



## *Reflection from Ben Babaran*

I recall six years ago, around this time, my seminary classmates and I had the surprise of a lifetime. On January 10, 2017, the Batch of 1983 from the Central Seminary of the Pontifical University of Santo Tomas in Manila, Philippines was the happiest group of men because one of us was elevated to the fullness of the priesthood being ordained Bishop of Baguio. Our dear brother, Victor B. Bendico, by way of his episcopal ordination became one of the successors of the apostles.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus chooses two sets of brothers to be his first apostles: Peter and his brother Andrew; James and his brother John. The two sets of brothers were fishermen when Jesus chose them to be fishers of men. These men must have had the biggest surprise of their lives. How can fishermen now catch men rather than fish?

In a similar manner, my classmate Bishop Victor kept on saying that day: "I am very surprised!" How could he not be surprised? He came from a region in the southern Philippines while being named bishop of a diocese in the northern Philippines. He definitely needed to learn a new language to be effective in his ministry of shepherding the faithful of the Diocese of Baguio. Thus, he promised in his acceptance speech, just before his episcopal ordination, that he would learn the language of the people of Baguio. Unfortunately, I, his classmate from the northern Philippines and who speaks the language, now reside in the US of A.

Bishop Carlito Cenzon, the bishop emeritus of Baguio and the homilist at the ordination, emphasized to the new bishop – "You did not choose me, I chose you!" (John 15:16) We may have plans and expectations, but God has plans for us! He is in control! So much so that when our plans do not concur with God's plan for us, we are greatly surprised. Our God is full of surprises!

God gave me a personal surprise during the episcopal ordination. Before Jo and I left the States that year, I asked then Bishop-elect Bendico how can Jo and I be inside the cathedral to witness the ordination? This was my biggest concern because he mentioned that there will be 300+ priests and 40+ bishops who would concelebrate in a cathedral that seats only 800. He assured me of two personal invitations for me and Jo. However, when the time came to enter the cathedral, Jo and I experienced what baby Jesus, Mary and Joseph experienced looking for an inn. We hopped from one door to the other without success because either we are not clergy or civil officials of the city. Finally, we were able to enter through the front door and ushered to the "Bishop's Family" section. Fifteen minutes before the entrance procession, the Master of Ceremonies came to our section to look for the family member who would read the first reading. All of Bishop Bendico's relatives declined to do the reading while a couple of them pointed at me since I was his classmate. Thus, God's surprise – I was given the honor to be a lector for my classmate's ordination! So, I joined the entrance procession to the amazement of my classmate-priests who were already in the pews as they were not part of the procession!

May God surprise you each day and may you share the surprise to others.

*Peace,  
Ben*