

FR. DAVID FLEMING'S HOMILY

Dear Friends,

It is a joy for all of us to be with Suman and Raj Mohan today as they make their perpetual profession of vows as religious in the Society of Mary. I was deeply honored to be asked to preach the homily during this profession Mass, since I have walked closely with both of them for quite some time now, since they first came to the scholasticate in 2007 and a little before.

The hearts and prayers of every one of us here are very much with them – family members, fellow brothers, co-workers in ministry, Marianist Family members, and friends -.

What they are doing touches something deep and personal in the hearts of each one of us.

The first reading they chose for this morning, from Chapter 3 of the First Book of Samuel, speaks about their personal experience. Like the boy Samuel, Suman and Raj are eager to be of service to people. They are both pretty calm and relaxed people, in the good sense of the word, but they are no sleepy dreamers, snoring on the job. Several times already they have thought they heard the Lord's call, and like the boy in the Bible, they have jumped up and said, "Here I am." Samuel did this three times in the story; if I am not mistaken, Suman and Raj have renewed their vows already four times. "Here I am. What do you want?" they have said.

Now, today, they know that it is truly God who is calling them, not just some human plan or project. He is calling them for life and not just for a short while, and so they say: "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

As their life goes on as Marianist religious, God will walk with them, guide them: "Come this way!", he will say. "Look at that! Watch out for this! Choose this turn or that!" The choices will often be up to them, and they will keep gaining a unique and rich personal experience, but God will be there, accompanying them unfailingly, inviting them to move, waking them up at times, encouraging, them, calming them, helping them enjoy the journey, calling their attention to much they might have missed. God has been doing this all through the experiences of Raj and Suman, and now brought them to this day of definitive commitment.

When I saw the readings chosen for today, I was especially intrigued by the second reading, from St. Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 12. I tried to find out why this particular reading was chosen. I do not remember it at other profession ceremonies. I didn't get a very clear answer. Raj said something about surrender, and that is certainly there!

At any rate, I think this reading sums up every religious vocation. Paul begs the first Christians to surrender their lives as a living sacrifice, a meaningful act of worship. Their lives are to be centered, grounded in God. That sounds daunting, frightening, tough, and it surely is!

Besides, Paul tells us to take a stand against much around us, to be different: "do not pattern your life on this world." But he also promises refreshing newness in our approach to life, as we keep on discovering, day after day, what is God's will for us. What a beautiful image of religious life! To surrender your life wholly to God, to lead a really meaningful reverent life, to question the everyday patterns of what everyone else does, and take on a new way of seeing things, a new way of acting in accord with God's plan!

Raj and Suman, the Gospel, you have chosen is traditional for Marianist occasions, one of our Founder's favorite passages. It remind us that the way of life you are choosing as Marianists is a way of service and mission, of service to the poor and needy, physically and socially and spiritually. By today's profession you are committing yourselves to be missionaries of Mary.

The Church has often been tempted to think of Mary as devout, obedient, silent, faithful, but not very dynamic. It has been tempted to reduce her role to a passive one. In fact, our Founder taught us to see her as a dynamic woman, one who gave herself wholeheartedly, aware and sensitive to the needs of the time, even sometimes, as at Cana, a little pushy in standing up for human needs, and ready to help in big things and small.

You are called to imitate her patience and gentleness, her affirmation of all the life around her, but also to share in her powerful and assertive, sometimes pushy mission of bringing Christ insistently to a world in need. Don't forget that you are missionaries of Mary, called to live your mission, to bring the wine of God to a thirsting world, in a

special way modeled on the life of the Mother of Jesus. She will be your help and your inspiration.

Each of you is concretely invited right now to share the service of poor and needy young people, to spread the word of God and model the personal love of God in the slums of Bangalore and the rural jungle around Ranchi. You are called not so much to be professionals or experts or social activists as to be brothers at the side of your fellow human beings to serve needs today.

This service of meeting the needs of people, very especially of poor children, is at the core of your Marianist vocation. Our Founder, Blessed Father Chaminade, sought to meet the needs of young people, especially those who are the most numerous and the most neglected (as he said) in a fast-changing world after the French Revolution. As Chaminade told us, we are all missionaries. And that is said personally to the two of you.

I would like to conclude by saying that the secret of being happy in your journey of Marianist life is to be faithful to a focus on Christ and Mary, who call us as we move ahead. If we lose that focus, we only become absorbed in our own struggles, internal and external, individual and collective, in small worlds of our own and in big, alienating, crushing problems that sap our energy.

Raj and Suman, if you can keep your focus on Jesus and Mary, you can be sure to have a happy and a rich journey. If you lose that focus, you will inevitably get swallowed up in some concerns or battles or frustrations or confusions. The way of Jesus and Mary for you will not always seem clear and evident, but your desire and longing to keep following, to jump up like little Samuel when they call, will be your assurance.

We pray for you today that you may keep following them in joy and in sorrow, all the days of your lives. Be sure of our companionship, our prayers and our sharing of aspirations, our desire to walk with you on the way of life to which you are making your commitment today. Amen.