

Magis

Formation for Mission

Stewardship
Simplicity
Sharing
Service

Official Publication of the
Magis Deo Community
May 2024 Issue

Transforming the Father's Temple Into a Den of Thieves and Murderers

On both macro and micro levels, we have grievously sinned against the Father, if not by our acts, mostly by our inaction.

Beginners' Serving and Singing in the Magis Deo Community

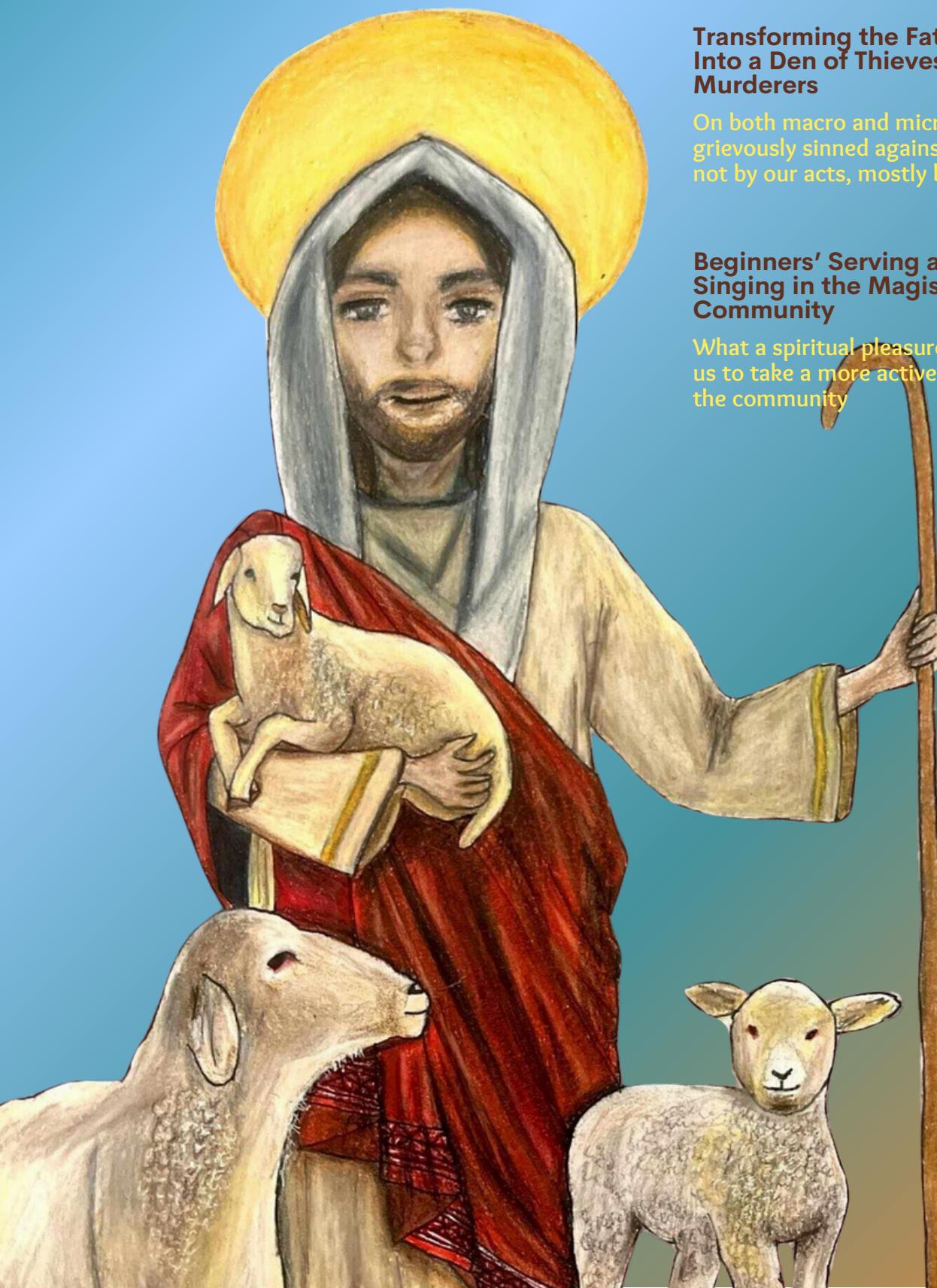
What a spiritual pleasure it is for us to take a more active role in the community

Finding God in Bilibid Prison

I found God in the 250 PDLs we interacted with. They have found God and I have found God in them

Attending to My Wounded Brothers and Sisters Along the Road

I sometimes do not know nor understand the situations God designs for me



The Good Shepherd

Rhea Gaddi, Prodigal 102 BCGG



The story of the Good Shepherd has always been a source of inspiration for Magis Deo. It is a story that teaches us the importance of caring for others, especially those who are vulnerable and in need of help. In the story, the shepherd goes out of his way to find a lost sheep. He does not give up until he finds it and brings it back to the safety of the flock. This act of kindness and compassion is a powerful reminder of how we should treat others. In our daily lives we encounter people who are struggling, who need help. It is easy to turn a blind eye and go about our business, but the story of the Good Shepherd reminds us that we have a responsibility to care for others. We can all be Good Shepherds in our own way. Whether it is facilitating a BCGG prayer meeting, offering water during the ComCel, volunteering for a Suyuan, leading a ministry, donating to charity, or simply lending a listening ear to a member of our BCGG in need, we can make a difference in the lives of those around us.

"We all have the good sheep and the good shepherd in us because our Creator is a Divine Shepherd and was once upon a time also a sheep in Jesus. At hindi naging maramot ang ating Pastol. He continues to share with us some measure of shepherd power, like he did with his disciples. Like him, we have led and guided, taught and counseled, fed and provided. We have been healers, forgivers, and even wonder-workers, too, like Peter and John." — Fr. Arnel Aquino, SJ. [From his homily]
Keeping the Faith, April 21, 2024

**About the artist: Nina Asher H Tayag is 18 years old.
Loves coffee and cats and discovered her love for drawing at 13.*

Editorial Board

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2/F RMT CeFam Bldg., ADMU Campus, Quezon city

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Shepherd's Pie: Inspiring stories of shepherding by Magis Deo Servant Leaders

Special Interview with Levy and Roxanne Espiritu

2024 Pastoral Council Chair Couple

Members of BCGG Transfiguration

The following article captures the highlights of the interview with Levy and Roxanne Espiritu about the 2024 Magis Deo Thrust, their experiences and inspiration as shepherds and servant leaders in the community. Watch out for the full interview on our Magis Deo social media pages.

