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**Reach us : [asiacatholic@gmail.com](mailto:asiacatholic@gmail.com) Unsubscribe : [catholic.asia@gmail.com](mailto:catholic.asia@gmail.com)**

**Address : 7/151A, Health Camp, Gudalur - 643 211, The Nilgiris, Tamilnadu, INDIA**

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**FORUM : On shorter homilies - Maybe Priests Should Talk Less By Nathan Schneider (America via CNUA)**

We all go through different seasons in our faith, and in each we see that faith, and its practice, differently. There have been times when I went to Mass looking for insight, looking for an idea or a clarification that might help my faith survive the assaults of doubt and difficulty for another week. There have been times when I would go for an hour of peace, or for the people I knew would be there, or even simply to be seen.

Now, I go to Mass with my wife and our 1-year-old. It is a huge hassle to squeeze it in between naps, but we go, not always knowing why. I am grateful that we do, mostly, and the kid sometimes seems to love at least parts of it. But a few minutes into the homily, the squirming can become especially intense. Among the various churches we have visited in his early and so far well-traveled life, I have frequently wondered whether maybe priests should talk less.

On Christmas Eve, at the church we attended in Columbus, Ohio, we experienced this kind of mercy. The priest, an elderly man I have come to know, a man of many ideas, got up after the Gospel reading and offered only one lovely idea—a couple of minutes, max, an observation that even though we celebrate Jesus' birthday each year the Christ child remains eternally young. Then he stepped back and got right on with the Creed.

That reminded me of the weekday Mass homilies, and often the Sunday ones, too, given by the priest who baptized me in college. They were of the same character: Just a seed. He left it to us and God and time to do the tending. These men are good priests. They have a lot to say; have a meal with them, and you hear it. But at Mass they're different.

Normally, at the various parishes I stumble through these days, I am used to a different formula. The homily begins with some story from the priest's life, usually one you have already heard if you've been going a few months or years, and probably one based on circumstances pretty unlike the lives of most people in the pews—because priests choose to lead unusual kinds of lives. Yet the story is somehow supposed to make the whole thing more relatable. Then, more or less successfully, he finds a way to connect his story with the Gospel reading, or one of the other readings at least. Finally, there comes some kind of practical encouragement or instruction, which may or may not have anything to do with one's life or needs at that given point.

I get it. The idea is to make the homily more down-to-earth, more human, more in the trenches of the everyday. I appreciate that. But I suspect this familiar formula is at least in part an inappropriate imitation of Protestant preaching, in which the sermon is a service's main content and event, in which the Word is only a text, not flesh. I do not think that is true for Catholics. For us, the Eucharist is the main event, and the Mass is a journey by which the community makes its way there. In that context—especially at a beautiful evening candlelight Mass—the homily risks charging in as an interruption. It risks getting in the way of Christ.

I like priests. Several of them have guided me to drastically change my life. I like learning from them, and I appreciate the treasure in their training and their ways of life. But I worry priests sometimes take on too much—as C.E.O.'s, as officiants, as psychologists, as poets, as memoirists. They simply do not need to be all those things, especially when there are people in the community who can do those things better. Priests have a glorious ministry, in offering the sacrifice and shepherding the flock, but good shepherds tend to guide gently. The sheep (as this particular metaphor regards the rest of us) mostly know where they need to go.

This is especially the case in the middle of an ancient, familiar, theatrical, sacramental journey like the Mass. What we do teaches us at least as much as anything that is said. By that logic, of course, sometimes a long and dense homily makes sense—such as in Masses orchestrated to hit more verbal or intellectual registers. Maybe, in the midst of some particular crisis or challenge confronting the community, it is worth the risk of offering more because people need more. Like any performance and gift, it is all about context. But on the whole, I suspect many priests might benefit from taking on less. Keep it short, enough to offer just a single, simple insight. Retain the rhythm of the rest of the Mass—don't interrupt. When more needs to be said, invite other voices to participate, emphasizing that we share the Mass as a community.

Some communities send children away for part or all of Mass. That's tempting. But another part of me trusts my kid's squirms. There is something not right when a baby is not following the action in awe. And it's rough on the parents. Help us out.

***(Few Comments worth sharing :***

**Bruce Snowden** - I'm not sure if its a matter of priests talking less, or a matter of us pew-sitters listening more, being fully attentive and less squirmy, pushing aside perhaps, the gravel

of inconsequential rhetoric, in search of that "pearl of great price" mixed in the rubble and meant just for the individual listener, Spirit placed, mindful that we do have God's Word for it, that, no Word of His returns unproductive. In other words, at least latch onto a single "word" finding fruition there. It works for me, guaranteeing a productive homily every time.

