

THIRD WEEK OF EASTER: FEED MY SHEEP

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."

(John 21:15-19)

Jesus Christ, the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Lord, is the Good Shepherd of his sheep, those he has purchased with his own blood. And he has called and commissioned under-shepherds to feed his flock, to guard, to tend and to love.

"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."

Thus, as we follow the command of our Lord, we will emulate Him by making ourselves 'Shepherds of His Flock'—by declaring our love to Him, we are to serve and nurture His people.

In so doing, let us give focus and our utmost attention to one of the calamities brought about by the Climate Change—the intense dry spell also known as El Niño in the Southernmost part of Mindanao, one of the three major islands of the Philippines. This drought has already devastated not only the agricultural lands of the area but also the lives of thousands of families due to hunger.

In 2015, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services (PAGASA) released statements that the dry spell is expected to reduce rainfall by 60 to 80 percent, affecting more than half of the country. It was expected to be one of the strongest in the last decades, predicted to endanger livelihoods, harvests and nutritional status of rural poor households in the agricultural sector.

To date, a severe food and water crisis is fast spreading in Mindanao in the wake of what scientists say maybe the most severe El Niño episode on record. Global warming and climate change has been generating not only super typhoons but also super El Niños. The Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services (PAGASA) issued a warning early last year that there would be 34 provinces affected by El Niño by March 2016 and 68 provinces by April. It is expected to peak between May and June or until the onset of the rainy season this year.

The Mindanao Farmers and indigenous people's communities would have been in a stronger position to weather the effects of El Niño if their watershed and water systems have not been damaged.

Suffering the brunt of the on-going El Niño to date, an estimated to at least 3, 500 families are affected in the Mission-served communities alone notwithstanding the other areas along and outside of South Cotabato and Sarangani Provinces in the Island of Mindanao in the Philippines.

These families of indigenous people/farmers within the areas served by the Catholic Mission to the Indigenous People's (CMIP) urgently need help for their daily subsistence. This incident has already caused widespread forest fires around major peaks and mountains in the areas causing more carbon emissions; local governments declaring state of calamities in their areas but has not delivered yet the needed assistance which resulted to the recent brutal and bloody dispersal of rioting for food farmers.

In other words, the drought that is being experienced right now by our brothers and sisters in this part of the world has damaged major agricultural lands--the very main food supply that caused this hunger in various communities. This also includes the effects to human health, especially among the elderly and children through the spread of various diseases and maladies known to emerge during a drought period.

Brothers and sisters, the flock of Christ in this part of the globe is going hungry and surely they need our utmost help and assistance in their dire needs.

Pope Francis has poignantly said that Christians have no right to refuse help to those who need it, saying that to partake in the commemoration of Christ's death is to see him in the poor and suffering and to welcome them and offer help.

Pope Francis says that those who participate in the celebration of the Eucharist like what we are doing right now, enters into a communion that requires them to give care for all.

When we take and eat this bread, we become associated with the life of Jesus, we enter into communion with Him. We commit ourselves to realize the communion between us, to transform our life into a gift, overall to the most poor. Today's feast evokes this integral message and pushes us to welcome the intimate invitation to conversion and to service, to love and to forgive. It stimulates us to become, with our lives, imitators of that which we celebrate in the liturgy.

The Christ who feeds us in the consecrated species of bread and wine is the same that we meet in daily occurrences. In the celebration of the holy mass we participate in the breaking of the bread (Eucharist) and everyone who received, broken as he/she is will become whole. It is the poor person who pulls our hand, it is the suffering person that implores our help, it is the brother that asks our availability and

waits for our welcome. It is in every human being, even the smallest and most defenseless. The Eucharist, source of love for the life of the Church, is a school of love and solidarity. Who nourishes themselves from the Bread of Christ cannot remain indifferent in front of the many that do not have their daily bread.

Oh Lord God, may you feed and build and tend your flock, we pray. May those generous giving helping hearts faithfully feed and lead the flock of dire need, we pray. We commend them to you, and to your flock of blood-bought sheep.

Say it out loud, Together:

Priest: Do you love me?

Congregation: Yes Lord, I love you.

P: Feed my sheep. (*slight pause*) Do you love me?

C: Yes Lord, I love you.

P: Feed my sheep. (*slight pause*) Do you love me?

C: Yes Lord, I love you.

P: Feed my sheep.

“Feed my sheep,” Jesus says. So let’s do it. For the sake of Our Beloved, the one we Christians say we love - Jesus. He said it—even we said it—three times. So now let’s do it. Let us feed his sheep.

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