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The Spiritual Exercises and the Philippine Hierarchy

HIS EXCELLENCY BISHOP LUIS DEL ROSARIO

POPE Pius XI, of happy memory, speaking to the Bishops of the whole world in his Encyclical *Mens Nostra*, December 20, 1929, said:

And Venerable Brethren, it is clear how much you esteem the spiritual exercises. For before you were invested with the sacred priesthood you gave yourself to them; you did so again before being adorned with the fullness of the priesthood; often after that, presiding over your assembled priests, you fled to the spiritual exercises to refresh your souls with the contemplation of heavenly things.

Confining our attention to the hierarchy of the Philippines, we propose to give in the following pages a brief account of the dispositions of our Bishops in regard to the spiritual exercises and to promote in this way during the Ignatian Year a wider diffusion of these exercises themselves.¹

SOME BISHOPS OF THE 19TH CENTURY

His Excellency, Bishop Santos Gómez Marañón, O.S.A., in a pastoral letter, issued on the occasion of his assuming the government of the Diocese of Cebu, in 1829, said:

We are resolved to make an annual retreat in this seminary for a period of eight days during Advent. And we wish, direct and command that all the secular parish priests make these exer-

cises with us. We would not be a good pastor nor a good father if we failed to provide so excellent a medicine to our sons . . . When the retreat of the parish priests is finished, the assistants will come to make theirs also in the seminary.

And in 1834, in an exhortation about the fulfillment of the Easter duty and other obligations of the faithful, he enjoined his priests, "to make every effort to have those who enjoy greater authority in the community—and then little by little the other principal citizens—make the spiritual exercises in the rectories together with you, in order to meditate on the eternal verities,—on death, judgement, hell, glory, etc." In another pastoral letter of 1835, he sent every parish priest a copy of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, translated into Cebuano, and he recommended that the people make these exercises.

His Excellency, Bishop Romualdo Jimeno, O.P., gave orders in 1848 that the directives of his predecessor, Bishop Santos, regarding the spiritual exercises be carried out. And in 1864 he required that all parish priests provide for the introduction into their parishes of the use of the spiritual exercises.

His Excellency, Bishop Benito Romero de Madridejos, of the Order of St. Francis, also Bishop of Cebu, instructed his priests in 1876, in view of the fact that they found it impossible to go to the seminary, as was the custom, "to make ten days of exercises and retreat in their respective rectories, and they should not go out on the street during those days except to discharge necessary and indispensable parochial ministries."

His Excellency, Bishop Pedro Payo, O.P., Archbishop of Manila, in order that the faithful might gain the Jubilee granted by Leo XIII on the occasion of his elevation to the Pontifical throne, arranged in 1879 to have a mission given in Spanish in the Church of Santo Domingo, and another in Tagalog in the parish church of Binondo. And when he was already a very old man he used to express the ardent desire he had of making the spiritual exercises together with his brother priests of the Archdiocese, a wish he did not have the consolation and satisfaction of realizing, since he was snatched away by death on

Jan. 1, 1889. The Reverend Capitular Vicar, Eugenio Netter, expressed the same sincere sentiments in a circular of the 19th of the same month.

His Excellency, Bishop Martín García Alcocer, of the Order of St. Francis, Bishop of Cebu and Apostolic Administrator of Manila, *sede plena*, in a pastoral letter of May 30, 1901 exhorted all the faithful to penance in order both to gain the graces of the Jubilee, which had been extended by Leo XIII to the whole world, and to counteract the grievous evils that then afflicted the Philippines. On this occasion spiritual exercises and missions were given in all the parishes, especially in those of Manila.

CONTEMPORARY BISHOPS

Since it is a well-known fact that the Bishops insist on the spiritual exercises before ordination and other occasions specified in the Code of Canon Law, we make no mention of such provisions, but confine ourselves to those episcopal pronouncements which in one way or other have recommended the spiritual exercises to persons not already obliged to make them, or have insisted on the observance of certain regulations for making them with greater spiritual fruit.

In June 1933, as an effective preparation for the International Eucharistic Congress which was to be celebrated in Manila in 1937, His Excellency, Most Reverend Michael J. O'Doherty, Archbishop of Manila, ordered parish priests and catholic organizations "to try earnestly by all means at their disposal to bring together each year a good number of workmen—if possible not less than thirty—who have the capacity to derive profit from the exercises of a retreat."