**Lisa Weber** - I go to Mass primarily for the homily, so a two-minute homily does not interest me much because it cannot provide much depth of thought. Poor homilies last far too long, no matter what length of time they are by the clock; a good homily always ends too soon. There are deadly sins in homilies and too many bad homilies prompt departure for a different parish. Use of the word "I", especially in the first sentence, signals a humdrum homily. Lack of preparation and focus are obvious in poor homilies. Meandering through personal stories without a clear point or a connection to the readings are the worst homilies of all. > >

> <https://mail.google.com/mail/#inbox/159ab44ebfbf54fd?compose=159b480f08332aac>

**HOLY FATHER : Luther's intention was to renew the Church, not divide her**  
**- Vatican Radio**



Pope Francis and the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation Rev Martin Junge at an ecumenical event in Malmo - AFP

(Vatican Radio via CNUA) *Pope Francis on Thursday said that "the intention of Martin Luther five hundred years ago was to renew the Church, not divide her". Speaking to members of an Ecumenical Delegation from Finland who are in the Vatican to take part in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the Pope recalled his visit to Sweden last October and said that the "gathering*

*there gave us the courage and strength, in our Lord Jesus Christ, to look ahead to the ecumenical journey that we are called to walk together." The Pope ended his speech with off-the-cuff remarks thanking the bishop leading the delegation for having brought his grandchildren to the audience and pointing out that "we need the simplicity of children: they will show us the path that leads to Jesus Christ." The annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity takes place from 18 to 25 January focussing on a theme selected on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation: "Reconciliation – The Love of Christ Compels Us". The celebration concludes with Vespers, presided over by Pope Francis, in the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls on January 25th.*

**Please find below the full text of Pope Francis' address to the members of the Ecumenical Delegation from Finland:**

Dear Brothers and Sisters, I joyfully welcome all of you, members of the Ecumenical Delegation, who have come as pilgrims from Finland to Rome on the occasion of the feast of Saint Henrik. I thank the Lutheran Bishop of Turku for his kind words. For more than thirty years, it has been a fine custom for your pilgrimage to take place during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which calls us to draw closer to one another anew through conversion. True ecumenism is based on a shared conversion to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Redeemer. If we draw close to him, we draw close also to one another. During these days let us pray more fervently to the Holy Spirit so that we may experience this conversion which makes reconciliation possible.

On this path, we Catholics and Lutherans, from several countries, together with various communities sharing our ecumenical journey, reached a significant step when, on 31 October last, we gathered together in Lund, Sweden, to commemorate through common prayer the beginning of the Reformation. This joint commemoration of the Reformation was important on both the human and theological-spiritual levels. After fifty years of official ecumenical dialogue between Catholics and Lutherans, we have succeeded in clearly articulating points of view which today we agree on. For this we are grateful. At the same time we keep alive in our hearts sincere contrition for our faults. In this spirit, we recalled in Lund that the intention of Martin Luther five hundred years ago was to renew the Church, not divide her. The gathering there gave us the courage and strength, in our Lord Jesus Christ, to look ahead to the ecumenical journey that we are called to walk together.

In preparing the common commemoration of the Reformation, Catholics and Lutherans noted with greater awareness that theological dialogue remains essential for reconciliation and that it is advanced through steadfast commitment. Thus, in that communion of harmony which permits the Holy Spirit to act, we will be able to find further convergence on points of doctrine and the moral teaching of the Church, and will be able to draw ever closer to full and visible unity. I pray to the Lord that he may bestow his blessing on the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue Commission in Finland, which is working diligently towards a common sacramental understanding of the Church, the Eucharist and ecclesial ministry.

Therefore 2017, the commemorative year of the Reformation, represents for Catholics and Lutherans a privileged occasion to live the faith more authentically, in order to rediscover the Gospel together, and to seek and witness to Christ with renewed vigour. At the conclusion of the day of commemoration in Lund, and looking to the future, we drew inspiration from our common witness to faith before the world, when we committed ourselves to jointly assisting those who suffer, who are in need, and who face persecution and violence. In doing so, as Christians we are no longer divided, but rather united on the journey towards full communion.

I am pleased to recall also that this year the Christians of Finland celebrate the centenary of the Finnish Ecumenical Council, which is an important instrument in promoting communion of faith and life among you.

Finally, in 2017 your homeland, Finland, will celebrate one hundred years as an independent State. May this anniversary encourage all the Christians of your country to profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ – as did Saint Henrik so zealously – offering a witness of faith to the world today and putting that faith into practice through concrete acts of service, fraternity and sharing.