The Story behind the 5th "S"

"Fr. James Gascon's message reminds us of what Pope Francis said about Synodality and it means pastoral collaboration, discernment, and journeying as a couple, as a family, and as a community. Sinabi nga ni Fr. James, ang challenge natin is to live further. To live further our commitment to the 4Ss (Service, Simplicity, Sharing, and Stewardship). Now how do you live further, your commitment to the 4Ss? It is through the fifth S, which is Shepherding. Now we have with us couple power, we have also a spiritual power to discern. We have to walk our talk. And we have to tread the path without fear or reservation. And it is this challenge of proclaiming the gospel of Christ by our very being and living. And what is that? It is a challenge towards shepherding."

– Levy and Roxanne Espiritu

Magis Deo community has been a beacon of hope for over three decades. However, it is time to take things to the next level. It is time to embrace a new dimension of spirituality: Shepherding. The concept of Shepherding reminds us to transition from the head to the heart and then to the feet. It is about moving beyond the acquisition of knowledge and putting that knowledge into action. It is about becoming a shepherd for others, serving as a role model and guide for those around us.



As members of Magis Deo, we are called to be shepherds for our families, communities, and fellow members. We are called to put our prayers into action and to serve the needs of others. We are called to be like Jesus, who calls us by name despite our imperfections and limitations, and sends us to be shepherds for others.

The power of Shepherding lies in its ability to transform our lives and the lives of those around us. It is about becoming a beacon of hope, a source of inspiration, and a guide for others. It is about taking our faith to the next level and living it every day.

Together, we can become the change we want to see in the world.

When you became Shepherds for other members or Servant Leaders, what was your experience like?

Roxanne:

At first it was overwhelming because our desire then was just to know Christ in our marriage. So, ang amin lang doon is for us to be able to learn from Formation, from all the Formation activities being offered at that time. The concept of the shepherd noon was taboo to us kasi we didn't want to be in that position, to have that responsibility. So, we would always find a way to deviate from that direction; we were very hesitant

FEATURED EDITORIAL

then to take on any responsibility. We just wanted to be "stalkers" in that we would just listen, but we continued to attend because we liked what we heard.

Levy:

We were obedient sheep (laughs).

Roxanne:

Yes, we were obedient sheep. So ang sabi namin, hindi namin papahirapan ang shepherds namin. So, we will abide, kung ano yung pinapagawa sa amin. One of the first things na parating pinupukpok sa ulo namin was about our prayer life. Our first Shepherd were Joey+ and Nina Yuson. Then Tony and Bambi Narciso, and Monchito and Tina Mossesgeld.

And we looked at them and saw how calm and how confident they are in their relationship with God. I guess it goes with spiritual maturity also, di ba? And you wanted to be like them, how do they know these things? How can they act so confidently and so calmly? So, we wanted to also acquire those traits. But at that time the structure was a little bit rigid because Fr. Ruben was starting to form Magis Deo. When he was starting to form Magis Deo, siyempre may mga guidelines iyan and may mga protocols iyan. Being still new and greenhorns at that time, we were still trying to learn.

Levy:

I remember we were focused because our leaders then, sina Tony and Monchito, would ask us, "How's your prayer life? Where was God in everything, in the happenings of the day? How did God touch you?" Well, actually, we were very inspired, and we looked forward to prayer meetings because of our servant leaders. And I think we were very comfortable with being a sheep. But as time went by, I think we transitioned into being shepherds.

Roxanne:

We slowly acquired confidence, especially when we were attending or started to attend formation programs, like our Annual Ignatian Retreat. At that time attending a retreat once a year was a big thing for us. I mean, it's something that is very, you know, difficult for us because we were thriving in our careers. We were raising young children and had so many things on our hands. It was so difficult for us to

attend to all those activities or expectations of the community. So, we kind of stayed in the background, but whenever they asked us to help, we were there to support, pero unless they nudged us, unless they called us by name, hindi kami mag vo-volunteer.

Levy:

We were performers then. When we had our first, when we sponsored an ME class, being performers what did we do? Ginawa namin yung flow chart ng ME Weekend. This flow chart was followed by the community for so many weekends and up to now. So that started that, that started it. And as we were called, we accepted the call from the community.

Roxanne:

I remember when we were first nominated to the council, we were not so confident kasi puro mga star-studded yung Council noon. Nandyan ang Del Rosario, nandyan ang Mossesgeld, si Palma that time, si Narciso. So, we were not that confident because we were the least experienced.

Levy:

We were not confident, we were terrified (laughs).



Roxanne:

We were given jobs, and we were just coasting along. We would listen to them and then we would, you know, Fr. Ruben would always attend our council meetings at that time. So parang kami noon, kung wala kang i-contribute, ano ka, wala ka. So nakikipagsabayan kami at some point, pero pagdating sa responsibility, we try to stay focused. What we did, since everything was about couple spirituality, the children were all often left at home, we suggested coming up with youth activities. So, we started having youth-oriented activities so that

we have a reason to bring our children. That started the family and Youth ministry.

Levy:

We headed the Youth ministry. And then we headed the Family Ministry, and then the Membership Formation. But the driving force then was, we had children growing up at different levels. And we wanted to also involve our children in the activities of the community. So that started with the Youth Ministry, and then we had the Family Encounter Weekend. And as we serve Magis Deo, our children also participated in their activities and even became facilitators in the Youth Ministry and Youth Camp. I guess it was because we were not only encountered couples; we were also encountered families.

Navigating the challenges as a Shepherd

"It is crucial to be patient with ourselves, with the group, and with the process. We should continue to pray and seek guidance, work on our personal growth, and participate in the formation programs to strengthen our resolve to lead as shepherds and set an example for others."

