



Mission News 2020

MAY YOUR KINGDOM COME!

Missionary Servants of the Blessed Sacrament in Asia

CHRIST, THE HOPE FOR ALL NATIONS



Christ, the Hope for All Nations

The year 2020 is nothing anyone expected. An invisible, lethal enemy caught the world by surprise. For a moment, time seemed to have gone on painfully slow motion. While for some, it has even stood still. Others say that the time we live now seems to be a nightmare, we could not escape yet—a bad dream from which we desperately want to wake up.

The threat of death, not only from the virus but also from hunger, mental illness, and the other consequences of this pandemic, hangs over our head. No one is exempted. The economy, both local and global, continues to dip. The poor suffer the hardest blow. The education of the young suffers as well. Families and communities are torn apart. Physical isolation has become a tool for survival. The list of suffering and tragedy that come upon the world seems to be endless.

Dark, gloomy night has engulfed the world, but it is in the darkest night that light glows more brightly. For us, believers of Christ, the light comes from the unquenchable flicker of hope brought by Christ, who, on one dark night, caught the world by surprise. On one dark night, His star shone brightly to the nations. “People who sit in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen” (Mt. 4:16).

The commemoration of his coming is near. Do we have a reason to celebrate? Do we have a reason to hope? Most certainly, we do, for thousands of years ago, God’s Son came into this world to bring us hope, joy, love, forgiveness, salvation. Let the stories of personal redemption amidst pain, sorrow, or difficulty remind us of Christ, our reason to hope. Let the images of solidarity, kindness, sacrifice, bravery, and love help us see or rediscover the light of hope kindling brightly. Let Christ be our hope. Let Him be the hope of all nations.

A Message from Pope Francis....

“Do not surrender to the night; remember that the first enemy to conquer is not outside: it is within you. Therefore, do not give space to bitter, obscure thoughts. This world is the first miracle God made. God has placed the grace of new wonders in our hands. Faith and hope go forward together. Believe in the existence of the loftiest and most beautiful truths. Trust in God the Creator, in the Holy Spirit who moves everything towards the good, in the embrace of Christ who awaits every man and woman at the end of their life. Believe, he awaits you.

The world walks thanks to the gaze of many men and women who have opened up breaches, who have built bridges, who have dreamed and believed, even when they heard derisive words around them.”



Catechesis

In this time of crisis, there is one thing that keeps us going – Hope. It is all the more important that we, as Catholics, understand what hope truly means.

Where do we base our hope? How can we cultivate hope? To whom can we look up to as models of hope?

This catechesis hopes to offer answers to these questions based on the Scriptures and the teachings of Pope Francis.

WHAT IS HOPE?

- Hope is a virtue which makes a Christian desire the kingdom of God.
- It stirs a Christian to desire eternal life as his ultimate happiness.
- It draws him to place his trust in the promises of Jesus Christ, relying on the grace and help of the Holy Spirit to achieve this final goal.
- Through this virtue, a Christian is inclined to desire communion with God.

(CCC 1817)



WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF HOPE?



- It keeps man from discouragement.
- It sustains him during times of abandonment.
- It opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude.
- It preserves him from selfishness and leads him to the happiness that flows from charity.

(CCC 1818)

Catechesis

Is there an assurance that our hope will be fulfilled?



When someone hopes for something, he must know within reason that there is a possibility that he will achieve his goal. One may say, can the Christian obtain the Kingdom of God? If he cannot, his hope and prayers would be a waste of time. The assurance of the Christian is his faith and hope in the Words of Jesus. Jesus said: “Fear not little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.” [Lk. 12:32]

WHO ARE THE MODELS OF CHRISTIAN HOPE?

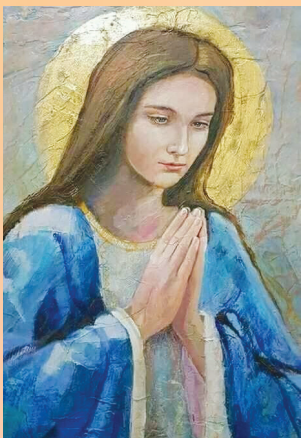
God had promised Abraham that he would have an heir through his wife Sarah and descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky. He had many human reasons for giving up waiting to have a child with Sarah. After all, Abraham and his wife were already advanced in age, he was 99 and Sarah was 90 years old and barren. Yet, Abraham continued to believe that God would be faithful to His promise.

Abraham trusted in God’s word and had faith in His creative power to do what appeared to be absolutely impossible. His trust was not based on human assurances but on God’s word.

ABRAHAM



MOTHER MARY



The Blessed Virgin Mary was called to believe what was unbelievable in human terms. Hope is what filled her heart during the dark days after her Son’s death on the cross.

From Friday afternoon until Sunday morning, Mary’s heart remained filled as she waited for Jesus to rise from the dead just as He had said (Mark 8:31).

She waited patiently for God’s promise to be fulfilled. After Pentecost, she strengthened the Church’s hope when they encountered difficulties, suffering, and persecution.

Catechesis

AS CHRISTIANS, WHAT ARE WE CALLED TO DO?

Hope is a virtue that is meant to be shared with other Christians. In love for others, the living Christian should witness regarding this Divine blessing which he has received. In his heart, he should sanctify Christ as Lord. He should always be ready to make his defense to anyone who demands from him an accounting for the hope that is in him. [1 Pet. 3:15]

His account should be given with gentleness and reverence. The Christian must keep his conscience clear, so that, when he is slandered, those who abuse him for his good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. [1 Pet. 3:16]



Beware of False Hopes



Christians must always remain alert so he will not be misled in false hopes that will turn him away from his salvation. The hope of money is a false hope, being the root of all evil.

Christians should run away from false hopes, never believing that there is a lot of time remaining to attend to his salvation. He should attend to his salvation now while there is hope, while the grace, mercy and patience of God remains waiting.

WHAT IS THE REASON FOR OUR HOPE?

The Lord is the reason for our hope. Jesus Christ assures us: “I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:20).

A Christian is never alone, because Jesus assures us that he does not await us only at the end of our long journey, but accompanies us in each of our days. There will never be a day in our life in which we cease to be a concern for the heart of God.



In God's loving design, nothing is ever wasted. No matter how bad things would seem, He knows how to transform the dark clouds to refreshing rain and the rain into a ray of bright sunshine. The following sharing of personal stories and experiences attest to that fact. In the midst of this pandemic, some people continue to hope and be instruments of hope to others in little and extraordinary ways. Yes, there are countless tragedies around us, but there are also small miracles, thanks to God's loving hand. The mission continues. Let us all carry on as we place our hope in Him.

In God's Time

By: Mercy G. Lee, MD



How can one assuage the fear and anxiety of a patient who is to undergo hysterectomy for endometrial cancer in this time of COVID19?

How can a mother comfort and reassure her only child, who is a physician frontliner that his future will be bright and he will be protected from this deadly virus, knowing that her son faces the challenge every day, treating the sick and going on duty, exposing himself and running the risk of being contaminated or even die?

In January 2020, everybody was looking forward to a better year, not that the past year was terrible but because we all want brighter and joyful days.

Little did we know that we were going to face the most uncertain of times. The Philippines was deluged with problems after problems like the great magnitude earthquakes, storms, Taal volcanic eruption, and the biggest of all, this COVID 19 pandemic!

Nobody thought of a lockdown and its repercussions - unemployment, sickness, death, confinement to home, physical distance from loved ones, and difficulty securing food to eat. On the brighter side, time was spent more at home, thus more with the family, having the opportunity to get closer and know each other better. The

Mission of Hope

environment became cleaner as there was less travel and fewer vehicles on gasoline were on the road. Generosity and helpfulness that were innate in us all surfaced. Frontliners cared for the sick tirelessly and unselfishly to the point of not being scared of contracting the disease and even die in service. And then, there is the great realization of our dependence on God. Many have become more prayerful, begging Him for protection and resilience, praying that we will be able to get through this pandemic unharmed through his benevolence.

As to the patient who had endometrial cancer, the operation lasted for 9 hours, and the surgical and anesthesia team in PPEs endured heat, discomfort, and risk dehydration and contamination. The surgery went well. A very remarkable and pleasant thing happened between the patient and me. We forged a relationship like that of a mother and child - mother caring for her child and a daughter seeking comfort and hope from a mother. This relationship exists up to this day.

The situation in this pandemic is not at all

reassuring. I have lifted my only son to God. It is in prayer that I seek comfort and courage to surrender for my child. Bearing in mind that God only lends everything I have now, it is in sweet surrender that I realize that I am nothing without Him. God knows and sees us. He has a plan for us. I admonish my child to be patient and persevering and to trust in the kindness of God. All these shall soon pass.

