

For The Bulletin Of
February 23, 2020

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time



Love your enemies,
do good to those who hate you.

From Father Robert

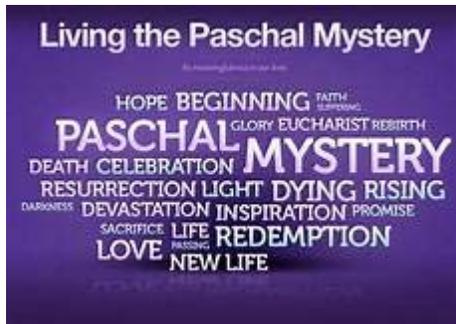
Today's gospel reading from Matthew picks up where we left off last week, in the midst of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' own preaching is on par with and actually fulfills the Mosaic Law, which came from God. Jesus' teaching authority is therefore equivalent to God, as Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said...but I say to you..." The passive voice "it was said" refers to God's word through Mosaic Law. Jesus uses the active voice, first-person singular, in claiming His own teaching authority. To claim such authority would have been shocking to those who heard it. The words we have reflect not only Jesus' teaching but also Matthew the Evangelist's reckoning that the authority of Jesus is paramount.

In the teachings from last week, Jesus goes to the heart of Mosaic Law, sometimes issuing commands that go beyond the mere letter of the law, such as prohibiting anger (rather than murder) and lust (rather than adultery). In this week's gospel Jesus goes beyond the "law of retaliation" (an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth). The law of retaliation represented a development in its time (centuries prior to Jesus) by limiting retaliation to one for one rather than five for

one. Yet, even this is superseded by Jesus' injunction to "offer no resistance to one who is evil." The way of discipleship goes beyond strict justice, beyond "legitimate" retaliation, and represents a significant development.

Something similar is at work in the next injunction Jesus issues, which is to pray for one's persecutors rather than hate them. All too often feelings of exclusion and division can rise up in the face of persecution, which is certainly understandable. Striking back in the face of persecution is a natural human response. But the way of Jesus calls His disciples to the lofty goal of praying for those persecutors. Few people have lived up to this ideal, but those who have are known for it, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, and the Dalai Lama. If we treat with kindness only those who treat us with kindness, we are merely living the values of the world. Jesus demands that we are "perfect," meaning pure in our devotion to God. Then we will be known as His disciples.





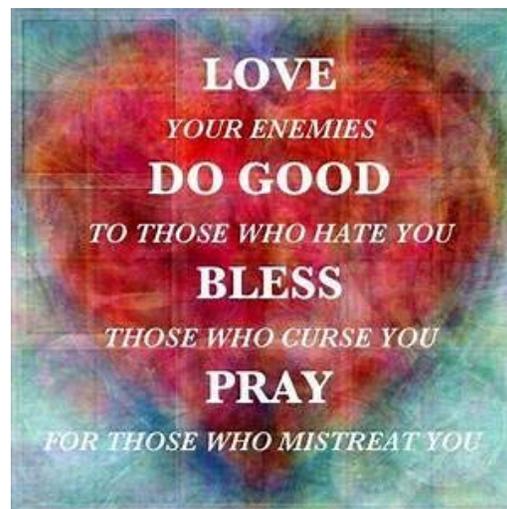
Admiring Jesus is easy to do. He was a gifted teacher, Who lived an ethical life. His sayings inspire us, to say nothing of His death and resurrection. But, merely admiring Jesus is not what we are called to do. As disciples, we are to follow Him. The Sermon on the Mount, from which we read today, is addressed to Jesus’ disciples. That is, the Sermon on the Mount is addressed to us. His words should certainly challenge us and our basic attitudes toward life. It’s much easier to be evangelized by the modern culture with values of the world. And many of these values are not bad, such as treating with kindness those who treat us with kindness. But Jesus has another way. We are to pray for our persecutors. We are to turn the other cheek. In the face of such injunctions, we may choose to admire Jesus for His simple advice, while quietly concluding that it’s not the way the world works. Jesus would agree. He calls His disciples to be salt for the earth, leaven for the world. The conclusion of this journey is not “to get ahead” but to die on a cross. But then comes the promised resurrection. Such is the paschal mystery, which is to be lived, not merely admired.

