

Magis

Formation for Mission

Stewardship

Simplicity

Sharing

Service

Official Publication of the Magis Deo Community

August 2020 Issue

Faith forward

In these unpredictable times,
be as certain as the dawn

God violates social distancing

Being near to Him keeps
your Spirituality alive



Marriage boosters

We may not be face-to-face,
but we're heart-to-heart

SDR in times of darkness

God wouldn't give us
something we can't handle

To be truly perfect

Perfection is measured by
how you accept yourself

About the Cover



It was during 1896 that we broke free from such a restricting empire spearheaded by colonizers. This colonization led to a distorted view on who we truly are as Filipinos — there's still fossils and artifacts to our rich culture that we've yet to exhume. From then on, we were watered down to the fact that Filipinos had strong resilience to trials of the universe; that we usually are "kind" and that we "smile" a lot. But did our Philippine heroes do nothing but smile to help us gain independence? Jesus was kind, but he fought for the injustices that plagued such an unholy land.

Right now, it's hard to smile. Months pass, numbers rise, and people lose people. You read articles about students/teachers climbing uphill for strong signals. PWDs travelling across provinces via wheelchair. Jeepney drivers resorting to seeking alms. Peace leaders getting killed brutally by anonymous men. Now let's ask ourselves: Where are our heroes? Are we truly free? Do we just smile through this pandemic? Our frontliners can only fight for so long. We cannot stay positive while being passive; exhume your Spirits, and be a hero for our country.

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Magis

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Erratum: The article "Finding the Positive" in the June 2020 issue of the Magis Newsletter was written by Nina Aguirre

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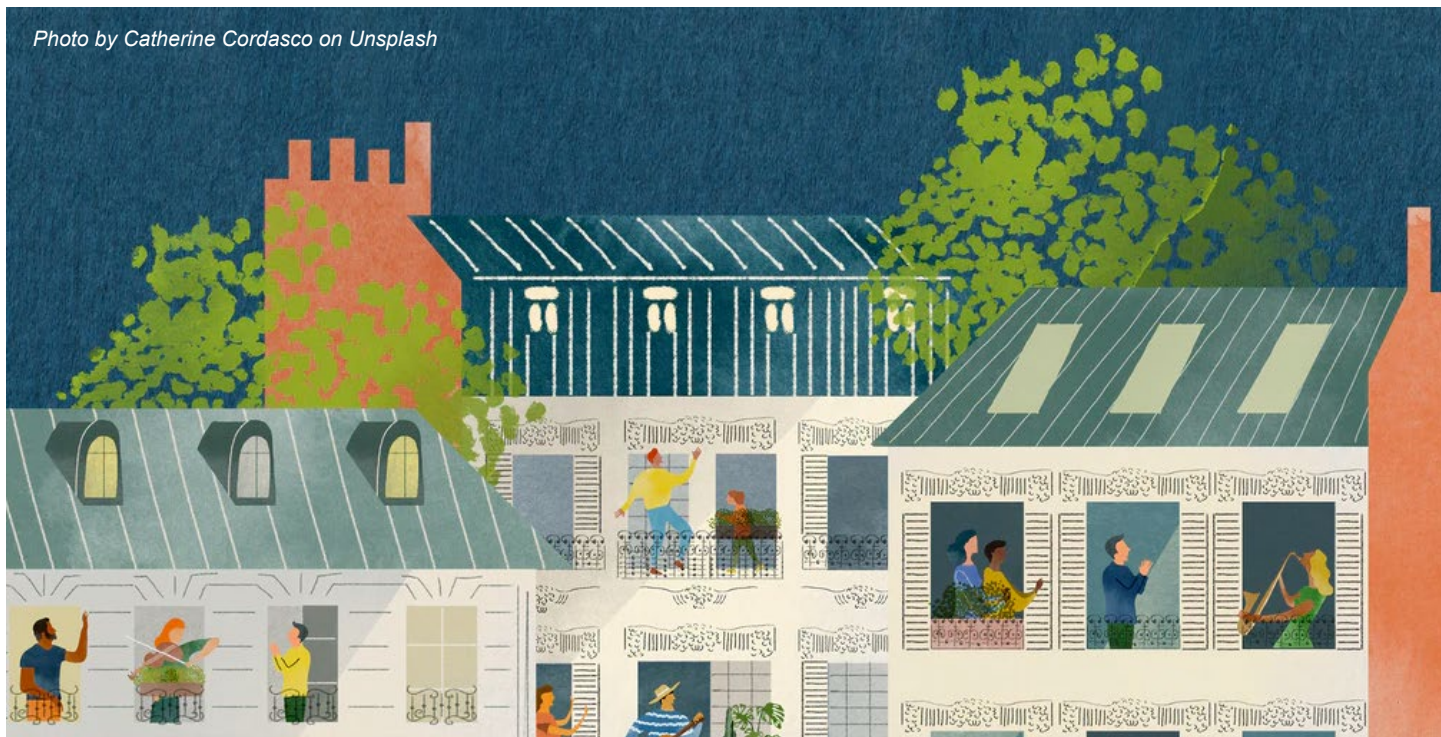
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Calendar of Activities: September-October 2020

September		September		October	
6	Community Celebration	19	"Zoomba", virtual health and wellness activity	4	Community Celebration
11-13	Annual Ignatian Retreat (AIR)- God's Love & Mercy	26	Marriage Booster: An Affair to not Remember		
11-13	Annual Ignatian Retreat (AIR)- Afoot with Ignatius of Loyola- Knowing, Loving, Following Jesus				

Our Mission in this Pandemic

Photo by Catherine Cordasco on Unsplash



Amidst the pandemic, the seeming chaos and noise of despair, we continue to try to keep our gaze on the Lord who walks on water, and bids us to come to Him. So many things are happening – sometimes too fast that we get lost in the whirlwind of events even as we stay in our locked homes.

When the lockdown was declared, it was a welcome respite for some who thought that things would be over after six weeks or eight. Time was on our hands to pray, reflect, do what we had wanted to do for ourselves and our family. Yet as time went by, and as we see the effect on those who lost their source of income for more than a month; then as the city started to open up, as we see the numbers rising; there is this unease that settles that then leads to anxiety as we begin to realize the pandemic is getting too close to home.

This is no longer about people that we read in the papers not known to us personally. Not about people whom we read in FB or hear at the teleradyo whom we pray for even if we do not know them well. Suddenly we hear of relatives, friends young and old, rich and poor, all close to us, who are confined, intubated, and worse, have passed on. The risks are all the more real and scary.

Reflecting on the gospels of the past Sundays – the events prior and after the transfiguration – we are called to reflect on our mission, and what this means amidst all these confusion and chaos. It tells us to find the calm from within, which we draw from our deep faith in the Lord and our fixed gaze on His mercy and love. It asks us to reflect how we now fulfill this mission to be the Lord's heart and presence for others.

There are just so many issues and concerns that beset us: sickness, increased poverty, loss of jobs, threats to our freedom. Yet amidst all these, we seek to listen, and heed the quiet voice calling us to love and follow Him. We do not know where all these will lead us to and when they will end. Yet we plod on with much faith, following the example of Mother Mary who gave her Yes to the Lord's invitation. We go out of our shell, extend our hand to those in need materially and spiritually. And as we do so, we conquer our fear. We become the vessel or instrument by which God makes His love known. We become the light that is no longer under the bushel but that which finds its place on the lamp stand to help others see their way in the dark.

Magis Deo in a New Environment

Boy dela Peña, Exodus BCGG

This is just a brief report on the most recent activities of our community.

The last ComCel held on August 2, 2020 had the theme “Living and Loving in the Reality Ever After.” The resource person and mass presider was Fr. Allan Abuan. He had a creative/innovative introductory part which presented favorite characters, analyzing their personalities, and making a prediction if they will live happily ever after. He did the analysis for Anna and Kristoff in Frozen, for Aladdin and Jasmine in Aladdin, for Belle and the Prince in Beauty and the Beast, for Shrek and Fiona in Shrek, for Ariel and Eric in the Little Mermaid, and for Cinderella and Prince Charming in Cinderella. He then very skillfully proceeded to discuss “fairy-tale – fantasy versus reality” – discussing the three stages of love (Marriage Encounter 1) and then focusing on “living and loving intentionally.” He ended by asking “Is there such a thing as a happily ever after?”

The three questions he passed on to the community for reflection were:

1. Am I living and loving my spouse intentionally?
2. What in me needs to change for me to love my spouse intentionally?
3. What are the concrete ways I can love my spouse intentionally?

The second item I would like to share is a listing of very productive and much-appreciated events for our youth. For the month of June, July and August, the Youth Ministry was fortunate to have offered activities for the kids:

- June 11 – 2nd Prayer Meeting of Magis Young Adults with Fr. James. Attended by 26 persons.
- July 18 – Story-telling and singing activity with Zarah Gagatiga and her son Nico. Attended by 14 kids.
- July 25 – Talk on Laudato Si and Caring for our Mother Earth, with the Sea Institute led by Robert Suntay. Attended by 35 persons.
- August 1 – Kids’ Color Me Fun by Karen Madrid. Attended by 19 kids.
- August 8 – Young Adult Fellowship Kahoot Bible Game by Joaquin and Janais Aldeguer. Attended by 15 persons.

The third item I would like to report is the recently concluded SDR conducted by Fr. James Gascon, SJ, last July 24-26, 2020.