As for me, I stand by my faith and hope in God. I was a prayerful person, but I am more prayerful now. In this dark trial in my life, I turn to God and nobody else. Amidst endless tears, doubts, and sadness, I turn to prayer to find reassurance and comfort in God.

From a pruned tree, new branches spring. This is the hope we always have. Today, God is not punishing us. He is just pruning us, for us to become better, patient, persevering and believing, and hoping that in His time, everything will be fine!

“Pray hope and do not worry,” St. Padre Pio says.

Hope springs eternal! 🙏

A photograph of a man and a woman standing together in a field during a golden sunset. The woman is on the left, wearing a red dress and a colorful patterned shawl. The man is on the right, wearing a red polo shirt and blue jeans. They are both smiling. The background shows a vast field, a line of trees, and a bright sun low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow across the sky and landscape.

Hope springs eternal!

“Do whatever He tells you”

Fr. Antonio Tria, SVD

As a pastor, I find weddings an interesting event to witness! In a provincial setting like ours, the excitement of people is palpable. Many are extending a helping hand to the couple who begins to form the smallest unit of society. From courtship to the wedding day, the family and extended family members are so involved.

It starts with choosing the date, venue, sponsors, preparations, food to partake, the wedding gown, make-up artist, and many other things. Everyone has something to say!

In my seven years as Parish priest at Saint Raphael, Looc, Occidental Mindoro, the typical average is twenty to twenty-five marriages per year. In this time of the pandemic, before the safety protocols in March, we had 17 applications. Only one couple had the guts to

push through, with minimal guests of 10 people. It was so private compared to a regular wedding ceremony yet solemnly done.

The most common reason for postponement in this pandemic is the observance of the protocols. It has tremendous economic implications on couples starting a new family. Monetary contributions from guests help defray expenses incurred on the occasion. With this lockdown, it would be a much greater burden.

For the first few weeks of lockdown, I was a bit anxious about what is happening and the ill effect/s of the pandemic to the people in general and the Church. Although feeling helpless, I tried to figure out things with my limited movements caused by protocols. As I was told during my seminary training to be a religious missionary, at times like this, I have to go back to my “Galilee,” the place where God has called me. At my “Galilee,” I heard Jesus say these words.

“Take nothing for the journey, neither walking stick, nor sack, nor food, nor money, and no one takes a second tunic” (Lk. 9: 14). Take nothing but God!

This kept me hopeful, energized, and willing to love and serve God and His people. As I continue to reflect on what is happening around us, I remembered the first miracle of Jesus at the wedding feast at Cana, turning water into wine. On that occasion, the “wedding coordinator” was anxious about the shortage of wine.



Mary intervened by telling the servant to follow what Jesus tells them. As the shortage of the wine exposed the guests' weaknesses and strengths, this pandemic has exposed so many weaknesses and strengths of humanity. Self-centeredness, greediness, misguided beliefs have been revealed. But so were the nobility of people who welcomed the needy, people who took this time as an excellent opportunity to dialogue with people and with God who gives us life, people whose hospitality took on a

different form – that of heroically caring for the sick, sharing what they have to those most in need, doing their duties amidst a difficult time. However, there is a need to remind ourselves what Christian hospitality means - hope for the Divine guest to be always present in every banquet. Let everything we do be with Christ, the true hope.

Now and forever, we hear Mary's invitation: Do what God is telling us to do. Let His passion be our passion. 🙏

Light in the Darkness

Sr. Maricel Dilengencia, MSBS

Pandemic ushered in a change that caught everyone – ordinary citizens, the wealthy, the powerful - unprepared.

Despite incredible achievements in the field of science and technology, the pandemic revealed our weaknesses and vulnerability. The world seemed to have stopped spinning. The fast-paced lifestyle, which most of us knew, began running in slow motion. The virus rendered useless almost all our plans.

Who would have thought that one day, travels and business will halt? Who would have imagined these days when airports, schools, entertainment establishments, and even churches are closed to the public, and going to supermarkets or shopping hubs would require passes? Who would have foreseen days when we would remain locked-up in our homes for months? Who would have thought that tiny invisible enemies could send superpowers crumbling down?

Amidst those first waves of shock and bewilderment up to this time, as we all try to cope up with the new normal, the Pope towers as a powerful image of hope. As he stood at St. Peter's Square, addressing his Urbi et Orbi message to the people in an empty plaza, a beacon of light shone through him. It was a light brought about by the knowledge and assurance that the Lord truly cares for His people. He suffers along with His people.

That image of our Holy Father, standing in an empty square amid the soft spatters of rain, blessing the world with the Blessed Sacrament brought many of us to tears. Yes, "we are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor. 4:9) because we have a loving, faithful God. The Pope, the Vicar of Christ, stands as a reminder that Jesus Christ, our only light, will never abandon us. 🙏

Deserted Roads, Waves of Silence, A Favorable Time

Fr. Felice Tenero

Jatobà – Diocese of Floresta (PE). Brazil

Deserted roads. Waves of silence. We are all locked up in our own houses. It is the last week of September in Jatoba, a city immersed in total isolation in which I am currently staying. Isolation is the only way we can protect ourselves from Covid-19.

More than five months have already passed, and there is no glimmer of improvement on the horizon. We have gotten used to covering our faces with masks, washing our hands often, living in fear. Listening to Brazil's daily news, you would hear that thousands of people are dying every day. As of this day, the number of those who died from the virus is 120,000!

Life continues! And it brings with it some questions:

Forced to slow down the pace of life, locked within the four corners of the houses, we discover the beauty of looking into the eyes of our family members, of listening to the voice of our neighbors next door, savoring the taste of silence and personal reflection. Will we be able to profit from the experiences forced upon us by the sudden and invisible virus?

Is it a favorable time to understand that what was done was fruitful, vital, and creative, or on the contrary, habitual, convenient, and unable to generate a future?

I live in Brazil, a structurally unjust and violent society, where the government system does not place the human person and the common good at the center but intransigently defends the interests of an economy that kills, as Pope Francis puts it (EG 53). Its economy is based on irresponsible exploitation of the land, which enriches a few and impoverishes many, favors consumerism that shatters and steals our soul. The time has come to review our lifestyles, to live a simple life where having less makes us more human. Are the things we buy, we accumulate in our closets, our mad rush, essential to our well-being? Or are we “stealing” them from someone who does not even have the necessities to live? I do not know how to concretely live a simple life where having less makes us freer and running less makes us more capable of authentic human relationships, but let's try to find out the way together. It is time for research and creative inventions. Give in to your imagination and have the courage to change!

Are we disposed to change the Church's way of life?

The coronavirus tests us and hastens the end of the way of society and a particular way of life as a



Church. Here, in the diocese of Floresta, we are experiencing a full-blown pandemic. It is difficult for us to think about how to live after COVID 19. The question we ask ourselves is: “how to live this ‘new normal’?” We were used to having community meetings, gathering in a chapel every Sunday to celebrate the Word, accompanying groups of young people, and visiting the sick. Now, with no available meeting venues, these questions confront us: “What to do?” “How to live the Gospel?” “How to feel that we belong to a community?” “Where are the meeting venues?”

We are asked to be creative and renew our trust that He, the Lord, has left the temple and entered our homes.

In this time of pandemic that forces us to detach from society and teaches us a “new normal,” we are rediscovering that our homes and families are domestic churches, a place of encounter with God and with our brothers and sisters, the context in which the light of the Gospel shines. The disciples of Jesus in Floresta are invited every day to gather around the banquet as a family. Following a short guide, they place the Word of God at the center, read the Gospel of the day and then, share their doubts, uncertainties, efforts, and pray. They break the Word and share the bread of fatigue. God is present there and celebrates with us. Indeed, he is the celebrant who passes from the temple’s sacred altar to the table of the daily meal and fraternal solidarity.

And the Word dwells within our homes. In June and July, each family was invited to continuously read the book of the Acts of the Apostles through a short virtual guide sent to them every day. Here in our place, August is the month of vocations. How many testimonies of laypeople and families are reaching our homes! Each family receives daily a simple outline of prayerful reading and a short five-minute video of witnessing of a layperson, a family, a nun, or a priest. It is to remind everyone that by virtue of our baptism, we have a “vocation.” We are called to be servants of the Kingdom: builders of good relationships, comforters



of those who suffer, witnesses of a simple life, weavers of fraternity. We have experienced so many gestures of solidarity at this time.

And one fine day, the world stopped...