How do we make the teaching of Jesus in the gospel today relevant to our lives?

- In Leviticus, God tells the people, “though you may have to reprove your fellow citizen, do not incur sin because of him.” When do you think

it becomes imperative for Christians to reprove their fellow citizens?

- St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” What would our society look like if this truth, that the human body is holy, was revered?
- In today’s gospel Jesus tells us to “turn the other” cheek. What is your understanding of this phrase and how might you use this advice in a situation you are currently in?
- Have you had an experience in your life where you practiced Jesus’ commandment to “love your enemies?” What was the outcome?



About Liturgy: Praying For Our Enemies

Unfortunately, tragedies such as school shootings and other attacks upon innocent human beings are becoming more common in our society. When terrible things like these happen, we should be ready to include at least intercessions for those who were killed and have been affected by it.

However, if we are to take today's gospel reading to heart, we must also include prayers for those who commit such violence. For many of us, this is difficult and at times impossible, for good reason. Remember when the attacks upon the United States happened on September 11, 2001, it was almost considered treasonous to even think of praying for those who planned it and killed so many of our loved ones. And yet, that is exactly what Jesus calls His disciples to do: "I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Look again at that command. Not only are we to pray for our enemies; we are to *love* them! Not just pray for God's mercy upon them but also treat them as our neighbor.

To be perfect as our Father is perfect is not to be indifferent toward those who hurt us. Rather it is to recognize that we belong to one another in Christ and we are not whole if we refuse to see that we are connected to one another, even in our pain and anger.



Shrove Tuesday, The Burning of the Palms
This coming Tuesday, February 25th, Shrove Tuesday, we will ritually burn the dried palms from last year's Palm Sunday Liturgies following the 8:00 a.m. Liturgy of the Word and Holy Communion. You are invited to be a part of this annual ceremony which prepares us for the next day's Ash Wednesday liturgies and the beginning of

Lent. After the palm ashes have cooled, they are ground into the ashes that we will take upon ourselves in the Ash Wednesday Liturgies.



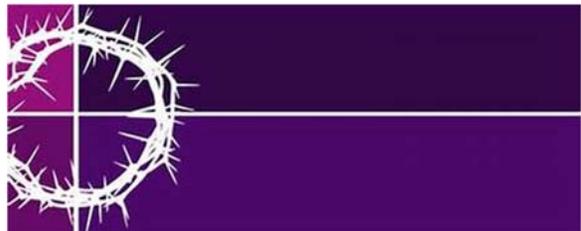
February 26, 2020

8:00 a.m. - Holy Eucharist and the Imposition of Ashes

12:00 Noon - Liturgy of the Word and Imposition of Ashes

5:30 p.m. - Liturgy of the Word and Imposition of Ashes

7:30 p.m. - Sung Evening Prayer and Imposition of Ashes



The Weekdays of Lent

Monday – Wednesday – Friday
Holy Eucharist - 8:00 a.m.

Tuesday – Thursday
Liturgy of the Word and Holy Communion - 8:00 a.m.



This year we will be having a simple soup and bread supper each of the Lenten Fridays at 6:30 p.m. A Free-will Offering will be received and all proceeds will be donated to our adopted parochial school of St. Peter Martyr, Pittsburg, as a part of our Lenten Almsgiving.

Following the supper, there will be a different Lenten service each week in the church at 7:30 p.m. The schedule is as follows:

Friday, February 28, 2020

6:30 p.m. Clam Chowder;
7:30 p.m. Stations of the Cross

Friday, March 6, 2020

6:30 p.m. Vegetable Soup;
7:30 p.m. Sung Evening Prayer

Friday, March 13, 2020

6:30 p.m. Cream of Potato Soup;
7:30 p.m. Liturgy of the Word and the Sacrament of Anointing

