

Some Reflections on the life of Fr. Gerry Cabillo, SVD

As a close friend of Fr. Gerry Cabillo, I would like to share with you some thoughts about who and what inspired him in his various apostolates.

1. For Fr. Gerry, his vocation was a singular grace from God and his being a member of the Society of the Divine Word was a blessing and privilege to be a partner in the missionary activities of the said society. (Jn15:16): "You did not choose me, I chose you and ordered his mission appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures." This became a hard reality when Pope Paul VI ordained Fr. Gerry as a priest at Luneta on Nov. 28, 1970. In the brief span of his life, he was given various assignments like parish priest, school director, campus minister, radio commentator, organizer, etc. In fact, he expended his ministry by involving himself in civil society through advocacies. Believe it or not, in Region I, he was the Chairman of Agrarian Reform Coordinating Committee. Also he was the Chairman of the Committee for Volunteers Against Crime and Corruption, just to mention some. Fr. Gerry was duly appointed to these responsible positions and member of various organizations without bribery, no questionable deals, no compromises, no pressures, no politics involved. Thanks to God. The many photos and certificates and communications, articles and newspaper clippings attest to the fact of what I have said.
2. No doubt, Fr. Gerry anchored his missionary apostolate in the 8 beatitudes just as Leo Tolstoy, a novelist and moralist (1828-1910) was inspired by the beatitudes. Most likely Fr. Gerry imbibed the thoughts of Leo Tolstoy when he said, " man keeps himself to the illusion of egoism, lives for himself and he suffers. It suffices that he begins to live for others and the suffering becomes lighter, and there is obtained the highest good in the world." In a word LOVE for people is the bottom line. For Tolstoy, the heart of the Gospel is found on the Sermon on the Mount.
3. It is interesting to know that Mohandas Gandhi or Mahatma Gandhi, the great soul of India was also inspired by the 8 Beatitudes and also by the writings of Leo Tolstoy. He was an ardent disciple of him. In other words, Gandhi made his activities revolved around the law of Love. The essence of his life is to work for the welfare of the marginalized people of society, namely, the 4 Ls of society – least, last, lonely and lost. Fr. Gerry tried also his best to bring justice to the poorest of the poor and word hard that their rights be respected and granted.
4. Im sure, Fr. Gerry was also encourage by the noble work of Mother Theresa of Calcuta who cared much for the human carbage of

- India, transcending cultural values and barriers. With all humanity, she admitted that although her work is very much unlimited, yet she was brave to claim that even if all she is able to do represents only a drop of water in the ocean, it makes a difference. Speaking of the limited impact which Fr. Gerry's work made on the poor people, one could say with certainty that it made also a difference.
5. I would like also to believe that the inspiring words of the famous author, George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) made a big impact on the life of Fr. Gerry. The British author said: "I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me. It's a sort of splendid torch which I have got to hold up for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before passing on to future generation." By the way, just think about the present Olympic torch that is being passed around.
 6. As an educator, I have the illusion that he is also very familiar with and inspired by classroom poster which reads: "My life shall torch a dozen lives before this is done; shall live countless marks for his evening sun; so this is the wish I always wish; let my life help the other lives it touches by the way."
 7. Fr. Gerry, being a wide reader surely came across the noble sentiments of the politico-religious leader of Tibet, Dalai Lama who stated his mission-vision of his life when he said: "My life is certainly meaningless if I do not help people. Hence, as long as I am alive, I will see to it, that I will be a solution to the problems instead of being a part of their problems."

One can gather from the above Fr. Gerry's mindset was greatly influenced not only by great minds but above all, by the words of the Divine Master who said categorically, that whatever is done to the least is done to himself.

As I see the trouble with Fr. Gerry in all his various apostolates, was that his passion, dedication, intensity, urgency, commitment, was not duly moderated. He went to far in his speed limit. An image of the candle that is burning at both ends at the same time might be an appropriate description of his daily life. No wonder, he was like a burnt-out candle too soon. Perhaps his consolation would be that he reach the biblical age of 70 and 1 year bonus to make it 71. (Psalm 90) Not so bad after all. He finished the line with flying colors.

Perhaps a question maybe asked about the difference reactions and perceptions of people who knew him relative to his departure beyond the sunset horizon.

- For his bitter critics, a big sigh of relief that the thorn at their sight is finally gone.

- For the farmers, a big loss for them since he is like an idol, champion, defender of their lives and a hero for them more than Manny Pacquiao, the champion boxer.
- For the government, also a big loss since he is in friendly partnership with the various government programs. His authenticity, integrity, intensity and organizational ability are very valuable traits of Fr. Gerry for the effective implementation of their programs especially in the area of land reform and social concerns, he was truly a valuable and very much appreciated asset for them. He is like a trouble-shooter.
- For the bishops, also a big loss since they are asking the government to extend the land reform program for another 20 years and the expertise and the intense interest and capability and dedication of Fr. Gerry is very valuable for the implementation of the said land reform program.
- For the SVD, a big loss for it is not easy to find one at this point of time to be successor.
- For us all, we are missing his humor, contagious laughter, long smiles, funny stories, and fiery talks, oratorical speeches, etc.
- Above all, in the religious context, we are happy that finally he is gone to his Divine Master in the other side of this life to receive his lump sum pension namely: life eternal, happiness eternal, joy eternal with the Triune God and with the Heavenly Company. The bottom line – no more suffering, no more death, no more rice shortage, no more global warming problems, no more heart attack, no more death threats, no more harassment, etc., etc.

Much could still be said about his rainbow-colored life. Truly he was a man of prayer, dedication a man for the masses, a man for justice and peace, a man for the common good, etc. etc.

For Fr. Gerry, he chose "The Road less Traveled" from the famous poem of the poet, Robert Frost. He has set an example to follow but above all to travel the best road of Jesus, namely, the royal road of selfless love by dying and giving us his life that we might have the fullness of life. (Jn 10:10) It is hope that this modest reflections about the pro-active life of Fr. Gerry will enhance our daily life from now on.

Reflections by Rev. Fr. Felipe P. Flores, SVD – a Veteran Missionary in Abra, aged 78, May 1, 2008 and a Golden Jubilarian, Dec. 21, 2007.