

May Your Kingdom Come!

MISSIONARY SERVANTS
OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT



MISSION NEWS 2021

COME, PRINCE OF PEACE



Ancelle Missionarie del Santissimo Sacramento

COME, PRINCE OF PEACE

Once upon a time, there was a just and wise ruler, well-loved by his people. While the kings of neighboring kingdoms spent their wealth on their armies and building a strong fortress, the wise ruler tended to his people. He would often visit, talk, or mingle with them. His subjects were happy, and they both respected and loved him immensely.

One day, his advisers counseled him to build a strong fortress to protect the Kingdom from invaders. To do so, they had to raise more funds and so increase the taxes. This, however, proved to be an unbearable burden to his subjects. Slowly, the happiness that used to vibrate in his land was replaced by gloom. The king, ever so wise, reconsidered his decision.

At last, he ordered that the fortress building be stopped and the little that was built be torn down. For he deemed the project too costly. It costs the happiness of his people.

Instead of building a wall to protect themselves from invaders, the wise king sent his son as an emissary to neighboring kingdoms, befriending them, and assuring them of his Kingdom's goodwill.

The narrative of Jesus' birth gives us a similar message. He came to tear down the wall that oppresses us, the wall that sets us apart from one another and from Him.

At his birth, he tore down the wall that separates us from God, assuming our human condition to walk alongside fallen humanity.

On the Cross, he stretched out his hands, reaching out to "saints" and sinners alike, bringing them the promise of paradise. All his earthly life was spent bridging the gap between peoples, and reconciling them to God, his Father. Christ is indeed the Prince of Peace.

His message of peace is what we urgently need during this time, a time when people are separated or isolated because of a deadly virus, a time when new walls are being put up, breaking man's relation with one another.

This year, we hope to share with you stories of people who have been and continue to be peacemakers in the world. Their stories bring hope for a peaceful world, a hope that could only come to fruition through God's grace and our willingness to take on the challenges of peacemaking in our society.

As Christmas comes, we hold on to the hope brought by Christ, the Prince of Peace, a hope that will remain alive as we continue to make little or great steps to bridge the gap that separate us from one another.

Jesus Christ is the Emmanuel – God with us. As He remain with us, may we be with and for one another. 🕯️



CATECHESIS ON THE 7TH BEATITUDE



In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus preached about attitudes and dispositions that will bring happiness and blessings to man. These are the **BEATITUDES**. The seventh Beatitude is "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9).

In what way are the PEACEMAKERS BLESSED?

First, we must understand these three terms: PEACE, BLESSED & PEACEMAKER.

MEANING OF PEACE IN THE BIBLE...



HARMONY, WELL-BEING and FREEDOM from inner turmoil

The Greek word for **PEACE** is **EIRENE**, from the verb **EIRO** which means to join or bind together what has been broken, divided or separated. When things (or people) are disjointed, there is lack of harmony and absence of an inner sense of well-being. When things (or people) are joined together, there is a sense of harmony, well-being and freedom from inner turmoil.

In many parts of the world, civil war and unrest bring so much suffering to people. Threats of war and escalating conflict among nations are also before us. The injustice that afflicts a great number of people, if it remains unresolved, threatens peace as well.

In times like ours, each of us has a role to play. In our own milieu, we can do something to promote and protect peace. ***For us Christians, the invitation of Jesus to be Peacemakers becomes ever more relevant and urgent.***

And so, in this Catechesis we will dwell on the meaning of peace and what it means to be peacemakers in the world today.

CATECHESIS...

MEANING OF PEACE IN THE BIBLE...



A HEBREW GREETING

In Hebrew, the word for Peace is Shalom. It is the traditional Semitic salutation. Jesus' usual greeting was the typical Semitic, "Peace be with you" (used 5 times in the Gospels).



GOD's GIFT

In 3 passages of the New Testament: Philippians 4:7; Colossians 3:15; and Romans 15:33 speak of peace as God's gift.

- Philippians 4:7: Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
- Colossians 3:15: And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful.
- Romans 15:33: The God of peace be with all of you.



A MISSION

In three passages in the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks of peace in the context of His mission:

- John 14:27: Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. Peace is here defined as the gift of salvation.
- John 16:33: I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have troubles, but take courage, I have conquered the world.
- John 20:19-29: On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, [...] Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." [...]. This is the typical greeting again, but it takes on a message of rejoicing in the miracle of the Resurrection of the Messiah and the promise of salvation as it is given through the breath of Christ from which the Apostles receive the Holy Spirit (Jn. 20:22).

From a biblical perspective, peace is a fruit of God's salvation. It is that state wherein man is reconciled to God via the gospel message of the Lord Jesus Christ.

CATECHESIS...

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE BLESSED?



The Greek word translated "blessed" in this verse is one that is also translated "happy." A blessed person will have joy and contentment.

WHAT DOES "PEACEMAKER" MEAN?



The Greek word simply indicates a person who makes or works toward peace. A person can only work toward peace if he is at peace himself. Believers have peace with God through Jesus Christ (Rm. 5:1). God is the source of peace (Phil. 4:7) and calls His followers to exhibit peace in their own lives (Gal. 5:22; Rm. 12:18).

THE NATURE OF PEACE

- **Peace is both a gift of God and a human work.** It must be constructed on the basis of central human values: truth, justice, freedom, and love.
- **Unconditional and effective respect for each one's unprescriptable and inalienable rights** is the necessary condition in order that peace may reign in a society.

Jesus said that peacemakers are blessed because they will be called sons of God. In other words, they will have the honor of being identified as children of "the God of peace" (Rm. 15:33).

To live as a child of God is to have the greatest relationship in the world. It's a relationship made possible by the Prince of Peace: "for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith" (Gal. 3:26).



"All men desire for peace, but very few desire those things that make for peace."

- Thomas A Kempis

CATECHESIS...

PEACEMAKERS IN THE BIBLE



ABIGAIL

She is the wife of Nabal, a rich but drunken man. Nabal insulted David, and because of this, David and his men planned to attack Nabal. Abigail interceded on his husband's behalf. She met David, fell prostrate at his feet and persuaded David not to take vengeance upon his hand. (1 Sam. 25)



JOSEPH, the DREAMER

Joseph, the Son of Jacob: Joseph was sold by his brothers. In God's grace, Joseph rose to prominence and power in Egypt. His brothers then approached him for provisions or food supply. Joseph sought peace by forgiving them.



JONATHAN

The son of King Saul and friend of David, Jonathan sought to make peace between his jealous and angry father and the rising and talented David.

Paul is a great example of a peacemaker in the Bible because for much of his life, he wasn't. He's often a brash speaker in his letters and, prior to following Jesus, was a religious persecutor who witnessed and likely participated in the deaths of Christians. However, Jesus changed Paul's life drastically. We see him embracing Jesus' example of peace when he confronts Peter on his rejection of the Gentiles. We also see him humble himself to those who mock and hurt him instead of retaliating against them.



ST. PAUL

He is the model par excellence of peace. His preaching and his life are remarkable examples of how each of us can be a peacemaker.

Here are some biblical passages which show Jesus as the peacemaker:

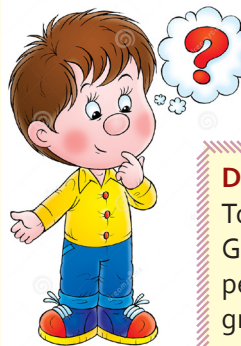


JESUS

In his preaching, he told his listeners: "If anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well, if someone wishes to go to law with you to get your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone requires you to go one mile, go two miles with him" (Mt. 5:39-41). With this, he countered man's tendency to retaliate. This does not mean that justice should not be sought, but that we ought to keep ourselves away from vengeful thoughts and attitude, and violence.

Jesus suffered the blows and insults on his way to Calvary with dignity and heroic compassion. While his arm stretched out and nailed on the Cross, in the greatest torment, he suffered, his words were: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). Peace is not possible without forgiveness. When we refuse to forgive, we allow the cycle of hate and aggression to continue. On the contrary, when we choose to forgive, we give to the reign of life and love, as Jesus has well shown us.

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HOW THEN CAN WE BE PEACEMAKERS?

DIALOGUE WITH GOD:

To become authentic peacemakers, it is fundamental to enter into constant dialogue with God, the Father of mercy. Since peace means reconciliation with God, we can become peacemakers by rejecting those that disturb peace: SIN, such as selfishness and violence, greed and the will to power and dominion, intolerance, hatred and unjust structures.

RECOGNIZE THAT WE ARE ONE HUMAN FAMILY IN GOD:

The attainment of peace depends above all on recognizing that we are, in God, one human family. Peace is an order enlivened and integrated by love, in such a way that we feel the needs of others as our own, share our goods with others and work throughout the world for greater communion in spiritual values. Fraternity is the foundation and pathway of peace: For peace to reign, a conversion of hearts is needed which would permit everyone to recognize in the other a brother or sister to care for, and to work together with, in building a fulfilling life for all.

