

# A GIFT FOR MISSION

## JESUIT PARISH MINISTRY

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### *Introduction*

I open the door to the Church for a boy who, every week in the month of May, brings roses to the Virgin; I stroll by the educational support rooms for immigrants where a nun instructs three boys in Spanish. One of the boys is Chinese, one is Romanian, and another is Moroccan. All three are in class at the same time... and yet they are able to understand one another. I go to the office and meet with Yadira, a Colombian immigrant “without papers” who met us at the “Point of contact”.<sup>1</sup> It has been more than three years since she arrived in Spain, but she still gets emotional when she remembers her country and her people. Her eyes are full of tears that refuse to spill; they are constant references to her fourteen-year-old daughter. She came to Spain for her daughter, for her security - in Colombia she was not able to buy even a single piece of bread. She understood that here in Spain she would have to work at something different than computer science or secretarial work, the professions which she had studied and in which she had been trained. She knew this. The beginning was most difficult. In order to head in the right direction in any enterprise in her world she would have to survive for over one month cleaning houses. One tour to the week for six Euros! After that month had passed, with her first paycheck, she took a walk with her daughter, and they did something that they could not do before for fear of their survival – they ate a pastry!

Her voice withdraws and she laments: *"My crime is that I do not have papers. This paper robs me of possibilities, not only for work, but it also seizes my future... How I am going to risk the little that I have? It takes everything just to ride a bus where it is possible for me to be detained for travelling without documentation"*. She feels rage when she considers the ways in which the authorities take advantage of her: *"Integration must be reciprocal. No one can be integrated if they are not welcomed"* she says. And she adds that, *"Those fierce stares that I get when I go to the supermarket, or to the bank cause my blood to freeze"*. She cries when remembering the day that she went to urgent care at the hospital with her daughter and overheard a doctor say:

- *"That immigrant had to have been stupid!"*.

- *"Mama, if a car has run over me... why does he say that?"*

asked her daughter.

We finish the conversation. I take a deep breath. I feel that it is a privilege to listen to this testimony. We continue sharing along other personal, religious veins...I sense that we are having a conversation that is close to the sacrament of confession. There are many encounters similar to this one – both one-to-one and in public – they are almost sacramental in that they are new moments that make Christ visible in Spain's thirty Jesuit parishes.<sup>2</sup> *"Parish life stretches to the limit all the brains, the talents, the spirituality and the resourcefulness that the best jesuit has. And this work goes on seven days a week during all fifty-two weeks of the year"* wrote one Jesuit<sup>3</sup>. Thousands of gifts poured out for us by the Lord...so that we might somehow give them back: *"Take Lord, and receive..."*

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### ***The gift that we receive in the parishes***

Jesuits from the parishes in Portugal, upon establishing an insertion in the south of the Tajo, wrote that: *"Like so many Jesuits in other fields, those of us in the parishes work very hard, and we are content with the*

work that we do. We think that it is important for the Church and that it fits perfectly with the apostolates of the <sup>4</sup> Society of Jesus.”

Given the Jesuit characteristics of mobility and availability and given the great variety of apostolates that characterize the Society, it is also necessary for Jesuits to commit themselves to parishes, where the base of the faith is nourished, and where the faith is expressed daily. Working in parishes offers us the possibility to give, to receive and to learn much. <sup>5</sup> It is not strange that we should experience, “the communion of the Church as a gift, always maintaining her universal dimension, while finding her most visible and immediate expression in the Parish,” and how, “it is, in a certain sense, the same Church that lives in the midst of the houses of her daughters and sons”. <sup>6</sup> Thus we concretely live “to feel with the Church” and we express this with joy whenever the Parish comes together as one to celebrate the joys, the struggles and the hopes of the community in the <sup>7</sup> Eucharist, the Word and in the other sacraments .

Parish ministry also gives us the opportunity to collaborate closely with others (with priests, religious, lay women and men...); it is edifying to be in close proximity with men and women who have such an admirable sense of responsibility for and surrender to the mission of the Church. “The Collaboration between the local diocese and the Jesuits who work in parishes creates a bridge between the Society, the local Church and <sup>8</sup> community organizers. We receive much, for example, when we experience the human and Christian quality of the many people who discreetly live deep lives of faith, hope and love. The parish is a concrete location that makes us accessible. The parish makes contact with the networks of those beyond the believing community easier. Friendship and cooperation around common projects and civil associations are formed as the result of our insertion in parishes.

In a society that is increasingly secular, our close proximity to the parish helps us to humbly offer the Good News and to engage in dialogue with various situations and diverse personal attitudes, discerning the positive values of each person while listening to their contemporary needs. A concrete example of the people with whom we may come into contact are the men and women who move away from the Church and who do not encounter the Church to be “like a home” (youth, people who have had a divorce, people of weak faith, etc.)<sup>9</sup>.

