

Gratitude Makes Sense of My Past

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to offer deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” Lk.4;18-19

With these words, explaining His mission, Jesus began His Ministry. The same words were proclaimed at the Mass of my Ordination, 50 years ago.

Looking back at the years past, I am overwhelmed by gratitude and stupor for my rich, intense and unique missionary life.

- 13 years were spent in Sierra Leone, -
- 10 years commuting, as a lecturer, between Gbarga (Liberia) and Parma (Italy), then
- 11 Years in Chicago Chinatown, as Pastor, and
- 3 years in Manila
- And –
- from 2014 up till now in Wayne, as Director of the Commission on Christian-Buddhist Dialogue.

Pondering over these years, I came to realize that a “golden thread” is uniting them, and I can truly say, “Everything is Providence”: everything has been directed and planned for my greater happiness.

I guess, I have entered the autumn of my life, which I consider a time for songs of gratitude.

Like King David who said, “Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house that You have brought me this far? “For You, O Lord of Hosts, have spoken to Your servant, saying, ‘I will build you a house.’ Therefore, Your servant has found the courage to pray this prayer to You. bless Your servant, and with Your blessing, the house of Your servant will be blessed forever.”
“2 Sam.7: 18-29

One special memory is the time I spent as Pastor at Chinatown, Chicago. Undoubtedly, the years spent in Chinatown were the most fruitful, of my life because of my first meeting with Asia

I remember when meeting people, I would introduce myself as “**the Happy Pastor of Chinatown**.” I felt “Happy” because at that time, I could almost physically touch God’s presence. On leaving, I had the weekly Parish bulletins bound together, while perusing them, I had a detailed vision of my Ministry of those years, I could realize how “I drank from wells that I had not dug and collected where I had not sown”; I was harvesting what other people had sown in tears without visible results. I was made aware of being a “useless servant,” and I prayed that I would not be and become “harmful” to the Church.

Together with the inevitable tiredness and discouragement of the journey, **I felt a new strength** that came, unexpectedly, from inside me, that gave me the energy needed to press on. It was as if, at the center of my being, there were a source of fresh, gushing-forth water, which flowed silently reaching the heart of the parishioners, transforming them.

On leaving the Parish, I prepared two DVDs where I was sharing the journey with Parishioners:

“I will treasure these years at St. Therese’s as a most precious gift: they have been the most fruitful time of my priestly ministry. “Harvest season” as I used to say. It was clearly of God’s doing. I have been walking on a holy ground like Jacob who exclaims: “How awesome is this place! Truly, the Lord is here!” Gen. 28:17

The dedication of parishioners and their friendship have given me encouragement. Their love made me feel as a “Father” to them. I shared with them how I admired them, and I would miss them deeply.

I promised them that I would remember each one of them in my prayers. I exhorted them to remember how: *“The fidelity of the Lord, which we experienced in the past, is the strongest foundation for the hope we have.”*

God, who was with me in the past, would have stayed with me also in the future.

After a short stay in the Philippines, I was assigned to Wayne Community as Director of the Commission for Dialogue between Christian and Buddhists, while helping in ministering to various parishes in the area. The various experiences of the past are now providential preparation to this task, enabling me build bridges of friendship between these two religions.

I am aware that I am close to the finish of my life and I can say with St. Paul:

✠ *I have fought a good fight,*
✠ *I have finished my course,*
✠ *and I have kept the faith...*

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. 2Tim. 4:6-8

Your friendship and your prayers, support me in my difficult times, and they enabling me, in turn, to offer my Ministry to those who need it. Thank you for that.

My gratitude goes especially to Fr. ST who made this day possible.

May God bless you!

Michael Davitti, SX

