

Homily of Archbishop Kurian Mathew Vayalunkal
Apostolic Nuncio to Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

Holy Spirit Seminary, Bomana

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Dear Rev. Fathers, Rev. Sisters, Seminarians, my dear sisters and brothers in Christ, and loving children.

We are assembled together to celebrate the EUCHARIST. The word Eucharist comes from the Greek word *eucharistia*, which means “thanksgiving”. The primary attitude of a Christian who celebrates the Eucharist is that of thanksgiving!

Wesley, the founder of Methodist Church, once met the gate keeper of his college very late in the evening and had a conversation with him. Wesley discovered that the man had only one overcoat, and except for a glass of water had no nourishment, and eaten nothing. Yet his heart was full of gratitude to God. Wesley asked him: “You thank God when you have nothing to wear, nothing to eat, and no bed to lie down; what do you thank Him for?” “I thank Him,” answered the porter, “that He gave me my life and being, and a heart to love Him, and a desire to serve Him.”

Dear friends, in today's readings we talk about an attitude of gratitude. Very often we are blind towards the many blessings that God daily showers upon us. We grumble on what is lacking in our life; we complain on our inconveniences and difficulties in life. But we forget that God, the Merciful Father, takes care of us each and every moment of our life. He blesses us far more than we realize and far more than we deserve.

In the Gospel we heard the story of Jesus cleansing the ten lepers. The bible says: “*As [Jesus] was entering a village, ten lepers met him. They stood at a distance from him and raised their voice, saying, "Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!" And when he saw them, he said, "Go show yourselves to the priests." As they were going they were cleansed.*” The ten who acted in faith were healed, but just one came back and praised God and was grateful. Jesus asks him, “*Where are the nine?*” Then Jesus told the leper who came back, “*Your faith has made you well*”

This story is an important one, and we could spend hours and hours meditating on it. I would like to point out particularly four lessons from this story:

1. Like these lepers, ***let us accept our states of life as they are***. We may not be lepers physically. But very often we are lepers spiritually; we are sick with sins. Just as this awful disease of leprosy separated the leper from the community, sin causes distance and rupture in human relationships, often among family members. Just as only God could heal this terrible disease, so only God can heal and cleanse the human heart from the awful disease of sin. The first step to receiving God's blessings is to acknowledge your desperate condition before Him. We have the tendency to refuse our real situation. We try to justify ourselves by saying: "look... I may have my faults—after all, I'm only human—but I'm not a terrible sinner. I'm basically a good person!" The lepers in the Gospel could have thought in the same way: "We may be sick, but we're not all that bad," then they wouldn't have cried out to Jesus for mercy.

2. Here comes the second lesson: Like the lepers ***let us call out to Jesus the Master of Mercy***. The lepers "stood at a distance from him and raised their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!" We must do the same. Cry out loudly... Jesus... I am a sinner, I need your mercy. I am sure that the gracious Lord will never turn a deaf ear to a cry like that! He will listen to our prayers. We acknowledge our sinfulness, but we trust in His great mercy. One thing is very clear that our God is generous in granting mercy. If we call out from the bottom of our hearts, he will listen to us.

3. The third lesson: ***Let us respond to God with obedient faith***. Something unusual happened in this story. Generally, we see Jesus healing people and telling them to go and show themselves to the priests. But here he is not healing them in the first place, he tells them to go and show themselves to the priests. I think it was a real test of faith for them to go without any evidence of healing. But they never questioned him. Intellectually speaking it is a stupidity. But they just accepted what Jesus said and they obeyed what he asked them to do. It is a manifestation of real faith. Yes, what we think as stupidity is the right thing in the eyes of God. Don't forget the saying that "God upsets *our* plans to setup *his* plans; we see the present and plan the future, but God sees the future and plans the present." The only condition to receive God's healing for our leprous souls is that we take Him at His word, and believe in Him unconditionally.

4. The fourth lesson: ***Let us respond as the one grateful leper did: glorify God at the feet of Jesus with thankful hearts***. Only a thankful heart can glorify God. While the other nine of them ran to see their families or friends, only this one came back running, glorifying God and thanking Him. Thanksgiving is an act of humility. It acknowledges our debt to the other person. Every day we should be filled with gratitude for all that the Savior did for us even if we were spiritual lepers before Him. Let's all learn from this thankful leper how to respond to God's blessings, especially to the blessing of

salvation. We should join him in glorifying God at the feet of Jesus with thankful hearts.