– Levy and Roxanne Espiritu

The main difficulty Levy and Roxanne encountered was organizing and establishing a routine with the group, considering that most couples in the program had young families and careers to take care of. Understanding the struggles of the group was challenging, especially since most couples in the program had young families and careers to manage, and there were several distractions, including work and family demands. It is essential to be compassionate towards themselves and the group, and to give the process the time it needs. The Espiritus believe that prayer and seeking guidance, working on their personal growth, and participating in the formation programs helped them lead as shepherds and set an example for others. Another challenge was working with experienced shepherds and servant leaders who have grown more spiritually in Magis Deo. They were initially intimidated and overwhelmed by them, but these veteran shepherds have been supportive and helped them along the

way. Magis Deo taught them to put their faith and trust in the Lord to guide them in performing their roles as Shepherds. The seasoned servant leaders have shared their journey with them and helped them grow in their role.

What is your message to current and future Shepherds of Magis Deo?

Roxanne:

Everything is a gift, people are gifts, you are entrusted with people. You are not chosen or forced to head a BCGG, they were given to you. And there is a responsibility attached to that and accountability, whether you find yourself fit or not. Nobody is equipped. Everybody is imperfect in their own way. It's just like the apostles, they were not equipped, they were not even educated. But they responded. They were commissioned, and all of us are being commissioned.

This really is the essence of our spirituality; you are being commissioned. So, because you are entrusted with people, you do not just take them for granted, you have members, they come to your life, because there is a reason for that.

We learn and grow more when we can Shepherd. We have grown to believe that no matter what situation relationship, place or job you're in, you should always add value and leave it better than when you found it. The same with marriage. It's also the same with raising a family, more so, the same with the community. You found this community; you add value to the community. That is your responsibility, to leave the community in a better state. What we leave in this world will be imprinted in the lives of the people we have touched.

Levy:

This week is about shepherding. The scripture readings of this week are about shepherding. And it's about Jesus being the Good Shepherd. We realized, who did the Lord call? It's the ordinary folks, the fishermen. We have imperfections. And it is like us, we are imperfect. But the Lord has called us to serve and to be shepherds for his sheep. So, who are we to say no to that?

Healthy 2023 Financials will help fund 2024 activities

The pre-audited Financial Statement shows a robust bottom line for 2023, both for the Internal and External segments.

To recap our financial framework, Membership Dues, Love Offerings, and Mass collections fund our Administrative Expenses, Formation Ministry, Praxis, CSM, and Youth Ministry. These are the "Internal community activities."

For this Internal funding, our Receipts surpassed Expenses, providing an excess or net positive Php 693k. This was primarily brought about by the increase in Love Offerings, which has almost tripled over the previous year. This also allows us to keep our Membership Dues the same for 2024.

On the other hand, any external fundraising activities fund the Outreach Ministry and Marriage Encounter Ministry. These are "External ministries" as they support our missions outside of Magis Deo.

Our Receipts exceeded Expenses by Php 747k for this external funding, primarily due to the income derived from the golf tournament.

Adding the Internal and External, our Total surplus amounted to Php 1,441k. This will help support our 2024 community activities.

If you have any questions, you may email secretariat@magisdeo.org, and we will get back to you.

In service of the Magis Deo Community,

Pastoral Council 2023



STATEMENT OF RECEIPTS & DISBURSEMENTS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2023

		TOTAL ACTUAL 2023
RECEIPTS		
Internal		
Membership Dues		496,550
Love Offerings & Tithes		1,055,652
Mass Collections		126,276
Ministries' Activities/Receipts		
FORMATION MINISTRY		77,800
PRAXIS MINISTRY		-
COMMUNITY SERVICES MINISTRY		275,181
YOUTH MINISTRY		600
Magis Golf Fund Raising (20%)		314,194
Interest from Bank Accts.		27,314
TOTAL INTERNAL RECEIPTS		2,373,567
DISBURSEMENTS		
FORMATION MINISTRY		153,800
PRAXIS MINISTRY		31,031
COMMUNITY SERVICES MINISTRY		901,159
YOUTH MINISTRY		60,625
PROGRAM DISBURSEMENTS		1,146,615
GENERAL & ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES		533,598
TOTAL INTERNAL DISBURSEMENTS		1,680,213
INTERNAL EXCESS (DEFICIENCY) Receipts over Disbursements	P	693,354
RECEIPTS		
External		
Ministries' Activities/Receipts		
MARRIAGE ENCOUNTER MINISTRY		640,183
OUTREACH MINISTRY		200,000
FINANCE MINISTRY (Golf Tournament)		1,814,406
TOTAL EXTERNAL RECEIPTS		2,654,589
DISBURSEMENTS		
MARRIAGE ENCOUNTER MINISTRY		958,099
OUTREACH MINISTRY		398,636
FINANCE MINISTRY		550,128
PROGRAM DISBURSEMENTS		1,906,863
EXTERNAL EXCESS (DEFICIENCY) Receipts over Disbursements	P	747,725
OVERALL EXCESS (DEFICIENCY) Receipts over Disbursements	P	1,441,080

Finding God in Bilibid Prison

Jun Ahyong, St. Peter BCGG / Head, Outreach Ministry

Ignatian Spirituality teaches us to find God in all things and encounters. It was hard for me to imagine **"finding God in Bilibid,"** a 500-hectare area that houses over 20,000 inmates incarcerated for different crimes in three camps – Maximum, Medium, and Minimum Security.

Of the seven corporal acts of mercy, I have done all except one – visit the imprisoned. It was my first time to visit Bilibid. I wanted to do it because I had to overcome my fear of being amidst inmates inside the Medium Security compound (for 6,800 inmates sentenced for 10 to 20 years) even though I would be with 49 volunteers and friends of Magis Deo. How can I be with the Outreach Ministry if I never joined a Bilibid recollection which Magis Deo has been sponsoring for over 12 years! And so, I decided to join this year's Easter Recollection with 250 PDLs. In the days leading to April 13, I kept asking myself – **"Can I truly find and experience God's love with the PDLs I will meet?"**

Upon entering the prison grounds, I found myself stepping into a community of PDLs who roamed freely with prison guards around. Yes, they are not behind bars. There were vendors and even barbers! PDLs smiled and greeted us respectfully. I was pleasantly surprised. It was not what I imagined it to be. Yet I knew this was just a snapshot of reality within prison walls. I am not there every day to know what life really is for them. I am not there to experience how it is to be deprived of freedom for years on end

One PDL shared that he has been in Bilibid for 31 years and was nearly sent for execution... twice! Another said no one has visited him for the last 18 years! Another PDL openly shared that he has been incarcerated for more than 8 years for a crime he did not commit, but he will be released soon. Despite these gut-wrenching stories, I sensed that the 250 PDLs with us did not exhibit much bitterness. Rather, they humbly admitted to their mistakes and vowed to make good when they leave prison. They were hopeful, grateful even, for the opportunity to have a second chance to make things right.