We explicitly recognize this gift often <sup>10</sup> - the Provincial of Spain <sup>11</sup> recently invited us all “*to with gratitude and humility, make a pilgrimage to our roots, to the grace that forms the nucleus of our deepest identity, so*

*that we might reanimate it and might continue responding, with hope, to the urgencies that are incarnate in the mission today*". This invitation stimulated us to exhibit how we live our gifts which pour forth from the distinguishing characteristics of our mission. We are "to pronounce with joy those "words" that identify us.<sup>12</sup> Words that put a name to the joy that is found in service to this ministry.<sup>13</sup> General Congregation XXXI declared that we must no longer say that caring for the souls of parishioners is in opposition to the principles of our Constitutions<sup>14</sup>. The Delegates from the Parishes of the Society<sup>15</sup> wanted to advance in this gift, framing it in our signs of identity: "We must refer to parish ministry as one of the services named in the Formula of the Institute (...) They not only tried to say that the parish offers a favorable context in order for us to live with the poor; it would be more appropriate for us to say that "in most of our assistencies today, parishes offer a most favorable context from which to live with the poor".<sup>16</sup>

There are an enormous variety of Parishes, some are among the entrusted works of the Society; these are distinguished not only by the role of the parish priests, but also by the means in which they are inserted and by the way their histories have unfolded. But in them we can find at least three characteristics that will lead us to give back the gift we have received according to our way of proceeding: Social ministry, Ignatian Spirituality, and mission that is in close partnership with the laity. I offer to you all the development of these three characteristics, from my vantage point in Spain, adding at the end something about the liturgy, which is so central to and present in the activities of the parish.

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### ***Social ministry***

A provincial in the Society of Jesus, in an encounter between parish priests and Jesuits, said informally: "Only in the parishes do I see us drawing near to the poor and to the crazy."

Parishes bring a context that favors life and solidarity with the poor and parish work is a key platform for the popular insertion of Jesuits. For

this reason, parishes are usually outstanding platforms for social projects that take the form of programmes with both local and global reach (at this moment parishes give special attention to the needs of immigrants). *The parish network, and social insertion, where common local needs are more easily determined and addressed, is a privileged place for the faith that seeks* <sup>17</sup> *justice* . *“Being associated with other Jesuit apostolic works and organizations connected with the Church and civil government, they oppose all forms of discrimination and they contribute an authentic culture of solidarity that transcends* <sup>18</sup> *the boundaries of the parish* . The Society of Jesus opts, then, to guide parishioners from wealthy neighborhoods to promote inclusive actions that will clearly place them in close proximity with the poor and to always choose these actions as their regular way of proceeding.

Rising up with the desire to serve the Church in the spirit of Vatican II, the call to promote spaces of solidarity will be most felt from the inner parts of the neighborhood. The parishes’ gratuitous offering of communion transforms the neighborhood into “a unit of coexistence where the parish is the Body of Christ in the neighborhood; the presence of Christ in bodily form, a group (facing inside and outside) that makes <sup>19</sup> solidarity a present reality”. And this solidarity is exercised through an organized and activity expressed in the three key dimensions of Church signaled by the GC XXXV decree on Mission: “they must be seen as part of the three responsibilities that constitute the nucleus of the deepest essence of the Church: the proclamation of the Word of God (*kerigma-martyria*), the celebration of the sacraments (*leitourgia*) and the exercise of the ministry of charity (*diakonia*)” <sup>20</sup>. This triple responsibility, interwoven throughout with solidarity, aims to consider parish work as one of the modes through which to carry out one of the goals articulated during GC 34, the creation of communities of solidarity <sup>21</sup>. And it is the parish that walks in the place in which it lives, at the centre of the community, becoming a space of solidarity; they verify that “*the parishes are are going to be regulating their lives from close relationship to those most affected by injustice: they have prayer, they celebrate the faith, they teach catechesis, they train people to lead Christian lives, they are present in the neighborhood, and they proclaim the Gospel . . . of the poor*”. <sup>22</sup>

From this nucleus of the communal parish, people are fed in the depth of trinitarian communion by means of Ignatian Spirituality. This

spirituality is opening up beyond its own limits to those who do not entirely share the faith. The Parish must look for, “an alternative possibility of community”<sup>23</sup> that is open to new possibilities, and that aspires toward renovation, thus looking for ways to be in the service of faith and in the promotion of justice for all, in line with the mission of the Society of Jesus today. We are to grow in this mission in the manner desired by Pedro Arrupe: *From the elements of contemplation, creativity and holy boldness proper to the Ignatian charism*<sup>24</sup>. *It is our particular way of proceeding to correspond with our parish mission hopefully, which is the gift we receive*<sup>25</sup>.

