

***The time is now! The place is here! You are the people!***

These are the words that begin the invitation from the Spirit of the Risen Jesus in the Munnar document from our Congregation Chapter. They are the When, Where, and Who answers to the challenge “Dare To Be Disciples.”

We have gathered this week as Brothers and members of the wider Edmund Rice Network for the first Edmund Rice Christian Brothers North America Province Chapter. We gathered as brothers and sisters, seeking a religious experience that would open us to the Spirit and help us discern our way into the future.

We began on Monday with Jack and Francis, representing the Congregation Leadership Team, leading us to reflect on our times and on the Congregation Chapter. We then heard reflections from those present who attended the Chapter in Munnar. The Munnar experience began with an openness that led to deep sharing and the awareness that as brothers, our communal life is our strength. As we continued to share our stories and our quest to enter deeper into the mystery of God, we encountered significant differences between us that gave us pause. The differences stirred up fear and a reluctance to move forward. But we stayed with the conversation and the Invitation From the Risen Jesus led us forward.

After the reflections on Monday, Tom Murphy raised a question I am not sure was answered but has stayed with me during this week. He asked something along the lines of “What was it that you held in common that enabled you to move forward?”

I believe the answer is in our acknowledgement that we are disciples of Jesus Christ, and that we live out this discipleship following the model of Blessed Edmund Rice. We also acknowledged the importance of our Brotherhood, that we are brothers to each other, we are in this together and our life together demands that we love each other. We were a community in Munnar and we made a commitment to remain present to each other and continue the dialogue.

Timothy Radcliffe recently addressed the Canadian Religious Conference. He was speaking of community life as a sign of the kingdom. In his view, a community of like-minded people is not a sign of the Kingdom, it is only a sign of itself. But as religious, our common life is a sign of the Kingdom precisely because of our differences. Our prophetic role is to reach out in love, beyond the divisions. Our commitment to brotherhood and to the charism of Edmund moved us forward.

Another statement that has stayed with me during the week is Jack’s reminder that Pope Benedict has announced this to be “The year of Paul.” St. Paul can easily be described as a passionate disciple. In Wednesday’s Gospel, we heard Jesus sending out the Twelve Apostles and instructing them “not to go into Pagan

territory.” In later years, Paul challenged the Apostles limited view of the kingdom and their mission. It was his passion that carried the message of the Gospels into the pagan lands and from there it reached our ancestors.

During this week, we heard that we are aging. For most of us, this was not a surprise. But we also heard that “brother” is not only a noun but also a verb, an adjective, a way of being. Being brother is about relationships and relationships are not about age. We live in an isolated world and people are yearning to know that someone cares. We offer a ministry of presence: a priceless gift, an ageless gift.

This week has been a gift. I have no doubt that the Spirit is with us and leading us. As we look to the future, we have challenged each other to work from a contemplative and communal framework. Members of the wider Edmund Rice Network made reference to the Edmund Rice Story as the context in which we minister. It is suggested that we pray the Chapter documents, that we need to focus on building community, that we reach out to those whose lives have been blocked by anger, that we use appreciative inquiry to see the possibilities in our midst, that we learn about the issues and stand in solidarity with immigrants, and that we live respecting the earth and all God’s creation.

Sebastian Samp started the week and ended the week reminding us the Spirit has been whispering the same message to us for many years and that now we need to listen. We have our Constitutions, the Four Directions, and the Seven Insights. The Spirit has given us ample direction. The Munnar document now offers an invitation from the Spirit of the Risen Jesus....

When, where, and who?

***The time is now! The place is here! You are the people!***

Why?

***I wish you to live life to the full and to carry it to the very edge of the Universe.***

How?

***Have courage. Risk leaping and falling. Trust me. Dare be my disciples.***