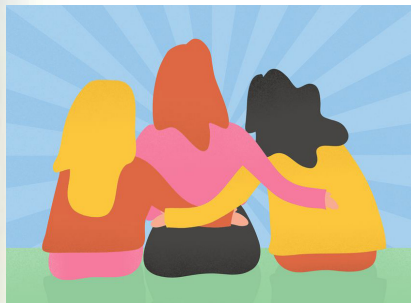


DEFEND AND PROMOTE LIFE IN ITS FULLNESS:

Peacemakers are those who love, defend and promote life in its fullness. The path to the attainment of the common good and to peace is above all that of respect for human life in all its many aspects, beginning with its conception, through its development and up to its natural end. Life in its fullness is the height of peace. Anyone who loves peace cannot tolerate attacks and crimes against life.

SPEAK A LANGUAGE OF PEACE:

Language is made for expressing the thoughts of the heart and for uniting. A peacemaker has a heart devoted to the higher value of peace. His language is that of listening and understanding, respecting others, gentleness, and trust. Such a language puts one on the path of objectivity, truth, and peace.



MAKING GESTURES OF PEACE:

The practice of peace leads to peace. It teaches those searching for the treasure of peace that the treasure is revealed and presented to those who produce humbly, day by day, all the forms of peace of which they are capable. Parents and educators, help children and young people to experience peace in the thousands of everyday actions that are within their capacity, at home, at school, at play, with their friends, in team work, in competitive sport, and in the many ways in which friendship has to be established and restored.

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HOW THEN CAN WE BE PEACEMAKERS?

TEACH PEACE:

Everyone can teach peace. Thoughts, words and gestures of peace create a mentality and a culture of peace, and a respectful, honest and cordial atmosphere. As a peacemaker, we can teach people to love one another, to cultivate peace and to live with good will rather than mere tolerance. A fundamental encouragement to this is *"to say no to revenge, to recognize injustices, to accept apologies without looking for them, and finally, to forgive"*, in such a way that mistakes and offences can be acknowledged in truth, so as to move forward together towards reconciliation.

FORGIVE:

Peace requires the growth of a pedagogy of pardon. Evil is in fact overcome by good, and justice is to be sought in imitating God the Father who loves all his children (cf. Mt 5:21-48). This is a slow process, for it presupposes a spiritual evolution, an education in lofty values, a new vision of human history. The pedagogy of peace implies activity, compassion, solidarity, courage and perseverance.



PROMOTE PEACE IN THE FAMILY:

"The family is the wellspring of all fraternity, and as such it is the foundation and the first pathway to peace, since, by its vocation, it is meant to spread its love to the world around it." - Pope Francis

CATHOLIC ORGANIZATIONS FOR PEACE

Pax Christi International:

Pax Christi International is a global Catholic peace movement working worldwide to establish Peace, Respect for Human Rights, Justice and Reconciliation.

Pax Christi was founded in Europe in 1945 as a reconciliation movement bringing together French and Germans after World War II.

Pax Christi operates as an autonomous Catholic entity in which laypeople, bishops, and other religious members work as equals in pursuit of peace and reconciliation.

As a faith-based Catholic movement, Pax Christi's efforts to resolve conflicts are informed by a deep understanding of both the positive and negative impact of religion. It brings the voice of civil society to the Catholic Church, and conversely carries the values of the Catholic Church to civil society.



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Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute:

The Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute (MPI) is an Asian training institute grounded in Mindanao, Philippines. Its context provides a space for people of diverse backgrounds to gather together, share and learn in a safe environment where all viewpoints are encouraged and respected.

MPI is a resource for peacebuilders: providing skills, conducting research and building solidarity within the Asia-Pacific Region. It creates a space where peacebuilders meet in mind, heart and spirit to keep abreast of the challenges which the issues of peace and justice present.

In a professional and personal way, MPI, through its programs, offers opportunities by which the journey of peace becomes real in the lives of peacebuilders and their communities.

**CATHOLIC
ORGANIZATIONS
FOR PEACE**

Silsilah Dialogue Movement:

Touched by an experience of conflict between Muslims and Christians in Mindanao and inspired by God's dialogue with people of all cultures and religions, Fr. Sebastiano D'Ambra, PIME, with a group of Muslim and Christian friends, started officially the Silsilah Dialogue Movement on May 9, 1984 in Zamboanga City, Philippines.

The movement is committed to live the essence of their respective faiths and bear witness to the values of their own religious traditions; to be in dialogue with all peoples, regardless of culture and faith, promoting a Culture of Dialogue with particular emphasis on spiritual values; and to be in solidarity with all people in the uplift of the less privileged, in the building up of a progressive, just, humane and ecologically sound society.



Sant'Egidio Foundation



for Peace and Dialogue

The Community of St. Egidio:

Sant'Egidio is a Christian community born in 1968, right after the second Vatican Council. The Community pays attention to the periphery, united by a fraternal tie through the listening of the Gospel and the voluntary and free commitment for the poor and peace. The awareness and understanding that war is the mother of all poverties has driven the Community to work for peace: to protect it wherever it is threatened and to help re-build it wherever needed, aiding dialogue between

parties when it has been lost. The work to foster peace is lived as a Christian responsibility, part of a bigger service of reconciliation. It is also part of the fraternity lived through ecumenical commitment and interreligious dialogue, in the "Spirit of Assisi."



Via Pacis Association:

Via Pacis Association is an international association of pontifical right, founded in Italy in 1979 by the married couple, Paolo Maino and Eliana Aloisi, and Fr. Domenico Pincelli, priest of the Diocese of Trento.

It is formed by a group of people united by the desire to live and spread the Gospel of Peace in everyday life. Its founder, Paolo Maino said: "The more we try to embody forgiveness, reconciliation and spirituality of peace, the more we see violent divisions and broken relationships around us, and the more we try to work for the good of the people. To work for peace, I must act in the world with God's love and allow God to work, to pray with a heart turned to God and God will do the rest. With your work, with one word, with a prayer, a greeting, a smile, your life will be filled with acts of peace and God will make it fruitful."



VIA PACIS

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The Swordless Warrior's Triumph

Sr. Amelita Cadiao, MSBS

*"Peace is a gift of God that requires our efforts.
Let us be people of peace in prayer and in deed."*

- Pope Francis

In the 12th century, a warrior decided to join the Crusade. It wasn't to reclaim the Holy Land from Muslim invaders, but to preach the Gospel of peace to them. Without a sword, armed only with the earnest passion for Jesus Christ and His Gospel, he undertook the journey fraught with hardship and danger.

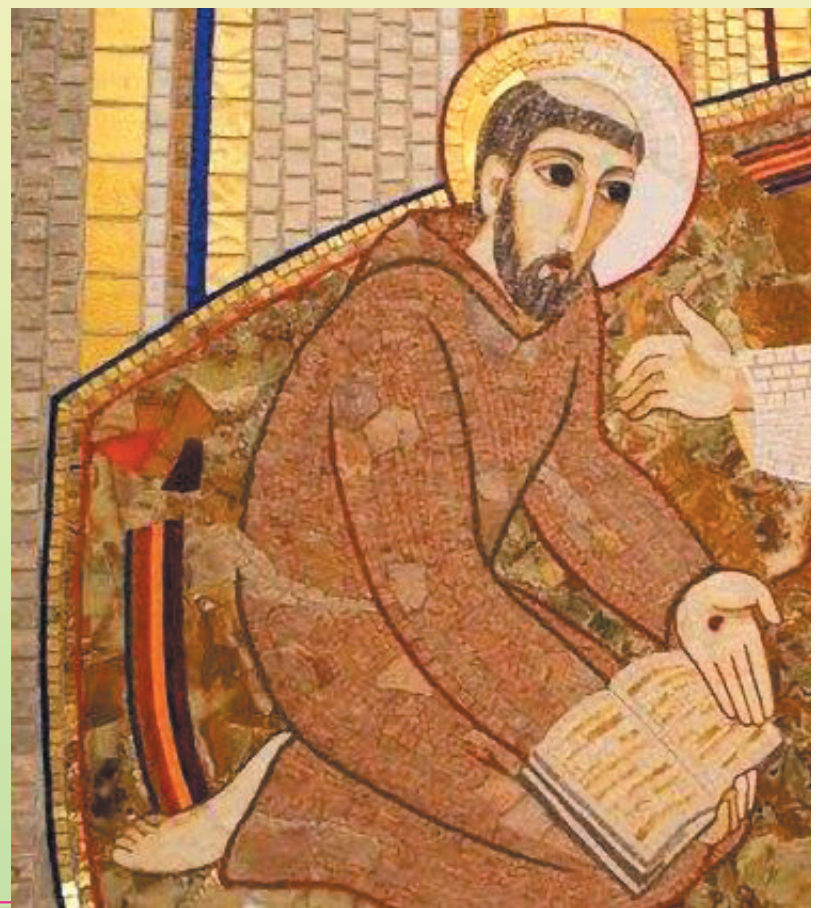
He was St. Francis of Assisi. He put his life at risk, crossing the battle lines along with his brother and boldly approaching the Sultan of Egypt to plead for peace. St. Francis and Br. Illuminatus were quickly captured by the Sultan's armies and badly beaten. However, the soldiers spared their lives and brought them before the Sultan.