In the hope that your pilgrimage may contribute to further strengthening the good cooperation between Orthodox, Lutherans and Catholics in Finland and in the world, and that the common witness of faith, hope and love may bear abundant fruit through Saint Henrik's intercession, I willingly invoke God's grace and blessing upon you all.

> [http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/01/19/pope\\_luther%E2%80%99s\\_intention\\_was\\_to\\_renew\\_the\\_church,\\_not\\_divide/1286728](http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/01/19/pope_luther%E2%80%99s_intention_was_to_renew_the_church,_not_divide/1286728)

### **HOLY FATHER : Blesses Louisiana project to support trafficking victims By Philippa Hitchen**



**Pope Francis greets Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards, Fr Jeff Bayhi, Sr Eugenia Bonetti and others involved in the 'Metanoia' project to protect victims of human trafficking - ANSA**

(Vatican Radio via CNUA) A delegation from the U.S. state of Louisiana was among the special guests meeting with Pope Francis during his general audience on Wednesday. Led by Governor John Bel Edwards, the delegation asked the Pope to bless the pioneering work that is going on in Louisiana to prevent human trafficking and to protect victims who've been trapped in this modern day slavery. That work includes special training for police officers and the opening of a

shelter for sixteen young women in a secure location near the city of Baton Rouge. To find out more about the project Philippa Hitchen spoke to **Governor Edwards and to Fr Jeff Bayhi**, pastor of St John the Baptist Catholic Church in Zachary....

Fr Bayhi was inspired the tireless anti-trafficking efforts of Italian Consolata Sister Eugenia Bonetti, whose passion, he says "is contagious". He explains that the Louisiana initiative has brought together the governor, state agencies, law enforcement, legislators and senators , alongside 'Metanoia', the umbrella group for the project which he founded. "It's been an incredible opportunity to see a state reach out and say 'slaves no more', we need to care for these kids" he says.

Governor John Bel Edwards says that Louisiana was a "hotbed" of human trafficking activity, partly as a result of some 15 million tourists that come primarily to New Orleans each year. The situation is also impacted by the "interstate" highway that runs from California to Florida, passing through southern Louisiana. "It's really a tragic circumstance and we have to really do much better in Louisiana and around the country," the governor insists. However, numbers of trafficking cases are dropping because of the Metanoia shelter initiative.

Speaking about setting up the house, Fr Bayhi says it will provide shelter for 16 children at a time, allowing them to "feel safe and secure, give them some sense of worth" as well as providing them with life skills to enable them to find other ways of earning a living. Sr Eugenia has helped by sending four sisters who will take care of the young survivors, together with other local professionals.

Fr Bayhi talks about Pope John Paul II's writings on the "culture of death", saying that human trafficking "is one more step in the devaluation of the dignity and the sanctity of human life." He also has a stark warning for male consumers of the human trafficking industry, saying they create "a deficit in the dignity of human life." "If anyone thinks that internet porn is victimless," he insists, "someone is there making those kids do that stuff. They are not there voluntarily and you're paying the money that makes it worth while to kidnap these kids and force them into that. You may have never picked up one of these children on a roadside but you make that possible". "If we want to fight this," Fr Bayhi concludes, "we have got to destroy the market that allows human life to be so denigrated. And if you have any part in that, you're part of the problem. We invite you to be part of the solution."

**Find out more about the project on the Metanoia website:** [www.metanoia-inc.org](http://www.metanoia-inc.org)

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> [http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/01/18/pope\\_blesses\\_louisiana\\_project\\_to\\_support\\_trafficked\\_victims/1286651](http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/01/18/pope_blesses_louisiana_project_to_support_trafficked_victims/1286651)

### **HOMILY : "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men" By Paul Burke**

(3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)—January 22, 2017

Readings: [IS 8:23—9:3](#); [PS 27:1, 4, 13-14](#); [1 COR 1:10-13, 17](#); [MT 4:12-23](#))

On many occasions since becoming Pope, our Holy Father Francis has recounted the story of his own vocation when he felt called by God to serve Him as a priest. On September 21, 1953, a 16-year-old boy named Jorge Bergoglio was planning to go out to celebrate with friends an Argentinian national holiday called "Students' Day." Jorge decided to start the holiday by going to pray at his parish church, dedicated to St. Joseph. When he arrived at church, he saw a priest he didn't recognize, but who seemed to radiate holiness. He decided to approach him, and asked him to hear his confession. We don't know what Jorge said to the priest, or what the priest said in response. But we do know that that confession totally changed not only the teenager's plans for the day, but for the whole course of his life. In

speaking to a group of ecclesial movements during the Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis said:

For me, this was an experience of encounter: I found that Someone was waiting for me. Yet, I do not know what happened. I can't remember. I do not know why that particular priest was there, whom I did not know, or why I felt this desire to confess. But the truth is that Someone was waiting for me. He had been waiting for me for some time. After making my confession, I felt something had changed. I was not the same. I had heard something like a voice or a call. I was convinced that I should become a priest.