The following year, 1934, on the occasion of the extraordinary Jubilee of our Redemption, His Excellency, Most Reverend William Finnemann, Auxiliary Bishop, of Manila, recommended and blessed most warmly "workmen's retreats".

His Excellency, Most Reverend Gabriel M. Reyes, Archbishop of Cebu, in a circular issued in Lent 1940, recommended the spiritual exercises for the improvement of the condition

of the masses and the spread of the light of eternal truth even into the neediest barrios and localities.

His Excellency, Bishop Rufino J. Santos did the same thing in 1951 while he was still Apostolic Administrator of Lipa, recommending to his parish priests, among other things, as a means of accomplishing the purposes of the Holy Year, "to organize, wherever possible, missions and retreats for their parishioners."

From Oct. 3 to Oct. 9, 1954 simultaneous missions were held in the parishes of Manila, promoted by their Excellencies, Archbishop Rufino J. Santos and Bishop Vicente P. Reyes. The occasion was the celebration of the Marian Year in the Archdiocese of Manila.

Finally His Excellency, Most Reverend Flaviano B. Ariola, Bishop of Legaspi, invited his beloved priests and faithful to a campaign of prayer and penance during the Marian Year 1954, and directed at the same time that groups of the people be organized to make the spiritual exercises.

SOLEMN ENACTMENTS

Among the "Conclusions", adopted by their Excellencies, the Ordinaries, in the episcopal conferences of 1933, there are two that read as follows:

57. Let that practise be kept which up to the present has been followed in the Philippines, namely, that the secular clergy make the spiritual exercises every year for four or five full days, at the discretion of the local Ordinary; with an earnest endeavor that the priests derive all the fruit hoped for from these days of retreat through the exact observance of silence during them.

58. The spiritual exercises of the secular clergy should be conducted in one or more groups at some house befitting the purpose, and under the direction of an able retreat master. This is to be done at a time which the Ordinary will judge most convenient, keeping in view the circumstances and especially the facility with which the parish priests can come together without prejudice to their parishioners. It is at the option of the Bishop to address the priest-exercitants or to preside over some of those assemblies.

In 1953, while he was still Bishop of Tuguegarao, His Excellency, Most Reverend Alejandro Olalia, in his desire for the greatest possible spiritual profit of his priests, arranged to have his clergy make a retreat of eight full days according to the method of St. Ignatius. The experiment proved to be a success.

This example, which won the commendation of His Excellency, Most Reverend Egidio Vagnozzi, Apostolic Nuncio, was followed by other Bishops during the centenary of the Immaculate Conception.

It is well to recall also the statutes of the following diocesan synods:

The First Diocesan Synod of Manila, held in 1911 and presided over by His Excellency, Most Reverend Jeremias J. Harty, says in number 111:

Missions and spiritual exercises in the parishes are deserving of the highest praise and we recommend them with all earnestness, because of the numerous conversions they effect and of the abundant fruits they harvest for eternal life. The parish priests ought to try to have these exercises in their parishes at least once every three years.

We read in number 25 of the Second Diocesan Synod of Cebu, held in the same year, 1911, by His Excellency, Most Reverend Juan Bautista Gorordo:

Happy experience teaches that the spiritual exercises produce abundant fruits of conversion and piety. Therefore we desire that all parish priests provide this means of salvation for their parishioners during Lent.

In 1911, in the First Diocesan Synod of Nueva Cáceres, His Excellency Bishop John Bernard McGinley, ordered under number 20: "This Synod earnestly recommends to the parish priests missions and spiritual exercises, not only in their parishes but also in their barrios and chapels."

The First Diocesan Synod of Calbayog, promulgated in 1911 by His Excellency, Mgr. Pablo Singzon, said in Tit. 1, const. 4: "With the approval of the Synod we recommend to all our faithful that they attend the missions which their parish

priests will conduct or arrange to have conducted in the parishes every two or three years." The Synod added, in Tit. III const. 3: "We give permission to all parish priests and others in charge of churches, to have solemn exposition of the Blessed Sacrament . . . during the spiritual exercises."