St. Bonaventure described the encounter in his writing, *"The sultan asked them by whom and why and in what capacity they had been sent, and how they got there; but Francis replied that they had been sent by God, not by men, to show him and his subjects the way of salvation and proclaim the truth of the Gospel message. When the sultan saw his enthusiasm and courage, he listened to him willingly and pressed him to stay with him."*

It is said that Francis greeted the Sultan with the greeting, *"May the Lord give you peace,"* like the traditional Muslim greeting of, *"Assalam o Alaikum"* or *"Peace be upon you."* This surprised the Sultan who was quickly enraptured by Francis' holiness. Francis proceeded to preach the Gospel to the Sultan in such a way that al-Kamil took no offense for what could have been considered blasphemy for a Muslim. The Sultan saw the love flowing from St. Francis and was astonished by his boldness. They spoke together of the spiritual life and reflected on each other's traditions.

The two friars stayed in the Muslim camp for several days and departed on peaceful terms. Before they left, al-Kamil wanted to give St. Francis lavish

gifts, but he refused them. This too left al-Kamil speechless as he was the first man to refuse earthly honors. The saint eventually accepted a single gift - ivory horn that is currently on display in Assisi. The encounter changed al-Kamil, who gave safe passage to St. Francis and his companions and began to treat Christian prisoners of war with surprising kindness. The Sultan proceeded to negotiate for peace with the crusaders, asking them to leave Egypt. The efforts though ultimately failed. By 1221, al-Kamil offered peace again, which was refused, and he consequently opened the floodgates of the Nile to further deter



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them. The crusaders then agreed to an 8-year peace agreement.

These two men of God (a Muslim and a Christian) are supposed to be sworn enemies and instead, they find that they have much in common, such as a firm belief in one God, an openness to strangers, a belief in serving the poor, and a yearning for peace. St. Francis and the Sultan both triumphed without a sword. They won out of their conviction on the love and goodness of the God they serve and love much! Though it had never really stopped the bloody Crusade, it nevertheless bore fruits of peace as is evident in the subsequent decisions made by the Sultan. It won St. Francis an ally for peace.

St. Francis' story shows us that we are indeed capable of becoming warriors for peace in our own little way. But this is only possible if we let God's love, forgiveness, and mercy reign in our hearts and if we make an effort of engaging in authentic dialogue with the other.

As Pope Francis says, *"Dialogue is born from an attitude of respect for the other person, from a conviction that the other person has something good to*

say. It assumes that there is room in the heart for the person's point of view, opinion, and proposal. Dialogue entails a cordial reception, not a prior condemnation. To dialogue, it is necessary to know how to lower the defenses, open the doors of the house, and offer human warmth." ☩



A NOTE ON THE FIFTH CRUSADE:

The Fifth Crusade (1217-1221 CE) was called by Pope Innocent III (r. 1198-1216 CE) with the aim of recapturing Jerusalem from Muslim control. The strategy was to weaken the enemy by first attacking Muslim-held cities in North Africa and Egypt, which was then controlled by the Ayyubid dynasty (1174-1250 CE). The idea that Egypt would be an easier target than Jerusalem proved to be mistaken, and the campaign was unsuccessful.

The Crusaders, although eventually conquering Damietta, was beset by leadership squabbles and a lack of sufficient men, equipment, and suitable ships to deal with the local geography. Defeated on the banks of the Nile, the Crusaders returned home, once again, with very little to show for their efforts.

The Sultan of Egypt Malek al-Kamil (nephew of Saladin) declared that anyone who delivered him the head of a Christian would be rewarded with a Byzantine gold piece. Fighting had been fierce and the Sultan wanted to put a definitive end to the conflict. By August 1219, his armies succeeded in defending the stronghold of Damietta, killing about 5,000 crusaders in the process. ☩



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Fr. Rhoel Gallardo: A Martyr of Peace

Sr. Maricel Oliva, MSBS

March 20, 2000. On that uneventful day for Claret School of Tumahubong, the Abu Sayaff bandits stealthily barged in, burned the school, and captured Fr. Rhoel Gallardo, CMF and 52 others, including teachers and school children. This day marked the beginning of Fr. Rhoel's walk to calvary.

The bandits brought them to Punoh Mahadji (a mountain in Basilan), holding them hostage for six weeks. They treated them cruelly, even dragging a pregnant woman when she could no longer walk due to fatigue. Despite the harsh treatment and tortures of their captors and with no clear sight of rescue, Fr. Rhoel remained serene and calm. No complaint was ever heard from him. His only concern was the safety and well-being of his companions. There were times that he even gave his meager ration of food to the children. He had often asked their captors about the well-being of his companions, who were separated from him and plead for their release. This often earned him severe beatings.

Fr. Gallardo stood among them as a friend, who is willing to lay down his life for them. As one of the captives narrated, Fr. Rhoel insisted that if ever they decide to release them, he would be the last to go. He's a priest and had nothing to lose, he said. When the bandits demanded that he renounce his faith, he stood his ground. His response to all their aggression was a calm demeanor and prayers. He was often seen praying fervently and alone. He was like His Master, a meek lamb led to the slaughter.

In the midst of violence and hatred, Fr. Gallardo was a vivid and concrete portrayal of a peacemaker who abides by nothing less than the law of love, refusing to succumb to the violence inflicted upon them. He showed no hatred for their captors, only determined but tranquil appeal for the release of his friends.

When the Philippine Army swooped in and rescued



the hostages, they found the dead body of Fr. Rhoel Gallardo, with several bullet wounds and other signs of torture. His nails were plucked out from his hands and feet, a few days before he was shot at close range. To this day, Fr. Rhoel is remembered as a martyr of peace.

Before his perpetual profession, Fr. Rhoel wrote: *"My pastoral immersion in Basilan last year made me experience concretely our witnessing and evangelizing life and mission to the poor as well as our community's presence in the dialogue of life and faith with our Muslim brothers and sisters. These experiences have become a real challenge to me to be a committed missionary and an active witness to God's liberating love for humanity, conscious that our life and mission demand a total*

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giving of ourselves for the greater glory of God and the salvation of humankind."

I believe that this was the same passion and conviction that made Fr. Rhoel endure torture heroically and accept death as a consequence of what he stood for. His life's testimony is a reminder of the suffering and death of Jesus, who embraced the Cross and Death to reconcile man to the Father. It is a reminder to all of us that building the "*kingdom of love and peace*" is a costly yet worthy endeavor. One may lose his or her life but gain life for another.

At present, many parts of the world are

combatting the effects of conflict and war. Our struggle for peace is about both the present and the future. *What kind of future do we want for generations after us?* Certainly, it is not a life shackled by injustice, violence, or oppression. We, Christians, are not without option nor do we lack guidance. Jesus Christ, his many followers, both in the past centuries and contemporary times, have shown us the way – it is the way of love, of sacrifice, self-giving, and even dying, not literally perhaps but dying to one's selfish agenda, preferences or desires. It is the way of martyrdom for peace, a path Fr. Rhoel Gallardo has willingly travelled. 🕊



BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES FR. RHOEL GALLARDO, CMF

Fr. Rhoel Gallardo was a Filipino Claretian Missionary kidnapped and eventually killed by Abu Sayaff bandits in Tumahubong, Basilan. He was born on November 29, 1965 in Olongapo City. He was the second child of Mr. Dominador Gallardo and Mrs. Raquel Dayap.

He entered the minor seminary at the invitation of Fr. Cacho. His classmates remember Fr. Rhoel as witty but a quiet fellow who was ever ready to give advice. His fellow seminarians jokingly called him "Little Claret" because of his height and saintly countenance. He also had special concern for the "little ones." A blind woman remembers how Fr. Rhoel would come to her aid. She said: "I knew a lot of priests but nobody ever washed my hands except Fr. Rhoel."

He made his first religious profession in 1989 and completed his pastoral year in Maluso, Basilan. He took his final vows in religious life on July 16, 1993 at Claret house in Quezon City. On December 6,

1994, he was ordained a priest in Santo Niño Parish in Zamboanga del Sur. A few years after, he volunteered for the mission in Tumahubong, where he served as the director of Claret School and parish priest.

Twenty years after his death, on May 3, 2021, the cause of his beatification was opened by Bishop Leo Dalmao, CMF during Mass at San Vicente Ferrer Parish Church in Tumahubong, Sumisip in Basilan province, where he last served as parish priest. 🕊



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An Angel of Peace

Sr. Maria Lam Bieng Kim Hien, MSBS

"Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth" (Lk. 2:14).

This was the angels' announcement to the shepherds in the field, keeping watch of their sheep in the night. Their proclamation propelled the shepherds to a journey that led them to the beautiful vision of God's Son. So astonished were they at the experience that they went back glorifying and praising God for what they had heard and seen (Lk. 2:16-20).

In the far-flung villages of Vietnam, a simple priest, a faithful son of St. Francis of Assisi, can be likened to an angel that announces peace to God's people. Wherever he is assigned, he bears the good news of God's love and peace.