We celebrated Mass, listened to their sharings, chatted, and ate with them. I shared most of my food. For them, the food we prepared was special. From their stories, I figured we probably will not eat the food rationed to them! The group of PDLs was lively, and their College Guild sang and danced so well I thought we were watching a live concert. There was so much energy and gusto. It was that good! I asked myself over and over, *"Lord, why are they here? They should not be here. They are so talented. Sayang."* For me, it was a surreal experience.

As we bade goodbye, I saw a tinge of sadness in them because their life in prison would be back to normal. I cannot imagine their hardship inside the camp. Being deprived of liberty, of freedom, is life slowly being chipped away. As I drove home, I asked myself if I found God in Bilibid. Yes, indeed, I found God in the 250 PDLs we interacted with. God has not forgotten them. It was in prison that they learned and accepted God's unconditional love, forgiveness, and compassion.

The 250 PDLs are just a small number compared to the over 20,000 inmates in the various camps. How about the others? How are they now? I now include the PDLs in my prayers. My experience has radically changed me and my view about PDLs. ***They have found God and I have found God in them.*** Amen.

Recollection Guide, Easter Recollection 13 April 2024

Bilibid Recollection: Inspired to Keep Going Back

Yoling Sevilla, Bartimaeus BCGG

I have been a sharer in the recollections our Community has been organizing in the Medium Security Compound of the New Bilibid Prison for five seasons, and the recollection guide for three seasons now.

What inspires me to keep volunteering to share or guide these recollections from 2017 to date?

- Compassion

Compassion for the PDLs (persons deprived of liberty) who are hungry and thirsty for human interaction with visitors from the world outside the walls of their prison.

- Call to Love

The call to reach out, love, and serve these marginalized members of our society, to enable them to deepen their experience of God's love and compassion, mercy, and forgiveness.



Some highlights of my felt experience during our Easter Recollection on April 13th:

- Heart overflowing with joy as the band and I practiced my reworded "Ang Buhay ng Kristiyano." I was overwhelmed by their eagerness to learn not just the new lyrics but also the actions for this song. They were my back-up when we invited the participants to sing the song as an expression of communal joy at our now being practicing Christians. Really enjoyed collaborating with them.
- Delightfully surprised by the PDLs waving their notebooks in the air and with a thunderous roar (250 PDLs!) expressed their joy when I invited them to express their gratitude to God.
- Tearful as I watched them posting their declaration and owning of their transformed selves on the tarp.

I feel called to continue serving as a recollection guide, to continue accompanying these brothers of ours as they journey from the darkness of sin to the light of a new beginning in Christ!

Mga Kuwento sa Bilibid

Pasko ng Pagkabuhay, Pasko ng Pagbabagong-Buhay

Ika-13 ng Abril, 2024

Na-meet ko ang maraming mukha ni Hesus. Mixed emotions ako.

Iba't iba ang edad ng nasa Group X ko. Hindi naman nila sinabi sa sharing kung galing sila sa Maximum Security Camp. Lima sa kanila naka assign sa chapel. Dalawa nasa college, isa nasa high school. Yung pinakamatanda, Grade 3 sa elementary level. Sinabi niya na doon siya natutong sumulat ng kanyang pangalan at magbasa. Kaya nga hindi siya makasulat ng mabilis sa notebook na binigay namin sa kanya. Sa kanya ko lang binigay ang aking pagkain.

Yung dalawang nasa college level, kasama as dance performers ng College Guild. Ang gagaling nila sumayaw.

Nagulat ako at nakaramdam ng lungkot nang marinig ko yung huling nagsalita sa big group sharing. Sabi niya, ngumunguya siya ng blade nang makulong siya sa bartolina.

Lagi ko nang kasama ang buong community ng NBP sa mga dasal ko, hindi lang ang aking Group X. Sana makasama uli ako sa susunod na recollection.

- **Sar Marigomen, St. Peter BCGG**

How hard it is to forgive your loved ones for not visiting you when you are in prison. But forgiving is a way to free yourself from hatred. Move on and be free.

- **Noel Gascon, James, Brother of John BCGG**



Tinamaan ako nang sinabi nang isang PDL sa grupo ko. "Sabik na sabik na akong mayakap ang mga anak ko! Palagi kong dasal sa Panginoon na buksan ang isipan nila na wag sana nila akong ikahiya paglaya ko. Siyam na taon na po akong nasa rehas na ito. Pero nagpapasalamat din po ako at kung di ako nasadlak dito, di ko makikilala ang Diyos na buhay. Dinala Niya ako dito para makilala ko Siya."

- **Merlie Cruz, James, Brother of John BCGG**



OUTREACH MINISTRY

My "Bilibid Journeys" always have a heartwarming take-home. This one opened an insight that all my children should experience this life-changing moment with the PDLs. I will start praying for this.

God's unique plan for each of us is manifested in their reformed lives. Bakit nga ba kailangan mapreso ka para makita mo ang liwanag.

An inmate wrote in his journal about his blessing for the day... "Salamat po at nakinig kayo sa amin."

I realize that we should journal too while facilitating... sayang yung impact ng fresh sharing considering that we can have reminders on how exactly they said it...iba yung feel sa hugot nila!

Mga sharing ng mga PDL sa Group A ko:

A-1: 20 years na po ako dito, ga-graduate na po ako ng elementary. Ito na po ang tinuturing kong tahanan. Dito ako nagbalik-loob sa Panginoon at nakilala Siya nang lubos.

A-2: Na-realize ko na kaya pala ako napadpad dito ay hindi upang idiin ang mga pagkakamali ko kundi upang makilala ko ang Panginoon. Nung una, palagi kong naiisip na mahirap magbagong buhay. Dito nadama ko na pwede pala sa tulong ng Panginoon. Handa na po ako harapin ang buhay sa labas.