Parishes are intended to respond to the gift of divine solidarity incarnated in Christ. Whether they know it or not, the parishes of Andalusia are very present in the popular consciousness. These parishes dedicate themselves even to teaching illiterate gypsies how to drive and to promoting a workshop on “the importance of breathing,” meetings that provide women some rest from their double work – in the family and on the job – to simply talk, and to breathe... Solidarity requires spaces of encounter in which to enjoy the gifts that have been received. An Andalusian Jesuit who works in the parishes of his neighborhood that are plagued with continuous conflicts (drugs, unemployment, etc.) told me: “While taking a walk through one neighbourhood, a family said to me: “Father Jesus, we love you simply because you visit us. That is why I work in the parish ministry. It gives me the opportunity to facilitate this encounter with others. This work is a gift, a grace of the Holy Spirit.” Or as David Martinez, a secular priest from a parish in the area outlying the “Pozo del Tío Raimundo” neighbourhood in Madrid shared: “The greatest gift that I receive is the smile, the close glance, and the friendship of five very simple women. These women have been mistreated and their lives have been very hard, but I help them, through contemplative prayer, to open their eyes to the joyful interior knowledge that God has been present to them throughout the whole duration of their lives. They undergo an interior change. They grow from routine, mechanical fear to the ability to approach the Father.”

Other “crazy people” approach the Parishes. These “small crazy people,” are the children in catechesis classes. Other “crazy people” have begun to discover life – adolescents and young people in the process of Confirmation or the “crazy lovers” enrolled in a course for fiancées. These youth can be defiant and a challenge for those in the many parishes who work with Jesuit high schools. But when they come into the Church later, as adults, once they have undergone the difficult experience of making the

Church meaningful in their lives, or when they marry, they will become the next generation of catechists and parents (where the parents become the catechists of their own children) and it is they who will make the parishes in Spain greater. Leading the challenge to make the Church relevant in the lives of the youth are groups such as the third generation “Ascending Life:” “crazy” grandparents who decided to provide theater in their parishes and who use the Internet in order to communicate or to play with their grandchildren. Through these ministries they continue to ardently pass on the faith they received. We have, in the gift of the faith passed on through generations, a privileged testament to the work of the parish.

Ignatius of Loyola leads us to other forms of foolishness: to take care of patients until they die, to accompany prisoners or those addicted by drugs until they leave jail, and to promote the campaign for peace and reconciliation as has so many times been insisted upon by our parishes in the Basque Country. It is evident that in order to receive this foolishness as a gift we have to be able to work in Jesuit parishes – in the same manner as “fools” enamoured with Jesus Christ and his mission. As a monk from Monserrat said of Ignatius of Loyola in 1522: “That one pilgrim was a fool for Jesus Christ”.

Parishes cannot be selective. They must welcome all into their doors and go out in search of all<sup>26</sup>. But they also cannot resign from offering programmes adapted toward the maturation of faith and communion with the church. “A community must do the work of evangelizing and remain committed to justice and reconciliation<sup>27</sup>, to dialogue with the culture and with other faith traditions, while avoiding entrenchment in a conservative pastoral nature of “Christians forever.” We also underwent the fruitfulness of the tension we experienced in the development of our creativity, incessantly reviewing, evaluating and adapting<sup>28</sup> our actions in the parish. All of this, in the lives of Jesuits and in the lives of all - can be bundled up within the Parish. Father Kolvenbach said something similar to emphasize the Ignatian character of this ministry:

*“Ignatius and his first companions liked to find people in the streets where, in their time, the lives of citizens took place. At present many Catholics receive their first and definitive impression of the Church from the parish. As one Jesuit has written: there (in the parish) the incorporation of the Body of Christ is realized; there the dramas of ordinary life are*

*celebrated; marriage, death, resurrection; there the fights, the failures are ventilated; and there also we encounter reconciliation. This happens in all the parts of the world and, when it happens, it happens with different shades according to the culture and the circumstances. But this fundamental fact cannot be disputed: the parish makes it possible for us to be with ordinary people. Therefore, when doing parish ministry, one of the possible apostolic options of the Society, we must certainly remain faithful to Ignatius.”<sup>29</sup>*

In truth, the Jesuit seems more customarily to work behind “the altar,” giving lectures, being listened to from the pulpit, almost in a “vertical” relation. The parish makes it more possible for our service to be “horizontal.” Parishes could not place us any closer to the vicinity of the people. Thus they have offered a possible and visible framework for our popular insertion. It is also very relevant that throughout the various forms of work in the parish they accompany the people of God and others in their daily lives. Without this ministry, the Society of Jesus would lose contact with the people in the street, with the believers and non-believers they encounters in their <sup>30</sup> daily life . The present Father General, Adolfo Nicolás, narrates his experience of the gift received in the context of a parish in a marginalized neighborhood in Tokyo.

