



## E-BULLETIN # 22

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*"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5,16)*

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### ITEM 48

## journeying through the desert

### a reflection on Pallottine formation

Formation is the process of facilitating awareness of God and self in an individual as he/she navigates this confusing world. This awareness is essential to ministry. The spirit led Jesus into the desert on a journey of such awareness prior to his public life. The desert might seem too far away from the everyday realities of the world. Certain distance from worldly realities is, however, necessary at times to gain true perspectives regarding them. The temptations in the desert that highlighted these redemptive perspectives point to issues central to formation. They deal with dimensions of the body, mind, and spirit that we often struggle to integrate in our life as we seek self-realization. Pallotti's own writings reveal this multi-dimensional nature of formation as he emphasizes human, intellectual, spiritual, and pastoral components of formation (Temu, 2009). Some distance and detachment from the bustling realities of the world around is beneficial during the period of formation. After all, we immerse ourselves in the world as we begin our ministry.

The first challenge the devil throws at Jesus in the desert is to turn stones into bread in order to satisfy the intense hunger resulting from fasting. Jesus reminds the devil not to focus on the body at the cost of ignoring God's word. This is certainly not an invitation to ignore the body. In spite of it, some choose religious life as an escape from the world and the desires of the body that seem both frightening and confusing. There is, however, no escape from them as indicated by recent scandals in the Church. Formation facilitates the embrace of the physical world as God's gift and invites one to treat it with the respect and gratitude the scripture exhorts us to accord it.

The second temptation is about our psychological need for power. We need to feel like we rule, that we are in control. Aspirations for wealth, position and status are attempts to fulfill this longing. Some would go to any length to achieve a sense of power. The devil urges Jesus to take drastic steps to fulfill the need for power. Jesus rejects this approach outright. The gospels tell us that true power resides in love and that those who feel this power express it through service. Formation introduces the formees to such an outlook on power as they prepare themselves to exercise their ministry of service.

Formation aims to promote an experience of God, the yearning of our spirit. In the third temptation, the devil invites Jesus to prove his relationship to God through a daring spectacle. Jesus, of course, refuses to do it. An experience of God is not always an experience of glory, as Jesus' own life reveals. Formation reinforces this characteristic of God-experience, a repeated theme in Pallotti's own writings.

In a consumerist world where what is visible is supreme, where power is understood in terms of being served and being in control, and where relationship with God is often seen as a means to material well-being, Pallottine formation will hopefully be a true desert experience that draws formees' attention to

redemptive truths necessary for self realization and awareness of God. This will in turn prepare them to facilitate true God experience among those they serve.

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ITEM 47

## preparing the Jesuits of tomorrow



There are many factors contributing to the increase in vocations, such as poverty and lack of other opportunities, along with the piety and devotion of the communities from which our candidates come. Our attention has been to improve the quality of those who are accepted rather than to increase the number of candidates to the Society, writes **Father Mark Raper SJ** in the newsletter of Catholic Religious Australia.

This is certainly the case for Myanmar, Timor Leste, Vietnam and Korea, where, over the past ten years, there have been good numbers of applicants. We have introduced tougher screening. We ask whether the applicant can take the long and rigorous studies, is ready to learn other languages and live in unfamiliar cultural contexts, is adequately free to make an independent decision about his life.

As a result of this screening, we tend to accept fewer persons. It also means that their formation can be more focused.

During the last few years, the conference has been examining its purpose for the ‘formation’ of Jesuits in Asia Pacific. We see formation as deep human education, a profound personal transformation. This transformation occurs often, perhaps exclusively, through experiences of vulnerability.

In other words, compassion is a key: enduring something with another person and allowing the pain of other people to get inside us dispose us to change, to being transformed. If the experience is deep, it is difficult to return to the isolated self again. But this formation cannot be forced; it is an invitation. It means being open to the outsider, to the poor and to those who suffer.

Our greatest challenges do not come from our changing demographics, but rather from the complexity of the world to which we are sent. Asia Pacific is changing fast. Moreover, perhaps thanks to the changing distribution of Jesuits, we are recapturing a sense of our universal mission that was so much in the mind of Ignatius.

He did not seek a Society that was grand in terms of numbers or prestige. He wanted a body of men prepared and disposed to go wherever the needs are greatest.

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