The Covid-19 pandemic did not dampen but in fact buoyed up the spirit of Magis Deo members in seeking God in the Spiritual Deepening Retreat (adapted) on 24-26 July 2020. It was the first online SDR but 42 participants came completely open to it: 4 from ME Classes, 8 SDR first-timers from BCGGs, 8 inactive Magis members, and 23 BCGG members from Archangel Gabriel, Easter, Exodus, Francis, Genesis, John, Mustard Seed, Prodigal 102, Transfiguration, Samaritans and St. Peter.

Fr. James Gascon, SJ, SDR retreat director and Magis Spiritual Director, creatively adapted the SDR to a home retreat; encouraged participants to have quiet disposition and treat all household activities as part of prayer; created sacred spaces at home; and provided a good taste of Ignatian Spirituality and the Spiritual Exercises (SPEX) of St. Ignatius of Loyola. The SDR prepared participants for succeeding Annual Ignatian Retreats.

The participants came with a desire to find God in the SDR but God found them first. God met the participants where they were at the moment. With openness, the participants allowed God to simply enter their hearts and minds and the graces flowed.

The fourth and last item I would like to share is the outreach plan initiated by Jojo and Rhea Gaddi and supported in the council by Benz and Vina Dimanalata. This is the planned project to assist members who need help with online classes for their children specifically in need of a laptop, desktop, or alternative gadgets so they can attend class. A team will be organized and mobilized; it will support and look for resources to help.

In addition to the above, we are happy to note particularly good participation among members in their online BCGG meetings as well as the interface activities.

We now look forward to very important virtual events, particularly the Marriage Booster which will be held on August 29 from 8:00 to 9:45 pm, to be given by Fr. James Gascon, SJ, and the two AIRs – the basic one on God’s Love, the other on Spiritual Exercises. Both will be held on September 11-13, 2020. The first will be conducted by Fr. James Gascon, SJ; the other by Fr. Bob Buenconsejo, SJ.

Ignatius and the nearness of God in the pandemic

God Violates Social Distancing

July 5, 2020 ComCel Talk by Fr. James Gascon, SJ

Jane Aldeguer, Chronicles BCGG

What's your Magis Ignatian score?

Fr. James: "Ako MAGIS 88%. More to go. Ikaw po?"

Jane: "I'm a struggling 64%."

Fr. James: "Don't worry. Passing grade is 10%. Grace is 90%. So yours is 36% grasya ng Diyos. Can I get an Amen?"

Jane: "Amen!"

"God violates Social Distancing – the most important principle of Ignatius; God will always be with us 'no matter what' at all times." What a fitting reminder once again from Fr. James, amidst these uncertain times due to this pandemic.

And what a timely topic as we celebrate the feast of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

If there is a favorite talk by Fr. James on Ignatian Spirituality, this is my favorite. Having been with Magis Deo for 18 years, we have taken advantage of various formation programs from prayer workshops to SDRs, AIRs, RDL, and the numerous ComCel talks. Whenever I hear a familiar note or quote, I try to remember... "When was that talk?", "I heard that from Fr. Ruben during...", or I'd try to dig in my files (or the search button in my phone) to revisit the topic, talk or homily from various Jesuit priests. But this one given by Fr. James on the *Ten Elements of Ignatian Spirituality*, is truly a wonderful summary of the vital concepts of who and what we are... Magis Ignatians.

First, Fr. James mentioned "spirituality." I grew up with the more familiar term "religious." With the various retreats and recollections, I have become more accustomed to "spirituality." The explanation of Fr. James enlightened me more on the true meaning and significance of Spirituality: "*As grace, we grow into our Spirituality. Healthy Spirituality gives birth to spiritual awakening: an experience that God exists, that God is near, that God is within us, not because someone told us so, but as personally experienced.*"



There is more to being "religious" than just going to mass every Sunday or daily, or praying novenas and repetitious prayers, or reading the Bible, or even serving in the parish. It is living my prayer in my way of life, making God known to others through my relationships, making the Word alive through my actions, and being mindful of God's faithfulness, goodness, and mercy in my life. (Lord help me...)

Here is a recap of the *Ten Elements of Ignatian Spirituality* and how they struck me:

Kudos to Fr. James for constantly guiding and inspiring the community with his teachings and reflections!

1. *It begins with a wounded soldier daydreaming on his sickbed.*

I gave myself a score of 8 on this. I have two Xavierian sons and I would tutor them in CLE which tackles the life of St. Ignatius. And Jojo would brag that he watched the movie "Ignacio de Loyola." But really, I grew to appreciate if not be inspired by the teachings, having known what Ignatius went through and how he was transformed, one of the fruits of which is our treasured "Spiritual Exercises."

2. *The world is charged with the grandeur of God.*

Seeing God in all things. Seeing God's will in all things. And using these things "so that we can know God more easily and make a return of love more readily."

3. *Call and response.*

God calls me, I respond. I remember Jojo asking me a couple of days ago regarding a work-related opportunity: "Why me? What is God's invitation to me amidst these?" Praise God for a slowly growing disposition in God's mission, returning of His love, and yearning to serve Him in moments in His life.

Continued to page 8

Faith Forward

Rhea Rosas Gaddi, Prodigal 102 BCGG

One of the fears of doctors during this pandemic is that during their duty, they might be exposed to the Covid-19 virus, thus exposing and putting their own families at risk when they get home.

A few weeks ago, our family faced these fears when Jojo tested positive for Covid-19. He only experienced dry throat, otherwise was asymptomatic. Upon receiving his test results, Jojo immediately scheduled the rest of our household (me, Enzo and our two yayas) for swab tests the following morning. By God's grace, we four tested negative for the virus.

What moved me most was the moment Jojo told me about his test results – “*Mama, I’m sorry,*” and he cried, moved away from me, motioning to keep my distance. He was sorry and feared that his being on duty that week might have exposed him to people carrying the virus. He apologized to me, Enzo and our yayas. He also apologized to his staff, fellow doctors and the patients he saw that week, concerned that he might have also put them at risk.

My heart broke as he broke down, but it was also filled by his love for our family and for others. I have never felt so loved by him, and I knew it was God’s love embracing us both at that moment. The Prayer for Generosity crossed my mind and reassured Jojo that he had nothing to apologize for because he responded to help save a limb and a life, as both were critical case surgeries.

**“Teach me to serve You as You deserve,
To give and not to count the cost,
To fight and not to heed the wounds.”**

That is our Doc Jojo – a man for others, putting others before his own. Amare et Servire.



As I write this, Jojo is recovering well and continues his usual activities before he got infected and went into self-quarantine – he continues to see patients online, joins webinars and virtual meetings at the hospital, exercises regularly and checks Enzo’s homework. He also makes sure we continue our family rosary in the evening via FB Messenger, and attend

our BCGG prayer meetings. To not burden me with additional chores, he does his own laundry in the bathroom and washes his utensils after eating.

Jojo is the fourth person in my family who tested positive for Covid-19. His father was also confined at the ICU due to another illness for more than a month during the ECQ. Today, we are deeply grateful that all our loved ones have recovered well. Our families continue to pray for each other, and for other families struggling with Covid-19. While we continue to fight this one virus, how it affects and infects us varies in so many ways. During these difficult times, I have realized these to be true:

.... that the love of our family will provide us that solid ground to stand on when we tremble;

.... friends will find ways to listen and comfort you, on-line and off-line;

.... when emptied by fears, our prayer community will refill our hearts with prayers of healing and support;

.... be kind and be open to the kindness of strangers as compassion does not discriminate;

.... and that God will never stop loving us and will rebuild us when we are broken.

The pandemic and Covid-19 may hold the world back, but we continue to move forward with love, gratitude and faith.



“And Your faithfulness, as certain as the dawn.”

– from *I Will Sing Forever*, by Fr. Manoling Francisco, SJ

Continued to page 8

God Violates Social Distancing... continued from page 6

4. *The heart has its reasons of which the mind knows nothing.*

During our ME Weekend, feelings were emphasized, feelings were valued. I continue to be reminded that God speaks to us through our feelings. And we can come to God with all bareness through our feelings.

5. *Free at last.*

This is one of the popular points during our BCGG sharing.... we strive and work hard and pray to be blessed with the fruits of our labor. But the goal is to be free from any attachment that may hinder us from serving God; inordinate attachments or “mga wala sa lugar, at, maling pagpapahalaga.” We are called to radical detachment, no preference. If I will not have “this,” will I still be the same person before God?

6. *Sum up at night what thou hast done by day.*

The Examen.... a basic way of deepening our spirituality. Taking time to know God through finding Him in our day's activity, and in the process, knowing ourselves better and how we can serve God more. Just like any relationship, it is cultivated with the time spent together. How beautiful that I am reminded of these three questions: What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I do for Christ?

7. *Practical Spirituality.*

TANTUM QUANTUM – whatever helps. In a way, Ignatian Spirituality is not a fixed box. CURA PERSONALIS - Caring of

the person; attention to people's individual needs and their unique circumstance and concerns.

8. *Don't do it alone.*

For me, this is the very essence of a community or a team, working with others, the harmony of the various gifts of each other, the beauty of knowing, affecting people, and growing with people, all instruments from God.

9. *Contemplation in Action.*

I always remind our family that yes, it is truly important to pray for others, but beg also for the grace to help us DO something, move us to ACT, and let other people feel God's love through us.