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*“... It was a great experience for me. Sundays, when I was free, I helped in the parish. There I made contact with the immigrants and the difficulties of their day. (...) I believe that Father Arrupe had a wonderful intuition: the direct contact with people and the work for justice can teach us much and make us better religious. It is important because the people with whom we work give us a strong sense of reality and it is in being here that informs and makes what we say or what we proclaim true. We took care of people of all types, people with faith, whatever that faith happened to be. This is the reality that gives us credence, not only to us, but also to our spirituality, and even to our faith. From my time there I began to understand that some people without any theological formation or a formal*



*education experience deep contact with God. This has always impressed me, and I wish to have that familiarity, that facility to relate with God”<sup>31</sup>*

### ***Ignatian Spirituality***

Ignatian spirituality brings us into close proximity with the poor. Now, more than ever, this proximity is promoted through the varied applications of the Spiritual Exercises (the lighter exercises of Anot.18, the exercises in daily life of Anot.19, etc.). Fr. Kolvenbach wrote: “I have thought that our parishes had to be peculiar. That they had to reach beyond the Church, to encounter those who are not her members. That we had to offer them the spirituality of the Spiritual Exercises. That this would mark a positive difference in the lives of the poor, both near and far.”<sup>32</sup>

I have always liked the close link between Ignatian Spirituality and proximity to the poor as explicated in this paragraph. This spirituality leads us to some characteristics that can affirm and promote our particular service in the Church.<sup>33</sup>

We can identify, a “family spirit” that, within the Church, we have the capacity to enrich it and to help it with something very specific that began, logically, in a common origin: we all trace ourselves back to Saint Ignatius of Loyola and to his understanding of the Gospel. His style has taken shape and has transformed with the passage of time. We find ourselves comfortable with him because we identify with this disposition and we feel the potentiality of our service. It is our way of being Christian and of being Church.

### ***Interiority Working Against Self-Centeredness***

In many parishes we offer human spaces and materials for prayer to help in relating with the Lord. In order to work against the temptation toward ego-centrism, in a time of triviality and superficiality, the Christian must be able to have and to cultivate an interior life and to find the doors to reflection open at any moment. Ego-centrism is to look at oneself that remains in oneself; the Ignatian experience is to go into the interior of oneself in a context, and in an openness to a project. It recognizes that we live both from and within a community.

“Imagining Christ our Lord present and placed on the Cross, let me make a colloquy, how from the creator He is has come to make Himself human, and from life eternal He has taken upon temporal death, and so to die for my sins. In like manner, looking at myself, I will consider what I have done for Christ, What I am doing for Christ, and what I ought to do for Christ, and seeing all this and seeing him hanging on the Cross, to contemplate over that which presents itself.” (SpEx 53)

Before the crucified one I watch myself and I am open to the question: What must I do for Christ? I place this inner experience within a context, a project and a future – all for Christ. We plan our decision

and our action, both individually and communally, in confrontation with the crucified one and with the crucified ones we ourselves encounter. Spiritual experience presupposes the triad: Christ - myself - others; I am between Christ and others. The parish community can clearly help place context and discernment into our lives. We are not freelance individuals, “lone snipers”.

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### ***A solidarity that goes deeper than immediacy***

The mite of the widow, captured so vividly by Jesus during his lifetime, miraculously multiplied every day – like the five loaves of bread and the two fish – in the daily and hidden gestures of the thousands of “widows” in our parishes. Jesus taught us to uncover and to reveal this gesture. And we enjoy it practically every day... an ignited lamp, anonymous charity...

In order to keep from being out of touch with the least of these daily gestures it will be necessary to turn individual and exact solidarity into communal solidarity. This is the great challenge of today for social action originating in the parish. The parish often spills itself out into a place, in an exact time, and into a form of solidarity where “in the hurricane,” “urgent collections”, and immediate stimulus predominate. It is necessary to change this perspective and to discover that the gift in which we will have to deepen

is also a challenge; walking more towards the discovery that the important thing is not only how to palliate the effects of disasters, but to work toward a world with fewer vulnerable people and to help people not only to survive this day, but to guarantee stable conditions for their ongoing survival. Ignatius discovered that structural and not only immediate concerns need to be addressed in order to better care for the poor.