To troubled lepers, Fr. Michael Ya Thu brings the soothing balm of love and selfless service. The lepers are neglected, abandoned by their families, rejected by the society, and banished to the mountains. For many, they are a burden to the society, but Fr. Michael treat them with great love and compassion. He built a clinic for them so that they will receive proper care. He, who used to serve as a nurse in military camp, also cleaned their wounds, carrying them on his back and giving them words of consolation. He provided for their needs as much as he could. There was a time that he even asked me to bring food for them every Wednesday and Friday of the week. The medicine for lepers is very expensive, but he always finds a way to provide it for them. I often heard how lepers talk about him with much affection and gratitude. To the lepers' battered spirit, his presence was a breath of peace.

At this time of pandemic, reaching out to the lepers is more challenging because of the strict restrictions on moving from one village to another. However, nothing could beat his enthusiasm and love for the lepers. Fr. Michael wakes up very early to avoid meeting people along the way and so be able to reach the mountains and take care of the lepers. He usually goes back in the middle of the night.



The lepers are not his only concern. Whenever he finds situations that make people suffer or live a life less than what they deserve, he always finds concrete solution.

When he was assigned to a Parish right after he completed his studies in the Philippines, he immediately noticed the difficulty of the people in communicating to him. Fr. Michael, who belongs to K' Ho tribe, tried to learn as soon as possible the Bana language. Soon, he was able to say the Mass in their language.

Moved with pity for people who wants to attend Mass but are hindered by far distance of their home from the church, the lack of transportation and inconvenient roads, he tried his best to build more churches in villages. When he noticed the people's need for clean water, he initiated a project that could provide clean water in every village under the jurisdiction of his parish.

Usually, charitable works are approved and appreciated, but sadly, they have been a cause of threat to his life and liberty. The government disapproves of his work. He was told to stop taking care of the lepers because they are useless and required him to accomplish a lot before granting

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him the permission to do any charitable work. They threatened him with imprisonment should he fail to abide by their mandate. Though furious about this injustice and unreasonable demands, Fr. Michael

always choose to keep silent for the sake of the people. He listened to their threats without defending himself.

He said: *"As a disciple of Jesus, sent to do the mission and cultivate peace, it is important to live in humility, to sacrifice, to be kind, not to aggressively defend oneself but to be prudent and alert. I take as my own, St. Francis' prayer: 'Make me a channel of your peace.' I am called to live it. I believe that a peaceful person will be able to persuade others to value peace as well."*

Then, he continued: *"We are children of God - children of light. We must speak out against injustice but with calmness, serenity and trust in God. We must especially pray for those who promote injustice. Prayer is the best weapon that can bring peace. Quarreling, on the other hand, will always bring war and hatred because it is the work of the devil."*

In many ways, Fr. Michael is an angel of peace to his flock. I hope and pray that there will be more and more missionaries who cultivate peace for the sake of the kingdom of God. 🙏



On the 22nd of May next year, the Holy Catholic Church will raise to the honor of the altars in Lyons Ven. Pauline Marie Jaricot. The title is given to those who have lived an exemplary Christian life, and a miracle through her intercession has been approved by the Church.

Ven. Pauline Marie Jaricot, a Frenchwoman, founded the Association of the Propagation of Faith and the Living Rosary Movement.

Born to a well-off family, she was a vain child but after a profound spiritual experience, she devoted her life to serving the poor. She promoted initiatives of raising funds for the Mission.

The Association of the Propagation of Faith was subsequently recognized as a Pontifical Society.

Her beatification will be presided by Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. 🙏





Pandemic & Liveli



"When the whole world was prey to a virus that brought pain and death, despair and bewilderment, how many outstretched hands have we seen!

(Pope Francis)

In this time of emergency and great suffering, your help has enabled us to extend a hand to alleviate the suffering and worries of 600 families who have received pack of groceries and rice... to offer livelihood opportunities to some families, and materials for the reconstruction of a bridge damaged by continuous heavy rains.



hood Assistance...



"Solidarity is more than acts of generosity; it is the call to embrace the reality that we are bound by bonds of reciprocity. On this solid foundation, we can build a better, different, human future."
(Pope Francis)

Despite the pandemic, the Feeding Program continues to serve children in eight villages. More than 420 children and elderly get lunch every day. When it is not possible to serve lunch at the Feeding Centers, baskets of packed lunch or vegetables and groceries are prepared for them.

Thanks to your generosity, we were also able to support medical check-ups and hospitalizations, and distribute medicines and supplements in ten villages.

Feeding Program & More



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Medical Assistance...



1491 children and young people benefit from our Scholarship Program.

As the schools remain closed due to the pandemic, the school year 2021-2022 continues with the blended learning system.

School supplies, books, contribution for internet fee, clothing, food pack for families, medicines, masks and other material were distributed to the beneficiaries of this project that supports the study of:

- 46 pupils of Pre-elementary level
- 354 pupils from 1st-6th grade
- 724 students from 7th-12th grade
- 246 College students

Moreover, support is assured for

- 19 sick children and young people
- 2 Kindergartens with a total of 102 children
- Remedial classes

Scholarship &



Education...



Since February 1, 2021, Myanmar people's life has changed. This was the first act in a long series of violence, harassment, and injustice and death.

Our sisters in Loikaw share the uncertainty, deprivation, risk, and pain of their people. The cruel war sustained by the thirst for power and the rapid spread of covid19 virus cause fear, suffering and death. Our two communities embrace every day the risk and the challenge of being a place of assistance and refuge for those who no longer have a home; a family for those who are alone, sick, abandoned, and support for those who do not have the strength to look at the reality that surrounds them.

Love for people, faith in God, hope for restoration of freedom and dignity, intimate relationship with Jesus in the Eucharist help the Missionary Servants of the Blessed Sacrament to tirelessly carry out their service - preparing food, growing vegetables and mushrooms, teaching children, praying, consoling, protecting the more vulnerable, and begging God for peace...

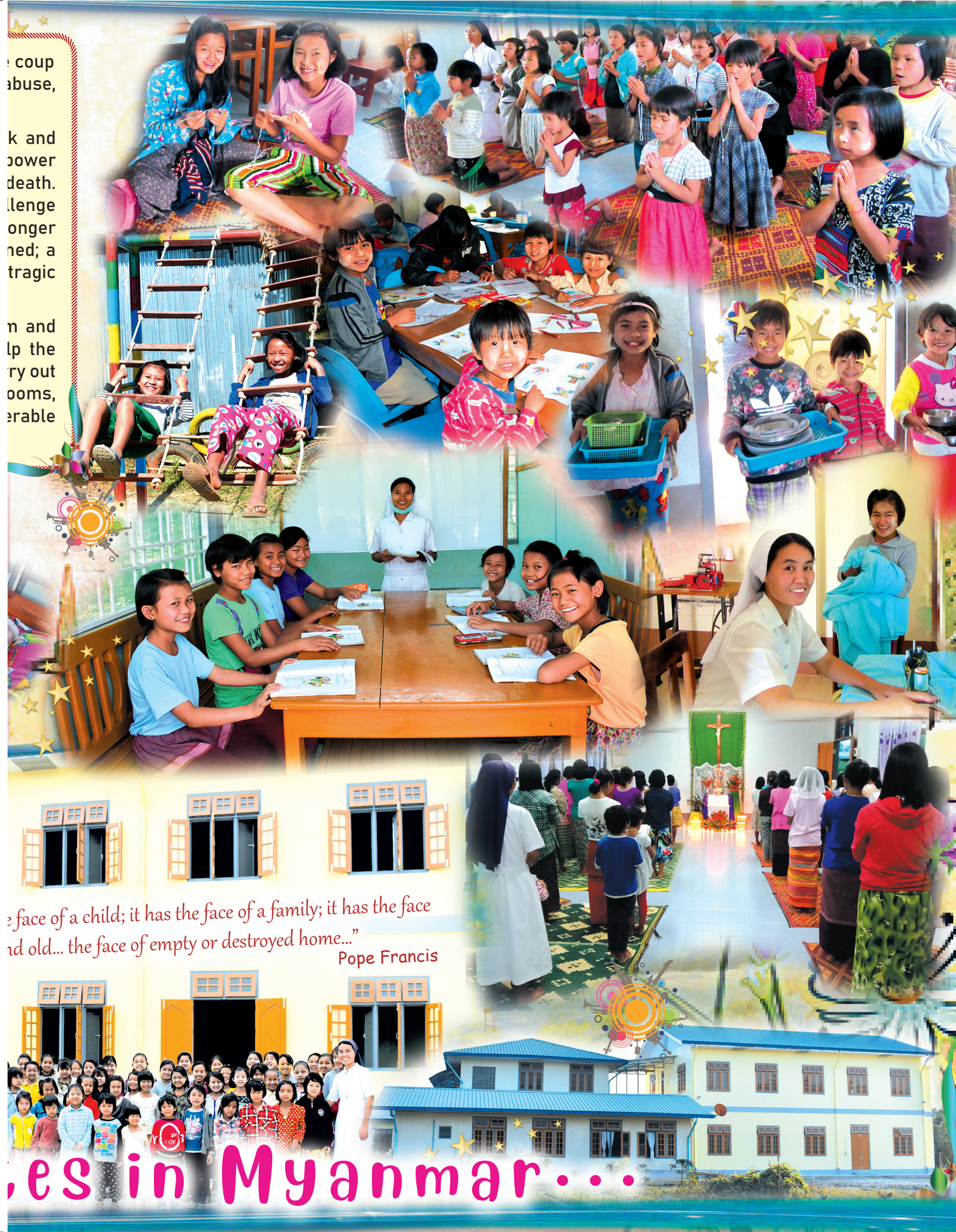


"Poverty has a face! It has the face of people, young and old."