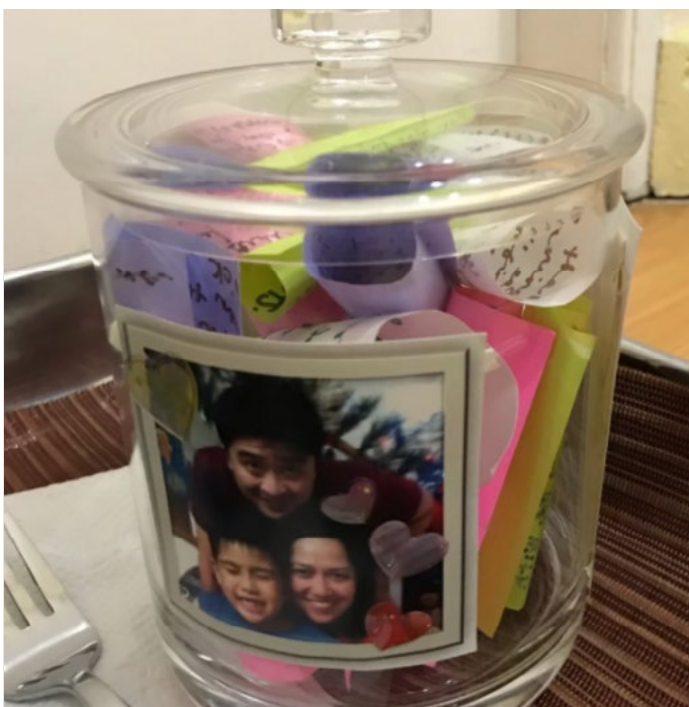
10. *Men and women for others.*

The most uplifting things in life are not what we do for ourselves or what benefits us, but what we do for others and what lifts them up.

Jojo is “green-blooded,” but if you ask about his spirituality, he will say he is Ignatian. Thank you, St. Ignatius, for coming into our lives. May the fruits of this spirituality trickle down to our children and our children's children, as it moves our family to serve God.

By the way... *How about you? What is your MAGIS Ignatian score?*

Faith Forward, continued from page 7



OUR GRATITUDE JAR

Enzo wrote on a post-it note
14 reasons, words or memories he
loves about his dad. One note per day
of quarantine ❤️

My mom and I enjoy writing – short notes, letters and stories. We were thinking of different ways to make Dad feel happy during his “Me Time” or what grown-ups call self-quarantine. Then we remembered the **5 Love Languages** exercise by Fr. James Gascon, SJ, during one of the Community Celebrations and thought... we can use that! We reviewed Dad's scores and his love language is **AFFIRMATION** (close to Quality of Time). So Mom and I created a “**Gratitude Jar**” where we wrote things we love the most or want to say “Thank You” to Dad.

Our small project (what Mom calls it) is something new to me but I felt good when I was doing it. I'm glad I did it because I know it made my Dad happy. And that's pretty cool 😊.

The Red Balloon

Pia Navarrete, daughter of Monchito & Tina Mossesgeld, Cana BCGG



The image by Banksy of a little girl letting go of a red balloon, has been on my mind ever since Ms. Rita Atienza showed it in one of the SALT Webinars. It brought back a childhood experience of losing a balloon. And as it is with childhood memories, it was not the actual event that I remembered but the emotions associated with it – the anxiety of losing something important, and helplessness that I could not do anything about it.

As a child, there were many similar moments when I became very sad about losing everyday objects, some of which people may have taken for granted, but were nonetheless important to me. In the Inner Child workshop I attended last school year, I became more conscious of how these experiences had a great impact on the way I dealt with things. I had the tendency to be over-controlling to shield myself from feeling anxious and upset. My tendency to be rigid lessened as I grew older, especially as I became a mother of 4.

Then suddenly, the lockdown happened, and I was that little child again. I started to panic and became upset over the things I “lost.” I entertained all sorts of fears mainly brought about by the uncertainty around me – fake news, an inept government, the loss of my usual sources of security, not being able to reach out physically to my parents, friends and other people from whom I drew strength. I also felt guilty about focusing so much on myself and the needs of my family when other people were losing their jobs and going hungry.

In a yoga lecture I attended last May, the teacher advised us to identify where we need to put our effort, where we need to let go, and accept that what’s going to happen will happen. I told myself, maybe it’s time to let go of the things beyond my control and focus on what I can do. However, unlike before, this time I let go willingly, knowing it was something I needed. As I let go of the routines at home that I had become accustomed to and insisted on, I found myself being more mindful, aware, and sensitive to what each of my family members needs at this time.

As I let go of the comforts I thought I should have, I have learned to focus on the essentials and become more aware of what life is giving me and my loved ones.

As I let go of the physical presence I felt was needed in order to establish strong bonds between family and friends, I have become more purposeful in how I would connect with others, and have even been able to form new friendships.

As I let go of the helplessness of not being able to assist others in the usual ways, I have found so many other avenues for reaching out through a colleague, a batchmate, and even mere acquaintances.

As the school year is about to start, I know there will be many more challenges and uncertainties to face. There are so many things that will still be beyond my control. I don’t know if things will ever be the way they used to be. I pray to God that I can continue to face what is to come with the grace of openness, acceptance and gratitude. I pray that even when the situation around us seems hopeless, I will never lose sight of our shared mission to form the children under our care so that they can help make our country and our world a much better place one step at a time. And finally, just like Jesus is to me, I pray that I can be a source of strength and light to others who may be like the little girl who is afraid to let go of her red balloon.

Meet me, O Christ,
in this stillness of morning.
Move me, O Spirit,
to quiet my heart.
Mend me, O Father,
from yesterday’s harms.
From the discords of yesterday,
resurrect my peace.
From the discouragements of yesterday,
resurrect my hope.
From the weariness of yesterday,
resurrect my strength.
From the doubts of yesterday,
resurrect my faith.
From the wounds of yesterday,
resurrect my love.
Let me enter this new day, aware of my need, and
awake to your grace,
O Lord. Amen.

– from the book “Every Moment Holy” by Doug McKelvey

Highlights and Reflections on Fr. Allan Abuan's talk on Living and Loving in the Reality Ever After







Aug. 2, 2020 Magis Deo Community Celebration

Ney & Pinky Rosas, Chronicles BCGG

I. ... and they LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Characters in fairy tales have their share of challenges and conflicts but in the end, the lovers end up in each other's arms. Fr. Allan gave us a hypothetical picture of what happens after the Disney ending and the solution of a happily ever after of togetherness. It calls for giving emotional support, guiding each other, accepting one's spouse for themselves and solving problems together despite having some doubts.

On the other hand, Fr. Allan shattered our fairy tale notion of the "happily ever after" with the prediction of a break-up due to selfishness, not making the effort to know each other, and shutting one's self from the other. However, all is not lost as doing the opposite will keep our characters, or us, together.

Happily ever after... they will always be together.		They will likely break-up... BUT	
Anna & Kristoff, <i>FROZEN</i> 	Kristoff will be very reliable for Anna. He can't help her with her government issues, but his emotional support and faith will help her when she needs it. And Anna can direct and inspire Kristoff.	Belle & the Prince, <i>BEAUTY & THE BEAST</i> 	There are 2 possible options. Either the Prince will follow his love everywhere and they will live their entire life together, or Belle will realize that she wants adventures more than love and will soon leave the Prince.
Aladdin & Jasmine, <i>ALADDIN</i> 	They are great for each other. Aladdin will guide Jasmin into another life that she has never seen before and Jasmin will remind him that there are better things in life than money.	Ariel & Eric, <i>THE LITTLE MERMAID</i> 	There are 2 options. Either they will live happily ever after forever, because neither of them is very clever, or they will break up soon because they don't know much about each other. And Eric will most likely get tired of Ariel.
Shrek & Fiona, <i>SHREK</i> 	They are great for each other. Everyone finds the things in this relationship that they need and they accept themselves for who they are. They solve all their problems successfully, despite all the doubts they have.	Cinderella & Prince Charming, <i>CINDERELLA</i> 	They will definitely have problems, but they will happen later in the relationship. Cinderella will shut herself down and nobody will help. And the prince will soon find a mistress or even divorce Cinderella.

II. Fairy Tale-Fantasy vs. Reality

Transitioning to reality, Fr. Allan presented the 3 Stages of Love (Review of Marriage Encounter)

1. Romance or Illusion Stage or the "Falling in Love" stage: This is the euphoria of falling in love, the early stages of romance.
2. Disillusionment Stage or "Falling Out of Love" stage: Fr. Allan gave possible scenarios or feelings husbands and wives go through during the Disillusionment Stage

– worry of growing apart, dissipating passion, boredom and dissatisfaction with life together and thinking you love your spouse but not "in love." Surprise, surprise... this is not necessarily the end of your happiness together but can actually be normal.

3. Joy Stage or True Love Stage: The key words here are joy and choice. Joy is dependent on your decision and it is your choice. Marriage, consequently love, is a decision.