A-10: Nasa puso ang bagong buhay ko. Nadama ko ito nang dinalaw ako ng aking nag-iisang anak na sanggol pa nang iniwan ko. Hindi ko inisip nuon ang makalaya dahil ang hirap ng buhay ko sa labas, pero nagbago ito nang sinabi ng anak ko, "Sana po pag pumasok na ako sa eskwela, makakauwi na kayo para kayo ang maghahatid sa akin."

Tinanong ko ang grupo ko kung handa na sila harapin ang pagsubok pag labas nila...siguro, mga pagsubok katulad nuong panahon bago sila pumasok sa preso. Lahat sila tumugon ng "Opo, matibay na po ang puso namin."

- **M. A., non-Magis member**

Being inside Bilibid, God makes you realize that you are still His child.

- **Nerissa Gascon, James, Brother of John BCGG**



Labing-apat lang siya nang makulong dahil sa pinagbabawal na gamot. Nagpapasalamat siya at kung di pa siya nakulong, di pa niya makikilala ang Panginoon.

- **Boy Cruz, James, Brother of John BCGG**

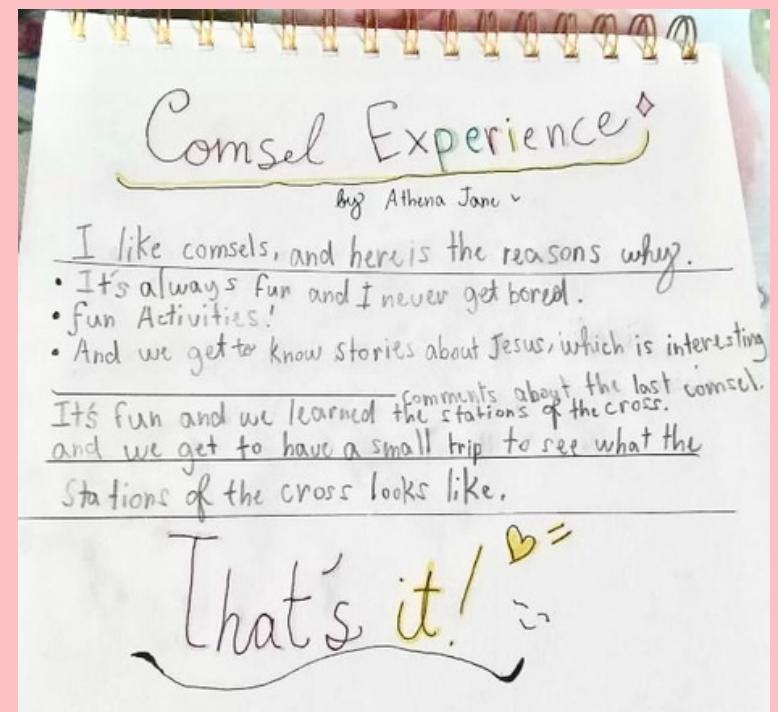


Kids of Magis Deo Youth



What I learned during the session: The Stations of the Cross is about how the Crucifixion happened. It was heartbreakingly sad and a nice feeling at the same time. The lesson was nice, and I got to learn about it and I felt happy and safe. The session was meaningful. Also, we went to the garden to look at the Stations of the Cross. It was like a short field trip. The pictures were nice just like the Station of the Cross. We also wrote a "I am sorry" and grateful letter to Jesus. Then after writing we burned the letters. It was so nice and heartwarming! I am grateful to learn about the Stations of the Cross! Thank you Magis Deo!! 🌸❤️

- MJ Pestaño (in red shirt, showing a peace sign)



- Athena Jane Sales (in peach shirt)

Chacho Angeles, Matthew BCGG

Loving and compassionate Father, I ask for Your mercy and forgiveness for this son of Yours has a lot of debt against You, others, Myself. Like dams of dirt and debris across Streams, I cannot lift them out to allow the Waters of life to flow freely to the river and To the sea. You did so for that is Your nature, A Father who gives life, and restores it that It may be fulfilled in the sea of Your love.



PROSE & POETRY

Loving God, creator and Father of all things,
You guided human development from basic
Single-celled organisms to where we are now.
Did You breathe Your spirit too in these cells
To nurture their growth from basic atomic and
Chemical interactions to instinctual actions to
Discernment and the knowledge of good and
Evil, our souls growing to perfection till their
Return to union with You, in death, in heaven?

You are in us, with us, even in this life, yet we
Forget this because trapped in our bodies, our
Hearts follow desires and directions that often
Lead us away from You. We also forget that
Our bodies are finite and temporary vessels,
Weak and prone to sickness, easy to break and
Suffer and eventually turn to dust in death.

As we go into Lent, we pray for Your grace to
Help us prepare by reminding us of Your constant
Love, by heeding and living the teachings of
Your Son who demonstrated this to us through the
Example of His suffering and death on the cross,
And subsequent resurrection, freeing us from the
Darkness of mistakes, falls, sin, death, showing us
How to love You, myself, and others as He, You,
Have loved us with a love that transcends,
transforms,
Makes whole our world-bound and selfish lives,
Hearts, desires, thoughts, words, actions. This we
Pray through Jesus, the Lord of our hearts.

Amen.

Mahal na Ama,

Hindi ko man maarok ang lalim ng pagmamahal Mo sa akin.
Hindi ko po ito nakita sa aking mga magulang, dahil marahil
Ito lang po ang abot ng puso nila, dahil matigas ang
Aking ulo, pasaway, at may sariling isip.

Nakita Niyo po ang ugali kong ito, na di matinag nino man,
Hanggang hinipo Mo ang aking puso at ako'y umiyak nang
Umiyak sa pagsisisi sa mga kasalanan at kapalaluan.
Pagtiyagaan Mo po ako sa aking pagsisikap na matutunan
Ang mga turo ng lyong anak, si Hesus, at hiling ko po ang
Tulong Mo sa aking pagsisikap na maisapuso ko mga ito
At maisabuhay at maibahagi sa aking mga kapatid,
Upang ang puso ko'y maging salamin ng mahabagin at banal
Na puso ni Hesus.

Ikawnawa.

Loving Father,

I heard it said that prayer is a relationship with You,
As necessary as breathing air and eating food,
Something Your son does even after a hectic day.