Various Apostolates

couple
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the face of a child; it has the face of a family; it has the face
of an old... the face of empty or destroyed home..."

Pope Francis

...es in Myanmar...

STORIES...

Limang Daan (500 Hundred)

Rev. Msgr. Esteban Lo, LRMS



Is it possible for what happened five hundred years ago to continue reverberating and influencing the present moment and even the future?

Five hundred years ago, the seeds of the Christian Faith were planted in our country, the Philippines. Ferdinand Magellan and his group left Spain in 1519 for the Maluku Islands ("Spice Islands"). They anchored, instead, in the Philippines on March 16, 1521. They left Europe searching for spices and gold, but what they found were the golden-hearted natives. The latter spiced them up with gracious and generous hospitality after a long, arduous, and perilous journey across the oceans. While they set out as mercenaries, they ended up as missionaries, albeit for a short while. To a person without faith, everything is a coincidence. To a person with faith, everything is providence.

The first Holy Eucharist was celebrated on the island of Limasawa, Southern Leyte, on March 31. A large wooden cross was planted on the top of

a hill overlooking the sea. It was Easter Sunday. It was, indeed, a crucial turning point in the life of our people. The first baptisms were administered two weeks later in Cebu on April 14. The first local Christian community was born. But, again, *was a local Christian community born, indeed, that day? Did Rajah Humabon of Cebu and his eight hundred or so relatives and contemporaries understand Christianity and what being Christian meant? Did they receive the baptism with good intention?* On the other hand, *was the refusal of Lapu-Lapu of the nearby island of Mactan to submit to the sovereignty of Spain an outright refusal as well of hearing the preaching of the Gospel itself?*

It appears that at the first historical sowing of the Christian Faith in our country, *"some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil and was not deep, and when the sun rose, it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the*

STORIES...

thorns grew up and choked it." (Mt 13:4-7)

When Miguel Lopez de Legazpi came in 1565, he and his men found an image of the Sto. Niño in one of the huts in Cebu. Not everything was lost, after all!

Since the seventeenth century, the Philippines has become a predominantly Christian nation. Questions have been raised concerning the seemingly very rapid evangelization of the country. Is it because of the sharp and long sword, not to mention several canons of the colonizers or the relentless labors of the missionaries, who came with them - the Augustinians (1565), the Franciscans (1578), the Jesuits (1581), the Dominicans (1587) and the Augustinian Recollects (1606) and various religious communities of women?

More than the colonizers' weapons and tactics, the missionaries' spiritual and corporal works of mercy truly opened, with God's grace, the hearts of the Filipinos to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Under the leadership of Fray Domingo de Salazar, OP, the first bishop of the Philippines in 1579, the missionaries took the side of the natives against the abuses of those in power, including the wealthy natives. Hospitals were established in the capital, not just for the Spaniards but also for the natives and the Chinese. The Franciscans administered the first two, while the Dominicans founded the third one. The natives were impressed by the sacrifices of the missionaries on their behalf: leaving their families and familiar world, crossing the vast and dangerous

oceans, visiting far-flung villages, promoting better community life, studying the medicinal benefits of local plants, promoting agriculture and husbandry, building irrigation systems, bridges, churches, orphanages, and plazas, among others.

Instead of forcing the natives to learn Spanish, the missionaries forced themselves to learn the native languages. The first book printed in the country, *Doctrina Christiana*, was simultaneously published in Tagalog, Spanish and Chinese. At first, the educational system was opened for Spanish boys only. Later on, it welcomed everyone. The Jesuits pioneered it in 1595, and the Dominicans followed suit in 1611. Different religious groups of women undertook the education of the girls.

There were, however, some very bad elements among those who came from Spain. The Lord Jesus himself has said that even within the Kingdom of God, wheat and weeds grow side by side (cf Mt 13:24-30), good and bad fish are found in the same fishing net (cf Mt 13:47-50).

At one point, the Filipinos felt that enough was enough. In 1896, they finally rose against the growing oppressive Spanish colonial government. The revolution was also very much anti-friars. By God's grace, though, the firm foundation laid down by the earlier and idealistic missionaries remained firm. Despite the strong anti-friar sentiment among some of the *illustados* (the affluent intelligentsia), the

strong influence of the schismatic *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* (Aglipayans) and the eventual massive Protestant campaign that came with the annexation of the country as a colony of the United States of America, most Filipinos have remained Catholic Christians. The faith has survived the vicissitudes of history and the weaknesses and sinfulness of its proponents.

After the departure of most of the Spanish friars, there was a great need for priests to serve the orphaned communities. One of the issues in the revolution was the



STORIES...

opposition of those in power against the development of the local clergy. Thus, the lack of native priests. Upon the Vatican's appeal, non-Spanish missionary congregations of both men and women came to succor and accompanied the Church in the Philippines: Redemptorists (1905), Mill Hill Missionaries (1906), Missionaries of the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception (1907), Sacred Heart Missionaries (1908), Society of the Divine Word (1908), La Salle Brothers (1911), Oblates of St. Joseph (1915), Maryknoll Missionaries (1926), Columban Missionaries (1929), Society of St. Paul (1935), Foreign Mission Society of Quebec (1937), and Oblates of the Immaculate Conception (1939), among others.

The Christian Faith has been a great gift of the good Lord to us. It belongs to the essence of a gift, however, that for it to remain as a gift, it needs to be shared. A blessing that is hoarded and not shared ceases to be a blessing. Thus, in celebration of 500 years of Christianity, our theme is **"Gifted to Give"** in accordance with the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, *"Without cost, you have received; without cost, you are to give."* (Mt 10:8)

We thank the good Lord of the harvest that we still have many young people who consider religious and priestly vocations. Many religious congregations around the world are blessed with many Filipino members. Some major religious congregations for both men and women have had Filipinos as Superiors General. Through the years, different groups were established to share the gift of faith to other nations: Mission Society of the Philippines (1965), Philippine Catholic Lay Mission (1977), Columban Lay Mission (1990), and Lorenzo Ruiz Mission Society (1997), to name a few. Countless members of different ecclesial movements have also volunteered as missionaries ad gentes — either as individuals, as couples, or even as families.

By God's grace, most of the millions of Filipino migrant workers worldwide have become living witnesses to the Christian Faith. They have injected new life into parishes and dioceses in different countries

where they work and live. It is very significant that the two canonized Filipino Saints died as missionaries abroad: San Lorenzo Ruiz and San Pedro Calungsod.

Five hundred years after the seeds of Christianity were planted in our country, some people ask, *"Has the Philippines been truly Christianized? Or, has Christianity been fully Filipinized?"* It's both, and both are ongoing processes. Christianity has colored the character and culture of our nation. We live and celebrate Christianity in our very own Filipino way. Yet, many areas in our individual and communal lives still need the transforming power of the Gospel very much. We still have a long way to go for our character and culture to be more really purified of their non-Christian elements and for the Christian Faith to become more truly a way of life every single day on both personal and national levels.



STORIES...

The journey of faith, hope, and love continue. The quest for truth and justice, inclusive and sustainable development, democracy and peace, authenticity and accountability, spirituality and fullness of life continues.

This pandemic has negatively impacted our celebration of the 500th Year of Christianity in our country. Yet, this pandemic has led us to celebrate it more simply, entrust ourselves to God more fully, and reach out to one another more generously. Our quincentennial celebration of our being Christians has given us the needed courage, strength, peace, and hope to face this great crisis of our lifetime. The words of the late Rev. Fr. Horacio de la Costa, SJ, many decades ago continue to ring true — *"You know, we are a remarkably poor people.... But poor as we are, yet we have something. This pauper among the nations of the*

earth hides two jewels in her rags. One of them is our music; we are one people when we sing. We are again one people when we pray. This is our other treasure: our faith. These are the bonds that bind us together; these are the souls that make us one. And as long as there remains in these islands one mother to sing Nena's lullaby; one priest to stand at the altar and offer God to God, the nation may be conquered, trampled upon, enslaved, but it cannot perish. Like the sun that dies every evening, it will rise again from the dead."

We look back with gratitude. We look forward with hope. We look around with compassion and commitment. As we celebrate the 500th year of Christianity in our country, we renew our **"yes"** to the Lord to go forth and *"speak of what we have seen and heard"* (Acts 4:20), so that more people *"may have fellowship with us; for our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.... so that our joy may be complete."* (1 Jn 4:3, 4)

In Tagalog, 500 is translated as *limang daan*. Interestingly, *limang daan* may also be translated as five roads, paths, or ways. What happened *limang daan* years ago leads us to trudge *limang daan* as missionary disciples today.