III. Living and Loving Intentionally

From St. Thomas Aquinas, “To love is to will the good of the other.” What does it mean to be loving intentionally? Love is an act of will – namely both an intention and an action. As our BCGG homework focuses on Loving Intentionally, here are the points enumerated by Fr. Allan:

- It means you are purposeful in word and action.
- It means you live a life that is meaningful and fulfilling to you.
- It means you make thoughtful choices in your life.
- Being intentional means you actively interact and engage with your life.
- You wake up every day and ask yourself, “How am I going to make this day great?” “How am I going to love my spouse today?”
- You respond instead of react.
- You love instead of fear.
- You embrace instead of expect.
- You accept instead of resist.



Fr. Allan also suggested some activities to enhance living and loving intentionally such as having a dialogue with our partner once a day to share about our day and our feelings about things going on (not discussing logical concerns, kids, etc.). We could also choose to do something loving for our partner even when we don't feel like it. Finally, start thinking about some aspirations, sharing goals and supporting each other. Making plans and sharing goals create a sense of unity that encourages growth in a stagnant relationship.

Is there such a thing as happily ever after? The answer is, with living and loving intentionally we can have our fairy tale ending. Fr. Allan left us with 3 questions (which we can do in our BCGG prayer meeting). Here is our sharing:

Reflection Questions	NEY	PINKY
1. AM I LIVING and LOVING my SPOUSE INTENTIONALLY?	I pray that I do, each day.	Yes but I should exert more effort to translate this into action which is my husband's love language.
2. WHAT IN ME NEEDS to CHANGE for me to LOVE my spouse INTENTIONALLY?	The way I think about each day. Doing things for her but not knowing if these are the things she really needs. I believe that my intentions are good but if they are not at the right time they all fall into nothing.	I should be more purposeful in my actions with my husband. I should be more engaging. Like when he cooks, I could be in the kitchen and keep him company instead of watching TV. P.S. I read this to Ney and he said, “Hindi naman kailangan yon.”
3. WHAT are the CONCRETE WAYS I can LOVE my SPOUSE INTENTIONALLY?	Greeting her with a kiss once she wakes up in the morning and say “I will surprise you today”. Giving her a kiss before sleeping and telling her what a wonderful day it was and let's do it again tomorrow.	I am very vocal, freely saying “I love you” to my husband. I can concretely show him my love by remembering that “actions speak louder than words.” This means not just showing affection but by being present, giving him attention, engaging him in talk or socializing with him more. I should intentionally spend quality time with him.

The Promise

Delsa Sangalang, Samaritans BCGG



What struck me when my son's girlfriend posted her anniversary greetings on FB last July 20 was her statement, "Dalawang taon na kitang pinipili araw-araw at patuloy kitang pipiliin Mahal." Given my son's profession and time limitations, I guess she really has to be intentional in loving my son.

Sa case namin ni Cesar, di ko matandaan kung ganun din ang iniisip ko nung nagsimula kami. Basta ang alam ko mag-nobyo kami ng 2 months before we graduated in college, at nabuntis na agad ako 6 months after the graduation. Up to now, di ko pa rin sure kung napilitan lang si Cesar dahil nabuntis ako, o natakot sa sinabi ng Nanay niya na baka kukulamin ko siya dahil Bisaya ako ☐. Basta sa part ko, I prayed for him to be "The One." Sabi ni Fr. Abuan, "Love is an act of will, it is an active choice." Sabi din niya, "being intentional means to be purposeful in word and action and making thoughtful choices in life." And I chose to love Cesar, despite our differences in upbringing, dialect, culture, and even religion.

Because...

- Unlike the Prince Charming, Cesar is not spoiled and absent-minded. Galing sa hirap... nangarap... nagpursige... at maswerteng nagtagumpay.

- Unlike the Beast, he is compassionate and not ill-tempered. Although paminsan-minsan wala pa rin sa tama ang tono pag may sinasabi o pinapakisuyo, kaya nakakasakit pa rin ng damdamin. Pero nakakabawi naman agad.

- Unlike Kristoff, Cesar spent most of his life communicating and interacting with other people. Minsan nga lang, pwede nang awardan sa pagiging Mr. Congeniality and I think he's just too accommodating, to a fault.

- Unlike Shrek, he is not selfish. He is kind and compassionate to his family and friends and he's always thinking of ways to help out.

- Unlike Aladdin, he is confident. Although minsan over na rin sa confidence at nasa borderline na nang pagiging mayabang. But I guess it has always been part of his leadership capabilities. And,

- Unlike Eric sa Little Mermaid, Cesar is smart and responsible. He's been a great father and an inspiration especially to his pamangkins.

There are many likable characteristics about Cesar but, mind you, meron ding mga di kanais-nais na katangian na minsan na ring sumubok sa aking pasensya at sa aming pagsasama. But I won't go through the details. I choose to focus on the nice and the positive and to never forget why God gave him to me in the first place. So yes, I could say I am living and loving my husband intentionally, simula pa nung nagsimula kami.

I'm not perfect either. I was as naive as Anna and Cinderella when we started, and sometimes had low self-esteem like Fiona. And right now, most of the times, I'm as stubborn as Jasmine and very sensitive, just like most of them probably. I tend to feel everything deeply. But I think what I really need to do, so I can love Cesar intentionally and he can love me back every day, is to let go of my pride and selfishness and insecurities. I have to love and respect and trust him just as I have committed then. I have to understand and forgive him infinitely. And I have to be grateful always for this gift that keeps our family together, with God in our midst.

This pandemic has actually given us this rare opportunity to choose to do something loving for each other. Pinagbu-brew at tinitimplahan ko siya ng kape twice a day habang nilalagyan niya naman yung water bottle ko as needed. Kung dati e may weekly date nights kami, ngayon naman ay araw-araw na zumba and online masses, and I get to kiss and greet him with peace every day. Sama-sama naming inaayos at nililinis ang bahay at ang fishpond, and that's already a loving act of service. Kung dati ang shared goal namin e sa acquisition ng property o kung saan mag-tatransfer, ngayon e kung pwede pang ayusin sa bahay, o kung saan ilalagay ang halaman, o kung anong bibilhin sa Ace Hardware.

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MARRIAGE BOOSTERS:

Couple Nourishment during this Time of COVID

Winston and Mae Cruz, Matthew BCGG / ME Ministry



When the Covid virus hit early this year, the Marriage Encounter Ministry had to make a tough decision on whether to proceed with the March Marriage Encounter Weekend.

There was a substantial headcount of 80 participants, including 22 newly registered couples, all set to attend the weekend retreat in Antipolo. Eventually, this ME Weekend had to go the way of other Magis Deo face-to-face community activities: we informed the participants that the Weekend was postponed... for now. But with Covid not likely to go away soon and the remote possibility of congregating for weekend retreats, the ME Ministry had to rethink its programs.

The ME Ministry now presents the Marriage Booster Program, a series of monthly online talks by a guest priest, covering topics on married life, from common marital issues to couple spirituality. The program provides an online (via Zoom) venue for couples to receive inspiration and guidance in their

marriage without having to go to a face-to-face event. This also gives Magis Deo members something to offer to their couple friends in lieu of the ME Weekend, until we can again hold community gatherings.

The series will be launched this month. The first talk, by Fr. James Gascon, SJ, will be on August 29 Saturday at 8:00 pm. We encourage you to share this poster (available in the Marriage Encounter Weekend Philippines Facebook page and in your BCGG Viber Groups) and invite your couple friends to sign up for this event. Magis Deo members are also welcome to sign up and attend. Every month will feature a new topic and a new guest speaker.

The ME Ministry hopes that the Marriage Booster series will serve as an effective outreach program and allow Magis Deo to continue to be relevant to and make an impact on the larger community of married couples.

Thank you for your support!

The Promise, continued from page 12

I learned to be intentional and do even simple ways just to show my love lalo ngayon na lagi kaming magkasama. Mahirap nang magkasawaan, dahil bawal lumabas. Although paminsan-minsan, nahihirapan pa rin ako hanggang ngayon not choosing to be right and just choose to be happy lang... pero pipilitin ko.

I guess the fairy tale-fantasy is really totally different from the reality. Wala naman talagang happily ever after. May away at tampuhan at samaan ng loob pa rin paminsan-minsan. But there will always be hugs and kisses and making up after. And

I would like to think that God gave us to each other because we were meant for each other, that we complement each other, and that through these 23 years, we've already accepted each other for who we are, despite our shortcomings and weaknesses. I'd like to hope and pray that despite all the doubts and uncertainties, we will grow old together, still patient and understanding and loving each other intentionally, with God's guidance and grace.



MARRIAGE BOOSTERS

Give your marriage a dose of nourishment in the comfort of your home with our Marriage Boosters series of monthly talks! Open to married couples of all ages!



IS LOVE ALL YOU NEED?

with Fr. James Gascon, S.J.

Do you really know what Love is? Or do you confuse it with Desire? Should Love help us Grow? How do I know that the Love we share is truly Authentic?

Aug 29, Sat | 8-945pm

Sign up for a topic each month! To register for this month's topic, please see accompanying message link.



AN AFFAIR TO NOT REMEMBER

with Fr. Allan Abuan

Whether it is an infidelity or an unhealthy addiction, marriages are subject to constant threats. How do you recognize when an emotional disconnection is happening and how do you work together to address it?

Sept 26, Sat | 8-945pm



THE ART OF FIGHTING

with Fr. Bob Buenconsejo

Fighting between couples is expected once in a while. But there is a way to handle this that will bring benefits to your relationship.