Friday, March 20, 2020

6:30 p.m. Cream of Carrot Soup;
7:30 p.m. Stations of the Cross

Friday, March 27, 2020

6:30 p.m. French Onion Soup;
7:30 p.m. Sung Evening Prayer

Friday, April 3, 2020

6:30 p.m. Clam Chowder;
7:30 p.m. Communal Penance/Sacrament of Reconciliation



Saturday, February 29, 2020

4:00 p.m.
The Penitential Procession and Great Litany

Sunday, March 1, 2020

8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m.
The Penitential Procession and Great Litany



One of the important directions we have taken as a parish this year is to do even more regarding the Works of Justice. How does this apply to the Season of Lent? With regard to the threefold discipline of Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving, we suggest the following:

Prayer – in place of “memorized” prayers, we invite you to pray for the trouble spots and painful places in the world, i.e. Iran, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Africa, for the healing of our government and its leaders as well as those of all the countries of the world, for the healing of our Church as an institution.

Fasting – not so much from food as from any ways of thinking, speaking, or acting that are negative, hostile, judgmental,

negatively critical, and remembering that we are totally dependent upon God. We can be at one with the hungry of the world for dignity, respect, for forgiveness, and for love.

Almsgiving - in addition to our financial support for Catholic Education through our adopted parochial school of St. Peter Martyr, Pittsburg, our almsgiving this Lent can challenge us to be less material, less of a consumer, and more united with the holy ones who dedicate their lives to the needs of others.

Additionally, Ash Wednesday is a Day of Fasting and Abstinence for all between the ages of 13 and 59, which means only one full meal and two lesser meals that do not constitute a full meal and refraining from eating meat or meat by-products. All the Fridays of Lent are Days of Abstinence, refraining from eating meat or meat by-products. Good Friday is also a Day of Fast and Abstinence for all those aged 13 to 59, only one full meal and no meat or meat by-products.

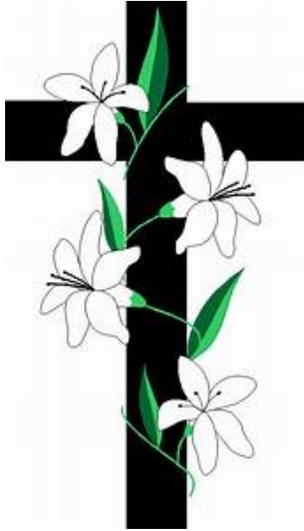


Today throughout the Diocese is Commitment Weekend for this year's Bishop's Appeal. The theme for this year's Appeal is once again "Rebuild My Church." Our goal is the same for last year: \$34,900.

The Appeal serves various ministries within the diocese including retired priests, on-going clergy education, parishes and schools.

I introduced the Appeal to you two weekends ago at each liturgy in advance of each of our households receiving a letter from the diocese with details about the Appeal along with the contribution envelope. **It is important that you return the envelope with your contribution to the parish so that our counting teams can keep track of all contributions to the diocese. Please do not mail the envelope back to the diocese, but rather place it in the Sunday offering along with your regular donations.** I will give you a weekly accounting of our progress towards reaching the goal. As we have done each year, we not only reach the goal but we exceed it! And we do that by everyone of our families/individuals participating.

In order for us to reach this year's goal, I am asking for a one-time contribution in the amount of \$50.00. I realize that some will give that exact amount, others will contribute less than the requested amount, and others will give more than the requested amount. Again, **what is critical to the success of our reaching the goal is that everyone participate.** Let us all do our part to help further the various ministries of our diocese. As always, your generous participation is greatly appreciated.



Upcoming Funerals

This coming Saturday, February 29th, we will celebrate a Memorial Funeral Liturgy at 11:00 a.m. for **Juan Maldonado Figueroa, beloved father of Carmen Garces.**

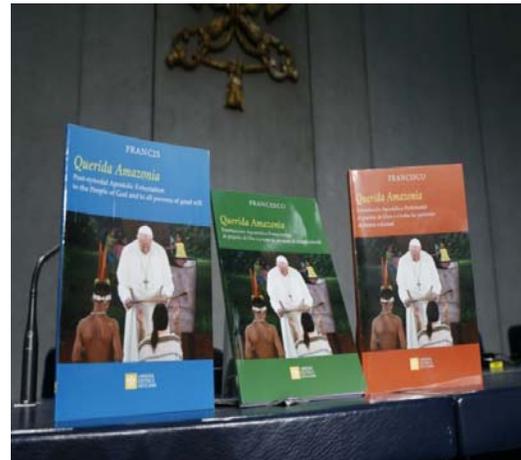
On Wednesday, March 4th, we will celebrate a Funeral Vigil at 7:30 p.m. for **Jim Peddicord, beloved husband of Maryann,** with the Memorial Funeral Liturgy following the next morning, March 5th at 10:30 a.m. A reception follows in our parish hall.

*Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord;
And let perpetual light shine upon them.*

'Querida Amazonia' shows how Francis is looking for deeper change

Feb 13, 2020

by [Michael Sean Winters](#)



Copies of Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation, "Querida Amazonia" ("Beloved Amazonia"), are pictured at a news conference for the release of the exhortation at the Vatican Feb. 12. (CNS/Paul Haring)

Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation [Querida Amazonia](#) is a multifaceted document. I would like to look at what I found the most striking aspect of the text, its ecclesiological significance.

Many NCR readers will be disappointed that the [pope did not move forward](#) on either ordaining *virii probati* to the priesthood, older deacons who could then preside at Eucharist and absolve sins in the sacrament of penance, or ordaining women deacons. Certainly, the [final document](#) of the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon last October invited him to address both these issues. Why didn't he? I think the pope is looking for a deeper change. His emphasis on [synodality](#) has become one of the most dominant themes of his pontificate and holds the potential to help the church step away

from the [Ultramontane excesses](#) of the 19th and 20th centuries. Synods are consultative bodies, and they usually leave the difficult decisions to the pope. But Francis wants us to move away from that monarchical model and engage the whole church in the process of discernment on issues like bringing back the female diaconate.

You can't achieve synodality if you continually look to the pope to make the tough calls. It reminds me of those politicians who argue we need to get big money out of politics and call for a constitutional amendment to overturn *Citizens United v. FEC*, but in the meantime continue to collect a lot of that big money as they run for office. Real change never works that way. The proof of the pudding must be in the eating, not in any rationalizations.

Right at the beginning, the Holy Father indicates a significant departure from past practice in which all synodal processes ultimately resulted in papal decisions. Here, Francis proposes a different model of relationship between the final document from the synod fathers and his own exhortation.

In this Exhortation, I wish to offer my own response to this process of dialogue and discernment. I will not go into all of the issues treated at length in the final document. Nor do I claim to replace that text or to duplicate it. I wish merely to propose a brief framework for reflection that can apply concretely to the life of the Amazon region a *synthesis* of some of the larger concerns that I have expressed in earlier documents, and that can help guide us to a harmonious, creative and fruitful reception of the entire synodal process.

Indeed, the pope even breaks from his own previous practice in deciding not to cite the final document from the synod in this text. "At the same time, I would like to officially present the Final Document, which sets forth the conclusions of the Synod, which profited from the participation of many people who know better than myself or the Roman Curia the problems and issues of the Amazon region, since they live there, they experience its suffering and they love it passionately," he writes. "I have preferred not to cite the Final Document in this Exhortation, because I would encourage everyone to read it in full."



Pope Francis attends the final session of the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon at the Vatican Oct. 26, 2019. (CNS/Paul Haring)

This is quite remarkable. Instead of the synod being a consultative body that helps the pope form his own judgment, here he is giving the outcome of the synod's deliberations its own standing and status. The line about the synod fathers knowing more about the region than the pope and the Curia is not something one would find in, say, the teachings of Pope Pius X. I had not anticipated this and, so far as I can tell, neither did anyone else.

The second major ecclesiological issue is Francis' effort at grounding the church's

methods of evangelization in a specifically Catholic doctrinal approach. Francis has been clear since the beginning of his pontificate that he does not conceive of spirituality or ethics in the individualistic manner of some Protestants. The Gospel is never reduced to a personal disposition. Neither is the Gospel ever presented as some pie-in-the-sky dream.