No one foresaw it, and everything basic passed in the background: those meetings, untimely commitments, important parties, social gatherings. Mobile phones, computers, smartphones became our eyes and arms to communicate and meet. Now, our meeting rooms are zoom, google meet, messenger, etc. Who would have thought about that? Meetings of the pastoral council, catechists, biblical formations, meetings of the clergy, Eucharistic celebrations were all carried out, recorded live, and transmitted through live streaming. We are all adapting to this new language, the elderly and adults, the young with much more ease. How much creativity is awakened in us! Videos, pictures of the meeting, messages of solidarity. And here the laity is better than us priests. Even the expression of the sacred is transforming... priests in their vestments are not the only ones who occupy the sacred sanctuary, but men and especially women, in usual clothes, climb the “virtual sanctuary” and direct or animate the Sunday celebration, daily prayer, virtual encounters... We have become seekers and wanderers on the path of life, with Him, the Living God!!! ☩

Mission Amidst the COVID 19 Pandemic

Sr. Grace Pagwagan, MSBS



When the President announced a nationwide lockdown due to COVID-19 virus, I was in Looc, Occidental Mindoro, together with two postulants, doing the apostolate in the Parochial School. My companions had to travel back to our formation house in Quezon City. I was left alone because I still had to attend to some matters about the school. A few days after, the government announced an enhanced community quarantine that prohibited travels and social gatherings.

Though I wanted to travel back to our formation house in Quezon City to be with my community, it was impossible. I was trapped in that situation. I could not do anything but trust in the Lord, pray and wait for things to get better. Thanks to social media, I had a way of keeping in touch with my community and family amidst the crisis. I knew in my heart that they were praying for me. But what gave me peace and strength was the bible passage from Deuteronomy (31:6): “Be strong and

courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.”

God fulfilled his promise from the beginning until the end. God didn’t allow me to feel alone and abandoned. He makes himself visible through the presence of the parishioners serving in the parish, the presence of Janella, our search-in, and Fr. Tonton, the good parish priest. During the Enhanced Community Quarantine, I spent my time gardening in silence, praying for all our brothers and sisters affected by COVID-19. In silence, God made me realize that I also have to look within, contemplating His marvelous works in me. I was also thankful for the opportunity to participate daily in the Mass and receive Jesus in the Holy Eucharist as I was living within the parish compound.

When the town was placed under modified general community quarantine, we started allowing more people to attend the Holy Eucharist, following the government’s protocol for the safety of the people. Together with the parish priest and our youth leader, listening and seeing the needs for the spiritual needs of the youth in our place, we decided to have Liturgical Bible Study in the family, especially with youth. Some of the youth were becoming depressed due to this situation. It was something we needed to address. The parish priest and I trained some youth to help us carry out the mission of bringing hope to them and helping them face this crisis with confidence in God. I felt that we, the religious sent in this place, are strengthened by God to help our brothers and sisters’ in their life of faith. Every afternoon from Mondays to Fridays, we visit the family and talk to the youth and had



Liturgical Bible Study with them. In those moments of sharing, I came to know their cries, struggles, and fears because some of their loved ones live in Manila, where there are many cases of infection. I also shared my reflections, my faith in God. It was a good opportunity to impart our faith to them and explain what Jesus wants to teach all of us.

I thank the Lord for His providence. He who

strengthens us by His Word keeps the hope in our hearts and makes us more intimate with Him. My experiences of doing the mission with the people made me realize that I am not alone in this journey. He is always present in moments of difficulties and moments of joy.

There is no trial that I cannot overcome with the help of His grace.✝️



Thoughts on the Front Line....

Lovell Cristina Sioson-Magat, MD, MHA, FPDS

It has been six to seven months since the government has declared Enhanced Community Quarantine. Reality is setting in. We know we have still a long way to go. We can see the light at the end of the tunnel, but we don't know how long is the tunnel. We always hear people say that we are in unprecedented times or uncharted territory. We respond to this experience in different ways – some stayed home, others became active in social media disseminating information and news, and others shared resources to help our countrymen needing support and assistance.

At J.P. Sioson General Hospital, we remained open to our patients despite the enhanced community quarantine, modified enhanced quarantine, and now during the general community quarantine. The hospital saw patients for consultation in the outpatient department, admitted patients requiring procedures like giving birth and surgeries, and some doctors provided telemedicine consultation for those scared and unable to go to the hospital. The hospital also helped triaged patients with COVID signs and symptoms and referred them to other hospitals to provide COVID treatment. When there was no available transportation, the hospital became its employees' home where they stayed while the others opted to use the company's shuttle to go home. During this pandemic, all the frontliners – doctors, nurses, nursing aides, medical technologists, radiologic technologists, pharmacists, housekeeping, dietary aides, orderlies, cashiers, security guards, and administration – all came together to help serve the community.

No one can say how long this pandemic will stay, but with our faith and hope in God, we will find a way to survive, transcend this trial and heal as one.

*To be Women Missionaries and Disciples
in the World Today*

Sr. Emi Soe, MSBS



The women disciples in the Gospel are fascinating. They quietly followed Jesus in His Ministry, serving, and attending to the needs of Jesus and the twelve disciples. Today, thousands of known and unknown women are doing the same, quietly serving the Church, dedicating their lives for the holy cause of the mission.

We, as Missionary Servants, are called to imitate those women disciples. Wherever we are, we ought to render our service of whatever form to the Church. In Myanmar, we were given the opportunity to take part in the Christian formation of the young. We also render our missionary service in some areas of pastoral care and in collaboration with the missionary structure of the local and universal Church. We are involved in the Holy Childhood Association. The diocese has also entrusted to our community the task of leading the daily adoration in the chapel. These are great opportunities for us to live our charism for the local and universal Church, be in solidarity with the people in their “joys and

hopes, their griefs and anxieties,” and thus give comfort and hope in times of difficulty.

We also gradually begin to engage in education as we recognize its importance in promoting a better life. We believe it is essential to plunge into educational undertakings in which less-privileged young people are helped to excel in their academic studies. We strive to form a community of learning with a teaching program that contributes to elevating the poor’s living conditions. This activity shows preferential love for the poor, offering them a chance to improve their life. For this reason, we organize learning activities as much as possible for the underprivileged children, teaching English, giving a tutorial class to those who need assistance, and opening a nursery school.

However, the pandemic has limited our capacity and possibility to carry out this apostolate. We cannot hold English class, tutorial class for the children. We cannot organize activities for the Holy Childhood Association, which would involve a

large group. We cannot hold catechism classes. This, though, does not make us lost hope. We trust that the Lord will bless our mission as long as we remain in him when we allow Him to work through us. The pandemic or other kind of adversity will have no power over our lives, nor can they overcome us if we remain faithful to God.

Despite the limitations, we try to use all the opportunities to promote gospel values, creating awareness of the reality of hardship and suffering. We believe that the mission and our apostolate will continue until there are children who need to be educated in the faith, who need to be loved and to be cared for.

Whatever the mission situation is, “we are called to become restless women more and more! Until there is a soul to be saved, a heart to fall in love

with Him, a reality to evangelized, a service to do, a prayer, and suffering to be offered.” This is the call of our last General Chapter. This challenge is all the more relevant today – the challenge to be women disciples and missionaries with the ardent desire to run until there is a heart yet to fall in love with Him, women who know how to listen, talk and look. 🙏



Thoughts on the Front Line....

Pinky Roleda, RN

We are currently in the midst of a worldwide trial that has changed our lives. We are confronted with the uncertainty of human existence and vulnerability of human life. Every one of us bears great responsibility for the health and well-being of ourselves, our family, community, and nation. Covid 19 Pandemic shows us the value of social relationships and helps us appreciate the essentials and basic things, recognize the bravery and nobility of others especially nurses, hospital utilities, supermarket crews, delivery personnel and others. Coronavirus shows us the futility of being entangled in the endless battles for wealth, status and power.

As a frontliner - a Community Health Nurse – I am playing a vital role in the community especially in the Indigenous People’s community. In our community, health education and any form of health advocacy campaign in line with COVID-19 preventive measures are very important. Community health awareness, self-discipline, vigilance, active community participation and collaboration really matters in continuing the fight against this Pandemic.