Oct 24, Sat | 8-930pm



LET IT GO: HOW TO FORGIVE

Before you can truly love and commit, you must learn to forgive. How can you do this with sincerity and conviction?

November



WHEN TWO PRAY

How important is prayer to a happy and lasting marriage? Am I praying the right way? Let God be the third party in the relationship and discover how you can overcome your daily challenges thru prayer.

December

These talks are conducted using Zoom app.



Loving Intentionally Starts with a Decision and is Possible by God's Grace

Reflections from Fr. Allan Abuan's Talk, "Living and Loving in the Reality Ever After"

Yang Puzon Reantaso, Samaritans BCGG



1. Am I LIVING and LOVING my SPOUSE INTENTIONALLY?

I learned from the talk of Fr. Allan that loving intentionally is the best way to love. It should be purposeful... pinag-iisipan. If the question is "Do I love my spouse?", this is no longer a question. Of course I love my husband, Ojay. But the challenge is, when misunderstandings or miscommunications arise, do I still love him? Hahahaha. Are my responses and actions attuned with the will of God? Matutuwa ba si God sa aking reaction? More often than not, I am not always living and loving my spouse intentionally because the way I respond or react (without going into specifics hehehehe) is not always something that God will be happy about (and my husband too, by the way).

2. What in me needs to change for me to LOVE my spouse INTENTIONALLY?

First, I need to make a firm decision and commitment to love intentionally. It all starts with a decision. It should be a daily conscious effort. I need to remind myself 24/7 especially that I am with my husband 24/7 (hahaha! I am not complaining!). Loving intentionally is always not easy but if once I make that unshakeable decision, then I believe it will be less challenging to do especially during moments when my husband is unlovable (when he becomes soooooo cranky and sungit!!!!). Thank you again, Fr. Allan, for this important tip.... "Pag-isipan muna kung anu ang gagawin or sasabihin before responding or reacting. Will God be happy with the way I will respond?"

Second, I know I have to tone down my ego, my pride and my being selfish. Most of the time, I only think of or put importance on how I feel. Paano naman yung nararamdaman ko, yung opinion ko? But Fr. Allan said in his talk (nakakainis na po kayo, Fr. Allan, hahahaha), "Simply willing the good of the other is an act of Christ-like love." Boy, was I convinced! Christ-like love is always selfless and unconditional.

3. What are the concrete ways I can love my spouse intentionally?

When I answered these questions, I thought of enumerating them all. Please, do not be judgmental. Hahahaha!

- Eat breakfast with him daily even if I am still so sleepy
- Bike or exercise with him every time he invites me even if I am so lazy
- Listen to him intentionally when he is saying something (I need to stop working or using my phone) even if I am busy or not interested in what he is saying (hehe)
- Respond to him lovingly and respectfully even if he is not lovable at that moment (Well, I am not lovable all the time too. Hehehe)
- Choose to be kind to him even if he is not kind to me at that moment
- Obey and respect him at all times even if I do not agree with him. I realized that he will not say or decide on any thing that will harm me or our family. At the end of the day, his intentions are always for the good of our family.
- Accept him for who he is -- the good and the bad because to be honest, I am not perfect either. Besides, my husband's good traits exceedingly outnumber his "not so pleasant traits" anyway. Plus, I cannot live without him so my only choice (hehehe) is to accept, appreciate and love him for who he is at all times.

After answering these reflection questions, I cannot help but be convinced by God's invitation for me to love my spouse more intentionally. I know it's not always going to be easy but with God's grace and my firm commitment to do so, nothing is impossible. Despite the many moments we would disagree about things and issues, which I know are normal with any married couple, I still always thank God daily for blessing me and my kids with a husband/father who is loving, thoughtful, selfless, goal-oriented, hardworking, patient, loyal, funny, cute (hehe) and is always willing to sacrifice to give us the best that the world can offer. This is how much he loves us. That's why he truly deserves to be loved intentionally by me.

My children and I are truly blessed to have Ojay in our lives and I believe I can go online shopping after he reads this article. End of my sharing.

Thank You, Lord...

Therese Martine (Timmi) Castillo Aguirre, Magis Youth



Photo by Baim Hanif on Unsplash

Dear Lord,
 What a journey it has been! A roller coaster ride with its ups, downs and turns. All the lows and the highs, our failures and our successes, thank you for all of it. We offer it all to you, Lord.

Thank you for staying by our side every step of the way. Thank you for giving us strength to keep going when we wanted to give up, peace when we were troubled, humility when we were filled with anger or hatred, love when we needed forgiveness and healing. Thank you Lord for everyone who has helped us through our journey.

Thank you for our family, our first mentors and teachers, for their undying love and support. Thank you for the sacrifices they have done for us. You have given us rest and consolation through our families.

Thank for the community that spreads so much love, kindness, and support to all of us. Thank you for our teachers and mentors, the front liners in our learning experiences, our guides not only in our school activities but also in our personal growth. They have helped us open our eyes to see the beauty in everything and helped us develop a keen eye on the injustices around us, and a yearning to do something about it. They have helped us shine our light shine for ourselves, for others and for You. Thank you for the people behind the scenes, the staff, the Alta Serv, the guards, and the canteen personnel who have helped us in many ways – helping us start our day with a smile on our faces, cleaning after our mess, preparing food, looking out for us, and thinking of our safety.

Thank you, Lord, for batch Bente. You work in mysterious ways and have brought us together. Thank you for bringing us together to be the batch Bente we are today. Whether it was our choice to transfer or not, we have all grown to love the school and the environment. Thank you for allowing us to grow through the friendship and the special bonds we have created. The gift of our friendship has allowed us not only to have companions in our high school life but also another family – a home we can run to.

In all the experiences we have gained, and all the people I have met in my high school journey, most especially in batch Bente, I see You, Lord.

As we put an end to our high school years, we ask that you guide us in our new endeavor, college. Continue to stay by our side. Continue to embrace us with your loving arms and give us strength, hope, peace, humility and love. May the next chapter be as fun and meaningful as the past one.

Send us the Holy Spirit, Lord, to guide us that we may start our college years with an open mind and open heart. When faced with challenges, like this unique time, help us continue to believe in goodness and spread kindness to those around us. May we embody the values instilled in us and be true persons for others. May we apply our knowledge from lessons learned and insights we have gained for the greater glory of God. These we ask in Jesus' name. Amen

To Be Truly Perfect

Caterina Nicole (Nina) Castillo Aguirre, Magis Youth



Perfection. Something I strive to be every day. I try to be perfect in the simplest ways like being able to tie up my hair perfectly, having my notes organized perfectly and even having my blouse tucked in my skirt perfectly. But also, I try to be perfect when it comes to grades, performing and being the perfect daughter and sibling.

However, I know perfection does not come easily and it's something not a lot of people can achieve because we say only God is perfect. To me, perfection is possible but to achieve it, you need to fully accept who you are and what you have. I learned how to accept myself not at the highest point of my life but my lowest. The one thing that prevented me from seeing myself as perfect were my insecurities.

Insecurities. Like it or not, we all have insecurities. There's always that trait others have that we wish we had too. Insecurity by its definition is the lack of confidence or self-doubt. Yes, I do have insecurities. My biggest insecurity is comparing myself to someone whom I see as perfection. And that perfection just happens to be none other than my sister. She's the exact definition of perfect to me. She's talented, intelligent, approachable, beautiful and hard working too. Her voice is like the sound of angels singing, her beauty is more than Snow White's and her personality is unimaginably pure. How's that not perfect, right? I love her with all my heart because she's my sister and we're very, very close as well. But sometimes I just can't help but be jealous of her. I am jealous when I see her getting better grades than me. How she can reach the standards of teachers and other people while I on the other hand try to. How she can be effortlessly beautiful in the eyes of

others even if her clothes don't match sometimes and her hair looks so haggard. How her artisticness reflects her simplicity as a person and how her smile can make others smile as well. How she's so willing to make sacrifices and think about others more than herself. Don't get me wrong, she really inspires me with all her traits, but I can't help but wish I had them too.

I remember those moments when I would compare myself to my sister. I remember those boys who want to chat with me just so they could ask me to tell my sister that they want to talk with her. Mostly, I remember the days when we were still kids and how much I was envious of her. I recall those moments in grade school when they would award each grade level with distinctions, honors, and the top ten of the batch. I would burst with excitement every time they would call out my name. "Caterina Nicole C. Aguirre, with honors." After all the awards would be called from my batch, next was hers. The teacher calls her name and adds, "third honors." During these moments I asked myself, haven't I studied enough? Didn't I give my all? But after showing my award to my parents, I realized that they show the same amount of joy and proudness to me and my sister every time we give them our awards. And that experience of feeling the joy and proudness of my parents overcomes the jealousy I feel when I compare myself to my sister.

When our whole family went on a pilgrimage to Europe, I remember the instance my grandmother asked my sister to sing on the bus. Yes, she has such a beautiful voice and I was not surprised my grandmother asked her to sing but I couldn't help thinking why she didn't ask me to sing too. I mean we would always do duets together so why not do another one.

I remember looking out the window, with a view of the blue sky and an ocean with sunlight reflecting on it. I also remember drops of water falling from my eyes with every note my sister reached. But as we passed the ocean and I saw the sun shining on me, I stopped crying and smiled as I closed my eyes because after my sister sang, I heard my grandmother tell the people in the bus how proud she was of her grandkids. She was telling everyone how much joy we give her and how she wouldn't want to change any single bit of her grandchildren. That to me was a sign of relief. The words coming from her lips made me realize that while my sister and I are different, she loves us for who we are. And at that moment, I was open to acceptance. Acceptance of myself.

