

**INAUGURATION OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2008-'09**  
**St. Joseph's Pontifical Seminary, Alwaye.**  
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*Presidential Address by*  
*Archbishop Soosapakiam M*  
*of the Archdiocese of Trivandrum*

**Lectio Brevis on:**

"Body as Locus of Divine Revelation of Love : Exploring Communion through the  
Theology of the Body"

Very Rev. Fr. George Njarakunnel, President of St. Joseph's Pontifical Institute,  
Very Rev. Msgr. Bosco Puthur, Rector of Mangalapuzha Seminary,  
Very Rev. Fr. Selvester Pongumathan, Rector of Carmelgiri Seminary,  
Respected member of the Staff, Rev. Fathers, Sisters and My dear Seminarians and Friends,

First of all I take the opportunity to congratulate Rev. Fr. R.B. Gregory for the beautiful presentation of the Lectio Brevis on the topic "Body as Locus of Divine Revelation of Love." All of you will agree with me that his presentation was quite enlightening, informative and inspiring. Fr. Gregory was making a study of the dogmatic aspect of the Theology of the body. He was highlighting the role of the body as locus of communion with God, with one another and with the whole universe. Now I am asked to make my comments and observations on this particular topic. For me this is not an easy topic to deal with. Though I visited the internet and come across references to the 129 lectures given by Pope John Paul II on the Theology of the Body. I was not in a position to make a deeper study on this topic. In this situation, I really feel a little embarrassed to address this august audience where many professors and scholars are present.

As I dare to make any comments on this theological theme, I am reminded of a little story. During his pastoral visit, a Bishop was addressing a group of little children in one of his parishes. At the end of the talk he exhorted the children to feel free to ask any question or clarification. A little boy raised his hand and asked: "I would like to know how does one become a Bishop". The Bishop told the boy that, to become a Bishop one has to be holy, learned, committed and responsible. One must be extraordinarily good at preaching and be prepared to give a talk on any topic at any time. Then the Bishop asked the boy: "Now, tell me, my dear child, why did you ask this question?" The little boy replied: "I asked this question because, in my house whenever we talk of you, my father always says that he doesn't know how on earth you become a bishop".

Dear friends, at the end of my talk I am afraid of similar compliments from you. That is why I was hesitating to accept your invitation to preside over this inaugural session. However, Fr. Njarakunnel prevailed over me saying that he is coming to the end of his office and has no more chance to invite me for a similar function. So I accepted his invitation out of love and respect for him, of course knowing very well my limitations and incompetence to make any reasonable observation on this particular topic.

Some of my findings as I was trying to make a study on the Theology of the Body are the following:

- Body is usually any object with physical properties such as extension, weight, solidity and substance. However, this word has also its social spiritual and metaphysical meanings.
- The Greek conception is more or less extreme dualism. Here the body is presented as the "prison" or "tomb" of the soul.
- There is no such dualism in the Bible. "Flesh" and "breath of life" are used in the Bible to designate the human being in its original unity. Here the body is not an external instrument, but integral part of the human being.
- In the New Testament we see St. Paul in his letters struggling to develop a theology of the body. Paul speaks of the body of death, the body of sin, the earthly body, the heavenly body, the immortal body, etc... Though not completely consistent he mainly makes use of two terms, Soma and Sarx. Soma is the earthly body as well as the heavenly body, the unity of the whole human being, here on earth subject to concupiscence, sin and death, but destined to be exalted and transformed by the Spirit or Pneuma. Sarx alone in St. Paul can mean the locus of sin and death which is to be slain by the spirit in order to ensure life.
- As we know very well, it was St. Thomas Aquinas, who tried to convey, the Christian notion of the body in terms of the Aristotelian categories of form and matter. According to him the body is the substantial "expression" of the soul in which the soul first achieves its concrete reality. The soul of the Soma can fulfill itself only in intimate union with corporeal entity of the same Soma.
- It is a false notion to assume that the more a human being becomes spiritual, the more it is detached from the body. On the contrary the more a human being becomes spiritual the more it becomes body. This means the body is the medium of all communication and that conversely the soul fulfills itself in proportion to its association and interaction with the bodily world. So the corporeal reality is not something bad. God who is pure spirit created everything in the universe to communicate himself to us and to invite us all to be in communion with him. "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good" (Gen. 1, 31). Therefore the corporeal reality which forms part of the indivisible Soma or Body is not something bad, but good and very good. The climax of God's self-revelation was not an escape from the prison of the body, but incarnation. "And the word became flesh" (Jn. 1, 14). "In many and various ways, God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed as the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (Hebrew 1, 1-2). Jesus, the Word made flesh effects our redemption in his body and there by our body is conformed to his body.
- The fact that the Church realizes herself essentially in the Sacraments ie, communication by sensible signs, is also an internal element of human salvation.
- Our faith in the resurrection of the body also teaches us that death is not the permanent separation of body and the soul and it is wrong to limit grace to the soul alone. Human body, the temple and expression of grace and an integral part of the entire human being will be glorified and will live for ever.

