

Let Not Your Hearts Be Troubled

By Fr. Munachi E. Ezeopu, CSSP

Five-year old Johnny is in the kitchen with his mother who is preparing supper. She asks him to go to the basement and fetch her a can of tomato soup. "It's dark in there and I'm scared," replies Johnny. The mother tries to convince him it is safe to go alone to the basement but without much success. Finally she says "It's all right, Johnny, Jesus will be in there with you." Johnny walks hesitantly to the door and slowly opens it. He peeps inside, sees that it is still dark in there, and starts to go back. Then, suddenly he gets an idea. He opens the basement door a little and yells: "Jesus, if you're in there, would you hand me a can on tomato soup, please?"

Johnny's fear is similar to the fear of the disciples as the time draws near for Jesus to leave them. They are afraid to face the world alone. In today's gospel reading, Jesus does pretty much what Johnny's mother tried to do, namely, convince the disciples that there is no need to be afraid, even when he is not there with them.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled" (John 14:1a). The Greek text shows that the disciples are already afraid and Jesus is asking them here to master their fears. What reason does Jesus give them? It is both simple and profound: **"You believe in God, believe also in me"** (14:1b). It is easy to believe in God, a spiritual being that we cannot see. The challenge is to believe in ordinary, flesh-and-blood human beings whom we know all too well already. The challenge is to believe in the incarnation, that the all-knowing, all-loving, and all-powerful God is present and active in ordinary human beings who are often lacking in knowledge, in love, and in moral strength. You believe in God (that is the easy part), believe also in me, a presumably frail human being (that is the hard part).

The disciples see God in Jesus. So long as he is around, there is no fear. But they do not see God in their fellow disciples. They are just too human, subject to the shortcomings and weaknesses of ordinary mortals. The disciples set Jesus apart. They put him on a different platform from themselves. It is interesting to note that all the reasoning that Jesus offers to persuade them not to fear is pitched on

the exact opposite camp. Jesus is trying to convince them that if God could work through him, Jesus, then God could as well work through any other human being. Jesus places himself on the same platform with them so as to make them believe that God can use them and work through them in spite of their human deficiencies. In fact, in order to drive home this point, Jesus even goes as far as placing the disciples on a higher platform than himself as people through whom God can work: **"Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father"** (verse 12).

Today, many of us are like Philip; our prayer is, **"Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied"** (verse 8). Show us that God is with us in the church. Show us that God is alive and actively involved in events in our world today. What does Jesus answer? **"How can you say, 'Show us the Father?'"** (verse 9) when God is so deeply involved in the events and crises of the church and of the world. You see, the incarnation (God becoming flesh) has removed the wall of division between the divine and the human. The history of God and the history of humanity have become inextricably intertwined. The story of the kingdom of God, which Jesus came to inaugurate, cannot be told apart from with the story of the church in the world. God took a risk when God decided to become human. Whether the divine risk will issue in success or failure is up to us.

When we see things happening in the church or in our world the way they should not, it is not time to blame God for abandoning us to our own whims and caprices. No, God is always with us. It is rather a time for serious soul searching, a time for us as individuals and as a church to ask ourselves: Where did we miss it? How can we get back on God's tracks? What is God saying to us in these events and crises? We should not let our hearts be troubled. We believe in God, let us now believe in men and women made in the image and likeness of God.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Acts 6:1-7 1 Peter 2:4-9 John 14:1-12

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誰看見了我，就是看見了父

蔡惠民 神父

有一個信仰十分敬虔的老先生，夜裡夢見耶穌次日要來拜訪他。老先生從夢中驚醒，非常高興，於是用心地計劃要如何款待耶穌。他費心預備了許多美食和珍貴的禮物等待耶穌的來臨。直到天黑了，耶穌都沒有來，等著等著他睡著了，在夢中聽見耶穌呼喚他，並且謝謝他的招待。老先生納悶地說：「主啊！我等了你一整天，你都沒有來。為何還謝謝我？」耶穌說：「我今天已三次到你家。我就是喝你冰水的郵差，吃你美食的乞丐，和收你禮物的孤兒。」

按宗徒大事錄的記載，執事在早期教會的選立，一方面反映宗徒對團體需要的敏銳，繼而選拔適當的人專責服務。另一方面，宗徒們專務祈禱，服務真道的角色更形明顯，他們不希望因為繁重的庶務而放棄天主聖言。由此可見，執事職務在教會的出現，是一個有別於宗徒，但與宗徒相輔相成的標記，好使教會的聖言宣講與愛德服務互相照明。

在歷史的過程中，執事職務雖然經歷了興衰，但始終不離其愛德服務的特質。近年來，執事職務在西方教會慢慢復興。在禮儀中，他們宣讀福音，服務祭台，間中亦因需要而主持洗禮、婚禮或殯葬禮。在禮儀外，他們則探望病弱、孤寡、囚犯……，從事愛德的見證。然而，兩者比較，執事職務在禮儀中的形象似乎更根深蒂固，以致產生「等」神父的錯覺，失去與宗徒職務不分而有別的微妙關係。

在很多人心目中，教會之所以在宗徒以外選立執事，是因為宗徒人手不足，需要助手分擔宗徒的職務；又或者由於今天絕大部分執事都是已婚人士，無法滿全司鐸職務獨身的要求，只好退而求其次，讓他們以執事的身分，減輕神父的工作。但事實上，教會近年復興執事職務的真正目的，是要讓教會的聖言宣講，不斷成為可見而生活的事實。

在若望福音中，斐理伯要求耶穌將父顯示給他。耶穌對他說：「斐理伯！這麼長久的時候，我和你們在一起，你還不認識我嗎？誰看見了我，就是看見了父；你怎麼說：把父顯示給我們呢？」耶穌是聖言，祂清楚地揭示了父，除了適當的講解外，最重要是祂的整個生活見證。同樣，教會所宣講的聖言，若果沒有具體落實的行動演繹，一切亦只會流於空言。長久以來，教會的宣講予人博大精深，卻缺乏生命觸動的詬病，正是執事職務的長期被忽略，或未能與宗徒職務健康地互相補足的後果。

今天，大部分執事均為已婚人士，他們的背景或訓練固然不能與神父相比，也不應混為一談。執事的神恩正突顯於神父所欠缺的婚姻生活、專業技能、社會閱歷……。他們的服務和臨在，標誌著教會在生活中的見證和實踐，使聖言活現於人間。根據教會聖召和慕道者的經驗，他們與聖言的相遇，或聽到祂的呼喚和邀請，首要是通過朋友、家人的生活見證，而非文字的報道。故此，我們期望執事的職務，在聖言的指引下，能推動和招展教會的愛德服務；反過來，在愛德的服務中，能加深教會對聖言的體味和領會。

最後，復興教會內執事的職務，伯多祿前書提醒我們，並不局限於領受執事聖職。通過洗禮，每一位基督徒都是「特選的種族，王家的司祭，聖潔的國民」。無論有沒有特殊職務，我們都是被召在服務中宣講聖言，就如我們都分享普遍的司祭職一樣，因為教會內成員間的見證都同樣獨特以致不能彼此取代。當主教授予執事福音時，他會誦念以下幾句經文，願藉此彼此互勉：你要信仰你所宣講的，要教導你所信仰的，要實行你所教導的。

摘自「公教報」