Continued to page 20



Artworks of Samantha Nicoele Fajardo &
Sam Lorrenz Fajardo





Adele Espiritu Villanueva



Christianna Yupangco



Kaye Sangalang



Akia Tabilog



Garieth Geslani



Jared Belga



Ariela Lopez



Pablo Galang

To Be Truly Perfect, continued from page 17

I learned to accept and to be grateful. I learned to accept that I'm not like my sister and I shouldn't try to be like her because at the end of the day, being myself is the greatest blessing that I can give to the world. And I learned this because of the many times my parents would tell me, "Nina, we don't expect you to be like your sister and you don't have to be like her because we love you for you."

And all those times my friends supported me when I felt I was still not enough made me realize that if others accept

my personality and simply me, then that's the only way to find perfection. Without them I would never be able to find perfection and without my sister, I would have never found myself and how special I am. I accepted my loud and noisy self, my outgoing personality and my talents. I learned the importance of acceptance and what it can do to me. And with this lesson, I now know that I shouldn't be my sister's perfection but be my own perfection, because of the 7 billion people living in the same Earth as I am, there's only one of me.

Experiencing God in the (Home) Spiritual Deepening Retreat

Kaye Angeles, Genesis BCGG



There is no denying the extent of the crisis that we are going through now. The Covid-19 pandemic has restricted movement, reduced income and work prospects, but has given us a lot of time at home with the family, and opportunities to gain spiritual insights. Because of the lockdown, we have managed to transfer a substantial portion of our work, meetings and transactions onto electronic media and teleconferencing tools.

Keith and I have been working from home for some time now and we have found it quite doable. However, managing our emotions and keeping focused on the positive during the ECQ was crucial for us. We relied heavily on prayers. But after the tax season (mid-June), we both noticed that a lot of our initial energy was gone and we felt weary, wanting to move at a slower pace. God immediately answered, stepped in a little closer, and brought in our very home the Spiritual Deepening Retreat (SDR).

Day 1: July 24, 2020

Orientation

"Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while." Mt 14. 22-23

This opening statement of Fr. James, in the WHY of SDR, clearly offered us the respite we needed. The WHAT in SDR reminded us how God is there to be found by those who seek HIM. And the HOW of SDR spoke of the ordinary moments that comprise our days when we look, listen, smell, taste and touch what surrounds us (God's gifts in our paths each day) and allow ourselves to be surprised by HIM.

Session One – Renewed Awareness that I am Loved

"You created every part of me; you put me together in my mother's womb." Ps 139. 13

We are reminded of who we are in the eyes of God. We

are fearfully and wonderfully made. We are God's beloved, His precious children. God delights in us and He loves us!

"...Even if a mother should forget her child, I will never forget you." Is 49. 15

Contemplating on these words, we are reminded of the love and joy we feel when we lavishly show affection to our children and tell them how much we love them. And so it is with God. God knows us and sees us for who we really are – in all our glory and misery, our highs and lows. He knows every part of us, our heart and soul, our innermost thoughts and desires. God sees all our humanity, our daily battle with sin, and what in us need improvement. Nothing is hidden from HIM. And yet, He loves us.

Just as God put His loving arms around us, Keith and I can stand before HIM, expressing our profound gratitude for all that has been, saying our courageous YES to all that will be, and trusting HIM to take our hands and lead us to our journey with HIM.

Day 2: July 25, 2020

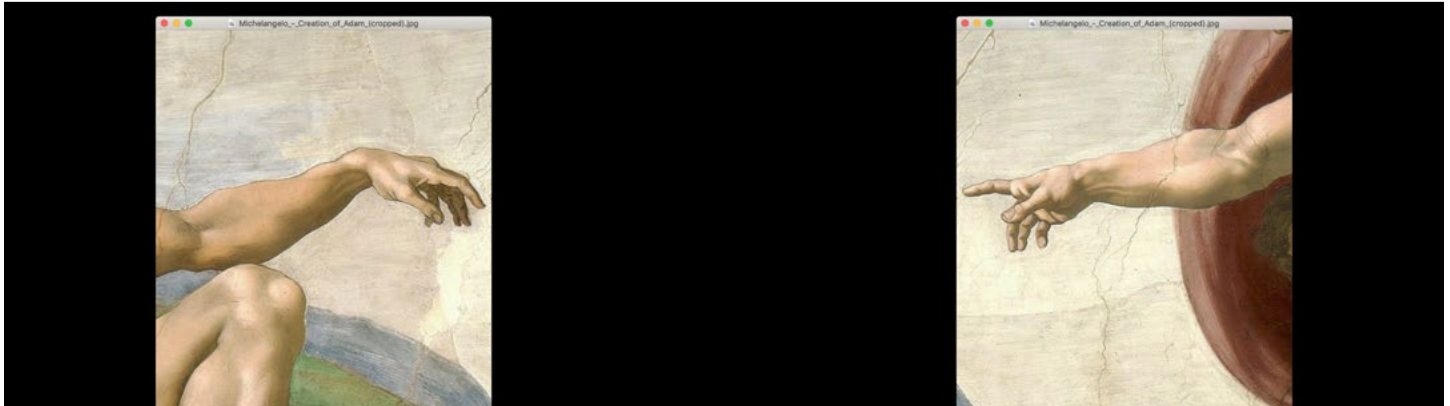
Session Two – My Creaturehood: I belong to God

"Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?" Mt 6. 26-27

The Covid-19 outbreak really took its toll on us all. We had our share of anxieties, worrying a lot, especially where to get much needed funds during the Enhanced Community Quarantine. We anchored our hope for providence on God, and we were able to get through that time of scarcity.

Fast forward to the present. We again face the same fears due to reduced income opportunities and increased cost of living. Keith and I have been juggling our funds to make ends meet and have been worrying.

At the SDR we were asked to observe the nature around us and take/reflect on something to represent us. On my way back home from the laundry shop, I drove around the block where our chapel is. I saw two zebra doves cooing on the road and in that moment, I saw ourselves in the birds. God cares for them as He even more cares for us. I knew the birds would be ok and we would be ok. I did not need to worry. We needed the reminder to depend on God.



Session Three: Spiritual Woundedness

“What an unhappy man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is taking me to death? Thanks be to God, who does this through our Lord Jesus Christ!” Ro 7. 24-25

In the SDR and in real life, this part has always been the hardest one. It is hard to seek the grace of a deep sense of shame and confusion before God for the effects of sins in our life.

Revisiting the patterns of sinfulness in our life, we see that we continue to sin. But asking ourselves every day which of our actions, or failure to act, have drawn us closer to God or have drawn us away, is more fruitful than the review we do when asking for the grace to make a good confession. We hope this will help us understand better the dynamics of sin in our life, for us to be able to say NO to sin and YES to God's love.

We are still a work in progress on this one. GOD is not finished with us yet.

Spiritual Activity: Contemplation of My Own Death

While we know that we all have our TIME UP in this world, death is something dreadful to talk about.

Both Keith and I pray for a peaceful death. We also pray that we, including the family that we would leave behind, would be prepared spiritually for that time. We both hope it will not happen soon and that we would be given the time and grace to secure our children's well-being. We would want to have lived the life that God intended for us. And we would like to be remembered as a true and faithful servant of God. We pray to have the courage to live the way we want us to be remembered.

Session Four – Call to Discipleship

“The grace to know Christ more intimately, to love him more deeply and to follow him more closely.”

This is the call for us to be MORE for GOD and LESS for ME. Where are we on this? It took us a lot to pass the stage of just taking interest in a life committed to following and serving GOD and setting it aside to attend to many more pressing needs. Now we are working our way to be free from any attachments that hinders us from answering YES to His call to discipleship. This road is not easy but as we grow deeper in our relationship with God, we get the certainty of God's presence in

every situation, even in the most painful and pressing times. The invitation is constant -- to live with God in our center, to recommit our relationship with Him and to be one of His disciples.

Day Three: July 26, 2020

Session Five – The Cost of Discipleship

“Those who do not take up their cross and follow in my steps are not fit to be my disciples.” Mt 10. 38

To us, the cross represents the greatest love. The greatest love that endures and overcomes all. I have found my cross in Keith. He has found his in me. God has given us the cross of each other to love, to carry all the time, not to throw away but to treasure till the end. The cross demonstrates that death, pain and suffering do not have the final say. It is love.

Session Six – The Triumph of Discipleship

“Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” Lk 24. 26

From the pain and darkness of the Cross, God brings us the Resurrection. But sometimes when we struggle with adversity, it takes time for us to recognize the reality of the Resurrection. It is the triumph of life over death, good over evil and love over hate, but it is not as quick for us to realize and feel that we are already in the Resurrection. Moments of grief, illness, fear, or uncertainty about the future take away our time and patience to acknowledge our feelings, to pay attention, to listen and to pray.

We realize that if we feel empty, have fears, doubts and anxieties, we can bring all those to God, wait for Him and let Him walk with us, talk with us, and fill us with His divine presence. We can let ourselves love Him and let Him love us in return to experience new life now, amid hardships.

In anything and everything, God is reaching out to us, we are reaching out to Him and we are reaching out to one another.