With this comes the necessity of presenting some mediation so that the gift of solidarity does not burn out like a fleeting star. Formation, for example, <sup>34</sup> – so needed in parishes today – needs to sincerely engage parishioners in analysis and reflection with a long term perspective. Parishes need to engage in projects with a long reach, both in time and space. It is possible that in this way of proceeding, we will not appear quite as protagonistic, but our actions will have more efficacy.<sup>35</sup> And we will be in accord with the spirituality born from Ignatius.

*Accentuating dialogue and lay support ahead  
of management and clericalism*

**The accent on community is precisely the added value a parish gives when compared to pastoral work done in other churches or temples of the Society: the existence of one unique ecclesial entity of identity and evangelisation, of one community of reference with distinct levels of connection.**

Today the Church is rather “clerical”, even “episcopal”. It is not a question of numbers, but of the power they retain, whether they wear necktie or black shirts. The preoccupations they express are typical of the clergy; they answer questions that have not been asked and preach about realities that do not affect those who listen to them. Ignatian spirituality demands more lay support and leadership. A long time ago, Fr. Arrupe convoked a meeting of “experts” <sup>36</sup> and it was there indicated:

*“Priests should help all the faithful toward an awareness of their universal priesthood in service to the community of the Church and to their mission towards the world. This objective will not be obtained without a change of mentality among the clergy and, to a certain extent, of male and female religious. They have to renounce the bad habit of wanting to command*

*and to direct in all scope of things. They have to give the Church back to the laity."*

The gift of Parishes is only possible if they are open to making as part of their own identity, the gift of dialogue. "A parish community that commits itself to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, especially the dialogue of life, the dialogue of action and the dialogue of the religious experience<sup>37</sup>.

Evangelization is the mission of all. And we still have a long way to go in this. The reflection over what we are doing for the transmission of faith in Europe and North America spills over the limits of this writing and affects the whole reality of the Church; the pastoral reality and evangelisation when highlighting the "first announcement" and "propositional catechesis".<sup>38</sup> The need for more missionaries is always going to be an urgent one. Both the laity and the Jesuits – are called to be missionaries. The goal of evangelization is not to be more numerous or to become more important, but to transmit the good news, to build the City of God; and most importantly, to unveil the Gospel. Evangelization is brought about when people listen, welcome, appreciate, and aid others in reaching their potential. Dialogue is our best bet today as our "form of evangelisation".

### ***The missionary dimension in partnership with the laity***

The model of an "apostolic body" is the model Ignatian Spirituality espouses for the molding of communities into active participants in the building of the Kingdom of God. This model emphasises that the community is not an aim in itself but its aim is always for mission because the important thing is the Kingdom; and the community must strive to ever more closely approach it. This model constantly seeks the best service, the "magis," the agglutinating force which is its characteristic dynamism. It goes beyond merely heating things up in one's own house, it requires opening doors and windows so that those that live outside can enter or, at least, to show themselves; it does not matter if we sacrifice "privacy", if this results in our being more welcoming to those who approach us. It might sometimes require us to change our customs, our celebrations, or our way of life in order to most efficaciously share with others an "understanding" of the whole reason of our being: the Gospel. We are to be apostolic: communities for

the Kingdom, a Church for the world, and a life that increases in the giving of it.

Carmen and Francisco, married in the Jesuit parish of Cordova, spoke in the last meeting of Jesuit Parishes in Manresa: "It is a gift to enjoy a new evangelisation, free and open where there is room for everybody and where people on the fringes (homosexuals, divorced persons, the socially excluded) know that they are listened to and helped."

What matters in the building of the Kingdom is not a uniformity of equals, but that a partnership of people from different backgrounds (different capacities, sensitivities...) agglutinated around a common Project, turns and faces outward. A Jesuit parish either it is missionary or is not Jesuit. It is essential that the mission be shared, because following the teachings of Vatican II, we must understand the importance of the activity of the laity in <sup>39</sup> the Christian communities. This "collaboration in mission" is central and supposes our partnership with non-Jesuits which is, as of late an outstanding aspect of "our way of proceeding" in parish ministry, again insisted upon by Fr. Kolvenbach <sup>40</sup> and in accord

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with G.C. <sup>34</sup> <sup>41</sup>. This new vision of partnership in the mission of parish ministry invites us to a new type of leadership: cessation of control, the ability to delegate, formation in responsibility and working as part of a team, To work together as a team, Jesuits and others together, requires a "deep and continued conversion". And this is as true for us Jesuits, as it is for all those who participate in our mission. We are all called to learn to work together, like a team, to discover new styles of leadership, and to participate in the same mission.

