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Memorial of St. Robert Bellarmine, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

Date: Tuesday, September 17, 2024 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** B
First Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:12–14, 27–31a
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 100:1b–5 | **Response:** Psalm 100:3
Gospel Acclamation: Luke 7:16
Gospel Reading: Luke 7:11–17
Preached at: the Chapel of the St Pierre Favre Community, Doula, Cameroon **in the** Archdiocese of Doula, Cameroon**.**

Yesterday some of us were introduced to a word that was perhaps not part of the usual vocabulary of men and women who work in finance. That word was charism or spiritual gift. It is a word that our first reading from St Paul's letter to the Corinthians examines.

When Paul looks at the early Christian communities, he sees not just the financial health of the community or work, but also, and most especially, the giftedness of the people in that place. His concern – like the Provincial's in our provinces and regions – are that the people live and work harmoniously, putting their gifts at the service of the community. St Paul makes five points, it seems to me, in his letter.

1. Firstly, All the gifts come from the Spirit working in the community;
2. Secondly, All the gifts, though given to individuals, are for the good of the whole community;
3. Thirdly, The importance of each gift is to be measured by its benefit to the community;
4. Fourthly, The gift of 'prophecy' is far more important than being able to 'speak in tongues', a gift about which the Corinthians apparently thought very highly.
5. Finally, Love (agape) transcends and is present in all the genuine gifts and is in a class by itself. This is dealt with in the famous 'Hymn to Love' (1 Cor 13:1-13) which will be tomorrow's reading, so I will not say much more on this.

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Paul uses the analogy of the human body to show how the different parts make up the whole and the whole would be incomplete, indeed even ill, without any one part. Paul warns against focusing on any one part – this was something that the Corinthians were guilty of, exaggerating one gift or one person over the rest… This is a temptation perhaps we are at times guilty of, focusing perhaps on just the financial side of things and, as our Paul said yesterday, preferring a narrow insight, instead of the broader vision that our documents call for.

St Paul prioritises the gifts, those who proclaim the Good news, the Apostles are placed first, then the Prophets second.

Being a prophet is not foretelling the future, rather he or she is the one to whom a special message is entrusted. Fr Minaku generously referred to the Treasurers as 'heroes' – and there is much unsung heroic work and dedication that has been done selflessly and persistently in this group. But I want to suggest this afternoon that we are also called to be prophets – encouraging hopefully, but sometimes warning, of the limitations, or conversions needed in our midst, so as to continue the good work of building up God's kingdom.

I'm sure many of us would wish that the charism God would give us would be to be miracle workers – but sadly that is rarely God's way of acting. Rather we must trust in the Lord – and encourage our brethren and our Provincials to collectively place our trust in the Lord always. As the Psalm said, "we are his people, the sheep of his flock." God is in charge, and we must continue to give thanks to him.

Listening to our sharing this morning I was struck by how difficult the situation in many provinces really is. Perhaps I was wrong – God has gifted some of you to be miracle workers indeed! But when I look around the room and see the smiles at the dinner table and during the Socials together, I think that the Lord has indeed been faithful. All of us Jesuits begged the Lord, should it be his will, to experience actual poverty in the Exercises, and the Lord continues to call men into our Society, blessing us with Jesuits and partners in mission rich in spiritual gifts, and other talents. We must continue to trust that the Lord will provide.

We heard this hope today when one of us said they hoped their funds would have a resurrection, or a rebirth. This was the healing action described in the Gospel with the widow of Nain. Jesus says: "Young man, I say to you, rise!" As in other

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similar stories, the word used for “rise” is the same as that used when describing the resurrection of Jesus, for as read in John, Jesus: …came that they may have life and have it abundantly. (John 10:10)

This gospel can be the occasion for us this evening to look and examine our own situation and see, first of all, how alive we really are, and the extent of the gratitude we have. But our gaze must not be on our own needs, but rather on the community around us, the people to whom we have been sent to serve. The people who need to be lifted up and helped to find a new life. It is for them that that we – with our particular gifts of stewardship and prophecy – must aim to help.

Let that be the motivation for our work, not just in our provinces, but in our collective responsibility to better assist our Provincials in responding to the needs of JCAM and our neighbours in the conference. Because Jesus did not overlook the desperate request of the widow of Nain, nor did he teach us to ignore the stranger or orphan. We can best imitate Jesus by growing in the interior freedom to help each other, to reach out and to bring some new life to those who are suffering.

Just a closing footnote about today’s feast that we celebrate in the Society, commemorating St Robert Bellarmine. He is remembered, rightly, for his role in the Galileo affair, and for his outstanding teaching in doctrine and theology - a work still dear to the Society and enabling that teaching occupies many of you here today as you enable the successful administration of those institutions. But there was a story I read somewhere about how he was also famous for only having one Cardinal’s robe. It was said that even his patches have patches. He was a Jesuit that was called to serve in a particular way, but he never let himself be distracted from the nourishing simplicity of life that confirms us in our vocation and reminds us that we are close to Jesus when we are close to the Poor. Let us pray, on his feast day today, that all of us too might receive that grace to live simple lives and serve our brothers in the Society.

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