The Second Diocesan Synod of Tuguegarao, held in 1923 by His Excellency, Most Reverend Santiago C. Sancho, laid down in Const. VII:

One of the most potent means of increasing and strengthening the faith of the people is the use of the spiritual exercises during Lent. Consequently we order all parish priests, missionaries and chaplains, to try by whatever means their zeal will suggest to introduce among their flock this holy practise, so highly recommended by the Church. They will endeavor to follow the instructions which we gave in this regard in Circular no. 14, Feb. 14, 1919.

The Second Diocesan Synod of Manila, assembled in 1925 by His Excellency, Most Reverend Michael J. O'Doherty, provided in number 147 as follows:

We earnestly request all Parish Priests to lend every possible aid to the missionaries whom we hope to be able to send every five years to all the parishes of our Archdiocese.

And in number 74, it

...condemns the use, by the priests, of any other place than the confessional for the confessions of women, even in those great gatherings of people, which take place on the principal feasts of the year or during the days of the spiritual exercises.

In the Third Diocesan Synod of Nueva Segovia, held in 1930 by His Excellency, Most Reverend Santiago C. Sancho, the 172nd Const. says:

The spiritual exercises are in the words of our present Pope, His Holiness Pius XI, "a treasure-trove of God," and as such they are a very effective means for the conversion of sinners, for the perseverance of the just, and for the acquisition of perfection in Christian living. Consequently we order that every year at Lent the spiritual exercises be held in all parishes and missions for a space of from *three to five days*, in the form and manner recommended by His Holiness in his encyclical *Mens Nostra*.

Similarly, the Third Diocesan Synod of Cebu, held in 1931 under His Excellency, Most Reverend Gabriel M. Reyes, decreed in number 159:

With fatherly solicitude we recommend to our faithful spiritual exercises as an opportunity for serious thought and efforts in caring and providing for the salvation of their souls. By such exercises they will receive a powerful aid to a more vivid faith and reformation of life.

Finally while His Excellency, Most Reverend Alfredo Verzosa was governing the Diocese of Lipa, the Second Diocesan Synod was held. In addition to ordering in chapter I, art. 6 that all secular priests of the diocese should every year make the spiritual exercises at the time, in the place and for the period previously appointed by the Bishop, the Synod made the regulation, chapter XXXII, art. 356, that a mission was to be held in the parishes of the diocese at least once every five years, under the direction of the Redemptorist Fathers, without prejudice, however, to the right of the Bishop in certain particular cases to entrust this sacred ministry to some other group.

THE COUNCILS

Decree 866 of the First Provincial Council of Manila, held in 1907, says clearly:

The Bishops should see to it that in each parish, as occasion offers, the spiritual exercises be given to persons gathered in houses provided for the purpose, separating the men from the women in the cities and larger towns; and that two retreat masters at least be appointed to discharge this ministry with great zeal and charity, for the space of some days, and following preferably the norms laid down by St. Ignatius.

Finally the Fathers of the Plenary Council which was held in 1953 in the Church of San Agustín in Intramuros, Manila, were in accord on the following degrees:

23. All secular priests should make each year the spiritual exercises at least for the space of five full days, which the Ordinary will determine. And no one is exempted from this, unless it be in a particular case for a just cause and with the express permission of the same Ordinary.

688. Every year minor seminarians should make the spiritual exercises at least for a period of three consecutive days, and the major seminarians for at least five whole days.

Before ending we wish to recall here the following paragraph taken from the letter sent by His Holiness Pius XI to the Ordinaries of the Philippines on Jan. 18, 1939: "We think it necessary" His Holiness says, "to consider here the great importance of the yearly use of the spiritual exercises, and of the monthly recollection, for the spiritual advancement of university students and persons of culture, and to strengthen them in their apostolic ideals."

The reason is, as the same Pope said in his Encyclical, *Mens Nostra*, because the book of the Exercises is "like a most wise and universal code of rules for the government of souls in the way of salvation and perfection."

¹ Principally but not exclusively of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. He is the patron of *all* spiritual exercises, using that term for any series of meditations or sermons and other religious practises proposed within a brief space of days according to a fixed plan.