Dear friends, as far as I and most of the people present here are concerned, all these intellectual exercises and theological speculations are perhaps beyond our comprehension. I don't feel quite competent to go on like this. Moreover, most of you are going to spend many more years here in this seminary and you will get ample time to reflect over these truths.

In this context I thought that I should share with you now some very simple and practical reflections on the theology of the body. Our primary concern should be our own celibate body, which is part and parcel of us, inseparable from us, a necessary entity as we are now, to put us in communion with God and the created universe. Secondly we should have a clear idea about all other bodies ie, the world around us with which we come into contact in our daily life.

1. We priests are celibates. By taking the promise of celibacy we give up marriage and family. Thus, we who renounce the old order of creation for the new orders of Kingdom of heaven become symbols of the life after resurrection where "they neither marry nor given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Mt. 22, 30). Consecrating body and soul to the Lord implies that one wants to please him with all one's life and with all one's being.

Everyone who takes the promise of celibacy is generally serious. Thank God a vast majority of priests are faithful to this promise of celibacy and it is granted to them to understand the meaning, dignity and value of celibacy (cfr. Mt. 19, 11). There celibate body is the locus of experiencing divine love which surpasses all other joys the world can offer. However, as we know, sexual scandals are rocking the Church in Europe and America. Unless proper care is taken and remedies are applied in time very soon the situation in India is not going to be any different.

What happens? With all the good intentions the candidates to priesthood and religious life take the promise of celibacy. They, in fact, try their best to be faithful to this promise. But very soon many fall victims of a sort of mental pain and anguish often caused by the realization of a lack of companionship, loneliness and similar emotional problems and mental instability. This leads them gradually to a process of rationalism and justification. They subscribe to the views of a section of contemporary psychologists and biologists who hold that celibacy is something impossible and even harmful. Some of these priests dare to leave the priesthood, some remain opportunistic and others opt to wear a mask of celibacy preferring the securities and privileges of priestly life.

Fr. Gregory rightly observes in his presentation that "if God is speaking, God is speaking to our body selves. If we are listening to God, we are listening to him as body-selves. The body then is the mid-point and locus of communication between God and us." It is precisely for becoming the mid-point of communication between God and us, we consecrate our bodies to God through the promise of celibacy. But this consecration does not free our bodies from its concupiscence, attractions, cravings and urges as long as we live on this earth. The Spirit of God or Pneuma, which is given to us in a special way in this consecration initiates a process of overcoming the concupiscence, sin and death of our body, transforming it gradually and leading it to its

destination of one day becoming the heavenly or glorified body. This experience of the Spirit working in us fills our celibate bodies with heavenly peace and joy even in the midst of struggles, thereby rendering our bodies symbols of heavenly bodies which we are going to possess after resurrection.

This is a joy that flows in to us from God when we consecrate our bodies to him out of love. To illustrate this point, Blessed Teresa of Calcutta gives us an example. Here I am quoting a passage from one of her articles: "One day two young people came to our house and they gave me a lot of money to feed the people, because in Calcutta, as you know we have many poor people, whom we feed daily. And I asked them wherefrom they got so much money. They said: "Two days ago we are married. Before marriage we decided that we were not going to buy wedding cloths, we were not to have a wedding feast, but that instead, we would give you the money to feed the poor". It was something extraordinary to Hindu high-class people to do that. I asked them again, "Why did you do that?" and they said, "we love each other so much that we wanted to share the joy of this loving with the people you serve".

After narrating this incident, Mother Theresa adds: "To me this living story of two people in love with each other is a living sign of that oneness of Jesus and the priest. Here the sacrifice is not money or material things, but a highest and better gift - that of priestly celibacy. The greatest gift one can give to Jesus on the day when one joins the priesthood is a virgin-heart and virgin-body. We call it priestly celibacy."

2. Secondly, I would like to draw your attention to all other bodies with which we come into contact in our daily life. The world around us is not opposed to our bodies, but infact it can be called an extension of our bodies. Everything is created for our use, to make us happy and to help us to reach our destiny. The theme of this Lectio Brevis is "Body as Locus of Divine Revelation of love." Fr. Gregory indicates that according to John Paul II, God created the body i.e., everything in the universe as a "sign" of his divine mystery, his divine love. Body is indeed a powerful medium of communicating love. To illustrate this point, I would like to recall the experience of my first meeting with John Paul II himself. I met Pope John Paul II for the first time as a Bishop in Catel Gondolfo. I was very happy and a bit nervous. Perhaps noticing my nervousness he began to smile at me and crack some jokes and made me within a few minutes quite at home. After the dinner he presented all the Latin Bishops of Kerala region a chalice each. When my turn came he gave me a chalice and asked his secretary to bring one more chalice for me. All the Bishops were curious to know what happens. Giving the second chalice the Pope told me: "I know Bishop Jacob, your predecessor is staying with you. I know him very well. When you return home, present this chalice to him as a sign of my love and appreciation for him." After my return I did the same. Bishop Jacob could not at first believe that the Pope still remembered him. He was finding it difficult to control his emotions and tears of joy were flowing from his eyes when he received the chalice. Here, what we see is that a small object or body, a beautiful chalice serves as a very powerful medium of communicating the love and appreciation of the Holy Father to Bishop Jacob. Similarly everything God has created is good and every body with which we come into contact is supposed to communicate God's love to us.