Closing

As the SDR draws to a close, we are grateful for this experience, through Tita Josie Llamas. We thank Fr. James Gascon for helping to deepen our relationship with God, our spiritual life, and impacting on our way of seeing, of being in the world. Truly, God surprised us with His unique ways of making us experience HIM in this SDR.

SDR in Times of Darkness

Mark G. Madrid, John BCGG



Photo by Ahmed Hasan on Unsplash

These are hard times we are in now. Covid-19 has claimed lives, affected our livelihood, our families and our faith. It has been 4 months since the first lockdown was forced upon the whole world and us; it is truly an event of Biblical proportions. Where are we now? The numbers are rising, our government is struggling, our front liners are doing their best to save us and to help us with most of our essential daily needs. And finally, our churches are all broadcasting daily masses and online programs to guide us in our prayer, reflection and other spiritual needs.

My wife and I used to hear mass only on Sundays and our prayer time was irregular. But now, our whole household attends online masses on my laptop every day. We recite the Oratio Imperata at least three times a day and pray the Holy Rosary every night. "What happened?" you may ask. Well, fear happened. We are so scared to get the disease that our only defense is God's grace. We pray intently that all of us be spared from this harmful virus as we do our part by doing whatever it takes to safeguard ourselves.

We have been part of Magis Deo since 2009. We have attended several retreats starting with the Marriage Encounter followed by a few other couples' retreats over the years. Last July 24 to 26, we had our first SDR, the Spiritual Deepening Retreat, facilitated by Fr. James Gascon, SJ. Honestly, we did not expect it to be any different from the others we attended, other than this was our first to attend online. Because we were to listen in the comforts of our bedroom, my expectations were very low because of many possible distractions. I already had that mentality that this might not work as effectively as previous retreats we attended. My wife on the other hand was more optimistic.

The first night was just a simple getting-to-know-you activity wherein all 40-plus of us introduced ourselves and individually expressed what we expected to get from the retreat. Many cited guidance, clarity and strengthening of faith. I said the same and my wife added she always feels blessed despite all the bad things around us. The first talk revolved around the idea that God, with true infinite love, created each one of us uniquely. He made each of us special in our own unique way. Nothing ever happens in our lives if it were not planned by God Himself. Before we ended the night we were given an activity to write a letter to God. Write as if each of us were having an intimate

conversation with Him. And so I wrote and wrote and it turned out like nagsusumbong ako. You see, for many months, I've been pre-occupied by an irritating project that never seems to run out of problems. I was facing never-ending issues that cost me money. I have blamed everyone but myself. I strained my relationship with my business partner and my client. Some of the problems seemed so laughable that I could not understand why they even happened. What could go wrong did go wrong. There were a few instances that I wanted to quit but my wife was always there encouraging me to pray for guidance and offering much needed love and support. And so in my letter to God, I was questioning why I had to go through this. How could this simple job be such a burden?

My wife on the other hand had a different experience. It was the feeling of deep love and happiness. She was looking forward to this retreat to break the monotonous routine of being stuck at home. She felt the need to have a deeper relationship with God. She says that she always thinks that her life is easy and almost always, happy. During the activity of writing a letter to God, she contemplated hard on her whole life from when she was young till the present, and it made her realize that there were in fact so many hurdles and hardships that she has gone through. But she felt the burden was always made lighter because God was with her all the time. We both feel so blessed and loved by Him.

The next morning's talk focused on spiritual woundedness and God's mercy and compassion. Our propensity to fall into sin makes us feel guilty (or numb) towards God. But we forget that the other side of the coin is God's love and compassion. He gave His only son to atone for our sins. God's love is infinite and all we have to do to be at the receiving end, is to sincerely ask for forgiveness.

On the third talk, it happened. Fr. James talked about the mentality of the devil; riches, honor, pride and loss of hope. Ironically, it was like I saw a light shine in a very dark room. God TOLD me He needed to teach me a hard lesson because I would not listen. I was full of pride. I always sought praise from people. He had to put me in my place. He told me I had to change. No matter how prayerful I was, I still lacked discipline and humility. Fr. James said, in order to answer the call to discipleship, we must affirm our faithfulness and our availability to God. Humility before God, the giver of all things, and the people we encounter is a test of character.

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They Came and Found God: Online Spiritual Deepening Retreat (Adapted)

Philip & Malu Panlilio, Mustard Seed BCGG



The Covid-19 pandemic did not dampen but in fact buoyed the spirit of Magis Deo members in seeking God in the Spiritual Deepening Retreat (adapted) on 24-26 July 2020. It was the first online SDR but 42 participants came completely open to it: 4 from ME classes, 8 SDR first-timers from BCGGs, 7 inactive Magis members, and 23 BCGG members from Archangel Gabriel, Easter, Exodus, Francis, Genesis, John, Mustard Seed, Prodigal 102, Transfiguration, Samaritans and St. Peter.

Fr. James Gascon, SJ, SDR retreat director and Magis Spiritual Director, creatively adapted the SDR to a home retreat; encouraged participants to have quiet disposition and treat all household activities as part of prayer; created sacred spaces at home; and provided a good taste of Ignatian Spirituality and the Spiritual Exercises (SPEX) of St. Ignatius of Loyola. The SDR prepared participants for succeeding Annual Ignatian Retreats.

The participants came with a desire to find God in the SDR but God found them first. God met the participants where they were at the moment. With openness, the participants allowed God to simply enter their hearts and minds and the graces flowed.

From the faith-sharing, it was evident the God blessed the participants with awareness of God's presence in their lives; God's love expressed in beautiful ways not recognized before; gratitude for God's gifts; understanding of self and patterns of sin; God's mercy and compassion during darkness; a more intimate knowledge of who God is in their lives; and recognition of God's invitation. One invitation from God is to work more in bringing the ME graduates to the SDR as it is a critical program in their Magis formation and community life. Another invitation is to encourage existing BCGG members to take again the SDR to help them grow more in Ignatian Spirituality and understanding the SPEX, especially the four week-themes: Week 1 (God's Love and Mercy), Week 2 (Humanity & Public Ministry of Christ), Week 3 (Passion and Death), and Week 4 (Resurrection and Contemplation to Attain Love).

The graces received are '*pabaons*' to sustain the participants and help them grow deeper in their love for God. Magis ministries and shepherds will work together on the felt invitations to the Community during the SDR.

SDR in Times of Darkness, continued from page 21

So, all in all, this SDR proved to be very enlightening. It taught me how to become better. Not just better for myself or for my wife, but better towards others too. Yes this pandemic has severely affected our lives, but God always has His reasons for letting things happen and He will not give us something we cannot handle. And no matter how bad things get, it will

take a much deeper appreciation and understanding of His plan to fully grasp it. Even if we are too blind to see it, or limited in understanding, we just have to trust in Him. Let us always be reminded to find God in all things.

Lord God, give us strength, give us faith and give us peace.

The Grace of Knowing God through our Coupleness

Michael and Maricar Cerrero, ME Class 130

attended the Spiritual Deepening Retreat (SDR) in 2019 as one of the requirements of the diploma course I am taking in the Center for Family Ministries.

This SDR was a very meaningful experience and I could say it is the best retreat I have attended. However, God is truly a God of unpredictability and surprises, what I thought was the best became even more (I am not sure what I can call it now) because this year, I got to attend the retreat with my husband.

When we were invited to attend the July 24-26 online SDR, my husband and I planned to spend the entire retreat away from our home so we could focus. However, because of the community quarantine, we had difficulty looking for a place to stay. We therefore decided to spend Friday, the first part of the retreat, in our home, then go on a road trip Saturday morning and look for a place to stay. We also made arrangements with my mother and younger sister for the care of our 4-year-old son while we are on the retreat. Everything was settled. However, Friday night to Saturday morning, our son became emotional and did not want us to leave. From the moment he slept until I got up the next morning, he was hugging me tight. When he woke up and saw me ready to leave, he cried and asked me to hug him, and wrapped my arm around him. He was determined to stop us from leaving, so we just continued to listen to the retreat together.

When Fr. James was discussing the 2nd points he said, "what is good about the home retreat is that all ordinary activities in the house can be turned into a prayer experience." He encouraged us to ask ourselves: "Am I aware of what God reveals, a God who is in everything?" I asked God what



He wanted to reveal to us that moment when we were torn between staying with our son or leaving so we could proceed with the retreat as planned. After listening to the 2nd points, I told God that if our son would remain clingy for the next hour, we would not leave and would trust that we could continue with the retreat despite all the distractions at home. I also told my husband that I preferred to stay than leave our son with possible feelings of rejection and abandonment. I then asked him what God revealed to him and he replied, "Ok lang kahit mamaya na tayo umalis. Hintayin natin na maging okay siya. Baka ginagamit lang ni God ang delay para ilitas tayo from possible accident." And surprisingly, at breakfast our son said, "Pwede na kayong umalis, Mommy. Happy pa rin naman ako." It was a relief and I hugged him to say thank you for allowing us to go.

