

# THIRD SUNDAY OF OCTOBER

**DATE:** October 15, 2017 (28<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time)

**THEME:** Forming and Animating Young People

**READINGS:** Is 25:6-10 / Ps 23:1-3.3-4.5.6 / Phil 4:12-14. 19-20 / Mt 22:1- 14

**REFLECTION BY:** Irwin P. Gavilo

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## Forming and Animating Young People

Irwin P. Gavilo

Three points is a potent weapon in basketball. Sports writers would call it a dagger. If you have more players who can shoot accurately from beyond the arch, then you have an edge of winning a basketball match. This is the main reason why Golden State Warriors made it to the NBA championships dethroning the Cleveland Cavaliers in a devastating fashion. It is because aside from teamwork and tough defense, the Warrior Team has *mega* big guns, that is, players who can accurately shoot from the three-point territory. They have the unstoppable Kevin Durant alongside with the sharpshooters dubbed as the “splash brothers” in Stephen Curry and Clay Thompson, plus the other shooters of high caliber. Surely a massive force to reckon with!

For our reflection today, I will shoot three points from this humble *opus* with a prayerful hope that its simple wisdom would find its way into the consciousness of our young people, thus deepening their faith and awakening their zeal to live for Jesus Christ.

**1. Connect with Jesus. Pray!** What is the latest? This is the question that we can easily answer nowadays. From the latest news, coolest gadgets, recent events, trending fashion and even the status of our friends from all over the world, we are up to date because of our connection to the digital world through the internet. But the sad reality is that when we are asked what is the latest from the Lord or what is the message of the Lord for us, we are astounded and caught off-guard; our eyes become big and our minds become like a *tabula rasa*. Honestly speaking, we do not know what is the latest from the Lord nor his current message for us, because we are not connected with Him. A woeful reality! We are all connected to all the created things and beings around the world, but not to the One who created us and created the world.

Our readings today give us individuals who always know what is the latest or the current message of the Lord for them, because they are always connected with the Lord. We have Isaiah in our first reading who was able to deliver the message of Yahweh to the people of Israel. We

have Saint Paul in our second reading, decoding for the Philippians the good news from the Lord. In our Gospel, we have Saint Matthew proclaiming the message of Jesus to the Jewish community. All of them are human like us, but what made them special is their knowing what is the latest from the Lord and their ability to connect to him through prayer. Yes, prayer connects us to the Lord.

The invitation for us today is to pray. Do we pray? Yes, of course, is our confident answer. But the question is: how do we pray? More often than not we pray like this: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord, give me this and that ... blah ... blah ... blah.... In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. And we are done. Is this prayer? How can we know what is the latest or what is the message of God for us if we pray this way? We should bear in mind that when we pray we lift up our minds and hearts to God, and, God comes down and makes himself present before us. Prayer is supposed to be a heart-to-heart talk with the Lord. In prayer there is that open line of communication between the Creator and the creature. That is why when we pray we do it in a conversational way, meaning there is a listener and there is a talker. The talker becomes the listener and the listener becomes the talker. When we pray we talk to the Lord, and then we listen to Him. Spend some time in silence and hear Him speak in forms of whisper, inspiration or idea. It is only through this kind of prayer that we become on-line with God and in-sync with Him. And, it is in this sacred and intimate moment that God reveals to us what is the latest and what is His message.

My dear friends, as much as we exert an effort to connect to the world, more effort is needed to connect to Jesus. We do not need a gadget nor a wifi nor a signal nor spend an amount to connect with Him. All we need is to kneel, bow down, humble ourselves and lift up our hearts and minds to Him. Remember, it is only in connecting with Jesus that we will know what is the latest, His message and instruction to guide us to the path that leads to our true home, where all of us are invited to enter and share in the banquet prepared for everyone.

**2. Live with Jesus. Love!** Who is in love? We Christians are supposed to be lovers. Connected to the Lord in prayer, we come to realize that we are called to love. This is the meat and substance of Jesus' teaching and mission. Love is the commandment given to everyone who desires to follow Him. It is by loving that all men will come to know that we are Jesus' disciples. When we live in love we live with Jesus, and when we love we make Christ present.