I came from You, I look up to You, my model,
You are the source of my life, providing all I need,
Protecting me from harm and evil, guiding me in
Everything that I do, think, and say, inspiring me
To live my life as You plan and will, looking at
Everything in the universe as a unity under Your
Fatherhood, Your spirit permeating all, and at the
Same time You are most holy and totally other,
Whose existence and movement are the greatest
Concerto under the baton of a master, the Creator.

And when I fall, as surely I will, for the road to the
Wedding feast of Your Son and the Church is long
And hard, I can only come to You, after realizing
My failures and weaknesses, begging for Your mercy
And Your compassion, that I may change my ways,
My attitudes, my world view, and be restored to this
Loving relationship with You, that I may nestle
In Your loving arms, united with You once more.

Amen.

Transforming the Father's Temple Into a Den of Thieves and Murderers

Josephus & Emma Jimenez, Cana BCGG

Reflecting on the Gospel today, the third of March 2024, the Third Sunday of Lent, we as a Magis couple, are confronted with a very strong admonition from the Lord Jesus on how all of us humans have sinned grievously as we have desecrated God's creation, and on a personal level, have ruined our individual lives by the scourges of sins.



The Gospel of John tells how Jesus expressed His outrage upon seeing the Temple in Jerusalem desecrated by greedy, dishonest money changers and vendors of oxen, pigeons, and sheep. In Ignatian contemplation, we see the Temple as God's entire creation whose Nature and Natural Habitats are being destroyed by human greed, covetousness, and insatiable hunger for wealth, power, and prestige.

John's Gospel can also be seen from the perspectives of our personal lives if we accept that our bodies and our entire selves are temples of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This Gospel then is a direct reprimand on our desecration these temples with our sins of gluttony, lust, and other forms of abuse and neglect.

This reflection then is presented in two levels: First, the Social Sins – The Level of the Entire Humanity, where the Temple is represented by God's Creation, which is Nature as described by Pope Francis in his powerful encyclical "Laudato Si." Second, the Individual Level of Personal Sins Against the Father's Temple, as expressed by Pope Paul VI in his equally eloquent encyclical "Humanae Vitae."

On the macro level, as an encountered couple we confess our share of the entire sin of humanity as the world continues to destroy our forests; pollute our oceans, seas, rivers, and lakes; ruin our mountains, plains, and hills; and all seascapes and landscapes in the name of development and economic progress. We are guilty of closing our eyes, refusing to express our objections to the abuses against the Natural Environment. We have failed to heed the call of Pope Francis in "Laudato Si," and we have miserably refused to embrace the Church's conviction that we all belong to one body of God's creation, and whenever the smallest component of the whole is hurt by the assaults, abuses, neglect, and ineptitude of some lost sheep of humanity, then we all suffer and we stand to be indicted before God and be answerable to the Father.

How many times have we contributed to the destruction of the natural environment? How much garbage have we dumped into our immediate surroundings, mindless of the pollution we have created and the pernicious effects of our recklessness and imprudence? How many times have we refused to denounce the blatant destruction of our mountains by

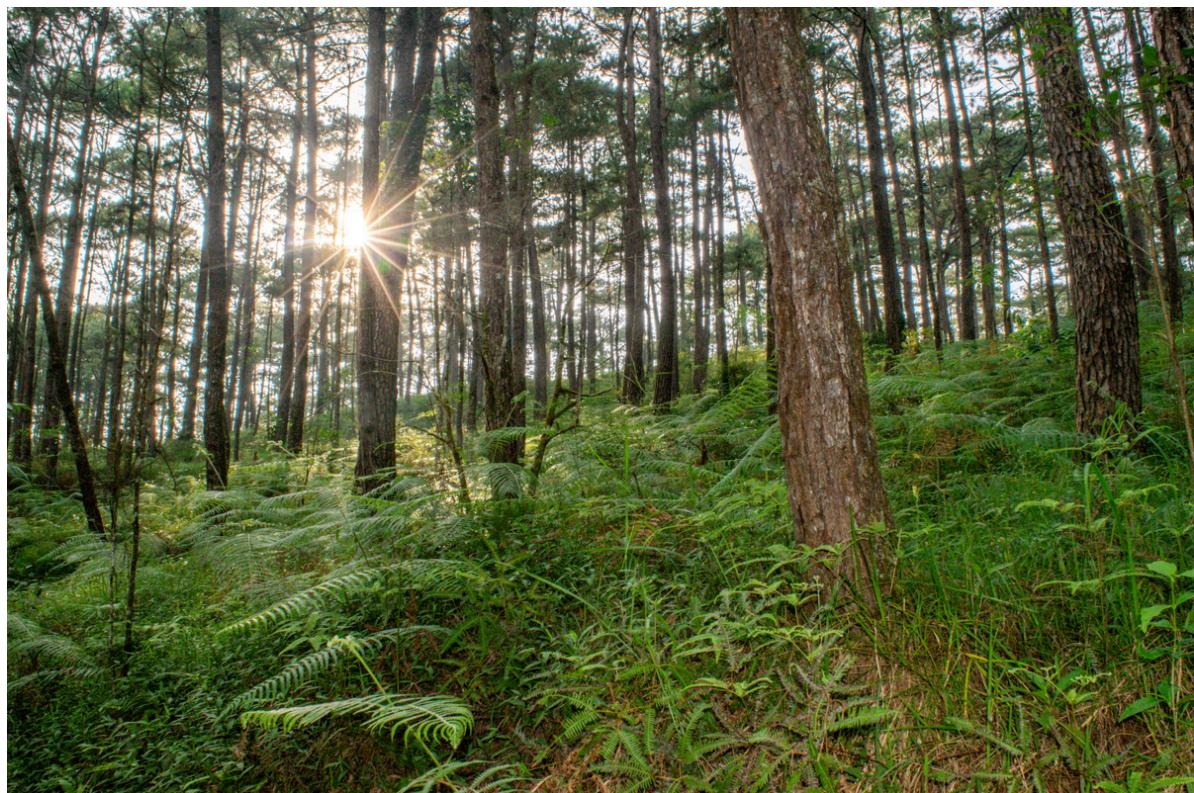
greedy and irresponsible miners and by selfish developers? How many times have we refused to get involved in movements against the destruction of our natural habitat? While young activists have been arrested, kidnapped, and illegally detained, what have we done to help those persecuted in the defense of the Father's Temple on earth?

