

## **Day of Mary's visitation to Elizabeth**

### **Christmas Letter to the brothers around the world**

*"Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Emmanuel" (Isaiah 7:14, NIV)*

*"It is not necessary to teach others, to cure them or improve them; it is only necessary to live among them, sharing the human condition and being present to them in love." (a quote from Brother Charles)*

Dear brothers, I greet you all with great joy and hope-filled peace from the Emmanuel!!!

How is everything with you? What realities and concerns are you holding these days? Are you radiating the Christmas message to the people around – your brother-priests, your bishop, the margins in the parish, your immediate neighbors? Are you attending to your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health while you do multi-tasks in ministerial work? What spaces are you creating in community for the Emmanuel to come into your lives together? What invitations from the Spirit are you responding so that you may journey together as a synodal community? And how is the life and charism of our dear Brother Charles making a difference in the way you live your call and in the quality of your response to these invitations? These are big questions that I wish to contemplate with you. Let our life in fraternity and our doing missionary work be deepened by the questions we hold.

What a joy to write to you a letter at this season of Christmas. More than just a mere tradition in the Fraternity, I am writing to you with a heart of a brother who longs to be in communion with you and who has a great admiration for all your creativity, fidelity, hard work and passion for Jesus and the Gospel in the footsteps of Brother Charles. I am holding your stories and faces - those whom I have met in person and those of you whom I have heard living Nazareth in the peripheries. (While writing this letter, I am told about the passing of 2 senior brothers, Alvaro Gonzalez from Chile and Antonino from Madrid fraternities. While we grieve their losses, we equally rejoice over 2 of our brothers who come home to the Father as faithful disciples of Jesus. May they now enjoy eternal peace).

Christmas is a "Kairos moment," the most appropriate time to take a long, loving look with new eyes at all of creation in different levels and forms– the human community, natural ecology, politics, economics, culture, religion, blended social relationships– in the light of the loving plan of the Creator. Through the mystery of the Incarnate God, all of creation, including natural ecology is radically transformed as a meeting place with God. What used to be radical opposites in the eyes of the world are now bridged and restored to their original setting in God's great design. Everything now is in God. Everything belongs to God. It is an inclusive universe after all.

But the world seems to be not ready for this God. It insists in a world where God is edged out and humanity creates an idol of the egoic self with self-serving, self-referential, delusional views, assumptions and ideologies. This was made prominent during the pandemic. The way we regard ourselves in relation to the Other, be it from within the family, parish community or among nations, we wear the masks of mistrust and deception concealing a lie that the egoic self is the reference point and the other a disposable entity. With globalized market, everything has been commodified. Notwithstanding the benefits of technology and social media, they have become "faithful servants" of the market. The poor, including Mother Earth as the new poor is crying for help. Power, authority and wealth could be used to restore, rehabilitate, serve and care but it seems that greed, apathy,

indifference has gained the upper hand. It blinds the mind and numbs the heart from taking responsibility. So, it's a dark world after all.

Precisely, this was the spirit of the original Christmas – the world was not ready (there is no room in the inn) that the Emmanuel has to be born in the periphery, at the dead, quiet night, without fanfares. This is the wisdom of Pope Francis' invitation for us to go to the peripheries and meet God there. We just need to ask the Spirit to give us new eyes to capture the signs, ordinary and insignificant they may be but they are gifts from God leading us to new light. In our scripture readings at Mass, we have been listening to stories of insignificant personalities as the path ways of the Emmanuel. They all seem to be facing moral dilemmas – in their barrenness, where is the light? In following their own plan, where is the divine plan? In their loneliness, helplessness, fear, shame, where is the way out? Precisely, in these very moments, God decides to come and live amongst us.

The only path that the Emmanuel chose to come into the world seems to be that of ordinary people in the peripheries, facing realities of suffering and pain and struggling to make a fundamental choice, either for hope or despair, for violence or for peace, for darkness or for light, for God or against Him. The Spirit through an angel has to overshadow them in order to free them from everything that makes them unfree so that they may freely submit to the bigger divine plan. When in our lives and ministries, we choose to collaborate with others than to be self-sufficient, to listen to the other than to do our own self talk, to care than to incapsulate ourselves in our own comfort, to understand the other patiently than to insist that we be understood, to serve rather than be served, we become little path ways of the Emmanuel present in our world, one moment, one person at a time. Our is little and small, a daily choice to make but precisely it becomes the sacred path of the Emmanuel when we do it very well. Brother Charles is our icon of hope. Pope Francis has recognized him in Fratelli Tutti as our path to dialogue and universal fraternity. Ours is to do our daily and monthly practice of the spirituality with resolve and determined action that we become joyful signs of the Emmanuel in our world today.

So, rejoice, dear brothers, Christmas is after all, a season of glad tidings and hope.

Here is a path for us so that we may deepen our practice and devotion to Bro Charles especially now that his life and charism has been recognized by the universal church. After the canonization, I received 20 relics of Bro Charles from the dicastery through Bishop John MacWilliams of the Sahara. These relics are available for us. We, from the international team, wish to hand carry them to you after you have written a letter of request addressed to [ericlozada@yahoo.com](mailto:ericlozada@yahoo.com). First come, first serve. The only requirement is that you organize a public devotion to his honor, most especially in seminaries and parishes named after him. Thank you very much.

May the Emmanuel empower us to capture the signs of our times, listen to their invitations in prayer and discernment and act on them in collaboration with God's people as pathways of the Emmanuel becoming present in our world today.

With my fraternal love and embrace,

Eric, your servant-brother