In general, we have five interrelated ways to do the mission at present: through

- (1) Presence / Personal Witnessing,
- (2) Ecological Advocacy and Promotion of Human Development,
- (3) Annunciation / Proclamation,
- (4) Consultation/Ecumenism and Inter-Religious Dialogue, and
- (5) Entreaty / Prayer and Liturgy.

May we walk along these *limang daan* more and more as we celebrate *limang daan* years of Christianity. This *limang daan* of doing mission lead us more and more to the PEACE of the good Lord. It is the peace that the world cannot give and cannot understand. It is the peace that is not the absence of problems but the presence of God. 🙏



STORIES...

Where Peace Begins

Sr. Aye Aye Mu, MSBS



"The military declared a five-month ceasefire." One of my co-sisters happily announced. I felt a sense of awe and joy because it means killings would stop even just for a few months in our country – Myanmar. Anxious feelings remain, however, as this does not mean peace yet. Ethnic wars, division among the citizens, destruction, deaths, injustices continue as the people, through the PDF (People's Defence Force), fight for democracy since the military take-over on February 1 of this year. Peace in Myanmar is still far from our reach, despite the ceasefire declared by the junta. Peace talk seems impossible now in Myanmar as massacre continues to be a way to stifle dissent and further the military junta's selfish agenda.

Hearing stories of brokenness makes me feel a sense of hopelessness, helplessness, and anger. *Who can help us out of these miseries?* How can we heal this wounded world? These questions became my prayers for quite some time and praying helped me see not only the bad but also the good things happening in the world.

Anne Frank, one of the victims of the Holocaust, wrote in her diary: *"I don't think of all the misery but of the beauty that still remains."* Indeed, there are beautiful things that happen even amidst tragedy. Some are known to people, but many remain hidden. God works miracles all the

time, but we don't just see them all.

I've read about this heart-warming story of a little Christmas miracle. In Christmas 1914, a ceasefire was unofficially "declared" between the German and British troops. On the Christmas eve, some German soldiers went out of their trenches to wish their enemies a Merry Christmas. At first, the British troops thought it was a trick. However, seeing them unarmed, they too crawled out of their trenches, shook hands with the "enemies" and joined them in singing Christmas carols, exchanged food and cigarettes as gifts and played soccer. This was how the fighting troops of Germany and Britain spent their Christmas in 1914.

It is one beautiful example of how God intervenes, works miracles, and stays with His people. For me it is a story of God's love. Though the truce was brief, we cannot underestimate the power of little miracles. I still believe that peace is possible in this world of tensions, conflict, and misunderstanding. I hold on to my belief that nothing is impossible for God. No matter how hard our hearts are, it cannot but melt before God's loving touch. His presence is a source of peace, especially for those who are suffering. He bears with us our cross. As Scriptures say, He bore all our wounds. He could transform our poverty, wounds, or failures as opportunities for us to be closer to Him, to be with Him, to suffer with Him, but only if we allow him. For this reason, I realized that neither hopelessness nor helplessness has a place in a heart of Christ's disciples. We can do something to assuage the pains and heal the wounds of the people. We can do this by reaching out to others with gestures of love, even as simple as smiling.

As St. Teresa of Calcutta says, *"Peace begins with a smile."* Similarly, greetings, wishing the other person's good, gratitude, appreciation, humility are weapons for peace and remedies to the wounded soul. Through them and through the offering of prayers and sacrifices, we all can cultivate peace. I believe this is where peace begins. It begins with you and me. ✠

STORIES...

A Little Place of Heaven

Sr. Melanie S. Reyes, MSBS

Reading Fr. Timothy Radcliffe's book *"What is the Point of Being a Christian?"*, I found a beautiful story about a religious community in Africa. In his book, Fr. Timothy talked of his visit to a convent of Dominican nuns in Burundi when the country was struggling against ethnic conflicts.

Since its liberation from Belgium's rule in 1962, Burundi, a country in East Africa, has been afflicted with ethnic conflicts between two principal ethnic communities, the Tutsi and Hutu. Waves of attacks and mass killing were carried out by one tribe against the other. A cycle of aggression and retaliation led to thousands of deaths on both sides.

In this climate of fear and hatred, a community of 12 nuns, six of whom were Tutsis and six Hutus, lived atop a green hill. All of them had lost most of their loved ones in ethnic violence. Fr. Timothy wondered and asked them how they managed to live in peace with each other. They told him that common prayer and listening to the news together helped them. Those moments allowed them to share their grief. Soon, people around the area began to look at the monastery grounds as a safe place. They gathered in the church to pray and grow their crops beside it.



Amid the climate of violence, the nuns found a way to convey gently yet powerfully a message of hope, that is, the hope that despite the forces that put up walls of hatred and division, love, compassion, and communion is possible. Their quiet resistance to the evil of violence and retaliation brought peace to the people around them. The nuns' community became a little piece of heaven for those who longed for peace. Their community was a compelling view of what heaven is like – a place where unity amidst diversity is not only possible but a treasure.

The many and significant challenges and demands of the world can lead us, consecrated persons, to work anxiously at a frenetic phase, but the sisters' witness is a powerful reminder of our fundamental call as religious – that is, to be a sign of the world to come, of God's Kingdom of Peace and Love.

In my own community, I have witnessed tender moments of forgiveness and reconciliation, the conscious effort and decision to get past one's hurts and look with compassion to one another, the continual effort to seek communion. As one author once said, ships docked at the harbor tend to bump against each other, and so are people who live together. Conflict, disagreements are part and parcel of life, but it is precisely these moments that give us that blessed opportunity to have a little piece of heaven, certainly not when we hurt each other, but when we make a conscious decision to build communion amid our differences. 🙏



STORIES...



"But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. (Luke 6: 27-28)



Jesus teaches us to love not only those who love us but also our enemies! This is a very hard teaching to live out especially for one who is being badly and unjustly treated, whose loved ones have meaninglessly been murdered, all in the name of greed for power and selfish agenda, whose properties have unjustly been taken or destroyed, leaving nothing but ashes and ruins.

How can one find in his or her heart the willingness to forgive when the things or persons you treasure most, the properties you have acquired through years of hard work, copious tears, sweat, and blood are intentionally destroyed in just a blink of an eye? Is forgiveness possible? Is peace worth fighting for amidst unforgivable offenses and transgressions? Children becoming orphans. Parents becoming childless. Families becoming homeless and pressed to live in abject poverty. Youth left only with uncertainty and a dim future ahead of them!

In the past months, our country has lost and wasted so much lives... young people who dared to dream of a better future, had their dreams nipped in the bud, dealt with fatal and final blow of death. I know of a teenaged boy who was killed in the battle. He was one of those young people who just

could not give in without a fight to the oppressors who threaten the people's freedom.

The boy was a member of the Holy Childhood Association, a group of children and adolescents who contribute to the mission through small contributions and prayers. He was a responsible child. His death was a loss and it pained me a lot. If I, who was not his kin, felt so much pain, I could not imagine how torn apart are the hearts of the mothers or fathers who have lost their child.

The wounds cut so deep, and the pain is so unbearable. Can love and forgiveness be still found in the hearts of the innocent people of Myanmar who have had and continue to have a taste of too much cruelty? As human beings, forgiveness in these circumstances is inconceivable.

To be honest, forgiveness feels truly impossible at this moment. Wounds are still raw and gaping. However, as Christians, much is demanded of us. Jesus Christ, while his arms were outstretched and nailed on the cross, with his every laborious intake of breath, uttered the impossible words: **"Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing."**

He harbored no ill will to those who mocked him, slapped him, and scourged him. He had only love and pity on those who were persecuting him! He lived concretely the truth that God is Love! "He makes his sun rise on the bad and the good and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust" (Mt. 5:45). For God loves everyone.

Truly, forgiving is a difficult task and an arduous process. However, God is Patience and Love. I beg him to grant me the grace to learn to love and forgive. As the Lord Jesus and his countless saints show us, peace can never be attained by clinging to grudges and hurts, to vengeance and violence. May we find in our heart the magnanimity to counter hatred with charity, violence, and greed for power with meekness and humility. 🙏

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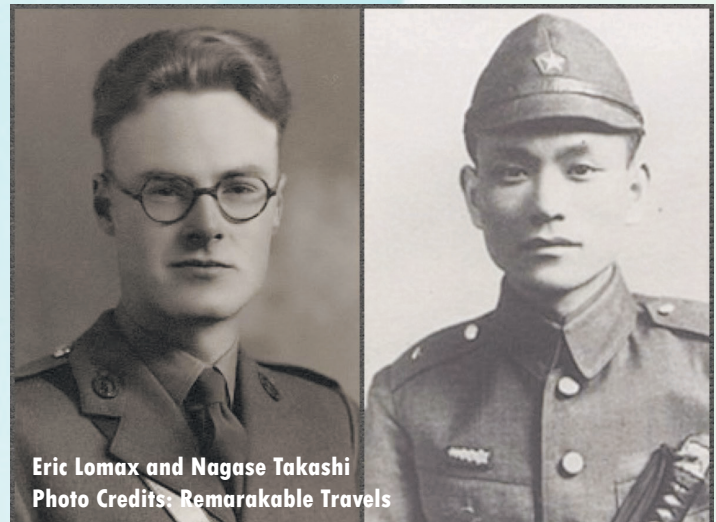
Healing Balm to the Wounds of War

Sr. Ermelinda Bhiju, MSBS

The wounds inflicted by wars run deep. The scars never become numb, reminding persons of the horrors and griefs they bring. Yet, many does not seem to learn from the mistakes of the past. Wars continue to be waged in the name of power and material wealth.

