

Reminding us about the universal character of our vocation

[On the occasion of a testimonial dinner and the launching of the Adolfo Nicolás Endowment Fund at the EAPI (East Asian Pastoral Institute), August 4, 2018.]

When I first asked Fr Nico his thoughts about having this testimonial dinner and the launching of the Adolfo Nicolás SJ EAPI Endowment Fund, his reply was quite revealing: “Although it goes against my principles and my personal standing, due to my affection for EAPI, I agree to both.... Regarding the name, I accept it with the condition that if in the process, another name is found more suitable, the name be changed without any consideration for my feelings.” You have to help me find a more suitable name to replace his, if not, that will be a matter for future governance to consider. But that’s typical of Fr Nico, always self-effacing, never self-referential.

Fr Frederico Lombardi SJ, speaking on behalf of the delegates of the last General Congregation, and in some sense, of the whole Society, has this beautiful tribute of him following his resignation as Superior General. “Thank you for your personal style. All who have known and encountered you speak of your cordiality, spontaneity and simplicity, of your accessibility, of your friendly relationship with all, whether with simple persons or with those of high rank. Those who have lived with you in the Curia for years have been struck by your always smiling expression and your good humor....” This is also our experience of him during his stay with us. Many people still remember his jokes. If we compile his jokes I bet they would be a bestseller. He has this infectious laughter when he tells jokes. At times, we can’t figure out what the joke is because he would just laugh before telling us the punch line of the joke.

Lombardi continues: “You have been a Superior regarded with fondness, perceived to be close and fraternal – in a word, loved.” This best describes who Fr Nico is to us here in East Asian Pastoral Institute, Arrupe International Residence and to all who have known him since he came here in February last year. He is very well-loved. People have so much affection for him. He is an inspiring and truly a happy presence here. He will be surely missed.

If I may add my word of thanks, I would say: *Thank you, Fr Nico, for reminding us about the universal character of our vocation, that is, we are priests and brothers not simply for the Provinces and Regions we belong but for the Church and the universal Society of Jesus. Thank you for challenging us to shun away from superficiality and mediocrity and enter into spiritual depth. Thank you for cautioning us against being attached to work and works, against being overextended because of too many ministries, good as they are, but our attachments to them have made us less discerning. You have often reminded us that it is never enough to begin and maintain our ministries. You challenged us to have apostolic imagination and even let go of ministries if the Lord calls us. Thank you for your profound wisdom, your encouragement to be creative and imaginative, and not simply replicate success stories. Your decision to have the 70th Congregation of Procurators in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2012 was symbolic for it was the first time ever that such a gathering happened outside of Europe and more particularly in a poor and struggling*

continent. I still remember being part of the steering committee of the congregation of procurators and having meetings at night with you to prepare for the sessions the following day. While you were still so alert and insightful, I must confess, there were times I had to struggle against the temptation to doze off. Thank you for your friendship with Pope Francis and for enabling us to be constantly at the service of the Church – the reason for our existence – as St Ignatius would have his way.

Many of us have been greatly inspired by the way he handles his illness. Despite his medical condition, there was hardly any hint of complaint or irritation on his part. He is always at peace. When he hit his head on the floor after losing his balance, he lightened our anxiety by remarking that he did more damage to the floor than it did on his head!

Que Dios vaya contigo siempre! Dios te bendiga y muchas gracias, Padre Nico!

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