In today's Gospel, Jesus called Simon Peter, and his brother Andrew, as well as James and John, the sons of Zebedee, to follow Him. His invitation to them was a simple one: "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." They left everything behind, and followed Jesus. It was an irresistible call to be led into the unknown, and to be co-workers with Jesus of Nazareth. This was courage and conviction at its finest. No hesitation, no questions, no doubts—just a firm resolution to be a disciple of Jesus, and to all that entails. Their number increased to twelve, reminiscent of the twelve tribes of Israel. For three years, they would accompany Jesus, hearing him preaching and teaching, healing and exorcising, and calling people to repentance. This was the actual launch of the public ministry of Jesus. The disciples would have much to learn, but they were ready. They were ordinary men with no special training or skills. But yet, the Lord called them. This is the springtime of Jesus' public ministry, where he would go from town to town, preaching the Good News, and calling people to repentance, and forgiving sins. Might the apostles have been somewhat proud, that they were chosen and not others? Or were they just eager to learn as much as possible from Jesus, the teacher, knowing that one day, they, too, would have to carry on that same mission? The very fact that you and I are in this Church today means that the Apostles did what was asked of them, and in many ways changed the world. They were not perfect, and there was division at times, yet they were completely open to God's will. In the Gospel, we also hear that Jesus received word that John the Baptist had been arrested. It is possible that the first disciples were with John the Baptist before being called by Jesus. Many believed that John the Baptist was the Messiah; how often he said that he was not. In humility, he would say that he was unworthy to even undo the straps of Jesus' sandals. John's mission was to prepare the way of the Lord, whereas the apostles were entrusted with the task of going out to the whole world, proclaiming the Good News.

As we reflect on the call in today's Gospel, we might well ask ourselves: what would I have done? What would I do? To leave everything behind is no easy task, but Jesus taught by example. With those he called, he would always provide for their needs. It's a call to let go, and to be self-possessed. How often do the things of the world possess us, and bring us down. We recall the "Rich Young Man" from the Gospel story. He was called personally by the Lord. Jesus commended him for being faithful to the Commandments, but He also challenged him to give up his belongings, sell them, and give the money to the poor. Then, and only then, would he be ready to be a disciple. The young man went away sad—his possessions possessed him, and he could not let go.

Jorge Bergoglio encountered the Lord Jesus, and responded wholeheartedly to the call to the Priesthood. The Lord continues to call because the harvest is rich, but the laborers are few. How many people silence the call with their own pursuits? How often do we hear it said: "I want to be independent ... I don't want someone telling me what to do." This echoes the original sin in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve were banished for disobeying God, and for their desire to be "independent." We must open our hearts to the Lord by entering into silence, and like Samuel, say: "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." What is

the Lord calling us to? For all of us, first and foremost, He is calling us to a life of holiness. When we are rooted in God, we are more open and docile to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Some are called to the Priesthood, or Consecrated Life, others to marriage, still others to a single life ... all different, yet they are all calls to holiness. We all have a part to play in establishing the Kingdom of God, and continuing the work of those who have gone before us. Like Pope Francis, we have the same means before us, especially the sacraments, to help us to grow in holiness so that, one day, we might enter eternal life. > >  
> <http://www.hprweb.com/2016/12/homilies-for-january-2017/>

### **INDIA : Card Gracias calls for joint prayer in favour of Christian unity By Nirmala Carvalho**

Mumbai (AsiaNews via CNUA) – Card Oswald Gracias, archbishop of Mumbai and president of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), issued an appeal on the occasion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which begins today, saying "Let us pray together to accomplish Jesus's prayer that 'all may be one'," In the official statement, the cardinal notes that the celebration takes place every year, from 18 to 25 January, but "this year it takes on an even greater significance because of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation [. . .] an event that triggered a profound division in the Christian world between the Catholic Church and the Reformed Churches." At the same time, the cardinal underlines the efforts made in favour of dialogue last year by [Pope Francis, who in October signed a Joint Declaration with Bishop Munib Yunan](#), President of the World Lutheran Federation. Thus, "by embracing and signing the declaration, they put an end to 500 years of separation and hostility". As for the Church in Mumbai, Catholics and the Pentecostal Churches jointly organised the octave of prayer for the first time this year. The main event is set for 20 January, when Card Gracias will lead the prayer in Our Lady of Salvation Church in Dadar. Ecumenical prayers will also be held in ten parishes across the diocese.