Health is a Human Right. The fact that all people are created in the image of God calls us to recognize that everyone on this earth, regardless of status in life, is worthy of our respect and care. Living in this trying time, I learned to value more the precious gift of life from God. I am thankful to God for the strength and opportunity to be a public health servant, to care for the people He loves much. 🙏

Shared Passion with Mo. Caterina

Sr. Ri Moe Benedetta, MSBS

Reading Mo. Caterina's letters in the book "A Shared Passion," I came to know more about her soul, what she has been through in the beginning. The beautiful sentiments in these letters made me feel close to the heart of our foundress. She was fully human, and like us, had many ups and downs. Her letters and story are a beautiful memory for all of us to cherish and take as inspiration. In the lines of each letter, I came to see Mo. Caterina as a woman of endurance and a woman of courage. One line of her letter said, "neither the daughters nor I have to be weak women" (Pg. 84). Indeed, she was a strong woman and yet humble to submit to the will of God. She was strong enough to face all trials, obstacles, misunderstanding, and uncertainty before she could give birth to a new Congregation. Thanks to God, she was able to endure and succeed for the good of the mission.

If she were here with us now, she would tell us to be the same, to be women of courage too. She would ask us to be strong, especially in this time of many uncertainties and sickness, to be strong in our faith, in what we believe, and to be strong for those who need us, for our companions, for our friends, for our families, and our community. From her letters, I see that nothing had stopped her even amid the most challenging times. She endured all the physical and spiritual trials. She was so strong in her character and her faith. She never gave up on what she believes, and therefore she was able to preserve the gift (Charism), which was instilled in her heart by the Lord.

Reflecting on her letters made me ask myself: "What do we, as her daughters, need to endure?" "How can we be women of courage today, now that we are experiencing many challenges, both physical and spiritual?" We are informed about



how many lives are taken or threatened each day by COVID-19. We fear for ourselves, for our children, and our loved ones. We pray harder than before. We are uncertain about tomorrow. In this situation, perhaps we can say with Mo. Caterina: "we don't need to be weak women no matter what may come and what we are experiencing." Instead, let us look forward to the beginning of something better from the Lord. To be courageous or to be strong does not mean we don't cry, we don't fall or don't have fears, but amidst these, we dare to try, we dare to hope, we dare to forgive and to rise again in our failures. Just as Mother Caterina fought against the darkness that she encountered and experienced, we too are encouraged to cultivate the same spiritual intensity to continue to trust in the plans and providence of God. As MSBS, we look up to our foundress and imitate her endurance and courage in preserving the passion and our Charism. May we truly be her spirited daughters! 🙏

On the Footsteps of the Missionaries

Sr. Christina, MSBS



The Myanmar faithful owe their faith to the many missionaries who selflessly dedicated their lives to the mission. They trekked mountains, braved the threat of bandits lurking in the heart of the forest to spread God's love.

In December last year, one of my co-sisters and I were invited to Minelun Parish in Taungoo Diocese for vocation promotion. The parish is in a remote region. We had to pass through a mountain and deep forest. Walking by churches in the mountains, climbing those mountains, I could feel the indomitable spirit of the first missionaries who traveled the same way. I imagined the difficulties they had to go through to evangelize people.

Rough and uneven roads. No means of transportation. No electricity. The fatal danger of getting caught in the middle of the armed conflict between ethnic rebels and government forces. Looking at the roads, I saw their footprints, the sweat, and blood that trickled from their bodies and dropped to the soil. A deep sense of gratitude was awakened in me. So, when we passed by the

cemetery where some of the early PIME missionaries rests, I stopped for a while and uttered from my heart a thanksgiving prayer to God and them for their selflessness.

The trek was difficult and scary for me, but I took courage from those missionaries who experienced more hardship than myself. We arrived safely in the village Saturday evening.

The parish priests and peoples welcomed us. The next day, we shared about our Congregation to the young girls. There were also some older people. The church was full. After our talk on vocations, one man came to us and greeted us politely. He told me that one of his daughters is interested in becoming a sister, and he promised to share our Congregation with her once she passed the Tenth Standard. Her daughter is now staying with us in Loikaw as a search-in.

That man is U Magelo San Lwin, known to many of the villagers as Saya (Teacher) San Lwin. I came to know that he is the head of the catechists in the whole diocese of Taungoo. Before becoming a catechist, he had been a soldier of Karen National Union (KNU), an ethnic rebel group. At that time, there was still conflict between the KNU and the government. Although technically a rebel, Saya San Lwin was devoted to Mother Mary. He was always praying the rosary, although seeing him with a rosary in his hand displeased their leader. He was kicked several times for praying the rosary, but he remained devoted to praying it. Some years later,



he turned his back on being a soldier of KNU and became a catechist at 17 in 1992.

To be a catechist in a mountainous area is not easy, but he remains faithful in his mission. He leads the people in prayer and teaches them catechism. Many people are coming back to the church because of his witnessing. He is very prayerful and attentive in every church's liturgical activities and was never absent in all the devotional novena. Even he was

traveling, he would say the novena.

He faithfully accompanies the parish priest whenever he goes to the villages in the mountains to celebrate the Mass. Even though he is sick, Saya San Lwin still accompanies the priest and prepares the people for baptisms, marriage, and other sacraments. He lives quite far from the center of the parish, but he would come whenever the priest calls him, rain or shine. His dedication is admirable. The parish priest told me that when his son passed away while he was in a meeting, Saya San Lwin went back home and buried his son, but came back to the meeting as soon as he could. As a catechist, his motto was "when we pray the Rosary, everything is possible." He believes Mary is the "Mother and Model of Catechists."

In his mission as a Catechist, Saya San Lwin is a faithful follower of the first missionaries of this land. He has a strong missionary spirit, and he brings people closer to God in many ways. I see in him a person who dedicatedly walks on the footprints of the first missionaries. He fits so well Pope Francis' description of a catechist, that is, one who "leads people to encounter Christ by words and life, by giving witness." May the Lord bless us with more catechists like Saya San Lwin! 🙏



IT'S THE YEAR OF MISSIO AD GENTES in the Philippines!

The Year of Mission Ad Gentes caps the nine-year preparation for the 500th Anniversary of the arrival of Christianity in the Philippines.

This is an occasion for Filipino Catholics to set afire the missionary enthusiasm of the Philippine Church. Bishop Soc Mesiona, the Chairman of Episcopal Commission on Mission says: ***"We received the gift of the Christian faith through the missionaries who came to our land; now the baptized in the Philippines are called to give it to others."***

The Challenges and Hopes in Online Education

Sr. Edevina Cariazo, MSBS



Another Caterina School buzzed with life and excitement as graduating pupils rehearsed for the rites and the song. Teachers, too, were pumped up for the graduation rites, happy for the achievement of their pupils. Then, suddenly, two days before final examinations, the national government announced the cancellation of all classes! We thought it would only last for a couple of weeks, but we were wrong. A few weeks later, DepEd issued a memo closing the school year 2019-2020.

It was sad to close the school year without so much as parting words with our pupils, reminding them to continue to be good Caterinians, to bring the cultural and Christian values as they move to another school. It was both sad and rewarding to read the prepared thank you card of the graduates. They expressed their joy of finishing their elementary years and their gratitude for their learnings and discoveries with the help of MCS.

Then, we started thinking about the future.

Fear and uncertainty were mixed with the desire to answer many children's and parents' questions when giving them the hope that classes will still begin. The Government and DepEd later announced the good news that Private Schools can start preparing for the new school year. Clearly, they stated that classes would be online and prohibited face-to-face classes until a vaccine is available. That was enough

for us to see a glimmer of hope.

Coming up with DepEd's requirements to continue to operate, planning, and preparation for online classes were very demanding. We grappled with new language, methods, and technology. As a community, we decided that the kids' education is worth the risk and sweat. So, we prepared ourselves to face the challenges head-on. We went through informal training to equip us with the skills in using new apps and virtual platforms and prepared our e-modules. Creating an FB Group, Sr. Clemence reached out to parents to familiarize them with our platform's features and use. The parents' and guardians' enthusiasm to learn was contagious. What seemed impossible became possible!

Our faculty spends long hours in front of the computer and sleepless nights to finish their lessons on time. Editing modules, looking for the right images, recording voice, and searching for apps to make presentations attractive to the pupils, take a

lot of time. I can sense their fatigue, but our sense of commitment to the children's education sustains us. Despite it all, I feel the joy of discovering new things and helping one another. Nothing is truly impossible for a person on fire with a passion for growing, improving, and imparting learning to others.

Our focus was not only on delivering our lessons well but also on making a way to give hope and encouragement to the pupils and their parents in this strange and fragile situation. Above all, we continue to inculcate in the pupils the knowledge of God's love and the necessity of sharing it in every moment of our life, even during the pandemic. We prepare moments of prayer before starting the lesson and end it with the Oratio Imperata and Pope Francis' Prayer for Protection during the Coronavirus Pandemic.

Parents and guardians closely guided their children, and because of this, they too can spend moments of prayer with their children. With this, we hope to strengthen their family spiritually and assure them that they are not alone in this trying time.

