

Pono towards future generations

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I am very pleased to have been asked to talk in this series discussing "pono". As you know, there is no exact English translation of pono-- maybe justice, fairness, doing what is right in relation to other people.

You all know the motto of Maryknoll: Noblesse Oblige--the moral responsibility of those who are privileged to live honorably, and to share their talents and fortunes with others.

Noblesse Oblige is one example of pono.

Some of you know my son Mack, 9<sup>th</sup> grader. But two of my older children went to Maryknoll also.

The most precious things in my life are my children. I love them completely. I chose Maryknoll for them over all of the other schools in the world because of the fact that Maryknoll exhibits--lives-- Noblesse Oblige. The Maryknoll Order is well known around the world for helping less fortunate people struggle for social justice and economic equity. Maryknoll Sisters are killed almost every year as they try to live peaceful lives of pono.

I want my children to live their lives in the service of others--not in the vainglory of their own conceit. I believe there is no better place than Maryknoll for them to learn that, and by seeing pono lived in the lives of others here.

Now some of you, especially the 9<sup>th</sup> graders, might have thought that Mack and I were going to come out on stage here and do our current version of the rap we did for the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Talent Show--the "Maryknoll Grade School Rap". How many remember it?

It started out like this:

The stage was dark. Mack and I were standing shoulder to shoulder, our backs to the audience. Puff Daddy was playing what you call music for a few bars. Then I spun around like this and said:

"Listen my children and you shall hear  
A very scary story with many a fear.  
It's about Mack's life here at old Maryknoll.  
Tried to dress his body, and save his soul."

Then I looked down at Mack beside me and said:

"Hey, say, Mack, don't look like a jerk!  
Do you hear what I'm saying?  
Tuck in your shirt. Tuck in your shirt!

"And look at your feet. Your ankles are bare."  
(Then Mack replied): "I know I've got sox somewhere down there."  
"Well, pull up your sox, pull up your sox, ppppppppppull up your sox!"

And the rap goes on like that to document Mack vs. Maryknoll Grade School's failed attempt to make him into a neat and tidy boy. But I do hope a little of the pono rubbed off on him even if the neatness did not.

But no, there will be no rap today by the Bruze Bruddahs.

Instead, I want to have you think about something that very few people are thinking about these days--something that even the Maryknoll Sisters may not thought about, I believe.

A situation in which pono is very much needed, and completely lacking.

Let me ask you some questions first:

How many of you ride a bicycle to school? No. Pretty wimpy, right? Very uncool. Congratulations to those of you who do, however.

How many of you ride to school in a SUV? Yeah, Who da guy!

Now, how many of you ask, before you ride your bicycle or your SUV, which vehicle future generations would prefer you to ride?

Indeed, before you do anything, how many of you ask yourselves, "what will future generations think of what I am doing now?"

None of you. Not a single one.

And yet I KNOW each one of you spends a LOT of time in the morning wondering about how you look, and what other people at Maryknoll might say, or not say, to you about how you look and act.

Indeed, most of you are obsessed with what other people think about you, even though, in truth, most other people don't think about YOU at all--they are so busy thinking about what other people are thinking of themselves--which is nothing.

So we live in this crazy world of the present, paranoid about what other people think when, in truth, they could care less about you.

But WHY do you care what other students or faculty here at Maryknoll think about you, but don't even consider for one moment what future generations might think about you?

The way you live your daily life now impacts not only those around you NOW, but also those who are unborn, but who will live in the future which you are creating for them by the way you live now.

Consider the SUVs you guys drive.

As macho as they may be, SUVs are also horrible gas-guzzlers. They guzzle gas like Mack guzzles sodas. SUVs are enormously inefficient. They drink gallons and gallons of gas which future generations will need, but won't have, because you burned it up.

One reason we have SUVs now is because gas is so cheap--or was until recently. Did you know that during the 1990s it was cheaper to buy a gallon of gas than a gallon of water?

So we didn't care how fuel-efficient our cars were.

The price of gasoline has risen a bit, but gas is still cheaper in the US than anywhere else in the world.

Is that because the US has a lot of gas and oil within its borders? No. Not at all. More than half of all US gas comes from overseas, mostly from the Persian Gulf. We fought the Gulf War when you were young so there could be plenty of cheap gas for us to burn now.

Well, I regret to tell you that many experts now agree that the world's supply of petroleum will peak about 2010--in about ten years. It will then rapidly dwindle, and the price of gas will rise. Eventually, there will be no petroleum in the Earth to extract, refine, and burn.

That will effect you, in your future, but it will impact future generations who are not born yet even more. There may be no oil for them at all, if we continue to burn it at the rate we are now.

But we don't care.

We say, "what has posterity ever done for me? Future generations have no power over me at all, so I won't consider how my lives will effect them. I will only worry about people around me, who can and do get back at me when I do something they don't like."

And that is our main ethical dilemma today. That is the main challenge to pono today.

All our ethics--everything that Jesus taught, or that Moses, or Confucius, or Mohammed taught, or the Church teaches--all traditional ethics is based on what is called "reciprocity".

Consider the Golden Rule, a version of which exists in all religions, philosophies and cultures: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Or, stated negatively, "Don't to things to others that you don't want them to do to you."

And since those "others" are your friends and neighbors, they CAN "do unto you". They can hit back if you hit them. Or they can call the cops, or the Vice Principal, if you hit them or threaten to hit them. So you don't hit them, partly because you know it is wrong to hit them, but mainly because you don't want to go to jail, or get expelled, or get shamed by others around you.

But future generations!! Who cares? Smack em in the chops! They can't get back at you!

Well, I care about future generations, and if you are--if Maryknoll is--seriously concerned about pono, and Noblesse Oblige, then you and everyone else in the world must learn to be concerned about future generations too.

We must learn something completely new. We must learn how to balance the needs of present generations with the needs of future generations in everything we do.

And the reason we must do that, and the reason Jesus and Moses and the rest did not say anything about it in their time, is because now we have such powerful technologies, that what we do in the present often has consequences that last for decades, centuries, and sometimes for millennia.

I think you all know that the half-life of the highly radioactive and dangerous waste of the fuel used in certain nuclear reactors is thousands of years. By burning nuclear fuel to power our TVs, computers, and Segas, we are requiring future generations to take care of our waste long, long after we and our children and our grandchildren are dead and gone.

This is only one example.

There are many ways in which the most ordinary aspects of our lives have very long-lasting future consequences.

OK. I've talked enough for now. I want to ask you to think about and talk with each other about what I have been saying.

I am going to ask you please to get in small groups and try to identify some things you do now that impact future generations more than they impact present generations.

I have given you two examples--SUVs guzzling gas future generations need, and nuclear power plants producing wastes that future generations must take care of for thousands of years.

I want each group to come up with at least ONE different example of how your daily lives impact future generations.

After a discussion of the examples from the groups, and if we have time, I will then ask the groups to take one issue and discuss what we should do in order to change our values and behavior so as to take the needs of future generations into consideration before we act in the present; how we can learn to balance the needs of present generations with those of future generations.

In other words, how we can and should develop pono for future generations.

In the meantime, I'll see you in four years when Mack and I will do the "Maryknoll High School Rap".

Tell then.