

# From the Pastor's Desktop

Spiritual Reflection by Father Charles Puthota

September 29, 2024



Dear Parishioners of St. Elizabeth,

## A FRANCISCAN BENEDICTION

May God bless you with discomfort at:  
Easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships—  
So that you may live deep within your heart.  
May God bless you with anger at:  
Injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,  
So that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.  
May God bless you with tears to shed:  
For those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and war,  
So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them  
and to turn their pain into joy.  
May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe  
that you can make a difference in this world;  
So that you can do what others claim cannot be done. Amen.

(Posted at National Council of Churches)

**Reflection:** We will do well to meditate on these gifts coming from the hands of our loving God: discomfort, anger, tears, and foolishness. These seem strange, even undesirable, gifts because the world appears set on marching to a set of values diametrically opposed to these gifts. Who would want to go through discomfort when we could try to attain comfort? Why should anyone be angry when what we are aspiring for is peace? Who would ask for tears when we should be laughing? How could anyone possibly seek foolishness while knowledge and wisdom are what we would like to achieve? And yet these are gifts we as Christians are called to embrace joyfully. We are not only to be enriched by these values and virtues but also defined by them.

St. Paul exhorts us to have the “mind” of Jesus (Phil 2:5). This would imply having the “heart” of Jesus as well, so that we can think and feel like Jesus. Delving into the mind and heart of Jesus, we come to realize that the strange gifts of discomfort, anger, tears, and foolishness are completely in consonance with the values Jesus spoke about and put into practice in his life. St. Paul says: “We are fools on Christ’s account...When ridiculed, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we respond gently.” (1 Cor. 4). St. Paul also says: “God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, so that no human being might boast before God.” (1 Cor. 1)

A quick glance at the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5, 6, & 7 --- a must read for all Christians) will clarify this abundantly. Speaking paradoxically, Jesus yokes together apparently contradictory things, such as tears and laughter, being first and the last, master and servant, the meek and mighty, giving and receiving, persecution and glory, foolishness and wisdom, the cross and resurrection --- and God and people.

Hence, from the perspective of Jesus whom we seek to follow earnestly, if we would like to be really comfortable, we have to become uncomfortable. The saying that God disturbs the comfortable and comforts the disturbed is true. St. Augustine said that our hearts are restless until they rest in God. There must be a sacred restlessness and a holy discomfort deep down in our souls at the shallow lives that we may be leading, at our dependence on appearances rather than reality, facile rationalizations, and a stubborn refusal to confront truth in all its various forms.

We are conditioned to think that anger is bad, but there is a brand of anger which Jesus himself practiced when he cleansed the temple and confronted hypocrites and religious fanatics who pretended to love God but thought nothing of compassion toward fellow human beings. Jesus invites us to feel a righteous anger at poverty, hunger, disease, exploitation, bondage, loneliness, misery, hypocrisy, and violence. Wherever human dignity and decency are trampled upon, the followers of Jesus have to be outraged. The only disciples of Jesus worth the salt are those who can work for the spread of peace, justice, and freedom.

Jesus wept at the death of Lazarus. He wept (“Dominus Flevit”) over Jerusalem. He was moved to tears by human suffering and plight. We cannot remain hardhearted at --- and indifferent to --- the enormity of human suffering. Anger at such suffering is not enough; we have to suffer with the suffering, like Jesus, in order for us to be able to alleviate suffering, pain, and heartbreak. Collaborators with the Redeemer, we have to do our part in redeeming the world in a continuous way. This is highly possible because of the redemptive grace of Jesus Christ offered to all of us.

**Action:** Become “foolish” enough to know that the situation is not hopeless; and that individually and by building alliances of hope-filled people you can make a difference. Believe that God chooses the foolish, the weak, the lowly, and the despised---to shame the so-called powerful people. Become an authentic person and Christian and go out of yourself to confront evil in your own humble and simple ways and embrace suffering in the world. Redemption of the world with Jesus begins now in and through you.

Your Friend and Pastor,

Father Charles Puthota