On the micro level, we claim spirituality by the mere symbolism of our rituals and ceremonies by repeated prayers in public to show off our religiousness. But in the immediate vicinity of our churches, we refuse to lift a hand of charity to the poor. We close our eyes to the abuses of the powerful against the powerless. We contend ourselves to our display of worship not unlike the scribes and the pharisees. We are dressed in white like painted sepulchers but in our deepest secrets, we have closets of skeletons of stench and decay. We sing our songs in the comfort of our air-conditioned churches while millions are dying of hunger, disease, and loneliness. By our omissions,

neglect, and lack of care, we have failed the Father. Today's governments have transformed the Temple of the Father into dens of thieves and murderers. But we Christians remain content and happy with our songs of peace and serenity. We have cooperated by safely and softly joining the conspiracy of silence and uncaring.

On both macro and micro levels, we have grievously sinned against the Father, if not by our acts, mostly by our inaction. And in this Season of Lent, we need to accept that our lives are borrowed, they are lent to us. They are gifts to us, and we have ruined the gifts by our sheer sinfulness, ineptitude, and reckless neglect.

The Gospel of John, like Pope Francis' "Laudato Si" and Pope Paul VI's "Humanae Vitae," are very strong reminders that we have turned against God Himself, and we need to ask for forgiveness, express deep remorse, reform our lives, and, like prodigal children, return to the House of our Loving Father.



Yang's Holy Week Reflection (As posted on her Facebook Wall last Black Saturday)

Yang Reantaso, Samaritans BCGG



Last Holy Thursday night, my right foot got caught by the closing screen door of our house and if you know how super sharp the edge/corner of an aluminum screen door is..... huhuhu... you know what I mean!!

The impact was so strong that I felt it up to the bone (Parang 'Sarap to the Bones' ng Max's Fried Chicken pero di siya masarap at all) and I could see the inner flesh of my foot popping out... bleeding.

The pain was excruciating that I cried out loud like a baby. (See photo. Nagpapicture pa talaga ako sa asawa ko. Paawa effect.)

The cut was so deep and painful that I even had to ask my daughter to blow on it as I dabbed a cotton ball with alcohol to clean it.

So why am I sharing this now (sana di kayo kumakain as you look at my gross wound) ...

Sabi kasi ni Kuya Julian, para daw ako pinako sa cross like Jesus. So true.

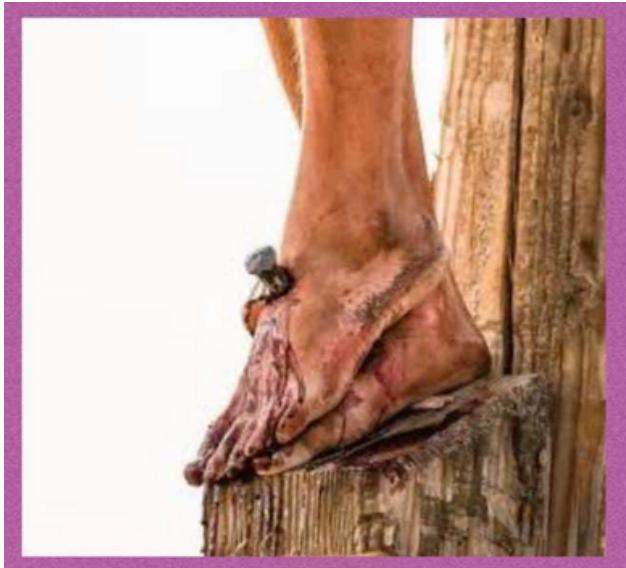


But when I saw Jesus on the cross  gazing at me last night (Good Friday) when we visited the church for confession, my pain was nothing at all compared to His crowning of thorns, the scourging He endured, the carrying of and nailing on the cross, and most especially, the emotional suffering He experienced as people shouted, "Crucify  Him!" Even His own disciples abandoned Him. 

Lord, ang sakit sakit ng sugat ko pero mas masakit to see You suffering and crying for the sins I persistently commit. I am so sorry, dear Lord, for always offending You and I  promise to be more and more like You each day. I want to have a  heart like Yours.

Thank you, Jesus, for your abounding LOVE and MERCY and Your gift of  SALVATION. 

I cannot wait to  celebrate Your RESURRECTION tomorrow. 



A Reflection on the Sacred Gaze Lenten Recollection Attending to My Wounded Brothers and Sisters Along the Road

Mina Tamera, Mustard Seed BCGG

Among the reflection questions Fr. Willy Samson, SJ, posed at the March 3 Lenten Recollection, I chose "Who are my wounded brothers and sisters along the road I took?"

I vividly remembered my experience a few weeks earlier. On our way to the office, our car had difficulty accelerating, then suddenly stopped in the middle of traffic. I got stressed by the heavy morning traffic and this car problem at the start of the week. I asked the Lord, "Bakit ngayon pa? Huwag naman Po ngayon, Lord." Having a car to go to our work is now a necessity for me and my husband Floyd, especially with heavy traffic, problems with public transportation, and the daily rush of people.

We brought the car to a shop where we were told it would take 3 days to fix the vehicle. This meant that for the next several days we would take three to four rides to work, then another four rides to get home. This everyday rush and commute will definitely stress me.

On the third day of our commute, we were the last to get off the jeepney. I saw a pouch on the passenger seat and I opened it to check if there was an ID or contact number of the owner. I found one, and also saw many thousands of pesos in the pouch. I thought – perhaps that person might still be in the area and started looking around. Or we could contact that person, or post on social media, and hope it gets the attention of the owner. I was thinking of all the possible ways to get the pouch to its owner.

While walking home, we saw two men running towards where the jeepney passed. I recognized one of them from the ID. We approached them and asked why they were in a rush. They explained that they left something in the jeep. I asked for his name, and it was the exact name in the ID. . I showed him the pouch and asked if it was what he was looking for. He said yes; and he was very relieved, thankful, and happy when I handed it to him. I explained that I opened the pouch just to check if there was any ID.



After that, we rushed to the auto shop before it closed at 8:00 pm. Our car was already fixed, and we were pleasantly surprised that the mechanic did not ask for any payment because all it took was a minor fix. We felt the kindness of the mechanic.