We also made sure that our new learning environment is inclusive. We make sure that those who are financially challenged are not left behind and don't feel insecure. We chose modular distance learning so that even those who have bad internet connection will have access to the e-modules saved in the memory flash. They watch the lessons on their TV sets at home.

Challenges and difficulties are part of this new adventure. Poor internet connection, disciplining the children in virtual space, attending to

children's queries, lack of social interaction that pupils need, the risk for teachers who are prone to online bullying, and technical inconveniences are just some of these challenges. However, we continue to move forward with our mission as educators, confident that our sacrifices will surely pay off.

We are grateful for the spirit of communion experienced among us. The whole MCS community, parents, support staff, teachers, and pupils exchange words of encouragement. I came to know more parents of our pupils as I communicate with them through Facebook. Ironically, social distance has brought us closer to many families and friends who need at this moment the assurance that they are not alone in this fight against an unseen enemy.

I thank God for the blessing of social media and new technology that bridges the distance between our pupils and us, making education possible in this crisis. I thank God for the spirit of communion and collaboration. I salute the parents' and guardians' eagerness to learn new things for the love of education.

Above all, I thank God for the MSBS Community, who is always at our back. Thanks to the community's caring heart, I find the hope and strength to face my own insecurities, uncertainties, and unfamiliar things in carrying out my responsibility as an educator in this time of crisis. 🙏



Embracing the Challenge and Rising Above

Joselito G. Gutierrez, Ph.D., L.P.T.

Amidst the challenges of COVID-19 and the imposition of community quarantine as a government response to contain the virus, our day-to-day activities, including learning, should continue. This means embracing purely online education or home-based learning as the only available option to ensure the continuous delivery of education at the safety of our home during this pandemic. However, the sudden shift from the traditional face-to-face classroom to online learning mode brought many challenges to teachers, parents, students, and other stakeholders in the country's academic sector.

As a college professor for more than ten years, I experienced distress when the government suspended classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic last March 2020. The stress aggravated upon resumption of classes with the adoption of the self-paced blended learning from April to the conclusion of the Academic Year 2019-20.

When the university administration announced that the academic year 2020-21 would push through, and professors will have to use fully online instruction, my anxieties further aggravated. The fear and worries affected my physical, emotional, spiritual, and social wellness due to the coming school year's challenges. Meanwhile, the school administration had started to conduct a series of training to prepare us for fully online teaching. Although we have learned and understood the different mediums, the stress lingered and heightened as class opening got closer.

As a teacher, the different challenges that I already foresaw were the unstable internet connection, preparation and delivery of live virtual instruction, development of student-friendly modules, familiarization on various platforms, and many more. For the students, online related challenges include zero or low accessibility to the internet, availability of learning devices, and failure to focus on their study because of the distress brought by the COVID-19, noises and distractions at home.

Thank God, everything is going smoothly now. At first, there were simple but manageable mistakes. I felt awkward delivering my lesson and uncomfortable with the virtual class. But I was able to do it! Slowly, I became comfortable and started to facilitate each course smoothly. I can confidently say now that I am on the road to becoming an expert online teacher. I thank our college administrators and e-learning specialists' combined efforts, who patiently provided us the necessary training and are always available for consultations. I also want to thank the cooperative students who patiently participated well in the virtual classes. Of course, all these happened when I started accepting that change is inevitable. I was able to embrace the challenges that this pandemic brought. I was also able to retool myself to be able to deliver the lessons online effectively.

Albert Einstein once said, "In the middle of difficulty lies an opportunity." In the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent community quarantine and eventual shift to pure online teaching, I deliberately choose to see the opportunities these have given me. Online education is already long-overdue. It is about time to explore this modern learning experience and develop a creative way of doing this. It is the right time to embrace all challenges and rise above the situation. 🙏



Faith and Devotion in Times of Crisis

Sr. Veronica Imelda Uko, MSBS

On the first Sunday of March 2020, I was at St. Michael Parish Church, where we were set to begin our mission in Maumere Diocese. The church was full of parishioners. The choir sang out their hearts and everybody actively participated in the Eucharistic celebration. As it was the custom every first Sunday of the month, the parishioners and even the parish priest and nuns wore traditional costumes. Parishioners were very kind and friendly.

Looking around, I felt a surge of eagerness in my heart to pass on our charism to this land. I could taste that dream of sharing our charism with the locals. Unexpected things happen, though. COVID-19 turned our plans upside down.

By the fourth week of March, Maumere was placed under total lockdown. The church that used to be filled with believers had gone empty. But homes have become a place for devotion and worship. Almost every family regularly prayed the Rosary and novena to the Holy Spirit to plea for the pandemic's end during the lockdown. People prayed incessantly. Somehow, the pandemic has done us some good. People found the time to nurture their relationship with God.

By God's grace, churches were reopened to the faithful in the first week of July. I and Sr. Rina has the schedule to distribute communion on Saturdays and Sundays. People started going to church again,

observing the restrictions and norms set by the government. The crisis did not quench the people's thirst to hear God's words and receive the Holy communion.

As I distribute the holy communion, I pray in my heart: "Lord, I hope that this longing and thirst to receive you will remain in your faithful's hearts. Help them realize that you are always here, waiting for them."

The parish priest continued to keep alive faith and devotion in the hearts of his parishioners. What consoled me during this challenging situation was the presence of young people in the church, attending Mass and devotions not only on Sundays but also on weekdays. Every Friday and Saturday of the first week of the month, people also come for adoration and Rosary.

Although another lockdown was imposed for more than a week in October, we continue to hope that things will be better. Seeing this fervor in people strengthens me and gives me hope. As an Ancella, this crisis challenges me to be a sign of God's presence to those I serve to provide hope and encouragement to my brothers and sisters who are losing hope.

As an Ancella, I am always reminded of my identity and responsibility "to listen to the longings of the world today" and to answer "to the signs of the times" through my works, prayer, and sacrifices. 🙏



Hope for Drug Dependents

Sr. Susan Oroza, MSBS

Drug addiction is one of the problems here in the Philippines. It has become a hot button issue in recent years, with the controversial Extra-judicial killings of drug abusers and dealers. In the small parish of Looc, I had the privilege of having a close peek into the minds and experiences of drug abusers. Thanks to the invitation to be a one-time counselor of drug dependents. I, together with Sr. Grace, Fr. Tonton Tria, SVD, a deacon and a priest of Aglipayan church, a born-again pastor, and a health worker, attended the graduation of the second batch, consisting of over 60 drug dependents. They were all locals. The occasion was to mark their being free from addiction.

More than celebrating with them, we were there to listen. The Rural Health Unit doctor gave us an orientation on how to deal with them. I followed his instructions and took note of his reminders. I asked a few questions to each of those assigned to me, mostly about how they are coping in this pandemic.

Listening to their sharing, I understood what brought them to addiction. One of the most frequently mentioned reason is poverty. Most of them do it to cope with their desperate situation of

poverty. Those working overnight at sea say they rely on illegal drugs to keep them awake, strong, and away from loneliness and fear.

One of the counselees told me that at first, he thought it was helping him but later on realized that it is destroying his good relationship with his wife and depleting him financially. The realization that he was causing much suffering to his family woke him up. He asked me to pray for him and his family so that the Lord will forgive him for what he has done. I held his hands even though it was forbidden because of the pandemic and assured that God would forgive him if he sincerely turns away from illegal drugs.

The majority of the counselees were men, but I had a chance to assist a woman. She was teary-eyed when she sat in front of my desk. When I initiated the conversation, she started sharing with me. She confided that she and her husband were both users and dealers. She told me it was the only way to provide for the needs of the family. She started to use it out of curiosity only, but finding it pleasurable; she continued using it.

Fear for her life and family in the heat of the



drug war led them to surrender and seek rehabilitation. She plans to focus on her children and expressed her wish that they will finish their studies. I told her to take courage, not to lose hope, and always hold on to God. I assure her that God is present. We cannot see Him, but everything we see reveals his presence to us. The ocean, the sea, mountains – these are the proof of his love for us. God gave us all we need and enables us to see and feel how He loves us.

Just as God revealed His presence to Elijah in the soft sound, I believe that the silent and gradual journey to freedom or liberation from addiction is a sign of God's enduring presence. Our hope for redemption is not as fickle as the human mind. The signs of hope may be subtle, but it is certain. Hoping in God will never fail us, so whatever our "addictions," maybe, there is hope for redemption. There is hope for freedom, for God is with us. 🙏



Magnetic Faces

Post. Veronica, MSBS

When I was a child, I met some sisters in our parish. They used to come to our village during the big celebrations like Christmas or the gathering of the Daughters of Mary in our parish. They looked happy doing their mission, giving their service with a smile and enthusiasm. I was so attracted by their smile and enthusiasm that I told myself, "I want to be like them someday, bringing joy to the people." This desire faded in my heart as I was growing up.

