

Mission and God's Providence

Emilio A. Ascaño

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If I look back on my seven years of *mission ad extra* in Taiwan, I can say that it was a mission of good memories. If I look back on my assignment for *mission ad intra* within the Philippines, I can say that it is also full of good memories. When I say “good memories,” I am not only referring to the good things I did for the Lord for the past seventeen years, but also about having experienced what the Lord did for me. We missionaries have good memories, because of the faithfulness of the Lord in taking good care of anyone who is sent on mission. To be able to experience the providence of God in a most profound way is one of the best gifts that the Lord can give a missionary. I stand as a witness of God's loving providence. He took good care of me, he is taking good care of me, and he will take good care of me.

Jesus has always been telling us to trust Him and to rely on his goodness and the goodness of others; he provides for our needs as we go on our journey, as we set foot in our assignments and mission fields. The Lord tells us not to worry because God is with those whom He sends. Truly God was with me and will continue to be with me. When we talk about “needs” in mission, we are not talking only of the small things (e.g. somebody gave you a gift during Christmas or Chinese New Year). It is something bigger. It is something larger. I remember when Msgr. Esteban Lo, LRMS, who was then our Father Moderator, called me and asked me

to continue in Taipei so that we could start a mission in Taipei. At that time, my missionary visa was about to expire; the Maryknoll Fathers had asked me to move from their house in Taipei; there was a need to wait for the decision of the Archbishop with his Council as to where I would stay.

Even if you are doing God's work, you still have to make great efforts. One has to still do something to make sure the work of God will start somewhere, always believing that God will provide. God's providence was evident in the kindness of Taiwanese Catholics who joyfully welcomed me and kept me in their homes and communities. The seasoned Maryknoll Missionaries like Fathers Al Doyle and Tony Polyak helped me while waiting for the renewal of my missionary visa and while waiting for the decision of the Archbishop. God was gracious and good. The Archbishop assigned me in a missionary territory as an assistant to a kind-hearted priest, Father Joseph Wang of Ji-Lung. In his parish I was able to learn two more languages (Mandarin and the Amis dialect). My experiences in this parish eventually prepared me to be assigned in one of the best parishes of the Archdiocese of Taipei, Saint Columban Church of Bei-Tou. This year, Saint Columban Parish is celebrating their fiftieth anniversary, and I am so blessed to be a part of their journey of faith. Though it was short, the experience of God's providence was meaningful and substantial.



When Jesus asks us to depend on God's providence, he doesn't say: "Hey, let's just sit here in the shade and wait for something to happen." We have to do something to make things work. We cannot wait for the would-be believers to come to us! Missionaries must be active and have to go from place to place, to invite others to come and see. In Saint Columban Parish, for example, we went singing Christmas Carols at MRT stations to attract would-be Christians. We went to the hospitals to visit the sick, the elderly and the abandoned. We had to gather the children to be catechized. We had to think of activities and formation programs that could make the faith of the youth alive. We had to prepare well for the Mass to help members deepen their faith. And, more importantly, we had to become witnesses of the Gospel. A missionary is an active agent of the Lord Jesus Christ and a firm believer of God's loving providence.

I offer a simple side note. My warmest congratulations to the parishioners of Saint Columban Church in Bei-Tou, Taipei. Happy fiftieth anniversary! Thank you for all the good things you have done for me. I have good memories in our

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parish. I felt that the love of God was overflowing, not only because of your generosity towards me but most especially for inspiring me to be a good priest and missionary because of your fervent faith in the Lord. May our Christian community continue to grow in faith, hope and love!

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