"Everything that the Church has to offer must become incarnate in a distinctive way in each part of the world, so that the Bride of Christ can take on a variety of faces that better manifest the inexhaustible riches of God's grace," Francis writes, setting forth the theological grounds for his stance. "Preaching must become incarnate, spirituality must become incarnate, ecclesial structures must become incarnate."

This is the answer to those who oppose the pope and charge him with breaking from the tradition of the church. The pope's opponents seem to think that St. Thomas Aquinas was the final word on inculturation. As H. Richard Niebuhr observes in his book *Christ and Culture*:

Yet Leo XIII and all who followed him in calling for a new synthesis on a Thomistic basis are not synthesists. The synthesis of Christ and culture is doubtless their goal but they do not synthesize Christ with present culture, present philosophy, present institutions as Thomas did. ... What is sought here is not the synthesis of Christ with present culture but the re-establishment of the philosophy and the institutions of another culture ... the reign and Lordship of Jesus have been so identified with the dogmas, organization, and mores of a cultural religious institution that the dynamic counterpoises characteristic of Thomas' synthesis have disappeared, save in the accepted theory itself.

For the pope, inculturation is always a sort of two-way street. On the one hand, the church "constantly reshapes her identity through listening and dialogue with the people, the realities and the history of the lands in which she finds herself. In this way, she is able to engage increasingly in a necessary process of inculturation that rejects nothing of the goodness that already exists in Amazonian cultures, but brings it to fulfilment in the light of the Gospel."

Neither does the church "scorn the richness of Christian wisdom handed down through the centuries, presuming to ignore the history in which God has worked in many ways."



Deacon Shainkiam Yampik Wananch prays in a chapel in Wijint, a village in the Peruvian Amazon, Aug. 20, 2019. (CNS/Reuters/Maria Cervantes)

Only those who think of the tradition as a kind of museum piece fail to grasp this dynamic of inculturation and fail to appreciate its value. They are the ones who charge the pope with being a Hegelian. One need not subscribe to the philosophy of the great German thinker to recognize the dynamic of dialogue between God and man that characterizes the Hebrew Scripture and

the Gospels. The Incarnation makes inculturation obvious and necessary. "Inculturation elevates and fulfills," the pope writes.

Thirdly, the pope continues to invite the church to be less self-referential and more focused on the needs of others, especially the poor and, [in this case, the planet](#). When the synod met, the Amazon basin was literally [burning](#). The forests of the region have rightly been called "the earth's lungs" and so damage there has the potential to wreak havoc with the entire planet.

As the pope made clear in "[Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home](#)," there are not two crises in the Amazon, one environmental and the other social, but one crisis that is both environmental and social. Damage to the environment will necessarily damage the society and culture of the [people of the region](#), people who have long and lovingly cared for the Earth.

To allow the church to get sidetracked on the particulars of presbyteral or diaconal ordination, important though they may be, when the people of the world need to galvanize themselves to save the [Amazon ecosystem](#) that sustains all human life would be like criticizing the curtains in a house that is on fire.

Finally, the pope clearly believes that there must be a conversion of heart and mind before the church can begin changing its structures. Quoting from [Amoris Laetitia](#), he writes, "the Church must be particularly concerned to offer understanding, comfort and acceptance, rather than imposing straightaway a set of rules that only lead people to feel judged and abandoned by the very Mother called to show them God's mercy."

Francis also seems as suspicious of the legalism of the reformers as the legalism of the traditionalists. He writes, "It is not simply a question of facilitating a greater presence of ordained ministers who can celebrate the Eucharist. That would be a very narrow aim, were we not also to strive to awaken new life in communities. We need to promote an encounter with God's word and growth in holiness through various kinds of lay service that call for a process of education — biblical, doctrinal, spiritual and practical — and a variety of programmes of ongoing formation."

In the subchapter titled "The strength and gift of women" we see how differently the pope approaches these issues from the way they are most often discussed here in the U.S.

This summons us to broaden our vision, lest we restrict our understanding of the Church to her functional structures. Such a reductionism would lead us to believe that women would be granted a greater status and participation in the Church only if they were admitted to Holy Orders. But that approach would in fact narrow our vision; it would lead us to clericalize women, diminish the great value of what they have already accomplished, and subtly make their indispensable contribution less effective. ... Without women, the Church breaks down, and how many communities in the Amazon would have collapsed, had women not been there to sustain them, keep them together and care for them. This shows the kind of power that is typically theirs.