That night I was very thankful for what we received, and for our good deed, without any temptation to keep the money for ourselves. I then realized, "Oh Lord, I know it was You!" Everything that happened was God's plan. I sometimes do not know nor understand the situations God designs for me, but I know there are reasons and I need to trust Him for everything.

I remembered one of my favorite quotes, "When the God of all comfort makes you uncomfortable, it is because He is stirring you up to a greater level of spiritual awareness and growth." This quote pushes me to greater responsibility, giving to or caring for the needy, and showing grace and compassion. Helping others not only makes the world better; it also makes me better. Giving back, with my values and well-being, encourages me to lend a hand to those in need. I know I represent God. I know God is sure I will handle situations well and will not disappoint Him. I know God trusts me.

Knowing I make a positive impact on someone's life can be incredibly fulfilling and motivating, gives me purpose, and helps me focus on showing love and compassion to others, the way Jesus taught us.

Beginners' Serving and Singing in the Magis Deo Community

Kish Abante, Mirakulo BCGG

Our Contemplation Process

Even before we were commissioned as Magis Deo members, Lito & Mona Ramos were persuading us to join the Community Services Ministry (CSM), and Tita Dolly Llamas was urging us to join the Magis Choir. We were hesitant then, scared of the weight of responsibilities they might give us. As our commissioning approached, OJ and I evaluated the ministries to join. We were already considering CSM because it requires us to be present only at the first Sunday Community Celebrations (ComCels), which do not coincide with work. Additionally, we saw what the ministry does during ComCels and these were doable for us, being kaladkarins. Thus (plus the constant proddings of Lito & Mona), we signed up for CSM. Tita Dolly also invited us on many occasions to join the Magis Choir. Again, we hesitated for three reasons. First, choir practices were on the night of a weekday and might affect our work schedule. Second, the choir practice location then was farther from us as they were not yet held in Winston & Mae Cruz's residence. Third (and the most honest reason of all), we might be the only young couple in the choir. During the deeply compelling talk of Fr. James Gascon on Shepherding last January 14, Tita Flor Pison's and Tito Boy de la Peña's convincing power became more persistent. The words of Fr. James flowed through their lips, stating reasons such as "Kung gusto ninyong humaba ang buhay ninyo at tumanda tulad namin, you should join the choir." And join the choir we did! We also prayed to the Lord for guidance as we embark on the ministries we enlisted in.

Embracing the Singing and Serving Experience

For the past months, OJ and I have been assigned as greeters at the ComCels. We assisted Ms. Ria in the registration of Magis Deo members and the distribution of their IDs. Being our usual game selves and with the guidance of CSM Heads Mona & Lito, Overseers Jojo & Rhea Gaddi, and other CSM members, our tasks became light, fun, and fulfilling. The once-a-month choir practices served also as rest and recreation, with a small simple feast for the month's birthday celebrants. The elder members of the choir treat us kindly and share with us their stories about joining the chorale. The warmth and kindness



they do on us remind OJ and I of our lolos and lolas. The direction and coaching of our Musical Director, Kuya Rannie Bello, have improved our singing.

Getting involved in two ministries has flowed blessings into our lives. First, we participate in ComCels, serving in both ministries simultaneously. Second, and more meaningful graces, are the contagious and invigorating energy and sense of community of the CSM and the Choir members. They are all very welcoming and caring to us. The warm smiles, hugs, and stories shared over sumptuous meals during practices and on actual day of community celebration are such a joy. The third and most important of all, we have deepened our relationship with the Lord as individuals and with each other. We do not only pray within the corners of our small home and within our BCGG Mirakulo but we also get to put into action Jesus' teaching of serving using His singing and serving gifts to us. What a spiritual pleasure it is for us to take a more active role in the community.



Spiritual Tidbits and Humor

Rey (and Pia) Mella, Bartimaeus BCGG

"We shall steer safely through every storm, so long as our heart is right, our intention fervent, our courage steadfast, and our trust fixed on God."

– St. Francis de Sales



I love traveling, and planning adventures brings me great joy, regardless of budget or my wife's schedule. From researching top destinations to mapping out daily itineraries with precision (including the minutes and meters to walk to a bus stop or train station or nearest coffee shop, among others), every detail adds to the excitement.

But in one of these exercises, I had a sudden realization: God has given me a round-trip ticket for life's journey. I have been traveling on His budget all along. While I'm not ready to use the return ticket just yet, I would like to believe I am ready and "eager" to embrace whatever divine plans He has in store for me!



Why did Jonah refuse to travel to Nineveh? Because he heard it was a "whale" of a journey!

Why did the Israelites complain during their journey through the desert? Because they were tired of the "sand"wiches!



"Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light."

– Helen Keller



"Why did the airplane break up with the airport? Because it needed some space!"

Why don't skeletons ever go on vacation? Because they don't have the guts for it!

Why was the math book sad during the road trip? Because it had too many problems!

One time, I received incorrect information the night before a whole day meeting, only to discover it was actually a one-hour bonus to tackle some work the next day!

I woke up at 6:00 AM, hit the treadmill, enjoyed breakfast, showered, dressed, and logged in by 7:30 AM, only to find out the 8-to-5 planning session didn't start until 9 AM.

Did I feel disappointed? Not really. As a morning person, I welcomed the extra hour to be productive.

It's moments like these that make me realize how often small mishaps can unexpectedly turn into significant blessings in our lives.



In my younger days, before I became more spiritual, my family and I used to spend Holy Week in resorts. We went to Boracay, Cebu, and even Disneyland in April 2000. Since we had limited vacation days, we made the most of the 4-day weekend from Maundy Thursday to Easter Sunday, along with the weekend before and the Monday to Wednesday of Holy Week, making it a 9-day vacation. For longer vacations in the US, we saved up more vacation credits.

As my wife and I grew in our spirituality, we decided to return home by Wednesday of Holy Week to observe religious rituals, like Maundy Thursday's "visita iglesia." This tradition has lasted over a decade, and we spend the week in reflection, watching the Passion movie every Good Friday and participating in religious activities.

Skipping beach trips during Holy Week hasn't affected our lives much. We prioritize religious practices and manage our vacation schedule for other times of the year. I know God guided us to this path.



"As we journey through life, let us choose the path of peace and love."

– Pope Francis

Note: Sources of jokes: From my notes, which must have come from the internet.