We have already been working along these lines. In the Interprovincial Jesuit Parish Meeting IX in Javier (Navarre), some lay delegates – men and women - expressed "what the laity expected of Jesuit parishes". The laity indicated that they felt "proud and content" belonging to Jesuit parishes because of their openness to all people, their freedom of expression, their Ignatian spirituality, their practical recognition of the joint lay responsibility... They have asked us for and continue to request, in this field and in other fields, empathy and personal support, friendship, recognition of pastoral councils, formation with resources, transmission of our spirituality, connections between personal prayer and communal

celebration with lived reality, to take care of and to connect aspects of social justice with evangelization... That the Society values the parish mission, that it chooses Jesuits who are prepared, that it invites Jesuits in formation, that “our parishes be not islands”, but integrated within the Diocesan Plan, living our charism.

<sup>3</sup>The recent General Congregation already points to this missionary gaze with clarity: To learn to see the world with the eyes of those on the fringes. With non western eyes, contemplating “the world globally” to act “locally”, with more affection and effectiveness... with others.

### *The community and the liturgy*

In all of these communities, lay and priests, we all have something to say and all of us have much to learn. I write from La Rioja in the middle of the Way of the Peregrinos [pilgrims] towards Santiago de Compostela. For this was the way of Ignatius - who passed through this earth as an anonymous traveller towards Monserrat - we like this image of the pilgrim, who is on the way to discover himself, and to knowing God better. Because along the way are the wounded ones who demand our full attention, and the detour that causes us to be uncertain but opens us to new perspectives; along the way we have the possibility of finding ourselves with the other, and the need to enter into dialogue; along the way there are those who have lost their way, and a glimpse of the outlines of joy. With Ignatius, we want to be pilgrim people and communities, walking towards the most precious temple of God: the human person.

Many <sup>42</sup> parishes generate enough life in order to create or to live next to very important social works that once born grow to be autonomous, with a life of their own. It is not possible to have a parish if there is no rich community of reference, that nourishes the parish and allows it to grow in a life of brotherhood. We do not want to become “dim stations for the service of the sacraments”. Much for this reason – Rev. Fr. Picarral in Zaragoza,<sup>43</sup> Pilarica in Valladolid, - take great care of basic communities of reference with clear lay protagonism and that are closely tied to social, political, and local realities. This active nucleus invigorates the life of the parish community, in order to be a fount for the global village..., in the middle of the street, in the neighborhood associations, through union organizing, etc. seeking to quench “the thirst that burns within me” that St. John of the Cross

spoke of. And for this reason it is associated to “other communities,” Christians or not, but communities nonetheless essential in the beautiful task of bearing tenderness and solidarity. G.C. XXXIV speaks correctly about the “ecclesiastical base communities”. The concepts of “communion”, “community”, “community of communities”, will have to be central in respect to parish ministry.<sup>44</sup>

The Community sustains, propels and...celebrates. We must celebrate! This is one of our characteristics. It is necessary for us to celebrate

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our shared lives and events. If it does not happen, it is as if you were to leave your life at the door of the temple. Jesuits have not been outstanding in liturgy, but the Parish offers us the possibility of more vitally expressing the fine intuition of the simple woman or man on the street and thus to make accessible what the liturgy sometimes obscures: the profundity of the message of Christ

celebrated with dignity. Let us look at an example: Years ago the parish of St. Francis in the Port of Santa Maria “invented” a procession of children with placards claiming, or making known, “the last Supper of Jesus with the children” during Holy Week. The Parish of Valladolid situated “a nativity scene” in an ample scale model that reproduces its district and adapted “the franciscan” locations to those of the context of its own citizens: The castle of Herod could be an Official Building, the shepherds were the workers who rise early and cross the dangerous railway that divides the district, etc.

For this reason it is a gift to celebrate the Eucharist daily with our open doors looking out upon our town. Two things happen to us during the Eucharist: the beginning of a new life and, in our time, the moment in which or from which reality can be “christified”. We tend to be able, not only in the Eucharist but also in daily liturgy, to become a sort of “continuing connection” between life and liturgical celebration. To harness what we experience in the Exercises: encountering God in all things<sup>45</sup>. Then liturgy is really open to true life and we are able to act in a way that is festive, full of gratitude, and fraternal...or, on the contrary, when something is not going well in our way of being and of celebrating. As Father Madroño, former Provincial of Spain tells us: “There is a good homely feeling in the parish, between the life we are to celebrate in the more precise moments and the

liturgy that helps to pierce, to drill into us, the connection that exists between the daily and the particular moment, between what is existential and what is habitual”<sup>46</sup>.