Dear sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ, we all must have this thankful heart, especially we priests and seminarians. We have a lot to thank our Lord. He is very kind to each and every one of us. He showed his mercy in its fullness.

Dear Seminarians, this is the second time I come to this beautiful chapel to celebrate Holy Mass with you. Last time I met you all as the members of the CTI; today I talk to you as the Seminarians of the Holy Spirit Seminary. Why are we here? What made you to come and stay in this Seminary? It is your vocation that brought you here. It is not something that we can demand for, instead, it is a gift given to us. Yes, the vocation to priesthood is a gift God gives to some for the good of all.

My dear brothers, our call to priesthood is *to give our life to Christ forever*. It is not a temporary arrangement - not something for the time being. You can't say that I will offer my life to Christ as his priest for few years and then I will look for something else. This is a dangerous mentality and this culture of the temporary is a dangerous situation now a days. This problem is everywhere today. Look into the families. People are afraid to make definitive commitments. Everything for them is temporary or short lived. There are people who marry for some time and then change the partner and go for another marriage. The situation is dangerous because one does not make a decision once and for all. But in the case of priesthood you can't do it. Your decision is forever. You can't change your decision every 3 years or five years. Priest is a priest forever. If we are not convinced of this, then this is not a place for us. As Pope says, religious or seminary life is not a refuge and consolation in the face of a difficult and complex 'outside' world.

This vocation should transform us. You are not any more the old person. You are a new person with the imprint of that "call" on you. So you can't behave as you have had behaved before. This doesn't mean that you should lose your culture or identity. It doesn't mean that you should fully neglect or abandon your family or village. Let me explain: When a young man joins the military... what happens to him?. He has to go through specific training and he has a rule of conduct. He can't walk around in the military camp as he would have behaved in his village. He has to learn how to march, how to speak the language of a military personal; he must learn how to use the military equipments properly, he must learn how to behave in front of his superiors, he must learn how to work in a team and live in a community etc. Yes, even in the seminary life there is a specific code of conduct and life style. There is a certain discipline which demands rigorous observance. So formation is a must and is very important for future priests. Your professors and formators

are here to help you in this transformation. They are experienced people and you should follow their instructions and guidance.

This formation must bring you happiness. You must be people with smile on your faces and joy in your hearts. No one should be in this place, if he is not happy. Seminary should be a place of joy and happiness. Each and everyone in this seminary should be filled with joy and then you can transmit that joy to others. “Joy is prayer; joy is strength; joy is love; joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls.” (St. Teresa of Calcutta).

I am not talking about the joy that this world could give you; I am talking about the Joy of following Jesus, a joy that the Holy Spirit gives us. The joy that this world could offer us is a temporary one; but the joy that Jesus could give us is something that will remain with us forever. Holy Father Pope Francis once said that the religious-sisters or priests should not have faces like “chilies pickled in vinegar”. We must be apostles of joy; someone filled with joy, and someone capable of transmitting this inner joy to everyone around.

This morning we have here in front of us these kids who bring joy to our hearts. They are here ready to receive Jesus first time in Holy Communion. My dear girls and boys, you have been waiting for this day for a long time, and now you are thrilled. Today is an important and special day for you. You look like princesses and princes! You have put on your best cloths to meet Jesus in Holy Communion. But more important than the clothes you wear, is the fact that you have also prepared your hearts to meet Jesus. That is why you made your first confession. You have been praying to Jesus every day because you want to make sure that your heart is ready for him. When you receive Jesus in Holy Communion, you will tell him that you love him, and you will thank him for coming to you. Of course, today, you will receive some gifts from your relatives and friends. But the most important gift today is Jesus coming to you in Holy Communion. Jesus is more important than anything in your life. Continue to pray to Jesus and Mary every day because they love you so much. I take this opportunity to congratulate you dear boys and girls.

This is a very special day for all of us, relatives, friends, teachers and people gathered here, especially for the parents of these kids. We all pray for these kids today and we feel proud of them. But my request is to pray for them, not only today, but every day.

This morning, at the Vatican, Pope Francis will celebrate the Mass to conclude the celebration of the Marian Jubilee, which is part of the celebration of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. I would like to entrust these kids, our Seminarians and all of us to the motherly protection of our Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy. She is the Queen of priests and protector of vocations. Let us pray together a Hail Mary...