There is so much hate in the world today. It is instilled in social media, magnified in the news as if the only solution in today's chaotic world is hate. But, amidst this kind of society that we have now, the challenge for us Christians is according to the prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi: where there is hatred we are called to sow love. The commandment of the Lord is still valid: Love one another as I have loved you. This is what the world needs today.

In the commandment to love, it is noticeable that the Lord did not stop from saying love one another. There is another commandment attached to that same commandment: as I have loved you. The reason is evident. Because our understanding of love is different from that of the Lord. Our love is choosy. I love you if you love me. Our understanding of love is conditional.

It must always be reciprocated. We are always the beneficiary. Christian love is different. It is loving the way the Lord loves us—unconditional and non-judgmental. The Lord loved us despite our weaknesses and frailties, despite our unworthiness and hard-headedness, despite our ugliness and nothingness. He loved us because he chose to love us. As recipients of this kind of love, we are called to share this genre of love so that people may experience that God is in their midst.

The challenge for us today is to love our enemies by forgiving, praying and befriending them. Honestly speaking, this is so hard to follow, especially with the world's trend to retaliate and seek revenge. No matter what the tides may be, as Christians we are not haters; that is why our values must transcend what the world considers as proper and normal. Loving the unlovable is our identity as disciples of Jesus. If you love those who love you, what is good about that? And, if you are friendly only to your friends, what is so exceptional about that? As disciples, we are asked to pray for our persecutors: to pray for blessings and good tidings to befall the people who hurt us no matter how bad it may be. And, still we continue to be good and do something good despite of the sour treatment that we received from them.

My dear friends, always remember that love is our being and love is our mission. It is in loving that we make Jesus alive in our lives and in the lives of those whom we love. Love is the wedding garment that we should wear in order for us to be accepted in the wedding banquet prepared by the king as mentioned in our Gospel parable today.

**3. Share Jesus. Proclaim!** What is our purpose? Connecting and living with Jesus are not the be-all and end-all of everything. We have a mission which is to share Him with our brothers and sisters. It is the mandate that we receive from the Lord to go into the whole world and make disciples. We are the servants sent by the king to call the invited guests to the wedding banquet. The task given to us by Jesus to make him known in our family, circle of friends, community, and to the people we meet in the highways and byways of everyday life.

In our world today, this is easier said than done, because there is so much hunger and thirst, not for food or water, but for popularity. The temptation is to be recognized and praised. That is why we keep posting on Facebook and Instagram for the world to know us, what are we doing and where we are going. We are on cloud nine if our posts are trending, when we have so many likes and gather positive comments. We love to see our names printed on tarpaulins or streamers. Hearing our names mentioned in big events for an accomplishment is like a melodious song in our ears. On the other hand, we feel sad when our efforts and contributions are not recognized. We grumble when our names are not written in the roster where we expected to be included.

Despite this great temptation of proclaiming oneself, we are reminded of our mission and purpose. As baptized Christians we are supposed to be selfless when it comes to our service of the Lord. Work great or minute things for the Kingdom without self-proclamation. Just like Saint John the Baptist, our goal is not to direct the attention of people to ourselves but to Jesus. He must increase while we must decrease.

People nowadays expect only one thing from us Christians; it is Jesus. People wish to see Jesus in us. Unless we are able to bring Jesus to our community where we live, then our purpose, I think, is a total failure. According to Saint Paul: Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel. We are sent by the Lord, wherever we are, to bring the joy of the Gospel, to let people hear, feel and experience the presence of Jesus and that he is always in their midst, journeying with them and will never abandon them no matter what. The authors in our readings today did their part; I hope that we do ours.

Finally, I hope and pray that this humble sharing of mine will help deepen our understanding of who we are as true disciples of the Lord. We are (1) to connect with Jesus through prayer; (2) to live with Jesus through love; and, (3) to share Jesus through proclamation.

My dear friends, I throw the ball from beyond the three-point arch. The question is: *Will that ball find its way into the basket of our consciousness, of our lives?* Amen.

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