At a time when almost the entire church in the United States is clamoring for an end to a [clericalism](#) that has replaced a primacy of service with a mere accumulation of power, it is strange to hear some clamor for an end to the all-male priesthood because that robs

women of power. French philosopher Michel Foucault was many things, but he was not an apostle.

Bishop Jerry Kicanas, the bishop emeritus of Tucson, Arizona, was part of the recent *ad limina* visits, and he said something that points to a reason why the pope thinks there needs to be more discernment on these neuralgic issues.



Jesuit Fr. Alfredo Ferro celebrates Mass July 14, 2019, in the indigenous community of Nazaret, Colombia. (CNS/David Agren)

"I think he senses that there's a kind of, his phrase would be, a spiritual worldliness that has taken over and not having the sense of living my life in a sacrificial way, in a serving kind of way, in a giving kind of way, in a generous way," Kicanas said [after his group's meeting with the pope](#).

Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe, New Mexico, said something similar: "The pope, very gently and very calmly, said, 'You know, this point was really not a big point. ... I don't even think at this point that it's something we're going to move on because I

haven't sensed that the Holy Spirit is at work in that right now.' "

To be clear, Kicanas and Wester were not speaking specifically about this text, but it is the case that even many faithful Catholics have adopted essentially political frames of reference for understanding the church, frames that Francis has been resisting since he was superior of the Jesuits in Argentina many decades ago.

It is an open question whether the pope's call for a spiritual renewal will lead to the kinds of structural changes many of us would like to see. Francis is clearly suspicious of self-will and its ability to obstruct the movement of the Spirit.

On the other hand, it is surely impossible for him not to see that sometimes structures and laws must change in order to facilitate spiritual renewal. I am reminded of an old New Yorker cartoon that portrayed a chicken and an egg in bed, both of them smoking, and the caption read, "Should we tell them?" I will continue to give him the benefit of the doubt because his discernment seems so much more holy than my calculations.

I understand why others, and especially women, will find it more difficult to give him the benefit of the doubt after this document. In preparing this column, a woman friend expressed not just disappointment but hurt, and it is always painful to witness someone I love be hurt, and especially hurt by a pope we both admire. Many Catholics will have similar experiences in the days ahead.

It should be noted, however, that Francis closes no doors in this document. None. There is a section in this exhortation after which you expect to find the pope write that

the church has no authority to ordain woman, or that the subject is closed, but here we find only a call to continued discernment and dialogue.

I hope that in the case of clergy sex abuse, when the pope listened to victims and that altered his perspective, the pope will listen to those who suffer because of the church's theology of human sexuality and gender. The most powerful evidence of the Christian faith is love immanent in the world, and such love often, indeed usually, is manifested in the form of suffering. As theologian Fr. Hans Urs von Balthasar used to say, "Only love is credible."

There are other aspects of this document that warrant examination, most especially the Holy Father's intense spirituality of the environment and appreciation for the spirituality of the indigenous peoples and his use of poetry to not just echo but to instantiate the doctrinal points he is making. His insight into the problem of Christ and culture is further revealed in all its complexity. His attentiveness to the promptings of the Spirit is remarkable. In trying to return the Petrine ministry to something that continues to serve as a source of unity while undoing the suffocating uniformity produced by the Ultramontanism of the past 200 years, through the mechanism of synodality, Francis is attempting something almost impossible to conceive. Unless you truly believe that with God all things are possible. Do we?

[Michael Sean Winters covers the nexus of religion and politics for NCR.]