However, the delays did not end there. We traveled to Antipolo to find a place to spend the rest of the retreat but the hotels and resorts were closed. I wanted to give up and go back home but my husband was determined. We kept looking and finally found one. At the hotel, being a task-oriented person, I wanted us to do every activity that the retreat required but I sensed discomfort on the part of my husband. So, I asked about his feelings and why he was so determined to go regardless of all the hassles and delays. He said, "Sobrang busy mo sa anak natin at sa work mo. Ngayon lang ang time natin para sa isa't isa." I felt his sadness and his yearning for my time. I did not know how to respond to him at that moment so when I got the chance, I wrote this letter to God: "Lord, I know we are here for the retreat but I want to be happy just being with my husband. I want to enjoy every moment we have."

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Chacho Angeles, Thessalonians BCGG

Mary was a simple girl from the small town of Nazareth, and she was chosen by God to be the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. Despite being the mother of God, she experienced all that a loving mother goes through, the joyful, the unusual, as well as the painful – that of giving birth in a stable, fleeing persecution to Egypt, losing a twelve-year-old during a religious festival in Jerusalem, or the most painful experience of seeing her son die a most painful execution on the cross. She accepted everything, pondered these in her heart, and placed them at the foot of God. Whatever people, theologians, historians and writers think, say and write about her, she will always be a mother to me, my heavenly mother, my plain, simple, obedient, faithful, loving and caring mother.

(1)
Remember our Lady of the Sacred Heart,
The great things the Lord has done for you.
He chose you for His mother.
He wanted you close to His cross.

Let me learn from you
True humility in my heart;
Ungrudging obedience;
Service without asking nor
Expecting anything in return;
Acceptance of the cross
I have to bear in this life;
Pondering purpose,

Learning significance and
Finding meaning in the
Sacrifice Your Son made
On the cross for the Love
Of the Father and redemption
Of all. Give me the strength
To be faithful to my mission.

And as you did countless
Times with your Son,
Comfort me in your warm,
Loving embrace!

(2)
Mother Mary,
When you said yes, Your will be done,
You might have said this with a big gulp,
Not knowing what will happen to you,
Considering your youth, considering that
You were already engaged to Joseph,
Knowing full well what can happen to you
When he learns that you are pregnant.
But your trust in God is just too strong,
Overcoming your fears and anxieties.

I pray that I grow in such faith and trust,
That I too am able to overcome all the fears
That come my way, day-in and day-out.
Stay by me Mama, cuddle my heart that I may
Continue to live in love with Jesus,
Your son, my brother, my savior.

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The Grace of Knowing God through our Coupleness, continued from page 25

I want to maximize these rare moments, with just the two of us. I want to know You Lord by knowing myself and my husband. Help us see each other the way You see us individually and as a couple.” Then God gave me His answer, which is to savor every moment we have together as husband and wife, away from our parenting obligations and busyness in our respective careers. I found out on the last day of the retreat that my husband received the same message.

These experiences made me realize that God meets us where we are, and He reveals Himself in whatever way He desires. By being attuned to His words and trusting Him to have His way with us, He allowed us to experience the benefits of the SDR in a very unexpected and profound way. I thought the SDR would be a success only if we read and reflected on the bible together and did the retreat activities, but God had a better plan.

God gave us the grace to experience His love and presence by our choosing each other over everything else, and by loving and spending quality time with one another. In those few hours my husband and I were together, we felt closer. We revived our connectedness and oneness – OUR COUPLENESS that was set aside as we became occupied with the busyness of our day-to-day lives.

Our experiences at this year's SDR will be our anchor that will remind us how God loves us, individually and as a couple, and how He desires to nourish our relationship as husband and wife. Indeed, our SDR experience is one of our greatest treasures because He gave us a very special gift, a lifetime reminder of His goodness and His promise of a fruitful and blissful marriage – our second baby.

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(3)

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart of Jesus,
My heart is in torment because like me,
The hearts of people I love are also in torment.
I pray for your intercession to the loving Father,
To the Holy Spirit, my guide and my support,
To His son, your son, whose compassionate Heart
Ever embraces the whole of me with my strengths,
My weaknesses, my joys and my pains, my
Blessings, my ever searching and restless heart.

Please help me look inside my mind, my heart,
My soul, and realize that I will always have
Crosses to bear, as I at the same time, receive the
Love that God showers on me every day.

I pray that the example of this love be my guide
In transforming my life that I may live it as your
Son teaches me; that the pain is there to make
Me stronger, to make me see that the sacrifice
He made on the cross is an act of love for me,
For all of us; that He is ever present in me as
I enter the narrow doors that I go through in
My life; that as He forgave those who made
Him suffer, I too can forgive those who hurt
Me, including myself, for the wrongs I inflict
On myself and on others; that my life be filled
With gratitude for all that come my way and
See You in all I encounter that I may serve Jesus
By serving Him in joy; that they may see in me
This love as a visible invitation to that wedding
Feast that the Father has set for all His children.

Mother Mary, let me lie on your lap as I cry,
Coddle this aching heart and let me feel you
Stroking my hair, whispering words of comfort
With a soothing voice that comes from your
Loving, faithful and obedient heart, I pray always ...

(4)

Jesus,
How may I know you, my Lord and my God?
You are totally holy and I am totally profane.
How may I expect water to mix with oil?
You were with us two thousand years ago
And what you did and taught I know only
Through the writings of Your disciples.
And yet these same things set You apart
From this puny creature called a human.

Let me sit with You at table, dining on
Simple dishes of flat bread and broiled fish
Washed down with water or country wine,
Savoring the simple meal You always shared
With those You chose. Please choose me.

Let me walk with you through the roads in the
Countryside, without baggage, without money,

Relying only on the goodness of those You
Find along the way. And if there is none, You
Multiply food so that You and the people may
Eat. You stay in the open air, and pray under the
Moon and stars. Please nourish me.

Let me fish with you in the still salty Lake of
Galilee, catching even those that do not want to
Get caught, but could not escape the net of Your
Love. Let me see and feel Your compassion
Whenever You meet the people, a shepherd-less,
Broken flock, healing them of their afflictions,
Banishing demons that possess their souls and
Spirits, and even bringing the dead back to life.
Please catch me and heal me.

May I hold You and hear you say my name?
While I sit beside You, guide me through
Your teachings, which I often find puzzling.
Let me touch Your hand, no, even just Your
Clothes so that I may experience Your power
Up close. Let me touch your wounds, let me
Touch Your hair, caked with blood and grime,
The thorns on Your head, pricking my fingers
With a sharp pain. May I feel Your suffering,
Your sacrifice for my sake when you made
Sacred us whom You love, that I may learn
That love goes all the way, even to the death,
As Your mother standing at the foot of the
Cross, agonizing at the sight of Your bloody
Body, suffering and feeling with You the
Breathlessness, the pain and seeing the
Coming darkness of a most painful death.

Let me feel the pain of Your love, and the joy of
Mary Magdalene when You conquered death,
And she heard Your loving voice again.
Please let my heart be like her joyful heart,
And put her glorious smile upon my lips.

(5)

Loving Jesus,
I ask for the grace to be like Mary of Bethany,
Extravagant in her love for You, in her own way.
Let me be present to you like Your mother Mary,
Mary from Magdala and Mary wife of Clophas
Who are present in your crucifixion, burial and
Resurrection. Let me be like Peter who denied
You, but continued to love You, follow You and
Perform Your very crucial mission of establishing
Your church in this earth. Let me be like Simon
Cyrene and Joseph of Arimathea who helped realize
Your plan in their own ways. Let me be like the
Criminal crucified with You, who accepts his
Sins and humbly asks You for mercy. Let me
Be like the beloved disciple who takes Mary
Your mother into his home to care for her in her
Grief and aloneness. Let me be like You, a
Brother to all, compassionate, helpful, merciful,
Wise, obedient to the end, steadfast in Your love
For us - my teacher, my Lord. Amen.



Afoot with Ignatius of Loyola:

*knowing
loving
following*

AIR ONLINE

Jesus...



Annual
Ignatian
Retreat

September 11, 2020 (5:30pm)
to September 13, 2020 (12n)

Retreat Director:

Fr. Bob Buenconsejo, SJ

Intended for those who completed
SDR and AIR on GOD's LOVE

FREE

To register, please text:

Philip Panlilio : +63 9175461953

Malu Panlilio : +63 9088881106

Annual
Ignatian
Retreat



AIR ONLINE

Afoot with
Ignatius of Loyola:

*knowing
loving
following* Jesus...

Guidelines for Online Retreat:

1. Commitment to silence and quiet disposition despite the distractions of the home environment. Self-discipline is key.
2. Commitment to have a prayer disposition throughout the retreat and treat/consider all activities, including household activities, as part of prayer.
3. Inform household members that you are having a retreat and minimize conversations.
4. Avoid using your cellphones or gadgets, accessing emails, watching TVs, etc. which distract your attention on prayer.
5. Has sacred space at home to pray.
6. Commitment to silence during the retreat conference sessions by muting Zoom. During the mass, only the priest and lector/readers are not muted; all others are muted.
7. Commitment to attend all retreat sessions. Please inform retreat coordinator if you cannot attend a session (allowed only on emergency situations).
8. Commitment to observe personal prayer periods. Commitment to having video 'on' at the beginning of each retreat session for purposes of attendance checking. Having name in Zoom meetings is recommended for identification of participants/retreatants. If the gadget you are using does not carry your name, please inform coordinator that gadget belongs to you, i.e. Galaxy 10 is Maria Cruz.
9. Observe punctuality in retreat sessions, masses and activities.
10. Has bible and notebook with you throughout the retreat.
11. Has internet and Zoom connection.