According to Sajan K George, a Syriac Orthodox and president of the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC), "the primary task of the Church is to promote peace, harmony and unity." He notes that at present in many parts of India "there are episodes of intolerance and religious extremism against the Christian faith. Dalit Christians also suffer harsh forms of injustice and violence." This is why "it is urgent that all Christian churches unite in our society, which is pluralistic from the religious point of view but with great economic disparities". For the Christian leader, "ecumenism is essential to fight the growing division between the few rich and the majority of the people, who are marginalised and excluded from society." What is more, "existing divisions between Christian denominations are used by radical Hindus to undermine the Christian icons of charity, education, and care for the sick." Hence, a "significant ecumenical spirituality may manifest itself in the struggle for the emancipation of Dalits and Tribals, to give voice to those who have none and to serve those who are dehumanised." "Ecumenism," he says, "must necessarily promote mutual understanding and enrichment through joint prayer, sharing experiences, and reflections." "This is the way with which we can, not only deepen our common realisation of the truth, but also develop our common commitment to ensure a religious dimension to people who are looking for a fuller life of peace, fraternal freedom, and justice."  
> > > <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Card-Gracias-calls-for-joint-prayer-in-favour-of-Christian-unity-39694.html>

### **INDIA : Protests gather steam across Tamilnadu By Pon Vasanth Arunachalam (The Hindu via CNUA)**

Thousands of youngsters staging a protest at Tamukkam Grounds in Madurai on Wednesday.

**Stir gets more organised with supply of water and food.** The protests for jallikattu gained momentum across the State with people from various walks of life lending their support for the conduct of the bull-taming sport. The protests at Alanganallur, a town near Madurai which was made world famous by jallikattu, continued with the same momentum for the third day on Wednesday with more people from nearby villages and districts joining. A considerable number of those detained by the police on Tuesday returned to the protest venue on Wednesday. The protests became more organised with the setting up of loud speakers and volunteers from Alanganallur and nearby villages ensuring regular supply of water and food. Earlier in the day, the protesters announced that no celebrities or politicians would be allowed to address the protesters but they could instead participate as individuals. No political party will be allowed to stake a claim to the protests, the organisers said. Some of the television channels were treated with hostility as a section of protesters felt that they were not giving adequate coverage of the protests in Alanganallur. One of the TV channel crew was even gheroad. As the protests continued through the night, the protesters remained resolute that they will not leave the place until arrangements were made to conduct jallikattu immediately.

**Turnout at Coimbatore** - Coimbatore city witnessed the biggest gathering of students ever as nearly 20,000 of them bunked classes and marched to VOC Grounds in support of jallikattu on Wednesday. 'Ban PETA' turned out to be the most repeated slogan of the day. Students attached to various colleges and polytechnic schools boycotted classes and joined processions bringing traffic on Avinashi Road to a standstill. Students from at least five colleges gathered at the Codissia Grounds and joined the procession. S. Radhika Sundar, a home maker from Ganapathy had come with three of her friends to support the protest in which her son is actively involved. While the number of women participants was barely 200 on Tuesday, at least 6,000 of them assembled at the grounds on Wednesday. Mobile toilets were also placed at the corner of the venue exclusively for women. In the Central region, massive pro-jallikattu protests by students and youths were held. According to police, protests were held at more than 100 places in seven districts. Thousands of students, mobilised through social media messages, took to the streets. Students of a majority of colleges boycotted classes to take part in the protests. In Tiruchi, protests were held at 15 places including Tiruchi city.

**(With inputs from Wilson Thomas in Coimbatore and C. Jaisankar in Tiruchi)**

> > > <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/Alanganallur-resolute-protests-gather-steam-across-TN/article17057163.ece>

**MYANMAR : Rights groups concerned by disappearances of Burma pastors** (Associated Press / Catholic Herald via CNUA)



Burma military at a flag-raising ceremony (PA)

*Two Baptist pastors who had shown journalists a Catholic church allegedly damaged by airstrikes were summoned to an army base*

Human rights organisations expressed alarm on Tuesday over the disappearances of two Baptist pastors who had shown journalists a Catholic church allegedly damaged by airstrikes by Burma government forces who are fighting ethnic Kachin rebels. Langjaw Gam Seng, 35, and Dumdaw Nawng Lat, 65, were summoned to an army base in northern Shan state in north-eastern Burma on December 24. Heavy fighting has been occurring in the area between the government

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