In this sense, we must try not so much to take care of the rubrics, explaining them so that they are understood, but to rescue that which is fundamental, to take care that the signs are significant in and of themselves and that they appeal to life’s realities; because if we do not do this, we will be left with small, superficial things, esoteric experiences, that barely push us to confess the existence of “Who is given to us”. It is necessary that we prudently lightly touch the affection of the heart, not of fear; with a prudence that is close to the affective tenderness that ties us to Jesus of Nazareth. We must risk making our homilies not only interesting but significant gestures in the liturgy. The sacrament is basically a sign that “realizes” that which it signifies.

*“It is necessary to allow the symbols and the liturgy to be(in the parish and in the Church) something alive, dynamic, communicated poetically, narrated and communicated somewhat ambiguously (polysemic). The sacraments are symbols that express the Christian experience lived by believers, as an expression of the faith. And the community expresses this mystery by means of symbols, myths, poems, testimonies, metaphor, song, hymns, affectionate greetings, sincere prayer, forgiveness that is felt, joy, proclamation, exhortation and, mainly, through narrative language”.<sup>47</sup>*

Fr. Timothy M. McMahon S.J., former parish priest of St. Francis Javier parish in Kansas City and currently the Provincial of the Missouri Province, in the USA, goes on to say that “the whole parish is a sacrament” in one of the most beautiful testimonies that I have read on this gift given to the Society:

*“Like all our works, our parishes are sacraments, places where we, Jesuits, found the grace of God when at the service to the world, in places where we are invited to enter into the lives of the people and into the life of the planet. Our parish is a sacrament, a gift from the grace of God, that gave me the privilege to share the faith and the confidence of a young woman*



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## A GIFT FOR MISSION

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*and her husband of twenty-five years while they lose the battle against a cerebral tumor; the privilege to know an unmarried mother who walks up to the parish in the evening with her alms because she cannot come to the morning Mass; the privilege of being witness to the determination of a family of refugees who fight to learn not only English, but a new world; and the privilege to accompany the elders who gradually resign their freedom and life more and more to God with an exquisite grace. And it is, finally, for me a great privilege to preside every week like their shepherd while they come together as a community, while they construct the bridge of the Eucharist among themselves and while they become the body of Christ with respect to each other. I believe that we Jesuits need our parishes as much as they need us.”<sup>48</sup>*

I finish as I began: An afternoon in May when I allowed the boy with flowers into the Church and received the immigrant woman. Perhaps depositing a rose at the feet of the Virgin is also one of these sacramental signs.

### *Epilogue*

We remember, with Yadira, the excursion of Latino emigrants through the snow, - an unknown surprise for many of them - or the end of the Christmas Mass when we savored the little Ecuadorian soup and Spanish chocolate in the *soirée* that lasted until early morning.

The same dream pursues her time and time again: to see her mother and her family and others whom she left behind in Colombia. But that is a right that she cannot allow for herself, at least for now.

And meanwhile, the boy that had taken the flowers to the Virgin and who spoke to you all in the beginning of this article, after depositing his roses at the feet of the image, he remains at her side, singing and saying the prayers that he learned in catechism class to himself:

*“He does not know that every rose that he brought is going to turn into a flower of justice”.*

Yadira said this to me, in my parish office, when I told her what the boy did...

*Translated by*  
Matthew R. Holland, S.J.

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<sup>1</sup> Jesuit Parishes' Initiative (Logroño, Madrid-La Ventilla, Tudela, etc.) to unite and celebrate the richness of different cultures of immigrants.

<sup>2</sup> J.L. Pinilla, "Historia de 10 Encuentros" April 2008. Meetings held every two years of Delegates for Parish Work in Spain, Portugal and this year Italy.

<sup>3</sup> Mission Statement for Jesuits in Parish Ministry. Pg.1. Santa Clara, USA, July 23, 1987

<sup>4</sup> Document "Parroquias da Compañía de Jesús" of Jesuit Parish Priests, Resurrection Sunday, 1997

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. no 3

<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, "Christifideles Laici" (1988) no 26

<sup>7</sup> G.C.34, d.19, n.3

<sup>8</sup> Letter of Fr.General Kolvenbach, to Jesuits in Parish Ministry in Japan. October, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> "Atención pastoral en las iglesias de la Compañía de Jesús" National Pastoral Commission, May 2005. Spain.