Quite a lot of bodies or things or objects placed by God at our disposal may not be useful to us. They are useful for one or other persons around us. We should be ready to share them with others. Thus these bodies help us to deepen our love with our neighbours and bring us closer to God.

In the parable of the rich fool, Jesus tells us clearly what should be our attitude towards our possessions: "The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought to himself, 'what shall I do, for I have nowhere to store up my crops?' And he said, 'I shall do this; I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry!' But God said to him, 'fool! This night your Soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared where will they be?' After narrating this parable Jesus gives the following advice, "So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God" (Lk 12:16-21). Again in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus exhorts us; Do not lay up for yourselves treasure on earth, whom moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Mt. 6:19-20).

So we should handle all other bodies with the realization that whatever we claim our own, is actually given to us by God as means or medium to achieve our ultimate goal. Once their purpose is served, today or tomorrow, we are going to leave all these bodies. So we should never be attached to any worldly possessions and should not identify ourselves with these bodies. Thus we should be very particular to avoid greediness towards hoardings and collecting various worldly things which are perishable, changeable and subjected to decay by their very nature. The tendency to collect and hoard more things whether you require them or not, eventually brings more and more anxieties and tensions and dissipation of your energy in ensuring their security, their regular maintenance and unnecessary blockage of space by them. The more we become bound to them, the more disappointed and sad we will feel at their eventual loss. So before they start troubling us, it is better to leave their attachment on our own and become free. We should have only very few material possessions with us as are required for our basic comfort and survival and resist the temptations of unnecessary accumulations and additions.

Therefore, instead of hoarding things, we should be able to discern and choose what is useful for us and what really make us happy. More than success we should look for happiness. Somewhere, I read this beautiful dictum:

'Success is getting what we want  
Happiness is wanting what we get'

In fact, most of the things we get or hoard are not useful for us. We carry it along with us as heavy burdens. Often what we consider a blessing becomes a curse. Our First Parents thought the forbidden fruit was going to be a medium of blessings to them; in fact it turned out to be a medium of curse to the whole humanity.

The Greek epics narrate a story of a certain king Medacine. He had great ambitions in his life. He went to a forest and spent a long time in penance, trying to please his god Back.

The god appeared and wanted to know what he wanted. He wanted that everything he touches should become gold. With a heavy heart his god granted his desire and disappeared. Immediately he picked up a few leaves of a nearby plant. He was overjoyed to see it becoming pure gold. He plucked an apple from a nearby tree and it also became shining gold. He asked his ministers to arrange a grand banquet to celebrate and to demonstrate this extraordinary power. After days of severe penance he was also hungry and thirsty. He took the bread and before he could eat it, it became gold. He took the wine to drink and it turned into golden liquid and got chocked in his throat. He could neither eat nor drink or sleep. What is the fun of turning everything in to gold? He realized that what he thought a blessing was in fact a curse. He went to the forest again to do penance and when his god appeared the only thing he wanted was to take away the special power granted to him. Quite a lot of people including priests and seminarians are like this king. The very things they consider as blessings are in fact burdens and curses.

We should not be like the foolish people who are worried about what they don't have, but fail to enjoy what they have. Everything, God created is good. Therefore we should experience this goodness in the few things we chose for ourselves and enjoy them; the rest of our possessions we should be ready to leave to others so that they may be the medium to them also to see this goodness of God and enjoy it. The beauty of the flower, the song of the birds, the taste of the food are all mediums used by God to communicate his love to us and thereby to make us happy.

As far as we are concerned it is impossible to accomplish anything without some - Body. Illustrating this I would like to conclude my reflections on body with another story. This is the story of four people whose surname is Body. The first person is Every - Body, the second are Some - Body, the third one Any - Body and the fourth person is No - Body.

There was an important job to be done and all these four Bodies came together for a discussion and decision. Every body was asked to do it. Every body was sure that somebody would do it. Any body could have done it, but no body did it.

Some body got angry about that because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought that some body would do it, but Nobody realised that Everybody wouldn't do it.

It ended up that Every-Body blamed Somebody when actually No-Body asked Any-Body.