Beloved Amazonia: a love letter for the conversion of hearts

Feb 14, 2020

by [Mauricio López Oropeza](#)



Indigenous people carry offertory gifts as Pope Francis celebrates the concluding Mass of the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon at the Vatican Oct. 27, 2019. (CNS/Paul Haring)

Editor's note: *Mauricio López Oropeza is executive secretary of the Pan-Amazon Church Network ([REPAM](#)), which connects the bishops' conferences and church communities across the nine-nation Amazon region and was the primary organizer for the hundreds of on-the-ground consultative meetings leading up to the 2019 [Synod of Bishops for the Amazon](#). López was named by Pope Francis in March 2018 as the only layperson among the 18 members of the pre-synodal council that helped draft the gathering's eventual working document, and was later a participant at the synod. Originally from Mexico, he now lives in Ecuador.*

It's Wednesday, Feb. 12, and I'm on the road into the Amazon region in Ecuador. We had

to leave very early in the morning to make it on time for the diocesan vicariates' assembly after a four-hour drive into the town of Puyo. It's not just another day for us. This is the day we had been waiting for in which Pope Francis was to present his post-synod apostolic exhortation: [*Querida Amazonia*](#).

As we are on the road, I start reading a good number of articles, previews and reflections about this, and most of them come from elsewhere, from all around the world. This is good in a way, but then I start sensing again and again the lack of understanding in commentaries that are not truly concerned with the Amazon and its peoples. The reflections are mostly focused on an obsessive concern with the implications of this exhortation for the universal church, rather than its true impact in the lives of those communities here in the Amazon, suffering and wishing to deepen their faith life in a more connected way with their cultural and ancestral identities.

This was to be expected of course, but this ghost, and this feeling we experienced during the assembly in October, comes back again. The words that come to mind as I read most of those pieces are the same words that came to mind during our stay in Rome: disconnection, self-affirmation, Eurocentrism, incomprehension, incompatibility.

Moreover, the pieces demonstrate a disrespect for the central focus of this synod — the lives and the future of the peoples in the Amazon.

The commentaries often ignore the indigenous peoples who represent other different possibilities for responding to this massive climate crisis, or their attitude of caring for creation that we need so much to be incorporated into the Catholic Church, or

their deep desire and right to live their faith in a more connected and respectful way towards their cultural identity and spirituality.

Of special concern is the suffering they face from the threat of extractive interests allied with their local and national governments, which fail to respect their rights, putting their lives and futures at risk.



Our Lady of the Rosary Cathedral in Puyo, Ecuador (Wikimedia Commons/David C. S.)

Throughout this four-hour drive, I start to feel anxious. When the press conference about the document begins in Rome, my internet connection is so poor that I can't follow it live, but as it goes on, I continue to feel as if the whole synodal process had been held hostage by some portions of the media (and the interests behind them), focusing on one thing only: the approval or not of married priests.

So, I think to myself, how can this be when this is only one proposal out of 200 possibilities presented in the final document? This is one issue, important

certainly, but in no way the most important one for the peoples in the Amazon.

I can't help but recall the polarization of very small fractions of the synod's assembly, two extremes lacking a true capacity for listening as the pope did — and as he asked for — as a requirement for communal discernment.

On one extreme, the conservatives accepting no change at all and placing themselves as the protectors of the so-called orthodoxy of the church, when in fact it seems to be their intent to protect the status quo approach to how the church is to be governed. It is a Western, Eurocentric view that by no means represents the whole of the beautiful diversity of our church. We need to know that this diversity is part of our own history and identity, meant to express the true catholicity of our church.

And on the other side, I see some people defending a position that is more ideological than pastoral, arguing that the changes need to happen in a time frame of their choosing and with the features they consider essential. Any outcome not in line with their wishes is considered soft or lacking courage.

Both small sides seem to be uncomfortable with the final resolutions of the assembly, and I can't but realize that in both cases many of those persons do not actually live in the Amazon region, and do not directly work on a daily basis connected with this territory and its people. It seems as if both sides were using the Amazon as a means to advance their particular intentions, regardless of the actual cries and hopes of this territory and its peoples.

At this moment, I notice that we have left the Andes region of Ecuador, we've left behind the mountains with permanent snow,

and we are actually entering the beautiful natural gate into the Amazon region. She, the Amazon region, explodes in front of my eyes. Beautiful, untamable, diverse, full of contrasts, and vibrating in life.



A view of the Amazon rainforest on the Puyo-Macas road in Ecuador (Wikimedia Commons/David C. S.)

