact on a deep personal level, and thus be able to love and appreciate himself and others, he will have satisfied his needs. If a priest receives from his brother priests the affection, approval and sense of self-worth so necessary for wholeness, he will be able to sustain the frustrations even of a celibate life. If a priest feels fulfilled in his priestly ministry, he will feel no lack, nothing missing in his life, and so will not crave for things illicit. If a priest regards himself as good and worthwhile, he will not tarnish this self-esteem by violating his vow of celibacy and chastity.

Moreover, and most especially, if the priest genuinely prays, constantly and very deeply, acknowledging his weaknesses and limitations and his need for the help and assistance of God, who will never fail him because of his great mercy, the priest will gladly embrace his priesthood and his chastity as a total offering of himself to the God who loves him so very dearly, he will give himself completely in total dedication and commitment to the mission of bringing Jesus and his saving presence to others, the mission he has received from the God who first gave himself totally and completely to all of humanity.

In the end, integration, total integration, of the self is what each priest needs: to be able to put together all his needs – physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual – into one integrated whole, appreciating each of these in context, as integral parts of the totality of the life and ministry of the priesthood and not separated from it or opposed to it. So that, in the end, it is the priesthood – a priesthood that is lived with and for Jesus – that is the integrating force of the priest's life.

As a program of priestly renewal, it is hoped that *Gaudium sacerdotale* would facilitate this process of integration. It would be a big mistake, however, to think that it is the answer to every case of clerical malfeasance and clerical falling out. Bigger still is the mistake to think that the program offers solutions to every problem

encountered by the priest in his life and ministry and that the program quickly instantiates *miracles* of transformation and conversion. That may very well be the case in some instances, but there is no absolute guarantee that anyone who has undergone the program is no longer vulnerable to possible relapses. For as long as human weakness remains, and that may very well be said of the priest, the possibility is always there for freedom to be abused. If *nine years* or so of seminary formation did not completely succeed in molding the priest into the ideal priest he ought to be, it would be too much to expect a mere *forty days* of renewal to do as much or even more. In the end, *Gaudium sacerdotale* is only a modest attempt to help priests treasure their priesthood by rediscovering the joy that it brings. Its success and everything else about it is ultimately dependent on the love and mercy of Jesus, the eternal High Priest.

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