When I reached grade 8, my parents sent me to the boarding house of the Servite sisters. Life in that boarding house was simple. The food was very simple. But I was happy. The sisters brought us along on holidays to visit the families, prayed the Rosary with us, and shared their mission experiences with us. Staying with the sisters reawakened and strengthened my desire to be a nun. When they learned about my desire, the sisters sent me to Yangon for a vocation seminar during one summer break. I prayed the Rosary more fervently and asked Mother Mary to pray for me so that I will pass the Tenth Standard Exam and so be able to enter the convent. I passed the exam, but I also felt disturbed by other choices and advice. Still, I decided to join the Congregation of the Servite sisters. But I had a sudden change of plan. I saw a picture of the Missionary Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, and I felt the pull from their magnetic faces, faces filled with smile, joy, and enthusiasm. So, I finally decided to join their Congregation. I was sent to the Philippines for my formation.

I arrived in the Philippines on April 21, 2015. I was a quiet and timid person, so it was difficult for me to adjust to the different and new people I met in the big MSBS Community. As years in formation have passed, I learned to open up and share with the community members, especially my batchmates. Now I appreciate the art of relating to others, the value of sharing, and listening to others. I learned many things, how to play organ and guitar, dance, live in a community, the Christian faith, the mission, etc. I am thankful for my religious community, which helps me grow more and more in faith. 🙏

The World in a Room

Fr. John Taneburgo (Comboni Missionary)

In this article, I describe my experience as someone who tested “positive” with coronavirus. My infection lasted about fifteen days. I am convinced that it lasted rather a short time because the Lord worked a miracle for me through the intercession of Mary, Saint Daniel Comboni, and other Saints I feel so close to me.

From March 23rd to April 8th, I did not feel well, and my temperature ranged from 37.5 to 38.8. I really felt exhausted. Several times a day, I recited this prayer: “Lord, I trust you, and I entrust myself to you. Come to me in my weakness and give me your strength.” From April 8th onward, I felt better and better. I had neither fever nor cough. I had a good appetite, and I was able to distinguish the different foods’ taste and smell. At any rate, the two coronavirus tests I had, one on March 28th and the second on April 21st, still found me positive. My doctor, a man of deep faith who is a good friend of mine, told me: “Fr. John, you can be at peace because, thanks be to God, you have overcome the virus. I suggest you stay in your room in isolation for two months. A negative test result may come delayed; you must be patient.”

And thanks be to God, during this period of my life, I have been patient and really at peace with this conviction: “If God is with me, nothing and nobody can be against me.” When I discovered I had cancer (earlier in my life), I said: “I have cancer, but cancer does not have me.” Since then, whenever I do not feel well, I say: “I may have a disease, but no disease can have me.”

I had two other tests with positive results, and, finally, two more came out negative.

During those days of isolation, I did not remain idle. On the contrary, I kept very busy. I wrote articles for the Comboni magazine published in Manila, for

which I have been writing for the last three years, until next November. I have continued writing, and at the moment, I have written articles for the issues of 2021 until March.

Besides working for our magazine, I prayed a lot. Every day, I had some special

beautiful moments when I prepare a small altar for the Eucharist on my desk. At 7.00 am, I turn on a small television and celebrate the Eucharist in union with Pope Francis, whose Mass I could follow on TV, as well as in communion with all my Comboni confreres, my relatives, friends and all people throughout the world in my room. In my mind and my heart, I imprinted this expression: “The world in a room.”

All that I experienced and have described has filled my inner self with that kind of gratitude, which is the heart of prayer and life itself.

I hope that what I have shared may inspire all those who read it. I ask them to pray for me as I will pray for them. And together, let us pray for all those who are sick that, through the intercession of Mary, they may give their suffering a creative meaning in Christ Jesus who suffered, died of the Cross, and now lives as the Risen Lord. 🙏



Each one of us has a unique story of how God has found us. But in all our stories, the message of hope resounds. Despite our flaws, the tragedies of life, God always finds a way to reach us, and mold us into His own...

The Sun Shines on a Winter Night

Post. Thuan, MSBS



As a child, I used to hope that the sun will shine on a winter night to make us feel warm. It was a hope that consoled me as I braced myself for long cold nights every winter season. When we were young, my siblings and I slept in one bed with only one blanket. At night, we play tug of war with the blanket that could not cover all of us. So, I prayed to Jesus to make the sun shine on winter nights. Years after years of waiting and hoping, I finally realized that the sun would never shine on a winter night.

Then, my young life felt like an extended winter night. Because of poverty, my parents had to work hard to send us to school and provide for our basic needs. At a young age, my parents left me to take care of my younger siblings. I also learned to work

on the farm, assisting my mother. Despite their busyness with their work, my parents strove to raise us in the Catholic faith. They taught us how to pray. My father brought me to the catechism class every weekend. With my mother, I used to attend the Mass and prayer in the church. When I was in grade 9, my father had a stroke. My mother needed a lot of money for his recovery. As the eldest, my mother wanted me to work and take care of the family. I did not want to stop studying because I also realized that I wanted to be a sister. Congregations in Vietnam do not accept those who did not finish high school. During my three years in high school, I was a working student. I studied in the morning and did odd jobs in the afternoon. On summer

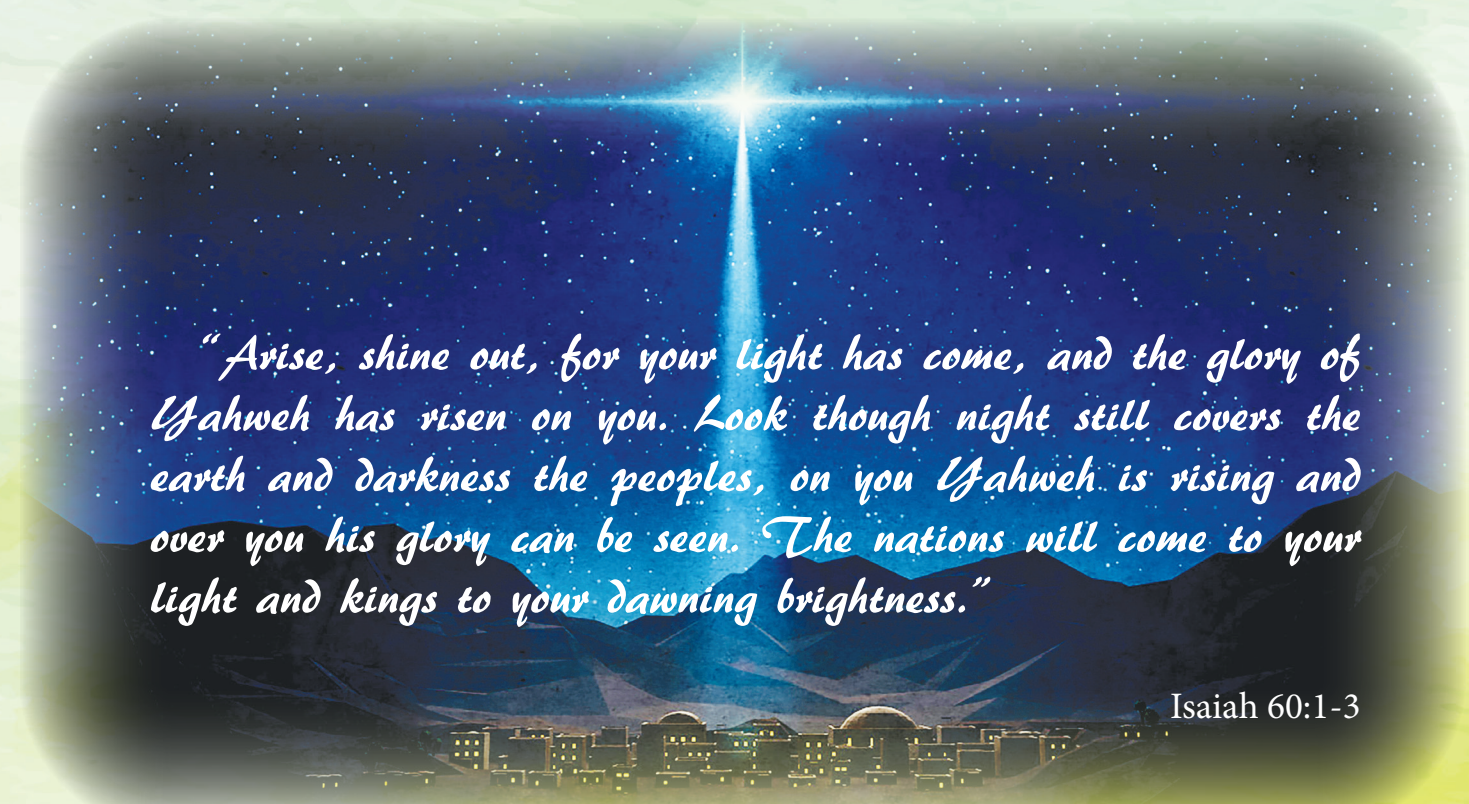
vacations, I worked in the shrimp factory. In grade 10, my mother also got sick.