<sup>10</sup> "El don y la misión en las Parroquias confiadas a jesuitas" Jesuit Parishes' Commission, Madrid, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Elías Royón, S.J., "Ignacio, Fabro, Javier. Acoger el don, impulsar la misión", Pg.3, July 31, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> See note 10

<sup>13</sup> G.C.31, d.27, 9-10

<sup>14</sup> Even so in the collective imaginative conception of the Jesuits, pastoral ministry continues to be considered as secondary and rather not pertaining to the Society. Deep down the perception persists that a parish is not more than an agency of sacramental services. It is no more than a subsidiary work of these sacramental services without any link with a parish or an ecclesial community.

<sup>15</sup> Meeting in Rome of "Jesuits Pastoral Ministry" Curia of the Society of Jesus, September 9-15, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Propositions

<sup>17</sup> Letter cited. In note no.8, p.133

<sup>18</sup> G.C.34, d.19, no 6

<sup>19</sup> Jesuits Parishes of Loyola, Javier-Navarra 1998

<sup>20</sup> G.C.35, Decree on Mission

<sup>21</sup> G.C. 34, d.3, n. 10

<sup>22</sup> See note 19

<sup>23</sup> Isidro G.Modroño, S.J.,Provincial of Spain.VIII Parish Encounter, Madrid, February 23, 2003

<sup>24</sup> Jerry Rosario, S.J.,Dhanam Movement, Meeting of Jesuit Parish Ministry, Curia-S.J., Rome, September 2007

<sup>25</sup> See document in note no 10, pg.13

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. no, 4

<sup>27</sup> G.C. 34, d.19, n.3

<sup>28</sup> See Fr.Arrupe note 11, nn.10-11

<sup>29</sup> Fr.General P.H. Kolvenbach, "To the Jesuits in Parish Apostolate" (1999)

<sup>30</sup> See citation in note no 16

<sup>31</sup> Transcription of the conversation of Fr. General with T.Rochford, P.Bélanger and D.Villanueva, official web-page of G.C. 35, February 10, 2008

<sup>32</sup> Fr.General Kolvenbach, to the Jesuits in Australia (1995)

<sup>33</sup> To describe these traits I am summarizing extracts from the conferences given by Darío Mollá, S.J., in the V Jornadas Nacionales de Parroquias Jesuitas (Madrid, November 1995) and in the III Jornadas de Parroquias Jesuitas de Castilla (Villagarcía de Campos, June 1999)

<sup>34</sup> This is the slow process of Parishes in Spain: the joint formation of Jesuits and lay persons: Loyola, "Parroquias-Comunidades de Solidaridad", Barcelona, "Comprensión bíblica y eclesiológica de la comunidad parroquial", Salamanca, "EE en la vida ordinaria para parroquias", etc.

<sup>35</sup> The shared gift expressed in the twinning of parishes: S.Ignacio (Portugalete-País Vasco) with parishes in Haiti, or S.Francisco de Borja (Madrid) with "Fe y Alegría" in "Alto Marañon" (Perú) or the support of the Italian province and the Jesuit parish of Tirana, (Albania), etc.

<sup>36</sup> Juan Ochagavía, S.J. and others. Meeting of Jesuit Parish Ministry, Jesuit Curia, Rome, 1996

<sup>37</sup> Jesuit Parishes Meeting. Rome, September 2007, pg.31

<sup>38</sup> J.L. Saborido "Propuestas". Jornadas parroquiales de Castilla, Valladolid, November 2006 and his reference to the colloquium : "Nuevo paradigma de la catequesis" held at the ISPC in Paris (February 2003) and which Emilio Alberich wrote in *Catequética* (January 2004, pgs.2-9); *proponer la fe hoy* (Ed.Sal Terrae, Santander, 2006)

<sup>39</sup> See note 28, n.13

<sup>40</sup> Letter cited in note no.8, p. 133

<sup>41</sup> "...we must increasingly shift the focus of our attention from the exercise of our own direct ministry to the strengthening of laity in their mission" (G.C. 34, d.13, n.19)

<sup>42</sup> S.Ignasi en Lleida, El Milagro de Salamanca, Lourdes en Tudela.

<sup>43</sup> A.Alemaný, S.J., "Mi experiencia en el Apostolado Social" Promotio Iustitiae. CIS. no 90, 2006, pg.19-25

<sup>44</sup> See note no 16

<sup>45</sup> “The Ignatian ingredient introduces in parish life, which is characterized by cyclical and repetitive religious practice, the personal awareness of the interior process towards the growth of an adult faith”, See note 8

<sup>46</sup> See note 23

<sup>47</sup> Cipri Diaz, IX Jesuit Parish Encounter. “Eucaristía y solidaridad”. Javier-Navarra, Novel ver, 2005

<sup>48</sup> T. McMahon, S.J., Documents concerning Parish Ministry in the Society of Jesús. Jesuit Parishes’ Meeting, Rome, September 2007.