In West Papua (Indonesian: Papua Barat), a province of Indonesia located in the western part of New Guinea, armed conflict between those who clamor for independence and the government forces continue. Burning of houses and schools, indiscriminate killing – all in the name of war for power and sovereignty. The prevailing climate of mistrust and hatred engenders fear and trauma. On both sides, lives have been lost.

The cycle of hatred and violence will keep on rolling. In its wake will be thousands of lives taken, ruined, or at the least severely injured. Where lies the solution? Is there still hope for reconciliation when so much damage has already been done. “An eye for an eye” or “a tooth for a tooth” is an instinctive reaction of man. I believe though in the human heart’s amazing capacity for nobility, in its capacity to go against even his primal instinct to avenge when hurt. There’s a story about a British army officer named Eric Lomax.



Eric Lomax and Nagase Takashi
Photo Credits: Remarkable Travels

He was among the thousands captured by the Japanese at the fall of Singapore in 1942. Lomax went through days of beatings, interrogations, and torture in which his arms were broken, his body covered with bruises, and water poured into his nose and mouth. Lomax admitted that he could not find it in his heart to forgive.

However, fifty years later, he met one of his torturers, Nagase Takashi who later became a devout Buddhist and built a temple. Takashi humbly apologized and asked his forgiveness. Lomax gave him his total forgiveness. Lomax wrote: “I haven’t forgiven Japan as a nation, but I’ve forgiven one man, because he’s experienced such great personal regret.” In the days that followed, they became friends. Theirs became a story of acceptance, reconciliation, humility, forgiveness, transformation, and friendship. Later, Lomax described his feeling after meeting his torturer and forgiving him: “After our meeting I felt I’d come to some kind of peace and resolution. Forgiveness is possible when someone is ready to accept forgiveness. Some time the hating has to stop.”

Indeed, if we wish that war would end, we have to come to that decision – to stop hating the other, to begin the long journey of forgiveness, which is the only thing that can heal the wounds of war. And so, in the midst of wars and violence, may we continue to pray for all nations in conflict. May they find in their heart the courage to turn away from hate to love, to transform hate with forgiveness and respect. 🙏



Supporters of West Papua shout slogans during a rally on Dec. 1, 2020.
Photo: © 2020 AP Photo/Achmad Ibrahim

STORIES...

Christianity in Afghanistan

Nov. Francis Mae M. Cajayon, MSBS

The harrowing images of Afghan babies and children left in the care of US soldiers or thrown over the fence in a desperate attempt to save them from a future fraught with repression, violence and death have put a human face to the threat of war and the rise of oppressive regimes. The issue of peace is ultimately an issue of human persons, whose dignity is violated, and whose growth and development is curtailed by war or disharmony. History is replete with stories and images of war that ravaged nations. Nothing good ever comes out of war and violence, and yet people continue to stumble upon the same errors of the past.

While the world struggles amid the health and economic hardships brought by Covid-19, minorities and vulnerable communities are facing the threats of an oppressive and violent war waged by totalitarian regimes and extremist forces. Afghanistan, a country that has for many years fought the extremist Taliban, reeled in August this year from the swift Taliban takeover of the country's capital.

Christians in Afghanistan face greater danger now. Christians already had a very difficult time living out their faith and their vulnerability has increased tenfold. Afghan Christians have historically comprised a small community, with a total of about 10,000 to 12,000 according to International Christian Concern, and almost all of them are converts from Islam. Afghan Christians cannot worship openly. They must worship in homes or other small venues, and evangelism is forbidden. Christians are highly secretive of their faith or interest in Christianity, and many of them had to keep their faith secret from families for fear of persecution. Religious extremists and conservative Afghan society consider renouncing Islam a disgrace and converts can face brutal consequences, not excluding death. A small number of Christians are martyred every year in Afghanistan, but their deaths generally occur without public knowledge. A few are also in prison, but imprisonment is not common. Christian converts from Islam are often killed by family members or other radicalized Muslims before any legal proceedings can begin.

There is, nevertheless, a special unity among Christians, who are laboring for the gospel in Afghanistan. Indigenous, near-culture and expatriate believers are boldly taking risks and using every possible opportunity to help believers grow

in faith and connect with local house churches. Significant Christian growth has occurred among the Hazara people, and some other people groups are also coming to know Christ. One Afghan pastor says, "It is the Hazara's experience of discrimination and suffering that has caused young Hazaras to question and look beyond the traditional beliefs of Afghanistan. When they hear about Christ who gave His life for them in an ultimate expression of selflessness, they are drawn to study more. And, as they read the Bible, they see themselves in the message of Christ and recognize the Savior who gave His life on the cross."

During his appearance to the public in St. Peter's Square, Pope Francis said, *"In these tumultuous moments, in which Afghans are seeking refuge, I pray for the most vulnerable among them, I pray so that many countries welcome and protect all those seeking new life."* May we, together with our Holy Father, hope and fervently pray that all Afghans, whether in their homeland, in transit, or in countries taking them in, may be able to live with dignity, in peace, and in brotherhood with their neighbors. We pray especially for our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters in Afghanistan. May they remain steadfast in their faith, courageous amidst danger and strong to endure their difficulties and suffering. ✠



STORIES...

Education for Peace

Nov. Maria Vu Thi Hang, MSBS

The despots of history and of present time and their enablers or collaborators are a curious case. How can a human being bear the knowledge that he has caused so many deaths and suffering? How can one stand and look with indifference, or haughtiness or even delight in the face of human cruelty-inflicted suffering?

Lord Acton, an English Catholic politician of the 19th century, said: *"The story of the future is written in the past."* The perpetrators of violence, the oppressors are, in part, products of a past that have failed to teach them the value of every human being. The wars waged in different parts of the world are beyond our control, but there is something that we can do in our own sphere of influence.

I think, first of all, of the important role of the parents in fostering peace in the society. They fulfill this primarily by educating their children on the value of human life. We know that the family is the first vital cell of the society. St. John Paul II called it the "school of virtues," of love, justice, respect, compassion, etc. If the family fails in this task, how can the community or society maintain peace and order? I remember how my mother would divide equally among us the fruits, sweets, cakes or candies she brought from the market. This gesture taught me the value of fairness and justice. She loved us equally and treat each of us fairly, letting us know our unique dignity. Not one among us could complain about preferential treatment.

She also taught us to always speak the truth and told us not to get what does not belong to us. I believe that teaching the values to the children would mold them into

builders of a just society and not destroyers, agents of peace and not war.

Educational institutions are likewise necessary. Teachers must be the parents' collaborators in the formation of conscience of the young. Most schools in Vietnam have this slogan or proverb in front of the gate: *"Tien hoc le, Hau hoc van."* It means that the first things we have to learn in school are right conduct and good manners. Knowledge only comes next. In school, the love for country, for peace and justice are instilled in us. I belonged to a class composed mostly of non-Catholics. Despite our differences in religion or faith, we respected the customs of each. My friends were also interested in Catholic teachings. A friend of mine in High School shared with me her love for Catholic songs. During Christmas or certain celebrations, we also invited them to join us. We were glad when they showed interest in joining us. This made me realize that peace begins also when people learn to appreciate the beauty and uniqueness of one another.

As an MSBS, we are also engaged in the education of the young. As a part of this community, I am given the capacity as well as the opportunity to cooperate in education for peace and justice. The lyrics of the song by Sy Miller and Jill Jackson reminds me to take action for peace: *"Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me..."* Christ is our perfect model and teacher, whose humble and meek heart is a master of the art of peace-building and reconciliation. With Mary's prayers and guidance, I hope to become like Her Son, a peacemaker. 🙏



STORIES...

Forgiveness and Peace

While he stood on the land he has tilled from his youth, he swept with quiet pride his gaze on sturdy trees and animals grazing the grass. This land has been a significant part of his and his family's life. With a contented sigh, he began traversing the path to his little home.

Just when he thought happily about how kind life has been to him, a heartbreaking news reached him. One of his children made a bad decision. He borrowed a large sum of money from the bank, forged his signature and made him the guarantor, without his knowledge. What's worse is that he assigned their land as collateral for his loan. Until now, he did not know for which reason, his son needed that sum of money. For reasons he did not know, his son was not able to pay his debts. When the bank let him know about the loan and the collateral, he could no longer locate his son.

When his other sons learned about his errant son's deed, they were furious. *"How could he do that? The land is our only source of income."* They insisted that their brother should pay up the loan on his own. He alone benefited from it so he should take responsibility for its repayment. In this tension-filled moment, the old man quietly listened to his sons. And when it was his time to speak, he calmly but firmly told them that he would not have any of his sons go to jail.