This is when it comes to mind what's been the center of our REPAM approach in this whole process: It's the lives of the peoples and the promise to respect and honor their voices that have brought us here. It is our commitment to come back here and to be able to look them in their eyes to tell them we've fulfilled our promise to bring their voices to the pope so they would be heard, and to make sure their most urgent cries and hopes would be respected and acknowledged.

As I see the enormous diversity of the flora out there, I also think about the 200 and more proposals in the final document representing the people's expectations, and I feel confirmed that we cannot allow the fear of those who are not here, nor work with these peoples, to be what leads the discussions.

How can some dare say this was an intention to destroy the core values of the church?

This does not match what I hear from Catholic sisters and brothers living in this territory, expressing that for the first time they feel acknowledged, along with the richness of their identity and traditional spirituality. They know that for the first time their church will embrace their wisdom in protecting our common home, our mother Earth, instead of rejecting their identity as Catholic sons and daughters of this land.

On the other hand, how dare some so-called progressive representatives of the church say this was a failure, and even suggest the pope surrendered to outside pressures?

The only thing the pope is surrendering to is the discernment of the voice the Holy Spirit. This exhortation is an absolutely beautiful love song and a love letter for the people in the Amazon, and a wake-up call for the church as a whole.

As we've been saying over and over again, nothing will ever be the same after this synod. Only those who love the church, trust the Spirit, and surrender themselves into a wider presence of God — beyond their own conservatism or ideological self-referring view — will understand this true kairos moment and will act and trust accordingly. For we know these are seeds planted that will continue to grow and blossom over the years and generations to come, to bring about the integral conversion and the four conversions (pastoral, cultural, ecological and synodal) resulting from this discernment and expressed in the synod's final document.

Today, I had the chance to share with the Amazonian church of Puyo the pope's four dreams in his exhortation. I asked them what are their dreams for their present and future mission in this portion of the Amazon. I saw hopeful eyes, vibrant commitments, and concrete decisions to go forward in

communion with what the pope has offered as a love letter sent to them directly.

So, I think to myself, "This is it." Anyone who writes and reflects on this exhortation should come here if they can, and listen to what's in the heart of these people before taking a position on this matter.

While it's obvious most wouldn't be able to come, I wish they could read with an open heart the preparatory document and the final document, so they could recognize the voices from the territory and therefore, maybe, they would change their perspective. This is the periphery breaking into the center, helping it to change, as the pope had wished for in this synod.



Patricia Gualinga, an indigenous rights defender from Ecuador, speaks at a news conference to discuss the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon at the Vatican Oct. 17, 2019. Also pictured is Leah Rose Casimero, an indigenous representative from Guyana. (CNS/Paul Haring)

Before I go back to Quito where I live, I have the privilege to visit an admired friend, [Patricia Gualinga](#), who is one of the strongest indigenous leaders I've ever met. She is a well-respected promoter of indigenous rights internationally, and also a devoted Catholic who was part of the whole synodal process, including the assembly,

and who will be part of the post-synod commission appointed by the pope.

The conversation is, as usual, profound and full of hope, but she also wonders why most of the discussions around the synod have ignored the issues most important to the people of the Amazon.

We know there is a decision from some media representatives to divert the attention from the truly crucial issues of integral ecology, intercultural expression in the church, and the broader view of promotion of ministries according to the reality of the Amazon. These issues come from the heart of people, and we know there is no chance they will be stopped from being developed and deepened.

We will continue to put our lives in service to this, and as it is in the Amazon rhythm, the storm will pass as it always does, sun will shine again as it always does, and the last word will be a hopeful word.

God continues to be manifest in the midst of the mystery of this territory and its peoples, regardless of the fear of changing this might produce in some, or the desire of others of controlling this and making it ideological.

Christ continues to incarnate himself in every culture and the seeds he has planted are there, all over the place, so he will continue to prevail, to enlighten our journey and our structures, making everything new over and over again. Thank you, *Querida Amazonia*.

[Mauricio López Oropeza is executive secretary of the Pan-Amazon Church Network (REPAM).]



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