My dream of becoming a sister seemed impossible. I felt tired. I felt unfree. I always thought I should be a good daughter. I tried to please my parents, but I could not seem to please them all the time. Our poverty pulled us from a life of happiness.

When I joined the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement, my life reached a turning point. I encountered many old and sick people, children who cannot go to school, hungry children, those who do not have parents and have been neglected. This made me realize how blessed I still was and am and gave me the courage to follow God's call to bring His love to all the people. In grade 12, I planned to enter a Congregation in our diocese. However, I found out that I was sick, and so I once again felt hopeless. I kept crying. I prayed to Jesus and asked Him what He wanted me to do. He heard my prayer. One day, a sister who once visited my family when I was in grade 11 and introduced the Congregation of the Missionary Servants of the Blessed Sacrament called me up and invited me to enter their Congregation.

Their charism and spirituality attracted me because I love the Eucharistic Jesus very much. Yet, I did not want to go to the Philippines because my father was still sick. My mother was not healthy, either, and I am the eldest. But I realized that I have to give up something for the greater love.

As I reflect on the years that have passed, I saw Jesus' providential love from my family, community, and people I have encountered. I found the sun I failed to see before, a sun shining on my winter night. With my formators' help, I gained the courage to go deep into the winter night of my heart, which had been freezing cold for a long time. I realize that the sun can only shine on it if I am willing to open my heart to His light and grace. That light will shine in every cold corner of my heart to warm my soul. Jesus has come to earth as a light shining in the night. I pray that He may continue to illuminate my soul with the light of His love so that I can bring His light to those who are immersed in suffering. I hope that the Lord will warm everyone's hearts with His loving light and salvation, especially in this pandemic. 🙏



"Arise, shine out, for your light has come, and the glory of Yahweh has risen on you. Look though night still covers the earth and darkness the peoples, on you Yahweh is rising and over you his glory can be seen. The nations will come to your light and kings to your dawning brightness."

Isaiah 60:1-3

Art, Beauty, and Life

Nov. Geraldin Evangelista, MSBS

I spent a great part of my growing up years in a beautiful place. In my childhood, the farm was my playground and the forest, my personal “Neverland,” a place of adventure. I loved collecting wild fruits and vegetables. At night, my favorite game was catching fireflies. Nature enthralled me, and that place was like a paradise to me.

As I grew up, I began to see the troubles in my little paradise. My eyes were slowly opened to the harshness of violence and war. There was constant fighting between government forces and the rebels. Transportation and communication were difficult, and so was the rescue of casualties of the ongoing conflict. This dark reality tarnished the beauty of the place. I could hardly notice the beauty of nature because fear has become my constant company. The forest, my place of adventure, has become a refuge for the rebels. Instead of the silent fluttering of the fireflies’ wings and the musical sound of crickets, the booming fire of guns and bombs echoed in the night or at any unexpected hour.

Time passed, and somehow, I have gotten used to the darkness. The darkness I saw in the world outside moved me to create a world of my own, the world of Arts. It is a world where I can freely express my emotions, feelings, and dreams. It allowed me to describe all the joys and pains of life. It has become my place of refuge. To borrow the words of Thomas Merton, “art enabled me to find and lose myself at the same time.” Amidst all the violence present in my environment and family, drawing and artwork have become my friend.

Out of this distant and isolated place, God found me and pulled me out to a life He designed for me. I argued with Him, though, “Do you see from which kind of family and environment have I

been? I am not worthy of the life you want for me.” Still, He asked me to stay. The life I found is far different from what I have known. I discovered the experiences that wounded and scared me and the experiences that brought me joy. The journey of discovery was painful in the beginning. At some points, I got stuck in some of my wounds and traumas. I wanted to avoid dealing with my issues, but they kept haunting me. I was so blessed with good people whom God has sent to accompany me in this process and journey. My formator, Sr. Rosanna, told me, “You cannot avoid it. You need to face it but be gentle with yourself. Time will come, and the Holy Spirit will guide you to face it and be healed.” With these words, I found the hope and strength to continue to face and process my issues.

I am so blessed to have this religious community, a community that forms me to become a missionary of love and hope to all. Here, I find myself journeying with my companion in all the ups and downs of life. Journeying with them gives me the strength to carry my burden and to help others bear their burden. I do not walk alone on this road to which He has sent me. This community inspires me to trust, to have the



courage and firm hope in God's love. It has taught me to be life-giving to others and be a simple woman of God.

I am glad to have found myself in the hands of God through the help of this religious family. The darkness that covered the beauty of nature and life – God's exquisite masterpiece – is slowly being lifted, and life and beauty shine more and more brightly. I am moving forward in this journey, determined to brighten this world with rich colors, walking to my destination, to a life of freedom and joy. 🙏



A Mother's Witnessing

Post. Van, MSBS



I am Van, a Vietnamese postulant of the Missionary Servants of the Blessed Sacrament. I began my Postulancy on May 30, 2020, a new journey of knowing, understanding, and accepting better myself, along with all my stories of joys and sufferings. This new journey brings me back to my experiences to know myself more and recognize God's presence in my life; how He forms me and leads me to know and love Him through the persons he uses as instruments to reveal his love for me.

One of his effective instruments is my mother, who formed me, nourished me, and took care of me. I grew up in a neighborhood of people who have a deep Christian faith. My family's house is near the church. So, we could hear the bells' ringing to signal the start of prayer

or celebration of the Mass. There were times we did not want to join the prayer or the Mass, giving her excuses such as “we are tired,” “we have other things to do.” Her answer was always, “You can do that after praying.”

Our family life centered on prayer. We used to attend the daily morning prayer in the church. If one of us has failed to join the 4:30 a.m. prayer and Mass in the church, the whole family would have to gather in front of our altar at 5:00 a.m., praying the Rosary or a short prayer to offer our day to God. If we stay in bed longer than needed, miss the prayer, or are late or sleepy at prayer, my parents would call our name aloud, and her long homily will follow. In the evening, we pray in the church at 7:30 p.m. Every one of us was required to attend.

My mother would always sit at the back of the church like a camera, recording all the things I did wrong in the church. Whenever we misbehaved, we would be learning new lessons from my mother upon arriving home. She taught me what I should and should not do in the church. Memories of those times make me smile. Those experiences helped me know and love God and strengthened my faith in Him.

I feel so lucky to have a mother who loves, accepts, and trusts in Him even in moments of hardship and suffering. She knew how to make her pains her prayers. A small woman, she used to drive an old motorbike



laden with bananas to the market at 4:00 a.m. While on her way to the market, she used to pray the Rosary to ask the protection of Mother Mary. Her Rosary was always wrapped around her wrist. Even after a very tiresome day, she sees to it that she spends time for God, praying the Rosary, reading the Gospel even if she was sleepy.

Prayer was her hope. It gave her the strength to love her husband and four children and overcome all her pain and suffering. She is an example of holiness that inspired me to live a holy life. Her words always remain in my heart: “Pray, pray more, and God will help us.”

As St. Therese of the Child Jesus, the Patroness of the mission, said, “Prayer is an aspiration of the heart, it is a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love amid trial as well as joy.”

My mother helped me understand the importance of prayer life. Prayer helps me to know that in this journey, I am not alone. I have a God who walks with me through other people. 🙏

Prayer was her hope. It gave her the strength to love her husband and four children and overcome all her pain and suffering.

"Philippine Evangelization on its 5th Centenary Celebration"

Sr. Jenelyn Rellamas, MSBS

A glance from the past...

...footsteps of gratitude toward the future...

Who would have known that the pain and suffering of the past could be the joy of the future? What we hated then could become a reason for rejoicing?

For some, recalling the past could cause too much pain because it re-opens old festering wounds. As God's people who look at events with the lens of faith, looking back to the past always gives us inspiration and reason to stand up and move forward.