His sons were frustrated. They could not even have a word with their brother and see with him how to untangle the mess he had made. He reiterated to them his decision not to sue his son. He comforted them, *"We are more fortunate because at least we have each other, but your brother, we don't even know how he is now."* He did all he could to appease his sons for he wanted peace and harmony in his home. He encouraged his sons to accept and forgive their brother. He was like the proverbial Merciful Father of the Prodigal Son. His heart was open to the son who has squandered his wealth and to the elder son, who cries out in anger for the unjust deed of their brother. Now, he continues to try to make his other sons understand their brother. He urged his children to work together to help their lost brother and resolve their problem as a family. *"We are a family. Let's work together in harmony, charity and with peace in our hearts. What he did was wrong, but he is still part of this family."*

Peace in the society begins at home. When peace dwells in every home, societal peace is possible. This man's story tells us that the key to peace and harmony is forgiveness and compassion. This man chose the hard but surest way to ensuring peace, forgiving even before the transgressor sought it, wishing him good rather than ill and affording him a deep understanding and empathy. 🙏



STORIES...

Development: The New Name for Peace

Sr. Melanie S. Reyes, MSBS



Baskets of fruits...bamboo wood hauled onto an averaged size boat...At the break of dawn, this is a customary sight at the shore of the small village where I grew up. The baskets of fruits, mostly seasonal, and other products of the earth, are brought to the town, sold to the vendors in San Jose Public Market. I knew for a fact how little they'd be bringing home to their family after. I often wondered how they'd managed to make both ends meet. Granted that the cost of living is low, and that people are most likely used to living a simple life, but is there nothing left to do to improve the hand-to-mouth existence of many of the Filipino people?

I'd be downright honest and say that in my almost thirty-two years of existence, I haven't seen real progress in my hometown. I've spent more than half of my life in the convent and in those years, I witnessed my Congregation's work for human promotion and development. It is a mission we have been carrying out for decades and yet, tangible transformation and authentic development in the life of the people are still a dream. Families, but especially the young, continue

to suffer from an unjust living condition – lack of food and nutrition, unstable and insufficient source of income, inability to support the children's education, lack of medicines and financial incapacity to deal with natural calamity or sickness which require medical intervention. Christian charity urges us to continue this mission, and thanks to generous and kind-hearted people, this mission is sustained.

In this mission, we have seen both the good and bad. We rejoice whenever we witness a life being transformed, a person empowered to rise from destitution. We feel the pain, and even frustration, of seeing someone giving up hope, resigning themselves to a life of poverty and injustice, allowing the cycle to continue.

In recent years, disaster after disaster battered our nation, making the poor impossibly poorer. Political skirmishes not only among the supposedly "public servants" but also among masses who support their candidates even to a fanatical and cultic degree aggravate the situation and push the poor even more to the furthest margins or fringes of the society. Injustice, poverty exacerbated by corruption at all levels of the

society cause unrest. More and more people realize they deserve more than what they are living and some systems in the society prevent them from getting what they deserve. Disillusionment, but more strongly, determination to break free from the shackles of injustice angers the people. Without a radical solution or action, unrest, anxiety, and frustration could turn to something far devastating.

It is in this light that we understand better what Pope Paul VI meant when he said: *The new name for peace is development. "Extreme disparity between nations in economic, social and educational levels provokes jealousy and discord, often putting peace in jeopardy... our charity toward the poor, of whom there are countless numbers in the world, has to become more solicitous, more effective, more generous. When we fight poverty and oppose the*

unfair conditions of the present, we are not just promoting human well-being; we are also furthering man's spiritual and moral development, and hence we are benefiting the whole human race. For peace is not simply the absence of warfare, based on a precarious balance of power; it is fashioned by efforts directed day after day toward the establishment of the ordered universe willed by God, with a more perfect form of justice among men" (PP, 66).

Though the works of the Church in the field of human development may not be appreciated and our voices on socio-political matters not heard, our mission works continue. After all, we seek no human reward. The mission is not ours, it is God's and he's merely asking our cooperation, so that in this life and in the next, his people might enjoy the peace and justice that are characteristics of his Kingdom. 🙏



THE 52nd INTERNATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS

Post: Thi Thuy

From September 5 to 12, 2021, the 52nd International Eucharistic Congress (IEC) was held in Budapest, Hungary. It marks the second time Budapest has hosted this important event (the first being in 1938). The Congress was originally scheduled to take place in 2020 but was postponed to 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Its theme was "All my springs of joy are in you" (Psalm 87:7) .

More than 25 cardinals and bishops took part in the said events, leading the Congress' morning prayers, giving catechesis, testimonies, and facilitating workshops. After a week of liturgies, workshops, and socialization, the Congress concluded

with a Mass celebrated by Pope Francis in Budapest's Heroes' Square on Sept. 12. A crowd of tens of thousands gathered with him in the Square. The Pope encouraged Catholics at the International Eucharistic Congress in Budapest to spend more time in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and to become more like Christ. He said in his homily: "We do well to spend time in adoration before the Eucharist in order to contemplate God's weakness. Let's make time for adoration."

In this time of pandemic, the Congress was indeed "a great sign of hope for the Catholics all around the world" as it assures us of the presence of God among us. 🙏

EUCHARISTIC
CONGRESS

BUDAPEST | 2021
5-12 September



"The Lord's call is the loving initiative whereby God encounters us and invites us to be part of a great undertaking. He opens before our eyes the horizon of a greater sea..."

Pope Francis



SYNOD 2021-2023

OPENING of the SYNOD on SYNODALITY

Pope Francis opened the synod in Rome on the weekend of October 9-10, 2021 and every diocese across the whole world celebrated the opening of the synod on the local level the following Sunday, October 17. This synod is going to be unlike any other!!! From 2021 to 2023, it will be a journey of sharing, reflecting, and listening at all levels across the entire Church!

What is Synod?

A synod is a gathering, traditionally of bishops, that helps the Church to walk forward together in the same direction. The word “synod” comes from the Greek synodos, meaning “the same way” or “the same path” or “journeying together.”

When was the Synod instituted?

In 1965, Pope Paul VI instituted the Synod of Bishops. He wanted a way of continuing the fraternal, collegial exchange that had been experienced at Vatican II. Since then, synods have been organized every two or three years, bringing together bishops, experts, and various delegates to discuss certain topics of concern to the Church.

What does Synodality mean?

Synodality is the process of journeying together. This happens through listening to one another in order to hear what God is saying to all of us. It is realizing that the Holy Spirit can speak through anyone to help us walk forward together on our journey as the People of God.

Who are the Participants?

ALL OF US! Through this synod, the Church is saying: the voice of EVERYONE matters because God can talk through ANYONE – not only bishops, priests, deacons, brothers, or sisters but ALL OF US! All of us are called in virtue of our Baptism to be active participants in the life of the Church.

How can we participate in the Synod?

The process of Synodality has **Three Phases:**

- **First Phase - Diocesan Phase**

It is held from October 2021 to April 2022. Here in the Philippines, all parishes will do the consultation process. The output of the consultations in the parish will be collated by diocese and submitted to the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines. Inquire with your parish priest how you can contribute in this consultation process.

- **Second Phase:**

It refers to the Continental Phase which will be from September 2022 to March 2023. Here, the reports from the different dioceses will be forwarded to the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference, which will then prepare the final regional document for submission to the general assembly.

- **Third Phase:**

The Universal Phase will begin with the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican in October 2023.

In the Second and Third Phase, we can accompany our Church leaders with our Prayers.

What is the meaning of the Symbol and Theme of the Synod?

✦ **THE TREE.** "A large, majestic tree, full of wisdom and light, reaches for the sky. A sign of deep vitality and hope, it symbolises the cross of Christ. The horizontal branches, opened like hands, carries the Eucharist, which shines like the sun." The branches are also outspread like wings, symbolising the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit over the whole Synodal process.

✦ **THE PEOPLE OF GOD.** The 15 silhouettes depict a pilgrim Church on the move. The bright colours signify the joy and enthusiasm with which the People of God set out – young and old, men and women, singles, couples, families, children of all ages, persons with disabilities, clergy, religious and lay persons. The Bishop walks not in front of his flock, but among his sheep, with young people leading the way. This refers to Jesus' words, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children." (Mt. 11:25)

✦ **THE FOOTPRINT.** It symbolises the mark the Church leaves on the world as one united Body of Christ walking together in the footsteps of Jesus who commands them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the Good News to the whole of creation." (Mk. 16:15)

✦ **THE THEME.** The words "For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission" run from left to right in the direction of movement of the People of God, underlining and strengthening it. We must make time to encounter God and one another, then we must listen, and finally we must discern.



For a synodal Church

communion | participation | mission



Prayer for the Synod

*We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.
With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;
Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.
We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.*

*Do not let ignorance
lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.
Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together
to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.*

*All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father
and the Son, forever and ever. Amen.*





Loikaw, Myanmar

San Jose, Occ. Mindoro



*Annunciation House,
Quezon City*



Maumere, Indonesia



St. Joseph House - Quezon City



Looc, Occ. Mindoro

Merry Christmas

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