For Filipinos, Spanish colonization had brought trauma, pain and suffering to our ancestors. We do not forget nor downplay the painful experiences they had in the hands of the colonizers, but we remain grateful for that part of our history which brought to our land the gift of faith. It was the year 1521, when Filipinos first accepted the faith, and the first Mass was celebrated in our country in the Island of Limasawa. Almost 500 years have passed, and next year would have been the glorious and most jovial celebration of that historic event of our faith. We may not be able to celebrate it with grand festivities and big gatherings because of this pandemic, but our hearts will continue to celebrate, rejoice and glorify God for bringing the Gospel to our land.

We also give thanks to God as we remember and honor all the missionaries who heroically brought the faith to us, and all the faithful who offered their life to give witness to and defend our Christian faith. More so, the Church reminds all the faithful of our responsibility as baptized to take part in God's mission. Each member has a part in God's plan of salvation, especially in reaching out to those who do not know God yet, those who have no chance to hear the word of God, those who have no chance to receive him.

As we are now struck down by this deadly pandemic, many of us are tempted to despair, overpowered by fear of infection. We are afflicted

by stress and anxiety as we see each day the numbers of confirmed positive cases and deaths from COVID-19.

This pandemic tests our faith. Our ability to gather to worship has become greatly limited. Thanks to social media and technology, spiritual activities and worship have become possible virtually. We have the means to strengthen one another in faith, to share our hope and extend charity to those most in need.

Despite the suffering of the many of our countrymen, we have a reason to hope and celebrate our faith, for God never ceases to remind us that he is with us every step of our journey. He walks with us just as Christ walked with his disillusioned disciples at Emmaus.

These words of St. Paul could be our mantra today: ***"We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."*** (2 Cor. 4:8-9) 🙏



Janella Ann De Lara

"To be always close to Jesus, that is my life plan."

He was a young boy with a deep devotion to the Eucharist. At the age of seven, after the reception of his first communion at the convent of San Ambrogio ad Nemus, he began to be a frequent communicant. He never missed attending the daily Mass and always made an effort to reflect in front of the tabernacle. And at his very young age, he makes

Nothing, not even leukemia, derailed Carlo's life plan.

In 2013, the Diocese, where he belonged, petitioned to open the cause for his canonization. In 2018, the Church declared him Venerable, which means he lived virtues heroically. In 2019, the Church approved the





miraculous healing of a Brazilian boy attributed to his intercession. Venerable Carlo Acutis was officially beatified in a solemn celebration in Assisi last October 10, 2020. His body, dressed in jeans, sneakers, and sweaters, is laid on a tomb opened for public viewing, onsite and online.

Bishop Domenico Sorrentino of Assisi said during the Mass on the opening of Carlo's tomb last October 1, 2020. "Today, Carlo becomes in some sense visible again, the beauty of his presence among the angels and the saints. Carlo helps us to follow his footsteps and convert to Jesus." 🙏



Memorable Trip to the Barrio

Sr. Katharina Mogi, MSBS

After my first profession, I was sent to Maumere, Flores, Indonesia, my own country. Here, I am staying in a rented house together with my co-sister, Sr. Imelda and one search-in. I and Sr. Imelda often go with the priests to celebrate Mass in the chapels and bring communion to the elderly and the sick.

One Sunday, I was asked to bring communion to the elderly and sick in a far-flung village. I met there an old man who shared with me how life in their village is. They earn their living from planting corn, beans, cassava, fruits and other vegetables. With parched land on summertime, they could only expect little harvest and thus, meager earnings. What struck me, though, was the fact that despite the precariousness of their living conditions, they are still able to give something to the Church. They remind me of the poor widow in the Gospel, offering the little they had to God. In spite of their poverty, they continue to express their gratitude to God for the blessings and graces that they receive, for keeping them safe and providing them food to eat.

Listening to the sharing of the old man and observing their life, the words of our Foundress Mo. Caterina sounded off in my heart: "We have to do all that is possible for the spiritual and material good of Catholic missions and to propagate the missionary ideal among the different groups of persons." How am I to live as a servant and missionary, as a daughter of Mo. Caterina amidst this reality? The people from the barrio simply taught me how.

Seeing the joy of the old man in sharing his life, I learned how precious our presence is for others. Lending an ear, paying attention, these make them feel they are not alone.

One of the beautiful things about being a religious missionary is that we can make people happy by simply being ourselves. It is not because of our own merit but because by being consecrated, we carry in us or we, ourselves are made signs of God's presence and love. Our vocation though does not end there.

As Pope Francis said, "religious men and women must learn the art of dialogue." As a religious missionary, it is important not only to listen but also to enter into dialogue with people just as Christ did when He came into this world. 🙏

Education

Last March, the order to close the schools took everyone by surprise. It was not a temporary suspension as we thought, and the hope of resuming school activities was vanquished.



The school year 2019-2020 will be marked in history as a special year, where the evaluation of general academic performance replaced the final exams... A school year that ended suddenly without having time to greet and thank teachers and classmates without making plans for the summertime and the next school year. Academic lessons were interrupted, but life lessons



continued, teaching how to live in a different, essential dimension, sharing the fear of the entire community, nation, and world, learning to act with prudence, obedience, and respect for the good of all.

The school year 2020-2021 has started last September. No face to face class is allowed, but flexible, blended and distant learning, and where possible, online classes. Even in remote places, whenever internet connection and technological tools are available, students have learned to use zoom, video, google classroom, power points.



Education

During the past months, our children and families have received your support through grocery packs and rice.



As the school began, they have been provided with school supplies, books, allowance for internet connection, laptops, cellphone loads, and printed modules.



Centers for Young Girls

While schools have been closed during the lockdown, our Homes for young girls and abandoned children in Mindoro, Quezon City, and Loikaw in Myanmar have continued to offer shelter, care, and education.



Mindoro



Quezon City



Myanmar



Feeding

Till last March, our Feeding Program has regularly assured daily lunch to children of Mabini, Caminawit, Rizal, Bukal, Buriraoan, Tilaga, Sta. Teresa, Natandol, Naitan, and Mendiola High School.



We had to find new ways to reach the children in their own families during the extended lockdown. They couldn't come to our Feeding Centers, so we decided to bring the food to their homes.



Through our leaders and some mothers' help, the lunch is prepared every day and brought home or fetched at the Centers by the parents. This home delivery service has required us to prepare more abundant portions so that food rations can be shared at home.



Works of Solidarity

"In the midst of crises and storms, the Lord challenges us and invites us to reawaken and activate this solidarity capable of giving solidity, support, and meaning to these hours in which everything seems to be wrecked." - Pope Francis

The Covid-19 emergency we have been experiencing since last March has profoundly marked our life, not only from a health point of view but also from a psychological and, above all, economic point of view.

We found ourselves unprepared, weak, and vulnerable to the blows of this virus. We have known the experience of suffering, quarantine, the suspension of numerous activities, and, for many families, the Coronavirus emergency has also become a work emergency.

More and more people are complaining of difficulties due to job loss.

No one doubts that COVID-19 is one of the most terrible threats the world has ever faced. And yet, amidst the confusion and anxiety, there are many signs of hope and solidarity...



Thanks to your generous support, we can continue to grant help to hundreds of families, sick persons, and single mothers.



Works of Solidarity



In Mindoro, the year 2020 has carried on the wounds of Tisoy and Ursula's damage. No New Year celebration and festive atmosphere but uprooted trees and electric cables tangled up on the side of the road. The houses which were not destroyed had the marks of the extreme violence of the typhoons.

At the end of last October and November, three consecutive typhoons caused another devastation in many regions of the country, including Mindoro. The rice fields ready for the harvest have been destroyed and transformed into an

angry river that swept away the hope of a much-needed income for the families.



Thanks to your generosity, our community is always ready to shelter, feed, and give immediate help to families who need to evacuate their places and houses.



Thousands of food packages have been prepared and delivered in the most affected areas. The kitchen and house accessories have been provided as well as financial help or materials to repair the houses.



Merry Christmas!



MISSIONARY SERVANTS OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

25 Jaime St., Carmel 1 Subd.,
Bahay Toro, Project 6, Quezon City
Tel No.: (02) 3453-8900

Mabini Ext., San Jose,
Occidental Mindoro,
Tel No.: (043) 491-5542

#158, 8th Street,
Naung Yah (A), Loikaw,
Kayah State, Myanmar
Tel No.: (0095) 83- 22-22804

Parish of St. Raphael, the Archangel
Looc, Occidental Mindoro

Jln. Don Silipi, Desa Nita,
Kec. Nita, Kab. Sikka, RT/RW.001,
Mauwere, Indonesia